

# DOUBLE LIVES

RESEARCHERS REVEAL HOW THEIR OUT-OF-HOURS PURSUITS IMPACT ON THE 9 TO 5

## TELL US ABOUT YOUR DAY JOB

I'm an associate director at the Research Partnership, which specialises in pharmaceutical market research. My job involves managing projects, generating new business and overseeing a team of researchers.



## GUNTHER MEERT THE RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP

## BY DAY ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR BY NIGHT VOLUNTEER ON THE LONDON LESBIAN & GAY SWITCHBOARD

## NOW TELL US ABOUT YOUR OTHER LIFE

I volunteer for the London Lesbian & Gay Switchboard (LLGS), which is a helpline for gay and bisexual people, taking phone calls from the public. In one shift I could have to deal with anything from a teenager who thinks he might be gay, to someone wanting to know about STIs, to an enquiry about a gay walking group in Dorset. Some calls are very straightforward while others can be quite upsetting. My role is to listen and help the caller whilst being non-judgemental and non-directive. I can also occasionally be found in Soho bars rattling a bucket to raise funds for the charity, which relies largely on donations.

## WHICH CAME FIRST?

Market research, which I've been doing since I left university. I've been volunteering at LLGS for the last few years because I wanted to do something rewarding outside work. I know how difficult it can be for gay people to come out and how isolated people can sometimes feel. This was something I felt I could relate to and help others with.

## HOW DO YOU FIT THE TWO AROUND EACH OTHER?

It can be quite difficult at times, as my job can involve evening work and travel, but LLGS recognises that volunteers have day jobs and they're flexible about shifts. If you're committed to something you find time to do it.

## WHY DON'T YOU WORK FOR LLGS FULL TIME?

I enjoy my career in market research and wouldn't want to give it up. With LLGS I like being able to do my bit – the telephone shifts and some fundraising – without needing to get involved in the running of the organisation.

## WHAT DOES THIS VOLUNTEER WORK GIVE YOU THAT MR DOESN'T?

It helps put my everyday life into perspective and makes me less self-centred. And, as cheesy as it may sound, it is rewarding to give something back to the community.

## WHAT DOES YOUR DAY JOB GIVE YOU THAT THE VOLUNTEER WORK DOESN'T?

Market research is a fascinating industry – I enjoy getting engrossed in projects and developing an in-depth knowledge of the subject.

## WHAT DOES MARKET RESEARCH TEACH YOU AS AN LLGS VOLUNTEER?

Many of the moderating skills we learn in research are essential for an LLGS volunteer. You also

have to feel comfortable talking to different types of people about a range of topics. In both roles it's important to remain impartial, but at LLGS there is no guide to tell you what to ask next and the conversations can get quite emotional.

## WHAT DOES VOLUNTEERING FOR LLGS TEACH YOU AS A MARKET RESEARCHER?

It's a constant reminder that not everyone works and lives in a culture that accepts diversity. On a more practical note it highlights the fact that people do not always say what they are truly thinking and it takes the right kind of questioning to get to the heart of the matter.

## WHAT DO YOUR RESEARCH COLLEAGUES SAY WHEN YOU TELL THEM ABOUT YOUR OTHER LIFE?

They're surprised that I don't spend all my spare time doing hedonistic activities, like drinking and dancing to Girls Aloud.

## WHAT DO YOUR FELLOW VOLUNTEERS SAY WHEN YOU TELL THEM YOU'RE A MARKET RESEARCHER?

They usually assume that 'researcher' means I spend my time in a lab inventing new drugs.

## IF YOU HAD TO GIVE UP ONE OF YOUR TWO ROLES, WHICH WOULD IT BE?

I'd rather not give up either of them.