





Rainbow Threads is a creative project in which members and supporters of the North Midlands LGBT+ Older Peoples Group have been working with local textile artist and designer Jane Titley to create fabulous hanging pennants to use as bunting in celebration of our fifteenth year anniversary. We are also celebrating the centenary of Stoke-on-Trent becoming a city.

This book showcases the pennants that have been made to display at Stoke-on-Trent Pride in June 2025. The narratives that accompany the pennants make the beautiful designs even more engaging, and we hope you will enjoy reading this book.

The project has been very popular and our creative activities will continue.



Members and supporters creating Rainbow Threads pennants at our workshop for women held at the Brampton Museum in January 2025 and a mixed gender workshop also held at The Brampton Museum in February.



Rainbow Threads pennant making workshops held at B arts in February, April and May where we also undertook a renovation of our OLGBT+ marching banner.



Created by Pauline

People from any minority group can feel isolated – so meeting up with other like minded people is very important. The design shows hands about to meet, expressing the idea of coming together.



Created by Jane

'Love and solidarity' is a phrase I use to sign off a message to a friend who's having problems. It means you're my friend – I'm with you in your troubles as well as your joys' This is my message to the group. I was looking for friends and I've found some!



Created by Lyn Sharpe

I'm a proud, PROUD, Stokie "duck". This year we celebrate the City's Centenary, I see the duck as a significant representation, as important as the City's crest or the bottle kiln.



Created by Tamsin

Love is not restricted to just men and women no matter what box greater society says. You do not choose attraction love just happens and it's beautiful. I chose bright rainbow colours to symbolise pride.



Created by Tam Harrison

I have used denim because it is a fabric recognised across the world and LGBTQ+ people are part of every community in the world. I wanted red fabric as it represents love but also represents danger. Being LGBTQ Plus can be risky and dangerous in many parts of the world even today. In Britain people have been killed for being LGBTQ+ I used ripped denim to reflect the damage such prejudice does to people. The rainbow thread represents including all



Created by Mary Maddox

I am retired, I work in a group, I volunteer at various venues, I like my life.

people and the Sashiko thread is about mending and hopefully healing relationships. The fabrics are from clothes donated to a charity shop but not saleable being repurposed. I wanted to take part in this project because I know my closest friends are part of the LGBTQ community.



Created by Elise Turner

I work at Brampton Museum situated in Brampton Park. The room we made the pennants in looked out over the beautiful park. It was covered in snow, but flowers will bloom every spring every year. The rainbow flower reflects the hope of beauty returning after every dark period



Anonymous

I made a carabiner as my design because in recent years lesbian communities across the world have been using them to flag that they are lesbian to other members of the community.



Created by Tam Harrison

“Stoke’s a drag” came from finding the gold and pink fabric, thinking of the exuberance, pride and energy of drag, the energy and pride around Stoke and putting the two ideas together. The kiln symbolises Stoke



Created by Tam Harrison

Tam made this from African wax fabric with the idea of representing ethnic diversity and reminding us that LGBT+ people exist in every culture, even though the words adopted to describe their identities and experiences vary across time and place. The embroidered message says “everyone, everywhere”. The letters carry the colours of the Progress Pride Flag reminding us of the inclusion of ethnic minorities and intersectionality.



Created by Caroline

Me and my partner’s happy place on the beach, surf and mountains and sky.



Created by Jane

This was created by Jane as a demonstration piece at the start of the project. The rainbow has the colours of the Lesbian flag with two interlocked female symbols below.



Created by Mollie and Jane

Happy Rainbow Hearts pennant made by my ungod-daughter Mollie as part of a print workshop we did together. We printed hearts in white, then coloured them with Sharpie pens. Mollie is exploring her own identity and was very happy to make something joyful to give to the group.



Created by AB & MB

The pennant shows forget-me-not flowers, the symbol of Alzheimer's / dementia. The LGBT community is very supportive and inclusive of people with dementia, it is trying to be respectful and helpful for LGBT people living with dementia.



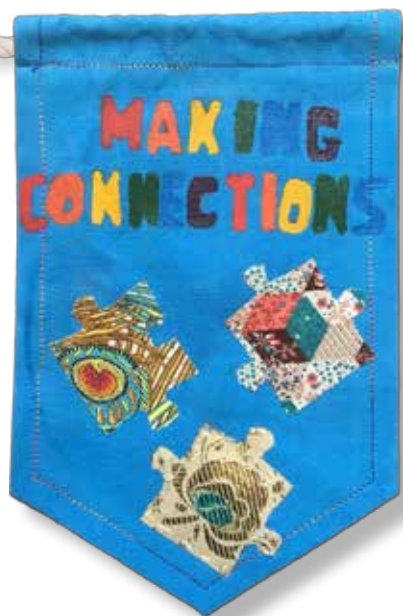
Created by Adey, Andrew and Jane

This pennant displays the symbol for people who are non-binary. It is a collaborative effort made by Adey who identifies as non-binary, Andrew who identifies as male and Jane who identifies as female – representing a spectrum of gender identities.



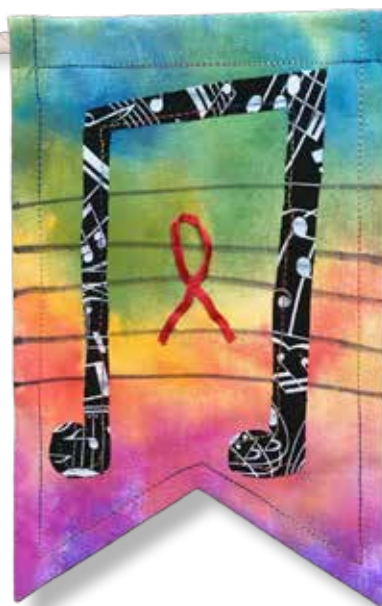
Created by Malachi White

Made by Malachi White, who kindly let me experiment with ways of teaching him stitch techniques, to help with my approach to facilitating workshops. He chose the rainbow flower and the word "friendship" to express his feelings towards the group and it's members, represented by Maurice and John, who we met at a B-Arts Climate Cafe.



Created by Stephen Malkin

Making connections. Using jigsaw cutouts to represent connecting to others. I am a huge jigsaw fan; it helps with conversation and keeps the mind active. Connecting with others can have the same effect.



Created by Josh Rushton

I chose a musical note design because like other performing arts, (acting, dancing) music is another form of self-expression which people of our community have used - be it singing or playing musical instruments – to express and show their experiences, both good and bad. The red ribbon is for World AIDS Day and with the musical note a symbol for the musicians of our community who lost their lives from AIDS.



Created by Jane and Bernard

This pennant was created by Jane and Bernard as an early prototype of a design that was completed later. Take a look at Bernard's other Welsh dragon pennant to read about why he chose to create this design.



Created by Andrew

I supported Nigel as a volunteer Buddy until his death from AIDS in 1992. This pennant features a lily which was Nigel's favourite flower. I have also used the same daisy stencil that I used when I made a panel for the UK National AIDS Memorial Quilt after Nigel died. My experience supporting Nigel enabled me to train volunteer Buddies in Stoke when I led the work to setup Staffordshire Buddies in 1993. Supporting Nigel changed the course of my life.



Created by J

I made two. They combine symbols from different periods and represent the idea that “none of us are free until we are all free”. The ground of my pennants is a rainbow flag, but at the edges you can see the brown, black and pastel colours of newer versions of the flag. The appliqué are triangles used in Nazi death camps to identify at a glance what prisoners supposed faults were – double yellow triangle (star of David) for Jewish, brown triangle for Gypsies, red



Created by Jane from a Design by Andrew

Writing about this design, Andrew says – “there is a difference between choosing an identity we feel comfortable with and being labelled by others. No one should feel compelled to label themselves, and love does not need a name”.

← for political prisoners. My grandpa was a political prisoner.



Created by Josh Rushton

I chose a military theme because “lest we forget” there are people of our community who serve currently and those who have served in the past that were/are still in the closet. “Lest we forget” in World War 1/2 there were young gay men, most likely not out, who died not fully living their true authentic life.



Created by Bernard

I lived in North Wales for 10 years and learnt the language, helping take classroom conversation out into pubs and clubs in the area. Many of the people I met were gay and supported “Pride”. I wore a tee shirt in support of Welsh Pride, consisting of a Welsh Dragon and LGBTQ+ colours. I still do, so the LGBTQ+ flag and Welsh Dragon really does reflect who I am.



Created by Maurice

I am a gay man and a long-term survivor of HIV and AIDS. My pennant carries three red ribbons, the global symbol of support and solidarity with people living with the disease and remembrance of those who have died from AIDS.

The pink background harks back to the symbol which homosexuals had to wear in Nazi concentration camps – a pink triangle.

A rainbow-coloured sash invokes the LGBT+ flag. →



Created by Jane

Experimental pennant given meaning by song lyrics, after going to a gig on Cyndi Lauper's final tour. It was wonderful to see so many LGBT+ people with us in the audience.

← Put together, I hoped the pennant might offer a visual prompt that links LGBT+ people with the Holocaust and the HIV and AIDS pandemic, which had such a devastating impact on a whole generation of gay and bisexual men.



Created by Anne and Mike

Our pennant is colourful and symbolises the joy of life even in adversity. This colourful representation of the rainbow colours, trans and inclusivity all chosen by Mike Birkett.



Created by Stephen Perks

I chose to do a flower with a petal representing all the colours of the new progress pride flag with the word equality which speaks for itself.



Created by Andrew

I started to make this pennant on Holocaust memorial day January 27th, 2025, which commemorated the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau and the 30th anniversary of the genocide in Bosnia, with the theme "For a Better Future". The pennant displays some of the badges that were used to identify the categories of prisoners sent to concentration camps. Central to this pennant's design is the pink triangle used to designate homosexual men and



Created by John

To let people of the world who are in conflict know that they are being thought of.

transgender women. This was later used in the 1970s and 80s as a symbol for the gay rights movement in the UK and many other countries. Other concentration camp badges included here are the yellow star for Jews, the blue triangle for emigrants and



Created by Jane

This is Mollie, my friend's daughter, still working out her identity. I want her to know I will love her whoever she is, whatever she does.

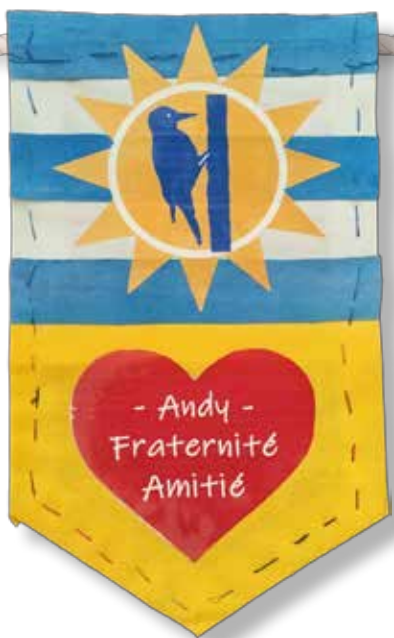
stateless people, black for social outcasts such as the mentally ill, disabled people, sex workers and lesbians, green for criminals, red for political prisoners and purple for Jehovah's witnesses and other pacifist religious groups. The blue stripes reference the



Created by Steve Perks

My pennant symbolises my gayness and passion for gardening hence the rainbow sunflower.

clothing that all concentration camp prisoners were forced to wear. I wanted to include all the people who were persecuted in the holocaust and remind us to remember where the hatred of those who are considered different can lead.



Created by Geoff

I made this pennant as a tribute to my close friend, emotional partner and soulmate who died on May 2nd 2024 aged 63 years.

Andy was a caring son, brother and friend and an accomplished and highly regarded Chartered Surveyor and work colleague. We met 36 years ago, and my life revolved around him; life with him was always an adventure filled with fun and friendship.

The blue and white represents the Finnish flag because →



Created by Paul Middleton

My pennant represents a multi-culture of Stoke-on-Trent people in a sea of calmness.

← we loved the warm friendly people the lakes the forest the countryside and the birds. The sun represents the land of the mid-night sun. Andy was an avid supporter of Leicester City Football Club, which is also represented by the blue and white, although not quite the right colour picked out by the blue thread. The wood-



Created by John

To let people of the world who are in conflict know that they are being thought of.

pecker which came to his garden every spring and summer represents his exceptional knowledge and love of birds as well as the countryside climate and weather.

Andy visited and stayed with a French family every summer as a boy, and they became close friends. He was a fluent French speaker, and he loved French cul-



Created by Jane

This pennant was created at the start of the project to display the project's title.

ture and food. The heart represents our love for each other, Fraternité means brotherhood and Amitié is friendship, which represents our relationship. There is so much more to say that can't be said other than he touched my heart like no one else has.

RIP Andy I love you and always will. Geoff.



Created by Andrew

Banksy's "kissing coppers", appeared on the wall of The Prince Albert pub in Brighton in 2004. I started to make this pennant in 2024 to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of this iconic piece of street art. Banksy never explains his creations so interpretations vary. As a man who loves men I see it as an image that highlights the existence of male attraction in the male dominated profession of British policing. Whether Banksy was mocking authority,



Created by Stephen Perks

This orange pennant is my appreciation of being welcome to a really friendly group of people, who after my relationship with one of your members ended, supported me and encouraged me to remain a member myself.

commenting on the internalised homophobia of some police officers or ringing in the changes of a more tolerant society is open to debate.



Created by James

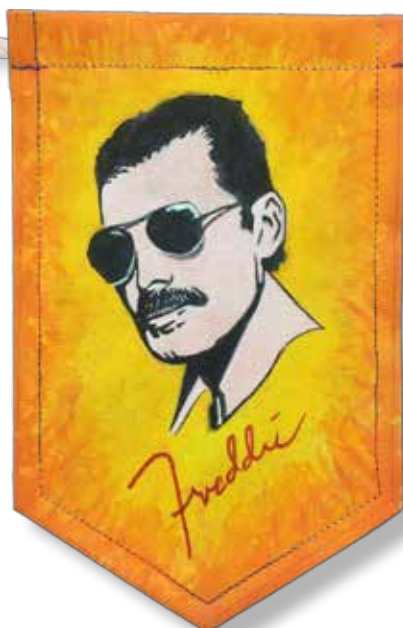
My pennant is about being you, and not trying to be something you are not, or changing to please someone else, or denying your sexuality. You can be as bold, bright and out there as the pennant itself, or like the butterflies, accepting of your sexuality, but it is not defining you as a person – or indeed be somewhere in between.

Accepting who you are might be difficult to start with, but it's also so well worth it in the end.



Created by Stephen Malkin

Making connexions. Using jigsaw cutouts to represent connecting to others. I am a huge jigsaw fan; it helps with conversation and keeps the mind active. Connecting with others can have the same effect.



Created by Andrew

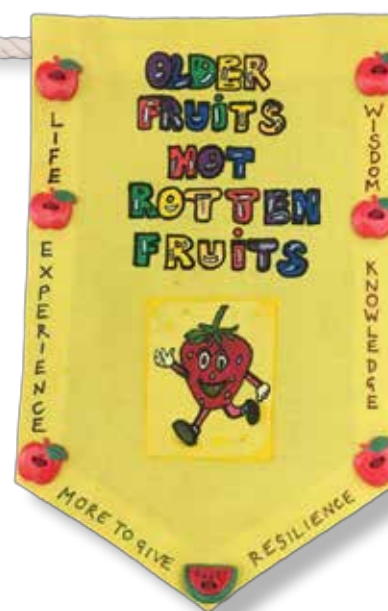
When I first heard Queen's 1991 album "Innuendo" I had a pretty good idea that Freddie Mercury's lyrics were about AIDS. I was supporting a gay man with AIDS as a volunteer buddy and tracks like "I'm Going Slightly Mad" and "The Show Must Go On" resonated with his lived experiences of AIDS related dementia and life limiting illness. In November that year Freddie died with AIDS shortly after his diagnosis was made public. I had just started to work in a paid role →



Created by Jane

The red ribbon is a global symbol of HIV/AIDS awareness

← with Body Positive North Midlands, a local self help group for people living with HIV set up and run by local gay men who were HIV positive. A few years later, the Freddy Mercury Phoenix Trust set up in Freddie's memory gave a substantial grant towards buying a building that established a drop in centre in Hanley.



Created by James

In the 1960's, 1970's and possibly as early as the 1950's the word fruit was often used to describe a gay person. My Pennant celebrates getting older – we may be older fruits, but we are certainly not past our sell by date!

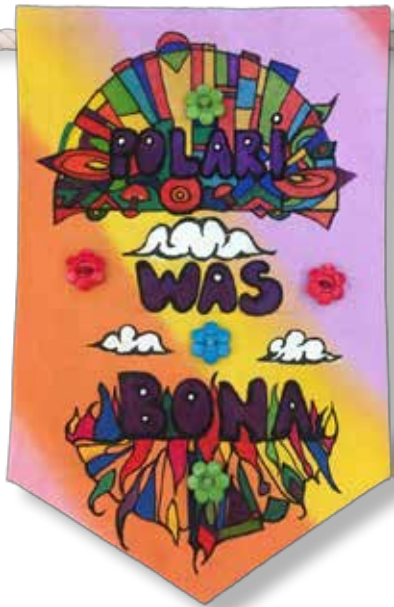
We have a wealth of life experience, knowledge and wisdom that we can share with others. We still have more to give and often do things in later life that we wish we had done many years before. Life is for living, →



Created by Stephen Perks

After celebrating the 15 year anniversary of the group, I thought it would be nice to make a pennant commemorating that great achievement, with both years embroidered on a rainbow flag.

← however old you are, just live it!
As a person of a certain age, you can often feel invisible. This pennant is a reminder that we are not, we have a value and have a lot more living to do!!



Created by James

This pennant is a nod to the past, and celebrates the ingenuity of gay people in the face of adversity. Polari is a made-up language used and developed by gay people to enable them to speak freely in public. This was at a time in the 1960s and 1970s when prosecution, persecution and physical violence against gay people was rife.

Polari uses Italian, French, backslang (saying a word as if spelled backwards) and →



Created by David

My pennant design is of a bottle kiln in rainbow colours, which I thought represents the city of Stoke-on-Trent and gay pride.

← cockney rhyming slang. It evolved from an older form of slang called Parlyaree used by travelling entertainers and fairground people in the 19th century. It then found its way into music halls and theatres being used by dancers and singers. It was also widely used in the British Navy.



Created by Jane

Created by Jane at the start of the project as both a demonstration piece and a personal statement "I go my own way".

Polari has also influenced popular culture, appearing in various forms of media including theatre, radio and television, probably most famously in the 1960s BBC Radio show called "Around the Horne" which included two camp Polari speaking characters called Julian and Sandy (played by Hugh

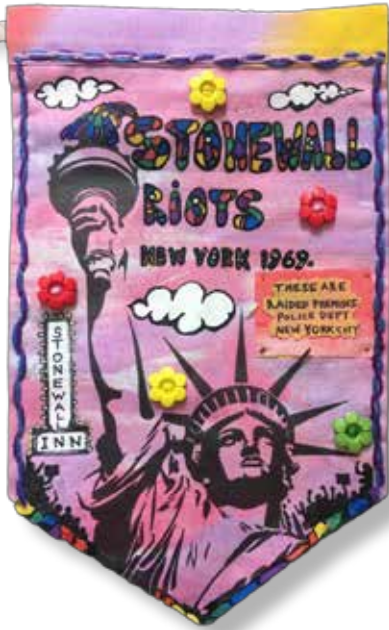


Created by John

To celebrate diversity and to show support to Ukraine. Denim is the universal material of freedom and expression.

Paddick and Kenneth Williams of carry on fame).

My favourite Polari saying is "vada the dolly dish" (look at the attractive man). Polari is used quite widely today, for example "slap" for make up and "trade" for casual sexual partner. The word "bona" on the pennant means good.



Created by James

The Stonewall riots began on June 28th 1969 and were a series of spontaneous demonstrations by members of the LGBTQ+ community in response to a police raid at the Stonewall Inn. The Inn, on Christopher Street in New York's Greenwich Village, was a popular meeting place for the gay community and police raids were common. On the night of June 27th and in the early hours of June 28th 1969, police raided the bar, throwing patrons and staff onto the streets →



Created by Jane

A beautiful pennant with a simple message "love and pride"

← and arresting others. Unlike in passed raids where patrons and staff were compliant, this time patrons and onlookers fought back against the police. This resistance was fuelled by years of frustration and discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ people. This initial resistance quickly escalated into a riot. The riots and protests



Created by Stephen Perks

A heart representation of the rainbow with love embroidered under it.

lasted several days and finally ended on July the 3rd 1969. They became a major news item in the US and sparked national attention.

The riots were the catalyst for the modern LGBTQ+ rights movement and the inspiration for gay rights organisations including



Created by J

There are LGBTQ+ people on narrow boats in Stoke-on-Trent and throughout the canal network.

the Gay Liberation Front and the Human Rights Campaign and many more. In the following year, 1970, the first gay pride marches took place in the U.S. in four U.S. cities including New York to mark the anniversary of the riots. This has now become a world-wide event and June has become "Pride Month".



Created by The Social Agency



The Social Agency is an arts based social and support group for Autistic and Learning Disabled adults over 18 years old who live in Stoke-on-Trent and surrounding areas. We provide a safe place for Autistic and/or Learning Disabled adults to come together and create. Find out more on our website: www.thesocialagency.info

"We were really pleased to help in the creation of this beautiful textile work. Huge thanks to the OLGBT+ group and Jane for letting us be a part of it."

Our group thoroughly enjoyed creating the pennants and can't wait to see them with the rest of the work.

On solidarity:

"It is important for us to stand by each other. We've got more in common than divides us."

"No matter who you are, you can love whoever you want."

"Never let the rainbow fade."





Created by Adey Bee
For Those Whose Chairs Remain

In the low hum of a quiet room,
we gather -
hands wrapped in threads,
a hush stitched between
breaths.

Each pennant begins in silence -
a square, a strip, a soft-held
piece,
blank but expectant,
open to what hands will make
of it.

We do not name.
We do not frame.
But in the warp and weft,
something begins -
shapes from shadows,
gestures caught in thread,
a shared glance outlined in
frayed indigo,
a hush of lapis
where someone once sat.

Conversation grows in the
rhythm -
needle, pull, pause -
words rising like steam
from teacups cooling beside the
cloth.

Stories unfurl slowly,
stitched into the seams
between patterns and missteps.
Hope passes hand to hand,
soft as silk,
strong as space held gently.

Sometimes, the needle slips -
a prick of pain
where we didn't expect it.
We flinch, we breathe,
we learn to stitch around the
hurt,
not to avoid it,
but to acknowledge where it
lives.

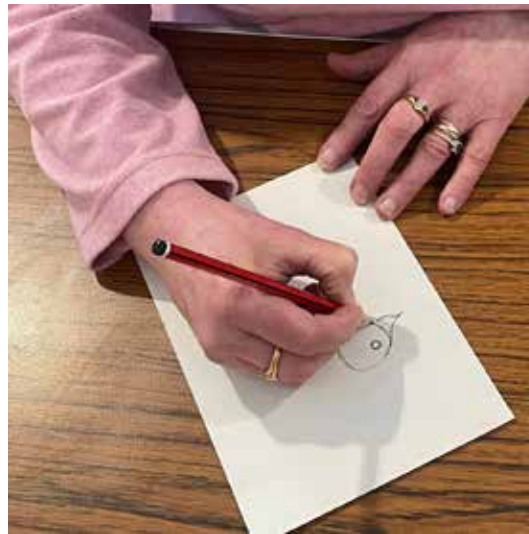
Some chairs remain at the table.
We leave them there.
The fabric remembers —
in threads loosened,
not lost.

We do not seek perfection.
We let the thread wander,
tangle, snag -
because it is in the fray
that we find each other.

What we make is not one voice,
but a chorus,
a patchwork of presence -
where now touches then,
and leans into what could be -
held together by time,
by care,
by the slow magic
of making something together.

We are not single strands,
but a skein -
twisted, dyed, and drawn close,
stronger in the winding,
unravelling by life's warp,
and even then,
capable of being threaded back
again.

© Adey Bee April 2025





Thank you to all our members and supporters for your wonderful creations. A special big thank you to textile artist and designer Jane Titley for all her help and support “one stitch at a time”.



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North Midlands LGBT+ Older Peoples Group

Registered Charity No.1186844

Credits

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Contact us through our website olgbtstoke.org.uk

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<https://olgbtstoke.org.uk/rainbow-threads>

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