

ON THE QUEST

DISSATISFIED WITH YOUR LIFE BUT UNSURE WHY? STILL TROUBLED BY FEELINGS OF SHAME? NOT SURE IF YOU ARE EXPRESSING YOURSELF IN A HEALTHY AND SELF-LOVING WAY? GAY MEN'S GROUP, *THE QUEST*, AIMS TO HELP YOU DISCOVER ANSWERS TO A WIDE RANGE OF QUESTIONS...

On a freezing cold night in early February, a group of nine gay men took the stage at the Central School of Speech and Drama in Swiss Cottage, London. In front of a packed auditorium, they unveiled their life stories. Not acting, but simply playing themselves, they allowed those present an intimate insight into their lives. All had experienced shame or hostility earlier in their lives – typically during their formative years.

The event, entitled **Beneath The Surface**, was an extension of the activities organised by **The Quest**. This growing group is aimed at gay men who have questions about their lives, who are perhaps still struggling to find their place in the world, and who are simply seeking to lead a happier and more fulfilling life, or who are struggling with issues or painful memories from their past. We caught up with one of the group's co-founders, **Ade Adeniji**, to find out more.

For anyone who has yet to have heard about it, what is The Quest?

Ade: The Quest is an experiential platform for gay men to rediscover and reconnect with their core self, thereby enabling them to live a life of authentic self-expression. The processes used by The Quest as part of the journey include facilitating weekend and one-day workshops, which involve coaching, journaling, sharing experiences and a variety of individual and group exercises. The concept behind The Quest is to investigate and explore the emotional and psychological impact of 'growing up gay in a straight man's world'. In our workshops, this is done through revisiting and healing any limiting beliefs and negative thoughts, emotions and behaviours developed during the formative stages of growing up. The ultimate intention is to release the pain from the emotional wounds of the past and to start cultivating self-nurturing beliefs, attitudes and behaviours that are supportive of the life that the men who journey with us would love to live.

How did the group start?

We ran our first workshop for gay men in June 2011. Darren [*Brady*] and myself had attended a panel discussion at the Drill Hall, which had been organised by *Attitude* magazine. The event was a follow-up to a feature the magazine had published in autumn 2010 on gay men's mental health. We had both been touched by the stories shared



by the panel members about some of the dysfunctional behaviours within the gay community. We had left the event saddened that there did not seem to be many places where gay men could collectively go and get the support to help release their emotional pain and trauma.

As life coaches and gay men, Darren and myself felt that we could bring our experience and skills to helping gay men find meaning, and to live more fulfilling lives. When we ran the initial workshop, we did not have a vision for what might manifest, although towards the end of the workshop, which ran over six consecutive weeks, it became evident from the feedback we were getting from other gay men that there was a need for this type of emotional and psychological 'inner' work. We have since facilitated eight, weekend exploration workshops, a series of shorter workshops and a two-day event last November, which explored the many issues that lie beneath the lives of gay men.

What sort of activities does The Quest arrange?

Alongside our weekend exploration and one-day workshops, we offer monthly social events, storytelling workshops and a yearly retreat. In addition to the personal development aspect of our work, we are also helping to create a community of gay men who are learning to express their needs in an open, honest and non-sexualised environment with other gay men.

Can you tell me about the book you've been involved with producing, *Love Me As I Am*?

In October 2012, we published the anthology '*Love Me As I Am: gay men reflect on their lives*'. The book features entries by 24 gay men who have attended our workshops, including Darren and myself. The anthology comprises letters that these men have written to their 16-year-old self. The idea behind this being, if these men could go back and talk to their younger self, what would they say to him? In addition, the book contains short biographies on where each person is with their life now. The book grew out of an exercise on our weekend workshop, with one of the participants suggesting that the letters to the 16-year-old could be inspirational to gay teens. We also knew that the book had the potential to touch everyone, regardless of sexual orientation. Since publication, we have received a lot of positive feedback, including from straight allies, many of whom shared with us their stories of how being 'different' has had an impact on their lives too.

The profits made by The Quest from the book sales are being donated to the charity Diversity Role Models, who are working to tackle and eliminate homophobic bullying in schools. To find out more about the book, visit: www.lovemeasiamthebook.com

www.thequestawaitsyou.com

