



Evaluation of the yOUTH service 2020

Dr Eleanor Formby and
Dr Jo Woodiwiss

© Sheffield Hallam University 2020

This publication may be reproduced in whole or in part and in any form for educational or non-profit purposes without special permission from the copyright holder, provided acknowledgment of the source is made.

Published by Sheffield Hallam University 2020
Howard Street
Sheffield
S1 1WB
UK
Email: e.formby@shu.ac.uk

**Sheffield
Hallam
University** | Sheffield
Institute
of Education

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	3
1. Introduction	4
2. Survey of young people	5
3. In-depth discussions with young people	10
4. Conclusion	24
References	25

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank all those who supported this work, including the young people and professionals who completed or distributed surveys and/or who participated in interviews and discussion groups.



1. INTRODUCTION

In 2018, Eleanor Formby from Sheffield Hallam University and Jo Woodiwiss from the University of Huddersfield were commissioned by The Brunswick Centre to undertake local research and evaluation of the new yOUTH service in Kirklees. This is a five-year project, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, which seeks to support lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) young people and their parents or carers on a one-to-one and/or group work basis. The aims of the project are to ensure that:

- LGBT young people have increased voice and influence;
- LGBT young people report happier and healthier relationships and improved emotional health and wellbeing;
- schools will be safer spaces for LGBT young people due to a reduction in bullying and improved anti-bullying policies.

Research and evaluation connected to the project consists of the following elements:

1. Service mapping interviews with staff and related stakeholders to find out about current services and any gaps or needs in provision for LGBT¹ young people (published in 2019)
2. Needs research with LGBT young people via an online survey and follow-up interviews and discussion groups with young people (published in 2019)
3. Yearly impact evaluation with young people, involving online survey and follow-up interviews and discussion groups with young people (reported here)
4. Final impact evaluation involving online survey methods and follow-up interviews with staff and related stakeholders (due to be completed in 2022).

This second annual report documents findings from recent research activities, i.e. the second round of impact evaluation with young people. This involved the distribution of an online survey to project participants (reported in Chapter 2), and follow-up discussions with project participants, either in groups or individually (see Chapter 3).

¹ Although we use the term LGBT throughout this report to correspond with the yOUTH service's focus we made it clear to all young people that the research and evaluation activities were open to those identifying as LGBT+ (i.e. not only those identifying as LGBT but also other gender and sexual minorities as well, such as non-binary, gender-fluid, pansexual, queer, and so on).

2. SURVEY OF YOUNG PEOPLE

The purpose of this evaluation component was essentially to gather views on the yOUTH service from young people with experience of accessing it. Survey respondents were recruited through Brunswick Centre dissemination of the survey. In total, 45 people responded to the survey, of which 32 had experience of yOUTH, so it is these results that are reported here.

Participants

The majority of respondents were aged 16 (x 6), with smaller numbers either side of this: one was 12, four were 13, four were 14, four were 15, four were 17, two were 18, one was 19, and two were 24. In terms of gender identity, the majority (21 in total) did not identify as cisgender: sixteen were trans or trans male, five were gender non-binary, one was genderqueer, and one identified as agender. In addition, six identified as female and six male. Regarding sexual identity, seven identified as bisexual, seven as pansexual, two as gay, two lesbian, two heterosexual or 'straight', two said they were queer, one "ace lesbian", another asexual, and finally one "pansexual and poly". Respondents largely self-identified as white (x 24), with smaller numbers Asian or Asian British (x 1), or from a mixed background (x 3). The majority (x 13) said they had no religion, whilst five were Christian, two Wiccan, one reported Jainism, one Jewish, and one Muslim.

Services and support

Survey participants were asked what kind of contact they had had with the yOUTH service. As the below table indicates, exactly half (50%) had received one-to-one contact or support. The yOUTH group had been accessed by 84%, with 59% saying they did so 'most of the time'. Smaller numbers (37.5%) accessed an LGBT youth group at their school or college that the yOUTH service had involvement in. A little under half (44%) had attended the monthly parents and trans youth group.

	Yes but only once	Yes but not very often	Yes quite often	Yes most of the time	No never	I'm not sure
Contact or support on a one-to-one basis (in person or over the phone)	4	3	3	6	8	4
Attended the weekly LGBT youth group in Huddersfield	1	1	6	19	-	1

	Yes but only once	Yes but not very often	Yes quite often	Yes most of the time	No never	I'm not sure
Attended an LGBT youth group at my school or college that the yOUTH service are involved in	0	2	2	8	12	5
Attended the monthly parents and trans youth group in Huddersfield	1	3	3	7	11	3

Participants were also asked what they thought of their contact with the yOUTH service. The table below clearly shows that results were positive: of those with experience of the provision, 89% found one-to-one contact or support excellent or good; 100% found the weekly yOUTH group excellent or good; 69% found their school or college group excellent or good; and 85% found the monthly trans group excellent or good.

	It was excellent	It was good	It wasn't very good	It was rubbish	I'm not sure	I have no experience of this
I've had contact or support on a one-to-one basis (in person or over the phone)	12	4	0	0	2	11
I've attended the weekly LGBT youth group in Huddersfield	20	8	0	0	0	1
I've attended an LGBT youth group at my school or college that the yOUTH service are involved in	5	4	1	1	2	15

	It was excellent	It was good	It wasn't very good	It was rubbish	I'm not sure	I have no experience of this
I've attended the monthly parents and trans youth group in Huddersfield	7	4	0	0	2	16

Some people provided more detail to explain their responses and how the yOUTH service had helped them. These comments mostly related to confidence, self-esteem and/or friendship and peer support:

"They gave me confidence to be myself and come out to my parents"

"It has given me people to relate to - people who are going through the same situations as me"

"Able to be myself more"

"It has helped me realise that I am not alone and that people are always here to support me"

"It has let me be the person I was born to be and I am more confident in myself because of it"

"It helped me feel more confident to come out, connect with other queer young people, help me gain confidence in general"

"They're helping me with moving out at 16 and with transitioning without my parents"

"The staff are absolutely amazing and very comforting"

"Make me feel safe and I have friends here who are very supportive. I feel a lot more comfortable about my gender and about my sexuality"

"Has helped me with coming out about my sexuality and help with self-harm and mental health"

"The group has made me happier and has let me meet other LGBTQ+ people who let me know I'm not alone"

"They help me come out and help me to be who I am"

"It has helped me make friends".

Respondents were also asked about any information or support they had been given about particular issues. The table below suggests that the three issues most likely to be discussed were (in this order): sex and relationships, including sexual health; mental health and emotional wellbeing; relationships with family or friends. Perhaps not surprisingly, seeking asylum seemed to be the least discussed.

	Yes	No	I'm not sure
Smoking	17	7	5
Drug or other substance use	18	7	4
Domestic/interpersonal violence and abuse	10	8	11
Child sexual abuse/exploitation and online safety	11	5	13
Homelessness, housing or missing persons	11	6	12
Mental health and emotional wellbeing	22	3	4
Experiences of bullying at school	16	7	6
Sex and relationships, including sexual health	23	2	4
Seeking asylum	6	11	12
Employment and looking for work	10	6	12
Further study or training	7	6	14
Relationships with family or friends	20	3	5

Another question respondents were asked related to any further information, support, groups or other activities they would like to see the yOUTH service provide for LGBT young people or their families in Kirklees. Responses included the below:

"Sex education in the LGBTQ+ community"

"Something that can be brought into high schools"

"More school support and groups in catholic or religious or non-religious schools and colleges"

"More info for parents struggling with their child"

"Healthy eating, more trips, longer residential"

"Toxic masculinity".

When asked if there was any particular information or support they would like to see about sexual/intimate relationships, participants responded with the below:

"Sex education for LGBTQ+"

"What is a healthy relationship"

"[I] wanna know about different types of domestic abuse".

The final survey question asked participants if there was anything else they wanted to say about the yOUTH service or what it is like being an LGBT young person in Kirklees. The responses are below:

"Life can be really difficult"

"It is amazing and I am so thankful it exists. It has saved my life"

"It is amazing and I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for the group. It is amazing and is very supportive and helpful to me"

"It is amazing and has really helped me come out of my shell"

"Really good at making me feel comfortable"

"It's excellent"

"yOUTH is good".

3. IN-DEPTH DISCUSSIONS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

The purpose of this evaluation component was to explore issues raised in the survey in more detail. Follow-up discussions were held with 29 people; one within an individual telephone interview and 28 within discussion groups (x 4) which took place as part of existing yOUTH or school/college group meetings. This qualitative data was digitally recorded and then transcribed before being analysed thematically. Those involved in data collection about the impact of the yOUTH service were aged between 12 and 18. Most were living with their families and attending school or college.

Experiences of the yOUTH service

Initial discussions with participants focussed on what aspects of yOUTH they had engaged in. Most conversations focussed on the weekly yOUTH group, with participants generally complimentary about the staff/service:

"The staff are really lovely"

"The service itself is really good"

"It is really good. It's better than CAMHS or anywhere else like that... it's really good".

However, some people did raise concerns about some others members of the group, as this exchange shows:

"Some of the people here, they're really annoying..."

It's the younger kids

The 'circle'...

They don't understand rules, that's the thing...

I'm fine with being friends with people of all ages [but] it's their maturity level, and respect for everybody else, because they don't have much respect for everyone other than their clique, which is really irritating...

They can also be chill, when they're on their own, or there's only two of them together, but as soon as you have the entire whole group together, they all bounce off each other and that's when it gets to be a problem... As soon as you get them together, all morals go out the window...

They usually sit in this room and isolate themselves from everyone else

They started doing interviews to join the 'circle'

That was intimidating

You had to say five sentences of why you deserved to be in the group".

Some young people also suggested that there could be more activities within the group:

"It's great, but like sometimes there's nothing to [do]"

"If we had more to do, more activities, it would be a lot better"

"It's three hours and there's not much to do for three hours"

"It can get really boring and we don't get given a lot to do"

"[We could have] more activities towards the end half of group, because that's when people go absolutely sky-high because there's no activities"

"From 6 onwards the hyperactivity kicks in, because there's no more activities, people's hyperactivity gets channelled into them just running up and down the hall"

"I think that if people had something they could focus their activity on, it would be a lot calmer atmosphere".

Others, however, valued accessing information via yOUTH service activities:

"They do lots of little activities, like for mental health awareness week we did activities like how you're feeling, one-to-one, or in a group. You do little activities based around, like abuse, drugs... you become involved with how to prevent the issue [or] deal with it if it has happened. They make it so that we actually understand it".

The impact of yOUTH involvement

The above comments notwithstanding, the yOUTH service clearly was an important part of the young people's lives. Participants were asked to explain how they felt the yOUTH service had impacted on them. For some people, responses focussed on the friendships they had formed as result of the group, which helped tackle loneliness and build trusting relationships:

"The people here are the only people I feel... they're the only people I can, like, truly trust... I don't feel like they're all going to leave me in a second flat".

It was clear that group members felt they benefited from peer acceptance, support and understanding:

"For me, it's like when you walk through the school doors, you're going to get someone who is going to look at you in a funny way, even like something as simple as what shoes you're wearing, what socks you're wearing, what jewellery you're wearing, where you're wearing your jewellery, how you've put your hair, what colour

you're dying your hair. But then like, when you walk in here, you don't get any like funny looks"

"It's just like the support... because I don't have a great experience in school, and there's not many people at all in my school like me, so I just come in here with, like, loads and loads of people like me"

"My experience is just like there's loads of people that support you... you can speak to them and they won't judge you"

"The people in here are, like, super-supportive. They've always been there for me. And I've never been, like, felt left out, or like been pushed to one side. You're all in this together"

"You can talk to people and there's, like, loads of young people who know what you're going through, so you can tell them how you're feeling and they won't, like, judge you".

Such comments accord with other research that suggests LGBT people find value in contact with other people perceived to be 'like them' (Formby 2017). For others, responses concentrated on impacts on self-identity and confidence specifically:

"It made me feel more like myself... when I first came here I didn't really know fully who I was, because I hadn't long come out, and I came here and people here helped me find the person inside"

"Ever since I first started until now, my confidence has grown and I've got more self-esteem and ability to speak to people. So, it's definitely helped me become the person who I am".

yOUTH staff members were praised for the support they offered young people:

"They [the staff] have helped me... when I've really, really needed a helping hand"

"It's kind of saved my life because they [the staff] have been there when I thought I had no one... It's nice to always know that there's hope and people do understand what you're going through"

"It [yOUTH] has made a massive difference really... especially the support from the staff".

Participants were clear that they felt safe within the yOUTH group, which was explicitly contrasted with their experiences of school.

Experiences of school and college

Within the research, young people talked about their lives in general, and in particular their experiences of school. These experiences were often thought to be defined by inappropriate school staff behaviour:

"They teach that some people are gay, some people are lesbians, some people are trans, some people are bi... and they teach it as if there is nobody like that in the room... It's an abstract concept"

"There was like a whole LGBT session, and they made a massive deal out of me being in the room... Because I was like the only one in my class... it was like, 'is this alright, can we teach this in front of you?'"

"...being over-inclusive, like checking with every gay student, 'is it OK if we say this?'"

"In my school, we've got this teacher, she's horrible... basically she knows I'm gay... She'll come up to me, 'just as a warning, gender in this classroom means male and female!' ...I've mentioned it many times to her and to other staff, and they've been like, 'oh, well, it's kind of just her opinion and we can't do much about it. And I'm sure she didn't mean it in that way, she's trying to understand things'. I don't want to be asked these things! And if I look uncomfortable, don't ask me about it!"

"I was outed by my head of year... to a roomful of about 10 other people who then went and told everyone. And I wasn't ready for that yet"

"With my school, it's not that they weren't accepting, they were generally quite accepting, it's just for, like, LGBT education it was just Year 7, 'here's a film [Stonewall's 'Fit'] that has gay people in it, go crazy'. And then that led to a lot of, like, – especially like the younger boys – throwing slurs left right and centre... and they never really, there was nothing really done about it, like every other bullying seemed to be tackled, but not that".

Perhaps as a result, some young people had very low expectations for their life in school, mirroring previous research in this field (Formby 2013):

"I got grief just because of the way I looked in the first week of transition week... It must have been the fourth day of transition week that I got a Year 11 boy coming up to me and went 'oh you little faggot'. Didn't even know who I was... I've had death threats. People told me that people have been paid to come and stab me... The teachers don't really do anything about it, like all last week I was getting grief every single day. It's just kind of the reality now, and I've just got to get on with it".

Another common theme within school environments was LGBT invisibility within the curriculum:

“We never did anything about LGBT... I’m talking this year, 2019 – we never did anything about LGBT, so never awareness [or] any experience”

“In history, why can’t we learn about.. LGBTQ history”

“It’s almost as if LGBTQ people didn’t exist in history”

“There’s nothing. It’s just the same old same old”.

There was particular interest in leaning about LGBT rights/current affairs, for instance around new rights to marriage in Northern Ireland, alongside LGBT history:

“Things like Gentleman Jack, like I only learned about her from my [LGBT] group... and also from the TV series... and I live in Halifax! I live near her – I should know her history and I don’t, at all”.

Whilst LGBT visibility in schools was generally viewed positively, it did contain some ‘risks’ and highlighted underlying issues about prejudice towards, or the ‘acceptability’ of, LGBT identities:

“I feel like a lot of the pupils, if they saw you looking at them [posters], they’d make fun of you... But it was good, because there were lots of posters”

“I think that happens everywhere. If you’re looking at an LGBT poster, or anything to do with it, they’re going to take the mick out of you, no matter who you are. That’s happened to me a lot, in my old high school”.

Sex and relationships education (SRE)/relationships and sex education (RSE) was also felt to be weak for LGBT young people (see also Formby 2011, Formby and Donovan 2020):

“They teach sex ed for, like, straight people, but they don’t like do anything for... gay people or LGBT... How to stay safe, contraception”

“It doesn’t tell us about any sex other than straight regular penis in vagina sex”

“It is literally – here is a penis, here is a vagina – they have sex. Don’t do it! Don’t do it if you’re under 16!”

“It doesn’t go into two women, or how trans people would approach sex, or two guys”.

Although some people had slightly better experiences, they were still left wanting more:

“In sex education they touched on it... but it wasn’t very educational in the same way that they educated us on straight sex, so they never said, ‘oh yeah this is how lesbians have sex’ or ‘this is how gay men have sex’. It was just, ‘gays and lesbians exist, you should be aware of that’”

"In my high school, you kind of touched upon things like femidoms and dental dams and stuff like that, but it really was just touched upon. Like, we got to practice putting on a condom and we got to... pass around some femidoms and stuff like that, but we never go to practice... We got kind of told what to do with femidoms but we didn't get taught anything else".

Some participants were also vocal about disagreeing with segregated SRE/RSE provision, which was seen as problematic both for trans people, and because it then means that people do not understand the experiences of others.

By contrast, where there was some visibility, this was appreciated:

"It's just like the little things... In form we had a PowerPoint presentation and it was like different scenarios for relationships and it was like which one of these is healthy. And one of them was two 14-year-old girls who met at school. And I was just like, 'yes!' You know, just the little tiny things mean a lot".

Whilst some talked about Catholic teachers saying things they did not agree with, others indicted that being religious/having faith does not always mean opposition to LGBT identities, also suggested by existing research (Carlile 2019, Formby forthcoming, Taylor and Cuthbert 2019):

"I go to a Catholic school and they're trying to be as inclusive as possible".

Echoing feedback last year, some young people called for more punishment of inappropriate language within schools:

"He [my teacher] just didn't do anything. Like, the most he did is tell them to stop being so loud, let's watch the movie. Like, there should be harsher punishment for kids who do that, even if they're not aware that there are any LGBT students in there".

Once again, school proms were also the subject of conversation (see also Formby and Woodiwiss 2019):

"Am I allowed to dance with a girl? No. Am I allowed to not participate and say I'm not going to prom? No. Am I going to be referred to as what I want to be referred to? No! And how do they refer to us dancing? 'Men, grab your women, put your hands on their shoulders, make sure your woman is safe and tight when you dip her'".

Colleges generally tended to be talked about in more positive terms than schools:

"What I've come to is an absolute haven for LGBTQ+ positivity... Nearly all teachers have a rainbow ribbon on their lanyard. They're so sweet. I came out at the beginning of the year to my teacher and she said, 'just to let you know, when we get to the topic of gender, it may get a bit uncomfortable for you'. We've got to that topic, because we're starting it tomorrow, and she came up to me last week, gave me the revision guide and said 'I'll let you read this and prepare yourself for it, and if you get

really uncomfortable, feel free to leave and you don't have to come in for the lessons on transgender and dysphoria if it's going to make you feel uncomfortable and unhappy. And I'll be happy to teach you one to one for that'... Considering I went from one of the most homophobic and transphobic high schools where I... had death threats and stuff like that... And from there going to this college that is honestly one of the best colleges I would say for LGBTQ+ people. It is honestly such a beautiful juxtaposition of going from one terrible time in my life to going to such a beautiful place".

Family life

Although not a focus of this project, young people's experiences of living with family, and/or reactions to their identity from family, did feature in our research interactions:

"My Mum is supportive but my Dad isn't. I've to call the police on my Dad. He threatened to put me up for adoption... Continually calling me a faggot, stuff like that".

Whilst the above example may be more 'extreme', other family members – whilst 'trying' – exhibited a lack of awareness or understanding, at least initially:

"She [my Mum] is trying... But some of the things she says, it's like I know you're not meaning to be offensive, but as somebody who has trans friends, who has non-binary friends, who themselves is gender-fluid, some of the things that she says are a bit like... Please don't say that... She's so accepting and so inclusive, but I think it's just because society has always been like – this and this. It's so binary".

Some acknowledged that this was about lack of education, which could be addressed informally:

"When I came out as trans, my Mum was very shocked and she didn't really understand... I don't identify as a trans man anymore, and also I'm not out to her as non-binary, but now I feel complete confidence in the fact that if I were to come out, I would immediately be called my preferred name, I would immediately be called my preferred pronouns. And if she ever slipped up, she'd be so apologetic. And I feel like it's about education... Because I have brought trans friends home and I have brought non-binary friends home, my Mum is completely OK with it... It's like that old saying – you can't teach an old dog new tricks. It might take a while, but you can".

These experiences are important as they inform the context in which young people live their lives. If their experiences of education and family life are negative, then LGBT spaces/services often become more significant, which we return to below.

School and college-based LGBT groups

School and college-based groups for LGBT students supported by the yOUTH service were generally regarded positively. Initial discussions focussed on what was the appeal of this type of provision:

"It's the sense of being around people that are like me, people I can rant to"

"We all have something in common"

"You feel more normal"

"The sense of community"

"I feel, like, a lot more connected with LGBT people. I feel more confident"

"Because we're all in the same boat, we know that we're all like-minded, so... I know that nobody would do to me what [others do]"

Once again, these comments indicate the importance of a sense of similarity, 'normality' and/or community for LGBT people (see also Formby 2017). They also suggest that a key element of these groups is that they are solely for LGBT young people, which perhaps calls into question the more popular gay-straight/gender-sexuality alliance (GSA) model in North America, i.e. including cisgender heterosexual people (see also Formby forthcoming). For a majority of these young people, the (out of school) yOUTH group did not feel accessible as they were not out to their parents and therefore did not know how they would explain attending the group. School and college-based groups are therefore vital for some. They provide a space (sometimes the only space) in which young people can discuss their experiences, for example:

"There are quite a lot of us who come and hang out, but quite a lot of the time we do talk about some issues while we're... [hanging out]"

"...like struggles we've had. Like, bad experiences, because all of us had some pretty bad experiences and bullying and things. So we talked about that"

"We exchange stories about what's gone on and try and give advice on what to do".

Discussing media content that included LGBT people held particular significance as it aided representations of LGBT visibility, which was of clear interest to the young people, as this group exchange shows:

"I feel like a lot of the time when we don't have much to talk about, or we finish the activity, we do talk about LGBT media a lot, so things like Drag Race... I remember there was, when the finale came on, there was a lot of drama about it, but it's nice to be in a place where you know that a lot of people in the group either know about it or watch it..."

...The shared experience of LGBT media where I think a lot of people feel represented, especially in the UK version. I feel like having those spaces where you can talk about things like that is good, and I think it's a valuable space for that..."

Yeah, I feel like it's one of the few things that everybody can chime in on. Even if you only know something, you'll still get a chance to talk

I feel like it's also very refreshing to have discussions about media that represents us without having like cis-het voices weighing in... and I think it shows, like... you're not alone in what you're thinking...

And whilst we discuss media in here, you don't get the 'yeah but if my kids watch gay stuff they're going to turn gay', which is really annoying, because you bring up representation in the media, and that's all you tend to get thrown at you".

As another participant summarised:

"Representation on shows means a lot, like Glee... Like when you watch a character and, like, 'I went through that!' and then you watch how they cope with it".

However, it was noted that:

"The thing is with representation, it can either be accurate or it can just relate to stereotypes... [and] stereotypes can be very annoying".

The advantage of visibility can also therefore be marred by the disadvantage of poor representation:

"I think Riverdale is good, because it's very mainstream, so there's a lot of people, straight people, who watch it and I feel like they became more relaxed about it, I think, when that couple came on, and I really noticed that. But the way they choose to represent them, isn't great".

Similarly, in a context where young LGBT people do not always feel supported or accepted, other sources of support outside school/college settings and the yOUTH service were also explored. Access to online spaces and communication is one such example:

"It's just easy... it just makes you feel like you're not alone, you know, and I would never talk to somebody older than me... but just to see celebrities, or like talk to other people my age who are within the area, like mutual friends of friends, it just makes you feel better".

Although concerns have been raised about the safety of young people using online sites in this way (e.g. see Craig and McInroy 2014), this and other research (Formby 2017, Taylor et al 2014) indicates that young people's desire for information and/or identity experimentation/affirmation (which might lead to not using privacy settings) should not be underestimated (Formby and Donovan 2020). Some educational spaces focussing only on the 'dangers' of the internet to young people do therefore not recognise the simultaneous potential for positive opportunities, and indeed safety, in online spaces for LGBT young people (Formby 2017, Formby and Donovan 2020), which for some may be their only source of information and/or affirmation. Young people accessing support and/or identity validation,

whether it be by groups, media or online, is important when they are not always able to talk about their experiences at home or with family:

"I think it's just hard when you can't tell your family about it [poor experiences at school]"

"You get bullied and you're in a really awful place and... you can't say"

"School called my Mum and Dad up, and it was like, your son is being bullied. And then they asked me, why were you being bullied? And I'm like, um... because I'm short!"

"So many nights when you're just really upset and they're like, 'what's happening', and you're just like, 'can't tell you'. That sucks".

School/college-based groups were identified as positive spaces that facilitate friendship formation, peer support, and information sharing:

"I like the friends I've made from it, that I wouldn't have met otherwise, because they're in very different years or I don't have any classes with them"

"I had no friends before this group. So, it's given me people who I can trust and talk to"

"It's made me more open to talk about how crap the school is"

"I like the discussions we end up having".

Another way the groups were helpful was in providing access to information and advice missing elsewhere:

"We learnt about safe sex and also illegal things like cottaging and dogging"

"And chemsex and all that, and how we can support people who do that because they're going to do it anyway, so it's teaching you to be safe, and how to be safe in any other types of sex".

This information could also be used by young people to provide help to others:

"Through learning about safe sex... I've been able to help friends with it and stuff like that... when they had issues with it, and give them advice".

In one of the groups, there was an exchange that demonstrated a shared view that although mental health and wellbeing was already discussed, it could be talked about even more, with an eye to prevention rather than (only) response:

"I think we could talk about mental health more, actually..."

I would definitely

We really only talk about it if one of us is brave enough and stands up and says something's not right, but we have those days when we don't want to talk about it, but it should still be there because that gives us more, like, hope, or some bravery to speak about it

I think, like, growing up LGBTQ, everybody has their moment, a lot of people have a moment when they hate themselves

Why couldn't I just be normal...

So to talk about that, would be helpful...

Maybe it would be helpful if we talked about how we feel bad... and [if] enough people share their stories and then we can say how we can prevent it. Then after the problem we can address it...

Recently I've been down a lot and some days I don't even want to get out of bed, because I feel like what's the point about it all, [but] I get up and I put a smile on my face even though it's not what I'm feeling, like, inside. But it helps to know that people are like me, just to even, to know that there's people to go to – it helps".

Practical activities were also thought to aid mental health:

"Last week [yOUTH staff member] set up a positivity box, where we write down something that we've liked about this session or this person or something in particular, and we write it down every week and we put it in, and then at the end of the college year we'll take them out and read them all... I think that's a good way to positively increase mental health".

Such spaces were also important in supporting identity development and affirmation:

"There's quite a few people in this room, I think, who go by names or pronouns that they don't necessarily go by at home or outside of this room, and it's very important to have a place where you can... It helps you decide whether that name or pronoun is right for you, without having to be unsafe... To have that personal choice is very empowering, where you can use it in a certain setting and never have anyone that you don't want to find out find out"

"I recently started going by a different name in this room, and the reason I only go by it in this room is because, like, in Year 9 I tried to go by it and nobody honoured it whatsoever. They literally told me 'no' to my face... Now that I've been here... people are using it, and it's just that feeling of, like, people understanding and using what you want them to use, without any sort of question of 'oh well, why?' or like 'no, I'm not going to do that, because you're not medically transitioned' or something like that".

Participants were clear that they felt safe within the groups, which was contrasted with their experiences of the wider school or college environment:

"I get misgendered constantly, and like I don't feel comfortable saying like 'oh, actually...' whereas in here I can be like, 'don't, I'm not a female'".

Such experiences of being repeatedly misgendered can cause significant upset, as documented in previous research (Formby 2015).

More generally, there was also a view that it was easier to get people to use chosen female or male pronouns than it was to get people to use gender-neutral (they/them) pronouns. A participant commented:

"It's this misconception that to be non-binary you have to be completely androgynous or there has to be some sort of transition, but I shouldn't – as someone who is female born – I shouldn't have to look male to be accepted as non-binary. And someone that is male born shouldn't have to look female to be accepted as non-binary... You can have butt-length long hair and wear nothing but floral skirts and high heels and you can still be non-binary. There's no set way of being non-binary".

When asked about future wishes, comments implied that young people were already broadly happy with the provision:

"My only request would be that we get a bigger room, because we are outgrowing this room"

"Honestly, I feel like there doesn't need to be anything [else] in place, because I feel like just having that space you can come and talk to other LGBT people and have those discussions in a safe space, is like what it's all about, and that's what I like about it. And even if [a yOUTH staff member] isn't there... on a one-off occasion that we're not doing anything and we can just come and talk, I think that's OK... I think that's quite healthy, just come and have a chit chat about Drag Race and stuff".

Experiences of mental health support outside yOUTH

Many of the group participants appeared to have experience of some form of mental health related support, including Brunswick Centre counselling and CAMHS provision. Unfortunately, no-one we spoke to was complimentary about CAMHS, often related to waiting times:

"You will literally be on a waiting list for years"

"It is the cycle of, you go to counselling, they think you're fine, you're discharged. You're not actually fine, you get put back on the waiting list, and it continues on. I got put on the waiting list when I was 14. That was four years ago".

These experiences concur with recent national research which reported that "newly collected data reinforces the picture of a system that is failing to meet need across the country... [and]

it remains unclear what support is available for the one in four children with mental health difficulties referred to, but not accepted into, treatment” (Crenna-Jennings and Hutchinson 2020: 8).

In a context where dedicated mental health support was difficult to access outside the yOUTH service, The Brunswick Centre had tried to meet this need. This was appreciated by some young people:

“I had private counselling with [Brunswick Centre staff member]. That was the best thing that anyone has ever offered me... I’ve got more out of 12 sessions with [them] than I did with the CAMHS... He was more down to earth and actually listened to what I was saying rather than trying to blame someone”

“I had 10 weeks’ sessions and I’ve only just finished... It was very, very good. It was stuff like teaching me how to cope with things... because I’m not very good at conveying my emotions as such, because I have really bad trust issues with people at school and things... I got taught how to deal with it properly”.

However, this was not everyone’s experience:

“I found the one-to-one counselling really unhelpful... It just got really repetitive, and he was asking the same questions. Even though I was trying to talk about different things, he kept going to the same things before, trying to link it when it didn’t at all... Like other problems that I’d spoken to him about in the other sessions. They tried to link things that I’d said after that, back to it, when it didn’t link at all, and it just sort of made it a bit, (1) offputting, and (2) a bit like... I don’t really want to talk to you anymore... He tried to connect me being trans to my dad leaving when I was [younger]”.

Those who had experience of school-based counselling had mixed experiences, which overall tended to be less positive than experiences of Brunswick Centre provision:

“My school is horrible at it. We used to have this really lovely woman, but then school was like, ‘ooh, funding, we need these big seats, do we need a useful counsellor? Nah. We’ll get one of the other staff to do it”

“I had the really nice counsellor and I was making progress and then they got rid of her”

“My counsellor gives me leaflets, and that’s it”

“I just feel like it’s a pointless service”.

Understanding of LGBT identities, and gender identity in particular, was felt to be poor, as this group exchange about school-based and CAMHS counselling provision illustrates:

“It’s like they see it as like a problem. They’d be like, ‘yeah, we don’t know much about you, so we’re going to demonise you as a problem group that we can’t deal

with', so we're just going to pretend you don't exist, and pin all your problems on something else

...or try to explain it, as if, like, there has to be an explanation for why you're like [you are]

...which is really annoying

...horrible

They don't do it to help people, they do it to get more people off the waiting list...

Because it is so under-funded, no one has time to be trained in it properly, and they don't have time enough to see people and go into depth with people, so it just doesn't work".

4. CONCLUSION

Here we summarise key findings from this report. Overall, the yOUTH service was clearly appreciated and viewed positively by LGBT young people. This applies to both one-to-one support and the groups that the yOUTH service run/support in and out of school and college settings. These services facilitate peer friendships, and growth in self-confidence. Group settings in particular aid self-acceptance and mutual understanding. Although there were some concerns expressed about 'cliques' forming within the Wednesday evening group, and a desire for more activities during it, yOUTH staff members were viewed very positively. This would suggest that the service is meeting its aims to improve LGBT young people's emotional health and wellbeing, and to make schools safer spaces for LGBT young people (even if only within the space of the dedicated LGBT groups).

By contrast, school environments generally tended to be synonymised with LGBT invisibility and a lack of understanding and support from staff. Experiences of counselling within CAMHS and school settings were unanimously reviewed negatively. For the most part, Brunswick Centre counselling was more valued. Where support and/or understanding may be lacking within families and/or home situations, LGBT-inclusive media content and accessing information online can also become significant to LGBT young people. There was particular interest expressed in learning more about LGBT history, rights and current affairs. In the absence of this information being included in school curricula, yOUTH service delivery could seek to address this desire.

Reflecting back on our previous report (Formby and Woodiwiss 2019), it seems that the yOUTH service is still highly valued, particularly in relation to the offer of LGBT groups for young people (both in and outside school/college settings). However, it is clear that two key issues for LGBT young people remain, relating to LGBT-inclusive SRE/RSE, and support for mental health and emotional wellbeing. Although the yOUTH service can - and does - address these gaps in provision, it is evident that weaknesses in statutory provision remain.

During the preparation of this report the world's situation has obviously changed dramatically with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. This obviously has implications for the yOUTH service as it has had to shift its provision to a remote service delivery model. Early research suggests that some issues relating to the virus and associated isolation measures may disproportionately affect LGBT people, including access to peer support and feelings of community, with implications for LGBT health and wellbeing (Carman et al 2020). It is recognised that - although challenging - the yOUTH service will be having to keep these issues in mind, whilst also building on current delivery.

REFERENCES

Carlile, A. (2019) 'Teacher experiences of LGBTQ-inclusive education in primary schools serving faith communities in England, UK', *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*.

Carman, M., Bourne, A. and Fairchild, J. (2020) *COVID-19: Impacts for LGBTIQ communities and implications for services*. Melbourne: Rainbow Health Victoria.

Craig, S.L and McInroy, L. (2014) 'You can form a part of yourself online: The influence of new media on identity development and coming out for LGBTQ youth', *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Mental Health* 18 (1): 95-109.

Crenna-Jennings, W. and Hutchinson, J. (2020) *Access to child and adolescent mental health services in 2019*. London: Education Policy Institute.

Formby, E. (2011) 'Sex and relationships education, sexual health, and lesbian, gay and bisexual sexual cultures: Views from young people', *Sex Education* 11 (3): 255-66.

Formby, E. (2013) 'Understanding and responding to homophobia and bullying: Contrasting staff and young people's views within community settings in England', *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 10 (4): 302-16.

Formby, E. (2015) 'Limitations of focussing on homophobic, biphobic and transphobic 'bullying' to understand and address LGBT young people's experiences within and beyond school', *Sex Education* 15 (6): 626-640.

Formby, E. (2017) *Exploring LGBT spaces and communities: Contrasting identities, belongings and wellbeing*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Formby, E. (forthcoming) *Homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying and LGBT inclusion in English schools*. Bingley: Emerald.

Formby, E. and Donovan, C. (2020) 'Sex and relationships education for LGBT+ young people: Lessons from UK youth work', *Sexualities*.

Formby, E. and Woodiwiss, J. (2019) *LGBT needs research and evaluation of the yOUTH project*. Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University.

Taylor, Y. and Cuthbert, K. (2019) 'Queer religious youth in faith and community schools', *Educational Review* 71 (3): 382-396.

Taylor, Y., Falconer, E. and Snowdon, R. (2014) 'Queer youth, Facebook and faith: Facebook methodologies and online identities', *New Media and Society* 16 (7): 1138-1153.