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GROUNDBREAKING STUDY HIGHLIGHTS BUSINESS CASE FOR ADDRESSING NEEDS OF LGBT EMPLOYEES IN HONG KONG

New research released by Community Business examines current climate for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals in Hong Kong

[HONG KONG, 17 May 2012] – Groundbreaking research released by leading non-profit organisation Community Business today, highlights the business case for addressing the needs of LGBT employees and calls for greater openness and dialogue on the subject of sexual orientation and gender identity in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong LGBT Climate Study 2011-12, sponsored by Barclays, examines both general attitudes of the working population in Hong Kong towards the subject of LGBT, and the experiences of LGBT employees themselves.

In looking at the current climate for LGBT individuals in Hong Kong, the research is based on the findings from two survey components:

1. A representative survey of the working population in Hong Kong conducted by random telephone interviews. (Sample size: 1,002 respondents)
2. A focus survey of LGBT employees currently working or seeking jobs in Hong Kong conducted via an anonymous online survey. (Sample size: 626 respondents)

Both surveys were conducted by The University of Hong Kong Public Opinion Programme between November 2011 and January 2012.

The key findings of the research show that:

- Although sexual orientation and gender identity have long been regarded as a taboo subject in Hong Kong, **there are signs that Hong Kong people are more accepting of LGBT individuals than has previously been assumed.**
 - Majority (50%-58%) of Hong Kong people say they are accepting of LGBT individuals.
 - At work, over 80% say it is unacceptable to exclude an LGBT individual from social events or deny them a promotion.
 - 68% of the Hong Kong working population say they are 'very much' or 'somewhat willing' to work alongside openly LGBT individuals.
- However **cultural, family and social pressures remain strong, leading many LGBT**



individuals to remain 'closeted'.

- 22%-25% of the Hong Kong working population say they are not accepting of LGBT individuals.
 - 44% of LGBT employees in Hong Kong are not open at all with their parents about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. They fear that their family will not understand (66%) or accept them (63%).
 - Level of contact with LGBT individuals is low - 57% of the Hong Kong working population say they do not personally know anyone who is LGBT.
 - For those who do, 70% say they do not talk openly about this person's sexual orientation or gender identity with them. LGBT remains an unspoken subject.
- **The majority of LGBT employees are not open at work because they are worried about negative consequences.**
 - 60% of LGBT employees in Hong Kong are not open with colleagues in general.
 - LGBT employees are least open with clients (74%) and the human resources department (71%).
 - This is because they are concerned about:
 - What other people will think (56%).
 - Being stereotyped (46%).
 - Losing connection or relationships with colleagues (42%).
- Although instances of open bullying and violence may not be commonplace, **LGBT discrimination and harassment is rife in Hong Kong's workplaces.**
 - Almost 80% of the Hong Kong working population think that LGBT individuals face discrimination or negative treatment.
 - Discriminatory practices in the workplace continue to be accepted by some in Hong Kong.
 - 35% find it acceptable not to give LGBT individuals customer-facing roles.
 - 25% say it is acceptable to not offer a job to an LGBT individual.
 - 67% say people at work tell anti-LGBT jokes or negative comments about LGBT people.
 - 58% have heard rumours about their own or someone else's sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
 - **Non-inclusive workplaces are impacting LGBT employees' well-being, productivity**



and engagement.

- 85% of LGBT employees say a non-inclusive workplace has had a negative impact on them personally.
 - 71% have had to lie about their personal life.
 - 54% say it is difficult to build authentic relationships with colleagues.
 - 53% report being exhausted, depressed and stressed by having to pretend to be someone they are not.
 - 26% say they have stayed home from work because of a non-inclusive work environment.
 - 22% say they have left or considered leaving a job.
- **People are looking for greater inclusiveness and leadership from companies on this issue in Hong Kong.**
 - 85% say Hong Kong needs greater inclusiveness and that it's the responsibility of Government (59%), civil society (19%), schools (17%) and companies (12%).
 - 80% believe that companies should take proactive steps to ensure that LGBT employees are treated fairly in the workplace.
 - However, **Hong Kong employers are currently doing very little.**
 - LGBT employees rate their employers' efforts at creating an inclusive workplace at only 2.68 out of 10 and 35% say their employers are doing nothing.
 - International companies are rated higher (4.32) whereas the Government/public sector is rated the lowest (1.47).
 - Top recommendations from LGBT employees on what companies can do to create more inclusive workplaces are: extending employee benefits to same sex partners of LGBT employees (65%) and putting in place an equal opportunities policy that covers sexual orientation and gender identity (46%).

Commenting on the findings, Founder of Community Business, Shalini Mahtani said, "This is possibly the first ever research for Hong Kong that so clearly demonstrates the business imperative for addressing the needs of LGBT employees. The findings show that the majority of LGBT individuals in Hong Kong are leading dual lives, concealing their sexual orientation and/or gender identity from family and colleagues. There is widespread discrimination - both in the community at large and in Hong Kong's workplaces. Of particular concern for employers, are the



findings that workplaces that are not inclusive of LGBT employees are having a negative impact on business performance. However the findings point to a changing climate in Hong Kong and a greater level of acceptance towards LGBT individuals. We believe it is time for greater openness and dialogue on this subject – by both the community and the corporate sector. Creating a more inclusive and open environment will not only be good for business – it will be good for Hong Kong as a whole.”

The Hong Kong LGBT Climate Study 2011-12 was sponsored by Barclays. “Equality of opportunity is a key principle of Barclays and we are committed to fostering an environment that offers everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, the same opportunities to be successful.” said Richard Seeley, Regional Head of Spectrum Asia, Barclays. “This study generated a number of specific concerns across a wide range of policy areas. However, the baseline conclusion is that the corporate sector in Hong Kong must take a proactive and leading role in affecting efforts to foster LGBT-inclusive environments. It is our responsibility to advance effectual LGBT-inclusion programs that will lead to a greater engagement on LGBT issues in Hong Kong and broader understanding of equity in the workplace.”

The report has been published in English and Chinese and is available for download on the Community Business website at www.communitybusiness.org

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About Community Business

Community Business is a unique membership based non-profit organisation whose mission is to lead, inspire and support businesses to improve their positive impact on people and communities. Community Business provides training, facilitation and advice to some of the world’s leading companies in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and its major areas of focus include: CSR strategy, corporate community investment, diversity and inclusion and work-life balance. Founded in 2003 and based in Hong Kong, Community Business currently works with a number of organisations, small, medium and large, committed to CSR. For more information, visit www.communitybusiness.org