



Belong To LGBTQ+
Youth Ireland



Standing Up in Our Communities

**A Resource for Post-Primary Schools
and Youthreach Centres**



Standing Up in Our Communities

Standing up in our communities assists in increasing awareness of LGBTQ+ youth among other students, teachers, principals and others in the wider community. The *Being LGBTQI+ in Ireland* research, published in 2024, shows the importance of community groups and spaces in allowing LGBTQ+ people to foster connections and self-acceptance which enhances their overall mental health and wellbeing.¹

It is important that young people within communities are actively involved in the decisions that impact their lives, as outlined in Tusla's *Child and Youth Participation Strategy 2019-2023*.² Youth participation within the community brings about many benefits, including improved decision-making, skill development, changing attitudes and positively enhancing personal development. As young people are experts within their own lives and experiences,³ long-term youth participation can lead to a better informed society which will be passed on to future generations.

Anywhere throughout the guide that you notice this icon ➡, it means that we have additional resources available with more information about these topics on our website for you to use.

What is a Community?

When we think of our community, we might think first about the street, estate or town that we live in. In reality, we all live in multiple distinct and overlapping communities at the same time, and this is no different for young people.

A community is a group of people who share some common identity, culture or set of common interests, and they come in all shapes and sizes. The type of communities we occupy, as well as how we engage with them, can depend on a number of factors. For example, young people may engage more with online and digital communities, and they may increasingly rely on the support of these communities as they progress through adolescence.

Communities are diverse spaces and include people from all different walks of life. Young people may be members of a sports community, like a camogie team or soccer club, or within a youth group or musical community. They may also be members of a religious or faith-based community, or an ethnic or minority language community, or within a group of people with disabilities. Then there is also the LGBTQ+ community.

Of course, none of these groups are mutually exclusive of one another. So, a young person might be a keen basketball player living in a Gaeltacht area while attending the same school as another young person who is an avid guitar-playing Taylor Swift fan who uses a wheelchair. There will be many circles in which these two young people's paths intersect, and many in which they do not at all. At *Belong To*, we want to support young people in all their various communities to support their LGBTQ+ peers to feel safe and welcome.

Why is Community Important?

A sense of belonging within the community is fundamental to the wellbeing of people of all ages and can be particularly important for young people.⁴ As social beings, the desire to feel like part of a group, family and community is hardwired within us. On the other hand, things that make us feel like we are an outsider within communities can have a negative impact on our wellbeing.

It is important that no one is made to feel excluded from these spaces just because of who they are, whether it's because they are LGBTQ+ or another aspect of their identity. Research has shown that LGBTQ+ young people whose local communities are not LGBTQ+ friendly can feel particularly vulnerable and isolated.⁴

The 2022 *School Climate Survey*, published by the Teacher's College, Columbia University and Belong To, found that inclusive spaces within the school community can positively impact the overall wellbeing of a young person.⁵ If we are aware that inclusive spaces positively impact the mental health of young people within the school environment, then it may also be worth looking outside the school community and within your own local village or town.



Barriers and Entry Points

Depending on the particular community or space, there are different factors that might impact how easy or difficult it is for a young person to feel welcome. Some of these barriers are not immediately visible or obvious, and may impact some young people more than others, or in different ways.

Examples of specific barriers and entry points are listed below.

Barriers:

- ▶ Frequent use of unchallenged LGBTQ+phobic language can create an environment which feels unwelcoming for LGBTQ+ people and their allies.
- ▶ A lack of representation and visibility of LGBTQ+ identities.
- ▶ Instances of LGBTQ+ exclusion, harassment or bullying may prevent young people from returning to a space.

Entry Points:

- ▶ Visible support for LGBTQ+ people, such as flags, posters and stickers.
- ▶ The existence of, and support for, LGBTQ+ and allies groups.
- ▶ Community-based events and activities specifically for LGBTQ+ people and allies.
- ▶ Online communities and societies for LGBTQ+ young people and allies.

Taking Pride into the Community

With the understanding of the importance of LGBTQ+ young people feeling safe and supported in all spaces in which they find themselves, as well as some of the specific barriers and entry points for community, what practical steps can we support young people to take, in order to make this a reality?

We can break this down into three areas that our young people are involved in within the community, how they can make an impact and what actions are needed within each of these areas:

Your School or Youthreach Community

Think of all the people that make up your community. This might include students and teachers, but also young people's families, the non-teaching staff, Board of Management and so on. The community should feel like a welcoming and inclusive space for everyone, both inside and outside the building.

Schools and Youthreach centres can carry out a huge range of actions to achieve this, from presentations and art competitions to bake sales to rainbow jumper days. Staff and young people really enjoy these! As well as these kinds of activities, perhaps the young people in your setting could organise a coffee morning to welcome all members of the community (including, for example, parents and guardians) to join together to show their support for the LGBTQ+ community and learn more about LGBTQ+ inclusion.

SAMPLE ACTIONS

- Coffee morning for parents, guardians and members of Board of Management.
- Invite the whole school community to participate in a Pride flag-raising, or Rainbow Jumper Day.

Your Local Village or Town

Every year during Pride, lots of community groups and businesses show their support for the LGBTQ+ community by displaying flags and posters. These same groups and businesses may be willing to participate in a special display of support. Identify the local spaces that the young people in your setting spend most time outside of school – a community centre, sports hall, shop or café. Write to the business owners or people running these spaces and invite them to participate in your activities.

Think also of the other groups in which the young people in your setting might participate. For sports clubs, you could invite players and coaches to complete Belong To's 45-minute **e-learning module 'LGBTQ+ Safe and Supportive Sports Clubs'**, which allows them to learn more about creating LGBTQ+ inclusive clubs. ➔

SAMPLE ACTIONS

- Create posters showing LGBTQ+ inclusivity and ask local businesses to display them prominently in your space.
- Ask your local sports hall or community centre if you can organise an LGBTQ+ friendly sports event in their venue.
- Ask local sports teams to wear rainbow laces or armbands to show their support for LGBTQ+ inclusivity, and invite them to complete Belong To's e-learning module on creating LGBTQ+ inclusive clubs. ➔

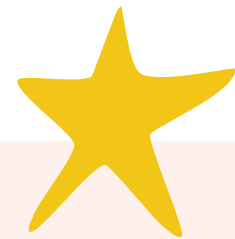
Your County

As well as the people in the immediate local vicinity of your school or Youthreach centre, the young people in your setting could engage with decision-makers in your county or city council. Recent years have seen multiple referendums, local elections and European elections, general elections and a presidential election. That makes this a great time to support the young people in your setting to learn more about civic and democratic processes. What kind of decisions do local representatives have authority to make that could support the inclusion on LGBTQ+ people in your local community? Perhaps a councillor would be willing to come to your school or youth service on what they are doing to support LGBTQ+ people in their constituency.

SAMPLE ACTIONS



- **Support young people to write to your local council asking them to paint a rainbow walkway nearby.**
- **Invite a local council representative to visit your school or Youthreach centre to talk about the actions there are taking to support their LGBTQ+ constituents, meet with a group of students, such as your LGBTQ+ and Allies Club.**
- **Ask your local representatives to commit to supporting the LGBTQ+ community and taking a stand against anti-LGBTQ+ actions for the length of their time in office.**



References:

1. Higgins, A.; Downes, C.; O'Sullivan, K.; de Vries, J.; Molloy, R.; Monahan, M.; Keogh, B.; Doyle, L.; Begley, T.; & Corcoran, P. (2024) Being LGBTQI+ in Ireland: The National Study on the Mental Health and Wellbeing of the LGBTQI+ Communities in Ireland. Dublin: Belong To. Available [here](#).
2. Tusla (2019) Child and Youth Participation Strategy 2019-2023. Dublin: Tusla Child and Family Agency. Available [here](#).
3. UNICEF 2017
4. Forde, C.; Horgan, D.; Dr, S. M.; & Parkes, A. (2017) Children and young people's participation in the community in Ireland: experiences and issues. Irish Journal of Applied Social Studies, 17(1), 2. Available [here](#).
5. Pizmony-Levy, O. (2022) The 2022 Irish National School Climate Survey Report. Research Report. Global Observatory of LGBTQ+ Education and Advocacy. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University. Available [here](#).



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.



Belong To
13 Parliament St
Dublin 2, D02 P658

info@belongto.org
www.belongto.org
01 670 6223

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