



# Jan's Story

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## Using this photo-story

This story is written for use by and with women and men with learning difficulties around same sex relationship issues. This may be for women and men who are lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB), or to help other women and men with learning difficulties to think about the issues involved.

The story is based on research called, 'Secret loves, hidden lives? Exploring same sex relationships for people with learning difficulties', carried out by David Abbott and Joyce Howarth at the Norah Fry Research Centre, University of Bristol.

David and Joyce found that often no-one had spoken with people with learning difficulties about being LGB. This often made it very hard to tell others about their sexual identity and increased the feeling of extreme isolation – one of the women believed she was the only lesbian in the world. For this reason it's good to use the story for women and men who are 'questioning' their sexual identity, but also to use them with all people with learning difficulties.

If this photo-story is used with a group of people with learning difficulties, think about how to challenge any homophobic remarks or 'jokes' that come up. Prepare for using this story by checking what resources there are locally for LGB people. In the back of 'Diva' and 'Gay Times' (monthly glossy magazines aimed at lesbians and gay men) there are community listings, with details of groups and helplines. There is more information at the back of this story.



Jan goes to the Forest day service.



She is part of a women's group there.



All the women want to talk about men, and their relationships.



Jan wants to talk about how she fancies women – especially Madonna, but is frightened of what the others will say to her.



She often feels very lonely.

She thinks she must be the only woman in the world to fancy other women.

She doesn't know anyone else who feels like this.



Sometimes she thinks she must be bad, and cries.



A new woman with a learning difficulty starts at the day service.

Her name is Liz.

She is confident and happy.



In the women's group, the women talk about their boyfriends again.



Liz says she doesn't like men. She likes women.

She had a girlfriend, but they split up.

She says she's a lesbian.



The other women look shocked and don't know what to say.

Jan smiles secretly – she's not the only one!



One day, Jan asks Liz if she can talk privately.

They find somewhere to be quiet.



Jan tells Liz that she fancies women too.

Liz smiles and gives her a big hug.



Liz asks her if she has a girlfriend. Jan says she has never had one.

Liz is surprised, and asks her what other lesbians she knows.

Jan says she doesn't know any, she thought she was the only one in the world.





Liz laughs, and points at one of the support workers called Emma.

Liz says that she had a drink with Emma and her girlfriend in a gay club last week.



Jan is now shocked – she had not thought that any of the staff might be lesbians too.



Jill then asks what gay clubs are.

She has never heard of them.

Liz says she will take her to one.



That weekend, Liz and Jan go to a gay club in town.

Liz knows lots of women, and introduces them to Jan.



Jan feels a bit frightened of all these new people, and the music is very loud.



After an hour, she can't take any more and says thank you to Liz for taking her, then goes home.



At home she cries, thinking that she doesn't like the places that lesbians go, so she'll never find a girlfriend.



She likes Liz a lot as a friend, but not as a girlfriend – she doesn't fancy her.





Next week at the centre, Liz talks to her about the club.

She's sorry that Jan didn't like it.

Liz doesn't know any other places.



They decide to go and ask Emma if she knows anywhere.

Emma says she knows other places that lesbians meet.



Emma says she will show Jan where there is a meeting place for lesbians.



The meeting is in a private room which is quiet and not smoky.

Jan sits and looks at the other women there – they are all lesbians!



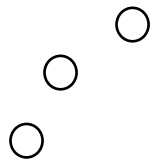
One woman says she fancies men as well as women – Jan learns that the word for this is bisexual.



Jan keeps going to the group. It is so good not to be alone and to be listened to.



She hasn't met  
a girlfriend yet,  
but maybe one  
day ...






## About this photo-story

Joyce Howarth and David Abbott interviewed 20 women and men with learning difficulties who identified as LGB from across the UK and 71 members of staff in different services. Jan's story is not about any one person who took part in the research. We picked out some of the biggest issues from all of the interviews and put them into one story about an imaginary person called Jan.

The photographs for Jan's story were taken by Jill Rutherford. Actors from the Misfits Theatre Company, Bristol kindly volunteered to be in the pictures. Karen Gyde at Norah Fry did the design and layout of the photo-story. The whole project was funded by the Big Lottery Fund and carried out as a partnership between the Norah Fry Research Centre, University of Bristol, the Terrence Higgins Trust and REGARD.

The full report about this research, '**Secret loves, hidden lives? Exploring issues for people with learning difficulties who are gay, lesbian or bisexual**', by David Abbott and Joyce Howarth is published by The Policy Press and is available from Marston Book Services on  **0 1 2 3 5 4 6 5 5 0 0** (£15.99 + £2.75 p&p) email **direct.orders@marston.co.uk**

A summary and easy to read version of the report are available at **[www.bristol.ac.uk/norahfry](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/norahfry)**

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# Useful organisations

**The London Lesbian & Gay Switchboard** is open 24 hours a day and has details of other switchboards across the UK,




**0 2 0 7 8 3 7 7 3 2 4** and at [www.llgs.org.uk](http://www.llgs.org.uk)

**The Terrence Higgins Trust** can give advice and support about HIV and sexual health. The headquarters are in London but they will be able to give you details of the office closest to you,



**0 8 4 5 1 2 2 1 2 0 0** and at [www.tht.org.uk](http://www.tht.org.uk)

**REGARD** is the UK association for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender disabled people. They currently offer a penpal and befriending service. Email: [regard@dircon.co.uk](mailto:regard@dircon.co.uk) and see the website at [www.regard.org.uk](http://www.regard.org.uk)

**Stonewall** are a campaigning organisation for equal rights for lesbians, gay men and bisexuals. They have information on various issues including violence and hate crimes, 'coming out', and gay pride events.  **0 2 0 7 8 8 1 9 4 4 0**  
minicom **0 2 0 7 8 8 1 9 9 9 6**, email: [info@stonewall.org.uk](mailto:info@stonewall.org.uk)  
[www.stonewall.org.uk](http://www.stonewall.org.uk)



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