

## Why do we ask equalities monitoring questions for SAM?

Current SAM stats indicate a reluctance on behalf of some COPA delivery partner staff and volunteers to ask particular equalities monitoring questions. This may be out of embarrassment or because the person asking isn't quite sure why they are asking.

### **Benefits of monitoring:**

It helps create equality of access and opportunity

It improves service provision to meet specific needs

It creates a culture of inclusivity and openness (moving beyond mere toleration)

It prevents unfair treatment of individuals from protected groups

SAM gives OPAAL and local COPA delivery partners the equalities information we need to prove we are supporting a wide range of people.

We therefore need this information for a number of reasons, primarily for our funders both Big Lottery and Macmillan Cancer Support. However, we may also use this anonymised information as headline equality statistics when making presentations about our work at external conferences or when writing articles describing our work.

Once everyone is clear on *why* we ask monitoring questions this can be used as a clear explanation before proceeding – i.e. “If it is ok with you I am now going to ask you some monitoring questions which will help to inform whether our service is reaching a wide cross section of the community and to report anonymous statistics to our funders”.

Service users need to be reassured that all information collected will be securely stored in line with data protection laws.

All monitoring questions should be asked in the same manner with no added extra explanation/apology for any individual questions. Sometimes it simply takes practice to build confidence in asking questions that are assumed to be personal or intrusive, but a question about sexual orientation should be approached in the same tone as a question about age.

A service user might “prefer not to say” for any monitoring question. That’s absolutely fine but shouldn’t be used as a get-out for an embarrassed staff member or volunteer.

Remember, we’re gathering this information to show we support all sections of the community and if it’s not recorded we can’t prove it.

OPAAL asked Roger, one of our ex Trustees who is gay, if he thought we should be asking the sexuality monitoring question that we do. Here’s what he had to say:

*“I do think people should be asked about their sexuality. The more real stats we have the more our needs will be taken seriously. I hear figures bandied between 20% and the recent 1.5% - the gay community shouldn't be afraid about the real stats being known. Proactive commitment to LGBT people is essential. Volunteers should talk about it. Keep at it. Sooner or later gays will try you out and discover the value of your service.”*

Several delivery partners simply print off the equalities monitoring form and ask service users to complete it themselves. That’s absolutely fine. Please ensure that your service users are able to fill it in themselves. Some may need assistance.