

London Link Group: Young People boundaries update

London Link Group committee minute 17/20

Updating our Young people boundaries or booking form so that they don't use contradicting language on 'gender' vs 'sex' based sleeping arrangements.

Currently the young people boundaries state "All sleeping areas are single sex at all times and members of the opposite sex are not allowed in others' sleeping area at bedtime". On the booking form we ask to state "Gender": "Male, Female or Other" and therefore imply recognition of gender over birth sex.

This has been brought to our attention after a parent contacted us wanting clarification and assurances about sleeping arrangements.

The boundaries saying segregation is by sex has implications in that a transgender young person may be *'required'* by our policy to sleep in a room not of their gender but of their birth sex.

We have received contributions to the committee from a parent who has a view that sleeping arrangements should be segregated by gender, a parent with the view that sleeping arrangements should be segregated by sex and taken input from the young people who attend our events. We have carefully considered the contributions as a Committee.

Our primary responsibility is supporting young people who attend our events, recognising and valuing all individuals on their own terms. As Quakers we acknowledge that young people have as much access to truth as any adult may have, including defining their own gender.

All participants should feel safe at our events. We recognise that young people who are transgender may often feel particularly vulnerable. We do not wish to impose segregation over sleeping arrangements by sex at what we want to be inclusive events at which all individuals feel supported.

We feel it would be appropriate to change our policy so that it acknowledges that young people who define their own gender identity are supported by us in maintaining this when attending events. We ask our Clerk to prepare a revised draft policy. We will share any revised policy, and our thinking behind the change, with London Quakers and with parents.

Young people boundaries:

Sleeping arrangements [...] All sleeping areas are single sex at all times and members of the opposite sex are not allowed in others' sleeping area at bedtime.

Changes to:

Sleeping arrangements [...] Separate sleeping areas will be provided for males and females, you are not allowed in each others' sleeping area at bedtime.

Further background to our decision

London Link Group has been prompted to change our Young People boundaries to ensure that we are making the correct assurances and outward message to parents/guardians, young people and the wider community with regards to language used to describe sexes and genders.

Our young people boundaries policy which referenced the two sexes was adapted from another organisation and we have not updated it in some time, whereas the booking form was created by us a few years ago in the context of more current views of sex and gender being independent and varied, this is the mixed messages that we wish to address.

Gender issues are very complex; understandings and terminology are evolving with different schools of thought being formed; it spans neuroscience, psychology, philosophy and societal thinking to mention a few. We therefore acknowledge our human limitations in fully understanding these topics.

What we do know is that transgender, people transitioning gender and others fundamentally feel that their biological sex does not match the way they feel about themselves and that simple changes to use gender terminology in our policy can make an important difference in enabling us to better look after the needs of individuals.

In practice this means that if there were a young person who feels this way, they, in consultation with their parents/guardians, have the option to request their own space or use the gender separated spaces, such as sleeping accommodation, which matches their identified gender (rather than biological sex).

We trust the declaring of gender in the same way in which we did for sex. There is no change in other parts of our young people boundaries, which includes our commitment to anti-discrimination, inclusiveness, prohibiting of drugs or sexual activity, health and safety and participation at our events. Any young person feeling uncomfortable is encouraged to talk to an adult volunteer or contact childline.

Considerations we discussed:

The existing skills on the committee and preparation:

- We have a good amount of general experience on the committee, London Link has been going 7 years (35 events!) and 3 (or more) of the members of the committee have 10 years+ experience working with young people in a volunteering capacity.
- 2 members of the committee have been on a training course by Gendered Intelligence
- The clerk has been on safeguarding course run by Churches Child Protection Advisory Service and we feel confident in our safeguarding policy which is regularly reviewed.
- The clerk consulted a legal briefing on the Equality act on the topic of women only spaces
- We consulted a clinician on gender identity
- We consulted a radical feminist with particular views on gender
- We have talked with transgender people in the London Link Group community (volunteers and young persons)

The 2010 Equality act:

London Link isn't responding to a challenge that cites the equalities act to allow young transgender people to choose their sleeping arrangement. We're aware that it's 'allowed' to discriminate in certain circumstances if we wanted. This change comes from wanting to better meet our young people's needs.

Young people have been consulted about privacy. For example those who wish to get changed in more private settings generally use toilet cubicles to do so. If any young person didn't feel comfortable we would do everything possible to rectify this (discreetly if needed). The sleeping arrangements are explained in the event information, which is often 'indoor camping' i.e. sleeping on the floor of two rooms on mats and sleeping bags.

Safeguarding:

Safeguarding is taken very seriously, a key point of safeguarding is that we do not make any assumptions about situations or perpetrators. In that sense there is no change to our safeguarding policy and practice. What we are doing is adding awareness of transgender and other issues to the considerations of safeguarding, including trying to prevent harm that may be caused by non recognition of a young person's gender identity.

Practicalities:

If a young person is presenting their gender as not their birth sex and hasn't disclosed that to us and an issue came up, we would be unprepared. By making these changes, we hope to build trust, in that way, we can be better prepared to support the young people if needed. When we are aware, it will always be considered on the individual's needs, in consultation with the young person's parents/guardians and the organisers.

Wording:

The wording of the document with the change in, is a set of boundaries or expectations on behaviour that the young people agree to adhere to. The language is designed to be appropriate for that use.

On behalf the London Link Group committee,
Michael Wood
Clerk

For any questions please do not hesitate to contact the clerk at clerk@londonlinkgroup.org.uk . For the full boundaries see <http://londonlinkgroup.org.uk/about/boundaries/>