

# Youth Chances Summary of First Findings:

the experiences of LGBTQ  
young people in England



2014



# Introduction

This report outlines what we know about the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) 16-25 year olds in England – as reported by young people themselves.

It comes from a five-year ground-breaking research project funded by the Big Lottery Fund and conducted by METRO in collaboration with Ergo Consulting and the University of Greenwich. To date the project has surveyed over 7,000 young people aged 16-25, making it the biggest, most representative and robust survey of its kind. The project has also surveyed commissioners of services for young people and relevant service providers across England.

Full reports of the [survey of 16-25 year olds](#), [survey of commissioners](#) and [survey of service providers](#) present comprehensive accounts of methodology, data and findings to date.

We are very concerned about what we have found. The high levels of discrimination, abuse and mental health issues that young LGBTQ people face should be a wake-up call to all of us, whether we are involved in the day to day lives of young people as parents or carers, family members, teachers, youth workers, or we are shaping the responses and support young people can access as providers or commissioners of services or policymakers. Our young people are badly served. We hope that the comprehensive evidence provided here leads to action.

The key findings and summary report represent the first-cut analysis of responses. We will be conducting further analysis of the data to look at issues, such as how the experience of being LGBTQ is affected by the process of coming out and how the experience and need vary across different sub-groups within the LGBTQ population.

We will also look at what kinds of support are most useful in helping LGBTQ young people deal with discrimination.

*Please see our [Next Steps](#) section for further information and how to get involved.*



# Background

Youth Chances is a social research project aiming to identify the needs of LGBTQ young people and improve the commissioning and provision of services to meet their needs. Its starting point is that not enough is known about the specific needs of this group of young people – their experiences are not routinely captured at local, regional or national levels.

METRO, like other organisations providing direct services to young LGBTQ people, understands the significant challenges facing them. Youth Chances aims to understand whether LGBTQ young people fare significantly worse than their heterosexual non-trans<sup>1</sup> counterparts in respect of their health, wellbeing and life chances; what specific deprivations, exclusions or under-achievements LGBTQ young people experience; what support is available to them and what more needs to be done.

With this in mind we have looked at young people's experiences through the lens of nationally recognised frameworks for young people's outcomes: participation; staying safe; enjoying and achieving; economic wellbeing; health and wellbeing<sup>2</sup>.

- [Participation](#)
- [Staying safe](#)
- [Enjoying & achieving](#)
- [Economic wellbeing & career success](#)
- [Health & wellbeing](#)



1 'Non-trans' is a term used in the report to signify somebody who does not identify themselves as transgender. This is sometimes referred to as 'cisgender' (somebody who identifies with the same gender they were assigned at birth). 'Non-trans' is used here to improve accessibility.

2 The Children Act 2004. (c. 31). London: HMSO; Cabinet Office and Department of Education, 2011. Positive for Youth: a new approach to cross government policy for young people aged 13 to 19. [pdf] London: HMSO.

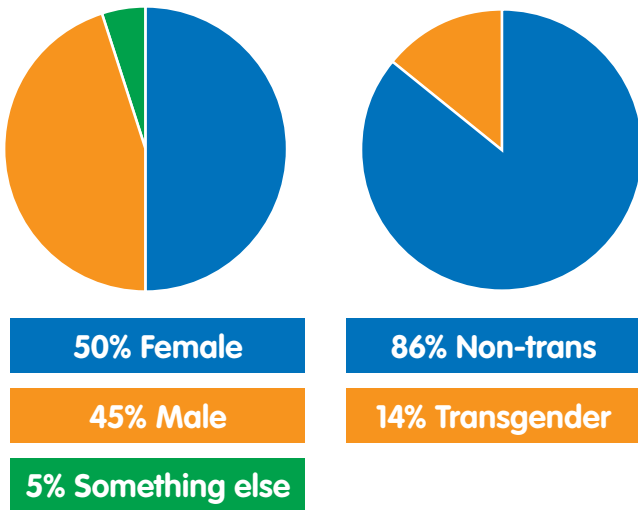
# Respondents to the survey

This is the largest survey sample of LGBTQ 16-25 year olds<sup>3</sup> in England, with a significant rate of response from trans young people<sup>4</sup> it also includes a sub-group of respondents who self-identify as heterosexual and non-trans<sup>5</sup>.

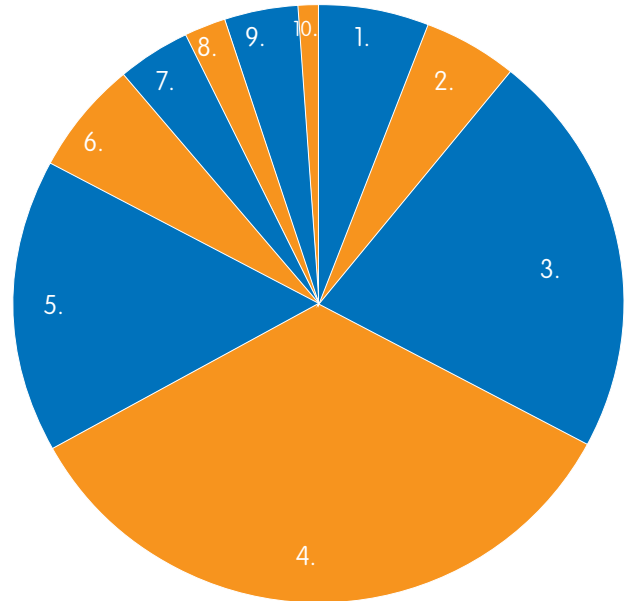
It is a representative sample of the English population:

- Gender identity distribution is roughly half male and half female
- Age spread is broadly consistent with the overall English population
- There is relatively even spread across the regions<sup>6</sup>
- Ethnic diversity is broadly consistent with the overall English population<sup>7</sup>

Gender of all survey respondents and proportion of respondents who identify as transgender



Sexual identity of all survey respondents



1. Female heterosexual 6%
2. Male heterosexual 5%
3. Lesbian 22%
4. Gay 34%
5. Female bisexual 16%
6. Male bisexual 6%
7. Female questioning 4%
8. Male questioning 2%
9. Female other 4%
10. Male other 2%

3 n=6,514

4 n=956

5 n=612

6 There is a slight over-representation of London and the South east (19% from London and 22% from the South east, compared to 15% and 16% respectively in the English population according to Census 2011)

7 A slight over-representation of White British (84% in Youth Chances sample, compared to 80% in English population according to Census 2011)

# Key findings

1. All respondents perceive that discrimination against LGBTQ people in general is still common and this is confirmed by the higher levels of discrimination, and disadvantage that young people experience.
2. LGBTQ young people feel substantially less accepted in their local community than their heterosexual, non-trans counterparts particularly in religious organisations and sport.
3. LGBTQ young people experience significantly higher levels of verbal, physical and sexual abuse.
4. Nearly 1 in 10 of LGBTQ young people (8%) have had to leave home for reasons relating to their sexuality or gender identity.
5. Most young LGBTQ people feel that their time at school is affected by hostility or fear, with consequences such as feeling left out, lower grades and having to move schools. Most report that their school supported its pupils badly in respect of sexuality or gender identity.
6. Schools also neglect areas that are known to be public health concerns. Sex and relationships education is not inclusive of LGB relationships and does not provide young people with the emotional and sexual health information they need. This is a particular concern for young gay and bisexual men who are at higher risk of STIs and HIV.
7. LGBTQ young people experience less discrimination at university and work, which are also rated as environments that are much more tolerant and supportive than school.
8. LGBTQ young people report significantly higher levels of mental health problems including depression and anxiety, self-harm and suicidal thoughts. High rates of poor mental health were found in the whole sample, presenting a concerning picture in the youth population at large.
9. Trans young people face the greatest levels of disadvantage and discrimination and report lower overall satisfaction with their lives. 36% of trans respondents agreed with the statement *'In most ways my life is close to my ideal'*, compared to 47% of LGBTQ respondents and 51% of heterosexual non-trans respondents.
10. It is clear that the needs of LGBTQ young people for support and help are great yet only a minority of areas in England have services addressing the specific needs of young LGBTQ people and there is little evidence of local service commissioning for the specific needs of LGBTQ young people.

## Being different

The experience of LGBT ideation and activity starts early for many, particularly when compared with the age at which targeted provision for LGBTQ people generally starts.

Over half of LGBQ respondents (53%) knew they were LGBQ by the age of 13. Over half of trans respondents (58%) knew they were trans by the same age.

Unsurprisingly relationships are critical to young people when they are coming out and LGBQ and trans young people most commonly draw on their friends for information and support, often without turning to close family.

*“With my parents it was more complex, as my mum got it and tried to deal immediately, my dad shut down, and to this day the reasons why he looks down on me, in my opinion, are rooted with the homophobia he originally felt. It certainly changed the way he saw me, which is affecting our relationship to this day.” (Jake, gay man from the East of England, 18)<sup>8</sup>*

When coming out as LGBQ or trans, over four fifths of LGBQ respondents (81%) and nearly two thirds of trans respondents (62%) told a friend first. Amongst the survey respondents over a quarter of LGBQ young people (29%) have not told their mother, nearly a half (45%) have not told their father, and 5% have not told anybody. Approximately half of trans respondents have not told parents or siblings that they are trans and 28% have not told anybody.

Young people tell us that they most want emotional support to help them when they are coming out but most are not getting it.

The second most important thing to them is to meet other LGBTQ people and again over half of them did not get this opportunity.

*“I think the main thing that young people going through the process of coming out really need is people they can talk to who have been in the same position as them.” (Taz, gender queer person from the South-east, 18)*

## Participation

We asked young people questions about how involved they feel in their local areas and what sorts of social activities they engage with. These measures are generally accepted as good indicators of civic engagement and participation.

LGBTQ young people are twice as likely not to feel accepted in the area where they currently live, compared to heterosexual non-trans young people.

There also remain particular areas of social activity where LGBTQ young people face exclusion. This might be because it is difficult to be open about their sexuality or gender identity, or they are excluded because of experienced hostility, or they appear reluctant to take part compared with heterosexual non-trans young people.

This is most marked in religious organisations, and to a lesser extent in sport. 59% of LGBTQ young people that would be interested in joining a religious organisation have stopped or reduced their involvement owing to their sexuality or gender identity. Over a third of LGBTQ young people (34%) are not able to be open about their sexuality or gender identity at a sports club they are involved in.

## ● Staying safe

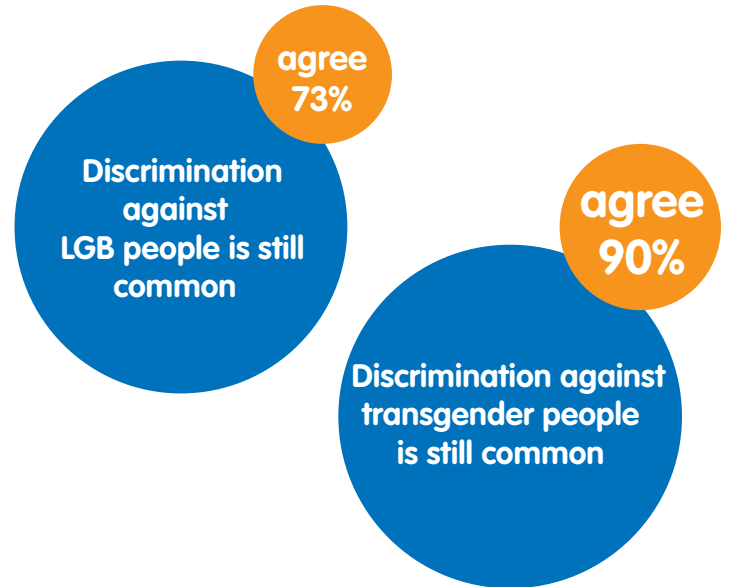
Discrimination against LGBTQ people is still a significant problem with most young people perceiving discrimination as common especially against trans people. 73% of the LGBTQ sample agreed that discrimination against LGB people is still common and 90% of the LGBTQ sample agreed that discrimination against transgender people is still common.

These perceptions are consistent with disturbingly high levels of abuse and violence that LGBTQ young people face. Verbal abuse is very common, and a substantial minority of LGBTQ young people report very serious crimes including physical and sexual abuse. About three quarters of LGBTQ young people (74%) have experienced name calling, nearly a half (45%) have experienced harassment or threats and intimidation and almost a quarter (23%) have experienced physical assault.

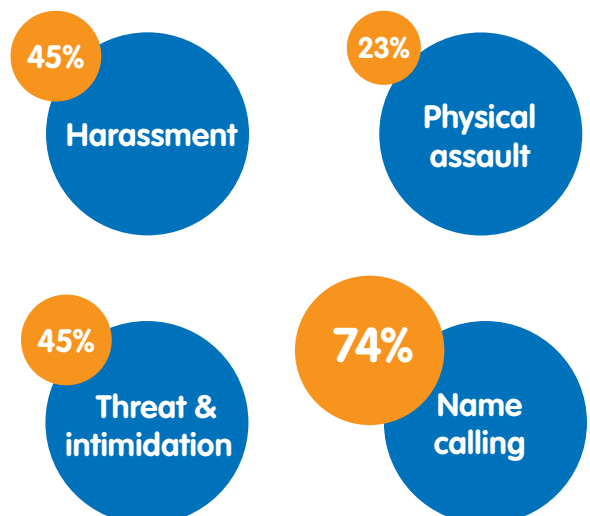
Over half of all types of crime had happened in the last year: 88% of LGBTQ young people do not report these incidents to the police and when cases are reported only 10% lead to a conviction. This finding accords with recent research by Stonewall<sup>9</sup>.

*"I only began IDing as Trans in the past year and I'm 20 now. Back in Secondary I was out as Bi but it really made no difference to my actual learning experience. Just my travel between there and home. Bullying on the buses and while walking home was common. Now that I'm home between Uni terms and Trans, I'm scared to go out because of those people and how they may be with me now should I encounter them..."*  
(pansexual trans woman from the North East, 20)

### Proportion of LGBTQ sample who agree discrimination is common



### Proportion of LGBTQ sample who have experienced bullying or hate crime



9 Guasp, A. 2013. Homophobic Hate Crime: The Gay British Crime Survey. London: Stonewall. pp.17-23

29% of LGBTQ respondents reported domestic or familial abuse, compared to 25% of the heterosexual non trans group. These findings are consistent with the levels of severe maltreatment during childhood reported by young adults in research by the NSPCC<sup>10</sup> but our survey shows the level is slightly higher for LGBTQ young people. Over a third (36%) of LGBTQ respondents in our survey cited their sexuality or gender identity as at least a contributing factor in the abuse.

Almost one in five (18%) LGBTQ young people have experienced some form of sexual abuse, compared with one in ten (11%) of non-trans heterosexuals in our sample. Our findings on non-trans heterosexual young people are consistent with findings from NSPCC on experience of sexual abuse of the general population<sup>11</sup>. Of significant concern is that most LGBTQ respondents who have experienced sexual abuse (79%) have not received any help or support.

It is clear that a significant proportion of LGBTQ young people are at high risk of discrimination and abuse; that they are not getting the support that they need and that the consequences can be very serious: nearly one in ten LGBTQ young people report that they have had to leave home for reasons relating to their sexuality or gender identity.

## Enjoying and achieving

Discrimination and fear of discrimination is affecting young LGBTQ people's experience of school and their ability to enjoy and achieve.

Overall nearly half of LGBTQ young people (49%) reported that their time at school was affected by discrimination or fear of discrimination. The consequences can be devastating for their education and life chances: missing lessons, achieving lower grades than they might have expected, feeling isolated and left out and having to move schools are all reported.

*"In year 11, before I had come to terms with things myself, I was tricked into coming out to someone and was severely bullied, it meant that I had lots of time off school and avoided contact with other students at breaks, including eating my lunch in the toilets on my own for fear of being verbally abused by fellow students. I gave up at school at this point. I did well on my GCSEs but never fulfilled my full potential because I hated every minute of being there." (Gay man from London, 22)*

61% of the whole sample reported name calling because they were LGBTQ or people thought they were. This is slightly higher than the proportion of LGB respondents reporting homophobic bullying in recent Stonewall research<sup>12</sup>. This figure includes the experiences of heterosexual non-trans respondents: it is an issue for all young people.

About one in five LGBTQ young people experience physical attack at school on account of their sexual identity or gender identity. The majority don't report this and only

10 25% of 18 to 24 year olds report severe maltreatment in Radford, L. et al. (2011) Child abuse and neglect in the UK today. London: NSPCC. p. 88

11 11% of 18-24 year olds report contact sexual abuse in Radford, L. et al. (2011) Child abuse and neglect in the UK today. London: NSPCC. p. 88

12 Guasp, A., 2012. The School Report: The Experiences of Gay Young People in Britain's Schools in 2012. London: Stonewall p. 8



a small proportion of those who do experience resolution. For some reporting the abuse means that it gets worse.

*“Severe, genuine verbal abuse (Prick, bender etc.). Minor skirmishes, such as damage to possessions. Lack of support from staff at school for incidents.” (Gay man from the south-east, 17)*

In sex and relationships education, where more inclusion might be anticipated, young people report very limited acknowledgement of LGBTQ relationships and issues. Around two thirds of LGBTQ young people say they learn a lot about relationships and safer sex between a man and a woman, compared to less than 5% who say they learn a lot about same sex relationships and safer sex. 89% of LGBTQ young people report learning nothing about bisexuality issues and 94% report learning nothing about transgender issues.

In terms of addressing well-known higher sexual health risks for gay and bisexual men<sup>13</sup>, schools are demonstrably ineffective. Only 25% of LGBTQ young people report that they learned *anything* at school about safer sex for a male couple.

Less than one in five LGBTQ young people (18%) report that school provided any useful preparation for happy and healthy sex and relationships. It appears that respondents found what was missing from their peers: over four fifths of LGBTQ respondents (84%) say talking with friends and partners was useful.

The overwhelming message from young people is that schools can and should do much more. Nearly two thirds of LGBTQ young people (65%) think their school supported its pupils badly in respect of sexuality or gender identity. Schools scored low in terms of having specific things in place that would demonstrate that support: little awareness amongst young people of school policies to protect LGBTQ young people; only a very small proportion reporting seeing affirmative posters representing sexual and gender diversity or access to other resources such as books; little awareness of any links with LGBTQ support groups and organisation outside school.

*“My school had no posters, no helplines and no sex education for LGBTQ. There were loads of posters for bullying, but no information for anyone who was considered to be gay or LGBTQ. Posters, talks, awareness and action is what my school lacked, and that is what I believe would help.” (Lesbian from the south-east)*

## ● Economic wellbeing & career success

In contrast to school, a smaller proportion (15%) of LGBTQ young people report that their time at work has been affected by discrimination or fear of discrimination about their sexuality or gender identity. This drops further to 10% of LGBTQ young people who report that their time at university was affected.

It appears that the transition into adulthood and the new environments that introduces does improve LGBTQ young peoples' experiences.

*“There’s an LGBT society, the Student Union has an LGBT week, the counselling services are notably great and are apparently really helpful for dealing with stuff like sexuality-based issues, there are posters everywhere;*

13 Public Health England, 2013. Health Protection Report Volume 7 Number 23. [pdf] London: Public Health England. pp. 8-21

*basically, '...' offers a really great inclusive environment and seems to strive to maintain it.”(Gay man from the North-west, 19)*

The level of reported name calling is also lower in these settings: 18% of LGBTQ young people report name calling at university and 10% report name calling at work.

*“They employ a large, diverse range of staff and are all very accepting. There is also a manager and a supervisor who are LGBT, so it is nice to have someone similar to me in a higher position. They also have no tolerance policies on LGBTQ bullying, and the staff are very approachable to talk to on this issue. Also, in the induction training we had examples of things employees at other stores within the company had done, why they weren’t acceptable and how those people had been dealt with, and this included an example of a transgendered woman who had been laughed at, so it was nice to know they take their no tolerance policy seriously, and that they felt comfortable using examples with an LGBT person in.”(Lesbian from the South-east, 17)*

Whilst work to improve these conditions is still important, the worst experiences are encountered at school where young people are younger and likely to be more vulnerable. Feedback from respondents can be analysed to collect ideas and actions that will enable improvement in all these areas.

## Health & wellbeing

We asked young people a range of questions about their physical, mental and sexual health. In general we found little difference in overall levels of physical and sexual health but we know that there are significant differences within particular sexual and gender identity subgroups.

We know, for example, that gay male respondents in our sample were more likely to have ever had a sexually transmitted infection compared to all other sexuality groups. Whilst gay men made up 30% of the survey sample, they accounted for over half of respondents who had ever had an STI and 67% of those who reported repeat STIs.

In respect of body image, 59% female respondents reported thinking that they are overweight, compared to 44% of male respondents. Women also report higher levels of eating problems, with greater proportions overeating, undereating, overeating and then vomiting and refusing to eat. These patterns in body image and eating problems are also manifest in national research that shows more adolescent women than adolescent boys have been on a diet to change their body shape or lose weight<sup>14</sup>.

Previous research has presented how LGBTQ people experience poorer mental health than the general population<sup>15</sup>. The stress associated with minority status and associated discrimination has been presented as a reason for this situation<sup>16</sup>.

The differences in mental health for LGBTQ young people we have found are startling. Several measures in the survey indicate that mental health problems are significantly worse amongst LGBTQ young people including acute problems such as self-harming and suicidal ideation.

- 14 Centre for Appearance Research and Central YMCA 2011. The Body of Public Opinion: Attitudes to body image in the UK. [pdf] London: YMCA Central. p. 4
- 15 Chakraborty A, et al. 2011. Mental health of the non-heterosexual population of England. British Journal of Psychiatry 198(2) pp. 143-148.
- 16 Meyer I, 2003. Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: conceptual issues and research evidence. Psychological Bulletin 129(5) pp. 674-697.

42% of LGBTQ respondents report going for medical help for depression or anxiety, compared to 29% of heterosexual non-trans respondents.

*“When I was at school I told a couple of friends that I was bisexual at the time and word got out and the whole school thought instantly I was a lesbian... I am now however... but when this leaked out at school I got horrifically bullied by the majority of the pupils in my year. The school well they did nothing about it! Ever since I’ve struggled with my confidence and suffered anxiety and depression. Cheers (name of college)”  
(Lesbian from the south-east)*

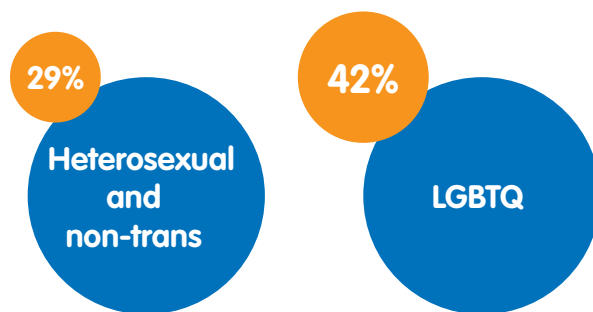
Over half of LGBTQ respondents (52%) report self-harming, either now or in the past. This compares to 35% of heterosexual non-trans young people in our sample and to a rate of 12% for this age-group self-reported in a household survey by the NHS in 2007<sup>17</sup>. 44% of the LGBTQ respondents report having ever thought about suicide. This compares to 26% of heterosexual non-trans respondents and a rate of 21% documented in the same research from the NHS<sup>18</sup>.

The rates of self-harm and suicidal ideation reported by both groups exceed national statistics, suggesting an alarming rise in the prevalence of poor mental health amongst all young people.

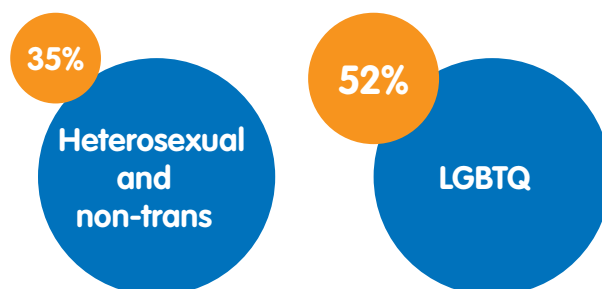
In addition to these acute mental health conditions, a substantial minority experience problems with accessing physical and mental health services related to their sexuality or gender identity.

*“I had a psychologist who was treating me for depression. I wanted to tell him about my trans issue, but he was treating me like ‘one of the lads’ like I was a ‘proper chap’. He had no idea I had such an issue about my gender because he was trying to build my confidence by complimenting my ‘male’ gender, which, was actually damaging.”  
(Trans woman from the East Midlands, 21)*

### Percentage of respondents going for medical help for depression or anxiety



### Percentage reporting self-harming now or in the past



17 The NHS Information Centre for Health and Social Care 2009. Adult Psychiatric Morbidity in England 2007, results of a household survey. London: NHS Information centre p. 82

18 The NHS Information Centre for Health and Social Care 2009. Adult Psychiatric Morbidity in England 2007, results of a household survey. London: NHS Information centre p. 82

## Support

Our survey of commissioners indicates little evidence of local commissioning that serves the specific support needs of LGBTQ young people, either through specific LGBTQ services or within mainstream services. The limited engagement of only 29 respondents and the findings themselves are disappointing and concerning. A complementary picture emerged from our provider survey (52 respondents). Only a minority of areas of England appear to have services that are sensitive to the specific needs of LGBTQ young people.

Respondents from both surveys confirmed that the main obstacles to improving this underdeveloped area were the impact of public sector austerity cuts; the structural change to public services; historical and continuing prejudice; as well as the limited needs assessments of LGBTQ young people.

One provider commented starkly on the:

*“increased demand for support with decreasing resources” and another noted encountering “institutional homophobia”.*

Commissioners indicated local leadership, young people’s involvement and the implementation of diligent commissioning processes, including an evidence base, as the key drivers for improving policy.

One commissioner said:

*“There is a severe lack of information, particularly regional or even local. Any information/data about the needs, wants and aspirations of young LGBTQ people would be most welcome.”*

The main enablers that providers identified were funding and access to specialist knowledge and understanding. Throughout there was a strong call for robust data that can provide an evidence base for the needs for this population.

Youth Chances are pleased to deliver this missing evidence, with the potential to develop better practice and policy to meet the needs that have been identified.



# Next Steps

This report represents the first phase of our analysis and will guide the project to inform and influence policy and practice. We are committed to making a difference to the lives of LGBTQ young people and will take the following next steps:

## 1. Developing recommendations

Youth Chances has established growing networks of commissioners, provider organisations, young people, policy makers and academics. We are inviting interested individuals and organisations from these groups to contribute to a series of seminars about the following key areas identified in this report:

- Safety & risk
- Transgender young people
- Mental health
- Schools

The aim of these seminar events will be to draft a set of policy and practice recommendations that can be shared with commissioners and organisations working with young people. You can register your interest for these seminars with [Dan Baker](#).

## 2. Further analysis and research

We are making a call for academic partners to undertake collaborative analysis to progress the data analysis. We are inviting proposals that will test clear hypotheses grounded in literature for the purpose of submitting articles to peer-reviewed journals. We have set out a '[Data Sharing Policy](#)' that can be found on the project website. Applications are now welcome and will be reviewed by the project Steering Group. Contact [Dan Baker](#).

## 3. Further data releases

We will be working to disseminate first findings of the survey for different regions of England in January 2014.

We will be examining the variation between our LGBTQ sample and the heterosexual non trans sample, as well as national statistics for the general 16-25 year old population. We will explore the impact of 'being out' and how LGBTQ young people experience life having told people about their sexuality or gender identity.

The diversity within our LGBTQ sample necessitates understanding of sub-groups across sexuality, gender and different trans identities, as well as variables such as population density, class, age, ethnicity and religion.

The clear message from the young people we surveyed is that there is much work ahead to ensure that LGBTQ young people are afforded the same life chances as their peers. We are inviting collaboration to maximise the impact of the evidence base we have achieved and to create a real sea change in how our young people are served.

Youth Chances is a collaborative project led by the charity METRO with the University of Greenwich and Ergo Consulting and funded by the Big Lottery Research Fund.

Suggested Citation:

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You can review this report in a [short evaluation](#).

You can find out more about the project at [www.youthchances.org](http://www.youthchances.org) and by contacting Dan Baker, Project Manager [Dan Baker](#)

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[www.metrocentreonline.org](http://www.metrocentreonline.org)  
[info@metrocentreonline.org](mailto:info@metrocentreonline.org)

