



Case Study

# Manchester Lynx

Women's Basketball Club, LGBTQ+



# Who are Manchester Lynx?

**Established in 2008,  
20+ members,  
weekly 1-2 hour sessions**

Manchester Lynx was formed 16 years ago, under the name Slam Dunkin' Divas, with the original founders having an ambition to create Manchester's first LGBTQ+ women's sports club in the North-West. It still remains the only one of its kind in the North of England. Following a few years of growth, the basketball group re-emerged with a new name - Manchester Lynx - to mark a new ambition to play competitively, show pride for where they are based and to open up more opportunities for women (with and without experience of playing basketball), to the joy and camaraderie of playing sport with like minded people.

## Key features about the organisation

- Supportive
- A safe space
- Relaxed basketball
- Beginners welcome





*"I thought, even if I reach 80 years old and I'm not able to walk, I'm still gonna find a way to play basketball, because I love this sport so much... I still have the enthusiasm about playing, but for me now it's more about passing on this enjoyment to other people and showing them what the joys of basketball are."*

# Meet Georgia, Chair

## The Organiser's Story

Georgia hails from sunny Greece and lives in Manchester with her partner. She loves spending time in the outdoors and keeping physically active. When not super busy running Lynx Manchester, Georgia cycles with another LGBTQ+ group – the Rainbow Riders.

Georgia took on the role of Chair for Manchester Lynx in 2011, after 3 years as part of the club – the founders recognised her dedication and passion for the club.

Manchester Lynx fulfilled a need for there to be a safe and welcoming sporting environment for non-heterosexual people to truly be free to be who they are, although heterosexual women are also welcome as long as they are allies.

Now her key aim is to grow the club further, by increasing the number of sessions held each week and the number of members. Over 10 years ago the club received funding from Sport England, but these funds have long depleted. Georgia is focusing on getting more funding, one source being Sport England's Movement Fund to help pay for additional sessions, venues, kit, training for coaches, and equipment, and to employ a dedicated fundraiser.



# Meet Jen, Lead Participant

## A Participant's Story

Jen lives in a semi-rural village in Cheshire with her partner and mum next door. She is a self-employed graphic designer by day and is passionate about her job, with much of her work being for LGBTQ+ sport.

Jen has always loved basketball – she tried other sports, but basketball is the one that resonated with her the most. She first discovered the sport whilst at school, and continued to play with mainstream clubs in her younger years.

However, she soon started to feel uncomfortable in the heterosexual environments, particularly given she had not 'come out' yet, and found herself feeling anxious and unable to talk about herself openly and honestly. Eventually, Jen left the club and spent almost a decade not playing basketball or much of any sport, which left a huge void in her life.

16 years ago, after specifically looking for an LGBTQ+ basketball club, she came across Manchester Lynx and took herself along to one of their first sessions – she hasn't looked back.

With Manchester Lynx she feels free to be herself, which means she can throw herself into all aspects of being part of the club – from playing to socialising – without apprehension. Being part of Manchester Lynx has helped Jen to grow in confidence, on and off the court, make lifelong friends, travel the world and fulfil her joy of playing competitively too.

*“Manchester Lynx is important to me because it gives me a sense of belonging and camaraderie and a way to keep fit. What makes it special is the people! If it didn't exist I would feel bereft because there's no other sports and team that could compare so I would probably stop playing.”*





*"I've made friends for life, met my best friends through playing basketball with Lynx. I've been to everyone's wedding, I'm Godparent to the child of someone I met here. I'm so much more confident now than I used to be."*



*"I just love it. Like everyone has said, it's so welcoming. You feel like you're part of it straight away. It's really great to play with them, it's a great atmosphere in the training. We are competitive but not too much. You know, if we lose, it's just onto the next game!"*



*"When I took on the role of chair, I started noticing that there were lots of people out there that wanted to play who didn't necessarily define as LGBTQ+... as soon as we opened the doors to everyone, lots of people started coming in, women from different backgrounds, nationalities, various ages."*

# How does Manchester Lynx successfully support the community to be active?



## Relevant and relatable leadership and workforce

Leadership from other LGBTQ+ people who have shared experiences with participants by virtue of identity.

Support for people to take basketball as far as they want to – from casual to competitive play and professional skill building.

For example, helping to fund courses in refereeing, coaching or table officiating; facilitating opportunities to compete in tournaments at home and overseas.

Encouragement from leadership for members to learn new skills and get involved in the club beyond playing only.

They hold an Annual General Meeting to discuss the running of the club, where members get updated and share their views on its continued development.

## A supportive culture and environment that feels safe

A friendly and welcoming 'in it together' atmosphere.

A safe environment for their LGBTQ+ members to relax and let go.

An inclusive culture, that reflects/ responds to community need – they accept non-binary, transgender and heterosexual female allies.

Enable people to feel seen and able to be their whole selves.

The fun and joy of playing basketball is more important than winning games and developing more advanced skills.

## Reaching their community by being one of a kind

They stand out as the only LGBTQ+ organisation by women for women in the North East.

Word of mouth is one of the most common ways they get new members.

Social media – namely Facebook and Instagram – is used to promote their meetups and games.

Having a presence on other community websites, such as Pride Sports and doing press/media interviews.

## Leading with fun and connection when designing and delivering sessions

Always beginning with a welcome and introductions.

Explaining the session format and an important reminder that experience is not necessary – key for first timers.

Constant encouragement from the coach, and support for hobbyists and those who want to play more competitively.

Breaks to allow people to mingle and get to know each other.

Friday night sessions to kickoff the weekend, and socialise together.

# Manchester Lynx: The journey so far...

## Original inspiration

The 3 original founders recognised that there were no Women's basketball clubs with an LGBTQ+ focus in the North of England, and an idea was born. They wanted to be able to attend the Euro Games LGBTQ+ Olympics!

2008



2008-2011

## Build and get the word out

In 2008, the founders set-up a basketball team, to give LGBTQ+ women a safe space to play recreational, casual basketball sessions. They relied on word of mouth and the support of other organisations to promote their sessions, such as Greater Manchester Moving.

*Mainstream organisations helped get the word out. For example, Basketball England.*

## Early days

The early days quickly confirmed that there is an appetite for basketball in the community, which gave them confidence and motivation to continue. It also highlighted that there is a lot of interest amongst non-LGBTQ+ women.

*Women from a range of backgrounds enquired about joining.*

## Formalising and progressing

Lynx grew its member numbers, played in more official tournaments through the MABL and Basketball England. They formalised processes (Chair, Treasurer, Lead coaches, volunteers and meetings focused on the business of the club).

However the COVID pandemic halted progress, and led to a drop in numbers.

2011-2020



*Joined the MABL - Manchester Area Basketball League.*

2020-Now + Future



## Growing

Lynx received a grant of £3,500 from Sport England.

The grant helped the club to set up a second team and organise a Summer tournament.

*2nd team created in 2013 aided by funding.*

## Sustaining

This is where Lynx is now - focused on maintaining the club and establishing new teams and growing their presence. Their numbers aren't back up to their pre-COVID numbers yet, but they have ambitions to go beyond them.

*In another growth phase, to get back to pre-pandemic numbers.*

*Need new income streams and more funding.*





# What does Manchester Lynx provide to the community?



## The emotional

- A safe space for LGBTQ+ people to play sport and connect with one another.
- An opportunity to meet like minded people and form friendships.
- A chance to form a 'family' in a new country / new part of the UK.
- Visibility for the LGBTQ+ community in the wider basketball community.



## The functional

- Get back into playing / coaching basketball.
- Get physically active.
- Play competitive sport.
- Learn to play a new sport.