



How You Can Help Us

how
adults
can help
lesbian,
gay,
bisexual
and trans
youth

www.lgbtyouthnorthwest.org.uk

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How You Can Help Us: How adults can help Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans* youth

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* Trans means someone's gender identity is different to the sex they were assigned at birth.

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LGBT Youth North West is a regional youth work organisation made up of 30 LGBT youth groups. We support young people through face-to-face youth work provision and support; through training (LGBT Youth College); and through regional events such as our Pride Youth Games and LGBT Youth Conferences. We train professionals who work with young people in LGBT awareness, and delivered training to over 5,500 people in schools last year.

For more information:

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YouTube: [LGBTYouthNorthWest](https://www.youtube.com/LGBTYouthNorthWest)

Introduction



Why this research?

This research was identified as necessary for a number of reasons. Staff members within LGBT Youth North West observed high numbers of young people disclosing experiences, both positive and negative, of coming out, or talking about their gender, sexuality and identity, and the response from significant adults in their lives. The staff at LGBT Youth North West also noted the number of parents, carers, and adults who support young people, including teachers, who are involved with LGBT Youth North West training, requesting help in supporting LGBT young people.

Using participatory approaches, the research aimed to discover “How You Can Help Us”, how adults can help LGBT young people.

Teenage years are imperative when considering gender, sexuality and identity, as it is in these years (however often earlier, and for some later) that young people may begin to explore their feelings and begin relationships. This is a time of learning about, and developing knowledge which may be a basis for their future relationships and identity. The transition period brings with it experience, and the experiences of many young people highlight both positive and negative experiences when they are supported by adults.

This research is an attempt to gather the experiences of young people across the North West and present them in a number of formats, including this report, a summary resource for adults, and videos in which young people have discussed their own experiences, giving advice to adults. The researcher, LGBT Youth North West and Children in Need hope that this will help those adults who are significant in LGBT young people’s support them, but also help them to understand that there is support for adults, as well as young people.

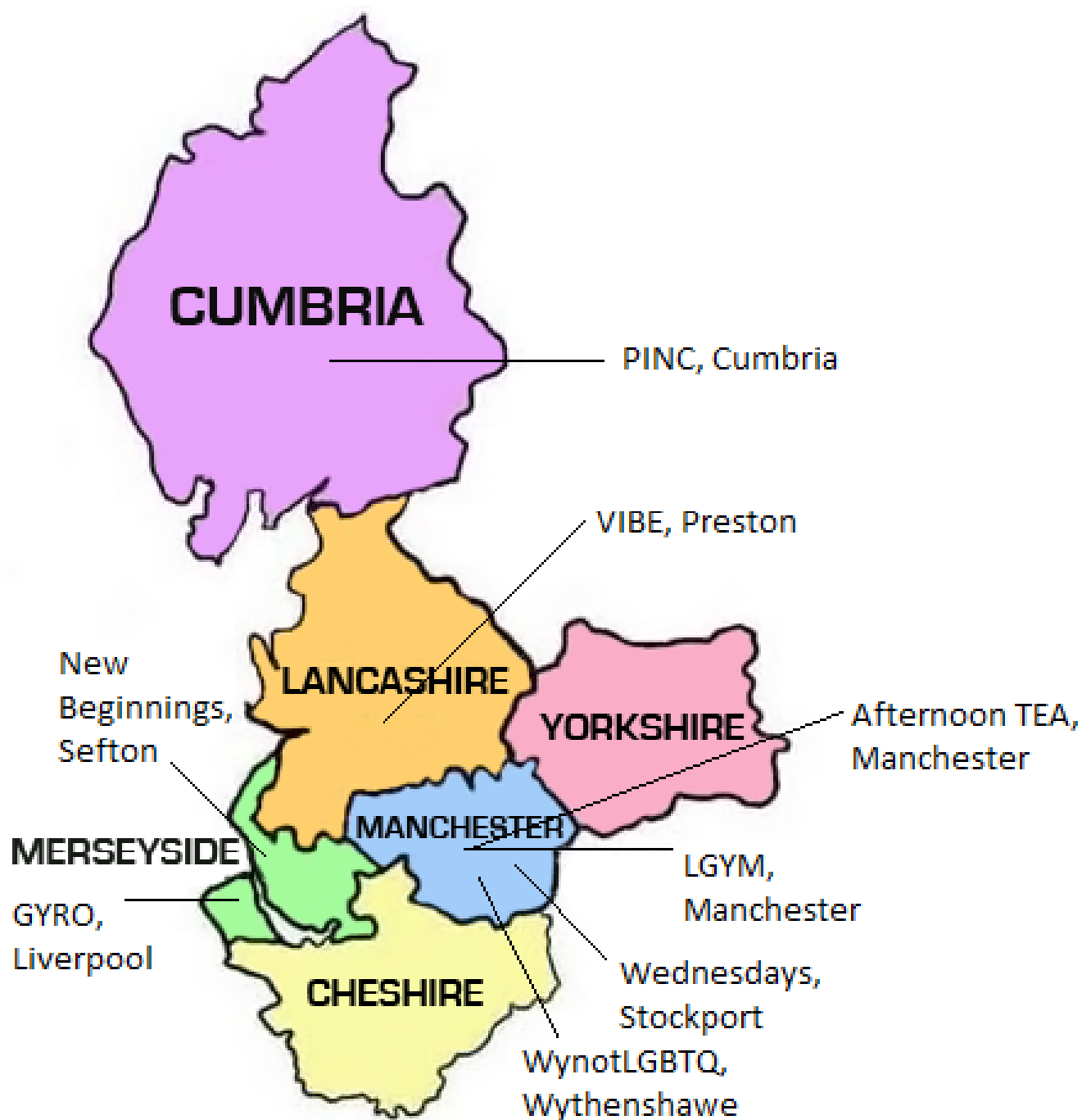
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Summary of results

128 young people contributed to the research in total:

- 77 young people face-to-face in consultation focus groups
- 10 young people who took part in the video project, sharing their experiences,
- 41 separate questionnaire responses

The young people who participated were aged 15-19 and lived in areas across the North West from LGBT Youth North West's youth groups across the region.



‘Adults Who Can Help Us’

Each focus group was asked to discuss adults they felt were significant in their lives, who should support young people. This list (see later) was compiled by all the groups, and they were then asked of these adults, who they actually feel comfortable getting support from. When asked about each of these adults, and how comfortable they would feel about talking to each one about their gender, sexuality and identity, issues around sexual and mental health, and other issues young people might deal with, some of the young people did not choose any of these adults, and some did not apply to them personally. Some young people chose more than one (numbers do not add up to 128).

Those who highlighted these significant adults as people who they felt comfortable talking about gender, sexuality and identity to, also disclosed that in their experience, it may have taken them a long time to get to this stage, with some of their experiences being negative. 33 young people highlighted that they would not feel comfortable talking to any adult.

'How You Can Help Us'-A guide for if someone comes out to you

For many adults, the thought of a young person coming out to them, or talking about their gender, sexuality or identity can be quite scary. LGBT young people have given some advice, based on their own experiences, in order to help those significant adults support young people:

Young people have given some advice, based on their own experiences, to help YOU to help others.

AS AN LGBT YOUNG PERSON YOU CAN HELP ME BY...

Being supportive

Listening to what I have to say

Offering advice

Being prepared, (having information and giving advice) - But we understand you might not have all the answers, don't worry, we don't either!

Being positive

Not rushing me

Signposting

Researching, and helping me research

Being honest if you're not sure

Treating me, and my experiences individually

Asking what you can do to help

Giving me time

Taking time for yourself

Respecting me and the LGBT community

Keeping calm

Bringing me to an LGBT youth group (you can find these on www.lgbtyouthnorthwest.org.uk) and helping to ensure that groups like these stay open

Having resources and information ready for me (especially teachers)

Challenging discrimination, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia

Realising you're being trusted with something important, significant and amazing

IN THE PAST, AS AN LGBT YOUNG PERSON, MY COMING OUT EXPERIENCE

WAS MADE DIFFICULT BY SOMEONE...

Telling me it is wrong

Criticising me

Being negative

Being judgemental

Asking lots of questions (this can be intrusive and just because we are LGB or T doesn't mean we know the answers to any of your questions)

Discriminating

Telling someone else

Assuming

Making a big deal of it

Stereotyping

Making jokes

Imposing your own beliefs/opinions

Assuming gender identity and sexuality were the same thing

Assuming all people who identify as Trans* want surgery

Dismissing

Ignoring

Ignoring others bullying me and telling me that I need to grow up

Telling me it is "just a phase"

Being aggressive

For more information, and the full report of "How You Can Help Us" please contact cliodhna@lgbtynw.org.uk Or Info@lgbtynw.org.uk Visit www.lgbtyouthnorthwest.org.uk where you can get more information and training, and find out more about our 'Don't Assume...' Campaign



Trans* is an umbrella term that refers to many identities within the gender spectrum including transgender, intersex, androgynous, transsexual & transvestite.

Aims and Methods

Aims

The organisation aimed to conduct research into how adults (identified by the young people in the focus groups and questionnaires) support Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Trans young people, with a focus on sexual and mental health.

The researcher, and those involved in the project, ensured that young people were consulted at all stages of the research, including pilot studies of both the face-to-face consultations and the questionnaires, and delivering the project to a number of groups. Young people were also heavily involved in the design stage of the resources, and were able to take part on a voluntary basis.

In order to gain an insight into young people's opinions and needs the researcher used qualitative data. As a Community Youth Worker, the researcher values the opinions of individuals, and in this project aimed to hear the voices of the minority. By asking young people what they thought, the researcher was able to contextualise the feelings, meanings and experiences related to the stimulus exercises and questionnaires, drawing conclusions, which were then approved by participants once written.

The combination of a questionnaire and focus groups enabled the researcher to gain a valuable insight into the experiences of those who participated within the groups already, and those who could not attend sessions. The research produced 'information-rich' results, allowing the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of each participant's view, as well as further explanations of individual approaches and opinions.

The questionnaire also enabled the researcher to access the views of young people who may not have been able to attend the youth groups, for reasons which may include not being out as LGBT, not being able to afford to come to groups or confidence levels. These reasons also link to the answers which young people gave on how the significant adults can help them.

Participatory Action Research

Participatory Action Research enabled the researcher and participants to work together to reflect on a subject and aim to change it to benefit them. By ensuring that young people were central to the research project, it met the National Occupational Standard of (1.1.5) "Supporting young people in taking action and to tackle problems" (National Youth Agency 2008). It focused on the experiences of young people in order to understand their needs in the hope of improving services for them, and empowering them.

This research addresses issues related to gender, sexuality and identity. While ensuring that minority sexualities were represented in research, the researcher was aware that less research considers the T of LGBT – Trans, and this was highlighted by the young people in

the groups the researcher had worked with previously as a gap. As Community and Youth Workers we aim to (1.4.1) “Provide information and support to all young people” (National Youth Agency 2008), the researcher aimed to be representative of the opinions and needs of young people, regardless of gender identity.

Focused Conversation Method

The researcher planned the focus groups using the Focused Conversation O.R.I.D. method, as it was designed specifically for the type of conversation the researcher aimed to have with the participants (ICA:UK, 2002). The Focused Conversation Method provides a structure for clear dialogue and reflection, and the researcher aimed to encourage reflection on the stimulus used. It probes beneath the surface of a topic and encourages diversity of a topic, which was important to the researcher in order to understand how the participants felt they could be supported by adults, but also ensured a variety of responses. This technique is often practised within the organisations which were used for the focus groups, so the researcher knew that it was a format the young people would be comfortable with. The researcher designed questions which would be ‘Objective, Reflective, Interpretive and Decisional’.

Focus Groups

The researcher used primary research in order to hear directly from the young people who may have experiences in being supported by adults.

The researcher designed the focus groups to encourage conversation around the topic in a “safe environment” for the young people, especially as the topic was very sensitive. Rather than one-to-one interviews, the researcher used focus groups with semi-structured questions and activities. Each focus group was asked the exact same questions; however the researcher allowed the young people to take the conversations in whatever direction they felt appropriate.

The researcher believed that by speaking to a group of young people who self-identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans, information specific to the topic would be “rich” as discussed earlier. However, the researcher also understood that this group is not representative of all Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans young people. The groups contacted were LGBT specific organisations, which the researcher had worked with previously, allowing for ease of access and an established rapport.

After explaining the aims of the research to the managers of each organisation, who all agreed that the young people might be interested, the researcher introduced the idea of the focus group to the young people via their organisation Facebook groups. This gave the researcher access to the group in a medium they were comfortable, and was a safe space to clarify questions.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was undertaken with a small sample of participants to test out the approach that was to be adopted, and if the wording and organisation of the questions and the topic were suitable. Undertaking a pilot was also useful to test the reliability of the research.

The Research Project

The primary research took place between September 2013 and October 2013 in cities in the North West including Manchester, Wythenshawe, Stockport, Sefton, Liverpool and Preston, in locations convenient to the participants. The researcher considered carefully the importance of ensuring the comfort of the groups while discussing something as difficult as the topic, and so chose the usual meeting spaces of participants, hoping they would feel safe. However, the researcher was also mindful of going into the young people's space, and respected this when conducting the research.

The researcher confirmed the focus groups with those interested on Facebook, a medium which enabled the researcher ease of access to a high number of the young people from the organisations. For those not on Facebook, the researcher also emailed the organisations, briefing the staff who explained the research to the groups.

The researcher conducted the focus groups during the organisations' usual sessions, and the sessions lasted between 45 minutes to an hour. The researcher also considered that this would leave time during the regular session for young people to talk to the researcher or other staff about the topics discussed. Members of staff from the group were present, and young people were made aware of confidentiality and the voluntary nature of this project. Support was offered before and after the project was completed.

The researcher introduced the focus group, and briefed the young people on what was, and wasn't expected of them. All young people, apart from one in the second focus group agreed to take part. The researcher had ensured when contacting the organisations that there would be an alternative activity on the night for young people to do, so they wouldn't feel pressured to take part.

Each focus group was asked the same four questions and activities were the same. The researcher aimed to ensure that the research activities were young people friendly, and so included activities which were kinaesthetic, visual and auditory. However each group was able to dictate the nature and development of the conversation. The Focused Conversation Method worked very well for this exercise, and the young people responded well to the questions, which the researcher believed encouraged them to reflect and move forward. Where appropriate, the researcher stepped in to ask further questions. One focus group appeared to need more encouragement and the extra questions prepared by the researcher and staff member from the group supported this need.

Data was collected in focus groups which contained approximately 8-15 young people ranging from age 15-19. Participants were encouraged to “question each other’s views” which in turn lead to a more informal atmosphere. The researcher had worked with the groups before and recognised that some young people may feel reluctant to speak out in front of their peers, therefore, some questions were adapted into activities and smaller groups were used. The researcher believed this activity and the crossover between the role of the researcher and role of the Community and Youth Worker helped in engaging with participants.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was piloted with a small focus group of young people who created the initial list of significant adults (which was added to by young people), and then sent out online to all the networking groups alongside a briefing for the youth workers involved. Information was also provided about what the research was for and where the results would be collated, to ensure the young people who participated made an informed decision. While this is a quantitative method, it was used to gain a deeper understanding into the support particular adults give young people, and so results were collated quantitatively.

Data Analysis

Information from the questionnaires was collated over the two month period. The information from both the questionnaires and the focus groups were kept securely with the researcher, and discussed only with the supervisor, and young people involved.

Results

Demographics

The focus of this project was to discover how the adults LGBT young people identified could support them, with particular focus on sexual and mental health issues.

Through the focus groups we contacted 77 young people aged between 15 and 19 from Manchester, Wythenshawe, Stockport, Sefton, Liverpool and Preston. Through the questionnaire, 41 people responded, and those who took part in the focus group also completed the questionnaire. A further 10 young people participated in creating videos about their experiences. (128 young people altogether).

The researcher endeavoured to ensure that there was representation from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans* community, and in every group these identities were represented.

Findings

Which adults can help me and how?

As previously highlighted, the young people identified a number of significant adults in their lives. These adults were labelled as “adults who should support me” and the young people then went on to indicate whether they felt personally these adults were supportive, particularly around the areas of mental and sexual health.

The researcher found it interesting to note the similarity between the answers of the groups. There were crossovers between which adults each group chose, and why, and their reasoning for choosing significant adults were almost identical.

Young people were very quickly able to identify those adults who should support them, however, few of those adults were then chosen by the participants as people they might turn to for support. Worryingly, it was highlighted 33 times that young people would feel they had no one to turn to for support around issues such as gender, sexuality and identity, sexual or mental health.

For those adults chosen as “significant”, young people were able to give advice based on their own experiences about why they may find it difficult getting support from the particular adults, good examples of support, and what adults can do in the future if someone comes to an adult for support.

Parents

“Parents should be accepting. I know that this is tough for them, but it’s really difficult for us too. Knowing that we’ve got someone to love us after we come out would be such a reassurance”.

“Parents should be there to listen”.

“While our parents may not have been through our experiences with sexuality, they might have had issues to do with sexual and mental health, so I’d hope they’d help us regardless of our sexuality, gender or identity”.

“When I told my mum about my mental health issues, like my sexuality, I expected her to keep it between just us”.

“It’s your job as my parent to accept me”.

“I wish my mum hadn’t told the rest of my family. It was my special thing to share”.

“A lot of parents are very uneducated about the issues and aren’t prepared for their children to have issues”.

“My dad really surprised me. He listened, gave me the time and space I needed, and treated me the same. I’m very glad to have such great support. I know a lot of people who don’t have that sadly”.

“I felt I had to tell my parents about my mental health issues, because I was scared my doctor would. I live in a small town where everyone knows each other...I wish I hadn’t felt such a pressure. I needed more time to figure it out myself”.

The young people were very clear that they hoped that their parents would be supportive, through listening, being confidential, and by accepting them. For many of the young people, their negative experiences have led to them not being able to ask their parents for help in issues to do with relationships, education and finance. Young people highlighted that without support from their parents, they were more likely to go to the internet for support. The researcher and staff members discussed with the participants some dangers of information from the internet, including lack of accuracy and also some triggering information. While participants agreed, many of them highlighted that thanks to the internet, they were able to find the LGBT youth groups they attend today.

The young people had a great understanding into how difficult hearing their child has an issue might be for a parent, and explained that for that reason, they should access support from services like LGBT Youth North West, who could signpost to relevant organisations.

Grandparents

“Get with the times, please”.

“You are so important to me, I hope I’m important enough to you that you’ll accept me”.

“So many of my friend’s grandparents don’t accept them because of their age. I understand they grew up in a different time, but still, it is discrimination”.

“Like racism, I’m not going to stand for my grandpa being homophobic. I’ve challenged him a lot in the past, and I think he is beginning to learn. I understand though at 80 it’s hard to completely change your views”

“My mum kicked me out when she found out about me being bisexual. Granny took me in. I’m so grateful. Granny is disgusted that mum still doesn’t talk to me. I hope things will change...because now my mum has kind of lost her mum like I have lost mine”.

“My Grandpa came to an LGBT Youth North West event once. That was pretty cool”.

“I think grandparents can be a lot more patient than parents. Maybe because they don’t have as much responsibility for you, but they love you just as much. When I told my grandparents I was pregnant at 15, they were just so excited to be great-grandparents”.

“I don’t know if I’ll ever be able to tell them about my sexuality”.

“It just seems unfair that every year my siblings bring their partners to my grandparents’ parties but I’m not allowed to because I have a boyfriend”.

“I wouldn’t want to worry my Nanna talking about my depression and stuff”.

For many of the young people, they found it easier to approach their grandparents about issues which were personal to them, but highlighted throughout this research was the idea that young people would go to those who they have formed a positive relationship with. There appeared to be a divide in the number of young people who felt they were supported, or they did not receive support, and for many young people who had no support from their parents, their grandparents became a source of support during difficult times, and also times of celebration.

Challenging older people about language and attitudes was a focal point of the discussion, and it was encouraging to the researcher to hear how many young people felt more confident in challenging their grandparents when necessary.



Challenging older people about language and attitudes was a focal point of the discussion



Many came out to a sibling first to ‘test the waters’.



Carers

“I found it easier to come out to my carer. I felt like she was more ready and prepared for any issue I might have”.

“My carer works with lots of young people, and I found him very supportive”.

“I’ve found it hard to come out to my carer because I’ve only known her for a few months, but I think she’s cool with me talking to her about all my issues”.

“I feel like I can be myself now that I live with a carer, because I’m starting fresh”.

There were a small number of young people who lived in care, and for them, they found their carer’s previous experience in dealing with issues young people might have helped them to seem more prepared, which is something they appreciated. Many young people who attend LGBT Youth North West services are signposted by carers, and their knowledge of resources and support for issues young people might be dealing with appears vital in the lives of those who were part of the research.

Siblings

“For lots of my friends, they found it difficult to come out to older siblings”.

“It really changes things in a lot of ways if you’re close, because it’s like you’ve been hiding something from them...Well that’s what my brother thought”.

“I think my sister found it hard because people in school found out and treated her differently. I guess it was then that I realised it doesn’t just affect me, sadly”.

“My siblings are the only people who know”.

“I’m the eldest child, and my siblings are really young. It was so easy to tell them about my partner, they just were happy that I’m happy and didn’t have any pre judgements or stereotypes in their heads. My parents were a little worried...I just said to them though, would you have a problem with them meeting my partner if I was in a straight relationship? I think they got it then. It hasn’t done my siblings any harm. I think they more accepting people from this”.

For those young people interviewed, if they had siblings, depending on how close the relationship was, many came out to a sibling first to “test the waters”. However, some found that it really changed the dynamic of their relationship, and for many, while their sibling was older, the young people felt they had to “protect them”, e.g. from bullying in school or from the truth about their mental health. Siblings can help these young people by treating them as they have always done, and with respect.

Extended Family

“It’s tough. I don’t see my extended family enough to know how they’ll react to some of the issues I’m having”.

“My parents told my extended family without my permission. That really annoyed me. And now when I see them at family gatherings, no one talks about it, but we all know. It feels really dismissive”.

“My extended family have been great. But I think because our family is very open about our history of mental illness, and the fact that my cousin came out as gay a few years ago really helped me”.

“I find it hard at things like weddings and Christmas when I don’t feel accepted as myself because I can’t bring or talk about my partner. I don’t think the whole family will ever fully respect it”.

“My parents told me not to tell my extended family. I guess they’ll never know about my sexuality”.

“My extended family know about my transition. They know that I’ve changed my name and everything but still use the wrong pronouns and my birth name. Every Christmas they’ll send “girls” clothes and stuff...I know they need time but it has been 5 years. I honestly don’t know if they’ll ever accept me”.

For a number of the young people, their relationship, or lack of relationship with their extended family made it more difficult for them to come out, or talk about the issues they may have. In the same way the young people would like to be treated by other family members, these young people asked for respect, time and understanding from their extended family. And to understand that they might want to tell the family themselves, but again, that may take time.

It also seemed that mental health was something that a lot of the young people understood was very prevalent in their families, but something that wasn’t easily talked about. They believed that this reflects the attitudes of society today, in which mental health is stigmatised as a very personal issue which shouldn’t be talked about openly.

Likewise, but for different reasons, many of those who took part in the research said they wouldn’t talk about their sexual health to their extended family, because it is a personal issue. However, that it shouldn’t be something which people think of as a taboo subject.



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Teachers

“In my experience, teachers are terrible. And I know that sounds harsh. And I know their job is tough. But they have an opportunity to make five or so years of our lives a little bit easier. And for some, they don’t support at all. Ignoring bullying, not being prepared, being heteronormative...It is really hard to feel normal as an LGBT young person in school”.

“Schools only do so much. I know they have anti-homophobia policies, but all teachers should have to apply them-to students AND themselves”.

“So many times I’ve been told to ignore the bullying. But if it was racism you wouldn’t be saying that? Every inequality issue is just as bad and teachers have to show us they are there to help”.

“My teacher was great. He didn’t make a big deal of it or out me to my friends and everyone else which is such a big worry to me. He had some leaflets in his drawer which he gave me after class, and I know he’s there to listen, which is amazing”.

“The things we learn about in school should reflect the society we live in. So if a writer is gay, or if someone we’re learning about has mental health issues, recognise it. Normalise it. You’re being exclusive otherwise”.

“Don’t make assumptions or label me”.

“Teachers go through training in their PGCE, right? Do they get trained on how to deal with students coming to them with issues? I think they need more of it really”.

“I spent every day for 3 years with one of my teachers. Probably more time than I spent with most other adults. You build a relationship with them, so of course they might be the first person you talk to with an issue. They need to be prepared for that”.

Teachers have a huge role to play in young people’s lives, and in every focus group their role in supporting young people was highlighted. The majority of young people don’t feel that teachers are prepared enough to support young people on a one-to-one basis, and in a classroom setting, many teachers do not challenge comments enough, and do not ensure that LGBT issues are visible in the curriculum. Young people repeated the importance of being there to listen to young people. This requires time, and patience, as a young person may need to build a relationship with the teacher first. Being inclusive in lessons is a big indicator for young people as to whether they feel they can get support from a particular teacher. The young people also highlighted that in schools, many young people have learning disabilities, and a lot of teachers appear to wrongly assume that they do not have sexualities. This visibly annoyed the young people, and reinforced the idea that adults need to educate themselves more in order to support young people.

Youth Workers

“I don’t know what it is...But youth workers just understand us more”.

“They’re always prepared to talk and listen, and signpost. I think their knowledge is what makes the difference for me”.

“My youth worker makes me feel comfortable and safe. And I learn from her”.

“Youth workers are more supportive of me than my parents, and I see them for an hour a week”.

“I think having LGBT youth workers makes a big difference for me. I feel safe, and like they understand what I’m going through”.

“I’ve learned so much about mental health issues that it helped me when I was going through a tough time”.

“I can imagine in a generic youth club it would be more difficult to be as supportive, because you’ve got so many needs to deal with. But knowing that this group exists, signposting young people to it could really help someone”.

“Youth workers should challenge language and behaviour”.

“I don’t know what I’d do without my youth worker. She’s helped me through my transition. Her understanding, patience and support honestly saved my life”.

“I learn more from my youth worker than I do from my teacher”.

“My youth worker helped me when I needed sexual health support”.

The young people interviewed appeared to be most comfortable talking to youth workers. The researcher recognises the bias of the research, considering that these young people access a service which allows them to be supported by youth workers, however, the relationships the young people are able to build with the youth workers, and the knowledge and understanding they share appears to really help young people, through a vast number of issues, including education, home life, relationships, mental health, gender, sexuality and identity, and family life. In a number of the sessions, the researcher did not ask for open feedback about youth workers, because some of the young people may not have felt they could be fully honest in front of their own youth workers. However, the results above indicate the significance many youth workers have in the lives of young people.

The young people believe that all adults should adopt a similar approach to youth workers when supporting young people, which includes being non-judgemental, listening, and starting from where the young person is at, treating them and their experiences individually.

Social Workers

“I don’t want my social worker to know about my personal life”.

“My social worker isn’t as supportive as I’d hoped”.

“I don’t know if his role is to support me in the way I need it. But he hasn’t signposted me anywhere else. I’m not too sure what to do”.

“My social worker brought me to this group. I’m very grateful for that”.

Young people appeared to be uncertain of the role of a social worker in supporting them through various issues. It appears that young people would appreciate more communication, and for their social worker to have more of an understanding into what support they need. Again, the need for a relationship to form for both parties was highlighted.

Sports Coaches

“I don’t feel like I can play sport because of my sexuality...I’ve had a difficult time in the past being gay and trying to take part in sport...and a lot of that was from the coach as well as team”.

“Sports coaches and PE teachers were the worst for me. They let the bullying happen”.

“People question why more athletes aren’t out. But it’s a horrible place to be if you’re LGBT. And sports coaches should do more to help us feel comfortable”.

“I love sports. And my coach is really brilliant about challenging homophobia”.

“My coach doesn’t know much about me off the pitch. I don’t think I’d feel comfortable telling him about my depression”.

The young people discussed their difficult experiences as LGBT young people and playing sports. For the majority, sports have always been a negative experience, with bullying from peers, negative attitudes and lack of support from coaches and stereotypes being made about certain sports. Throughout the research, the young people discussed countless incidences of bullying related to sports, both in their personal life, and those in the media. The lack of LGBT representation in sport was something that appeared to discourage many of the young people from participating in sports which they might enjoy. Coaches are encouraged to challenge homophobia, and to look at the person for their sporting ability, not their sexuality, gender, or identity.

Religious Leaders



“I don’t feel welcome in any religion. And the leaders I’ve met have added to that”.

“My leader is amazing. He supports me in my faith, but also my personal life. I am very out within my church, and while I know some people have found this difficult, the leader is very inclusive, and non-judgemental. Exactly how I think leaders should be”.

“So many people just quote Bible verses at me. I think that’s abusing their role. They are there to help, not condemn”.

“Judge not lest ye be judged and all that”.

Participants found this area of the discussion quite difficult, and many of the young people had had negative experiences in the past. This included feelings of rejection and judgement. For many of the young people, from different religious backgrounds, they have practised their faith for many years, but once they came out, things changed. Many of the young people concluded that they understand that being LGBT could conflict with many of the religious leaders’ own belief, but it is their role to support. This can be done through signposting and listening, educating themselves. A number of young people discussed the 2013 Equal Marriage Bill. It was highlighted by young people if a church or religion did not allow them to marry in a church, for them it was a clear indicator that they were not welcome as LGBT young people.

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Doctors

“I need the support of my doctor about my mental health, but I don’t know how to approach him”.

“My doctor has been amazing throughout my transition. I think her honesty in the beginning, telling me she didn’t know some of the terms, and researching them with me, really helped me to feel comfortable around her. And showed that she was willing to learn”.

“It takes so long to get an appointment, and you’re in for about 5 minutes, that I don’t feel like I have time to talk to my doctor about everything that is going on”.

“My doctor made assumptions about my lifestyle. So I never went back. I just google everything now”.



“I was scared my doctor would tell my parents about what I said”.

“My doctor has posters in her office which include LGBT ones...It feels a little safer to me”

There was a mixed response from young people about their experiences with doctors. Notably, the young people who identify as Trans* eventually had better experiences than others, but according to them, that was due to their high number of appointments with doctors, and the relationships which were therefore established.

However, all the young people stated, that whether it was about gender, sexuality, identity, mental health, sexual health or a cold, the initial approach was difficult, especially for those who lacked support from family or friends. According to the young people, doctors should appear less judgemental, and have a better understanding of the issues young people face in 2013. For a lot of young people previous negative experiences discouraged them from seeking help now. Age was another limiting factor, in that for a lot of the young people, older doctors appeared to them to have less of an understanding, and so this was something they highlighted as work for the future.

Worryingly, a high majority young people stated that they would rather look on the internet if they needed help, and for some, this had led to misdiagnoses.

 My doctor has posters in her office which include LGBT ones...It feels a little safer to me. 

Nurses

“My nurse made a lot of assumptions when I last saw her. I was getting a blood test done, and she asked if I was sexually active. I said yes, and so she asked could I be pregnant. I said no. But she made me take a pregnancy test anyway. I had to tell her I’ve only ever slept with girls. I felt really pressured into coming out. And she wasn’t supportive”.

“I find it difficult to be honest about my sexual history when getting checked by the nurse. I look around the office and only see leaflets and posters about straight people. I don’t know how to tell her I’m gay”.

“My nurse didn’t have any dental dams when I asked...I felt pretty embarrassed after that”.

“The school nurse gave me a leaflet about being Trans*”.

Young people appeared to have similar experiences with nurses as they did with doctors. They highlighted that nurses should be prepared for young people to disclose information to them, and be able to signpost them to relevant support. Often, young people felt judged, and this could be related to the attitudes of the nurse, or the experience of going to the nurse as a whole, including lack of resources within the exam room. Ensuring that there are resources which are inclusive can help young people to feel comfortable and reassured.

“ Often young people felt judged... Ensuring that there are resources which are inclusive can help young people to feel comfortable and reassured. ”

“ Seeing celebrities who are LGBT, or who may have mental health issues, gives the young people hope that they too can succeed. ”

Celebrities

“Celebrities should be role models. People like Stephen Fry and Lady Gaga are great. Lady Gaga has normalised being LGBT. And even though she is straight, she seems to understand us”.

“I think a lot of them, like Macklemore, are doing a good job in pushing for equality”.

“I know they don’t actually know us, but celebrities can support us as young people by showing us that they accept us. And understand that we have issues. Not just to do with being LGBT. But like mental health”.

“Lots of celebrities with mental health issues get such bad press. And a lot of celebrities are accused of “going off the rails” when really they clearly need support. It makes me feel guilty. But it isn’t their fault. Though I think it means we can relate to them more”.

“Celebrities often wait until they’ve won an award or retired (e.g. sports) to come out... It’s sad because I guess they, or their managers think they won’t be as successful otherwise?”

For young people, celebrities can be a big source of support. With the increase in access to celebrities’ thoughts and opinions via social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook, young people may feel they can seek support from these adults. And many of the celebrities these young people reach out to have had similar experiences with mental health issues, and are advocates for the LGBT community. For this reason, a number of the young people said celebrities are a good source of support, and by being a good role model, they can continue to do so. Seeing celebrities who are LGBT, or who may have mental health issues, gives the young people hope that they too can succeed.

Librarians

“I noticed that my librarian had leaflets in the support section about being gay. I knew then that she was cool with it”.

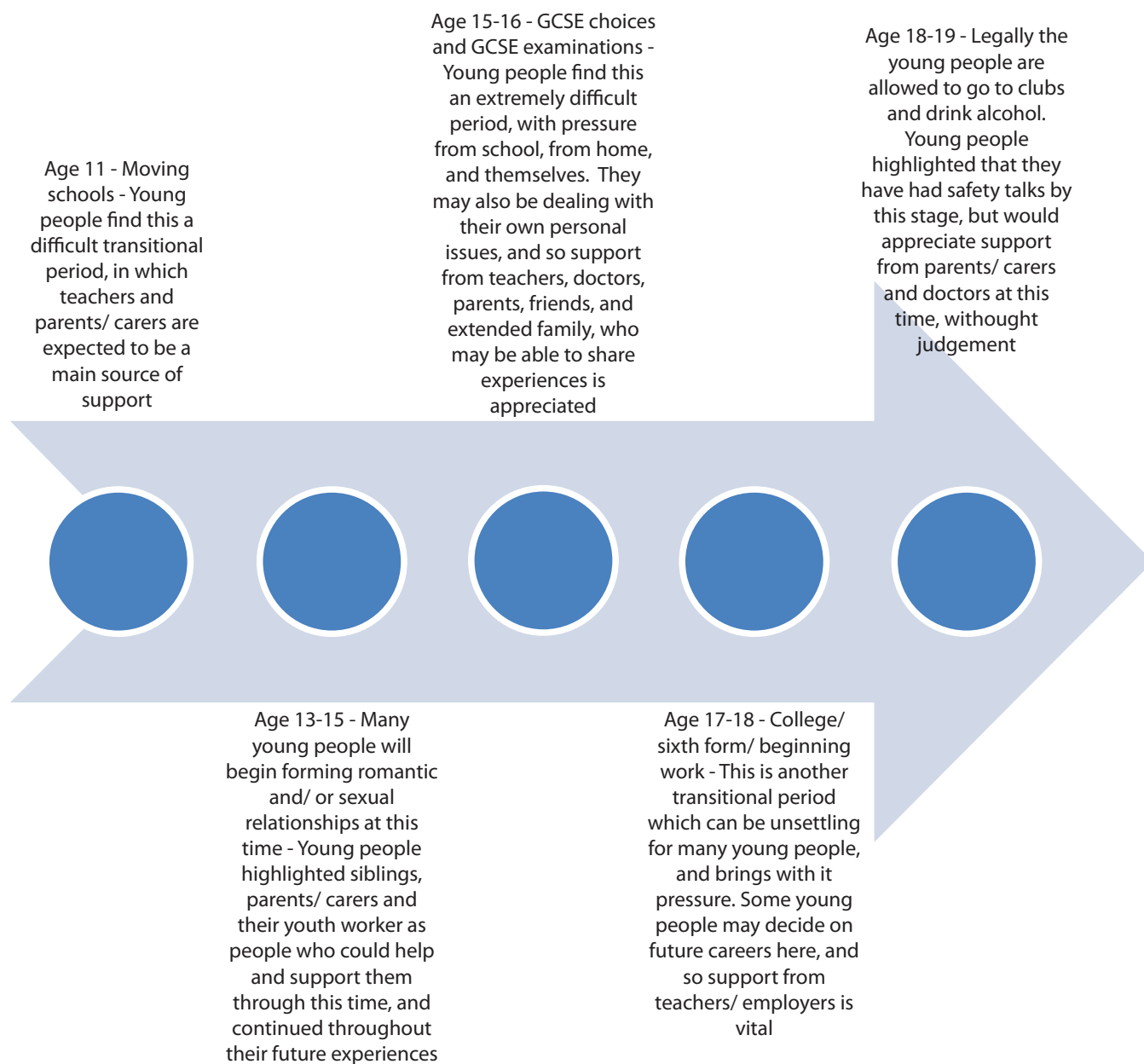
“My librarian supplies books with an LGBT theme”.

“I came out to my librarian, because she was really nice and always had time to listen. Her positive reaction made me confident to come out to others in the future”.

One of the main ways that adults can support, that young people highlighted was to have resources available. For some of the young people, their librarians have resources to hand, and are prepared to help, which is how they believe more adults should be. Their calm and gentle nature was also repeatedly mentioned, and according to those who chose librarians as significant adults, their patience and time they gave to young people meant they felt safe to talk about issues they might have.

Significant periods when young people need support

For adults, it is also helpful to understand when young people might need extra support, and what they can do during this time. Young people were asked to draw timelines of their lives, and highlight the times when they need most support. For a number of the young people, this was a time when they needed most support, but felt that they did not receive it, due to breakdown in relationships, or a lack of understanding from the significant adult. The researcher again noted the similarities between the group responses.



As an LGBT young person you can help me by...

As stated previously, these are the key ways in which adults can help LGBT young people in their coming out experiences:

Young people have given some advice, based on their own experiences, to help YOU to help others.

AS AN LGBT YOUNG PERSON YOU CAN HELP ME BY...	IN THE PAST, AS AN LGBT YOUNG PERSON, MY COMING OUT EXPERIENCE WAS MADE DIFFICULT BY SOMEONE...
Being supportive Listening to what I have to say Offering advice Being prepared, (having information and giving advice) - But we understand you might not have all the answers, don't worry, we don't either! Being positive Not rushing me Signposting Researching, and helping me research Being honest if you're not sure Treating me, and my experiences individually Asking what you can do to help Giving me time Taking time for yourself Respecting me and the LGBT community Keeping calm Bringing me to an LGBT youth group (you can find these on www.lgbtyouthnorthwest.org.uk) and helping to ensure that groups like these stay open Having resources and information ready for me (especially teachers) Challenging discrimination, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia Realising you're being trusted with something important, significant and amazing	Telling me it is wrong Criticising me Being negative Being judgemental Asking lots of questions (this can be intrusive and just because we are LGB or T doesn't mean we know the answers to all of your questions) Discriminating Telling someone else Assuming Making a big deal of it Stereotyping Making jokes Imposing your own beliefs/opinions Assuming gender identity and sexuality were the same thing Assuming all people who identify as Trans* want surgery Dismissing Ignoring Ignoring others bullying me and telling me that I need to grow up Telling me it is "just a phase" Being aggressive

For more information, and the full report of "How You Can Help Us" please contact cliodhna@lgbtynw.org.uk Or Info@lgbtynw.org.uk Visit www.lgbtyouthnorthwest.org.uk where you can get more information and training, and find out more about our 'Don't Assume...' Campaign

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Trans is an umbrella term that refers to many identities within the gender spectrum including transgender, intersex, androgynous, transsexual & transvestite.*

Conclusion

This research has enabled the researcher and LGBT Youth North West to develop confidence and knowledge of the needs of young people and in accessing support in these issues. While this piece of research was small scale, it showed the researcher how they might put together a more in depth piece of research, helping to develop skills which would be necessary.

Research takes time, and thorough preparation for this piece was vital. Crucially, time was also spent building relationships with young people in their own environment, and this was invaluable to the research process.

The relationships that had already been established with the groups enabled the researcher to have privileged access, one which the researcher believes was vital for the trust and helped in “facilitating young people’s exploration of their values and beliefs,” and “developing a culture and systems that promote equality and value diversity” (National Youth Agency, 2008). These factors were important to the researcher throughout the process, and they believe working towards them helped to create effective group work with illuminating and meaningful results.

In light of this, a number of recommendations are presented to embed the learning from this study. More should be done in both formal and informal education settings, and in the relationships with significant adults to help young people better access support for their own issues.

This research has also addressed the National Occupational Standard, “Working in partnership with agencies to improve opportunities for young people” (National Youth Agency, 2008) and as a Community and Youth Worker, the researcher believes that the young people’s voices being heard about an issue which is extremely important to them, and needs being met was a valuable result of this study. While the researcher was able to undertake independent research, they were extremely grateful for the time the organisations gave towards to project, both during the research while supporting the researcher in sessions, and after, when young people disclosed information and staff supported them.

Reflection was needed at every stage of the research, including reflection of own practice, reflection on other researchers’ practice and reflection on the behaviour and responses of young people throughout the focus groups.

The researcher is aware that this study was small scale, limited to the North West of England with a total of 128 respondents in the organisations. This research is not conclusive of the views of all lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans* young people aged 15-19. Despite this, the researcher believes that it is valuable research which questions what more adults can do to meet the needs of young people. The young people generated their ideas on what support they, and their peers in the LGBT community need including how places can be welcoming so young people feel comfortable in discussing and accessing support from significant adults.

This report details recommendations to adults in how to support a young person coming out, how to affirm a young LGBT person's identity, and specific sections looking at trans* young people. The young people also highlighted their specific needs in relation to sexual and mental health support.

How this has helped young people

Throughout the project, different evaluation tools were used, both verbal and written. As a result of the research, many of the young people have stated that they feel more confident in understanding and knowing how to talk to adults about their issues, and how to support adults supporting them. This project has enabled young people to design and implement research, developing skills including teamwork and communication, design skills, journalism and film making.

For many of the young people, isolation was a major issue, and studies show that for LGBT young people, this is a common feeling. Through this project, LGBT young people have been able to work together, creating a support network throughout the North West of England. The young people have also been able to identify avenues for support in the future, and a number of young people highlighted that they would feel more confident in accessing support from doctors, teachers and youth workers in the future.

Future impact of the project

The resource the young people produced will help their wider peer group in society, families (including parents) of LGBT young people, teachers and other professionals, including those, but not limited to the adults identified by the participants. The resource will be practical guidance to show people how LGBT young people want and need to be supported, especially during the tough coming out process. The researcher and young people hope it will lead to less hostility, abuse and fewer young people being thrown out of their homes, which are common issues among LGBT youth.

The young people who participated appear to have a sense of pride in achieving a tangible resource that will make not only their lives better, but also improve the lives of thousands of other LGBT young people. The videos made by the young people will be available online, and can be used as a source of support for both LGBT young people and adults.

The staff in the sessions appeared to gain a greater insight into what the new and emerging issues are for young people. Through continued contact, they in turn will be able to advocate for changes and to address needs e.g. through running themed workshops for the young people they work with or their colleagues.

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www.lgbtyouthnorthwest.org.uk

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