

**PRIDE – Developing archive collections to include LGBTQIA+ voices
Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Case Study – CLOA
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Teesside Archives is a local authority archive service that collects, catalogues, and preserves records and documents relating to Teesside, and makes them available for research. We are jointly funded by the 4 Teesside Boroughs - Middlesbrough, Stockton, Hartlepool, and Redcar & Cleveland.

After undertaking a collections audit, which identified several gaps in our collections, Teesside Archives has been working with partners and local organisations to develop the archives collections to better record the history of previously underrepresented voices. This case study looks at the work undertaken in 2022 to engage

The 2021 census was the first to capture data on the population's sexual orientation and gender identity. This was a huge milestone for those that had previously felt they were underrepresented with many people sharing photos of them filling in the census return with the hashtag #ProudToBeCounted. In January 2023, census data was released showing that just over 3% of the population of England and Wales declared themselves not to be heterosexual. Data for Teesside shows that over 10,000 people do not identify as straight or heterosexual, which represents 2.71% of the population aged 16 and over. The census is a part of history, and it's important, now more than ever, to show that LGBT people are here and their voices are heard and recorded for future generations.

In Teesside Archives' collections we have a lack of material that positively represents the LGBT+ community, yet we know that people who identify as LGBT+ have lived in our area. Records relating to individuals and communities are hard to find due to a variety of reasons but that's not to say that they don't exist. Although, it is not quite as simple as typing keywords such as 'lesbian', 'gay' or 'pride' into our catalogue search and seeing what comes up. The records that do exist tend to be driven by scandal or negative histories such as the HIV/AIDS Crisis and Criminalisation of Homosexuality. In these records, representation has been distorted. In order to develop your identity and find your community you need to see stories that you can relate to for validation. Inclusion of LGBT+ voices can do this!

I contacted a local LGBT+ charity Hart Gables to ask if they would be interested in working together. They very kindly invited me to attend several of their support groups to speak to their service users.

I ran a workshop with three of the groups about the archives and asked the participants what they wanted to see included in the archives going forward that would better represent them. The three groups covered a range of ages from two youth groups for young people and adult group for ages 18 and over. This enabled us to get a better picture of what representation meant to different generations

Collectively we came up with the idea of doing a time capsule that could be 'buried' in the archives for a period time with all the service users contributing to it with a reflection of who they are and what Hart Gables means to them. The plan is to revisit the capsule in two years' time to reflect on what was placed in there and hopefully add to it before 'burying' it again for a further period of time. It is hoped that this project will continue for as long as Teesside Archives and Hart Gables exist so that we can ensure that the voices and stories of the people included are remembered for years to come.

By conducting participatory practice, the outcomes of the project were much more authentic and community driven than if we had stuck with our usual methods of contacting organisations and asking for their 'official records' to add to the archives. The voices captured and preserved in the time capsule are real and authentic – much more relatable and reflective of the community the project engaged with.

The project has improved the archives' relationship with local organisations that support LGBT+ people living in Teesside as well as raising awareness for the service. By making sure that the Time Capsule is regularly revisited we will ensure that the project continues to be sustainable going forward. Engagement with the LGBT+ community has improved with further activities and events planned in the future such as guided heritage walks, archive visits and other workshops.

Our community engagement officer, Chris, also enjoyed facilitating two guided walks around Middlesbrough looking at the area's history with the adult service users last year with hopefully more planned this spring/summer.

Hart Gables have also kindly donated a copy of all their resources for inclusion in our collections for future preservation. We hope to keep working with the charity to collect further relevant material that reflects their aims as well as helping to support the vital work that they undertake.

Following our project with Hart Gables we have been contacted by several other organisations that are interested in working with us to improve equality and diversity within archives by engaging in events and activities whilst developing our collections. It's great for the service to be seen engaging more widely within the community and has given us a boost in engagement statistics. It also enables us to make sure that our collections remain relevant and inclusive through contemporary collecting.

The workshop format worked really well as it raised awareness of the existence of archives and developed new audiences that had not previously engaged with the service. It also created a safe and inclusive space where participants felt comfortable sharing their stories and showed willingness to work with us. By working together to come up with the idea of a Time Capsule and being led by the participants the project let them produce something on their own terms. Hart Gables Project Worker commented "It was a pleasure to have [Teesside Archives] at the group, thank you so much for joining us! I know everyone really enjoyed it and it was one of the most lively conversations we've had at the group! I think the idea about adding the time capsule to the archive is brilliant". We hope to use this workshop format with other groups to create different types of records for inclusion in our collections so that they feel better represented by their local archives. It is important they feel their voices are heard and recorded!

It was felt that trying to run these workshops at the archives would create barriers to people engaging with us due to travel expenses and being physically removed from where the participants felt comfortable. By conducting the workshops in a space that the participants were already used to and happy in was important to ensure they felt safe to engage with us. Going forward, depending on the participants, it may be challenging to find a neutral safe space people feel comfortable being in to open up and engage with us. Some people do not trust us as we are funded by a local authority so did not feel comfortable sharing their experiences with us due to historical treatment from authoritative bodies. We must respect this but hope that by building trust through continuing relationships will help with this in the future.