

# HOLLERAN CONSULTING

Strategic Planning, Market Research & Satisfaction Studies

## **Berks County Community Foundation, Diversity Alliance Fund**

*Community Survey Regarding  
Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender Issues*

*Submitted by:  
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## **BACKGROUND**

The National Lesbian & Gay Community Funding Partnership has made a matching grant to the Berks County Community Foundation to increase community awareness and funding for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) concerns in the county.

The Berks County Community Foundation, supported by the Diversity Alliance Fund, requested that Holleran Consulting work with the Foundation to assess the experiences of LGBT individuals in Berks County as well as their perceptions of how well Berks County is meeting the needs of the LGBT community.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A written survey was developed for use in the assessment. The survey was a revised version of a tool used by the San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation in California. Revisions were made to include questions and vernacular specific to the Berks County area.

The committee for the Foundation's Diversity Alliance Fund was responsible for printing and distributing the surveys. Distribution was executed through networking with various colleges, social service agencies, churches, and other organizations within Berks County. The potential respondents were given a survey with a pre-addressed, postage-paid envelope for return directly to Holleran Consulting. The direct return to Holleran Consulting was done in an effort to increase the comfort level of respondents by ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity provided by a firm outside of Berks County. Data collection took place approximately between August 15 and October 16, 2003. A total of 270 residents from Berks County completed and returned the survey. The number of completed surveys yields an overall error rate of +/-6% at a 95% confidence level.

## **READING THE RESULTS**

The graphical portion of the report includes percentages and/or average ratings, depending on the nature of the question. Subtitles and footnotes provide additional clarification. In many cases, the responses were broken out by heterosexual respondents versus lesbian/gay/bisexual/questioning respondents. This was done as the responses of these two groups often differed drastically. Tests of significance were conducted using t-tests and Chi-square analyses. Significant differences are identified with an asterisk and footnote. A  $p \leq .05$  was used as the cutoff for significance.

Several of the Health and Well-Being slides also have comparisons to national statistics. The national statistics are from the 2002 National Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS). The BRFSS is coordinated by the CDC and is conducted on an annual basis throughout the United States. The national statistics provide insight into the characteristics of Berks County residents compared to residents throughout the United States.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of the research study were as follows.

1. To determine the overall concerns and needs facing Berks County's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) population.
2. To determine the need for additional services (i.e., community center) for the LGBT population in Berks County.
3. To conduct research in a fully confidential manner consistent with the Code of Standards and Ethics promulgated by the Council of American Survey Research Organizations (CASRO).

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

### *Respondent Demographics*

The survey respondents were asked several demographic questions at the beginning of the survey. Nearly half of the survey respondents (47.7%) indicated they have been a resident of Berks County for more than 20 years. The breakdown of respondent zip codes is also reported in the graphical section of the report. It should be noted that a number of returned surveys listed zip codes outside of Berks County. It is likely that these zip codes reflect college students going to school in Berks County who listed the zip codes from their hometown. The largest proportion of individuals (30.7%) is between 18 and 25 years of age, with an additional 23.7% between the ages of 36 and 45.

When asked about their gender identity, the majority (64.1%) indicated female, while 34.4% were male. Less than 2% of the respondents indicated they were transgender or transsexual. The majority (62.8%) was also heterosexual. Nearly 22% were gay and 10% were lesbian.

Nearly eight out of 10 respondents (79.3%) were European American/White, with the next largest percentage (9.6%) comprised of Latino(a)/Chicano(a)/Hispanic respondents. The annual personal income of the sample varied, with the largest proportions between \$30,000 and \$44,999 (26.9%) and less than \$14,999 (26.5%). It is probable that the lower income bracket (less than \$14,999) is represented heavily by the number of college students who completed the survey. When asked about their household, about 20% reported they are single, living alone, 18.2% indicated they are a married adult with children, 16.4% are single, living with parents and 14.9% are domestic partners without children.

About one-third of the sample (34.3%) has a high school diploma as their highest level of education. Twenty-three percent have a four-year college degree and 19.8% have a graduate degree. The majority of the respondents (72.9%) indicated they have a spiritual tradition, with Catholicism being the most heavily represented religion. Nearly 71% of those who attend a church/synagogue/Islamic center, etc. indicate that they are supportive

and accepting of their gender identity and sexual preference. This differed significantly between the heterosexual and lesbian/gay/bisexual/questioning respondents. Approximately 85% of the heterosexual respondents stated they feel supported, but less than half (43.3%) of the lesbian/gay/bisexual/questioning respondents feel supported and accepting at their place of worship.

### *LGBT Issues in Berks County*

The respondents were asked the seriousness of several issues facing the LGBT community in Berks County. The three issues were anti-gay/lesbian violence, employment/job discrimination and housing discrimination. The respondents were asked to respond on a 1 (not at all serious) through 5 (extremely serious) scale. Anti-gay/lesbian violence and employment/job discrimination garnered the highest ratings (average = 3.5) among all respondents. There were no statistically significant differences between the heterosexual and lesbian/gay/bisexual/questioning groups.

The survey also identified a number of service needs to which respondents were asked to rate how well Berks County is meeting those needs. They were again asked to respond on a 1 (very poor) through 5 (excellent) scale. Among the lesbian/gay/bisexual/questioning group, “strengthening of LGBT Organizations,” “youth services,” and “social/recreational activities and services” were rated the lowest. Among the heterosexual respondents, “strengthening of LGBT Organizations,” “youth services,” and “supportive spiritual outlets” were rated the lowest.

Over half (51.5%) of the lesbian/gay/bisexual/questioning respondents indicated that they had experienced discrimination, harassment and/or abuse in Berks County because of their sexual orientation and 5% had experienced discrimination because of their gender identity. Among the lesbian/gay/bisexual/questioning respondents who had experienced discrimination, harassment or abuse, the largest proportion (45.5%) indicated they have been made to feel uncomfortable or unwelcome. Roughly 36% have been unable to acquire partner benefits, 32.3% have been treated differently from others, and 31.3% have experienced verbal abuse or threats.

Of those being discriminated against or harassed, less than 24% reported the incident. Among the lesbian/gay/bisexual/questioning respondents who did report it, 85.7% indicated they were not satisfied with the results.

It appears that approximately half of the Berks County respondents are aware that Pennsylvania has a hate-crimes law that protects the needs of the LGBT people. This percentage did not differ between the heterosexual and lesbian/gay/bisexual/questioning respondents.

### *Health & Well-Being*

The survey asked respondents to assess their general physical health. The lesbian/gay/bisexual/questioning respondents were more likely than the heterosexual respondents to indicate their general physical health is poor. The same pattern exists for their assessment of their general mental health. About 8% of the lesbian/gay/bisexual/questioning respondents rated their mental health as poor compared to 0% of heterosexual respondents.

The percentage of respondents with health insurance was around 90% and stayed consistent regardless of sexual orientation. For the roughly 10% without health insurance, not being able to afford the insurance, along with employers not providing health insurance, were the primary reasons for not having coverage.

The majority of the respondents reported that their regular source of healthcare is through a doctor or physician and roughly 56% have a person they think of as their personal doctor or health care provider. An additional 34% of respondents have more than one person they think of as their personal doctor or health care provider. Nationwide, more individuals have only one person (rather than more than one) as their personal doctor or health care provider compared to Berks County.

Heterosexual respondents in Berks County are more likely to seek regular healthcare than lesbian/gay/bisexual/questioning respondents (78.7% versus 67.7%). Reasons for not seeking regular healthcare among the

lesbian/gay/bisexual/questioning respondents were cost and wanting to avoid embarrassment or judgment.

### *Identification with the LGBT Community*

With the exception of a few questions, this section of the survey was relevant primarily to LGBT respondents. They were initially asked at what age they were first conscious of their LGBT identity. The largest proportion (42.4%) indicated between the ages of 10 and 15, with 20.7% indicating between ages 16 and 20.

When asked about their openness about their sexual orientation or gender identity, 1.1% stated they are not open with anyone. The largest proportion (31.5%) indicated they are open to their friends, 24.8% open with their family of origin, and 20% with fellow employees. Among all of the respondents, about half (48.5%) have no family members who are LGBT. About 28% reported extended family members who are LGBT, 10% “other” family members and 9.3% have LGBT siblings.

The largest proportion of LGBT respondents (60.6%) go to gay media/publications for LGBT information. The next largest percentage (56.6%) goes to the Internet. The fewest LGBT respondents (2%) use the GALA Community Center or telephone hotline as a source for LGBT information.

The survey also assessed interest in developing a LGBT community center in Berks County. The importance of such a community center differed between the heterosexual and lesbian/gay/bisexual/questioning respondents, with the lesbian/gay/bisexual/questioning respondents more in favor of an LGBT community center. Nearly 92% of the lesbian/gay/bisexual/questioning respondents feel an LGBT community center would be important or very important. This is compared to 70% among the heterosexual respondents. They were also asked to identify how they foresee themselves being involved in an LGBT community center. Approximately half of the lesbian/gay/bisexual/questioning respondents indicated they would volunteer, support financially, and/or use the

services of the center. The majority of respondents (72.7%) indicated they would use an LGBT community center on evenings and weekends.

### *Voting and Contributing*

The lesbian/gay/bisexual/questioning respondents in Berks County are significantly more likely to vote in local elections compared to the heterosexual respondents (80.2% versus 63%).

The respondents were also asked to which local organizations they contributed time or money in the past year. The lesbian/gay/bisexual/questioning responses were identified for the reporting. Within this group, individuals were most likely to have given to the Berks AIDS Network (BAN), with 25.3% giving money or time in the past year. Churches, national health organizations (i.e., American Cancer Society, American Health Association, etc.), and police/fire department/ambulance were also identified by a substantial number of individuals.