SECTION THREE

Working with LGBTI+ young people

Introduction

This section focuses on young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex (LGBTI+[i]). It presents demographics relating to LGBTI+ young people, explains the varying needs and issues that LGBTI+ young people may face and it offers practical advice on actions you can take to support them to access your youth service and contribute to it. At the end, if you have further questions or want to obtain resources, there are contact details for BeLonGTo and other LGBTI+ youth and community groups, as well as suggested further reading.

By all accounts LGBTI+ young people are 'coming out' about their identities younger and in greater numbers than ever before. In this way LGBTI+ young people who are in a position to tell others about their identities often cause great positive change in their youth groups and schools. However, most LGBTI+ young people are aware of their sexuality/gender at 12 years of age but do not tell others until they are 14-16. Because of this it is very likely that you are presently working with LGBTI+ young people who have not disclosed their identities to you yet. A key to ensuring that LGBTI+ young people are safe and included is to presume that you already are working with some, and to create

an environment which is open, safe, welcoming and equal for them.

Your role as a youth worker may involve working with a young person you have built a trusting relationship with who tells you they are LGBTI or +. The plus stands for other minority sexual orientations and gender identities. You can advise them about the availability of special interest youth services, however, it is important that the young person feels welcome to stay involved in your youth group, alongside any special interest group they might choose to attend.

By reading this section you most likely have an interest in working to make your youth service open, welcoming and safe for LGBTI+ young people. The fact that you want to achieve this and are taking action, means that you are well on the way to making it happen. As with all young people we want LGBTI+ young people to be empowered to grow confidently from their involvement in your service. We hope that you enjoy reading this section and are inspired to make positive changes in your service as a result.

In the Republic of Ireland under the **Equal Status Act 2000** and the **Equality Act 2004**, it is unlawful to discriminate against a person on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender in the provision of goods and services, education, sports, access to public facilities and accommodation. The gender ground also protects transgender people from discrimination[ii].

In Northern Ireland under the **Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2003**, and the **Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2006** it is unlawful to discriminate against a person on the grounds of sexual orientation in the provision of goods and services, education, sports, access to public facilities and accommodation and also in employment. Legislative protection for transgender people lies within Sex Discrimination legislation.
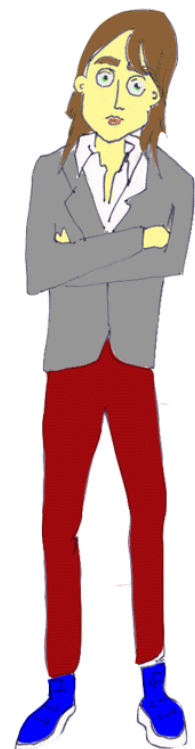
Terminology

This resource has been developed to be used by youth workers on the island of Ireland. At times it is necessary to make distinctions between our two jurisdictions and we had to choose a terminology to reflect this. We have chosen for the most part to use Northern Ireland (NI) and Republic of Ireland (ROI). At times we also use North and South. Additionally, for clarity, where information is significantly different we have used coloured boxes:

Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland

LGBTI+: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex people. The plus sign represents other minority sexual orientations and gender identities that are not specifically named, such as non-binary people.

Coming out: is the process through which an LGBTI+ person accepts their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics as part of their overall identity. It generally refers to the process of self-acceptance and to the acts of sharing this identity with others.

 "Coming Out' is not an event but rather an ongoing process. Most LGBTI+ people will spend their lives coming out in different ways because society generally assumes people are heterosexual unless a person indicates otherwise.

Sexual Orientation: sexual and romantic attraction.

Asexual: someone who rarely experiences sexual attraction; they may experience romantic or emotional attraction.

Bisexual (Bi/Bi+): An individual who may be attracted to more than one gender. Bi+ is an umbrella term used to describe other identities such as queer, pansexual and others who are not exclusively attracted to one gender.

Lesbian Women and **Gay Men** are people who are physically, sexually and/or emotionally attracted to members of the same sex. The word 'gay' is sometimes used for both.

Heterosexual/straight: Someone who is attracted to people of a different gender.

Pansexual: Someone who may be attracted to any person, regardless of their gender.

Queer: A term someone may use to describe their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression that does not conform to societal norms. Some LGBTI+ people identify as 'queer.' This can indicate that while they are not heterosexual and/or cisgender, the labels gay, lesbian, bisexual and/or transgender do not work for them. Queer is also used as an insult in Ireland, so some LGBTI+ people would be offended if they were called queer. It is best used to describe yourself rather than others.

Gender identity refers to each person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth.

Gender expression: how we show our gender through clothing, hair, voice, behaviour, etc[iii].

Gender fluid: refers to a person who does not feel confined by the binary division of male and female. They may fluctuate between genders or express multiple genders at the same time.

Gender Binary: the socially constructed idea that someone's gender can be one of two options, either male or female, and that this corresponds with someone's sex assigned at birth.

Cisgender: when one's gender identity matches the sex assigned at birth. This is used to describe anyone who is not transgender.

Transgender, or **Trans**: People whose gender is different to their sex assigned at birth. It is an umbrella term to describe anyone who is not cisgender. A trans person may identify as male, female, both or maybe neither gender fits them. The experiences and needs of transgender young people may differ from those who identify as lesbian, gay and bisexual. Nevertheless, the "coming-out" process and experiences of homophobic or transphobic bullying can be similar.

Gender dysphoria: The distress a person experiences because the sex they were assigned at birth does not match their gender identity.

Sex: At birth, babies are usually assigned male or female, based on their anatomy. (However, see Intersex below.) This sex designation is then recorded on their birth certificates.

Transition: the process in which some trans people begin to live as the gender with which they identify, rather than the sex they were given at birth. Transition may or may not include social, medical or legal changes, such as: coming out to family and friends; changing one's appearance and/or name, pronoun, and legal documents; and medical treatment, such as hormones, hormone blockers or surgery. In the past, this was called a 'sex change.'

Non-binary: An umbrella term for any gender that is not exclusively male or female.

Intersex: is a term for people whose physical sex is not definitively male or female. Intersex people are assigned a sex at birth of either male or female. Some children are surgically operated on without their consent to assign a sex: gender identity should be entirely for them to decide. For some intersex people, variations are apparent at birth, for others they emerge later[iv].

Homophobia refers to the fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against people who are or are perceived to be gay, lesbian or bisexual. Biphobia can also be used to specify similar actions targeting those that are or are perceived to be bisexual (Bi/Bi+).

Transphobia refers to the fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against trans/transgender people, based on the expression of their internal gender identification.

Heterosexism are societal and institutional structures that affords a range of economic, social and legal advantages, to people who are heterosexual, at the expense of others. This can affect everyone and happens on a variety of levels from: subtle to overt; interpersonal and institutional; intentional to unintentional.

Internalised Homophobia are negative beliefs and attitudes about same-sex orientation that lesbian, gay and bisexual people absorb through growing up in our society, which can interfere with the development of self-esteem and positive relationships.

Note: This terminology page is by no means exhaustive and it is always recommended to talk to the young people you work with about the terminology they use and what it means to them as changes are happening rapidly in this area.

Rainbow flag

Bisexual flag

Trans flag

This chapter was developed by Michael Barron (BeLonG To) and Amanda Stephens (Youthnet) for 'Access All Areas – a Diversity Toolkit for the Youth Work Sector' published by NYCI and Youthnet 2012 and updated by John Duffy (BeLonGTo) and Amanda Stephens in 2018

Demographics

Irish research has found that LGB young people were 8-11% of all youth, including 4% who identified as gay or lesbian, 4% as bisexual, and 3% as 'not sure'[v]. Of the 352,257 post-primary students in the Republic of Ireland in 2016 / 2017[vi] 8% represents 28,180 students who would identify as LGB.

Figures for a percentage of those who identify as transgender in the general population are limited. In New Zealand, researchers found 1.7% of high school students were trans, and a further 2.5% were unsure of their gender.[vii] Of the 352,257 post-primary students in the Republic of Ireland in 2016 / 2017; 5,988 (1.7%) would likely be trans or non-binary students.

People with intersex variations are about 1.7% of the world population[viii]. This would put the number of intersex students in the Republic of Ireland at approximately 5,988.

Needs and issues for LGBTI+ young people

Evidence indicates that young people are coming out as LGBTI+ in greater numbers and at an earlier age. "The LGBTIreland Report', the largest study of LGBTI+ people's mental health and wellbeing in the Republic of Ireland found that the most common age that someone knew they were LGBTI+ was 12 years old.[ix]

The ShOut report from Northern Ireland indicates that 86% of young LGBTI+ people were aware of their sexual orientation while at school.[x]

Education

'The LGBTIreland Report' which explored education issues in the Republic of Ireland found that:

- 20% of LGBTI students felt that they belonged completely in their school
- 67% of respondents reported witnessing bullying of other LGBTI students in their school
- 47.5% of LGBTI students personally experienced anti-LGBTI bullying
- 24% skipped school to avoid negative treatment due to being LGBTI
- 4% left school early because of negative treatment.

'OUTstanding in your field: exploring the needs of LGB&T people in rural Northern Ireland'[xi] found in general a high prevalence of homophobic language being used within education settings as well as low reporting from students. It noted that the vast majority (88.5%) of LGBT people had heard homophobic/transphobic language at school/college and more than half (55.4%) heard it most days or everyday. Most of those in this study reported hearing such language from other pupils (87.7%), while

over a quarter heard it from teachers (26.2%). Those living in rural areas were more likely to hear homophobic/transphobic language than their urban based counterparts.

The four most widely cited hindrances in tackling homophobic bullying according to the 'PRIDE Evaluation' in Northern Ireland were parental disapproval (53%); a lack of confidence in developing and delivering resources (39%); student disapproval (35%) and school inexperience in dealing with these issues (29%).[xii] 'OUTstanding in your field' found that 88.3% of people didn't report these and other negative experiences within education. The most common reasons were down to a belief that the school/college wouldn't do anything about (53%) followed by a fear of being outed to friends or family (40.6%).

The ShOut report[xiii] in Northern Ireland demonstrates that 44% of LGBT young people had been bullied at school because of their sexual orientation. The more recent 'OUTstanding in your field' report[xiv] did not qualify whether negative experiences in education amounted to bullying. It did however show that the following were experiences of LGBTI people in schools/colleges:

- **54% had experienced verbal abuse**
- **22.5% had experienced physical abuse**
- **52% were the subject of gossip and rumours**
- **35% experienced intimidation during the course of their education.**

Health impacts

Research carried out, both in Ireland and internationally, has established that LGBTI+ young people are at significant health risk due to isolation, fear, stigma, the 'coming-out' process, bullying and family rejection.[xv] The negative health impacts on LGBTI+ young people of widespread homophobic bullying have been well established. These impacts include internalised homophobia, poor body image and vulnerability to eating disorders.[xvi]

'The LGBTIreland Report' noted the significant impact of bullying on LGBTI+ peoples mental health. Those that experienced LGBTI+ bullying had significantly higher scores on the depression, anxiety, and stress scales and lower scores on the self-esteem scale. They also had significantly higher scores on the alcohol use scale, indicating more problematic alcohol use and behaviours.

This study also showed that in comparison to those that had not experienced LGBTI bullying in school, those that had were:

- **12% more likely to self-harm;**
- **18% more likely to have seriously considered ending their life; and,**
- **19% more likely to have attempted suicide.**

In addition to the health needs and challenges facing all young people, significant barriers exist to LGBTI+ young people accessing health services, including lack of access to appropriate information and fear of negative reaction. Young people who have not disclosed their sexual/gender identity to their parents/guardians, or who may not have supportive parents, may also not be in position to secure parental consent and so may not be able to access health services.[xvii]

Young LGBTI+ people in Ireland may experience additional barriers as a consequence of societal attitudes to sexual and gender identity. LGBTI+ people are shown as being "more likely to engage in alcohol misuse, drug abuse and deliberate self-harm".[xviii]

Suicidal behaviour

In relation to 14 – 18 year olds, "The LGBTIreland Report", found that:

- **56% had self-harmed**
- **66% of bisexual respondents and 67% of transgender respondents reported a history of self-harm**
- **15 years and 9 months was the average age of onset of self-harm**
- **69% had contemplated suicide**
- **32% had attempted suicide**
- **21% of gay respondents and 37% of lesbian respondents had attempted suicide at least once.**
- **Levels of severe/extremely severe stress, anxiety and depression were 4 times higher among 14-18 year old LGBTI teens in comparison to a similar age group (12-19 year olds) in the My World Survey[xix]**

Research carried out in Northern Ireland for the ShOut report into the needs and experiences of young people in Northern Ireland who identify as LGBTI+ found that:

- **26% of LGBTI+ young people had self-harmed**
- **29% had attempted suicide**
- **24% had been medicated for depression[xx]**

"Out On Your Own" research in Northern Ireland highlights that 71.3% of those surveyed had thought about taking their own life.[xxi]

The findings on self-harm and attempted suicide were strongly linked to experiences of being physically or verbally threatened, or hurt; and feeling alone and socially isolated, particularly in school, and a fear of or actually experiencing rejection by friends and family.

Connecting for Life: Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide: 2015-2020 has recognised LGBTI+ people as being a priority group. [xxii] The area of mental health was also looked at in the ROI's LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018-2020[xxiii]. It noted that:

"The mental health challenges young LGBTI+ people face are often the product of broader social attitudes, and so it is acknowledged implicitly throughout this Strategy that changing attitudes of non-LGBTI+ people towards LGBTI+ people through awareness and education improves the lived experiences of LGBTI+ young people themselves."

Protect Life - Shared Vision: The Northern Ireland Suicide Prevention Strategy and Action Plan 2006 – 2011 indicated one of its actions as "to ensure that appropriate support services reach out to all marginalised and disadvantaged groups, in particular lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and transgender groups, …"[xxiv] A later report on the 'Development of a new suicide prevention strategy for Northern Ireland'[xxv] has stated that there should be an 'information campaign for raised risk groups including LGBTI+' people.

Alcohol and Drug use

The LGBTIreland Report explored alcohol and drug use among LGBTI young people. Of 14 – 18 year olds, it found that:

- **62.3% had no alcohol issue**
- **28.4% had a medium level of alcohol problems**
- **4.4% and 4.9% had high or very high levels of alcohol problems.**

The ratings for 19 – 25 year olds was significantly higher.

- **47.9% had no alcohol issue**
- **38.8% had a medium level of alcohol problems**
- **7.2% and 6.2% had high or very high levels of alcohol problems**

With regards to drug use, The LGBTIreland Report showed that more than a quarter of participants aged 14-18 (29.8%) had taken drugs recreationally during their life. Nearly two-thirds of those aged 19-25 (62.5%) had also done so. The three drug types used most often in the past month and year were: hashish/marijuana/cannabis; codeine-based drugs; and ecstasy/E/yokes.

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The Northern Ireland research "Out On Your Own" indicated that 71.6% of young men had tried drugs or solvents at least once. In total, 17.4% of the respondents indicated that they used some form of drug on a regular basis, the most common being poppers with 10.6% indicating they used poppers on a regular basis.[xxvi]

Developing LGBTI+ inclusive youth work

This section focuses on some ways in which you can make your youth service LGBTI+ open and friendly, and hence safe and welcoming to LGBTI+ young people. It is important to have a supportive structure in place:

- **Ensure that you have a policy on the inclusion of LGBTI+ young people**

- **Explicitly mention LGBTI+ people in your policies and procedures**

- **Specifically outline equality legislation in your policies**

- **Ensure that your commitment to equality and inclusion are publicly known**

- **Ensure that your policies and procedures are understood, supported and followed through by staff and volunteers on the ground**

- **Deliver programmes that promote diversity and challenge myths and stereotypes**

- **Design and deliver your programmes to consciously include the needs and identities of LGBTI+ young people**

- **Ensure that staff and volunteers are adequately trained to work with LGBTI+ young people**

- **Provide literature, toolkits, and guidelines to educate and support workers and volunteers on LGBTI+ issues**

Creating safer environments for LGBTI+ young people

- **Do not assume everyone is heterosexual/cisgender or that everyone's parents are heterosexual/cisgender.**

- **Refer to the fact that some people experience attraction to the same sex/gender as themselves, or to multiple sexes/genders**

- **Try to avoid equating LGBTI+ issues only with sexual behaviour – those who identify as LGBTI+ have as varied interests as those that are heterosexual/cisgender**

- **Include information about LGBTI+ issues, supports, etc. in material that is distributed to everyone so that people do not have to identify themselves as LGBTI+ before getting information that is appropriate to them**

- **Address manifestations of anti-LGBTI+ prejudice – name-calling, bullying and violence**

- **Be aware that discussion around LGBTI+ identities may result in anti-LGBTI+ sentiment being expressed and be prepared for this**

- **Make it easier for young people who identify as LGBTI+ to find one another**

- **Make it easier for LGBTI+ young people to find other forms of support through LGBTI+ youth organisations, help-lines and so on**

- **Engage with parents of young LGBTI+ people who make contact and give them details of parent support networks e.g. www.look.ie (Loving Our Out Kids), www.sailni.com (SAIL) and www.gendered.ie (for families of gender variant children and Transgender young people)**

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Tackling Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia

'By working together, standing up for the democratic values that we share, refusing to go along with loudly-voiced prejudices, we can overcome the bias and hostility experienced by many young gay people throughout the country. No-one should have to suffer on account of their sexual orientation.'

Former President of Ireland Mary McAleese[xxvii]

Tackling homophobia, biphobia and transphobia within youth services needs to be taken on seriously, in the same way as other issues of equality are approached. Being inclusive of LGBTI+ identities needs to become an integral part of what youth work does.

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A first step is to promote the visibility of LGBTI+ youth. This can be achieved in a number of simple ways:

- **Frequently tell young people and staff that LGBTI+ young people are welcome in your service and will be treated equally**

- **Include LGBTI+ people as part of the community - in discussions, group work, one-to-one work, programmes and policy development**

- **Provide positive images of LGBTI+ people to be used alongside those of other individuals and community groups. This can be done by acknowledging the sexual orientation and/or gender identity of famous and successful LGBTI+ people. This should happen in the same way as ensuring work presented to young people includes positive images of ethnic minority people, women, people with disabilities etc.**

- **Provide books, leaflets and posters which depict LGBTI+ people and LGBTI+ community groups**

- **Celebrate LGBTI+ life in the same way that other diversity in the community is celebrated. Mark LGBTI+ days of significance, such as LGBTI+ Pride and International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOTB) each May**

It is vital to ensure that the conditions in youth groups and projects are such that youth workers who are inclusive of LGBTI+ identities in their work are not victimised or isolated. This will mean inclusion of sexual and gender identity as an issue in equality policies for both young people and staff.

Practical ways of responding to Homophobic, Biphobic and Transphobic remarks

From colleagues:

Firstly, name the behaviour as homophobic, biphobic or transphobic.

Then you could continue with:

- **"I feel uncomfortable with jokes like that/that kind of labelling."**

- **"As far as I'm concerned we are all entitled to respect."**

- **"You know, LGBTI+ young people are coming to our service, and we want to make them feel welcome and equal."**

- **"We have procedures to protect us all from that kind of behaviour."**

- **"Everyone is entitled to their opinion, but I'm shocked to hear views like that expressed here; we are all expected to support equality."**

- **"I'm worried that comments and attitudes like that can have a terrible impact on LGBTI+ young people, maybe we need to have training on LGBTI+ issues."**

From managers or supervisors:

Firstly, name the behaviour as homophobic, biphobic or transphobic. Then you could continue with:

- **"I expected you would be a leader in the promotion of equality here. Please don't assume I feel OK with what you said or seem to believe. I feel very disappointed and unsafe when I hear you speak of a minority group like that."**

- **"If someone said something like that about me, I would have expected you to stand up for me. I feel it is part of your job as a manager/supervisor."**

From staff you manage or supervise:

Firstly, name the behaviour as homophobic, biphobic or transphobic Then you could continue with:

- **"That kind of statement encourages scape-goating. We have a policy against that, it's called equality and we are all accountable for upholding it. You are in danger of being disciplined if you don't desist from expressions of that kind."**

- **"Have you ever attended a course or seminar on LGBTI+ issues at work? Maybe we should look into it. You don't seem to know much about the effects of homophobia on people with whom you work, or anyone else for that matter."**

From young people:

Firstly, name the behaviour as homophobic, biphobic or transphobic.

- **Young people often use the word gay randomly to describe a person, event or object they don't like or is in their minds 'un-cool' or 'weird'. This is actually homophobic and needs challenging.**

Timing is crucial here, make it clear immediately that it is not acceptable. The rule of thumb is to Stop it, name it, and put it in the context of your group or organisation's rules or codes of conduct, by naming the consequences of the use of disrespectful language or behaviour. Follow with a request for a change of future behaviour and check in and reassure anyone in the room that the comment or action was targeting.

You might ask questions like:

- **"What do you mean by that? A lot of the young people here use that kind of language – what do you think that's about – why are people so negative?"**

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- **"What are you intending to achieve by the use of the word gay?"**

- **"We have made it very clear in our policies that we respect everybody's human rights so using language in that way which implies that there is something wrong with being gay is unacceptable."**

- **"What you just said is homophobic. Why do you feel that it is acceptable to insult LGBTI+ people?"**

- **"Those remarks break this service's equality policy. We are committed to ensuring that all young people, including LGBTI+ young people are safe and welcome here. You know we will not tolerate that."**

- **"That sort of language is unacceptable in this service. You know we will not tolerate homophobia any more than we would racism or sexism."**

- **"Remember how we're always talking about equality - it sounds like we really need to talk about LGBTI+ equality."**

If further discussion is needed you might say:

- **"That is unacceptable in this service/youth club. I will want to talk with you about this later today/after the group …"**

For further help:

Contact BeLonG To for a copy of Addressing Homophobia: Guidelines for the Youth Sector

Contact SAIL NI for a copy of Supporting Trans Youth which has guidelines on tackling Transphobia www.sailni.com/education

Understanding Coming Out

There is a substantial period in a young person's life when they are struggling to come to terms with their sexual or gender identity. These years can be especially challenging for LGBTI+ young people because of their extra emotional dependency on their families, friends and those in school at this time of their lives.

Known as "coming out" it is an ongoing process through which the young LGBTI+ person accepts their sexual orientation and/or gender identity as part of their overall identity. It involves a process of self-acceptance and sharing this identity with others.

Most LGBTI+ people will spend their lives coming out in different ways because society generally assumes people are heterosexual unless a person indicates otherwise. For example, when starting a new job a gay or lesbian person will have to make a decision as to whether they will come out or not.

Research has indicated that the most common age when a young person realises that they are LGBTI+ is 12 and that the most common age when they tell anyone else (usually a friend) is 16, i.e. there are approximately four years between a young person knowing that they are LGBTI+ and telling someone else. This period corresponds with most of their teenage experience.

During this time, young people have reported feeling invisible, feeling terrified of being found out and being treated in a negative manner. One 17-year-old LGBTI+ male captured his experience of isolation and invisibility as follows:

> 'During school I spent every minute monitoring what I was saying and doing. I wouldn't even let myself think anything gay. Then after school I'd spend my time paranoid thinking I had slipped up on the act'.

Research carried out by The Rainbow Project in Northern Ireland in 2009 indicated that 39% of LGB people alter their behaviour to avoid others knowing that they are not heterosexual.[xxviii] The difficulty and reluctance to explore one's sexual identity is further hampered by negative experiences as noted below:

> 'The whole notion of LGBTI+ students being recognised at my school was non-existent...the biggest mention we got was that we were more likely to contract AIDS...which led to the catchy chant "You're going to die of AIDS!"'

Coming out can be one of the most testing and distressing times in an LGBTI+ young person's life. There are personal risks involved with coming out to family, friends and colleagues. Young LGBTI+ people can fear rejection and being misunderstood. By and large, LGBTI+ young people come out and go on to live full and happy lives. However, this process can be marked by intense anxiety and young people may need a great deal of support at this time.

Again the key to letting a young person know that they are safe at this time is to ensure that your project is visibly LGBTI+ friendly and that staff are open and prepared for a young person to come out to them.

Remember, if a young person does come out as LGBTI+ to you or another staff member it means that they trust you a lot. It is a testament to your ability to work with young people. Acknowledge that it may have been a difficult thing to tell you and thank them for opening up. If it seems appropriate, talk with them about how they are and if they need any support or want to know about any LGBTI+ youth groups in the area. It is understandable that you might be nervous and afraid of saying the wrong thing. But don't panic – this is a good thing! A young person may tell you because they are experiencing problems (e.g. with their family, or bullying), while others may be telling you because they are beginning a process whereby they want the people they care about to know that they are LGBTI+). Either way it's a big deal for that young person. They may have been building up to this point for a long time. Let them know that you understand how hard it is/may be to talk about it. For some, they might not want anything to happen, and are content and happy to be coming out to you. Others, particularly trans young people, may want you to start using a new name and/or pro-noun when addressing them. It is most important that you just maintain your positive and open relationship with the young person and be led by what they want to happen. A factor of this is respecting the young person's confidentiality, and not sharing their sexuality or gender identity with others without their consent.

Young people Coming Out as transgender

The term transgender is an umbrella term (see our Terminology Page for more detailed information) to describe anyone who is not "cisgender". It can refer to people whose gender identity or gender expression is different to the sex assigned to them at birth. A transgender boy, for example, was registered as female at birth but has a clear and persistent identity as male. A

transgender girl was registered as male at birth but has a clear and persistent identity as female. Gender identity is an innate, largely inflexible characteristic of each individual's personality which is generally established by the age of four, although the age at which individuals come to understand and express their gender identity may vary based on each person's social and familial development[xxix].

Some people identify as gender non-binary, meaning that they do not fit into either the female or male gender identity. The following advice will give youth work organisations guidance on how they can best support individuals who are coming out as transgender and work to avoid transphobic bullying; it will also have relevance for supporting young people who identify as non-binary, gender fluid or intersex. Self-determination is an important principle, in that the responsibility for determining a person's gender identity rests with the individual themselves, or in the case of a young person who is not yet able to advocate for themselves, with their parents/ guardians

How should a youth organisation respond?

Whilst the youth organisation may find the transition of one of its members initially challenging, it is critically important to the physical, psychological and emotional well-being of the young person that they are treated with dignity, respect and fairness for his, her, or their preferred gender identity. It is extremely important to ensure that the preferred gender, name and pronoun are used to address transgender or intersex people as it is a mark of respect against which individuals will measure the level of safety and inclusion for them

within the group. Some people will seek to legally change their name and gender by deed poll and get a gender recognition certificate[xxx]. While adjustment to using a person's new name may take time, and accidents in misuse of original names may happen, the organisation should also be alert to the deliberate use of the original name and pronoun by other members and youth leaders as a means of name-calling and harassment.

Young people who identify as intersex or non-binary will have varying needs. It is good practice to ascertain what supports they need on an individual basis and, where possible, to negotiate those supports between the young person, their family and the youth work organisation to try to reach an agreement that is fair and respectful to all.

Questions about schools, toilets and changing rooms

The use of toilet and changing facilities often causes most debate around the inclusion of transgender youth. It is a good idea to try to include gender neutral or unisex facilities in your buildings or future planning of accommodation as this can alleviate many difficulties.

Some people may feel uncomfortable with a transgender person using gender-specific facilities or having a gender neutral option. This discomfort may be rooted in an unfounded assumption of inappropriate behaviour and consequently it is not a reason to deny the trans person access to the facilities. However, it is important to address this discomfort and to foster understanding of gender identity in order to create a culture that

respects and values all people and prevents transphobic bullying. Regardless of the setting; the key goal is to ensure the safety and support of the young person so that they may be free from harassment and victimisation and in a position to reach their full potential.

If a young person asks you what they should do about being trans at school, you can find detailed responses in GLEN's document "Being LGBT at School" and in BeLonG To's trans info sheets. Some of the advice you can offer will also have relevance for youth organisations. For example, at first glance it may seem that the challenges facing single-sex schools or youth organisations (including single-sex boarding schools) in supporting their trans young people may be more complex than those of a co-ed school or youth organisation. However, increasing numbers of single-sex schools are supporting young people in making a transition. It is possible for a student to transition and remain in a single-sex school or youth organisation. Examples of how two schools approached it are available in the GLEN document. A school's single-sex status will not be altered by the continued enrolment of a transgender student whose gender is not that of the remainder of the student population.

In Northern Ireland the Department of Education has posted a guidance document for schools and youth centres on their website: 'Supporting Trans Youth: guidance for supporting trans and non-binary young people in formal and non-formal education'. The document aims to provide guidance and information on how to effectively support transgender, non-binary and questioning young people, and help improve their experiences throughout educational and youth work environments. It is available on: www.eani.org.uk/_resources/assets/attachment/full/0/51716.pdf

More about Coming Out - what LGBTI+ young people say[xxxi]

Young people were asked about coming out. These are some of their responses:

What is coming out?

- "It can be difficult at times but it is also a learning experience"
- "Something positive"
- "Coming-out as who you are"
- "Expressing one of many aspects of who you are"
- "Something you should not be pushed into"
- "People's comments can be difficult to deal with"

What are the barriers to coming out?

- "People making smart comments on the street"
- "People passing judgement before they get to know you"
- "People thinking all gays have AIDS"
- "Religion"
- "Stereotypes"
- "People thinking it's a phase"
- "Your own fear of being different/alone"
- "Fear of closing yourself off from all your friends"

So why come out?

- **"To be honest with yourself and others"**
- **"Finding your real self"**
- **"To stop living a lie"**
- **"It is a release"**
- **"To live your own life"**
- **"It strengthens your character"**

Practical tips for working with young people on Coming Out

Although 'coming out' can occur in a variety of ways and settings, even when you least expect it, we have compiled the following tips for young people which might be useful for them if they are considering doing just this!

Ask yourself why you are coming out to a particular person or persons

When you begin to come out to people, or when you have made some LGBTI+ friends, you may experience excitement and elation – the 'scream it from the roof tops' feeling. Cherish this – you have everything to be proud of, but maybe not everyone needs to know your sexuality. Think about who you are planning to tell or want to come out to. Is it a family member, a friend or an acquaintance? Do you need to come out to that person at this moment?

Timing

Although for many people there is no 'right' or 'wrong' time to come out, planning exactly when you are going to tell someone is well worth thinking about. Are you going to have adequate time afterwards to discuss it further or to answer any questions the person may have? Will you have the full attention of the person or are they pre-occupied with something else?

Where to tell?

Location can be important too. To allow for conversation afterwards pick somewhere that will give you privacy with minimal risk of any interruptions. If it's someone that you think may react favourably to your disclosure the location is probably less important. However, if you in any way expect negativity you are probably best sticking to a location where you feel safest.

Time to digest

Remember that you have had time to think about what you want to say. The person you are telling has not. Depending on your relationship with them they may have suspected already, but even if this is the case it may still take time for it to sink in with them. Don't automatically expect an extreme reaction either, the person you are telling may be slow to react. This could be because they fear offending or embarrassing you as much as anything else.

Resources

Having resources to hand is also useful. BeLonGTo have produced some booklets on being LGBTI+, as have some youth groups around the country. For more info on this – visit www.belongto.org

Talk to others

Talk to other LGBTI+ young people about the fears, expectations and reactions they experienced when coming out. Get involved in one of the LGBTI+ youth groups listed here.

Training

Further training is recommended to help ensure that your project or service is inclusive of the needs of LGBTI+ young people.

For more information on available training:

- Republic of Ireland – contact BeLonGTo at 01 - 6706223 or info@belongto.org or www.belongto.org

- In Northern Ireland signposting and further information and support can be accessed by contacting The Rainbow Project www.rainbow-project.org 028 9031 9030 or Cara-friend https://cara-friend.org.uk 028 9089 0202

Checklist 3 — How accessible is your organisation to Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender (LGBTI+) young people?

This checklist can help you to identify how you can improve your service for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender young people

Professional development

Our staff and volunteers are trained and supported to deliver an inclusive youth service

- Staff and volunteers have received training about working with LGBTI+ young people   YES   PARTLY   NO

- Staff and volunteers model inclusive language when speaking to clients about relationships and sexuality   YES   PARTLY   NO

- Staff and volunteers know how to respond to a young person who is considering "coming out"   YES   PARTLY   NO

- Staff and volunteers have an accurate understanding of issues for LGBTI+ young people   YES   PARTLY   NO

Public image

How we present our service to our community

• Our service displays LGBTI+ awareness posters and information	YES	PARTLY	NO
• Our promotional materials names LGBTI+ young people and indicates that they are safe and welcome in the service	YES	PARTLY	NO
• We have a referral list of services for LGBTI+ young people and their families	YES	PARTLY	NO
• Our service displays information about LGBTI+ youth support services	YES	PARTLY	NO

Programme planning and delivery

Our programmes are designed and delivered to include the diverse needs and identities of LGBTI+ young people

• Staff and volunteers actively challenge anti-LGBTI+ attitudes & comments	YES	PARTLY	NO
• We provide informal education to young people about LGBTI+ issues	YES	PARTLY	NO
• Our service marks LGBTI+ days of significance, (e.g. LGBTI+ Pride each June, International Day Against Homophobia each May)	YES	PARTLY	NO

Participation

We make sure we include the voices of young LGBTI+ people at all levels of our youth service

- Our service actively promotes a message of safety and respect for LGBTI+ people   **YES**   **PARTLY**   **NO**

- We consult with LGBTI+ young people, parents and organisations about the specific needs and issues for LGBTI+ young people in relation to accessing and participating in youth work   **YES**   **PARTLY**   **NO**

- Our service consults with LGBTI+ young people and actively involves them in decision making and the development of the organisation   **YES**   **PARTLY**   **NO**

Policies and procedures

We have a written commitment to deliver an equal and inclusive service

- Our service has policies and procedures in place to deal with homophobic / transphobic bullying and harassment   **YES**   **PARTLY**   **NO**

- Our service has an equality policy that names LGBTI+ young people   **YES**   **PARTLY**   **NO**

Useful contacts

LGBTI+ Youth Projects - Republic of Ireland

BeLonGTo Youth Service for young people – Dublin and National

Phone: 01 - 6706223

Email: info@belongto.org

Web: www.belongto.org

See the website for full details of Dublin groups and other groups nationally not listed below or for updated contact details.

Carlow **MUI (My Unique Identity) YWI Carlow** **Phone:** 085 2722379 **Email:** leannecrys@yahoo.ie	**Cavan** **LGBT Youth Cavan** **Phone:** 087 2193904 **Email:** lgbtyouthcavan@gmail.com
Cork **Up Cork (YWI Cork / Cork Gay Project)** **Phone**: 021 - 4300430 / 021 - 4808600 **Email:** info@gayprojectcork.com www.facebook.com/upcorklgbtyouth	**Donegal** **BreakOut** **(Groups in Letterkenny, Ballybofey, Glenties and Moville)** **Phone**: 086 1247968 **Email**: sinead.murray@donegalyouthservice.ie
Galway **shOUT LGBT Youth Group** **Phone**: 087 7738529 **Email:** shout@youthworkireland.ie **Web**: www.youthworkgalway.com www.facebook.com/shOUTGalway	**Kerry** **Kerry Youth Pride (KDYS)** **Phone:** 085 7599567 **Email:** oonaghosullivan@kdys.ie
Kildare **KLGBT (Kildare Youth Service)** **Phone:** 087 2564539 **Email:** KLGBT@kys.ie	**Kilkenny** **OpenDoor Youth Project (Ossary Y. S.)** **Phone:** 087 7377556 **Email:** rcarberry@ossaryyouth.com

Laois **Luck Out (youth Work Ireland Laois)** **Phone:086 2398577** **Email:** elaine@ywilaois.com	**Limerick** **GOSHH** **Phone**: 087 4447368 **Email**: youth@goshh.ie
Louth **Dundalk Outcomers** **Phone**: 042 - 9329816 **Email**: youth@outcomers.org **Web**: www.outcomers.org	**Mayo** **Ballinrobe Youth Café** **Phone:** 087 7714967 **Email:** ballinrobeyouthcafe@gmail.com
Sligo **SMILY** **Phone:** 089 4820330 **Email:** smilyyouthlgbt@gmail.com	**Tipperary** **OUTStanding (Youth Work Ireland Tipperary)** **Phone**: 087 9100727 **Email**: zoe.gogarty@youthworktipperary.ie
Waterford **Chill OUT (WSTCYS)** **Phone:** 086 0218941 **Email:** chillout@wstcys.ie	**Westmeath** **Athlone Spectum (Foroige)** **Phone:** 086 0279149 **Email:** mary.oneill@foroige.ie
Wexford **Wexford LGBT Youth Group (FDYS)** **Phone:** 053 91 23262 **Email:** david.clark@fdys.ie	**Gorey LGBT Youth Group (Gorey Youth Needs)** **Phone:** 086 1512861 **Email:** karen.mccann@gyng.ie
Wicklow **LGBTI+ Group (Arklow)** **Phone:** 086 7789427 or 0402 39646 **Email:** apluck@crosscare.ie	**Bray LGBTQ+ Youth** **Phone**: 01 2050502 **Email:** braylgbtyouth@gmail.com

LGBTI+ Youth Projects - Northern Ireland

Cara-friend LGBTQ+ youth **Phone**: 028 - 90890202 **Email** admin@cara-friend.org.uk **Web**: https://cara-friend.org.uk	Cara-Friend has support groups in: Belfast, Ballymena, Foyle, Cookstown, Armagh and Newry. Contact us or see our website for more information.
GenderJam NI **Phone**: 028 – 9099 6819 **Web:** https://genderjam.org.uk	**Out and About (YouthAction NI)** **Phone**: 028 - 90240551 **Web**: www.youthaction.org
Gay Newry **Web**: www.gaynewry.com	**Family Ties Project** **Web:** www.familytiesproject.org.uk
The Rainbow Project Belfast / L'Derry **Phone**: 028 - 90319030 (Belfast) **Phone**: 028 - 71283030 (L'Derry) **Web**: www.rainbow-project.org	**Here (lesbian and bisexual women support)** **Phone:** 028 - 9024 9452 **Web**: https://hereni.org
SAIL NI **Phone**: 028 - 9532 0023 **Web**: https://sailni.com	**Quire – LGBTI+ choir** **Web**: www.quire.org.uk
Gender Identity Services for NI Knowing Our Identity (Child and Adolescent Gender Identity Service) **Phone**: 028 - 9063 8000	**Brackenburn Clinic (Adult Gender Identity Service)** **Phone**: 028 - 9063 8854
Transgender NI (Hub of information for NI) **Web:** https://transgenderni.org.uk	

Other useful contacts – Republic of Ireland:

Gay Men's Health Service **Clinic**: 01 - 6602189 **Outreach** 01 - 8734952 **Web**: www.gaymenshealthservice.ie	**TENI (Transgender Equality Network Ireland)** **Dublin** 01 - 6334687 **Web**: www.teni.ie
OUThouse – LGBTI+ Community Centre **Phone**: 01 - 8734932 **Web**: www.outhouse.ie	**GLEN (Gay Lesbian Equality Network)** **Phone**: 01 - 4730563 **Email**: www.glen.ie
Cork Gay Project **Phone**: 021 - 4304884 **Web**: www.gayprojectcork.com	**L.inc** **Phone**: 021 - 4808600 **Web**: www.linc.ie
Rainbow Support Services Limerick **Phone**: 061 - 468611 **Web**: www.rainbowsupportservices.org	**Dundalk OUTcomers** **Phone**: 042- 9329816 **Web**: www.outcomers.org
LOOK (Loving Our Out Kids) **Parents Support Network** **Web**: www.look.ie	

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xxviiFormer President Mary McAleese speaking at BeLonGTo National LGBTI+ Youth Forum in October 2008

xxviii McNamee, (2006), The Rainbow Project

xxix Mallon, 2009; Brill & Pepper, 2008

xxx See www.belongto.org for information on the process of changing name and gender by deed poll and getting a gender recognition certificate

xxxi These responses were given at a focus group of LGBTI+ young people in 2006 organised by BeLonGTo