

Dear LLLGB Leaders,

We know that many of you have questions about what has been happening over the past month or so. Some of you have asked CoD for answers. This email sets out to answer your questions and set the record straight. It is by necessity long, but we would urge you to read it in full.

What we do

The mission of LLL is to “help mothers worldwide to breastfeed through mother-to-mother support, encouragement, information, and education, and to promote a better understanding of breastfeeding as an important element in the healthy development of the baby and mother”.

Some of our activities are applicable to all members of the public; the leaflets and books we produce, the website information and the advisory roles that members take in other organisations. We take calls from, and produce materials for anyone who supports the breastfeeding dyad (mother and baby). We also provide materials addressing situations that are beyond the normal course of breastfeeding, so that further support can be sought when issues fall outside of an LLL Leader’s remit.

Mother-to-mother support

However **our core activity**, which is to provide “education in the technique of breastfeeding” through “**mother-to-mother support**”, is different. We are trained to deliver that education in intimate settings, sometimes in our own homes, often with practical support during which mothers, and sometimes Leaders, are partially clothed. Women are entitled to expect privacy and dignity when they breastfeed. Leaders with LLLGB have always been able to guarantee this by maintaining women-only spaces, in accordance with UK law, and it is an approach that the women who use our services are familiar with and expect.

We are and have always been happy to include trans and non-binary parents who are of the **female** sex. This position has repeatedly been misrepresented by some Leaders and trustees, mostly through the conflation of sex and gender identity.

Our concerns go beyond the requirement to assist males to lactate and breastfeed. Although that is a real demand from LLLI, and is the focus of the media, it is not the only issue. We maintain that we must be able to exclude any male when we need to in order to **include all our beneficiaries** – namely, mothers and children with diverse beliefs, cultures and individual needs. Abandoning our historic status as a single-sex organisation, as LLLI demands, would mean that excluding males from our meetings would become difficult in practice.

Duty of trustees

LLLGB is a UK charity, affiliated to LLLI. It is our duty as trustees to work to carry out LLLGB’s charitable aims for the good of its beneficiaries, **according to** our governing documents and **with reference to** policy. It is not policy that should take precedence, as has been asserted by some, and which has brought us to this point. Those beneficiaries are mothers (under UK law that term means *all* biological mothers, including those who do not identify as women) and children.

Since being elected in November, a majority of trustees onCoD have attempted to carry out those duties, which has necessarily included addressing issues that are contentious within LLL.

Attempts to prevent discussion

Our task has been complicated by the approach taken by a minority of trustees within CoD and some LLLGB Leaders in relation to the policies about gender identities. Their stance has made any discussion, even in general terms, impossible. That minority has insisted that simply pointing out the

difference between sex and gender identity is “harmful”. One person within that minority described as “hate speech” a suggestion that we have time to carefully consider these issues, since it is unlikely that we currently have males accessing our support.

The result is that despite our efforts to maintain transparent and respectful communication, we have been unable to have essential discussions in CoD about the Equality Act, who our beneficiaries are, the impact on our beneficiaries of including “everyone”, the safeguarding implications of doing so, and more.

Language changes

Meanwhile we have been resisting changes to eliminate ordinary sexed language from our governing documents. We believe our existing governing documents are clear and unambiguous, and allow us to prioritise our services straightforwardly and transparently as we have always done. The changes that some trustees are trying to introduce would result in uncertainty and confusion, exposing us to practical and legal risk.

LLLI Board dialogue

At the insistence of the minority of trustees, CoD met with the LLLI Board at the end of last year. Before that meeting, the minority insisted that the majority must either agree to the contested interpretation of policy or resign. We considered either option a dereliction of our duty as trustees.

At the meeting the board appeared open to dialogue about the issues we were raising. However, subsequent email exchanges with BoD did not provide satisfactory answers to our requests to define gender, sex and mother. Nor did they resolve our concerns regarding the conflict between the LLLI inclusion policy and LLLGB’s governing documents. Due to the interference of BoD by releasing part of that correspondence (“Update from your LLLI Board representation” on 11th March), the majority of trustees felt it was appropriate to share the emails which gave context.

[Email links redacted]

These were shared after a Council vote and sent to all Leaders on 3rd April 2024 with the subject “FAO all Leaders in the interest of transparency”.

While voting was taking place, six trustees received notice of a formal complaint to BoD. While no details were provided about the complaint or the complainant(s), it referred to trustees “moving the organisation (LLLGB) towards being a single-sex organisation” and that the trustees concerned had “breached policies that require Leaders to treat others with respect for their identities” in LLL spaces.

When a board/council of trustees makes a decision that is lawful, compatible with a charity’s objects and reached according to proper procedures, those in the minority who do not agree with the outcome should either accept it or step down. When CoD voted to share the correspondence between one trustee and BoD, the minority of trustees of LLLGB took neither of these appropriate courses. They first invoked outside interference by asking BoD to try to stop the email of 3rd April going out, and then spoke out publicly against the decision.

LLLGB Leaders’ response to the sharing of the correspondence was mixed. There were emails of support, from those grateful for the release, and there were also complaints, both to CoD and to BoD.

Suspensions

It was at this point that six trustees were suspended as Leaders (the six trustees subject to the complaint to BoD). Immediately the minority of trustees removed suspended trustees from the LLLGB Leader Facebook group and took complete control of post approval.

Misinformation was circulated and we had no way of challenging it. Our operations manager was on holiday for two weeks, so emailing was not an option – the emails Leaders received during that time came from one of the minority trustees who has access to the mailing list.

Serious Incident Report to the Charity Commission

The continuing misrepresentation of our views and concerns by a minority of Leaders, coupled with the control of communications by the minority of trustees, has led to a complete breakdown in governance. That in turn has left a majority of trustees no option but to become whistleblowers and submit a Serious Incident Report to the Charity Commission.

Our report covered:

- the breakdown in governance
- the interference of an organisation outside the charity, invoked by a minority of trustees (we are affiliated to LLLI, but LLLGB is an independent UK charity)
- the conflict between our charitable aims and governing documents, on the one hand, and policy, on the other
- the interaction of the Equality Act with our services, in particular provision for single-sex services

Following our report to the Charity Commission, we will be meeting with them, at their request, in the next week.

We have also contacted the Equality and Human Rights Commission to get its view, and received an acknowledgement of receipt.

Media coverage

The fact that half of the trustees of a national breastfeeding charity had been suspended for raising concerns about supporting males to breastfeed was always likely to reach the press at some point. Two emails from BoD were already being discussed outside of LLL and causing damage to the reputation of LLLGB due to their content, the word mother described as a roadblock and the insistence that LLLGB must support male lactation. We were being misrepresented, and we took the decision to talk to the press to defend LLLGB and ourselves, and to advocate for our beneficiaries. It was not something that we did lightly.

Setting the record straight Whistleblowers concerns

There is a group of seven whistleblowers in CoD – “the majority” – which includes most, but not all, of those who were suspended. We have not taken any steps lightly and would far rather have kept all discussions within LLL. Attempts to discuss these issues within LLL led to the suspension of Leader accreditation and removal from LLL online spaces of six trustees. Appropriate processes for these sanctions have not been followed.

We care very much about the wellbeing of Leaders. We acknowledge both the distress caused by having to deal with challenging messages on social media and the Helpline, and the distress felt by those who are concerned by LLL straying from its mission of mother-to-mother support and protection of the mother-baby dyad.

Women only spaces

- Many mothers who come to us for support need a women-only space; we believe that we should be able to exclude males from those spaces. We are and have always been ready to

welcome trans or non-binary parents who are of the female sex. This is a position which has been misrepresented in recent communications by both some Leaders and trustees.

Focus on mother and baby

- We believe that the impact on our beneficiaries – mothers and children – should be our focus. In UK law, the word “mother” is sex-specific. It includes female people who have given birth even if they do not identify as female, as women or as mothers. And it excludes male people even if they do identify as female, as women or as mothers. We also believe that the impact on these beneficiaries of including any other group should be properly considered.

Privacy and dignity for women

- All women are entitled to privacy and dignity in the maternity period, including at our meetings, and the Equality Act enables us to provide this by making meetings single-sex if we choose to. If LLL were to abandon its core mother-baby mission and become a mixed-sex service, we would lose that ability and that choice.

Supporting male lactation

- LLLGB CoD conducted a survey on inclusion in 2021, but there was no mention of either gender identity or sex (it did include a section that mentioned additive language). It was presented with the implication that Leaders should agree or the whole of CoD would stand down. For Leaders not in a position to step up to replace the trustees on CoD, this ultimatum left little choice other than to agree even if they had concerns.
- LLLI BoD has never consulted on the inclusion of males as beneficiaries, which is a fundamental change to the charity’s aims and mission. The Board has so far failed to answer questions about when these changes took place. Instead it continues to conflate sex and gender identity.
- The crux of the complaints against trustees is that we disagree that our mission and beneficiaries include adult males and that we do not think we should update our governing documents to ensure we include them. (For more information about this, please see the email correspondence to BoD linked above.)

Overwhelming public support

Feedback to CoD from the public, including health professionals and those who are our beneficiaries, has been **exclusively** in support of maintaining our single-sex service. To date, CoD has not received one email or contact through our website in favour of supporting males to lactate or breastfeed. It is clear from the public response that the policy of providing “information, resources, and support to all nursing parents, regardless of their gender identity or sex” and of “making our spaces welcoming to all those who want to breastfeed or give their babies human milk” is entirely out of step with public opinion.

Any damage to the reputation of LLL, both GB and International, has not come from the actions of the majority of trustees. It has come from the “no-debate” position and the refusal to consider the consequences of allowing males in our spaces and the safeguarding implications of supporting males to lactate and breastfeed.

Misrepresentation

Since the first press article, the LLLGB Leader Facebook group has been used to misrepresent the views and actions of the majority. On the rare occasion posts from Leaders challenging this narrative are let through, there is often no right of reply when further misinformation is shared in response since comments are now locked.

Emergency General Meeting

As many of you will be aware, the Leaders who are sharing selective and misrepresentative information through the Leader FB group now seek to remove from CoD the six trustees who were suspended, through resolutions tabled to be voted on at an Emergency General Meeting (EGM). CoD is looking into this. It is clear that an EGM must take place. CoD will be sharing more information about the process, the resolutions and the EGM with all Leaders over the coming weeks.

Changing the mission

We understand from recent emails directly from BoD to GB Leaders, that the future aim of LLLI is to change the LLL mission by removing reference to mothers. We as the majority of trustees in GB do not agree with that. Many Leaders came to LLL because they were inspired by the mother-centred mission and philosophy. The philosophy statements centre the needs of the baby and LLL is the only breastfeeding organisation that takes this approach.

Mothering through breastfeeding is the most natural and effective way of understanding and satisfying the needs of the baby.

Mother and baby need to be together early and often to establish a satisfying breastfeeding relationship and reliable milk production.

In the early years, the baby has an intense need to be with his mother, which is as basic as his need for food.

Ideally the breastfeeding relationship will continue until the child outgrows the need.

If we shift our focus from mother-to-mother support for mothering through breastfeeding, to supporting everyone who wants to feed a baby human milk, the importance of the mother-baby relationship will be lost. The needs of the baby will be discounted in favour of the desires of adults, and the mother will no longer matter at all because anyone can feed a baby human milk/expressed breastmilk.

Representing Leaders

We acknowledge that as trustees part of our role is to represent Leaders. If the majority of LLLGB Leaders would like to move towards changing the mission and philosophy statements, including changing the governing documents and charity objects and overview, then we will respect that choice.

Queries and concerns

Please refer any queries, concerns or comments directly to CoD. Leaders can use the incident report form here or email [redacted]@laleche.org.uk.

Our aim is to bring clarity to all these issues so that you as Leaders can continue to run your meetings with peace of mind and in full knowledge of what the Leader role entails and so that mothers seeking support know what to expect from LLL.

With LLLove

[names redacted]

LLLGB Council of Directors