

Weekly Newsletter

Edition 23, 25 June 2020

Downtime at WEP – our free online Wellbeing and Employability services

It's Pride Week, a big shout out to all our LGBTQ family! Monday 22 June 2020 was Windrush Day celebrating contributions made by the Afro-Caribbean community, and the half a million people who travelled to the UK to help rebuild it after the Second World War. This week's newsletter will focus on wellbeing, health and employability activities. For back editions of this newsletter or to be added to the mailing list, please visit the link to our website: <https://www.westeustonpartnership.org/about-us-2/newsletters/> or email sharon@westeuston.org.

Find guidance about coronavirus (COVID-19) for health and social care settings, other non-clinical settings, and for the general public here - <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance>.

To book an appointment for Careers Advice, CV surgery or a place on the Dyslexia etc workshop or Making the Most of Now (online coaching) or English in the Workplace contact David on 07908845154 or david.hermanstein@camden.gov.uk. For information on the Community Choir, Tai Chi and Yoga email chuks@westeuston.org and if you want to know more about study support, WE CAN, or anything else email sharon@westeuston.org. Find out more about what's on in this newsletter.

People's Corner

Marsha P. Johnson and Black Lives Matter



When people talk about LGBT+ rights, the Stonewall Uprising is usually the first thing to come up. With the Black Lives Matter protests happening in June, the LGBT+ pride month, conversations about Black, LGBT+ lives are at the forefront. Along with this is the name 'Marsha P. Johnson' - but who was Marsha? And what was Stonewall, other than an uprising?

Marsha P. Johnson was an African-American trans person who frequented the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in Greenwich Village, New York. Queer people of colour and transgender people were not allowed in most gay bars at the time, which were reserved for white gay men, but the Stonewall Inn allowed anyone to come inside and drink. The bar was most frequented by butch lesbians, homeless youth, and transgender or gender non-conforming patrons - usually people of colour. It gained a reputation as a safe home for the most underprivileged members of society.

On June 27th, 1969, the police attempted to raid the bar on suspicion of selling liquor despite having no license, and 'homosexual activities' which were illegal at the time. An uprising broke out and the patrons of the bar fought back. Marsha P. Johnson and her friend Sylvia Rivera are said to have 'thrown the first stone' - that is, they were the first people to fight back against the police brutality. The uprising started, mostly transgender and queer people of colour, sparked two further days of uprising and are regarded as a 'turning point' for homosexual rights across the US. The first ever pride parade took place the following year on July 2nd, 1970, and started outside the Stonewall Inn.

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After the Stonewall Uprisings, Marsha continued to fight for the rights of queer people. She and Sylvia Rivera started S.T.A.R. (Street Transvestites Action Revolutionaries) that supported vulnerable members of the community, providing them with housing and fighting for the rights of all LGBT+ people, especially transgender people and drag performers who often felt left out of the wider gay rights movement. She was a well-known and welcoming figure in Greenwich Village, is known to have worked with Andy Warhol, and was a part of the AIDS activist group Act Up. Marsha P. Johnson's legacy is that of an outspoken and empowered activist who spent her life caring and fighting for other queer people. She is a modern icon of the LGBT+ movement.

Marsha P. Johnson and the other patrons of the Stonewall Inn that began the Stonewall Uprising stand as proof that just because something is a law, does not mean it is right. In the same way that the protestors fought against homophobia, Black Lives Matter protesters are fighting against racial injustice. If the Stonewall Inn patrons had 'followed the law' and allowed themselves to be prosecuted for their sexuality, change might never have happened for the LGBT+ community. The same can be seen reflected in the Black Lives Matter movements today - Stephen Lawrence, George Floyd, Sandra Bland, and so many other Black people have lost their lives for the colour of their skin. The power the police have is excessively used against people of colour, and while being Black isn't illegal like homosexuality once was, our current laws - including in the UK - still are structurally racist which shows in disproportionate stop and searches as well as the incarceration rate.

The LGBT+ community must not forget that Black Panthers were involved and united with the struggle for equality – now it's only just to connect with that legacy this Pride Month and once again stand in solidarity against oppression.

The Stonewall protests were not only effective in fighting back against the police violence and the unjust anti-homosexuality laws. After the display of unity between the queer community at the Stonewall Inn, people who had felt unable to display their sexuality in public began to hold hands and kiss their partners on the street, wear the clothes they felt comfortable in and express themselves honestly. And isn't that all anyone wants? To be allowed to live, honestly and openly themselves, peacefully? If gay people can hold hands on the street, why can't Black people live comfortably in their skin without the fear of abuse.

Black and trans folk like Marsha P. Johnson are still one of the groups most vulnerable to violence. While transgender people are now more welcome than ever within the LGBT+ community, lawmakers in the wider world are still debating legislation over their right to transition, and what gender means. Today Minister for Women and Equalities Liz Truss have made statements that aim to further exclude and victimise Trans people sending a clear message that the fight for equality is far from over and that we need to bridge the divide and speak for each other using our privilege as a platform to pull those oppressed up.

I therefore urge you all this Pride Month to have a think about your own experiences and reflect upon our privileges and advantages that we get because of them. Those might be the fact that we are cisgender, man, heterosexual, white, educated, speak English as our first language, are able bodied or are native here and see how that privilege can be best used to benefit those oppressed by the people who are on the other side. Let's educate ourselves on what it means to be an ally and stand united. Happy Pride Month to you all.

Article by Gabrielle Dixon, Mosaic LGBT Youth Centre