

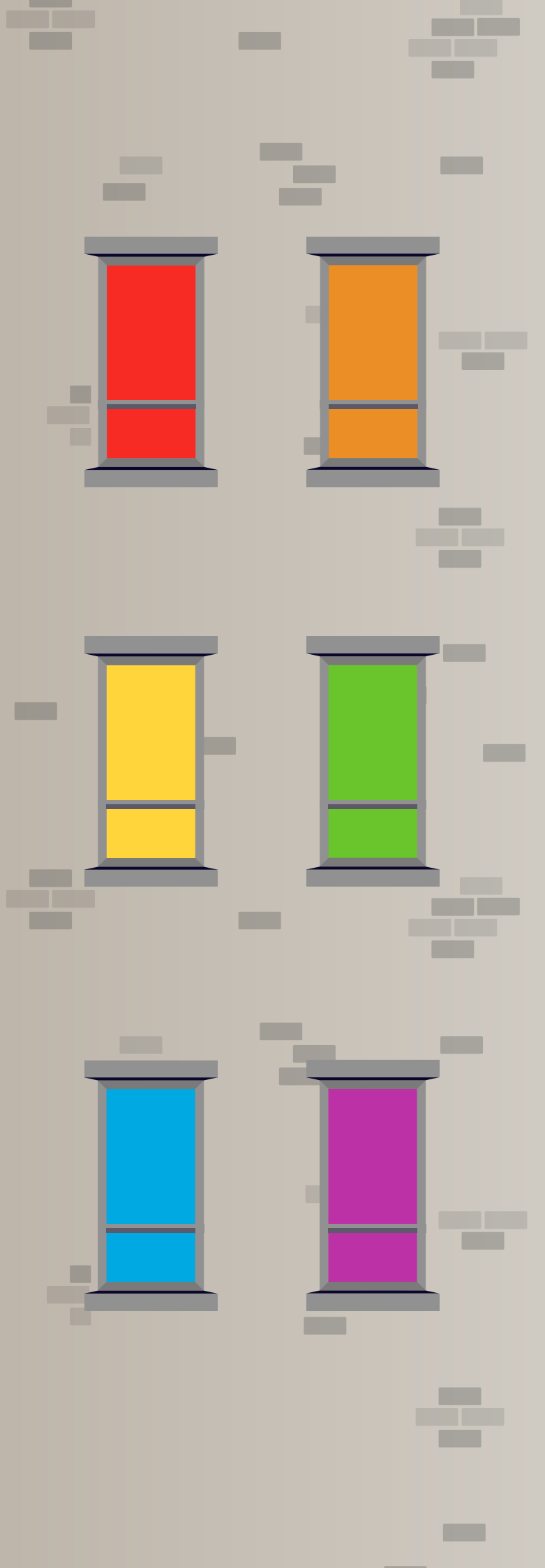
BeLoNG To Youth Services

LGBTI+ Life in Lockdown **Key Findings**

The Impact Of COVID-19 Restrictions
on LGBTI+ Young People in Ireland.

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

belong^{TO}



COVID-19 has serious implications for the mental health of LGBTI+ youth.

LGBTI+ young people don't stop experiencing crises during pandemics. Many feel isolated from their support networks who love and accept them for who they are. Some are experiencing emotional and physical abuse. They feel alone, scared and anxious. Although young people are estimated to have the lowest mortality rates from COVID-19¹, they are not immune to its consequences, including as it relates to mental and physical health and well-being. We conducted our LGBTI+ Life in Lockdown survey to really understand what life is like for LGBTI+ youth during this pandemic so we can best support their needs at this time. Here we share some of our key findings.

Many LGBTI+ young people experience ongoing mental health challenges and as the results of our survey show, these have been exacerbated by COVID-19. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, research highlighted the mental health struggles experienced by LGBTI+ young people in Ireland with the group being twice more likely to self-harm, three times more likely to experience suicide ideation and four times more likely to experience anxiety and depression compared to their non-LGBTI+ friends². This reality has been compounded since the COVID-19 pandemic began as LGBTI+ young people are experiencing a loss of access to the spaces and supports which they relied on for their wellbeing. The survey highlights that 93% of LGBTI+ young people are struggling with anxiety, stress or depression during the COVID-19 restrictions, compared to 53% of the general youth population named in the Young Social Innovators Covid-19 Youth 'Check In' Survey 2020.

During the pandemic, many LGBTI+ young people are confined to spaces that are unsupportive of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, such as family homes. Almost half (42%) of those surveyed experience their home environments as unaccepting of who they are. Family rejection, feeling unaccepted and a denial of identity can result in feelings of loneliness, stress, anxiety and more complex mental health challenges. For some LGBTI+ young people, their home environment is not a safe space and this can pose serious risk to their mental health and wellbeing.

At BeLonG To we have innovatively and rapidly responded to meet the needs of LGBTI+ young people during COVID-19 through the provision of digital youth work including online LGBTI+ youth groups and text, email and phone support services. Through this work, we are letting LGBTI+ young people across Ireland know that there is a space for them to come together, to be who they are and to receive support. But we cannot do this alone. We need the support of those passionate about ensuring LGBTI+ young people have their needs met and their voices heard.

Moninne Griffith, CEO



1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020). Severe Outcomes Among Patients with Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) – United States, February 12–March 16, 2020. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep*.
2. Higgins A. et al. (2016) *The LGBTIreland Report: national study of the mental health and wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people in Ireland*. Dublin: GLEN and BeLonG To Youth Services.

About this Survey

The LGBTI+ Lives in Lockdown survey was conducted online from May 1st-10th 2020 to assess the impact of the COVID-19 restrictions on LGBTI+ youth in the Republic of Ireland. To obtain a representative national sample of LGBTI+ young people, we conducted outreach through national, regional and local organisations that provide services to or advocate on behalf of LGBTI+ youth, liaised with our partners, our network of parents/guardians, professionals and young people via social media. The survey consisted of 22 questions and was hosted on the verified survey site GetFeedback.

The survey was anonymous for the safety and comfort of LGBTI+ young people. Some 519 young people started the survey, however the final sample consisted of a total of 294 LGBTI+ young people between the ages of 14 and 23 years. Participants were from all 26 counties in the Republic of Ireland. We captured where individuals were living at this time via county selection which is represented via a provincial breakdown: 4% of young people who completed the survey are living in Ulster, 8% in Connacht, 67% in Leinster and 21% in Munster.

Key Findings

MENTAL HEALTH

LGBTI+ youth have always experienced significantly increased rates of depression, anxiety and suicide ideation. These mental health challenges have been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the COVID-19 pandemic:

93% of LGBTI+ young people are struggling with anxiety, stress or depression (compared to 53% of young people named in the Young Social Innovators Covid-19 Youth 'Check In' Survey 2020.)

55% of LGBTI+ young people are struggling with suicide ideation.

45% of LGBTI+ young people are struggling with self-harm.

48% of LGBTI+ young people regard their mental health as bad or very bad.

60% of LGBTI+ young people are experiencing loneliness.



Sometimes I think being dead is better than having to deal with online school, criticism from the person I live with, and the fear of the virus.

EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION

While the majority of young people remain in education during the pandemic, the vast majority are not in employment and a percentage are in neither education or employment. This is likely to impact their livelihoods in the coming weeks and months.

During the COVID-19 pandemic:

8% of LGBTI+ young people are engaged in employment.

72% of LGBTI+ young people are engaged in education.

20% of LGBTI+ young people are not engaged in education or employment during this time.

HOME ENVIRONMENT

During the pandemic, many LGBTI+ young people are spending their days confined to homes that are unsupportive of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

During the COVID-19 pandemic:

42% of LGBTI+ young people said they were not fully accepted in their home environment.

53% of LGBTI+ young people stated their home environment as 'not good'.



They know I am gay but we do not speak about it. They make comments without thinking and never make any effort to be accepting or ask me about my personal life.



My sister harasses me and calls me slurs to her friends. I just want quarantine to be done so I don't have to hear her justify homophobia.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

The of physical health and routine on health and wellbeing is paramount. While some young people have good physical health, others are struggling and almost half of LGBTI+ youth have little to no structure to their days which negatively impacts emotional, physical and mental wellbeing.

During the COVID-19 pandemic:

46% of LGBTI+ young people are active (exercise 3+ times a week).

40% of young people said they had little to no daily routine.

42% of LGBTI+ young people regarded their physical health as neither good nor bad.

23% of LGBTI+ young people regarded their physical health as very bad or bad.

42% of LGBTI+ young people said they were not fully accepted in their home environment.

BeLoNG To's Response

Now more than ever, LGBTI+ young people need access to a wide range of support and life-saving resources. As Ireland's national LGBTI+ youth organisation, we are uniquely positioned and committed to respond to their needs through this pandemic and thereafter. We have rapidly adapted our work to ensure we can meet the needs of LGBTI+ young people during COVID-10 through:

DIGITAL YOUTH WORK

Our expert Youth Workers are providing text, email and phone support for those who need it during this time of uncertainty. Digital youth work uses technology to make our support services more accessible to LGBTI+ young people, their families and professionals supporting them. We create opportunities and spaces online where LGBTI+ young people can feel equal, safe and valued.

DIGITAL YOUTH GROUPS

Our online groups offer a space for LGBTI+ young people to connect with their peers, have some fun, feel a sense of community and get the support they need from our Youth Workers. The groups are available for existing LGBTI+ young people in our service.

CREATING LGBTI+ INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS AND YOUTH SERVICES

During the pandemic, we launched free online training for those working in the education and youth service sector. This interactive training includes videos, exercise and quizzes to equip professionals to create an environment that is safe and welcoming for LGBTI+ young people.

SUPPORTING PROFESSIONALS

Through the National Network of LGBTI+ youth groups which we facilitate, we have been hosting regular spaces for Youth Workers to come together, share best practice and support one another as frontline staff.

LGBTI+ Young People Need Your Support

We are dedicated to meeting the needs of LGBTI+ young people during this pandemic and call on our funders, allies and community to help us by committing to:

- Raise awareness about the increased vulnerability of LGBTI+ young people during this uncertain time.
- Ensure continued funding for LGBTI+ youth work to combat loneliness, isolation and mental health challenges.
- Promote LGBTI+ community events to help replace experiences of isolation with connection and community.
- Promote our services and the services we support through the National Network of LGBTI+ youth groups.
- Endorse our free online training for LGBTI+ youth services and teachers and encourage participation.



“Right now, more than ever we need to be part of a community. Especially because of the possibility of being in homes where we may not be accepted. We need to know that there are those out there who will support us and be there when we come out to the streets again.”

BeLonG To Youth Services is a national organisation supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex young people. Since 2003, BeLonG To has worked with LGBTI+ young people to create a world where they are equal, safe and valued in the diversity of their identities and experiences. The organisation advocates and campaigns on behalf of young LGBTI+ people and offers a specialised LGBTI+ youth service including crisis counselling in partnership with Pieta House, information and the provision of LGBTI+ youth groups across Ireland.

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Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



An Roinn Leanaí
agus Gnóthaí Óige
Department of Children
and Youth Affairs



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