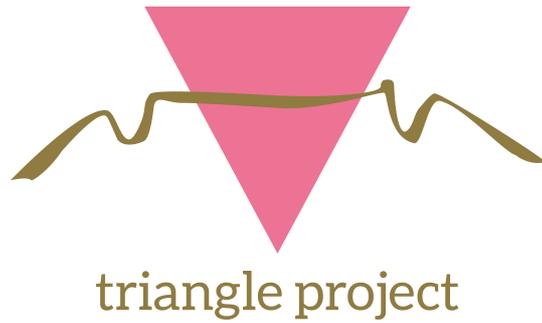


STATEMENT



International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia 2016

Tuesday, May 17th will mark the 12th annual “International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia”, created to draw attention to the lives of LGBTI people globally and to call for an end to the often violent discrimination they face. This year’s theme relates to the mental health and wellbeing of LGBTI people, a matter close to the heart of Triangle Project, which has been working on these very issues in the Western Cape for over 30 years. In light of the physical violence that many LGBTI people in South Africa are faced with, ensuring that LGBTI people have access to affirming and inclusive mental health services often receives less attention or coverage.

This glaring oversight is inherently problematic, but is emphasized when we acknowledge that LGBTI people in South Africa are documented to have higher-than-average levels of anxiety, depression and other mental health issues. Unfortunately, despite the high demand for adequate and sensitive care, accessing such services remains a challenge for many LGBTI people.

It is an unfortunate reality that the lack of affirming, knowledgeable and sensitive mental health services for LGBTI people is a key contributor to substance abuse (and the associated risks thereof) among LGBTI people and particularly LGBTI youth. Substance abuse is then in turn linked to potentially dangerous secondary behaviors like sexual risk taking, which can have dangerous and life-long consequences.

Many LGBTI sufferers of mental illness face the dual challenges of access to healthcare as well as social stigmatizations of their illnesses and their identities. For this and other reasons, we cannot pretend ‘health’ and ‘emotional wellbeing’ can be viewed separately. This is not only because either could influence the other but also for the fact that physical health can mean little if suffering from mental ill-health. Depression, anxiety, substance abuse and others can present

**TRIANGLE PROJECT// 2ND FLOOR LEADERSHIP HOUSE, CNR BURG AND SHORTMARKET ST,
GREENMARKET SQUARE, CAPE TOWN NPO: 003-971//INFO@TRIANGLE.ORG.ZA// 0812576693**

TRIANGLE.ORG.ZA

themselves physically in the same way that these physical issues can then also lead to mental distress. Furthermore, even if appearing physically “well”, an individual could be suffering greatly from “invisible disabilities”. Unfortunately, much like gender identities and sexual orientation that do not conform to narrow assumptions, so mental illness is often trivialised, misunderstood or stigmatized.

LGBTI people in South Africa are still mostly reliant on mental health services in an insensitive and severely under-resourced public health system. The ability to access even this limited selection of services is even more restricted for LGBTI people living in rural areas and LGBTI refugees and migrants. For far too many, access to mental health services is a luxury that is far out of reach and remains low on the long list of priorities for which few resources are available. While it is the job of the state to provide mental health services, we cannot ignore the fact that LGBTI people often seek out these services because they suffer discrimination, alienation and anxiety through their being different in a society which demands conformity. It is therefore, not just the government’s job to provide these services, but also the responsibility of society to create homes, schools, workplaces and places of worship that acknowledge and affirm people’s identities and provide places for people to grow and develop, rather than spaces that restrict or persecute. It is also important to acknowledge the positive role that traditional healers and faith-based support groups can play in people’s lives, providing an anchor for many, even if they fall outside of a conventional and modern understanding of support and emotional wellbeing.

On this IDAHOT, we gather to mark the lives that have been brutally cut short by the unspeakable violence that is far too common for LGBTI people in South Africa. We also pause to remember those we have lost to their own battles with mental illness and also extend a hand to those who are currently facing that same fight with bravery and often in silence. Although many have been lost in the battle against discrimination, homophobia, transphobia and mental illness; we continue to fight in their memory for the pursuit of understanding, affirmation and tolerance.

If you would like to access professional counselling, please call our office on 0812576693 to make an appointment

Triangle Project’s counseling helpline can be reached on 021 712 6699 every day between 1pm and 9pm