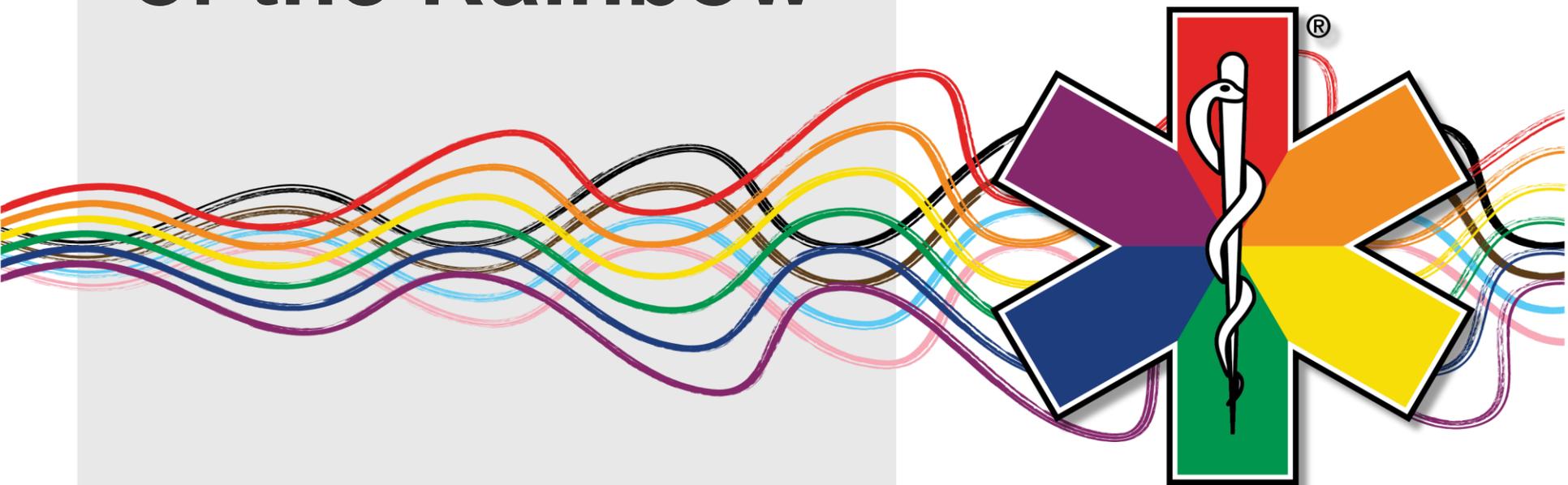


The Importance of the Rainbow

National Ambulance
LGBT+ Network



Katie Hilton and
Caroline Scott

20 October 2022



Celebrating the sexual orientations
and gender identities of all our
patients, staff and communities

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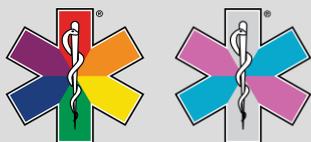
This 15 Minute Read

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Contributors to this 15 Minute Read
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LGBT+ Network Information

The National Ambulance LGBT+
Network exists to provide support to
LGBT+ staff within UK ambulance
services and ensure LGBT+ patients
receive the right care.

The national committee is made up
from two members from each NHS
ambulance service and additional
members with specialist roles. The
committee meets four times a year.

Further information about the
network, copies of our resources, link
to our online shop and a calendar of
events can be found on our website.

Information about LGBT+ networks in
each NHS Trust, including contacts,
can also be found on our website.

You can also contact members of the
committee using the *Contacts* feature
on our website.

[ambulanceLGBT.org](https://www.ambulanceLGBT.org)

Follow us on social media:



National Ambulance LGBT+
Network



@NatAmbLGBTUK

Getting Involved

15 Minute Reads

If you have an idea for a 15 Minute
Read, or you'd like to author an
edition, please get in touch with our
Editorial Team using the *Contacts*
feature on our website.

Author guidance information and a
style guide are available to support
aspiring authors.

Local Networks

All of our local networks are always
looking for people to get involved.
Have a look at the *Networks* feature
on our website for contact
information.

National committee members are
appointed by local networks.

Events

We publish a calendar of events
that you can get involved with, which
includes our annual conference.
Special events happen in LGBT+
History Month (February) and
throughout the Pride season (June to
August each year).

It is always worth contacting your
local network to see if they are
planning any additional events.

Our Stories



Without diversity and representation, growing up in rural Britain was an isolating experience, embedding all the messages we are trying to eradicate.

Katie Hilton and **Caroline Scott** reflect on their teenage insecurities and share why the rainbow means so much to them.



Visibility, whether through representation in film and television or by wearing identifiable items such as rainbow laces, is so important to us. We want to ensure that today's young generation don't feel the same guilt, fear, rejection, shame and self-loathing that we experienced as teenagers. The world needs to change and educate itself. We want to be a part of that process and we support and encourage all of you to do the same.

At East Midlands Ambulance Service, we are delighted that our uniform policy allows staff to wear rainbow bootlaces all year round to show their support. Already we have witnessed the positive impact as patients note and respond to them. Representation, visibility and seeing yourself in your society is so important for leading a happy and healthy life. And the rainbow has been a symbol of diversity since 1978.



LGBT+ Visibility Over the Years



Historians agree that same-sex relationships and people living as a different gender to that assigned at birth have been documented for years within many cultures. Religious texts and European ideals show that relationships accepted by cultures were suddenly seen as a deviation from the typical male/female identities and a moral sin.

Criminal codes were introduced and the first known execution for homosexual activity took place in Florida in 1566 (Morris, 2009). Gay men, incidentally, were executed in the United Kingdom, with the last hanging of two men in London in 1835.

What followed was centuries of persecution and hate for people who would now identify as part of the LGBT+ community. There have been many horrendous atrocities and crimes committed against people who identify as LGBT+ over the years. In certain countries, these still happen today.

A 'code' was needed for people to survive, and find

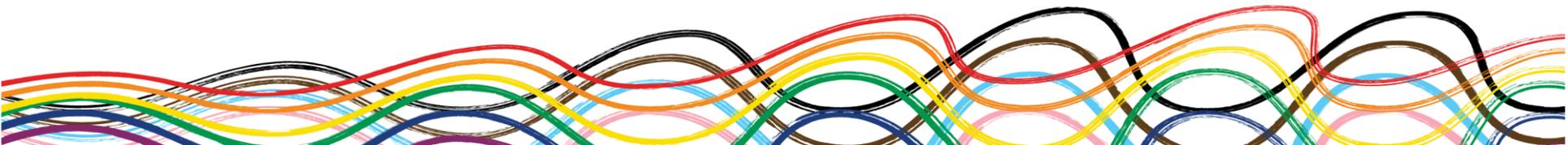
love and acceptance without risk; symbols, behaviours and phrases that enabled people to know they were safe to express their desires and feelings.

While the rainbow flag is now recognised internationally as a symbol of LGBT+ support, its origins lie elsewhere.

Symbols of Identity

Purple or lavender has been a significant part of gay culture over the years, according to gay historians. Grahn (1985) said it meant more than just mixing traditional male (blue) and female (red) colours. Purple represents transformation: it's within the dawn and sunset and holds great spiritual power.

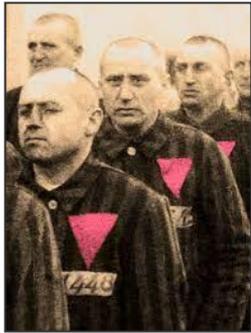
Green was also used to identify LGBT+ people because it was primarily worn by fairies, who inhabited Britain prior to 58BC. And in the 1950s,



Symbols of Identity



wearing green on a Thursday meant you were a 'fairy' or 'queer'.



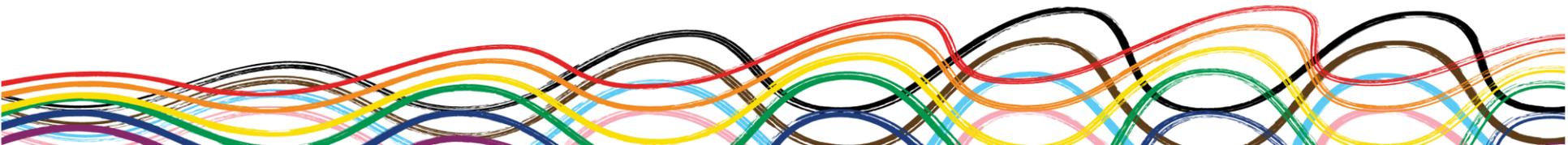
The pink triangle was a lesser-known symbol used to identify homosexuals who were to be put to death in Nazi concentration camps. Today, this symbol is worn to display solidarity in the war against oppression of LGBT+ people.

The lambda symbol was adopted to represent gay and lesbian rights following the Stonewall riots in 1969. The symbol carries several meanings including balance and unity. The Romans used it to represent 'the light of knowledge shed into the darkness of ignorance'.

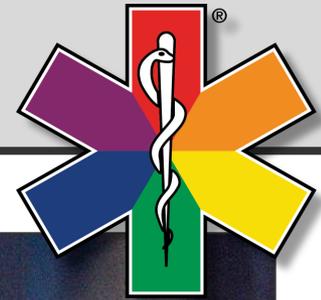


Phrases are also used to identify gay culture - 'friend of Dorothy' is perhaps the most well-known and believed to be inspired by Judy Garland's *The Wizard of Oz* character, Dorothy Gale. *Pride* magazine said the original Oz books 'were really queer and full of strong women in close relationships with each other, gender-bending princes and more'. In addition, one character in the film says: 'You have some queer friends, Dorothy' to which she replies: 'The queerness doesn't matter, so long as they're friends!'

The song *Over the Rainbow* also resonated with the LGBT+ community with lyrics about daring to have dreams that really do come true. Another reason could be the gloriousness of Judy Garland herself who became a massive gay icon following this film and coincidentally, or not as some people argue, the Stonewall Riots happened in the early hours following her funeral.



Positivity



Dorothy (Judy Garland) and her 'queer friends' in *The Wizard of Oz*.

A lot of gay history has been tragic, painful and hurtful with many thousands of people being persecuted, imprisoned and sentenced to death. These are all obvious reasons why secrecy and codes have been needed and that they were there to ensure safety.

Today, we are in a better world with many countries having equality laws that protect the rights of LGBT+ people. There is, however, still a need for symbols and support for people 'coming out' and accepting their identity to make them feel safe and included.



History of the Rainbow Flags



Gilbert Baker designed the rainbow 'freedom flag' in 1978 following encouragement from Harvey Milk, a famously gay politician in San Francisco. This was created for the Gay Freedom Day Parade in the city. The flag originally had eight colours and was reduced to six for ease of print as it was more cost-effective in the 1970s to have fewer colours. The rainbow was chosen because the community needed something beautiful following the atrocities in World War II.

The brash and colourful rainbow 'freedom flag' was designed to promote visibility and encourage acceptance. Since it was created, an increasing number of sexual orientations and gender identities have been added to the list of people represented by the flag. Today, the rainbow is the most widely recognised LGBT+ symbol in the world, it is an international beacon that displays support and acceptance. For many LGBT+ people, seeing the rainbow 'freedom flag' helps them identify safe spaces and services.

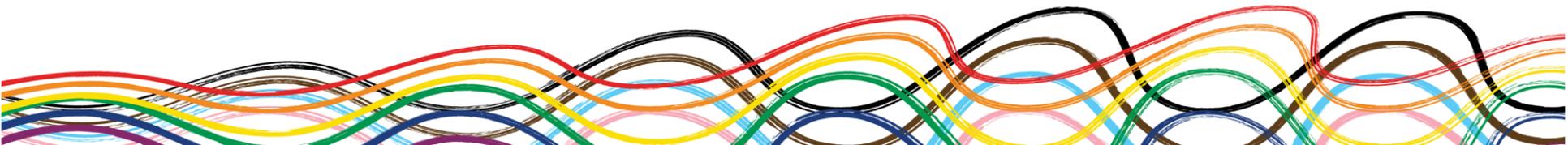
In recent years there have been additions to the flag and a new version, called the 'progress flag' is used to be more inclusive to the full LGBT+ community, including people of colour.



The LGBT+ Progress Flag.

The meanings of the colours are:

- Red for life, orange for healing, yellow for sunlight, green for nature, dark blue for peace and purple for spirit.
- Brown and black promote racial inclusivity.
- Pink, light blue and white for trans and gender inclusivity.



Importance of the Rainbow



Being visible for the LGBT+ community can happen in a variety of ways, the biggest being attendance at local Pride events. This allows us to directly engage with our service users to ask them how we can fully support them and their needs.

A more year-round approach is to wear a symbol denoting the rainbow flag that queer people will recognise. This will then hopefully allow for a safe environment and the opportunity to discuss all of their holistic needs so we can truly provide the best patient experience.

For us, this could be encouraging NHS Trusts to adopt rainbow lanyards, badges, laces within uniform and dress code policies for people to wear to show their support.

It would also be of importance to provide staff with education to fully understand the importance of the rainbow and the conversations and support they might have by being visible.

Some people think that rainbows are worn only by LGBT+ people, but the great thing today is that an increasing number of allies also wear rainbows as a show of support. You should never make assumptions about people based on someone wearing a rainbow. We should also not allow anyone to direct homophobic or transphobic abuse towards anyone.



Ambulance staff attend a Pride event.

Whilst homophobia and transphobia are terrible things to happen, it does allow us to identify the people that need education and support to become more LGBT+ aware. This could improve awareness and support in wider communities, which for healthcare providers really will make every contact count.



Visibility



Within healthcare we know that there are inequalities in how LGBT+ people access support and treatment. This is due to a variety of reasons, some of which are:

- Negative experiences
- Embarrassed to access healthcare and state needs
- Unsupportive GP
- Long waiting times for services

To fully support all people, firstly we need to know who our service users are. The LGBT Foundation have developed a guide to support the monitoring of sexual orientation, gender and trans status and how to ask the question appropriately.

By knowing who people are, we can then look at improving equality of access to services for all people, we can make healthcare more specific to peoples needs and we can create a better culture for people to feel safe to disclose their sexual.

gender and trans identities. It is only when we truly know people that we can treat them fully and holistically.

If healthcare workers can wear a rainbow lanyard, badge or bootlaces, this is an identifiable symbol within the LGBT+ community that will enable people to feel safe to discuss all of their needs.

Something as simple as rainbow laces lets people know a service is inclusive and supportive.



Pride Events



Pride events are held around the world and are fantastic events to be together and celebrate diversity, belonging and inclusion.

They also give the opportunity to make any political standpoint so that people can take note and start to educate themselves.



Representation on TV and Film



Visibility within the media, whether television or film, is vitally important and over the years representation has improved significantly.

Despite this, throughout the world there is still homophobia and complaints when representation is shown through media outlets. Most recently, *Lightyear* was banned in several countries due to an animated same-sex kiss.

Often what is seen within representation are queer people being the comedy aspect or meeting an untimely end as in the television series *100* and film *Brokeback Mountain* to name a couple. By showing queer people in relationships throughout media, it can reduce prejudice and hate crimes by showing typical relationships improving understanding of LGBT+ experiences.

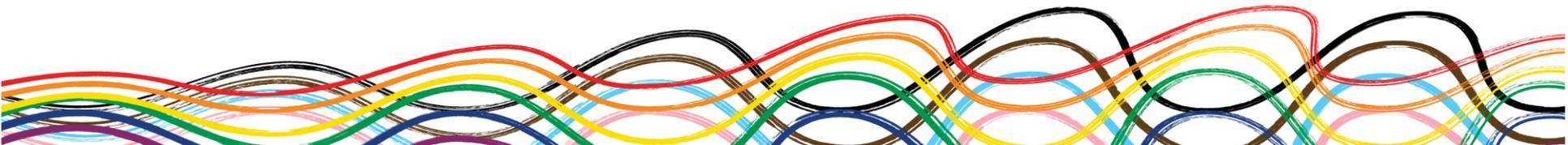
Visibility could also help prevent suicide within the LGBT+ community as people will feel included and accepted within the society they live.

Some television highlights:

- ***Brookside***: First same-sex kiss on British television (1999).
- ***Orange is the New Black***: Transgender and queer representation (2013).
- ***Supergirl***: Same-sex couple and first transgender superhero (2015).
- ***Star Trek: Discovery***: First transgender and non-binary characters (2017).
- ***A League of Their Own***: 1940s queer representation (2022).

Some film highlights:

- ***Philadelphia***: Legal drama based upon a gay man suing his company for firing him following his AIDS diagnosis (1993).
- ***Brokeback Mountain***: Western romantic drama between two bisexual cowboys (2005).
- ***Milk***: Based upon the life of gay rights activist and politician Harvey Milk (2008).
- ***Lightyear***: Animated film based on Buzz Lightyear that has a same-sex couple (2022).



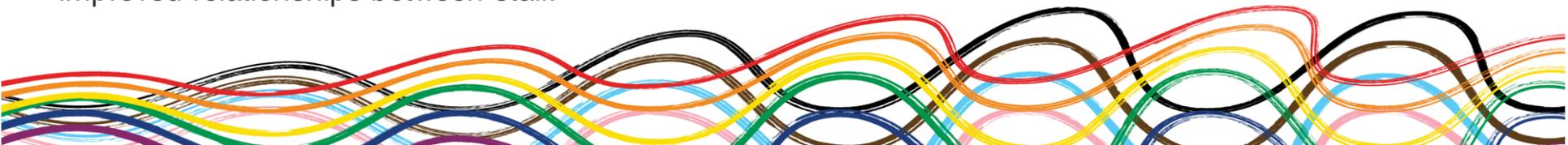
Wear the Rainbow Star!



You can make a difference and show your support for LGBT+ patients and colleagues. The Rainbow Star of Life pin badge was released nationally in 2015 and we have countless examples of how this has broken down barriers between ambulance workers and their patients, and improved relationships between staff.

The pin badges are available through each Ambulance Trust's LGBT+ network. If you would like to find network leads in your Trust, you can find local contact information on our website:

ambulanceLGBT.org/networks



Professional Development



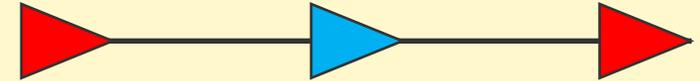
Make a Difference!

In July 2020 we released two professional development packages that focus on two major health inequalities for LGBT+ people. The first is the Ambulance Service Trans Toolkit, which aims to demystify the issues for trans patients and how we can provide better support for our trans colleagues. The second looks at how we can provide exceptional care to patients who are living with HIV.

Feedback from people that have completed the packages has been very positive and indicates the development helps people to provide a more confident and appropriate service to our patients.

It's all about providing **#InformedCare**.

In 2020, the first cohort of **1,138** ambulance staff completed one of our professional development packages. With 35,000 ambulance staff in the UK, there are a few more to go!



**Follow the line to
see how you can
make a difference**



Important Dates



20 November is...

Trans Day of Remembrance

A day to remember people who have lost their lives to anti-transgender violence.



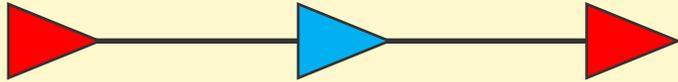
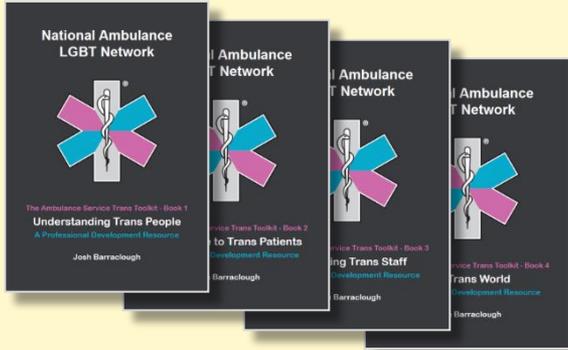
1 December is...

World AIDS Day

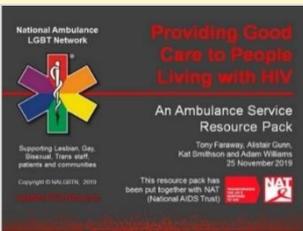
A day to show support for people around the world who are living with HIV and AIDS.



#InformedCare



Access to these packages is completely free.



Simply scan here to access resources



Gain certificates for your CPD portfolio.

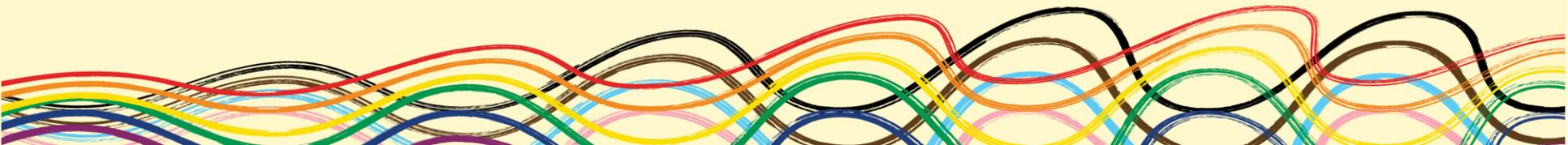


Photo View



More than fifty ambulance staff from West Midlands Ambulance Service attended Birmingham Pride on Saturday 24 September.

