

LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy
Department of Justice and Equality
BeLonG To Youth Services Written Submission

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Supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual &
Trans Young People in Ireland



Background Information

BeLonG To is Ireland's national organisation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Non-Binary (LGBT+) young people. BeLonG To's youth services in Dublin and around Ireland provide vital supports to LGBT+ young people. BeLonG To also works with government and other partners so that Ireland will be safe, equal and welcoming for LGBT+ young people. Our work is cited internationally by UNESCO as 'good practice', commended by Council of Europe's Human Rights Commissioner and cited by the UN Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights in their first global report on LGBT rights. We work with young LGBT+ people aged 14 to 24.

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To Note:

Given BeLonG To's remit as a national LGBTI+ youth service, the key points of action within this document pertain to LGBTI+ youth. However, the issues we have highlighted have broader applicability to the socio-cultural, political and economic difficulties LGBTI+ people of all ages face as a systemic product of their identity.

The main areas which we at BeLonG To feel require action plans are as follows:

- Physical/Mental health & Wellbeing
- Learning and Development
- Safety
- Economic security and Opportunity
- Socio-political and Cultural Participation

Physical/Mental health & Wellbeing

- Provide training to health care workers & LGBTI+ proof healthcare policies & practices.
- Tackle homophobic/transphobic bullying as major causes of mental health problems.
- Develop clear health care pathways for trans and intersex youth. Need for a psycho-social model.
- Provide appropriate sexual health care services, information, and education.
- Ensure a clear provision is included within the termination of pregnancy bill 2018 to allow for the possibility that trans men, transmasculine people, and non-binary people may need to access abortion services while not legally or physically presenting as women.
- Investigate provisions for gamete storage for trans people entering into medical transition, Ireland needs to engage in a form of reproductive justice which is dedicated to the right of all individuals to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities.
- Legislation on consent needed – UK ‘Gillick principles’ on a statutory footing to enable young LGBTI+ people access to services including sexual health and mental health, without parental consent being a barrier.
- LGBTI+ inclusion campaign within sports to be developed.
- Adequately fund LGBTI+ youth groups. This will build resilience, tackles isolation and restore agency to young people.
- Provide interpretation and translation services within any front-line services in which an LGBTI+ individual may need to access such as drug and alcohol services, youth work, health services, disability services.

- Implementation of National Sexual Health Strategy & resourcing of drugs and alcohol services to meet the specific health needs of LGBTI youth, as part of a three-year action plan for implementation.
- New research needs to be funded in relation to LGBTI+ drug and alcohol abuse, the last study (Sarma, 2007) is outdated. In order to understand the needs of the community, we must first identify the problems and systemic causes of drug and alcohol abuse among the LGBTI+ community.

Learning and Development

- Resource the full roll-out of existing Irish best practice models for tackling LGBTI+-related bullying: LGBTI+ Safe & Supported Schools (Post Primary), All Together Now (Primary) and Stand Up LGBTI+ Awareness Week.
- Fund a countrywide School Climate Report positioned as a collaboration between relevant NGOs, government departments and academics. Ireland is one of few countries left to perform a countrywide large-scale assessment of bullying within its schools, the climate needs to be assessed in order to calibrate the needs of the students, parents/guardians, and educators.
- During Department of Education and Skills (DES) Inspectorate inspections such as whole school evaluations, the effectiveness of a school's anti-bullying procedures for LGBTI+ young people should be specifically evaluated and reported on, this would support the gathering of national data about bullying.
- School Boards of management should be required to self-report to the DES on the numbers of instances of bullying of specific types recorded in their three-monthly reports on an annual/bi-annual basis. This would provide national data on all types of bullying, including LGBTI+.

- Produce National guidelines on the full inclusion of trans and non-binary students.
- Include questions about anti LGBTI+ bullying on student questionnaires (school inspections).
- Guidelines for initial teacher education need to require that bullying is addressed.
- Provide for full inclusion of LGBTI+ content across subject areas in school curricula.
- Ensure the ongoing review of the relationships and sexuality education carried out by the NCCA is inclusive of LGBTI+ people and seeks to promote support and pride in these identities.
- Provide LGBTI+ training for all new teachers and as part of CPD.

Safety

- Children & Family Relationship Act needs to be fully commenced to provide equal recognition and protection for LGBTI+ families.
- Treat bullying as a child protection issue - Special Rapporteur on Child Protection's 6th Report and vigorously address LGBTI+ related bullying in schools.
- Increase LGBTI+ family & helpline supports (e.g. LOOK, LGBT Helpline, Family Support workers).
- End direct provision & develop models of working with LGBTI+ refugee & asylum seekers that are appropriate and responsive to their specific needs.
- Introduce hate crime legislation and advocate for restorative justice techniques for those convicted in order to educate and rehabilitate offenders in order to prevent reoffence, liaise strongly with the Irish Penal Reform Trust and the hate and hostility group in the University of Limerick surrounding this issue.
- Ensure community safety initiatives are inclusive of LGBTI+ young people.

- Decriminalise use of drugs for personal use – treat as a health issue.
- Criminalise gay conversion therapies.
- Run high-profile campaign in the national & local media to address anti-LGBTI stigma & violence.
- Government initiative needed to scope the situation of intersex children, consult stakeholders, consider international best practice and make recommendations about their health and human rights.

Economic Security and Opportunity

- Fund further research on LGBTI+ homelessness. There is compelling international evidence that LGBTQI+ youth face a significant risk of homelessness (Curry et al 2017; Rosario et al 2012) and are overrepresented in the population of homeless young people (Lolai 2015; Cochran et al 2002). Although counts of LGBTQI+ homeless youths are even more difficult to obtain than the general youth homeless population (Tierney & Ward 2017) researchers estimate the American figure between 22%-40% (Bidell 2014); Canadian figures are estimated between 25%-45% (Abramovich 2012); and the Albert Kenny Trust (2015) in the UK places this figure at 24%. Given the evidence in international literature that presents the augmented vulnerability of LGBTI+ homeless youth, it is significant that provisions are created to house this vulnerable population who will be placed at greater risk. While current research is taking place as a collaboration between UCD, BeLonG To and Focus Ireland, more funding needs to be allocated to developing a more conclusive, wider-scale research project in conjunction with funding to implement the recommendation called for by the young people interviewed.
- Create LGBTI+ specific front-line homeless services to house those within the community at risk.

- Ensure trans young people's health care needs are appropriately met, especially if living in care e.g. through training. Provide further funding to ensure LGBTI+ friendly aftercare programmes are made available.
- Provide training for professionals working in the care and education system to better support LGBTI+ young people's needs.
- Address service gaps to support LGBTI+ people with disabilities.
- Address service gaps to support LGBTI+ people from the travelling community as well as homeless services and frontline drug and alcohol services.
- Reverse cut to welfare payments to young people (b) Introduce rent relief to low-income earners and (c) Introduce legislation to allow asylum seekers to work in the state. These measures have increased likelihood of positively effecting LGBTI+ young people because of the challenges outlined above.

Socio-political and Cultural Participation

- Provide proper resources for LGBTI+ youth services, including much-needed family supports.
- Provide funding to LGBTI+ arts and community lead initiatives.
- Provide proper funding and support to the Irish Queer Archive and create an open exhibition in order to restore lost histories, play homage to Irish LGBTI+ activism and educate younger generations on their liberation.
- Provide spaces for LGBTI+ individuals which are free, safe and sober environments where LGBTI+ people can socialise, create and receive educational workshops that are peer-led and self-selected.
- Legislation on consent – Put UK's 'Gillick principles' on a statutory footing to allow for differing competencies (evolving capacities) for under 18s/16s.

- Make schools and sports clubs safe, supportive and welcoming for LGBTI+ young people. Legislate to require schools and other bodies to address bullying and to ensure spaces are inclusive of LGBTI+.
- Include LGBTI+ in curriculum across all subjects. Provide support to GSAs (Gender and Sexuality Alliances) in schools.
- Implement the recommendations of the Gender Recognition Act Review Group, 2018 to include recognition for under 18's, intersex and non-binary young people, including new gender markers for non-binary people.
- Legislation, policy, and guidelines to recognise and protect intersex people.
- Gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics should be named as protected grounds under the Equal Status Acts.

BeLonG To would be happy to provide any further information required to the Department of Justice.

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