



# Evaluation of the yOUTH service 2018-2022: Final report

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Brunswick Centre commissioned Eleanor Formby from Sheffield Hallam University and Jo Woodiwiss from the University of Huddersfield to undertake local research and evaluation of the new yOUTH service in Kirklees in 2018. This five-year project, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, sought 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 were 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 consisted 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 LGBT+ 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 surveys and follow-up interviews and discussion groups with young people (published in 2020, 2021, and here)
4. Final impact evaluation involving interviews with staff and other stakeholders (reported here).

This fifth report documents findings from this year's evaluation activities, i.e. the last round of consultation with young people, involving the distribution of an online survey to young people accessing the yOUTH service (reported in Chapter 2), and follow-up discussions with young service users (see Chapter 3), as well as individual (online) interviews with Brunswick Centre staff and other stakeholders in the region (Chapter 4), including parents of LGBT+ young people (Chapter 5). The participants were all recruited through the lead author and yOUTH service staff distributing information and asking for volunteers. These findings are brought together in a brief concluding summary (Chapter 6), where we also reflect back on our previous reports and the evaluation as a whole. There is a separate summary report also available, and we will produce academic outputs exploring the data and its implications in further detail in the future.

## 2. SURVEY OF YOUNG PEOPLE

This online survey gathered views on the yOUTH service from young people with experience of accessing it. Survey respondents were recruited through the Brunswick Centre's dissemination of the survey. Following on from the previous year's shortened survey to take account of the pandemic/'lockdown' and its impacts, a decision was made to keep this simplified version for this year too. In total, 13 people responded to the survey, of which 11 had experience of yOUTH, so it is their results that are reported here (though not everyone answered every question). The relatively low response numbers here may be a result of consultation fatigue (for those who have been surveyed before), or may relate to a broader online fatigue linked to the pandemic and periods of lockdown.

### Participants

All survey participants were aged between 13 and 19 (inclusive). In terms of gender identity, one respondent identified as a woman, whilst all the others identified as genderqueer or trans. No-one identified as male, though one said they preferred not to say. In relation to sexual identity, two identified as bisexual, one as gay, one as lesbian, and one as queer. No-one identified as heterosexual or 'straight'. Everyone said they were white, and in terms of religion, one identified as Christian and one as pagan, whilst everyone else said 'no religion'.

### Services and support

Survey respondents were asked what kind of contact they had had with the yOUTH service. The answers are below, demonstrating that young people continue to be in touch with the yOUTH service on a one-to-one and/or group basis. The noticeable difference from last year, not surprisingly given the changing pandemic-related context, is the return to in-person delivery and a corresponding decline in online engagement (though still offered by the yOUTH service).

	Yes, but only once	Yes, but not very often	Yes, at least once a week	Yes, most days	No, never	I'm not sure	Total
I've had contact or support on a one-to-one basis, whether in person, over the phone or online	2	3	2	0	0	0	7
I've attended a group session run by yOUTH IN PERSON	0	0	7	0	0	0	7
I've attended a group session run by yOUTH ONLINE	1	5	1	0	0	0	7

Respondents were then asked what they thought of this contact with the yOUTH service. As the table below demonstrates, one-to-one contact or support and in-person group sessions are clearly appreciated, with all respondents describing them as 'excellent' or 'good'. Nobody described anything as 'rubbish', though there were more mixed views about online delivery,

with three individuals suggesting they found it 'not very good'. This was explored in more detail within discussions with young people (see the following chapter), and likely relates to a generalised preference for in-person delivery rather than any weaknesses in online yOUTH service delivery. To illustrate this point, when online delivery was the only option during pandemic-related lockdowns, young people unanimously described this delivery as 'excellent' or 'good' (see Formby and Woodiwiss 2021).

	It was excellent	It was good	It wasn't very good	It was rubbish	I'm not sure	I have no experience of this	Total
I've had contact or support on a one-to-one basis, whether in person, over the phone or online	5	2	0	0	0	0	7
I've attended a group session run by yOUTH IN PERSON	7	0	0	0	0	0	7
I've attended a group session run by yOUTH ONLINE	2	1	3	0	1	0	7

When asked to provide more detail on their answers, it was clear that people appreciated the yOUTH service, both personally and practically, and including in relation to their response to the pandemic. Although relatively brief, the responses hint at the effect the pandemic/lockdown had on some young people's lives, as well as the ongoing impact of being an LGBT+ young person:

*"Group has been really helpful with giving me some social space with similar people while I've been working this year"*

*"[The] yOUTH service has helped me get on the waiting list at Leeds GIC [Gender Identity Clinic], and helped my parents come to terms with my gender identity, and during covid they were there to support me, and the service made sure that me and my family got through it okay"*

*"I much preferred the in-person groups to the online groups. I do understand that we didn't have another choice, but at the same time I really didn't like them. The service has helped me make friends and gives me a space to feel more like myself, more free"*

*"During covid I didn't attend many sessions purely because I didn't like it, but during the few that I did attend, I felt heard. It was organised"*

*"[The service has] helped me to understand myself".*

As with evidence from previous years (e.g. Formby and Woodiwiss 2021), young people drew attention to yOUTH service impacts on, for example, their confidence levels, self-esteem and mental health, and on their communication skills.

Respondents were also asked what information, support, groups, or other activities they would like to see the yOUTH service provide for LGBT+ young people or their families in Kirklees in the future:

*“Trans group being able to run on a different night would be good so seniors could run all month”*

*“Keep doing what they’re doing”*

*“The same as before would be enough, online sessions. They supported other people, but I think if we can, in-person sessions are better”*

*“More days to go”.*

These responses show that essentially young people were only asking to continue or expand the availability of the current offer, which in turn suggests that they are happy with the current yOUTH service.



### 3. IN-DEPTH DISCUSSIONS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

In-depth discussions with young people as part of the evaluation allowed researchers to explore issues raised in the survey in more detail. Follow-up group discussions this year were held with 17 people across three group meetings. These were all held online: two were within regular yOUTH group sessions, and one was a standalone evaluation session. A number of individuals also volunteered for/requested individual interviews as part of the survey, but despite several follow-ups none of these eventually came to fruition. All qualitative data was digitally recorded and then transcribed before being analysed thematically. Those involved in this element of data collection were all aged between 24 or younger, with many being 16 or 17. Many (but not all) also identified as trans or non-binary, and most were currently in school or college. For the young people we spoke to, involvement in the yOUTH service had varied from a matter of months to several years. Within our discussions, some young people were particularly vocal about their experiences of schooling, and we have included some quite lengthy quotes in this chapter in order to maximise this youth voice.

#### Experiences during the pandemic

Like 2021, covid-19 and the linked periods of lockdown unsurprisingly featured within young people's discussions about their lives. In one group, for instance, comments related to online learning whilst schools were closed, and associated feelings of social isolation, summed up by one individual as "so bad":

*"You couldn't focus [online]... "*

*"... and you can't ask questions as well"*

*"It's very difficult to engage, and it requires a lot more energy than being in a classroom"*

*"I don't think I spoke to another human being for, like, a year".*

Although the above perspectives were negative, some did not mind the change of routine that periods of lockdown brought:

*"I quite liked being online... I liked being able to wake up five minutes before my lesson!"*

Nevertheless, the pandemic clearly led to uncertainty and missed opportunities/rites of passage that usually form part of a young person's life:

*"We thought there was going to be an apocalypse"*

*"We didn't know if we were going to be back in two or three weeks or we'd never see each other again!"*

*"I didn't say goodbye to friends [before leaving school]".*

Those who had left school and started at college during the pandemic described how they didn't know what 'normal' was for college, because they had never experienced it. This meant that people articulated both what they knew they had lost (e.g. saying goodbye to

friends), and a sense of uncertainty when they did not quite know what they had, or were, missing.

### Experiences of school, college and university

As one might expect, education was often a key source of discussion for young people, as many spend the majority of their time (whilst awake) in school, college or university. For LGBT+ young people, this can present challenges. For trans young people this was often about not having their identities acknowledged or respected in school, for example through teachers misgendering them or not supporting a change of name within IT systems (email, Teams etc.). A particular issue also raised previously is how some schools believe they have to get parental permission to honour or respect a young person's identity. This not only has implications for confidentiality breaches where this involves schools 'outing' young people to their parents (Formby and Woodiwiss 2019), but also demonstrates a lack of respect for young people themselves:

*"When I was coming out and saying I'm non-binary and I want my pronouns to be they/them, my Mum had to bring in a blimmin' letter and tell them to use they/them pronouns. I couldn't just ask them. They had to [get] consent from my Mum, which is wrong – they didn't have to do that. Also, they called me [my deadname] until my Mum gave in a letter. Imagine if my mum was, like, homophobic? ... It's horrible".*

Others also spoke of knowing about friends being bullied related to their identity, which is important as these contexts inform all young people's experiences (Formby 2015). There was often a belief that schools do not adequately respond to such experiences:

*"[Staff] didn't do their job"*

*"Nothing happened"*

*"They don't care"*

*"There was a session where the person who was running the [LGBT] group [at school] asked all of the young people, about 50 young people at school who are LGBT, and the person running it asked them ... 'how many have experienced homophobia?' and every single one of them put their hand up. Then the next question, I think it was something along the lines of 'do you think school dealt with in a proper way?' and I'd say most of them, if not all of them, said that they felt like it hadn't been dealt with in a good way".*

As one participant articulated, school's responses to homophobia were not only inadequate but could themselves be seen as homophobic:

*"There was an incident with some people who had a Pride flag and some homophobes who were saying things and throwing things at them at lunch time, and the school responded to that by banning Pride flags instead of dealing with the homophobia. They claimed that they were banning all flags to protect people's safety, but they only mentioned the fact that flags were banned when they came and spoke to the LGBT group and they didn't mention it to anybody else".*

When schools did address incidents, they did not always communicate their actions. As one participant observed:

*“I’ve reported things multiple times that [have] happened to me, and that have happened to my friends, and people I know. Sometimes they do deal with it... they do talk to people, but some of where the problem comes in is they don’t communicate that back to the person who has reported it. So if I reported something, I will have to go and ask them what have you done about it, instead of them coming back to me and telling me what they’ve done about it”.*

Whilst most of these comments refer to a *lack* of school response, echoing other evidence (Formby 2013), some people were also frustrated at what they felt was an inappropriate or misjudged school response:

*“In school, a lot of the time, someone would call you a name and then you’d tell them to go away, and you’d sort of say leave me alone, but you’d get in trouble ... you’d basically get in trouble for bloody sticking up for yourself ... That’s horrible”.*

Perceptions such as the above influence how young people manage their identities (Formby 2013), and young people we spoke to talked about protecting themselves by not being ‘out’ at school:

*“[I] would have had massive slurs [if I was out at school]”*

*“[It’s] not safe to come out”*

*“[If I was out there would be a] threat of being beaten up”*

*“I know lots of people who aren’t out at school and they have said it’s because most people don’t understand – they don’t feel like they can talk about it, because it’s not being spoken about anyway. There isn’t a conversation to add to [and] they don’t feel comfortable starting the conversation”.*

These experiences and feelings of invisibility, and/or the need to conceal aspects of their identities, echo previous data from Kirklees (Formby and Woodiwiss 2019, 2020) and nationally (Formby forthcoming), indicating that LGBT+ young people do not always feel their schooling environments are supportive, or even safe. For young people who had experience of LGBT-specific provision at their school, this was not always maintained – much to their disappointment – and it was not always clear if this was linked to the pandemic, or due to the school not continuing the provision after Brunswick Centre support had ceased. Either way, for them, there was a sense that provision related to LGBT+ identities was not prioritised in school:

*“We had an LGBT club at school, it isn’t happening at the moment ... and I’ve asked them multiple times why it’s not happening, and they haven’t given me a reason ... When we had [yOUTH staff members] coming into school and talking to people at school specifically – like doing the LGBT club – I think that was helpful, and [they] said, we’re not going to do it the entire time, school have to carry it on, and school didn’t carry it on ... It feels to me like a lot of the other things that are happening they see as more important”.*

Even when there were specific events or times of year scheduled, schools were seen to not prioritise them:

*“We were meant to be doing something for Pride month last year, and it was cancelled because of the exams, and I said ‘well will you do it, but not in June, because you can still do it’, and they never really got back to me about that. Then I tried doing it for LGBT history month in February and nothing really happened. Every time it just feels like there’s something else that has to happen first... Even if they do something for, say, Pride month or whatever, they don’t think they can carry on those things afterwards, so it just feels like that’s when they’re allowed to care about us”.*

Although this person lamented the loss of their school-based LGBT group, others described how their school LGBT group did not seem to be engaged with by young LGBT+ people:

*“There is an LGBT group on at lunchtime, but it’s the same day as the socialist club, so all the gays just go to that and basically we have our own LGBT group...”*

*“I don’t know anyone who actually goes to it [the LGBT group]...”*

*“... which is saying something, but we have our own network... so you get that socialist stuff whilst also interacting with people who are like you... [but] LGBT group... you already know all the stuff, they’re not going to teach you anything new...”*

*“... all the gay people are going to be there [at socialist club]”.*

Supporting previous research, this interesting exchange suggests that young LGBT+ people do want to spend time together – in one participant’s words, “for enrichment” – but do not necessarily feel that this needs to be in a group designed for LGBT+ people. There may also be some uncertainty about what the LGBT group offers, with the reference to not ‘teaching anything new’, which may represent a misunderstanding about the purpose or delivery of the group, that might not be seeking to ‘teach’. The young people also talked about meeting people ‘like them’ amongst those interested in theatre, for example, or amongst smokers and those with dyed hair. These interests/habits were viewed as indicators that people were “part of the [LGBT+] community”. Though the reference to smoking may be of concern from a public health perspective, the implication here is that LGBT+ young people may be able to find each other outside of school-based LGBT groups. However, it should be noted that school-based LGBT groups have been praised previously.

One person highlighted how school staff may hold some misperceptions, or a lack of understanding, about intersectionality, in suggesting that someone couldn’t be both autistic and gay:

*“Back in high school... they had an LGBT group... and I was also in the special needs area... and I would try and go to LGBT group because I had friends that were there, and... then they were trying to ban me from going in there because I already had support from the special needs unit... They’d be like, ‘you can’t go in there, you have support from us, you’re taking away support from actually gay people’, and I was like... I am gay though! And they were like, ‘no, you’re autistic’... [In the end] I just stopped going to anywhere really – I just hid in the bathrooms and cried for every day until I left that school”.*

The yOUTH service can and does impact on school and college environments, though, and this involvement was recounted in detail. This extract demonstrates the work of the yOUTH service, but also shows how some young people, to an extent, act as advocates or intermediaries for their (LGBT+) peers:

*“We’ve had to report a lot of things to [staff member] from the Brunswick Centre, and she’s emailed school about things – homophobia and things... She’s spoken to teachers about things that have happened, and sent emails... I’ve sent information back to her, and she had a meeting with the one of the teachers at some point... It’s been helpful... Even if the school hasn’t dealt with it in a proper way, more things have been brought to their attention... I would have felt comfortable going to talk to some teachers but I know lots of people who I’m friends with would not feel comfortable talking to the teachers... When I emailed [yOUTH staff member] about it, I asked other people what they’d experienced, so I’d had a long list, a document, of things that had happened, that I passed along... I have lots of people I can talk to about it, and that’s good, but not everybody does. That’s the problem”.*

Although this young person felt able to raise concerns and even advocate for others, they were also aware that not all young people saw the point of reporting incidents:

*“There’s, like, people at my school, they’ll say ‘well there’s no point in reporting it to school because they didn’t do anything last time’, and I will always say, ‘report it, because then if they don’t do anything, then you can take it further. But if you don’t report it in the first place, then nobody is going to ever do anything’. But the lack of trust between the people who are in charge and the people who are experiencing it – there’s too big of a gap between them”.*

This lack of trust in schools to address young LGBT+ people’s concerns and experiences is particularly striking, and speaks to a general sense that schools could do more, or better, to understand and support LGBT+ young people:

*“I think it [understanding] is very important, and I don’t think it’s there at the moment. Like with my school, I think they’re improving... There are some particularly good teachers, but as a school I don’t think they’re there yet... I think they need to increase the level of communication between LGBT students and staff, because I don’t expect them to understand everything immediately, but I expect them to listen and take on board what people are saying. I think the problem is, when I go or someone else goes, one of my friends will go and report homophobia and say it hasn’t been dealt with, their immediate reaction is defensiveness and to say that we don’t tolerate homophobia instead of listening to what’s happened”.*

A lack of understanding was particularly evident for trans young people in relation to names and pronouns:

*“When I went to one teacher saying I think I want to change my name... I know they’re not educated on it... but the person said to me, ‘right, don’t go rushing into things’... and I sort of just said, ‘um, I think there’s a bit of a distinctive difference between rushing into things and experimenting’. It didn’t mean that I was going to keep the name permanently – it’s not like I’m going on deed poll and changing my name legally... It’s not their place to say don’t rush into things, or you’re doing it*

*wrong. If you think it, think it in your head, but just remember don't say it... You can't change how other people want to change. That's not up to you".*

It was also felt that names could sometimes be misused deliberately:

*"Me and a[nother] teacher once got into a bit of an argument and she then just shouted my deadname... I kept correcting her and saying [my name] and she just kept repeating herself and saying [my deadname]... and I was like, you're just doing that on purpose... I never want to be treated that way again".*

In describing their experiences, the young person below draws attention to the importance of teachers understanding and respecting people's chosen names and pronouns (see also Formby 2013, 2015), but also comment that they would be willing to educate teachers if necessary:

*"When I came out at school, I tried to come out as pansexual and non-binary, and I think a lot of teachers at school, they don't understand more than they actually have an issue. I think some of them are amazing at saying 'I don't understand, talk to me about it', some of them will immediately react with 'I don't understand, I'm not going to say anything and I'm just going to leave it alone'. And I don't think that's helpful... I think it's about remembering [pronouns]. Some of them are more used to it – like we have some LGBT members of staff who are very understanding and very approachable. Then we have some other members of staff who aren't as much approachable, and because they don't understand they don't feel like they can ask the questions... because some of them are embarrassed for not knowing... I had quite a few teachers who want to say the right thing, and then they get it wrong, and then I correct them, and then they will be more worried about apologising for getting it wrong than getting it right next time. And I don't think that it's a helpful response that they do [that]... They need more of a central response to it, they need more of an actual 'this is what we do' when it happens, and they don't have that at the moment".*

They went on to explain why they felt pronouns and names are so important:

*"I go by the same name I was born with, but my friends don't. A lot of them have been told that teachers won't use their name because it's not changed on the register – things like that – and it's a problem because then when they try to get it changed on the register, it takes forever... They've already gone through the process of feeling able that they can come out, and they don't want to have another barrier there, to be called what they want to be called. I think sometimes the school – they don't know how much being called the wrong pronouns or being called the wrong names affects people... They don't put that much effort in, because they don't know why... If someone had come to me, a teacher had come to me, and said 'I don't understand this, could you explain it?' I would be perfectly willing to speak to them... A lot of the problems could be solved with just more communication".*

Although we agree that more open communication about gender and sexual identities would be beneficial in most school settings, it should be noted that scholarship elsewhere has pointed to potential difficulties in having LGBT+ young people educate around LGBT+ diversity/inclusion in schools. Not only might this lead to young people feeling responsible for levels of knowledge and understanding in their school, but it can also leave them open to

increasing exposure and/or hostility (see Martino et al 2020, Meyer and Leonardi 2018, Taylor and Cuthbert 2019 for further discussion).

Not all school experiences were negative, however:

*“The school I went to, they were really supportive of it when I came out to them”.*

Young people often highlighted contrasts between schools and college or university, and it was common for participants to describe local colleges in more positive terms than local schools. Huddersfield New College, for instance, was described as “very good” and “really inclusive”. In addition, college was thought to be “not the environment where that [bullying] would happen”. These perceptions, in turn, had influenced the timing of when some people had come out:

*“College is so much better than school...*

*... so much better than high school...*

*... I did not come out in high school, because if I came out I knew I would be called loads of slurs...*

*... it wasn't really safe to come out”.*

Factors picked out as positive included the provision of rainbow lanyards and pronoun badges. However, one individual – although feeling that university was more LGBT-inclusive than schooling in general – wished that their journalism course understood and could offer support in connection with the context they face as a trans student:

*“As a journalist who is also a trans man, there's something about having to, not juggle, as such, but having to [face]... especially [in] the papers, especially on Sunday... there's a lot of transphobia... [so] there's some things that I have to grapple or navigate myself, and I wish there was more support within my school”.*

### Family relationships and the local context

The young people we spoke to also discussed their home lives, and once again the issues of pronouns and deadnames were raised (see also Formby 2013, 2015, Formby and Woodiwiss 2020, 2021). Whilst we do not know why the young person below was being ‘grounded’, this parent’s use of their child’s deadname within any arguments/‘punishment’ is clearly problematic:

*“My mum does that [deadnaming]... when she's angry. It's not fair, it's very rude of her... She was being mean to me the other day... She's banning me from leaving the house, she's misgendering me”.*

Some participants said they had benefited from the yOUTH service intervening in family relationships (for example via the specific family support worker, funded by the Henry Smith Charity) – in a young person’s words, “they got my parents to understand”. Evidence of the importance of supportive parents/carers, and positive family relationships generally, came out in each of our reports (Formby and Woodiwiss 2019, 2020, 2021). This contributed to the Brunswick Centre’s success in securing additional funds, from the Henry Smith Charity, to support the provision of dedicated family support as part of the yOUTH service. Other young

people we spoke to, who perhaps were not aware of this aspect of the service available, also desired support with parental relationships and ‘educating’ family members:

*“I wish that there were some sort of way in group where they could take your parents somewhere to have a genuine scheduled talking-to by a pro-gay person – that talking bad about your gay child behind their back is a terrible thing to do, because I’ll just be here, like chilling in my bedroom, and I can hear my parents in the room behind me – deadnaming me and misgendering me... and I’ll be like, ‘I can hear you through the wall’, and she’ll talk like that to my friends... They [my parents] only respect my name and pronouns 50% of the time... My mum spent half an hour arguing with my non-binary friend over whether their name was their name, and what were you really born with though, like non-binary is not a real thing... And I’m like... just call them by their name and stop arguing with them”.*

We also asked participants to reflect on their feelings about the local area (i.e. Kirklees). Some were keen to see more LGBT-related events develop, because, they said, of “how little there is” currently:

*“We just need more LGBT-inclusive events, because Kirklees is such a massive area”*

*“I think it’s varied really for LGBT+ people, because there are places that you know are safer spaces for LGBT people than others, and I think most people I know are very supportive, but there isn’t a lot of knowledge about it... and I think that’s the area which should be improved. It’s less about people being really horrible about it, and more people just not really understanding it... I think that’s not just a problem in Kirklees, but it’s a problem everywhere”.*

Others drew attention to their experiences of prejudice:

*“It [prejudice] is something I experience on a day-to-day basis, unfortunately. Since I’ve come out, I’ve just learnt to live with it. It’s all you can really do – is learn to live with it... [but] I tend to bottle everything up”.*

This sense of resignation is striking, and echoes previous research with LGB young people (Formby 2013). Akin to discussions in previous literature (Formby 2013), participants also discussed the issue of discriminatory or problematic language use:

*“I think that it does happen a lot, it happens to me, it happens to every LGBT person, all the time... It’s something that’s normal and it’s a lot of people... they don’t understand why these words shouldn’t be used, and they don’t understand the hurt that they can cause... it’s so casual, like down the corridor in school, or on the walk home, it’s just something that happens... It’s a mix of generalised homophobia and very personal... I’ll say something to them, and they’ll say ‘well I wasn’t saying it to you’, and I think that doesn’t make it OK. It’s like, you’re still saying it! That’s the problem... It’s still hurtful to the person hearing it, and it’s like someone doesn’t think that what they’re saying is that bad... It’s not really taken any notice of, because it just happens, and everyone has just got used to it at this point”.*



More broadly, and again echoing previous research, young people talked about their experiences of health services:

*“I wish GPs understood... I went to my GP... and they were like, ‘you’re being selfish to your parents’... and then they tried to therapy me... My Mum was like, ‘hmmm, no’, and we left and never came back. It was a complete waste of my time. They just talked down to me and said you’re just dumb – a dumb child”.*

Once again, the issue of names was identified as problematic:

*“I wish when you go to the doctor’s and your name gets called out [that] my deadname [didn’t] get shouted... I’m like, my preferred name is on lists and stuff, can you not just shout out [my deadname]... You’re being shouted at in your deadname and it really brings you down... I honestly just wish that people had a lot more understanding... like how it feels, especially when you’re a teenager and you’re trying to find identity”.*

### Experiences of the yOUTH service

Mirroring our previous reports (Formby and Woodiwiss 2019, 2020, 2021), the vast majority of young people were complimentary about the yOUTH service and its staff:

*“I can talk to [yOUTH service workers] ten times better than any safeguarding officer, because they understand what I’m going through and what I’m dealing with, and they don’t patronise me...”*

*“... they don’t treat you like a child...”*

*“It’s like they actually do care about you”.*

Workers were also described as “so nice” and “lovely”. The provision of personal training sessions with a local trans personal trainer, and badge-making, seemed particularly memorable. Participants also discussed staff offering both emotional and practical support:

*“... Housing and stuff, and help you with money and everything... They’re just really helpful, really help you get through tough shit...”*

*“... and there’s no judgement”*

*“They [yOUTH staff] are great to chat to... We [my partner and I] were in a bad situation [where we were living]... and they helped us out”*

*“I wasn’t in a good situation with my family... [yOUTH staff member] was the first person I spoke to about it. She was really nice because she was explaining her family life, when she didn’t need to share that with me, but that was a really good thing to make me realise things and make me feel better”*

*“They [yOUTH staff member] seemed to really understand where I’m coming from and give me, sort of, personal understanding... that sort of helps me know that... they do genuinely care about me”.*

Just one person was a little critical of yOUTH staff:

*“I know obviously they have to be professional and not much personal thoughts can be given to the young people, but does it really hurt? Do you know what I mean? If it sort of helps the people feel less neglected, I think maybe do do that, at times. What is the real harm? As long as it’s not too personal, as long as you just try and help them out and give them some understanding... It’s just how I feel a lot of the time, I don’t feel like a lot of people understand me”.*

Whilst the majority of young people spoke positively about the yOUTH service and its staff, a small number of individuals also said they found it could be hard to enter or interact with other young people within the group sessions, which has also been identified previously by different young people (Formby and Woodiwiss 2021):

*“I first went in on the big frigging end-of-the-year party, and it was massive. I was just like, oh no! But people just randomly came up to me... On the second time when I was actually there in my normal group and not just the big party, I just awkwardly sat down... My boyfriend goes there occasionally now, I brought him along with me, and no-one has tried to talk to him. He just awkwardly followed me around all day and I kind of felt bad”*

*“When we first went, the first day was so awkward that we didn’t want to come back at all. No one eases you in. No one talks to you, really, on the first day you go. We weren’t going to go back... When you first walk through the door and everyone is staring at you, it feels like your worst nightmare... I think there should be someone you know who is at the entrance for you, if they know someone new is coming... It’s just the staff who speak to us, mainly, not other people... we used to do pronoun time, but the past few times we haven’t had it... [and] the only time everyone speaks to everyone is pronouns”.*

Whilst for some it was the general group experience that they found hard at first, for others the difficulty was linked to the differing maturity levels of those present:

*“Some of the [young] people are not really, it’s hard to get along with them, because I feel like maybe they’re not as mature as me. With the staff, I feel like I have better conversations than the people, because... they’re not like me, if you get what I mean. No-one really speaks to us... [If] I went by myself, I wouldn’t go again – I know that for a fact... Who would I speak to? There’s no-one... I’ve not really spoken to someone that’s... welcoming really”.*

These comments reflect mixed experiences of being more or less welcomed as a newcomer to the group. Whilst the pronoun circle might seem like an important opportunity for staff members to encourage collegiality among group members, the ‘on the spot’ format may not be suited to all young people:

*“It’s not like we have to sit in a big group and just say ‘hi my name is... and I’m this age and my pronouns are this, my pronouns are these, and whatever’, that’s just awful for autistic people”.*

However, a lack of communication between youth group members can limit the opportunity for sharing experiences and peer education, which is apparent in this comparison between the yOUTH group and another LGBT youth group an individual had experience of:

*“[Elsewhere] we had those sort of conversations... not sex education, but maybe that sort of thing, about boys and girls... and about being a lesbian and stuff [that] I didn’t get taught at school. I don’t really have those conversations with this [yOUTH] group”.*

When reflecting on periods of lockdown, and comparing the provision of services online and in person (following the easing of restrictions), young people were mostly in favour of in-person delivery, which one person described as “ten times better”. Whilst some people said they preferred online, another said that it was essentially like “inviting strangers into your own personal space”, and this was particularly difficult for those who were not ‘out’ at home. When asked how they had dealt with not being out and accessing online services at home, some said they had referred to their pronouns “in hushed tones”. Another had avoided attending online. By contrast, accessing the group in person was thought to be easier when not out to parents, as it could just be referred to as a youth group without giving away its LGBT focus. However, online delivery had been beneficial for those who preferred more regular service access:

*“It was nice to know you could get support every day”.*

Even those who preferred in-person delivery also recognised the benefits of online provision given the context:

*“It was good to have the Zoom sessions when throughout the week you might not have been speaking to any other human beings apart from the people you lived with”*

*“I don’t mind going on Zoom, but I definitely prefer to go face-to-face if that’s possible, but obviously for lots of reasons it’s not possible sometimes... During lockdown it was really important to still have something there because it’s like you’re literally not talking to anybody... I think now Zoom isn’t being used for everything, a lot more people don’t feel like they want to go on Zoom”.*

The splitting of the weekly Huddersfield group into two age cohorts was a big topic of conversation. In general, the ‘seniors’ in particular favoured this change, though recognised that they had originally been opposed. The division was thought to enable more in-depth conversations about certain topics, such as dating apps and sexual abuse. Though some missed seeing younger friends, they pointed out that this could happen at joint trips or events.

When asked to describe what they thought the yOUTH groups offered/provided them, young people drew attention to the provision of a safe space, and how they supported peer support and friendship formation. In addition, participants highlighted being taken to cultural events connected to identity validation and support, which they might not otherwise have access to:

*“I think it’s a safe environment for LGBT+ people to speak and spend time with other LGBT+ people and speak to people who are going through similar things... A lot of my friends that I know now I met at group... [It] has been very helpful... I think it’s really good. At some point last year we went on a trip – we went to Leeds for a Pride event. It was very nice [and] a fun day out to see people. And we also went a few months ago... on a trip to the [local] theatre to see a theatre piece by an LGBT person. It was very interesting... I think that a lot of these things I wouldn’t be able to do without [the yOUTH service]... I think it’s really important to have a place for LGBT*

*people in particular... It's important to have a place where you know that people are going to listen"*

*"I find it really interesting, and to meet new people... I've met plenty of new friends through the service... The groups offer a lot... You get days out through it, there's not much more that the Brunswick could really do, they offer you everything that you can get... I like to stay in and do my own thing but the Brunswick has helped me come out a lot... It's good because you can get a lot of homophobia whereas at the group it's self-contained".*

### The impact of yOUTH involvement

Following on from the above, participants were asked to try and articulate how they felt the yOUTH service had impacted upon their lives, with responses including mentioning friendships formed (see also Formby and Woodiwiss 2021), and placing yOUTH quite centrally in their lives, with the notion of an LGBT-specific youth service being 'life saving' mirroring previous evidence (Formby 2013, Formby and Woodiwiss 2019, 2020, Juetten and O'Loan 2007):

*"The group's kept me alive. It was a lifeline to me. This group has changed my life because I've met people that actually make me feel good, because I used to, like in high school... was the worst, and I actually realised what genuine friends were here, which I didn't have [before]"*

Similarly to this, others identified the importance of addressing social isolation and 'getting out of the house' to be with other LGBT+ young people:

*"If it weren't for the Thursday group we wouldn't leave the house to go anywhere... When it's movie night and they've got the fizzy pop and popcom, that's [the] best night ever".*

Supporting previous reports (Formby and Woodiwiss 2019, 2020, 2021), young people identified increased confidence as a result of their contact with yOUTH, and a related sense of mutual understanding, which echoes other research with older LGBT+ people (Formby 2019):

*"I feel like if I go to gay group... I can just go up to someone, have a conversation with them and... they're like, 'hell yeah', instead of judging me like normal human beings do, and it gives me confidence because... people need to understand".*

### Suggestions for future yOUTH delivery

We also asked young people if there was anything they would like to see the yOUTH service provide in the future. Most participants were happy with current provision and so there was not much feedback here, but several mentioned that they wished the seniors group did not clash with the monthly trans group so that they did not miss a week, and/or could attend both:

*"I'd kind of like not to [have to] choose between trans group and this group".*

It seemed apparent how important groups and scheduling was to the young people by how many quickly referred to pictures on their phone to explain what groups happened when. There was also some discussion/acknowledgment of financial implications for the Brunswick Centre in terms of the running of multiple groups.

Additional suggestions addressed some of the difficulties identified above, such as how to support new members:

*“Maybe [there could be] a buddy... someone that meets you first of all, or maybe someone that’s out of the group... when there’s someone new – there should be a person that’s picked. Different people, like a rota, that introduces people”.*

Others also wanted more different activities and discussions/information sessions:

*“I think there could do with being more activities but ... I don’t want to be forced to do them, I want to be working at my own pace... I think we should [also] talk about, not people’s personal mental health issues, but mental health and issues that people may be having, and what people are struggling with ... and do like sex quizzes and stuff like that”*

*“When we go to the Brunswick... we mostly hear about trans stuff, nothing barely about lesbian stuff”*

*“I think there could be a few more different activities ... I don’t even know how to play pool, so that’s not for me. The crafts – I enjoy crafts but maybe something else, I don’t know what... Just something else to do... Maybe for someone that doesn’t speak as much. I’ve seen a few young people, they don’t really say much ... maybe something to ease them into the group... Something to do that’s not pool, that’s not crafts”.*

Beyond the yOUTH service, young people also called for more communication from and with school staff, and more LGBT-awareness training for those working in schools and health settings. It was hoped that both of these would foster and increase understanding about LGBT+ young people’s needs and experiences.

#### 4. INTERVIEWS WITH PROFESSIONALS

Information was circulated to/by Brunswick Centre staff and their networks to recruit potential stakeholders. Ten one-to-one interviews took place online (or occasionally over the telephone when internet connections failed). In addition, one person responded to interview questions in writing due to scheduling difficulties. In total, four Brunswick Centre staff members were interviewed, along with seven stakeholders. Those we are referring to as stakeholders held a variety of roles, including within youth work, the police, education settings (school or college), and within the local authority. Interviews lasted between 23 minutes and an hour and eighteen minutes, with most being around an hour. Each conversation was digitally recorded and transcribed in full. Our analysis below is based on these transcriptions, with illustrative extracts drawn on throughout the chapter.

##### Understandings of LGBT+ young people's needs

Within our interviews there were some discussions about understandings of LGBT+ young people and what they might need, and from where/who. This included concern that some practitioners or organisations thought they should automatically refer LGBT+ young people to LGBT-focussed organisations, rather than being able to provide services - such as mental health provision - for LGBT+ young people just as they would for other young people:

*“Sometimes we get referrals from counselling providers referring young people to us for counselling. Never quite sure what that’s about ... I think if they’ve got some training needs around that, that’s what they need to be addressing rather than ... dumping these kids on us and seeing them as problems to be solved by a specialist”* (Staff member 1).

Whilst this might be related to capacity issues, it might also reflect a wider discomfort around young people and their gender or sexual identities:

*“Sometimes the organisations such as CAMHS [child and adolescent mental health services], Northorpe Hall [child and family trust], as soon as they hear that the kid is a lesbian or is trans, ‘oh, we’ll send them to Brunswick’. I’ve had to have a few conversations with professionals where I’ve said, ‘yes, the kid might be gay, but we’re not a mental health service, and they’ve come to you. They’re alright with their sexuality. They’re actually needing support around mental health for other reasons’ ... So I’ve had to persuade them to keep that child ... [and say] we can deal with identity and they can come to yOUTH group, but you’re the mental health professionals ... They can access both services, and we’re not a crisis service, and we’re not a mental health service”* (Staff member 4).

Whilst some organisations, like those identified above, may be uncertain as to who and why to refer young people to yOUTH, other stakeholders were very clear as to what LGBT+ young people needed, and what they thought yOUTH offered them through the services they provide:

*“They need services for multiple reasons, multiple levels I think ... Young people need a system, a structure, that provides a safer space where they can check out and be without a concern of experiencing homophobia or hate crime ... [and] they need to be*

*able to access staff who have knowledge and skills that can support them in making positive decisions for themselves” (Stakeholder 1)*

*“The group is obviously for the kids to understand they’re not on their own, they’ve got a group that they can feel comfortable with and not worry about, but... the one-to-one work I think is important as well” (Stakeholder 2).*

### Service access and experiences

***“It’s essential. I wouldn’t be able to do what I do in school if I didn’t have that linked-up approach with Brunswick” (Stakeholder 3)***

Overall, most participants were not aware of any services in the region that were similar to yOUTH provision, which meant their work took on extra importance. In this context, participants identified what they felt was important and unique about the yOUTH service:

*“They have a very clear mission, and that comes across, and it’s not rammed down the young person’s throat... they don’t do training every week, but there is a definite, all the staff seem to be... this is what we’re hoping to achieve, and they do that in a variety of ways, but certainly those young people feel informed about the choices they’re going to make in life” (Stakeholder 1)*

*“We have been privileged because we’ve got an LGBT team, we’ve got LGBT researchers, that does in my head feel it brings something else, through all our own lived experiences as LGBT people” (Staff member 1).*

A number of participants were aware of an informal group locally where LGBT+ young people could meet, and whilst they agreed it was good for LGBT+ young people to have spaces to meet up, there was some concern regarding the lack of qualified support:

*“It’s great that there’s extra provision but the staff aren’t qualified youth workers. There’s not the safeguarding infrastructure” (Staff member 2).*

Interviewees also talked about the work yOUTH staff do in schools. This was thought to be particularly beneficial for those school staff members setting up school-based LGBT groups:

*“I run the [school] LGBT club... We used the Brunswick Centre to start it up. We got six free sessions and that was amazing... Basically [staff member] and I sat with the pupils who came to the LGBT group, and we asked them what do you want to change in school, essentially, and it was like opening a floodgate. There were so many things. There were some really shocking things that I had to follow up really quickly in regard to teacher attitudes, things like that... From there the Brunswick really helped us to establish the core base of the group, you know, pupils who were really really interested and felt really listened to, early on... I was more of an observer at that point... seeing how he kept them all engaged and active... We absolutely wouldn’t have been able to do it as well as we do without them... It established the group in a way where it was so easy for me to go and take over” (Stakeholder 3).*

Access to the yOUTH service was thought to have been improved by moving the referral form online:

*“There’s some schools... that I go to where I see six or seven students who could not come out at home. The fact that they’re trusting us with that I think is really positive ... I think one of the things that’s really helped with that was us putting our referral form as an online form... because online anyone can access it any time, they don’t have to speak to a professional. That’s proven to be really, really successful and our referrals have definitely gone up since then”* (Staff member 2).

Whilst staff from the yOUTH service were happy to go into schools and support school staff, there was also a concern, as with referrals from mental health and counselling services noted above, that sometimes yOUTH staff were invited into schools when the issues should/could have been dealt with by school staff:

*“There is a lot of panic, especially in schools, where a kid will come out and they’ll call me in for a one-to-one. And actually they’re alright, yeah they’re non-binary but they’re fine, they understand it, they just need to come to youth group ... A lot of my time sometimes is taken up with those kinds of sessions. I think that’s a lack of understanding, and lack of education, and almost a fear... other professionals in the area thinking ‘oh god, what do I do? Call Brunswick in’”* (Staff member 4).

Although this might sometimes be a capacity issue with school staff not having enough time, as the above quote suggests, it also relates to fear and discomfort around (talking about) young people’s (gender/sexual) identity, that might not exist in relation to other (cisgender/heterosexual) young people’s experiences.

The youth groups are clearly an important element of the yOUTH service, but as this staff member observed, not all young people are ‘ready’ for this when they first access the service. One-to-one work was therefore identified as beneficial for some young people, especially those not yet ‘ready’ to attend a youth group:

*“With the one-to-ones, sometimes young people are not ready for a group, and having that one-to-one is that first step... Sometimes we do sessions with resources, we might play some games. Sometimes it’s resilience... and we’re thinking about healthy relationships, healthy friendships, other issues that are going on in school...”* (Staff member 4).

It was also thought that a yOUTH staff member being openly LGBT+ was beneficial:

*“I go in as an outsider... so I don’t go in as a teacher, I’m not a therapist, I’m not a counsellor, I go in and I explain to them that I’m a safe adult from the LGBT community... so I think instantly that brings any walls down”* (Staff member 4).

This one-to-one support was thought to be positive for pupils and their families, as well as school staff able to access this provision and call on Brunswick Centre staff more widely:

*“We’ve used the Brunswick for quite a few years now in the school for individual responses to pupils... but it’s all in the pupils’ hands, we never refer unless the pupils want to be referred... We’ve had some amazing success with parents who first were like ‘absolutely not, this is not my child... I think that school is pushing an agenda’... and I was really lucky to sit down in one of those meetings with those parents and with the support worker from Brunswick... It’s really nice to know we have people that*



*we can call on, if an issue happens or a parent responds in a certain way, I know I can just email the Brunswick [Centre]" (Stakeholder 3).*

The fact that it is a local service where stakeholders know the staff was also valued:

*"Being able to say this is our local support, they work one-on-one with pupils, and parents respond really positively to it... It's just really nice to know that there's something that I can refer the pupils to that's local and where I know the people there really well... and it doesn't feel like I'm sending them off into the ether and then they're just on a waiting list somewhere" (Stakeholder 3).*

The immediacy of the yOUTH service response and the lack of a waiting list was equally important:

*"Knowing that they can access support immediately is really, really helpful... We've seen multiple pupils really come out of their shell since that" (Stakeholder 3).*

For those young people that do feel able to attend a youth group, this is thought to facilitate feelings and experiences of community, belonging, and safety - which are not always enabled in school:

*"With the groups, definitely that sense of community, that sense of belonging, that some of them don't get at school. Some of them do feel like the outsiders, many get bullied, many do experience anxiety, low self-esteem... They know it's a safe space where they can be themselves, where they won't be judged, they can explore their identity" (Staff member 4).*

The youth groups also offer practical support as well as fun and empowering activities:

*"We take them to Pride. Recently we've been making badges and bracelets and stuff to sell at Pride. We've involved them in the process of making them, deciding how much to charge, all that kind of thing. Then we said the money that we make over Pride season, you guys decide what you want to do with it" (Staff member 4).*

Some of this support was compared by staff to the familial support that some young people did not have access to:

*"The ones going to uni, we're taking them to Ikea to get them set up for uni and stuff... We kind of fill in that family role for them... [as] some of our young people don't have a secure stable family environment. Next week I'm going to the doctors with one of my young people, because they trust me to go with them and they want me to go... because we've got that relationship with them... So they get quite a lot from the groups I think. I think they get what sometimes they're not getting from the family" (Staff member 4).*

Once again linking to the section on understandings of LGBT+ young people above, as well as the wider context about service access, it was thought that some professionals may refer young people to the yOUTH service because of capacity issues. This then heightens pressures on the yOUTH service, as well as individual staff having to juggle limited resources:

*“We’ve got one young person who’s been on the waiting list to see a counsellor from CAMHS since [nearly a year ago]. Mum has been approaching school saying I think my child is going to kill themselves... They come to trans group, and I was like ‘let’s refer you to our counsellor’. Within a week, they’re seeing somebody. But ... I’ve got a budget for 14 young people this year ... I’m already on kid two, and there are two young people that have been on the waiting list for Northorpe Hall or CAMHS for 12 months, and I’m genuinely worried that they won’t live if we don’t intervene. But ... I feel like I’ve got this ticking clock of... how am I going to decide who is or isn’t going to get one of those spots? It’s really hard” (Staff member 4).*

***“The fact that they were able to do six sessions with us, that absolutely we would not have been able to afford if we’d had to pay for it... How much they offer, and how much they’re able to support us... it’s essential” (Stakeholder 3)***

### Service impacts

***“The referrals we’re getting, we’ve had to triple our groups... our sessions are consistently busy” (Staff member 2)***

A large proportion of our interviews often focussed on discussing the positive impacts of the yOUTH service in various different ways, and we illustrate these below.

### Impacts in the area and among practitioners

Some stakeholders described the yOUTH service as modelling good practice and an example for other organisations:

*“They role model good practice ... That in itself demonstrates to workers from other organisations... things they should be covering... I think that role modelling of that has been really helpful in trying to say there is a standard and we should be meeting this, and it is OK to talk about these things” (Stakeholder 1)*

*“The way that it goes about its work and the way that it can provide a role model for other organisations doing this, I think has been really invaluable, above and beyond what they bring to the table in terms of their insight and their knowledge about the young people and the families that they’re working with ... They are a really important and significant organisation” (Stakeholder 5).*

Other participants emphasised the reputation and visibility of the service locally:

*“They’re a really well-respected organisation... There aren’t really any other organisations who are looking around these kinds of issues locally” (Stakeholder 5)*

*“I think professionals in the locality certainly see [the yOUTH service] as one of the main LGBT agencies locally, and schools value the support they provide... They are referenced a lot in meetings with external agencies and we have regular contact from the service in the form of newsletters” (Stakeholder 7).*

Importantly, this visibility was also seen to extend to parents:

*“[yOUTH] seem to also be really proactive in local events and I think this means parents are a little more aware that there is specialist support out there for families” (Stakeholder 7).*

The visibility of the service was thought to lead to LGBT+ young people’s needs being more recognised locally:

*“People know who the Brunswick are, which I don’t think they would have done five years ago... particularly for an individual young person for support around their needs as LGBT young people, it’s more on the agenda, people are talking about it, and I don’t think they would have been five years ago, so those needs are getting recognised” (Stakeholder 6).*

The growth of the yOUTH service was also seen to have raised the profile of the Brunswick Centre more generally:

*“With the yOUTH service getting so big, it’s raised the profile of the entire service a lot more, to the point where Brunswick is quite a well-known service in the area... People know who our service is, they know where to turn” (Staff member 2).*

#### Impacts within local schools and colleges

Stakeholders were able to identify what they felt involvement with the yOUTH service had offered their organisation:

*“The support [our organisation] offers to LGBTQ+ students has been officially recognised through achieving the Stonewall Gold Award... in acknowledgement of the plethora of things offered to students who identify as part of the [LGBT+] community... This wouldn’t have been possible without the massive contribution that we’ve had from the yOUTH service” (Stakeholder 7).*

They also valued the impact that the yOUTH service had on pupils and on them personally:

*“It’s been so rewarding, it’s honestly the most rewarding thing I’ve done in my career. I mean, it’s great teaching kids... but they learn it and they forget it in five years... whereas this, the impacts that you see on the pupils, and being able to create a community in the school and change the culture of the school to be more inclusive, the job satisfaction, you can’t get better, especially as a member of the [LGBT+] community myself... imagine if I’d have had that when I was in school, how much more confident I would have been early on” (Stakeholder 3).*

These positive impacts were also witnessed by yOUTH service staff themselves, who were able to describe positive impacts of their work in education settings:

*“One of my young people... has complained to me a couple of times about school. There are certain teachers who are transphobic, who misgender them, they don’t feel that they’re listened to. They were getting to the point where they were refusing to engage with this particular teacher, so I arranged a mediation meeting... and what it came down to was a lack of education and misinformation of the teacher, who wasn’t being malicious” (Staff member 4).*

Not only had this staff member helped to improve the school experiences of this pupil, but that work also led to the creation of resources that would help teachers improve the experiences of other pupils:

*“Out of the meeting, what we decided to do was I would work with the young person to create a CPD PowerPoint for the teachers... It’s something positive that’s come out of that, but if our organisation wasn’t involved, what would have happened?”*  
(Staff member 4).

### Impacts within families

Supporting young people is clearly an important element of the yOUTH service, but so too is working with parents and families of LGBT+ young people, the majority of whom also want to support their child. Staff members provided vivid illustrations of the impacts of their support on individual parents:

*“We had one mum who was actually at complete breaking point, and still with us five years on, doesn’t really need to come to service, just gave us a call and said ‘it’s amazing that I’ve got no problems’, whereas five years ago every week they were on the phone to us, emotional”* (Staff member 3)

*“[A parent] was threatening to take the child out of school. I’ve managed to mediate that... So for that family, I’ve managed to help keep the kid in school, and also mum feels she’s got someone on her side”* (Staff member 4).

Providing information and reassurance for parents contributed to a happier and improved home and family life for LGBT+ young people:

*“I had one young person who came out as trans... I did a family session... Mum was like, ‘I’m worried you’ll rush in, I’m worried things can’t be undone’... I was able to give the kind of professional advice of they’re not going to get into see GIDS for years, this is a slow process. At the moment they’ve just changed their name and cut their hair. That can all be undone if they change their mind... This mum has really changed her thinking quite a bit and has become really on board”* (Staff member 2)

*“There was one family recently, they would not let me in to see their young person... Eventually the parents, I got them on-side and they did agree to one-to-ones, and eventually the young person reported that things were improved at home... It was a long process, maybe six months, but we got there in the end”* (Staff member 4)

*“I went in, did one session with this boy... Spoke to mum afterwards and she was like, ‘it really has helped’... He was getting picked on as well because the other kids found out [about his family member], so it was about giving him that resilience. Even though he’s not LGBT, he’s been able to benefit from our service. He wouldn’t have got that anywhere else”* (Staff member 4).

As yOUTH staff recognised, parents and families also need support, and providing this can have a huge impact:

*“I think parents... they’re feeling less isolated... they’ve got someone to talk to who has got some knowledge around that... [it] is pretty amazing really... Their fear, their*

*apprehension... and getting that broken down, has been really positive for parents and carers” (Staff member 1).*

The trans group, like those for young people, also provided an important space for parents and families:

*“I think the work we do with families is so important because I think it makes families less afraid... By running things like trans group, we bring families and carers together to talk about things. We give them that safe space so they can rant, and they can ask questions, and where they can meet other people going through similar stuff” (Staff member 2).*

### Impacts for young LGBT+ people

Staff members and stakeholders provided many comments on the way that the yOUTH service has impacted on young people in the area. This feedback was in both general terms and specific examples. In general terms, participants drew attention to the impact of the yOUTH service on young people as a group, particularly in terms of their levels of confidence and knowledge:

*“[The young people] come across as slightly more confident. They come across as more in the know... They feel able to have a voice or an opinion or an idea, or just have a go... They’ve been much more willing and much more engaging... They’re definitely more informed, more informed about their sexual health, their mental health, how to stay safer. That might be around binding, or it might be around drinking...” (Stakeholder 1)*

*“Pupils [involved in the school LGBT group] just have so much more confidence, and they know that school accepts them and they’re not afraid of speaking up... Those pupils I think are much more confident being themselves in school, they’re not masking or trying to hide who they are, so they’re not having to think about that alongside thinking about their education” (Stakeholder 3).*

As well as recognising an increase in confidence and knowledge among LGBT+ young people generally, yOUTH staff also shared examples of how their work had impacted upon individual young people:

*I went and visited a young person in a local college... Now I’d say a month later, they’ve got a friendship group... That I think is really, really powerful... We’ve helped that young person find a voice and find themselves... They have that one place where they can be safe and they’ve got their little crew of [friends] who also go to the same college and they didn’t know about each other, which is really lovely because it means that that safe space has extended to college” (Staff member 2)*

*“[I] can see young people growing in confidence. I’ve got one young person who started last year, and they literally wouldn’t look up from the table, they wouldn’t talk. Now they’re the sassiest person I’ve ever met!” (Staff member 2)*

*“I’ve got one young [person]... we’ve been working with her for about a year. She was refusing to leave the house, very socially isolated... would not come to youth group... There was a lot of intervention that went in there, and then she turned*

*around and said I want to come. She's been coming every week... She's made a little group of friends... For her, that is a huge thing... This young person wouldn't leave the house a year ago" (Staff member 4).*

Although much of this impact related to young people having a voice, for some it went much further than that:

*"I've had one young person who I would say has been one of the biggest impacts this year... A young person who was constantly... threatening self-harm, suicide... They basically were just having a crap time at home... So we got them some housing so they can live independently... [and] we've not had a threat of harm, suicide, anything, in months now... It's really nice to see that growth... I definitely think that's something we do offer our service users" (Staff member 2).*

To a certain extent, yOUTH delivery was thought to be preventing and/or replacing mainstream service use by young people:

*"So much of what they do is just brilliant early support and preventative work... They save us an awful lot of time and money and work by being able to... work with individuals which gives them somewhere to turn for information, to get some support... whereas I think for some of those children and young people previously, they may have sat on a waiting list for a long time or have had catastrophic fallouts at home, which would have led them perhaps to becoming looked-after or getting themselves in really vulnerable situations" (Stakeholder 5).*

Whilst most interviewees stressed impacts on young people related to social and emotional benefits, one stakeholder also explicitly highlighted impacts on educational engagement and achievement:

*"What we've noticed, is that for the pupils who go [to the school LGBT group]... it's had a really positive impact on them within education, within their classrooms. They're more confident... They are more willing to share their opinions, ideas, perspectives, but also in their grades they're actually, their target grades are improving because they're more engaged in lessons... We're seeing real development there" (Stakeholder 3).*

The annual reports for this evaluation have highlighted the excellent work of the yOUTH service, but this has clearly not led to complacency among staff, who have been keen to take on board suggestions for improving the service. Some participants drew attention to how the research and evaluation running alongside yOUTH delivery had impacted upon the service:

*"The research element... has really helped us think things through, has helped us hear the voices of young people. For me, coming from that independent source has been massive really, and just really adds to the quality of that, so I've really appreciated that... [it] has really, really helped change our thinking" (Staff member 1)*

*"I noticed in the [last] report some people asking for more stuff related to sexual orientation, and we have taken that on board... We're planning on doing a lesbian lunch and getting everyone together, and then a gay gathering, to try and make it*

*more inclusive around sexuality... That's an area which maybe has gotten a little bit lost because gender has become such a mainstream issue now, and we've got more and more kids coming out as non-binary, trans... so a lot of our work has become focussed around that" (Staff member 1).*

***"It's had huge impacts... When we first started it up... people had not heard of us, but within 12 months... we were inundated" (Staff member 3)***

### The pandemic

Given the magnitude of the coronavirus pandemic and the resulting lockdowns, it is not surprising that it featured within conversations. Participants, for example, identified concerns that they had for young LGBT+ people at this time, with many identifying LGBT+ young people as more likely to be isolated:

*"I saw there was some [national] research into LGBT young people through lockdown, in regards to their experiences of lockdown... It was really clear that one in four young people who are LGBT felt isolated at home during lockdown" (Stakeholder 3)*

*"I think it was a difficult time for everybody, on lots of levels, but I think particularly for LGBT young people. They're isolated already, very often, and isolated within the family and friendship networks" (Staff member 1)*

*"[I had] concerns for some of those LGBT+ young people who had really difficult and unstable times at home, and whose support was through the Brunswick Centre, and just being concerned for them and their wellbeing if they were not going to have their usual kind of outlets, for some of those really difficult situations that they found themselves in" (Stakeholder 5).*

These views echo early research in the pandemic which suggested that some issues relating to isolation measures associated with the virus disproportionately affected LGBT+ people, including access to peer support and feelings of community, with implications for LGBT+ health and wellbeing (Carman et al 2020). Although the following participant identified similar concerns, they also suggested that for some young LGBT+ people, lockdowns also had their advantages, which echoes previous evidence from our research (Formby and Woodiwiss 2021):

*"I think it was incredibly isolating for some of them, especially those that are not out at home. A number of our young people did not have a safe space at home to discuss issues relating to their identity in times of remote support... They were closed off from friends who are also in the [LGBT+] community. However, some preferred it, home being their safe space, and being protected from hostility in public" (Stakeholder 7).*

Although there was concern that many LGBT+ young people would be more isolated, there was also appreciation of how yOUTH had responded and continued to provide a service, albeit one that was quite different. Much of the feedback focussed on the speed with which the service moved their provision online, so as to be able to continue during periods of lockdown, but also reflected on the range of activities that were on offer:

*“I think they did really well in the pandemic in the sense that they responded and they found ways, and they did lots of different things and they tried to make meetings interesting and stuff... I think there was something on four nights a week if not five. Some nights there were two or three activities” (Stakeholder 1)*

*“I applaud [my colleagues] for really sticking at that [online work]... It did, on a group level, had something on every day... Which I thought was just incredibly really, just amazing... Short-term that was absolutely fantastic, but I think for lots of young people it wasn't the greatest way to be engaging... [but] it was better than nothing... [and] the team were good at making sure that some fun resources went out to people” (Staff member 1)*

*“There was quite a lot of welfare packs that went out to some of the children and young people who weren't able to engage online... One of the things that I think we've all learned, actually, is that they were able to reach a load more young people in this way, because young people who couldn't, wouldn't, shouldn't come along to a fixed space at a certain time of the week, could engage online in different ways... It also became quite an empowering thing in the sense of the young people... are really tech-savvy, and were able to set up their own provision online as well” (Stakeholder 5).*

As this stakeholder identified, some young people benefited from considerable peer support and communication enabled through social media and prompted by their relationships established within the yOUTH service (see Formby and Woodiwiss 2021 for further detail).

It was not only the young people and their families who benefitted from the online provision, as stakeholders also benefited from changes to working patterns, meaning that online training could be delivered and accessed during the pandemic:

*“One of the things that happened in the pandemic was that we'd been trying to get some staff development and training organised... We never managed to get together very successfully... [but] as soon as we started running webinars online, we had really good take-up... The pandemic made that [CPD] feel a bit more urgent, but also feel a bit more accessible” (Stakeholder 5).*

It is worth noting that the yOUTH service benefited from, and were grateful for, national guidance that assisted with their planning and delivery whilst emerging from periods of lockdown:

*“Young people were really clamouring, can I get back to face-to-face stuff... and thank god for National Youth Agency guidance and support... The team really got stuck back in really, really rapidly, and as safely as they could. I don't think either staff or young people, anybody, contracted covid during all that. They worked really hard to keep everybody safe” (Staff member 1).*

Interviews also enabled staff members to reflect on their experiences of working through a pandemic. Everyone we spoke to was happy with, and proud of, what they had delivered during challenging times:



*“We responded really well I think. We moved online straight away... There was something on every single night, things through the day... doing check-ins over Zoom, and over the phone, so there was still that sense of community there... We were really quick compared to other services”* (Staff member 4)

*“As a service, [staff member] was spot-on. He was one of the first people I knew to go, ‘let’s try this thing called Zoom’... And from that, building and building to the point where we had so many sessions a week. I think the service responded fantastically well to the needs of young people”* (Staff member 2)

*“That was an interesting one for me because what really opened my eyes, because I did most of the Zooms... It was the referrals we were getting in, new referrals, who’d not met us before, that were coming onto Zoom. I felt that was just amazing... A young person mentioned yesterday, and his wording was, ‘I don’t know what I’d have done during lockdown if I hadn’t been able to come on Zoom’. He said it were rubbish having to use that, but bingo was so funny... We made it fun... The new ones were coming in on absolutely everything”* (Staff member 3).

Whilst they were rightly proud of the services they delivered, staff also remembered some of the difficulties and anxieties they endured working online in this way:

*I think it had its challenges, the safeguarding, not being able to see the young person all the time, worrying if they’re not coming online, young people who obviously aren’t out at home, having to explain what they’re doing, not being able to access it etc.”* (Staff member 2)

*“I used to think... what if something goes wrong with the technology? What if we have a safeguarding? So we were quite anxious...”* (Staff member 3).

Interestingly, some staff also believed that the pandemic and associated lockdowns had in and of themselves led to increased referrals, thus contributing to their workload:

*“We were getting a high amount of referrals and a high amount of young people that were coming out during the pandemic. There seemed to be a peak of it”* (Staff member 4)

*“Since the pandemic, we’ve had a lot more referrals... I’m guessing they’ve had time to reflect and they’ve gone back to school and they’ve been able to say ‘this is who I think I am’”* (Staff member 2).

As we emerged from lockdown, participants also identified what they saw as the impacts of the pandemic, as well as subsequent experiences since life became more ‘normal’ (e.g. with face-to-face delivery) during the pandemic. Some of this related to social interactions:

*“Young people wise, I’m still seeing the impacts of mental health, anxiety, especially in groups. We get referrals all the time that a young person is too anxious to attend a group. I do think a lot of that will be the fact that they’ve sat at home for two years and didn’t speak to other people... I think it’s going to be there for a long time with young people. It really has had a big impact... I’ve noticed a lot more anxiety around exams than normal”* (Staff member 2).

Although some yOUTH staff believed that many LGBT+ young people were ‘clamouring’ to get back to in-person groups, others noted a degree of anxiety among other LGBT+ young people, making them reluctant to attend groups:

*“We’ve really struggled with student engagement since returning to fully face -to-face study. Where our [college-based] group was around 15 last year, the highest attendance we’ve had this year is about 6, with 2-3 regularly... Students just seem really lacking in interest to commit to extra-curricular activities... Due to the lack of numbers, we haven’t organised as many external visitors as previous years”* (Stakeholder 7).

However, this is in contrast to LGBT+ young people’s attendance at the yOUTH group.

Another consequence of the pandemic was on the workload of yOUTH staff. Not only did they believe the pandemic had led to an increase in referrals and workload, they also felt that life had got harder for everyone, and therefore busier for them:

*“Individually, collectively, as an organisation, we did not stand still. And I don’t know where this relentless busyness has come from because it is absolutely constant, just all the time, my colleagues are absolutely pushed full-on, I’m full-on... Just the needs of clients, I think the hangover of everything, the poverty, the hardship, the economy hitting the skids, the cost of living, food poverty, fuel poverty...”* (Staff member 1).

We observed in previous reports based on research undertaken during lockdown that young people were appreciative of, and generally positive about, online delivery when necessary, i.e. when face-to-face delivery had to be suspended due to legislative restrictions (Formby and Woodiwiss 2021). However, once there was the option of in-person provision, this tended to be preferred, and online methods then talked about in less positive terms ( see earlier chapters). This was also identified by a yOUTH staff member interviewed during the brief heatwave throughout the UK this summer:

*“With the hot weather yesterday... and our building... is not air-conditioned. The windows don’t open. I was just like, no this is going to be hell... so I put on a Zoom and we had three people instead of 15. The young people don’t want Zoom. They don’t want to go back on it anymore... [but] I’m glad we’ve got that as an option, it’s really really useful. Some young people, if they haven’t got time to travel or whatever, or they just want a really quick catch-up, it’s great because we can use Facebook Messenger and all that stuff. So there are some really useful tools to have come from it, but I would say that young people definitely prefer face-to-face and human contact, and the ability to run around and be crazy”* (Staff member 2).

However, as this staff member observed, some useful tools have come out of lockdown/the pandemic.

### Looking to the future

When asked to reflect on their hopes and fears for the future, many responses focussed on a wish for continued, or greater, funding, to enable the service to not only continue but to also possibly expand:

*“We need more staff, that’s the main thing. We’re almost victims of our own success... If money was no object, for me it would be, definitely obviously the staffing, having more family support, a team of family support workers... you worry about those people that fall in that grey area... where they’re too old or they’re out of area... If we were able to expand and cover other areas, I think that would help”* (Staff member 4)

*“I just wish there was more money... because I do believe that the service quality could be better, because I’m very aware that I’m very rushed... I just want to do my best for these young people and I can’t always do that because I just do not have enough hours in the day... We’re victims of our own success I think”* (Staff member 2)

*“[The] project has developed and is huge now in comparison to when [staff members] started it. I do think we’ve got a lack of resources in terms of staffing... There’s not enough staff... and being able to spend more money on things for young people, because obviously resources and funding is limited... We would like more money to do events, more activity-based things”* (Staff member 3).

Staff were also aware of gaps or limitations in their current service provision that they wanted to address. Particular ideas for the future included training delivery, and attending to other perceived service limitations:

*“There’s something as well about some parity across the rainbow... I do worry about young gay men in particular... I think sometimes as workers we can make the mistake of responding to volume coming through our doors, so it will be lots of young people around being trans... I think within LGBT work, trans is overshadowing some of that stuff... [but] we can champion them all together, we shouldn’t just be focussed in on one thing”* (Staff member 1)

*“It’s been my frustration that we’ve not been able to do more with people of colour who are LGBTQ”* (Staff member 1).

There was some recognition that the success of some aspects of the service might leave other aspects lacking:

*“I do think we need to be more aware of the L, the G, and the B, because we are getting more referrals for trans people coming through... So that’s something that I’m wanting to pursue... I have had kids say to me, I’m the only lesbian in this group, and I’m like, ‘no you’re not’, but I can’t out other people”* (Staff member 4).

With increased demand, staff identified training as an important aspect of future work, and whilst some wanted to use their expertise and experience to offer training to other organisations, they were acutely aware they did not currently have the capacity to do so:

*“We’ve had so many requests for training, but the honest thing is... we haven’t got the capacity to do it... You could have someone doing full-time training, honestly you could, and the need would be there... I’d love to make it where we could give a school an accreditation to say they are an LGBT safe space. That would be really*

*cool, if they had to meet certain criteria from Brunswick, get mystery shopped, and then they could be that safe space” (Staff member 2)*

*“We are getting a lot of demand for training... and I think this is something I really want to implement through the Brunswick Centre... I’ve done a few small-scale ones... You talk from your own experience, and you talk from the experience of the young people, and I find that impacts [those attending training] quite a lot” (Staff member 4).*

There was also a recognition of gaps in education, with some stakeholders feeling this was an area that the Brunswick Centre could develop:

*“The education side of things, I feel there’s room to expand there, and I know that it’s a saturated market and we’ve got like a thousand organisations who do it, but I think if it were through Kirklees funding for Kirklees schools, it would mean that schools were more likely to link up with them than to link up with [other organisations]” (Stakeholder 3).*

Indeed, this was something that yOUTH staff had already started to address:

*“I put together a six-week workshop for primary school kids... because what’s happening is they’re going to high school and they’re getting bullied, whereas if they’d had that education at primary school, maybe it wouldn’t get to the point of them then getting bullied and self-harming and having mental health issues” (Staff member 4).*

Other specific suggestions for how the service could be adapted in future included:

- *“some apprentice youth workers would be really cool... It would be nice to train the next generation, especially if it meant some of our young people working their way up” (Staff member 2)*
- *“helping schools with things like their curriculum, their policies” (Staff member 4)*
- *“our own building would be the dream” (Staff member 2)*
- *“stronger linking in with the exploitation agenda” (Stakeholder 6)*
- *“something on every day of the week so young people always had a safe space to go... we don’t do enough weekend working” (Staff member 2)*
- *“help with how realistic we can be re neopronouns [e.g. xe, xem, ze]... [We’ve] only recently started to embrace... use of gender-neutral pronouns, and it feels really quick to be facing a new challenge. I think an advocate from the specialist agencies helping us get this across to students would really help them students not see it as schools being discriminatory” (Stakeholder 7)*
- *“really bolster North Kirklees a bit more” (Stakeholder 6)*
- *“a group that was specifically [for] young people of faith” (Staff member 2)*

- *“a summary email to partner agencies ... that outlines staff roles in the yOUTH service ... [and] an overview of the services available”* (Stakeholder 7)
- *“for us as a school to have just a single page of ‘this is what we can do, this is how to access it, this is where to find the form to fill in’”* (Stakeholder 3).

In a broader sense, participants also documented their observations and concerns about capacity and other issues in wider services for children and young people. Particular worries related to waiting lists, such as for CAMHS; deficiencies in trans healthcare and information; and making sure that LGBT+ youth groups offer more than ‘just a coffee’:

*“What can be problematic with lots of different bits of public service these days, is simply around capacity to be able to respond to scale, so it is things like waiting times to be able to access higher-level emotional wellbeing services [e.g. CAMHS]”* (Stakeholder 5)

*“Informal face-to-face advice and guidance on transitioning ... Education institutions have been given very strict guidance, received last term, from the NHS about not just advising students to book in with GPs all the time because they are overstretched, generally not just LGBT issues. We would normally signpost students in this direction re things like hormones but now feel hesitant to do so”* (Stakeholder 7)

*“I would [like] ... more explicit guidance from the council, like ... [a] trans toolkit, that would be great. We need more explicit guidance of what we’re allowed to do and what we’re not because you still have people who are very scared of going too far in supporting LGBT [inclusion in schools] ... With the conversation that there is currently, especially around gender identity, clear guidance would be amazing”* (Stakeholder 3)

*“How do we make sure that where there is an LGBT group happening, it’s actually doing youth work, or informal education ... It needs to be doing something, not just turn up and have a nice coffee. It should have intention beyond just being a social space ... raising awareness amongst practitioners or amongst providers that ... for LGBT groups there is a particular curriculum ... and I actually think there should be some form of quality standard ... what youth work I think does is, we’re there doing low-level all the time emotional wellbeing stuff, and we pick up very quickly when a young person is slipping down the nasty slope, and therefore we’re able to intervene or make that referral faster so they don’t end up being in CAMHS on a two-year waitlist, where nobody does anything with them for two years”* (Stakeholder 1).

These discussions about the context in which the yOUTH service has been operating recently often led to observations about the social and political climate surrounding LGB, and particularly trans, identities. A minority of participants shared relatively optimistic perspectives:

*“I think the future for LGBT young people looks brighter, compared to when I was younger ... A lot more young people seem to feel capable and safer to come out. I think young people are louder, actually speaking out about, like, no to the conversion therapy. A lot of our young people are quite politically minded ... so I do see the future getting better”* (Staff member 2).

Others focussed more on the variability of contexts and experiences, for instance dependent on identities and/or postcodes influencing the levels of service young people did or did not have access to:

*“I’m very optimistic for the LGB part of it”* (Stakeholder 3)

*“I think young people who live in the right postcode I’m hopeful for”* (Stakeholder 1).

School staff also drew attention to what they saw as weaknesses in the formal school curriculum, and related new guidance on relationships and sex education (RSE):

*“I worry about LGBT youth if there isn’t more guidance for schools, for educators, if there isn’t a clear mandate like Scotland have done ... I don’t think that we’re going to get there for a long time ... and those lovely two bullet points where it [RSE guidance] says ‘when it’s age-appropriate they should be told about different relationships’. No! Give us a curriculum through PSHE [personal, social, health and economic education]. Why do we not have a curriculum? We’ve got five different guidance documents... I need to figure how to cover it when I’ve got an hour a week ... It’s a minefield. But ... do you really want more government guidance on it, given some of the attitudes in government towards LGBT rights at the minute?”* (Stakeholder 3).

A small but vocal number of interviewees expressed serious concerns about the future for LGB, and particularly trans, young people:

*“[I’m] very much concerned about our trans young people, with everything that’s going on at the minute ... I think it’s positive as in there’s more support compared to when I was their age ... But I think with social media as well, things going on with GIDS [gender identity development service] ... that’s a big concern for me”* (Staff member 4)

*“I just feel desperately pessimistic. All the anti-trans stuff, the anti-woke stuff ... [I] feel anxious and apprehensive, and I fear, I particularly fear for LGBT young people ... people either don’t understand trans issues or are downright hostile to it”* (Staff member 1).

In light of these comments, the yOUTH service was widely regarded as vital in supporting LGBT+ young people (and their families) when they might be facing adversities. As this individual said:

*“It’s a dangerous environment to be in ... and the risk of that getting worse is always there ... unless we can counteract that, and I guess we do it in our work as best we can”* (Staff member 1).

## 5. INTERVIEWS WITH PARENTS

Information was circulated to parents and carers in touch with the yOUTH service via Brunswick Centre staff, inviting them to take part in a one-to-one interview with the lead author of this report. Three individuals (all parents of trans or gender non-binary children/young people) volunteered, and their interviews lasted between 21 minutes and an hour and eight minutes. The conversations took place online, were recorded, and then transcribed in full. The analysis presented below is based on these transcriptions, with illustrative extracts used throughout.

***“I’m so pleased with the support that we’ve had... I just wanted to take the opportunity to say how valuable we found it as a family” (Parent 3)***

Each of the parents spoken to had been signposted or referred to the yOUTH service from another organisation in Kirklees (a school, CAMHS, and Northorpe Hall Child and Family Trust), and all were very complimentary about the services they had received. As one parent summarised:

*“The yOUTH service offers a fantastic non-judgmental free support service to LGBTQ+ young people in all sorts of different ways. They offer central events, they offer trips, they offer counselling support, they offer so much advice and help and emotional support... and all on a shoestring! I don’t know how they do it... they do a tremendous amount of work” (Parent 2).*

Within the parent interviews, compared to the practitioner interviews, there was less discussion of understandings of young people’s needs. One parent, though, did note:

*“She’s done well, she makes us very proud every day. She’s a very strong character. She still has her demons, absolutely has her demons, every day she has to steel herself to get dressed and have a shower. She’s waking up every day in a body that distresses her. I can’t even imagine that” (Parent 2).*

### Service access and experiences

Participants often talked about services, both those that they had accessed and those that their child had. One of the services particularly praised was the monthly group aimed at trans young people and their parents/carers. The group was thought to be a space that facilitated parents and carers sharing their various experiences, and for those with younger children, or young people at an earlier stage of transition, it could act as an avenue for them to learn about what might be to come:

*“We have chats and stuff like that... we haven’t got the hormones involved yet, or anything like that, so I do feel like we’re not there yet... which is useful as well... because at least I’ll have a heads-up for when we do get to teenage years... It’s helpful for my child as well... she can actually see that there’s other people, young adults, around like her” (Parent 1).*

The group also offered a space to share practical information, which staff are also able to follow-up with schools if need be:

*“The changing of the names and obviously that sort of stuff... that’s quite useful information to know... [and] the Brunswick Centre also helps with advice for the school, because my child was the first one going in as transgender, so they were as clueless as what I am!” (Parent 1).*

In addition to the monthly trans group that parents and carers can attend, and work in/with schools, yOUTH service staff also offer one-to-one work with young people and their families. This ranges from crisis support, through school-based work, to more ad hoc communication:

*“[I] contacted them at a real crisis point... I literally contacted them in the morning, they weren’t available in the morning but rang me back by lunchtime-ish, and they said, ‘right, why don’t we come over tonight’” (Parent 2)*

*“[Staff member] came and met [my child] at school a couple of times... and picked things up at school with them in terms of creating a better non-binary space, particularly around toilets and so on” (Parent 3).*

Knowing that yOUTH staff were there and available was valued by parents:

*“The other thing that they do at the Brunswick Centre, if ever you’ve got any concerns or questions or queries or anything, you can just ring them up and have a chat with them and they’ll just help you out, so they make themselves very available and very accessible” (Parent 2).*

Importantly, the yOUTH service also offered entertaining activities which were valued by participants and their children. These included special parties and trips, which not only added to the variety of provision on offer, but also the opportunity to just have fun:

*“We’ve been to a couple of the Christmas parties... [My child] has really enjoyed those, and [they have] been on a couple of the trips as well... so we’ve used quite a lot of the services really” (Parent 3).*

The regularity and frequency of provision was also thought to be beneficial:

*“I think the Brunswick Centre is unusual in that it offers support stuff to young people and on a weekly basis... I think the Brunswick Centre is unique in terms of the amount of support that it offers and how regularly” (Parent 2).*

Parents recognised and appreciated the opportunity afforded by the group for their child to just be themselves and relax, which for many trans young people was not always possible elsewhere:

*“[My child] has gone to the [weekly youth group] regularly... and found that really, really useful, just as a safe space where they can be themselves without any edge or hassle or whatever – just a really safe place to just relax and have a nice time with other people. [They] look forward to that day... [they] really enjoy going to group for that safe space and just some activities and things with other young people that’s not school-related” (Parent 3).*



The yOUTH service was praised for adapting to their changing circumstances, such as responding to an increase in numbers, itself a sign of their success:

*“The [youth] group got so big... that they’ve had to split it into over 18s and under 18s... that’s been quite a good idea, splitting them, because obviously the difference in maturity between somebody who is 12 or 13 versus 19 or 20 is huge, isn’t it, so I think that’s worked quite well” (Parent 2).*

Staff members were also singled out for praise, not just for the service they provided, but also for their attitude to the young people accessing the yOUTH service:

*“They’re all brilliant, I can’t fault any of them... they’re in it because they care” (Parent 2).*

Parents were very aware of long waiting lists for both mental health services for young people, and gender identity services, and the negative effects they saw these having on their child. This led to some anger that their child’s mental ill-health could have been prevented, or lessened, with quicker access to mainstream services:

*“We were at absolute crisis point. We didn’t know where to turn and what to do. During all of this time, [she] was on a waiting list for counselling... but the waiting list was yaaay long... During the time she was on that list, her mental health absolutely plummeted, so a lot of it could have been avoided if we had been able to access more timely counselling... Those waiting lists are doing harm... There will be people, and we were nearly there... that don’t make it to the top because they commit suicide first, so it costs lives” (Parent 2).*

There was clear appreciation of the services offered by the Brunswick Centre, who were there when individuals and families needed them:

*“Organisations like the Brunswick Centre provide lifesaving help to people” (Parent 2).*

Within this context, counselling availability through the yOUTH service was highly valued, as discussed further below. Not only did parents appreciate the support provided by yOUTH staff, they also valued the information yOUTH staff were able to provide about accessing gender identity services:

*“The Brunswick Centre were absolutely fantastic... What they did, I think even at that very first meeting, they explained the duration of the waiting times which were horrendous even at that time, they’ve gone even longer since, and they said ‘right get yourself applied for this clinic, for the GIDS clinic, the under-18s, the Tavistock clinic. It’s a massive long waiting list. You can come off it any point, you don’t have to take the appointment when it gets through, but get yourself on that list so at least while you’re thinking things through and working things out, you’re working your way up that list’. So that’s absolutely what we did” (Parent 2).*

This process of accessing health services was sometimes referred to as a ‘game’, or even an ‘audition’, which people have to ‘pass’ in order to proceed (see also Hines 2013). This is because transition currently requires a diagnosis rather than self-identification to access healthcare:

*“We played the game and we got there, so she got her diagnosis of gender dysphoria and they referred her through on a continuous care plan through to the adult clinic, so she’s under the care of the adult clinic now... She has got very lucky, but that’s down to the Brunswick Centre as well, because if they hadn’t originally said at that very first meeting ‘get yourself on that list’ it would have all taken a lot longer, so that’s another thing that they’ve been massively helpful on, and that has also really supported [my daughter’s] journey... The whole nature of the way that the healthcare system for trans people is set up, it’s all about gatekeeping, it’s all about ticking boxes... If you went in with a broken leg, they won’t say well are you sure your leg is broken? How broken is it? Did you break it when you were little? You don’t start getting interrogated... Some of it just isn’t kind, it’s not compassionate. I do find it quite difficult” (Parent 2).*

It is perhaps worth stressing here that due to the lengthy waiting lists, ‘playing the game’ and ‘getting on that list’ did not commit parents or young people to particular outcomes, but rather relieved some of the pressure on them, and gave them time to think while they worked their way up the list.

### Service impacts

Having discussed some of their experiences of accessing services, parents were asked to identify what they thought were the impacts of having accessed yOUTH service provision. The trans group in particular was described as a ‘lifesaver’:

*“That was an absolute lifesaver... They were literally just in their first stages of setting that up... [We went to] some of the very first meetings of that and formed really strong bonds and friendships actually with other families that were going through the same thing... That was very powerful... for both the kids and the parents... That was a group where as parents we laughed, we cried, everything in between, but gave each other a tremendous amount of support” (Parent 2).*

Having a similar range of experiences was also highly valued and made talking about things much easier:

*People that are going through stuff like that get it in a way that most other people that you come across in your life don’t. So you can talk much more openly about things, and people understand without you having to explain all the backstory all of the time. I guess what worked really well there is because we all started at the same time, we were at similar stages and it tended to be quite a consistent group of people week in, week out” (Parent 2).*

However, it is worth noting that when trans group participants are not at a similar stage, it can sometimes be hard for parents who have been attending for a longer period of time :

*“We tend not to go as much now. I can find them quite difficult... it’s a much bigger group now than it was... but what I found was that as much as you do want to help other people... I found that because there’s always new people going, you’re always going back to that beginning point again, and always having to tell your story again. I just found it a little bit exhausting, so I took a little bit of a step back from that...”*

*because it is quite an emotional thing... It's something I might go back to in the future when I'm a bit more resilient about it maybe" (Parent 2).*

There is perhaps a fine line between benefitting from peer support and finding offering support personally detrimental, which could suggest that in an ideal world there could be the option of two groups: one for those at a further on stage of transition and one for those earlier on in the process.

Interestingly, the peer support that the yOUTH service facilitated has continued outside of the service too:

*"There's a family that live quite locally to us and I made a bit of contact with them. One of the parents who's cleverer than me [also] set up a Facebook group for trans parents so we have a bit of contact with each other through that" (Parent 2).*

The one-to-one work with families had clearly had significant impact for some. Staff not only provided support, but they offered very useful practical advice as well, which was seen to have a real impact on young people and their families:

*"Literally... when they [staff members] came round that night, we had a suicidal child on our hands... They extended that hand of friendship to her and gave her some hope at a point when she didn't have any... They gave us hope as well, because we were frightened, we were really frightened for her... It is quite a hard thing to talk about, just because it's so raw... but it's important... it's important to document the fabulous work that they do... Straightaway they said to her... pick a name... so they gave her some concrete things to do to move things on. They said if you want to bring some clothes to get changed into when you're there [at the youth group], bring some clothes... so they were giving her permission to do all these things... It's tremendously powerful... We couldn't believe it because we didn't even know that was out there... When they said 'right, why don't we come over tonight', we were like, oh my god! That's more than we could have ever hope!... We were absolutely blown away... That was a massive, massive turning point for us. It was a real crossroads. We could have gone one way or another, we could have lost her... She was self-harming already... It was absolutely pivotal in her journey... We're sort of five years on now, and you know what, she's absolutely blossoming and thriving... She's never looked back" (Parent 2).*

Parents also talked positively about the impact they felt that the youth groups had had on their children. The groups were seen as helping young people develop confidence in who they were, and provide somewhere to talk through their anxieties, including with other young people at a different stage in their journey:

*"It's definitely given them more confidence in their identity, meeting other people who are in that situation... maybe people who are a bit further on and people who are behind, it kind of helps to share that. And it's given them an outlet to go and talk to people about it, and definitely has helped their anxiety... I think it's just helped them develop as their own person... (Parent 3).*

The effect of attending the group was clearly seen by parents:

*“She enjoys it. You can tell when she comes out, when she’s a bit happier” (Parent 1).*

This was contrasted with young people’s often very negative experiences at school:

*“I think a safe space is a really important, is the thing that’s been a difference really... because school can be an absolute bear pit at times... I think [without the yOUTH service] [they] would be a very different person now... their anxiety would still be pretty high, be really struggling at school, and possibly more disengaged from school and not achieving at school even as well” (Parent 3).*

Parents were very aware of the negative experiences some young people had in schools, and as a result valued the work done by yOUTH staff within schools, which was thought to have had a positive impact:

*“[Staff member] has had some meetings with [my child’s] school. I think that’s made them buck their ideas up a little bit. Dealing with [my child] and maybe ourselves as individuals is one thing, but when the LGBT centre for Kirklees comes to talk to you, they did take a bit more notice... definitely” (Parent 3).*

In addition to the above, some parents felt their child had also benefitted from counselling provision within the Brunswick Centre. This was contrasted with counselling accessed outside of the Brunswick Centre, with parents recognising the value of having someone who understands LGBT+ experiences:

*“We’ve also had some funding for [my child] to have some one-to-one counselling earlier this year. [They] had 10 sessions of one-to-one counselling which again was really good because... we’ve used the local CAMHS but actually having somebody who understands the LGBT+ issues is more of the issue than anything else... [My child] has really struggled with anxiety and depression... [and] the last set of counselling has put [them] in a really positive place, more so than the support we’ve had from CAMHS... I think the Brunswick Centre has really got [them] into a much better place mentally, and just being more comfortable with themselves as well” (Parent 3).*

Clearly not all young people were able to talk to their parents, and counselling offered an important space where they could talk about and explore their experiences. Even for those who could talk to parents, being able to talk to a counsellor meant that they did not feel they were burdening their parents:

*“They also organised... for her to have some counselling, just to kind of help process what she’s going through. That was very good... She’s full of common sense, full of kindness and humour, she’s an extremely capable young woman... but she doesn’t always believe that about herself, so the counselling was to try and help her see what other people see in her... [Staff member] is the loveliest, loveliest guy and absolutely gets it... That was another very safe space for [her] where she could talk and... she didn’t feel like she was burdening me and her Dad with stuff” (Parent 2).*

Given the context of access to mainstream services and experiences/perceptions of (particularly) trans healthcare, it is noticeable that participants often felt ‘lucky’ to have

benefitted from yOUTH services, and sometimes even appropriate care/provision from GPs or schools. This feeling of 'luck' or 'gratitude' clearly speaks to a sense that people thought that their (positive) experiences were the exception rather than the (more common, negative) 'rule':

*"Whenever anybody has a crowdsourcing thing to pay for ... she's the first one to donate to that... She had a friend, and she donated ... half of her monthly salary, but she was like, 'I do that because everything has been easy for me'... She is grateful for what she gets" (Parent 2).*

Whilst some identified a degree of 'luck' in being able to access the services they had experienced, they also recognised that they had a degree of social and cultural capital, which itself could be seen as lucky, which made it easier for them in part because they were harder to be ignored. It was also thought that more positive experiences could perhaps be explained by privilege:

*"We've got privilege on our side as well: we're white, we're middle class, we're articulate, we can go and explain our story... I think when she [my daughter] has talked about some of this stuff, she's thought it through very rationally and can explain very rationally, and I think people take notice of that" (Parent 2).*

There was also recognition that not everyone was in that position, and for those who were not, life could be more difficult:

*"I think if she was Black and not quite so articulate, and so clever, and did not have such a good relationship with teachers and doctors and people like that, she might not have been taken quite so seriously... We have been quite lucky compared to some of the horror stories that I've heard" (Parent 2)*

*"I think it helps that [my child] is in the top set for everything. They'll take [them] a lot more seriously than perhaps some of their friends. They've got a friend who identifies as trans at school... and because they're not as high-ability as [my child] and they're a bit naughty and whatever, they perhaps get dismissed a little bit" (Parent 3).*

These reflections and experiences show how important it is to have a comprehensive understanding and awareness of the needs and experiences of LGBT+ young people, so that it is not only the most articulate who are 'lucky' and treated appropriately.

### The pandemic

Given the historic nature of the covid-19 pandemic during the course of our evaluation, it featured quite heavily in our data collection. Whilst the pandemic, and in particular the different periods of lockdown, clearly affected the services provided by the Brunswick Centre, parents appreciated that the yOUTH service was able to continue to offer services to them and their child, albeit in a very different format. People were quick to praise the service not only for continuing and adapting to the unprecedented circumstances so quickly, but also for doing such a good job and offering so much. Parents here echoed feedback obtained from young people earlier on in the pandemic:

*“It was good that things still continued. We found them in the middle of Covid... it’s probably one of the few things that [my child] was then able to go to during [the pandemic]” (Parent 3)*

*“They were... absolutely amazing, as ever... obviously it hit all of their face-to-face stuff, but they very quickly regrouped and went online to make sure that they were still reaching people in any way that they could. They were phoning people to make contact with them. They were sending stuff through the post. They were having bingo sessions and craft sessions. Doing film sessions where they’d all log on at the same time and watch a film together... they did loads of things” (Parent 2).*

Moving sessions online was not to everyone’s taste, though, and did change the nature of the groups, making it harder to have more private exchanges:

*“They did the Zoom [trans group] meetings once a month instead, but it’s not the same as a face-to-face contact... You can’t go off into your groups... and have those private discussions that might be more interesting to listen to” (Parent 1).*

It also made it difficult or more draining for some, particularly if they had been on Zoom for much of the day:

*“For us it was a little bit hard doing it on Zoom. You’ve been at work all day and doing Zoom calls and whatever... it was good, but yes it would have been nice to do it in person” (Parent 3).*

However, the switch to online provision did actually make accessing delivery easier for some:

*“We’d started taking a bit of a step back because it’s quite difficult for us to get over to Huddersfield for that time... I was hotfooting it from [work some distance away], finishing there at 4 o’clock and then I had to hotfoot it right over to Huddersfield for 6 o’clock, so it was always a bit of a challenge to get there. Actually when it went online all of a sudden that became a bit easier because all we had to do was get home” (Parent 2).*

There was also an awareness of how the pandemic, and lockdowns in particular, could adversely affect LGBT+ young people:

*“I think it just made them more isolated than ever, didn’t it. It highlighted inequalities. Did everybody have devices available? Did everybody have a private space where they could access these things? Not everybody did” (Parent 2).*

### Looking to the future

***“We absolutely need to treasure and support this service, and recognise the valuable work that it does” (Parent 3)***

Looking to the future, participants were very clear that they would like the yOUTH service to continue. However, they did have some specific feedback on potential service refinements, particularly around location and group access issues:

*“We haven’t managed to go to that [trans group] because Huddersfield is actually just so difficult to get to on an evening... because we’re North Kirklees, so that Dewsbury centre, it makes a difference... We’ve been really pleased, well amazed, at the support that they’ve got. A youth group that they don’t have to pay for and all the rest of it, it’s really, really, really good support that they give. Just carry on doing what they’re doing really... as much as they can” (Parent 3)*

*“I guess it would be great if it was big enough to be able to have a North Kirklees area... If you don’t drive that can be a bit more tricky... Something in North Kirklees would probably be really helpful for some people” (Parent 2).*

Whilst most people wanted to go back to face-to-face provision as soon as possible, the lessons of lockdown have also demonstrated the value of some online provision.

As well as wanting yOUTH to continue with the services they currently provide, parents also had suggestions for additional services, albeit whilst recognising capacity issues. Suggestions for expanding the service included more trips and service provision for primary aged children and their families:

*“Just more stuff for the primary school kids I think... It would be nice just to be able to get the information that we need for primary school kids, or even like a separate group for primary school parents and the kids... as well as the main one... I [also] just think they need another worker, I think she’s run ragged” (Parent 1).*

Looking to the future, parents also set their sights beyond the provision of yOUTH services, to also include commenting on wider societal change and improved (trans) healthcare:

*“I’d really like to see trans healthcare become part of primary healthcare, because the need and the demand is there... and I think that expertise absolutely needs to develop at that grassroots level so that people can access it easily, routinely... And it needs to be de-weaponised, I mean the tone of the [Conservative party] leadership debates has been shocking... That is not pleasant and it’s quite scary because it does set a tone that gives permission to horrible people to do horrible things... It doesn’t matter what’s in anybody’s pants, does it. We’ve all got something in our pants, and actually it’s none of your business what’s in my pants” (Parent 2).*

## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS ACROSS THE EVALUATION PERIOD

### Reflections across the evaluation period

At project start, in 2019, we carried out a service mapping exercise in the region, and identified grave concerns among practitioners about access to mental health support for young people because of the lengthy waiting lists involved in local provision. At the same time we conducted needs research with young LGBT+ people, which suggested that mental health and wellbeing, sex and relationships education, and access to local Pride events were important issues for our participants.

Our first round of impact evaluation with young LGBT+ people demonstrated that the yOUTH service (in particular the one-to-one support on offer and the weekly yOUTH group) was an important, trusted, and appreciated service for local LGBT+ young people. Feedback was unanimously positive, with the service thought to offer opportunities for safety and friendship, away from less positive contexts in which young people spend much of their time (such as school). Feelings of 'relief' and 'acceptance' at accessing the service resulted in young LGBT+ people reporting impacts on their self-confidence, and overall levels of happiness.

In 2020 (data collected before the pandemic), our report showed that the yOUTH service was still clearly appreciated and viewed positively by LGBT+ young people. This applied 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 led to increased 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.

By contrast, school environments generally tended to be seen by LGBT+ young people as synonymise 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 – all absent from school curricula.

Our report in 2020 concluded that the yOUTH service was highly valued by young LGBT+ people, particularly in relation to the offer of LGBT groups for young people, both in and outside school/college settings. However, it was clear that two key issues for LGBT+ young people remained, relating to LGBT-inclusive sex and relationships education, and support for mental health and emotional wellbeing. Although the yOUTH service can - and does - address these gaps in provision, it was evident that weaknesses in statutory provision remain.

In our 2021 report, it was clear - and unsurprising - that living through a pandemic was difficult for most of the young LGBT+ people involved in this stage of the evaluation. Perhaps most noticeable was the lack of routine or structured time, and the loneliness, that LGBT+ young people reported. However, there was a silver lining for some, such as those who found in-person socialising difficult, or those who found school life particularly hard, and who



thus welcomed not having to attend when schools were closed due to government restrictions.

Whilst our annual reports have shown that yOUTH is an appreciated service during 'normal' life, where LGBT+ young people often face challenges in school and/or at home (Formby and Woodiwiss 2019, 2020), this appreciation increased during the pandemic. The variety and frequency of yOUTH provision gave young people an important element of structure to their days (for some, it was literally one of the few things reportedly worth getting out of bed for), and importantly offered opportunities for social communication. These findings echoed similar data from LGBT Youth Scotland during this time period (YouthLink Scotland 2020), who suggested that digital youth work reduces isolation, improves wellbeing, aids personal growth (such as confidence), and increases resilience. It was therefore clear that the yOUTH service had been facilitating what scholarship suggested was good practice. As Long and Evans (2020) argued at the time, it was important to facilitate a sense of safety and connectedness, including through setting routines to help structure the day, using social media, and helping to manage anxiety.

The yOUTH service offer of group work and one-to-one support was obviously valued, with young LGBT+ people praising staff members, and articulating how important it was for them to meet with other LGBT+ young people who they felt were 'like them', and who could thus enable mutual understanding, and a sense of safety (see also Formby 2019). It is worth noting, however, that most young people involved in our evaluation were white, which we believe reflects the make-up of the majority of service participants. Given the diversity of the Kirklees population, it would be beneficial if the service (and the evaluation) included a wider range of participants. Our understanding is that the yOUTH service has been aware of this throughout, and staff endeavoured to improve their engagement with a broader section of young LGBT+ people - with some success.

Our report in 2021 focussed on experiences of the pandemic, and showed that yOUTH input had resulted in significant levels of peer support among young LGBT+ people during the pandemic/lockdown. It was clear that yOUTH had had a direct impact on young LGBT+ people's friendships, and often on a more positive sense of self. This was particularly important in light of research at the time (the 'queerantime study') which indicated that younger LGBT people had markedly higher levels of stress and depressive symptoms during the pandemic than older LGBT people (Kneale and Bécares 2020).

## Conclusions

We now turn to summarise key findings from recent (2022) data collection with young LGBT+ people, professionals, and parents. Once again, young people appreciated the yOUTH service and the access to both staff and other LGBT+ young people that it enabled (see also Formby and Woodiwiss 2019, 2020, 2021). Young participants' experiences of the yOUTH service were often in stark contrast to their experiences of school, though it should be noted that colleges and university were often talked about in more positive terms. Not surprisingly, the pandemic was a topic of conversation, and had obviously been a significant life event for the young people. Whilst the yOUTH service responded admirably (see Formby and Woodiwiss 2021 for further detail), and young LGBT+ people talked about the online service delivery in very positive terms when this was the provision they were in receipt of, once face-to-face service delivery was allowed, most young people were very clear that this

was their preference. It is interesting to note that the way young people talked about online delivery when looking back was noticeably less positive than it had been at the time.

The yOUTH service facilitates valuable group work which enables a space of safety for young people, and offers professional guidance that can encompass advice and support related to, for example, housing, money, and family relationships. Young LGBT+ people felt supported by staff emotionally and practically, and felt that the service contributed to their confidence, friendship circle, and a sense of being understood.

No service is perfect, and evidence presented earlier this year suggested that the yOUTH staff team have a hard balance to strike in many areas, for instance in providing activities but not 'forcing' young people to engage with them, and in responding to high numbers of trans young people without making lesbians, for example, feel neglected. It is important that the service listens to feedback from young people, and evidence across this evaluation suggests that this has always been the case, with the idea of a 'lesbian lunch' the most recent response to our data. The research and evaluation running alongside the service has therefore enhanced provision through annual reporting feeding into service development. In future, further thought could be given to how to best welcome and support new members. Equally, activities and developments should be sustained that focus on trying to diversify the range of young people engaged with the service, particularly Black and young people of colour/those from a BAME background.

Professionals we spoke to, both Brunswick Centre staff and stakeholders in the locality, were very positive about the services yOUTH has provided over the last five years. It was felt that the Brunswick Centre has become more well-known during this time, and the Centre and the yOUTH service were thought to be unique, and highly respected, with more than one stakeholder describing them as 'role models' to other organisations. Those benefiting from the service particularly appreciated the fact that it is locally based, free, and does not have the waiting lists of other mainstream organisations. The increased visibility of the Brunswick Centre was thought to have contributed to raising awareness levels about the needs of LGBT+ young people and their families in Kirklees. The work in/with schools and colleges was particularly valued, in terms of one-to-one service provision, guidance and support on setting up school-based LGBT groups, and more broadly being there for advice as and when needed.

It is worth noting that there was some concern that sometimes young LGBT+ people were referred to the Brunswick Centre, or support was requested from the yOUTH service, unnecessarily. This was thought to be because of capacity issues elsewhere, due to fears and/or a lack of confidence about supporting LGBT+ young people within mainstream settings, and/or because of misunderstandings that LGBT+ young people automatically need services from an organisation specialising in LGBT service provision. This means that such young people struggling with mental health issues, for example, can be inappropriately referred or signposted away from mainstream mental health services when these might actually be the most suitable sources of support for them, albeit possibly alongside yOUTH. However, more widely than mental health, there was discussion that LGBT+ young people can benefit from seeing/being supported by LGBT+ adults in service provider (or even visiting researcher) roles.

Professionals felt that the youth service enables LGBT+ young people to gain a sense of community and belonging, experience heightened peer support, and obtain practical help, particularly for those estranged from their families. Powerful examples were shared about the impacts for particular families and individuals, for instance including improved familial relationships, increased confidence and mental health for young people, reduced experiences of social isolation and agoraphobia, decreased suicidal ideation, and improved educational engagement and achievement.

No-one could have predicted the pandemic at the start of yOUTH service delivery, but stakeholders and parents we spoke to were unanimously positive about how Brunswick Centre staff had responded. There was awareness about the potentially unique impacts of the pandemic for LGBT+ young people, particularly those living in unsupportive home/family situations. The yOUTH service was thought to have supported these young people through the speed with which they had responded to the emerging situation, including providing an extensive range of activities online (and through the post) during strict periods of lockdown. Interestingly, this enforced period of isolation, away from schools and colleges for example, was thought to be advantageous for some young people, and some believed that it had actually contributed to increasing numbers of young people coming out about their identities, because they had been able to reflect during this time. This therefore was thought to have contributed to increasing numbers of referrals recently.

We observed clear concerns amongst both professionals and parents about the current social context for LGBT+ young people. This included worries about the political climate in relation to support for trans people, and fears about the state of mainstream services and associated waiting lists. Perhaps with this in mind, everyone we interviewed was certain that they would like to see the service continue, and expand where possible, and there were various suggestions for ways in which the service could develop in future (see Chapter 4).

Although small in number, the parents we spoke to were very positive about the yOUTH service, particularly the trans group which involves both young people and their parents/carers, which they had all had contact with. This group was thought to enable adults to share details of their “journeys”, which was often the word used to describe their experiences, and this peer support had also continued outside of the yOUTH service, through the establishment of at least one group for local trans parents on social media. The one-to-one service provision was also valued, as was yOUTH service staff involvement in/with schools. Parents talked about feeling the benefit of knowing that there was someone there to talk to, if and when they needed it.

Parents also discussed other provision that they and/or their child had benefited from, including parties, trips, and counselling provision. Parents felt that they could see the impact of involvement in the yOUTH service in their children, for instance discussing that they seemed happier and/or more confident. The service was even described as “lifesaving”, and was thought to provide a safe space that was not always experienced at school, which one parent memorably described as a “bear pit”. Parents said that they felt “lucky” to have found and received support from the yOUTH service, and it was clear that they thought their experiences were not the norm, or available to everyone elsewhere.

Looking to the future, parents wanted the service to continue, and the only suggestions for improvements were around expanding the provision geographically (so that more services

were available in North Kirklees), and in terms of who was eligible, so that primary school aged children and their families could also benefit.

Although there was some lack of awareness about the yOUTH service at project commencement (2019), visibility and understanding of the service has clearly improved since then. Overall, our evaluation indicates that the yOUTH service has consistently had a positive impact on the lives of young LGBT+ people across the delivery period. Returning to their initial aims, it would seem that the service has successfully contributed to:

- LGBT young people having increased voice and influence within Kirklees;
- LGBT young people reporting happier and healthier relationships and improved emotional health and wellbeing;
- schools being safer spaces for LGBT young people, at least through the provision of school-based LGBT groups.

For young LGBT+ people in Kirklees, it appears that the yOUTH service has, at least in part, been able to protect young people from the broader context of mainstream service access issues. This research and evaluation thus adds to the growing body of evidence about the importance of LGBT-specific youth work (Formby 2013, 2015, Formby and Donovan 2020, Woodiwiss and Formby forthcoming).

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