



Calderdale yOUTH service research: Summary of consultation with service users and staff

**Eleanor Formby, Drew Simms
and Max Kirk, Sheffield
Hallam University**

March 2026 (Year 1 interim report)

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Published by Sheffield Hallam University 2026
Howard Street
Sheffield, S1 1WB
Email: e.formby@shu.ac.uk

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These series of reports are dedicated to the memory of Jo Woodiwiss, whose contributions to understanding of the needs and experiences of LGBTQ+ communities continue to resonate. Jo's commitment and insightful research have helped develop services, inclusivity and support for LGBTQ+ young people. We remember Jo with love and gratitude.

John Mckernaghan

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank all those who supported this work, including the young people and staff members who participated in interviews and group activities.

INTRODUCTION

The yOUTH service currently offers group and one-to-one work for LGBTQ+ young people in Calderdale. This includes provision in Calder High School (in Mytholmroyd), the Orange Box in Halifax, and Todmorden High School. The service was commissioned by Calderdale Council, which funds the core offer, but has been expanded through the Brunswick Centre sourcing additional funding to now include, for example, a family support worker. Young people are referred to the service from a range of sources, including schools and colleges, from other services such as CAMHS (child and adolescent mental health services), and through self-referral.

Alongside the service provision, a team from Sheffield Hallam University are researching the delivery and impact of yOUTH, as well as young LGBTQ+ people's broader lives, from the perspectives of young people themselves, and adults who are involved in services for/working with young people. So far this has involved:

- data collection with young people (service users) through three individual interviews, three discussion groups (one school-based and two arts-based), and one paired interview
- five individual interviews with Brunswick Centre staff.

This summary report documents research activities taking place in year 1, meaning it captures perspectives at that point in time. As such, it is an interim report and will be followed by further interim reports discussing year 2 (later in 2026) and year 3 (in 2027). The final report (in 2028) will bring together all existing data, including from year 4. Key themes in the data are summarised below and will be more fully analysed within the final report, as part of examining yearly data collection. The research takes a qualitative approach, meaning it places an emphasis on the voices of participants, and does not include any quantitative (i.e. numerical) data. The goal is to inform ongoing service developments and increase understanding about the lives of LGBTQ+ young people living in Calderdale. This report therefore documents and contextualises the early development and delivery of the yOUTH service in Calderdale, from the viewpoint of its service users and staff, evidencing initial feedback from the young people on what is working well and what (if anything) could be improved.

All research activities took place within established ethics frameworks for youth research, and within the service's established youth work practice, informed by relevant legal and clinical guidance, for example regarding safeguarding, age-appropriate consent, and confidentiality. Where young people described any distressing experiences, safeguarding procedures were followed as required.

Young people involved so far range in age from 14 to 17. Staff members include both those working directly with young people and those in more strategic/managerial roles. Extracts from the data included in this document are inevitably subjective because they all stem from individuals' experiences and perspectives. Nevertheless, as the feelings and opinions of those connected to the service in some way they are important to consider.

RESEARCH FINDINGS: EMERGING THEMES

Brunswick service delivery and provision

When the Brunswick Centre took over service provision in Calderdale this was based on their model of delivery using qualified youth work and youth voice-led activities. As a staff member described:

“Our support... is very much using youth work curriculum, youth work ethics, youth work principles”.

Staff also discussed how the Brunswick Centre was able to combine some of their yOUTH offer, to the benefit of young people in Calderdale:

“We do a lot of shared work now as well, so Kirklees and Calderdale, we will do joint trips together because it’s more financially viable to have two staff taking two groups together than doing two separate trips where you need four staff”.

Interviews conducted suggested that this way of working, once they had grown accustomed to it, was appreciated by young service users. Young people we spoke to were asked to describe the service and what they think it offered them, which often drew attention to how other spaces they inhabited within their lives (such as home and school) were not experienced as so relaxing or supportive for them:

“It’s very welcoming, definitely a place that anyone can come to... If it’s like a certain week, sometimes it will be like trans week or something like that, and we’ll do the history of whatever part of the LGBT is. Other times it’s like little things just to get away from the rest of the world, like little projects... It definitely is somewhere to, like, get away from the home life, and it gives me routine – I come here every [week] without fail... It’s nice to have somewhere to go, especially when stuff at home is not the best... I know I can come here and be whoever I want to be, whenever I want to be, and I know that everyone is going to be alright with that”

“Here it’s very confidential – if you want to speak to them [staff] about something personal or private... you can, you just have to ask. It can be embarrassing, but it’s a very open space and it’s made very clear that you don’t have to, but they make [clear] you’re more than welcome, to sit and listen”

“It’s really nice, it’s really relaxed... Obviously the outside world doesn’t accept you, whereas in here you’ve got the safe space... They have different people coming in who do like little things with us, and they also have things relating to current events, or like what’s happening within the month, so during Pride Month we have certain things, and they do stuff for Neurodiversity Week and Black History Month... It can be a lot more open here... In school you have the set things that you have to do, whereas in here there’s activities that you can just walk up and join into, and there’s stuff that they want you to do, but you’re not particularly pushed towards it”

“We usually do circle first, which is names, pronouns and a question – which is usually suggested by one of the young people, which I think is a great way for the other young

people to get to know one another, especially if they're new or they come part-time. We do a lot of activities which we're always kept informed about. We'll do bingo, we'll do themed nights, we'll... do some cooking nights sometimes. There's always food so that people can help themselves. That's kept stocked as well as it can be by the leaders... When you walk in you can see that no-one is judging you, and it's just a very open and inviting space"

"Sometimes we'll go on trips, like we've been to Scarborough, that was an awesome trip. We've been on a residential where we went to York, and we spent three days there... We've been to all different sorts of trips, especially in this summer programme when all the schools are out, they offer trips out of the area... so there'll be people from this group and the Huddersfield group... We usually have a big trip at the end of the summer programme"

"Usually we've got a theme table, a crafts table, and a games table. If we're not interested in any of those, we can just socialise... Instead of just having to do one thing, we have a choice of what we can do in that session, and we're still getting out and socialising with people that we can relate to and people that support us"

"For me, it's an escape from home, from school, and I participate in the activities 99% of the time. The other 1% I'm either not here or I just don't want to. It is very fun and educational – more educational than my own school sometimes".

Young people also talked about the education they received as part of yOUTH service provision:

"They offer condoms here for people that either can't get them or can't afford to get them, which is really helpful, especially in this day and age, and we've had people come in from different areas and talk about sexual health and symptoms of STDs, STIs. We had a HIV worker come in and we had the offer of getting a HIV test, which some of us did and some of us didn't. It was optional, which I thought was just really great, because not everywhere teaches that now and there's a lot of miscommunication online about it, so if you're trying to look for it online it's not always going to be the answer that's true... And we had LGBTQ History Month where we could choose someone that we like and make a PowerPoint about them, a presentation, and we didn't have to do it, but it was an option there as one of the activities, and we learnt more about LGBTQ history which was amazing"

"It's a lot more open-minded and actually educated, and it's a lot broader, because in school when they do sex education for example, it's always the birds and the bees, but they don't talk about the birds and the birds, or the bees and the bees – which here they do, which is widely appreciated... In schools and high schools they don't really talk about same-sex relationships or trans relationships, so we can get that information from here when we're not given it outside"

"Sometimes we have sexual health things, and they sit down and we ask questions and they talk to us about things, like which different types of contraception are good to use, and how it all works... so even if someone didn't know about that, if they came here it would be quite educational".

School-based participants drew attention to enduring issues about how to advertise groups, and manage who attends, within school-based provision (see also Formby and Woodiwiss 2023, Formby et al 2025):

“Some people who come here, like, maliciously – they joke around and all that stuff. I know in forms and stuff, any time LGBTQ club is [advertised] at the beginning of the week, people make fun of it, saying ‘oh you should go there ‘cause you’re gay’... but then when you actually hear it’s like a safe environment to come and stay here, it’s like a good place to come... You can talk about stuff here and you’re not, it kind of stays in this place without you having to worry about it getting outside... It’s like a rule that anything we say here doesn’t leave, it’s just like a place where you can be happy... It’s safe and stuff so it’s really nice and... I would say comforting, because it’s relaxing you a bit, because you know nothing is really going to leave”.

Staff also discussed yOUTH activities provided for the young people, including arts and crafts, and cooking. It was felt that not everyone enjoys arts and crafts, but that – fortunately – those who don’t seemed to particularly like cooking:

“I think I’ve seen a couple of them really thrive in those sessions, and give them quite a big confidence boost, and be working together really well – that’s always nice to see”.

Staff also described the information that has been provided to young people, including from external speakers, for instance on wellbeing and resilience, drugs and alcohol, and sexual health:

“I think it feels useful where it’s like things that, especially when there’s been themes coming up in group... This thing is responding to these things that they’re struggling with, like around... healthy relationships, or feeling stressed about exams”

“A lot of education is missing [in schools], and I think we try and bridge that gap, but it’s never going to be enough. For example, we’ve had some recent cases of young people being groomed... If we’re the only ones talking about this being an issue, or if we’re the only ones where young people can go to, to talk about it, how many young people are we missing? ...A lot of young people don’t know any kind of warning signs of things like grooming... and actually a lot of our young people won’t get that education anywhere else, or actually I think schools don’t even think about it, and that’s really dangerous”.

Staff seemed attuned to getting a balance right for young people:

“It always feels like a bit of a balance between it being a space for them and not wanting to make it like a forced structure... Because of the room that we’re in as well, it kind of feels like if we’re putting something on, it’s quite hard for them to not be involved in it... It can sometimes create a bit of a classroomy vibe, where it feels like it might be hard to opt out, even though we’re obviously saying you don’t have to do this, it’s up to you... But I think generally we get that balance quite good”.

Staff also pointed to how they were fulfilling multiple needs for young LGBTQ+ people:

“The groups are mostly done on young people’s input, what they want to see, what they want to happen, so it’s all young person-led really. We do youth voice sessions once a quarter and then we base what we do at groups based on what those young people have said to us what they want to do, which is always really nice... It’s a good mix of making sure we’re educational but also having a bit of fun... I think a lot of our young people come to groups because it’s a safe space, more than the activities, and to me that’s the most important thing... making sure that people know that they’re welcome there, and they don’t have to join in. A lot of them do, and we really encourage them to, but actually sometimes they just want to come in and chat to their friends, or rant to a youth worker, and actually that’s OK too”

“I think our youth team does a really, really great job of asking the service users what they want to do, while also maintaining our obligations to funders, so it’s not like... a free for all, but like, ‘what do you want to concentrate on?’; ‘great, let’s now centre those into a youth worker framework of actually giving you something to do instead of just being a social group or whatever’, so I think they do a really good job of that, and I think it’s reflected in the youth coming back. We’ve always had really good feedback from service users”.

Changes in service provision since the Brunswick Centre took over have included combining Halifax into one group from two different age groups, with potential impacts on older young people:

“We were still splitting it into older and younger groups, which worked at the time, and then a lot of the older young people aged out, and a lot of the younger people aged up, and then... we combined them, which I think has been working well... I get the impression that some of the older young people weren’t so happy about it, and I haven’t seen as much of them recently, and I don’t know if that’s because of that or whether it’s because of things going on in their lives”.

These comments illustrate staff reflections at a specific point in time, and the service continues to review and adapt its delivery, within the confines of funding constraints.

Staff members also discussed what they heard from young people are some of the issues that young LGBTQ+ people face in schools, and therefore why they felt the yOUTH service is important:

“The main thing is... them [young people] coming and telling us... [about] things that their schools have done in terms of trans stuff or... bathroom use, or name changes... or not dealing with bullying... loads of stuff around that... It was really hard to get into schools [initially]... either they didn’t potentially have the budget, or... weren’t prioritising it within their budget... and obviously teachers are insanely busy ... When they [young people] are saying, like, my school doesn’t get XYZ, they do all these things in bad ways, then it feels like it’s so important for them to have a space where they can come and just be themselves, and not be scared, and know that they’ll be seen”

“Our young people are being bullied at school and schools don’t know how to deal with it, and don’t want to say the wrong things, so they don’t say anything, and then these kids keep getting bullied... One thing that happens quite a lot is young people get deadnamed as part of bullying, but... schools’ guidance is to tell the parents, and if they tell the parents and the parents say use this young person’s birth name, that won’t be identified as bullying, and

actually this young person is being horrendously bullied but school aren't picking up on it... There's young people getting bullied for being in relationships with someone of the same gender as them, or wanting to cut their hair short, or anything to do with being LGBT".

Understanding the Calderdale context

Young people we spoke to were asked to describe what life in the local area was like for them, with "hard" being a common answer. This was often then contrasted to the yOUTH service:

"If I stepped out tomorrow with a massive t-shirt on saying 'I'm trans and I'm proud', so many people would sit there and point and laugh, whereas coming here, I could do that, and no-one would bat an eye. Calderdale is full of [people who] don't like LGBT people – for what reason, I don't know, whereas here... because of course everyone is part of that community, so everyone understands"

"I think coming here is really helpful because... they're so accepting... At school they're a lot less accepting, but when you come here it's more relaxed".

Some young people described the local area as hostile, or at best, not as comfortable for LGBTQ+ people.

A young person also described how they felt things had got worse recently:

"I think there's been a shift in younger people recently, like in our area, because there was a point where everyone was really accepting, and then it's become a lot more against it now".

Another young person summed up their experiences of school as "hell on earth".

When asked to discuss their work in Calderdale, some staff had some concerns about what they perceived as varying levels of support for LGBTQ+ young people locally, at least initially. This included thinking that there had been some resistance to referral to gender identity clinics within professional practice locally. Within these and related discussions, some people felt that there had been a lack of support for trans youth in some settings:

"I think our main issues ended up coming from schools that, at the end of the day, are scared to say or do the wrong thing, and the people that get lost in those decisions that they make are youth, and particularly trans youth, so all of our issues have really come from that lack of understanding... We've been getting less referrals... Again I think that comes from some of that misinformation... I think they're afraid to get yelled at by parents, or not sure where their safeguarding responsibility lies when it comes to LGBT youth".

However, people also commented that the situation locally had improved, and that yOUTH was having a positive impact in the area:

"It felt [initially] like there was some reluctance, or resistance, to the work in Calderdale ... It does feel like there's a slightly different political landscape in some parts of Calderdale around trans stuff... [but] I think it kind of shows the power of having conversations with people, I guess showing the importance of the work"

“We have done a lot of challenging and making sure that the young people’s voices are at the table”.

Other perceptions of issues within Calderdale were also discussed:

“I feel like specifically young people in the [Calder] valley might find it hard to get out of the valley. They don’t see life outside of that. They don’t see themselves going to uni, and that’s not LGBT-specific, it’s a working-class mill area that people have stayed in for generations. So we try to do job development things and stuff like that, but I just hope they know that if they want to – and there’s nothing wrong with staying in the valley if they want – but if they want to get out, they can”

“Kirklees have things like the emotional support partnership... where professionals from a variety of services will get together and meet and will talk about issues in the area, and we’ll work as a partnership to create things and do things and make change, and I think there’s not as much of that in Calderdale. We have the youth development partnership board in Kirklees, so all the key stakeholders in youth work get together and we talk about things, we talk about things we’re seeing, solutions, and share each other’s offer”

“I think... the assumption with Calderdale is like ‘oh we have Hebden Bridge, so everything is fine’... where all the lesbians are; ‘we’re very queer and very accepting, so everything is fine’. I think there is that misconception... actually it’s like, ‘no, Calderdale is vast, it’s a lot more than Hebden Bridge”.

Given some of the issues discussed above and below, running an effective service within the context of a cost-of-living crisis was seen as a challenge.

Understanding the national context

More widely, participants were also asked about their perceptions of the national context. Staff members were all vocal about their views on the changing context for trans people in particular, and discussed both how this impacted upon their work, and young LGBTQ+ people:

“I feel like there’s just been so much misinformation given to schools in the last couple of years, and there’s a kind of worsening climate around trans stuff... Things like the Supreme Court ruling... In the week after that, when I came to group, the first thing that one of the young people said to me was ‘I feel really scared and upset about this thing’, and I was like, ‘it is scary and upsetting’... They’re definitely feeling it... At the same time, I feel like a lot of the time those issues don’t creep into group that much in the sense that I guess maybe it’s the one place where they don’t have to think and talk about those things, and that’s nice – or like they can, and there’s like solidarity... We’ve given them the chance together to respond to some of the consultations that have happened over the last couple of years, and I’ve had those conversations with them in a way that hopefully feels like more empowering than despairing... It is hard doing this kind of work in this climate”

“The work around our trans young people has had to change quite a lot, and I think we’ve had to be adaptive to the media, and especially to the schools’ guidance that came out.

We're getting more backlash from schools than we used to; we're getting more from parents... I think a lot of our trans young people are quite scared at the moment, which is understandable. I think there always has been mental health concerns... but it's kind of gotten more intense... It's hard to not get wrapped up in the negatives; it's really easy to sit and worry about all of it... be upset with all of it, but actually I think we just have to keep moving"

"The Cass report came out and just dropped a bomb on everything... It's just ridiculous, because it's not even about the third sector... We haven't seen this kind of like political atmosphere for a while, and it definitely impacts everything"

"I think of wider social issues and wider political issues as to why, for example, we're getting less referrals from schools at the moment, because let's look at what's going on in the wider world... In my time, I've seen things get so much better for young people... We had a little, short snapshot where I was like, 'wow, we're making real progress here, this is really cool', and now to see that all slowly disappearing is really hard... I'm finding we're getting a lot more challenges and a lot more backlash... and what we're seeing is that there is a significant impact on young people's mental health, young people's hope, their sense of having a future... We're seeing mental health getting much, much worse... young people using things like DIY hormones that they've got off the internet and injected themselves. Very scary things... The new Supreme Court ruling has been absolutely devastating to our young people... At youth group last night... they all just were like, 'it's shit, I'm sad, I'm fed up, I just want to exist in peace, and no-one is letting me. Why are people so obsessed with toilets?' ... As a community we're going to face additional challenges, but we are a community, and we're here for each other, and we will always be a safe space for those young people, where they can just sit and breathe and know that they're not facing that when they're with us... Yes it's a difficult environment... but I think we've got to spread some joy and keep up young people's hope, and we've got to be that safe space for them, where they know that walking through our doors, or texting or calling us, they are going to be safe, and they're not going to be judged, and they're going to be validated. That might be the only place they get validated that week. And that can be the difference between life and death for some young people" (emphasis in the original)

"The political climate is horrific for all of the adults involved, so knowing that our youth are going to be feeling that tremendously, but with maybe a little less historical understanding that it will get better, and that it does actually always get there in the end, so I think just concentrating on keeping them safe at the moment is the goal"

"We had a young person the other day do little mind maps for telling young people about... what's it like to be an LGBT+ young person, and one young person wrote that when they walk down the street people stare at them, and it makes them feel like an animal, and it's just like, this is not how you should have to live your life".

A sense of frustration was often palpable within staff interviews, and it was felt that (understandably) responding to the current context could potentially draw attention away from other young people, which those running the service were mindful of:

“Most of the world don't have toilets to use, and we're carrying on, you know, and Nicola Sturgeon said yesterday, ‘none of this will make a woman safe, none of it’, and she's absolutely right. None of it. You know, two women injured last week... by a crossbow. Jesus. That wasn't a trans person doing that, that was a cisgender straight man doing that. We know that all of this, all of that gets completely sidelined and lost in the heat of this argument... Why the actual F are we concentrating this hatred towards such a tiny part of the population who are just trying to navigate their lives... We're so caught up firefighting... we're at danger of not giving parity across the rainbow”.

Service impacts

Given all of the above, yOUTH is obviously an important service. From a young LGBTQ+ person's perspective, it enables significant friendships:

“It [the group] is a place where I know I won't be abandoned because people have reason for being here... Also people are more relatable here... I like my friends here; I don't like my friends very much at school”

“I've made more friends here than in school... My old friends are dicks. I have better friends now”.

yOUTH staff have also helped improve young people's experiences within school:

“It [yOUTH service] is what helped me get my name changed on the [school] register”

“They [Brunswick staff member] also called [the school] when I was trying to get my name changed on the school system, for my GCSEs and stuff – getting the certificates in the right name... to help me with that”.

Overall, young people were able to point to the difference yOUTH had made in their – and sometimes their friends' – lives:

“For me, it has been very positive... It helps with my mental health a lot. Before this, I was genuinely in a really bad place mentally”

“Before this, I was also in a really bad place, but I think that this group has helped me a lot, because before this I was not at all good at socialising”

“Brunswick helped me a lot with stuff... There is a lot of stuff in place that is very useful... They gave me a lot of advice which I needed at that time, a lot of support... They've had [a] really positive impact, because when I started here, I was suffering with a lot of depression... That was something I'd been struggling with for like five years, so to get to that point where I was actually getting support for that... it was really helpful”

“It helped me find my own labels for myself, because when I first came to the group I was struggling with my labels for quite a bit, and then I managed to put a label on it after coming to the group, and I became a lot more comfortable within myself as well, and it's better

because you're surrounded by, like, people like you in a sense, whereas at school and stuff, they're all a bit different"

"A lot of my friends that I've made here, they've all had their own personal issues, and the Brunswick have always supported them and tried to get them the support that they need without pushing it onto them... because not everyone is the same, not everyone's brains work the same. No two people are alike, so to have them individually work with someone and find out how they work in the group and outside of the group in order to support them... is just really great"

"I think that we have a lot of good services that are offered to us through the Brunswick Centre"

"Inside [here], best place ever. I'd rather be here than in my own home"

One young person talked specifically about yOUTH facilitating their access to counselling:

"Before I didn't really know where to turn and where to go, but now I know that on a [particular day of the week] I can come here and go speak to someone... It was very fast. I think I asked them and the next week someone said that I was getting a counsellor... I think that if you bottle up who you are for a really long time, then that can really negatively impact, then coming here and being able to be whoever I want, that made a big positive impact – obviously because it's better to be who you are than being someone that you're not, because that causes all sorts of problems"

yOUTH staff members were also able to identify young people for whom the service had been particularly impactful:

"There was one young person for example who came to us and went home and immediately she was like, 'oh I just want to come out to my whole family now, because it's safe here, I've got a group; everyone else is so confident in themselves, and I want that', so she went home and she came out and then her family bought her a little lesbian flag. It was just so wholesome and so lovely, she was just like, 'I don't know how I would have done it without coming to group', and that was really nice... Another young person, I met with them in school... They had a lot of gender dysphoria and were really, really struggling with it. I think they just weren't able to really function in school because their gender dysphoria was so all-consuming... Then they came to group, and it was like a completely different young person... I think it's just being in a space where everyone calls them their name and the right pronouns, everyone will chat to them, and they've got a group of friends now. They've never had a group of friends before... I guess we're adults that they can trust outside of school life and whatever. I had a really nice chat with one of them about, like, queer labels the other week, which was incredibly sweet. They were just asking me about how they know when a label is right, and what words do I use and why... It feels like it's important – obviously that's why we do this work, isn't it, because it is important really to have queer adults that they can look to who are specific role models. That definitely felt like one of those moments where I was like, I can give you this information because I'm also in this group... A lot of them have made friends through it. I guess having their own queer community at that age is quite important and powerful. I guess a lot of them don't have a nice time at home – they may not

be out at home, or they're not really supported in their gender or whatever at home, or at school. They come to group, and they can just use whatever names and pronouns they want, and everyone just understands that and respects it... [they] don't have to worry about that stuff here"

"We know there is such a long waiting list for CAMHS and services, so I think the fact that we can get a young person in to see a counsellor within a few weeks has been really nice. And a lot of the feedback from parents and families – their young people are making friends, who maybe haven't had friends before. And young people finding that safe space to be themselves... The feedback generally has been really positive, and they're very excited I think as well about getting to design their own programmes, design their own activities. And I think some of the best feedback is that young people vote with their feet. If they're not into it, they won't come. And the fact that we've got a really good strong group that turn up every week, I think that speaks volumes... I think that's probably the best feedback you can get, isn't it, that the young people want to come, and they want to talk to you, and they want to engage with you"

"I think the positives are actually the young people are still there and I'm seeing the benefits and hearing young people's stories about actually what would happen if we weren't there".

More than one staff member indicated that a particular strength of the Brunswick Centre was its dedicated and passionate staff, including some who specifically spoke highly of the CEO.

"I'm really proud of the project, very proud that we've got a degree-qualified youth worker leading that... because I think that youth work knowledge is so, so important... where we are now, we're like a million miles from where we were, and it's really nice to see... [The] Brunswick Centre are just so supportive and so passionate, and I'm really proud of that, and I'm proud to be a part of it".

Looking to the future: Plans and wishes

When asked to suggest improvements for the future, young people were often initially reluctant/unable to think of any, but did ultimately request:

- more beads, especially letter beads
- more snack/food options, hot chocolate, and fizzy drinks (specifically Dr Pepper)
- less strict rules about not allowing any energy drinks
- more varied craft resources generally, including hot glue guns
- more trips (e.g. to Comic Con, or musical theatre productions)
- more dance parties (e.g. themed by decade; could link in with educational material about LGBTQ+ history in that decade)
- for youth group to be longer, even just by 30 minutes.

It was thought that an ideal LGBTQ+ youth group would include the following factors:

- Pride flags specific to individual identities (e.g. bisexual, ace, trans, etc)
- posters and plushies from popular culture that young people like

- a calm room to escape to separate from the main room
- a scream room
- a beanbag area
- tablets for watching television.

Ultimately, young people wished for a place that felt like their own 'kingdom', with a lack of personalisation possible in the existing space clearly impacting on their sense of belonging and ownership of the current environment. What featured in their ideal spaces were references to queer pop culture, and comfortable 'nooks' where they could sit. Ideal organised activities included camping, zip wires, roller skating, and DIY clothes workshops (particularly to facilitate gender-affirming alterations).

Young people we spoke to also said they valued the opportunities for feedback within yOUTH:

"We do feedback forms every six months... I think that that's a great way for us to get our opinions across on how it can be better for young people, especially with young people that are either moving up or starting, because it means that if there's anything that we feel should be addressed, we're actually getting heard... And we can anonymise, so we don't have to put our names on it, we can just put pronouns, or we can just put nothing on it, and just write what we feel – which is quite good, because a lot of people here have social anxiety, so sometimes pointing out flaws isn't the easiest thing to do, so that's a great way for them to do it".

Those that were part of a school-based LGBT club wished that there could be provision for an after-school club as well or instead, because it was felt that 40 minutes at lunch time was not very long. They also wanted trips, for instance to local Pride events, and resources like board games, craft supplies, and books (e.g. the Heartstoppers series):

"It would be better if we got more books to explain the history of it [LGBTQ]".

More broadly, young people wished their schools could be more trans-inclusive/gender-affirming; specifically, that schools would not require parental consent to support social transition:

"At school you have to get your parents to accept it for your parents to actually say that you can change your name on the register, but some people aren't out to their parents, like I'm not because my parents don't think I'm old enough to decide that I'm trans or anything, so they say that I'm not allowed to change my name, so I'd say to make it so that people, if they want to be called something, they can have a little note on the side of their thing to say that... I think that would be good".

Staff members identified potential improvements for yOUTH as well, which often related to expanding the service and/or the diversity of its staff (e.g. related to geographical location, ethnicity and gender/sexual identity), though also physical changes:

"More trips, more residential, more stuff that feels like it kind of builds the groups as a bit more of a coherent community... More stuff across the whole service would be great, just more opportunities for them... We took them on a trip to Leeds last year some time, and a lot

of them were like, 'it's my first time leaving [town], it's my first time on a train'... It would just be so good if we could just take them more places, let them experience more things that they wouldn't otherwise experience... more opportunities to learn things that they're interested in learning... [and] more food! I feel like we have such a limited budget every week, and it would be nice if we could provide proper meals for them... With more staff we could do so much more, we could do more or longer sessions"

"If we could have one of us doing the Halifax side of Calderdale and one of us doing the Todmorden and Calder Valley side, that would be amazing"

*"We have a pretty diverse staff, but on the youth workers side, it's not as representative of the communities we want to serve. It's probably representative of the communities we **are** serving, if that makes sense" (emphasis in the original)*

"Our group is overwhelmingly white and not representative of Calderdale as an area, so I'm kind of aware that there must be intersections of our community that we're not meeting, we're not representative of... whether because we're not outreaching in the right ways that those young people know that we're there, or because they turn up and it's such a white group that they don't feel welcome"

"Our youth space isn't great. I would love to have a big youth space with comfy sofas and... a proper kitchen... Gender-neutral toilets. An outdoor space would be fantastic... The Huddersfield youth space is kind of the dream. If we could have one of them in Calderdale that would be fantastic".

Staff members also commented on things they would like to see in an ideal world:

"I wish we had... say like the referral list to get onto gender-related care, I wish that it wasn't six years long, because I think at the moment that's killing our young people, and there's not a nicer way to put it. Our young people have really bad mental health problems... and have been quite suicidal as I think a direct result of... waiting lists and not getting the care they need"

"I wish schools were better. I wish schools never had that [gender questioning] guidance, and should go by our guidance, because actually I think it's really dangerous to live as a trans young person in schools when schools are outing young people to parents. I know especially for a lot of non-white young people who are LGBT, it's a really terrifying time for them... If they get outed, it's a lot bigger for them; it's maybe being sent to a different country"

"I guess accessibility for our young people... We don't have to ask permission, but a lot of our young people feel that they need to, because actually they're still teenagers and they can't just disappear for three hours a week on a [particular day] and not tell anyone. I wish it was safe for everybody to come to our youth group"

"It feels like a lot of it is really... awareness raising across the board... It feels like the schools all need it... They [the young people] have to spend so much of their time every week in those places. That would be great. I think that's definitely a huge need there"

“I would like to see a transitional service for those who are 25-plus, because what we find is... places like Calderdale and Huddersfield, we don’t have as much stuff [as Leeds and Manchester]. Often when young people leave our service, they might still need that queer community, and they might not necessarily have that, so I’d like to see more of that – more funding going into just LGBT social groups for adults. I think that would be really good”

*“I want LGBT young people to just live a much easier life, and to not fear discrimination just walking down the street, not fearing hate crime... Young people just going to the toilet where they want to go to the toilet, like for their lives not to be reduced to a toilet conversation... because I think that’s often what it gets reduced to, and it’s like, why do you care **so** much about this? I really don’t understand” (emphasis in the original)*

“For young people, for their outcomes to match their non-queer peers, that’s the dream... They’re more likely to smoke, they’re more likely to have mental [ill-]health... Who you love, or who you fancy, or who you want to kiss, shouldn’t have that much of an impact on everything else... Just a bit of peace and quiet, that’s all I want!”

“Just to have our own building and our own place where young people can just drop in, I’d love that”

“The dream is that young people can just exist and be queer and everything is fine... The dream is they don’t need... a worker to support them with things like that, they just need a youth service like every other young person... but that is very idealistic and it’s never going to happen”.

CONCLUSIONS

We note that there have been developments locally since this data collection was carried out, for instance there is now a network of professional stakeholders working together as the Youth Collective Group, which may be able to address some of the concerns raised by stakeholders in this report. As an interim summary, the report does not include a formal action plan, but learning from the feedback has already been informing ongoing service reflection and development. Recommendations will be set out in the final report.

The data we gathered in this first year suggest that yOUTH is clearly contributing to:

- young people's emotional wellbeing, including their self-identity
- information exchange on physical wellbeing, including for example sexual health
- LGBTQ+ visibility and community engagement.

In the words of one young person and one staff member:

"It [yOUTH] is an escape from everything else"

"Our staff does such a tremendous job... They are doing so much with so little".

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