

**all different,
all together**



Belong To LGBTQ+
Youth Ireland

Strategic Plan
2022-2024

// Belong To is a safe space that gives me a warm fuzzy feeling, and I don't feel anxious.

Alex, (she/her)





Contents

Welcome from the Chairperson and CEO	05
About Us	06
Our Mission and Our Vision	07
Our Values	08
Setting the Scene	09
Our Strategic Goals	12



Belong To opened its doors as a youth service in 2003 to provide a safe space for LGBTQ+ young people to find support and acceptance. Thanks to our supporters, our staff team, our volunteers, our Board, our funders, our partners, and most importantly, the LGBTQ+ young people we work with, we have grown to become the leading national LGBTQ+ youth organisation in Ireland.



There has been tremendous change in the past 19 years, as we expanded from a youth service to a national organisation encompassing support services, training, education, and advocacy. The demand for our work continues to build from young people, their families, professionals, and our partners. In recent years, we have also experienced an increase in the number of young people under the age of 14 and parents and family members seeking our services. Greater visibility and awareness of LGBTQ+ people in Irish society in recent years has made it easier for young people to understand who they are.

Our growth into a respected advocacy organisation that ensures the voices of young people are included around tables developing legislation, policy and training over the past 19 years, informed our decision around our new name and strategy. Our unanimous decision to go forward as Belong To and remove ‘Youth Services’ from our name reflects this growth and advancement.

This Strategic Plan process provided us with the opportunity to look to both the past and the future. We came together and celebrated our strengths as an organisation. From reaching and supporting a record number of LGBTQ+ youth to building partnerships and effecting legislative change, we have a lot to be proud of. While celebrating our achievements, we reflected on the growth of the organisation and asked ourselves, what next? How can we support this growing demand and increase safe spaces for LGBTQ+ young people across Ireland?

We developed *All Different, All Together*, our Strategic Plan 2022-2024, to equip us with a roadmap to achieve our vision: a society where LGBTQ+ young people are equal, safe, and thriving. To achieve this vision, we have set out four ambitious strategic goals. During the strategic planning process, we examined challenges, opportunities, our database, and conducted an environmental analysis. We spoke to our partners, the media, politicians, our team, educators, youth workers, families, and

LGBTQ+ young people to ensure that this Plan reflects their perspectives. Guided by our value of being strategic, we aligned the development of this Strategic Plan with the development of a new fundraising strategy and brand identity, which you will see reflected in the pages of this report.

Just as the creation of this Strategic Plan was influenced by Covid-19, we anticipate that we will continue to see the impact of the pandemic on the lives of LGBTQ+ young people during the lifespan of this Plan. With this, the need for our vital services and programmes builds. Within this Plan, we outline key changes to the organisation, most prominent being the expansion of our support services to 10–14-year-olds and the development of a dedicated service for the parents, guardians, and caregivers of LGBTQ+ children and young people. We also plan to explore how we can work with primary schools to ensure that they are safe and supportive spaces for LGBTQ+ children. We are excited to have arrived at a place where we as an organisation can welcome a younger cohort of the LGBTQ+ community and continue to be there for their parents and caregivers.

We wish to thank Colette Kelleher and Kathleen O’Meara, operating as Kelleher O’Meara, who we appointed to develop our Strategic Plan and guided us to create this ambitious, bold Plan in line with our values. We thank all those who offered their insight and perspectives to shape *All Different, All Together*.

Central to our new Strategic Plan is the concept ‘All Different, All Together’. This celebrates individuality and reflects the diversity of humankind and the LGBTQ+ community, while championing community and togetherness. We value and celebrate our allies and our partners. There is strength in solidarity as we work together to create an inclusive, fair and equal Ireland for everyone. We are united by our collective differences and when we come together, we can achieve great things.

In Pride,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dominic Hannigan".

Dominic Hannigan (he/him)
Chair, Belong To



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Moninne Griffith".

Moninne Griffith (she/her)
CEO, Belong To



We are Belong To, the national LGBTQ+ youth organisation.

Since 2003, Belong To has grown from a youth project into a unique national services and advocacy organisation with and for LGBTQ+ children and young people. Youth services, which inform our research, education work, and a development approach, enable us to provide solution-based advocacy at an institutional and public level.

We are rooted in and driven by our direct work with LGBTQ+ young people aged 10-24 and we exist to:

- **Create and generate safe spaces and places for LGBTQ+ young people.**
- **Empower others through education to support LGBTQ+ young people.**
- **Lead policy and practice by providing expertise, developing best practice models, and reflecting lived experiences.**
- **Ensure LGBTQ+ young people have the opportunity to have their voices heard.**
- **Be an advocate for LGBTQ+ young people and champion change.**



Our Mission



Our mission is to empower LGBTQ+ young people, through youth work, education, changing attitudes, and research.

Our Vision



Our vision is a society where LGBTQ+ young people are equal, safe and thriving.



Our Values

Welcoming

We are mindful of people's wellbeing and strive for our spaces and interactions to be joyful and fun while ensuring they are safe and respectful.

Trustworthy

We are transparent in our work, how we operate and in our governance.

Rooted in experience

We work as equals with LGBTQ+ young people. What we say and do is informed by their lives, experience, and the challenges they face.

Courageous

We challenge and speak out about the causes and effects of prejudice, discrimination, homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia on LGBTQ+ young people and what must change.

Inclusive and diverse

We seek to create a sense of belonging and to reflect and include the diversity of LGBTQ+ young people, and are mindful of intersectionality. We work in community and solidarity for human rights and social justice.

Strategic

We make deliberate choices about where we focus our work and energy to make maximum impact on where we lead and where we partner with others.



Setting the Scene

The process of developing this Strategic Plan took place during the Covid-19 pandemic in the latter half of 2021. This global seismic event has already resulted in considerable change at all levels of the organisation, the impact of which will continue to reverberate during the lifetime of this Strategic Plan.



Like many organisations, Belong To executed sudden and radical measures to adapt to lockdowns. From early on, it was recognised that the pandemic and lockdowns posed particular challenges for LGBTQ+ young people, particularly regarding their mental health. This was highlighted by Belong To's LGBTI+ Life in Lockdown research, with 97% of respondents sharing their struggles with anxiety, stress, and depression in 2021. Belong To rose to the challenge posed by the impact of the pandemic and maximised the potential of moving its services online while recognising the need for LGBTQ+ young people to stay connected and supported.

During the development of this Plan, we identified **political, economic, social, technological, legal,** and **environmental** factors that will influence the organisation during the lifespan of this Strategic Plan.

Political

Politically, the landscape has altered for Belong To, with a new Government creating a hybrid Department of Children, Disability, Equality, Integration and Youth. This sets critical issues of concern for the organisation – children, equality, and youth – under one roof. In policy terms, the National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy came to the end of its lifetime in 2021, with the LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy having officially ended in 2020. Reform of the school curriculum and the Relationships and Sexuality Education programme continue as important issues for Belong To, alongside ensuring that an anti-bullying ethos is fully embedded across education provision. Working with the education sector to create safe and supportive school environments will remain a key focus for the organisation. Belong To will continue to strive to ensure that the outstanding recommendations related to the review of the Gender Recognition Act, 2015 are implemented, and work to secure a fully operational, national gender service for young people aged under 18.

Ongoing public engagement is important at this time as LGBTQ+ phobia has become a feature of discourse in some parts of Europe and beyond. Globally, the organisation must continue to be mindful of the impact of anti-democratic and anti-LGBTQ+ movements in parts of Europe, such as Hungary and Poland, threatening the cohesion of the European Union post-Brexit. The fabric of democracy is also threatened in the US, parts of Africa, and Russia. There is no room for complacency closer to home, even as Ireland continues to be lauded as a shining light of progressive thinking, post two historic referendums.

Economic

On the economic front, uncertainty dominates with the return of inflation and the global impact of the pandemic. While Ireland shows signs of recovering well from the impact on the public finances, there remains the risk of a cut in public spending. This would hit public services, including those of importance to LGBTQ+ young people, such as youth services and health services, in particular access to health services for trans young people. While austerity as an economic and fiscal response has lost traction since the financial crash of 2008, particularly at the EU level, for Belong To, the issue is pertinent, given its relevance to the work carried out by the organisation.



Social

Socially, the issues identified by Belong To in its *LGBTI+ Life in Lockdown* research will continue to be relevant during the lifetime of this Strategic Plan. The specific mental health issues experienced by LGBTQ+ young people, exacerbated by lockdowns and isolation and the continued challenge of widespread bullying, are currently, and are likely to continue to be, significant features of the landscape in which Belong To operates.

Access to health services for young trans people and youth mental health services is a key issue for those supported by Belong To. The pandemic has placed mental health and mental health services higher on the public agenda and has worked to further destigmatise mental ill-health. So far, however, it has not resulted in any increase in public investment in mental health services, which continue to deal with years of underinvestment and underdevelopment. This means that Belong To's role, both as a public advocate and a provider of services, will remain central.

The rise in the number of those contracting HIV, and the need to meet the health need arising from this, will be an issue of concern for Belong To as a public policy advocate, while ensuring that the public response does not attach any stigma to the condition. For Belong To, the wide spectrum of health care delivery, including mental health services, HIV services, and healthcare pathways for young trans people, are front and centre. Support for those dealing with addiction, whether it be drugs including chemsex drugs or alcohol, continue to need resourcing.

A number of important and potentially transformational issues in the education sphere are likely to be current for Belong To during the lifetime of this Strategic Plan. Among them are the reform of the curriculum around Relationship and Sexuality Education to reflect a greater embracing of LGBTQ+ identities, in parallel with the case for the divestment of education provision from the Roman Catholic Church as an important public debate. While much has been achieved through Belong To's Stand Up Awareness Week campaigns, ending LGBTQ+ bullying will continue to be a top-line agenda issue.

Technological

Online bullying via social media and its impact on young LGBTQ+ people is part of the context for increasing calls to regulate social media platforms and pressure governments globally to act. While it is difficult to predict how the issue of regulation will play out, given its implications for free speech, it is now firmly on the agenda, and the balance of rights arises as a context for the debate. From Belong To's perspective, the use by extremist groups of social media to undermine democracy and to advance an anti-LGBTQ+ agenda means the organisation must be heard in the debate.

Legal

Ireland has made considerable strides and shown leadership through the passage of the Marriage Equality referendum in 2015 and the adoption of the Gender Recognition Act in the same year. Nevertheless, it is vital for those advocating for LGBTQ+ inclusion and equality not to be complacent about what remains to be done and to be vigilant in ensuring that gains are not diluted or reversed. The advancing of the Gender Recognition Act, hate crime legislation, and equality legislation will need to be secured during the lifetime of this Strategic Plan. At a policy level, Belong To will need to remain vigilant to keep LGBTQ+ national youth strategies on the agenda.

Environmental

Global warming, climate change, and the existential threat to the future of the planet are more relevant to our young people than any other generation, and they are demanding to be heard. A just transition to a zero-carbon world is not inevitable; it will have to be fought for.



Our Strategic Goals

Our strategic goals express our vision, mission, and purpose and will drive and give focus to our work.

1

Delivering LGBTQ+ Youth Work

3

Campaigning for Change

2

Building Safe Spaces & Services

4

Being a Learning and Developing Organisation





Delivering LGBTQ+ Youth Work

Goals

LGBTQ+ young people are safe and supported by a quality youth work service delivered in Dublin in equal partnership with young people.

A strong, expanding network of quality, targeted LGBTQ+ youth groups and safe and supportive youth groups across Ireland.



Objectives

1.1 Empower LGBTQ+ young people through the continued provision of a blended direct youth work and support service which encompasses support to parents and professionals working with them.

1.2 Promote a positive attitude towards mental health while providing pathways for additional support through strategic partnerships with partner organisations.

1.3 Improve access to LGBTQ+ youth services across Ireland by developing youth groups in partnership with services within local communities, expanding the existing National Network, and implementing a mark of quality to ensure quality youth work and best practice LGBTQ+ youth work is promoted.

1.4 Reduce the harms of alcohol and drug use amongst LGBTQ+ young people.

1.5 Empower LGBTQ+ young people to have better sexual health.

1.6 Scope and research how best to provide support to LGBTQ+ children in the 10–14-year-old age range.

Outcomes

LGBTQ+ young people will have access to safe, high-quality youth work groups, services, and supports.

LGBTQ+ young people will have access to safe, high-quality mental health services and supports.

Young LGBTQ+ people will have access to safe, high-quality youth work services across Ireland.

LGBTQ+ youth will have access to specialist supports within Belong To, to reduce the harms caused by alcohol and drug use amongst LGBTQ+ youth.

LGBTQ+ young people will have access to specialist supports and programmes within Belong To related to sexual health and wellbeing, and sexual health professionals will have been supported to provide LGBTQ+ inclusive sexual health programmes.

Belong To will create and deliver a service for 10–14-year-old LGBTQ+ children.



2

Building Safe Spaces & Services

Goals

Training and educating professionals engaging with LGBTQ+ young people in schools, youth services, sports, and other services for young people.

Engaging with and supporting families.



Objectives

- 2.1** Support the promotion and creation of safe and supportive schools and alternative education spaces for LGBTQ+ young people.
- 2.2** Increase the knowledge and understanding of professionals and volunteers working across key sectors on issues affecting LGBTQ+ young people.
- 2.3** Support parents, guardians, and caregivers of LGBTQ+ young people to create safe, nurturing home environments.

Outcomes

- Schools and alternative education spaces will become supportive and inclusive environments for LGBTQ+ young people.
- Professionals and volunteers working in education, youth services, drug and alcohol services, sexual health services, homeless services, and sports will have increased knowledge of the needs of LGBTQ+ young people and how to meet those needs.
- Belong To will have a dedicated service for the parents, guardians, and caregivers of LGBTQ+ children, and young people.





Campaigning for Change

Goals

Champion the voice of LGBTQ+ young people through advocacy and engagement to create an Ireland where LGBTQ young people are equal, safe, and thriving.

Empowering LGBTQ+ young people to be agents for positive social change.



Objectives

Outcomes

3.1 Campaign for laws, policy, legislation, and national strategies that protect LGBTQ+ youth.

Belong To will have influenced policies, legislation, and national strategies relevant to LGBTQ+ youth, ensuring there is greater attention to non-discrimination, bullying, access to healthcare including mental health and sexual health, and the creation of safe, supportive, and inclusive environments.

3.2 Develop the research and data environment to better understand and improve the lives of LGBTQ+ young people.

Belong To will have produced a high-quality evidence base of research reflecting the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ young people in Ireland.

3.3 Amplify the voice and experiences of LGBTQ+ young people, supporting and facilitating them to be agents in positive social change.

Belong To will have ensured that the voices and lived experiences of LGBTQ+ young people have been heard in the decisions that the effects their lives taken by the state.

3.4 Grow public awareness of content related to LGBTQ+ youth and Belong To by reaching and mobilising existing and new stakeholders and the general public.

Belong To will have increased its visibility and recognition amongst its stakeholders in the media and in public discussions on matters that relate to LGBTQ+ young people.

3.5 Work for international solidarity to protect and advance LGBTQ+ people's rights.

Belong To will have engaged in solidarity actions to protect and support the advancement of LGBTQ+ rights internationally.

3.6 Campaign for inclusion of LGBTQ+ young people in education.

Schools will be supportive and inclusive environments for LGBTQ+ young people.



4

Being a Learning and Developing Organisation

Goal

A sustainable, professional, learning organisation with a skilled team, and robust systems working to achieve our vision.



Objectives

- 4.1** Nurture an internal culture that is rooted in our values, and which prioritises wellbeing, curiosity, courage, and learning.
- 4.2** Review organisational structure.
- 4.3** Collaborate with other like-minded LGBTQ+ organisations to scope out the potential for a shared flagship premises in Dublin.
- 4.4** Review and enhance key processes, through optimising the use of digital technology, emphasising effective communications, and strengthening relationships of trust.
- 4.5** Protect existing resources and grow sources of income to ensure sustainability.
- 4.6** Maintain good governance.

Outcomes

- Belong To's team will have been effectively managed, will have embodied the organisation's values, and be resilient.
- Belong To will have a robust Senior Management Team and team in place to achieve the ambitious strategic goals.
- A strategic decision will have been reached on the co-location of services for the LGBTQ+ community.
- Belong To will have best class operating systems and practices, our organisation will be efficient, well-run, and we will emphasis digital tools to save time and money.
- Belong To will have maintained, diversified, and increased its resources. It will maintain a high proportion of independent fundraised income comparatively to income from the state and state agencies.
- Belong To will be fully compliant with legal obligations, with the Governance Code, and our own governance guidelines and policies.



Funded by:



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



// **Belong To is place
where you meet
friends that become
like family.”**

Holly, (she/her)



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