



Belong To LGBTQ+ Youth Ireland

Marriage Equality in Ireland

A Resource for Schools and Youth Services





Friday, 22 May 2015 marked the historic day when Ireland became the first country in the world to achieve marriage equality by public vote.

The impact of the vote was felt not just in Ireland but across the world, and provided momentum and inspiration for LGBTQ+ rights movements internationally.

The successful vote represented the culmination of many decades of activism, and a particularly strong, coordinated campaign in the final months, weeks and days leading up to the vote.

Belong To and its partners in the BeLonG To Yes campaign played a crucial part in encouraging Irish voters to say 'yes'. A diverse group of organisations working with and for young people joined Belong To to highlight the fact that LGBTQ+ rights are also children's rights. These organisations included:

Barnardos

Children's Rights Alliance

EPIC

Foróige

Headstrong

Institute for Guidance
Counsellors

Irish Society for the
Prevention of Cruelty
to Children

Migrant Rights Centre
Ireland

National Youth Council
of Ireland

Pavee Point

Research Centre

Start Strong

UNESCO Child and Family

Yes Equality

Youth Work Ireland



Introduction

Young people played a key role in the campaign, showing great courage and determination in speaking at public events, canvassing members of the public on the doorstep, being active on social media and many other ways.

The voices of young LGBTQ+ people demanding to be treated equally under the law, and describing the importance of one day being able to marry the person they love, was a powerful decider for many people choosing to vote yes.

In 2014, Belong To decided that a key part of the campaign would involve a voter registration drive to actively engage young people, many of whom had never voted before. The registration campaign began in October 2014, and was accompanied by a video, 'It's In Your Hands!', made by Anna Rodgers and Hugh Rodgers. Along with Belong To's

voter registration drive, drives rolled out by the wider student movement, particularly the Union of Students in Ireland and Yes Equality, resulted in over 100,000 new voters enrolling. It was the country's largest ever voter registration drive.

For young people in schools and attending youth services today, they have grown up in a country where equal marriage has been a reality for most of their lives. They may have vague memories of the campaign, or none at all.

This resource is designed to support young people in schools and youth services to learn more about this period in Irish history – how it unfolded, and what it meant for LGBTQ+ people then and now.

The resource contains three suggested activities which can be carried out with young people in any setting – in school, in a youth service or elsewhere. We suggest utilising additional resources available on our website at www.belongto.org/marriageequality.

The Marriage Equality campaign succeeded through the determination and concerted efforts of individuals and groups across the country. Since then, there have been many changes for the LGBTQ+ community and for Ireland as a whole. We hope that these activities will help inform and inspire the young people you work with to envisage the kind of society they want to live in, and their limitless potential to make that vision a reality.



“The marriage referendum changed my perspective on Ireland’s historic attitudes towards people in the LGBTQ+ community. I remember campaigning and thinking ‘it won’t pass, there is too much uncertainty, too many warped minds dating back to before the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1994’. But it passed, and I felt not so judged. It is not the end of fighting for our rights, but it is a remarkable win”

EMMA WHITTY (SHE/HER),
YOUTH WORKER, FERNS DIOCESAN YOUTH SERVICE



Group Activities

This section contains three activities which can be carried out with young people in your youth service or education setting. The activities can be adapted to the length of time available and number of young people participating.

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Group Activity 1

Creating Campaigns

Aim

To use lessons from the Marriage Equality campaign to understand how to effect societal change.

Objectives

By the end of this session, young people will be able to:

- Discuss the factors that allowed the Marriage Equality campaign to succeed.
 - Reflect on their own ideas for change in Ireland.
 - Work with others to create campaign materials using a variety of media and methods.
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Who is it for?

14+ years

Materials

Screen to play videos, internet, markers, paper and pens

- Campaign video
[Marriage Equality: Bring Your Family with You.](#)
 - Video
[Mary McAleese–Former President of Ireland. Why My Family is Voting YES to Marriage Equality.](#)
 - Transcript of Mary McAleese speech
[Take from pages 57-62 of ‘Belong To Yes’ resource.](#)
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Duration

30-60 minutes in a classroom or youth group setting, or could be continued over several sessions.

Step 1

Discuss the marriage equality campaign from 2015. You may wish to use pictures and videos from the time. Some examples can be found on our website at www.belongto.org/marriageequality, or other online sources, such as:

[Marriage Equality Working for Equal Marriage Rights for Lesbians and Gay Men in Ireland Homepage](#)

[News articles from the time Ireland becomes first country to approve same-sex marriage by popular vote—The Irish Times](#)

What made the campaign so successful?

Some of the factors that campaigners said helped were:

- **Visibility and communications.** Creating impactful videos, posters and slogans allowed the campaigners to effectively reach members of the public and convince them that they should vote yes.
- **Building coalitions and allyship.** By collaborating with groups and individuals who shared similar goals and values, the campaign could increase the reach of its message.



Gaining the public support of high-profile people like former President Mary McAleese also brought more attention to the campaign.

- **Mobilisation.** As well as convincing the public to support the ideas of the campaign, they also had to persuade people to get out and cast their ballot on the day of the vote. Canvassing, door-knocking and encouraging conversations with family and friends helped them achieve this.

Step 2

Ask the young people to form groups of three to six people (or whatever makes sense in your setting). Each group will create a campaign for a referendum to create a change they would like to see in Ireland today. They will use the successful factors from the 2015 marriage equality referendum (above) to create a campaign that is as impactful and successful as possible.

Ask groups to develop a strategy which includes the following:

The Big Idea	What is the change you would like people to vote on?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Research to find out if this kind of change has happened before, either in Ireland or another country. What lessons from other examples can you incorporate into your campaign to make it more effective?
Laying the Groundwork	<p>Dig deeper into your idea for change and conduct some research to help your campaign:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → What exactly needs to change in order for your idea to become a reality? Is it a new law, or a change to an existing one? A policy for schools or youth clubs? → Who are the different audiences or groups of people you will need to engage with to achieve this change? 	
		<p>Visibility and Communications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → What is your campaign slogan? → What imagery will you use? Will you create a campaign logo? → Will you create posters/billboards/merchandise? → If you could create a TV/social media advertisement, what would it look like?

This activity can be completed quickly in one session or can be worked on over the course of several weeks. Participants can be encouraged to turn their ideas into reality – creating posters digitally or physically, filming campaign videos etc.

They could take turns presenting their campaigns to each other and even conduct a referendum among the wider group to see how successful their campaigning has been!

Step 3

End of Activity Reflection: Ask the group what have they learned about achieving social change through public campaigning. Are there any current campaigns or movements they would like to get involved with?



Group Activity 2

Facilitated Discussion

How Ireland has changed in 10 years, and what might the future 10 years look like?

Aim

To explore the social impact of marriage equality in Ireland.

Who is it for?

14+ years

Materials

Screen to play videos, internet, markers, paper and pens

Objectives

By the end of this session, young people will be able to:

- Explore the social impact of marriage equality in Ireland.
 - Reflect on their own experience and values as a young person in Ireland today.
 - Understand the history of marriage equality.
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Steps

1. At the beginning of the session, ask the group the following questions:

- Do you know when the marriage equality referendum took place to vote on same sex marriage in Ireland?
- Do you know anyone who campaigned or voted during the campaign?

2. Divide into groups of three or four. Within these groups ask them the following questions:

- What impact do you think marriage equality had for LGBTQ+ people in Ireland?
- What does marriage equality mean to you?

- Marriage equality was passed by a 62% yes vote. Do you think the result would be different today?
- In what ways has Ireland changed for the LGBTQ+ community since the marriage equality referendum?
- Looking at the next 10 years, what change would you like to see in Ireland for LGBTQ+ young people?

3. Facilitate feedback discussion from groups.

4. End of Activity Reflection: Check out with the group asking what one thing they are taking away from today's session.

Group Activity 3

Storytelling

The impact of media,
stories of impact.

Aim

To explore the impact of storytelling throughout the Marriage Equality campaign and how this can be reflected in today's society.

Who is it for?

12+ years

Materials

Screen to play videos, internet, markers, paper and pens

Objectives

By the end of this session, young people will be able to:

- Describe the impact of different methods of creating social change.
 - Explore how these methods were utilised in the Marriage Equality campaign, and how they may be used today.
 - Outline why each method was impactful.
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Steps

1. Explain to the group what marriage equality is and briefly discuss its history.

2. Play the following videos for the group, explaining that they are all videos from the Marriage Equality campaign:

→ [Marriage Equality: Bring Your Family with You](#)

→ [Awesome Marriage Equality Ad in Ireland–One of the Best Same Sex Marriage Ads I've Seen](#)

→ [#RingYourGranny for Marriage Equality–TCDSU–YouTube](#)

→ [Colin Farrell speaks out in favour of same-sex marriage on Claire Byrne Live](#)

→ [Big Love–Students in Ireland Yes to Marriage Equality](#)

3. Divide the group into groups of three or four. Ask each group the following questions about the above videos:

→ Did you find it impactful?

→ What elements were most effective in each video in communicating their message?

→ What emotions came up for you while watching?

4. Print the photos available to download under 'Activity 3' on [our website](#).

→ What do you like or dislike about these photos?

→ What messages are these photos communicating about marriage equality?

5. To finish:

→ Ask each young person to write a letter to the LGBTQ+ community outlining their support or thoughts on marriage equality, 10 years on.

→ Alternatively, they could write to a politician, changemaker, management in a school or service, to advocate for a change they would like to see. Participants can draw a picture or use another creative method if they prefer, instead of writing a letter.

6. End of Activity Reflection: Check out with the group asking what one thing they are taking away from today's session.

Want to do even more?

Optional: Ask the young people to research marriage equality around the world and make a comparison to Ireland.

Belong To is a national organisation supporting LGBTQ+ youth. Since 2003, we have worked with LGBTQ+ young people across Ireland offering safety and support through our services.

Let your students and youth groups know about Belong To and what supports are available for them including LGBTQ+ youth groups, crisis counselling with Pieta and digital support services.

For educators, we offer online training, support and initiatives such as the LGBTQ+ Quality Mark.

For youth workers, we support a National Network of LGBTQ+ youth groups and run the Rainbow Award – an action-focused accreditation programme that supports a whole-organisation approach to safe and supportive services for LGBTQ+ youth.

Learn more at www.belongto.org

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