

# Key Findings

## 'Your child is GAY what do you feel??'

### Key findings from discussion group with lesbian, gay and bisexual teenagers in Cheshire West & Chester

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**Contact:** Helen Pickin, Tel: 01244 977148

Email: [helen.pickin@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](mailto:helen.pickin@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)

**Client:** Equality and Diversity Managers

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The Research, Intelligence and Consultation Team is undertaking a series of discussion groups with members of the lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) community. The aim is to identify and understand the issues that affect their everyday lives. The findings will be used to improve the services the Council provides and to inform Cheshire West and Chester's Single Equality Scheme. This is a summary of the findings from research that took place with four lesbian, gay and bisexual teenagers who attend a LGB youth group in West Cheshire. Findings from all of the discussion groups are available at [www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/researchpublications](http://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/researchpublications).

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#### Key issues facing young lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals

##### Coming out

'Coming out' is a term often used to describe the first time someone explains to family and friends that they are lesbian, gay or bisexual. During this time:

- Young LGB people can feel very alone and isolated, and may have no one to talk to.
- They may try and keep their sexual orientation a secret and pretend to be heterosexual.
- Some LGB young people do not want to be gay and attempt to suppress their feelings.
- Difficulties in coming out are linked to fears of rejection by family and friends, worries about what life will be like when they 'come out', having no support and being told that "it's wrong to be gay".

The young people felt that bisexuality was more accepted in society and considered 'not fully gay'. Lesbian and gay young people may choose to 'come out' as bisexual despite being lesbian or gay, and may 'come out' as gay at a later time when they feel more

confident or that they cannot continue to hide their true sexual orientation.

##### Mental health

Fears about 'coming out' lead to denial, isolation, anxiousness and confusion. Those who do not 'come out' sometimes feel that they are living a secret life and are unable to be themselves. Those who do 'come out' often face rejection, abuse and, in some cases, homelessness. Young people often experience homophobic abuse, attack, hear homophobic language or face bullying. This can lead to LGB young people having depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts.

##### Being yourself

Young LGB people feel that they cannot be themselves in their home or in society as they often feel 'unaccepted'. Many young people compromise their behaviour for the sake of others and to avoid homophobic abuse. For example, they may 'pretend to be straight' to make others happy and choose not to behave like heterosexuals (for example, holding hands with their partner in public) due to fears of attack.

### Safety and homophobia

Homophobic bullying can be a daily occurrence for young LGB people. Bullying and homophobia takes place in the street, at bus stops, at home, at school and in college/ further education.

All the young people who took part in the research experienced homophobia regularly. This included name calling and bullying by peers and family members.

Gay bars are perceived as the only safe place to be, which is problematic for those under 18 who are not old enough to go to pubs and clubs.

### Family

Fear of being rejected by family is a major issue for young LGB people when 'coming out' and there are a number of key issues affecting family relationships:

- LGB young people may face homophobia from parents or siblings, including bullying, pressures to be heterosexual and not allowing friends or partners to visit the home.
- In some cases, young LGB people may not feel safe at home but are trapped as they do not have any place to go, or any means to support themselves, should they leave.
- Family members may not want them to talk about being gay or they may feel they cannot talk to family members about being gay.

### School

Young LGB people can face homophobic bullying at school and may feel that they cannot 'come out' whilst they are still at school.

All the young people who took part feel that sex education in schools is insufficient in that coverage of LGB issues is largely ignored.

The young people also feel that there is no support for LGB people in schools with no LGB-oriented counselling or information.

Those who had attended Catholic schools felt that LGB issues were never talked about and that there was an anti-gay ethos. Furthermore, some recalled that Religious Studies taught that homosexuality was a sin.

### Sex and relationships

The young people acknowledge that sex is a big issue for all teenagers and is magnified for gay teenagers. LGB issues are not

covered (or not covered widely enough) in sex education and LGB young people often learn about gay sex through pornography. The young people are concerned about sexually transmitted diseases, wearing a condom and contraception. The young people, like all teenagers, face relationship troubles but feel it can be difficult to meet other LGB people.

### Places to go and social networks

The young LGB people feel strongly that there is a lack of gay venues and events in West Cheshire, with only two gay bars in Chester City Centre and one youth group in West Cheshire (which is not in a gay venue). The young LGB people feel safe in gay venues and think there should be more places to safely meet friends and new people. However, young LGB people who have no transport, or cannot rely on family members for lifts, may be isolated and unable to access support.

### The future

The young people are concerned about their future and worried that being gay might affect their job prospects should they face homophobic employers. They are also concerned about ways of starting a family and feel uninformed about options.

### Support and information

Young LGB people need support with 'coming out' and coping with potential rejection and homophobia. They may have no one they can talk to, not know how to get in touch with other gay people or not know what support and counselling is available. Some young LGB people may need support with housing needs if they are forced to leave their home.

More information is needed on sex education, sexually transmitted diseases, contraception, pregnancy, having children, gay rights and gay venues and events.



## Changes young lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals would like to see

*'How would it make you feel if your son was gay and being verbally, mentally and physically abused?'*

### Homophobia

**Homophobic abuse and attacks take place, making LGB young people feel unsafe.**

The young people want to feel safer in their local area and want action from the Police and the Council to tackle the problem.

*'More help is needed in the LGBT area as too much abuse, attack, homophobia is happening!'*

*'Police [need to be] more aware of homophobic behaviour.'*

### Awareness

**People need to be aware of the LGB community and educated about their issues and lives.**

The young people feel that homophobia is linked to awareness and education, and they would like to see a gay campaign in West Cheshire. They suggest a march or a 'gay pride' event. They would also like The Hub (where an LGB youth group takes place) to be promoted, as well as other LGB support networks, gay events and venues so that LGB young people know where to go for support.

*'Need to do more to promote!!'*

### School

**Education on gay issues for all and support for LGB young people.**

The young people feel that schools need to educate young people on gay issues to prevent homophobia. They would also like sex education to address LGB issues. School councillors should provide information on gay issues and offer confidential support with access to councillors who are gay themselves.

*'More sex education for LGBT people.'*

*'Educate people about homosexuality from a young age to prevent homophobic attitudes.'*

### Venues and events

**There needs to be more gay venues and events taking place.**

The young people feel there are not enough gay-oriented places in West Cheshire where they can meet other gay people and receive support. Gay venues are not just needed in big cities and the young people would like to see a gay village created, maybe using buildings that are currently empty. They feel this is something the Council should invest in.

*'More money for LGBT groups, for trips and meeting up with other LGBT groups in the country.'*

*'Gay venue for just gay people, not just a night, and when lonely can meet up in that one place.'*

### A safe haven

**There needs to be a safe, gay-run place to go to and accommodation for young LGB people who are thrown out of home or need to leave.**

Homelessness affects some young LGB people and many LGB people stay at home, despite facing homophobia, because there is no where else to go. They would like to see some type of hostel, just for gay people, which was gay-run, that could also serve the LGB community in other ways such as holding events.

*'A gay hostel. A place for gays to go when they have bad living environments at home, strictly for gays, a place where they feel equal.'*

*'No places for anyone with family troubles. People homophobic in Shelter so need gay hostel.'*

### Support

**Support is needed for young people trying to 'come out', for those who are 'out' and for the families of LGB individuals.**

Young LGB people need support in 'coming out' and continued support around confidence, dealing with homophobia, sex issues and coping with family relationships. They also acknowledge the difficulties faced by their families, who also need support.

These services need to be promoted and transport provided to and from support services.

*'As a gay person I feel isolated and alone 80% of the time, the other 20% only account for me being out at home where I'm lucky enough to have an accepting family, for most gay people this is not the case.'*

*'Some people can't get to the hub and can't rely on parents to take you.'*

as to why, and would like to know if this research will make any difference!

*'Previous projects have been ignored, how can we be sure that our views will be put in to action.'*

*'The Council is blind to LGBT in most areas; they need to get more involved with LGBT...'*

### **The Council**

**The Council needs to do more to recognise, invest in, become involved with and support the LGB community.**

The young people feel that the Council does not listen, ignores LGB people and is not involved with the gay community; even the groups they are funding. They would like to see Council staff being more involved and 'out of their offices'. The young people also say they have put suggestions forward in the past, which were ignored, with no explanation

### **Involvement**

**LGB people should be involved in change.**

The young people feel strongly that the LGB community should be involved in putting together plans for the LGB community and that venues, events, support and so on should be gay-run.

*'LGB people involved in all changes. Gay run.'*

### **Hopes for the future**

**Below are the young people's hopes for the future:**

- *'Acception' [Being accepted]*
- *'More gay events to help younger people to come out'*
- *'More gay oriented places to go to where feel comfortable'*
- *'Living our lives'*
- *'Hope we can be ourselves as and when we please'*
- *'Acceptance in the Catholic church'*
- *More gay events Chester/ Ellesmere Port Pride'*
- *'Better gay help'*
- *'More help in schools'*
- *'A chance to have children'*
- *'Living the way I want and feeling comfortable'*
- *'Be accepted and loved'*
- *'Please!! Give us a gay hostel'*
- *'We would feel accepted in a gay hostel'*
- *'Family and friends support'*
- *'Free STD checks and healthcare'*

### **Worries for the future**

**Below are the young people's worries for the future:**

- *Rejection'*
- *'Being thrown out of our homes with no gay hostel to go to'*
- *'No gay hostel' (x4)*
- *'Not being able to come out to friends and family'*
- *'Family life – How to raise a family in future, current family issues'*
- *'Living in fear'*
- *'Not being able to be ourselves'*
- *'No acception in public society'*
- *'Feeling as though I can't be in a normal relationship because of others views'*
- *'No place of our own no where we feel accepted'*
- *'Homophobic access to us and depression'*
- *'Careers – will they hold me back? Why ask about sexual orientation'*
- *'No gay bars in the Port'*
- *'Sexual health worries'*
- *'Families'*
- *'No place to be ourselves'*