



# Building Blocks for LGBTI+ Inclusion in Youth & Family Services

## Report & Good Practices Toolkit

### Seeding the County LGBT+ Development Project



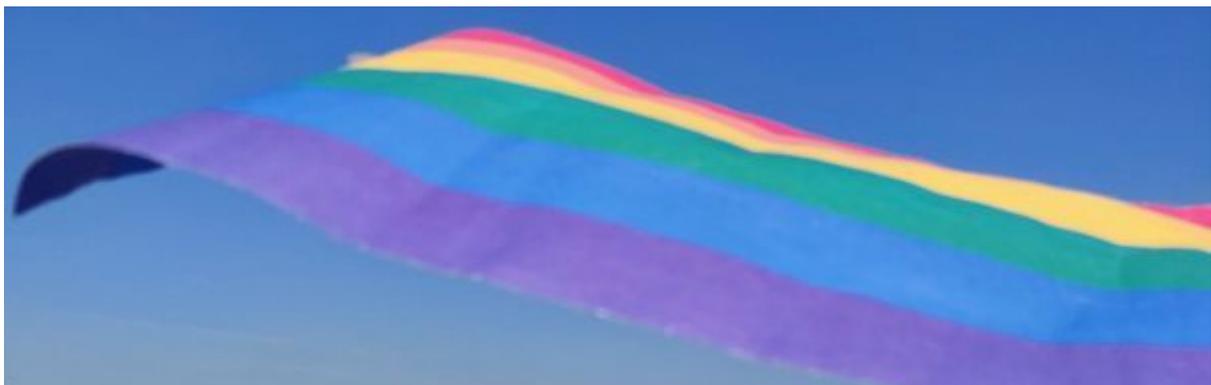
An Roinn Leanaí  
agus Gnóthaí Óige  
Department of  
Children and Youth Affairs

TÚSLA

An Ghníomhaireacht um  
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach  
Child and Family Agency

## **Table of Contents**

Seeding the County LGBT+ Development Project	2
Background to the 'Building Blocks' Research	3
Methodology	7
Review of Literature	8
LGBTI+ Youth Demographics	8
Intersectionality, Minority Stress and Social Exclusion	9
Current Supports for LGBTI+ Young People	12
Examples of Strategies for LGBTI+ Youth Social Inclusion	15
Findings from Consultations	18
Findings from Interviews and Focus Groups	19
Summary and Conclusions	21
Recommendations	22
<b>Good Practice Toolkit</b>	23
Internal Actions	23
External Actions	25
References	26
Suggested Resources	28
Videos	29
Other Resources	29
Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms	29
Appendix 2: Excerpts from Library Services Development Plan	32



## **Seeding the County**

*Seeding the County* is an LGBTI+ community development project which seeks to provide information, support and guidance to service providers and LGBTI+ service users across County Cork, with a focus on the most isolated and rural-dwelling people. The initial stage of the project focused on identifying the needs of LGBTI+ individuals living in rural Cork which fed into a needs assessment report launched in early 2021. Given that most services are currently based in Cork city, the key recommendations of the LGBTI+ Needs Assessment Report were to improve LGBTI+ visibility and facilitate the growth in quantity and variety of services, supports, activities and safe spaces for the LGBTI+ community across county Cork.

*Seeding the County* has established a Core Group to assist a range of service providers in addressing the concerns raised in the LGBTI+ Needs Assessment Report, and to create a sustainable LGBTI+ Interagency Network that enables resource- and skill-sharing.

The Core Group of *Seeding the County* comprises professional and voluntary staff of service providers across county Cork, including Skibbereen Family Resource Centre (FRC), Cobh FRC, Dunmanway FRC, Bandon FRC, Carrigtwohill FRC, Beara & Mallow FRCs; Cumann na Daoine Community Resource Centre, Caha Centre; Bród West (Clonakilty LGBT+) and Youghal Family Resource Initiative; it also includes representatives from Cork County Library Services Inclusion Committee. The Group collaborates with youth organisation Foróige, youth mental health service Jigsaw and LGBTI+ organisations LINC and Cork Gay Project.

A series of interviews with Core Group members in the early stages of the project explored the state of services for LGBTI+ people in Cork county, finding that city-based services were inaccessible to most rural-dwellers due to poor public transport and unreliable internet connection. It was observed that city supports did not always reflect the lived experience of rural-dwelling people. It was also reported that there was little LGBTI+ visibility and few community events in the county, contributing to high levels of isolation for LGBTI+ individuals not living in the city area.

# Background to 'Building Blocks'

Ireland has an admirable recent track record in improving LGBTI+ rights through a series of landmark legal and policy developments, including the *Marriage Equality Act (2015)*, the *Gender Recognition Act (2015)* and the *National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy (2019-2021)*.<sup>1</sup>

LGBTI+ people (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and individuals along the spectrum of gender and sexual orientations and identities) are increasingly recognised as being entitled to respect, support and opportunities on an equal footing to all, and Ireland has moved from 20th to 7th place globally in its acceptance of LGBTI+ people since the new millennium.<sup>2</sup> A 2020 OECD report, *Over the Rainbow*, asserts that LGBTI+ inclusion is an ethical, economic and social imperative, resulting in rights-respecting, economically flourishing and more equitable communities.

Adolescence and early adulthood is widely recognised as a time of change, uncertainty and stress. Young people who question their identity or identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex or any other sexual or gender minority during this period may experience additional stressors related to this at an already challenging time in their lives.

Ireland's *LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018-2020*,<sup>3</sup> the first of its kind in the world, aims to ensure that young LGBTI+ people feel as seen, heard and included as their non-LGBTI+ peers, and builds on the *National Youth Strategy 2015*<sup>4</sup> which is committed to enabling *all* young people to realise their potential.

The goals of the LGBTI+ Youth Strategy are:

**Goal 1:** Create a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for LGBTI+ young people.

**Goal 2:** Improve the physical, mental and sexual health of LGBTI+ young people.

**Goal 3:** Develop the research and data environment to better understand the lives of LGBTI+ young people.

This current piece of developmental research, commissioned by Seeding the County through Cumann na Daoine, sets out to create a report and guide for practitioners which enables them to meet the needs of LGBTI+ young people and their families within their services. The

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<sup>1</sup>Govt of Ireland 2019.

<sup>2</sup>Flores, 2019, p. 33.

<sup>3</sup>DCYA 2018.

<sup>4</sup>DCYA 2015.

outputs are based on a review of the literature, the voices of young people and their families, and critical appraisal of existing policies and practices by them and the service providers themselves.

## **Cumann na Daoine (CnD)**

Cumann na Daoine provides programmes which empower families by giving people a voice, building confidence and creating awareness of social issues. CnD works from the principles of equality and inclusion; committed to providing a safe, comfortable and confidential environment for people to explore and value their own power.

Cumann na Daoine, Youghal Family Resource Initiative and Youghal Library Inclusion Committee form the central group overseeing this research, and the resulting practice guide will provide tools to enable participant services to better anticipate and respond to the needs of LGBTI+ young people, ensuring they can achieve the same outcomes as all young people in Ireland.

## **Seeding the County Development Project**

Seeding the County (StC) is an LGBTI+ Development project working across county Cork to increase services, supports and social inclusion for LGBTI+ people and to provide sustainable support for adults, along with supports for young LGBTI+ people and their families. Seeding the County works from the principles of community development, empowering and resourcing people to take an active role in their civic engagement.

Seeding the County is led by Cumann na Daoine (CnD) Community Resource Centre, who support the East Cork LGBTI+ Network, Youghal Pride by the Sea and the 'Big Creative Project' LGBTI+ Youth Cafes. Seeding the County is a collaboration between CnD, FRCs, library services and LGBTI+ support groups & community.

### **Terms of Reference of Seeding the County**

- To work with and for LGBTI+ communities, with particular focus on the most excluded and isolated and on those living in rural areas.
- To increase awareness and inclusion for LGBTI+ people within their local and regional communities

- To support FRCs, library services and other NGOs in providing targeted, sustainable supports for their LGBTI+ service users.
- To work within the community development principles of empowerment, participation, education and inclusion

Many of the StC partners work directly with families and provide family supports in line with Tusla and FRC strategic plans. The 'Building Blocks' project is targeted at these organisations, to increase their capacity in providing sustainable LGBTI+ Youth and Family services and to encourage engagement in mainstream family services through LGBTI+ visibility..

The 'Building Blocks' project is a collaboration between Cumann na Daoine (the lead agency), Youghal Family Resource Initiative, who provide dedicated family supports in an underserved region, and members of Youghal Library Inclusion Committee.

'Building Blocks for LGBTI+ Youth in Family Supports' is funded through the 2021 LGBTI+ Capacity Building Initiative Funding Scheme for service providers to families and young people. The funding scheme is a joint initiative with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) and the Child and Family Agency (Tusla).

**Youghal Library Services** serve the area of Youghal and surrounds, and is committed to social inclusion. The library has an LGBTI+ section which includes fiction, reports and reference materials.

As a response to the growing needs of the community and to help build on the foundations already laid at local level, in 2018 a Senior Executive Librarian was assigned responsibility for the delivery of Inclusion Services in Cork County Library which has resulted in dialogue with LGBTI+ agencies, and collaborations and partnerships with a variety of groups and organisations to expand the network and further the Library Service's reach.<sup>5</sup>

**Family Resource Centres**, including the Youghal Family Resource Initiative, involve local people in identifying needs and developing solutions in response. FRCs work to support families with a range of universal and targeted services, while building the capacity and leadership of local communities. FRCs provide information, advice and support to target groups and families and provide onward referrals to mainstream service providers.

The key goal of Youghal Family Resource Initiative is:

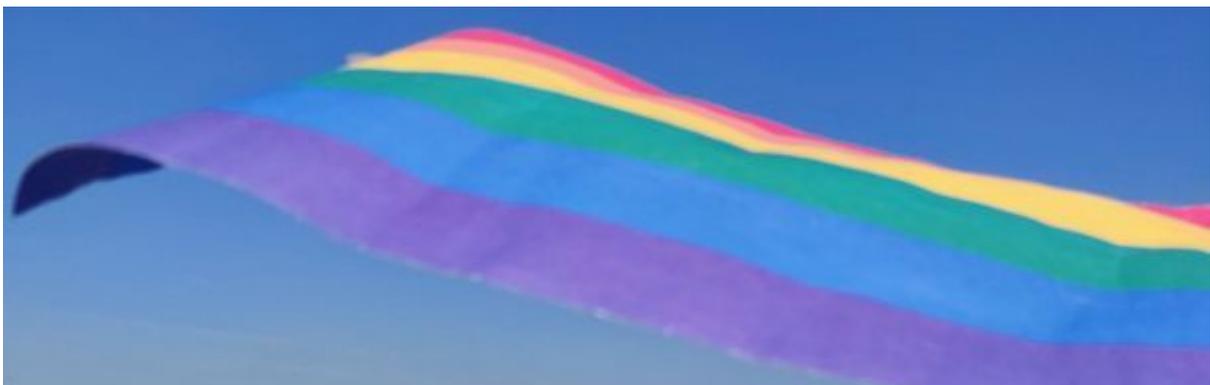
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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 2 for more details of the Library Service Development Plan.

- To ensure positive opportunities are made available and accessible to vulnerable and marginalised families in Youghal and surrounding areas.

Key objectives of Youghal Family Resource Initiative are:

- To increase community awareness of, and use of, services in the community.
- To build on good inter-agency working to deliver a continuum of coordinated, high quality service provision, including collaborative delivery and sign-posting as appropriate.
- To improve children's developmental outcomes.
- To improve children's social and emotional wellbeing.
- To improve parental wellbeing.
- To enhance parenting skills and increase parents' capacity to support their children's development.
- To ensure high-quality evidence-based responses (based on models of practice and delivery proven to be successful) are delivered to families accessing services.
- To bridge the gap in service provision experienced in Youghal as a result of being an area of disadvantage with families of wide-ranging needs.



# Methodology

The aim of this work is to develop the *Building Blocks for LGBTI+ Inclusion in Youth & Family Services Guidelines and Toolkit* for practitioners, and an associated consultation report.



The research for this report and Toolkit aimed to scope out existing relevant services, identify areas where these services are inclusive and effective, identify gaps in awareness, skills, and resources, and explore future potentials for increased inclusion.

A desk-based review of the literature including results from prior consultations relating to LGBTI+ people conducted by Seeding the County/Cumann na Daoine was carried out to inform the framework for the consultation with service providers and with the LGBTI+ community, focusing particularly on LGBTI+ young people and their families. The inclusion of LGBTI+ young people themselves in this research helps to ensure that the outputs are relevant, effective and appropriate.

A number of consultations were held with service providers, with LGBTI+ young people and with members of their families.

Due to constraints of the evolving Covid situation and people's personal time restraints, consultations took place by telephone or Zoom, with additional information from emails, and totalled 10 separate group meetings and individual interviews, with 2 young people, 4 parents and 8 service providers.

The consultation explored young LGBTI+ people and their families' awareness and understanding of existing supports, services and service providers and identified unmet needs within these services and resources. Prompts also explored ways in which services can respond more appropriately to provide services which are inclusive and effective.

Following the desk research and consultation, a report was compiled and a guideline document and toolkit developed for use by organisations offering youth and family supports, to increase the effectiveness of these supports for young LGBTI+ people and their families.

*Image above: 'Love is Love' badge created by MUI LGBT+ Youth Group, Carlow*

# **Review of Literature**

This literature review will consider the population demographics of the target group, LGBTI+ young people, and examine key research and policy findings. It will consider influences on and impacts of social exclusion, including minority stress, and will explore existing strategies to improve outcomes for LGBTI+ young people.

## **LGBTI+ Youth Demographics**

CSO figures for Ireland's current population are approximately 5.01 million people. A breakdown by age group from 2016 shows that Ireland's population is still a relatively young one, with the proportion of children and young adults aged less than 25 years old at 33.2%, including 371,588 children of secondary school age and 331,208 young adults aged 19-24 years.

Cork CYPSC's Children and Young People's Services Plan 2019-2021, provides a snapshot of youth demographics in Cork county and city. In 2016, there were nearly 181,000 children and young people living in Cork, with almost 142,300 of these living in Cork county. The youth dependency ratio is much higher in the county, with 36 children for every 100 working-age residents in Cork county compared with 20 in Cork city. One in five homes in Cork county report having no internet access.

We have no definitive count of LGBTI+ people in Ireland, nor are there questions in the Census that would provide us with reliable data on this population. It can be very difficult to ascertain the numbers of LGBTI+ people in the population because people are often unwilling to identify their gender and sexuality formally in official documents or surveys, and that, together with the complex and sometimes contested nature of such categorisation, further complicates matters.

Based on figures from 14 OECD countries where national surveys provide information, we can estimate an average of approximately 2.7% of people over 15 years who self-identify as LGB, although transgender, intersex and other gender and sexual minority people are not counted due to data gaps. Among younger cohorts (b. 1980-1999), the figure is 8.2%.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> OECD, 2019, p.9.



*BeLonGTo Youth Group at Northwest LGBT+ Pride, 2011*

The *Growing up In Ireland study, Cohort '98 (Child Cohort) Wave 3 - 17/18 years, 2016* included a question on gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation. The findings from this survey showed one in ten young people identifying as LGBTI+, which is in line with figures from the US showing 8.2% of millennials identifying as LGBTI+ (Ceatha, 2020).

## **Intersectionality, Minority Stress & Social Exclusion**

The Global Acceptance Index<sup>7</sup> measures the extent to which LGBTI+ people are accepted or rejected by the societies in which they live. Although in a minority of countries the trend is downward, there is an overall improvement globally. Ireland ranks 7th among the 174 countries rated, having steadily risen from 20th over the past two decades.

It is well documented that interpersonal and social exclusion and rejection contribute to poor mental health outcomes, and that violence and discrimination can flourish in societies where unequal treatment is tolerated or promoted. Those who are seen as “less than” are denied access to a range of practical, social and emotional supports including housing employment

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<sup>7</sup> Flores, 2019.

and benefits, education, relationship recognition and social belonging, and they may also experience interpersonal violence, hostility and rejection. Behind the statistics of inequality and violence are people's beliefs and belief systems which shape how different individuals and groups are perceived. Negative views of particular individuals and groups are influenced by laws and traditions, religious and education systems, as well as popular culture and media. Although Ireland is rapidly improving in its acceptance of LGBTI+ people, there is still a way to go before we achieve full equality. Young people face unique challenges in negotiating the societies they are growing up in, and LGBTI+ young people must deal with the added complexities their emerging identities encounter in a society where they are still seen as 'other'.

An intersectional approach to the issues facing young LGBTI+ people draws attention to the many ways in which they may simultaneously be experiencing social exclusion, but always maintains a focus on their minority gender and/or sexuality status. LGBTI+ young people may belong to a number of disadvantaged minority groups simultaneously, for example having a disability; low socio-economic status; membership of the Travelling community; living in Direct Provision. These factors may exacerbate each other and result in unique experiences of marginalisation for individuals. For people on the autistic spectrum who may already struggle to 'fit in' socially, the further stigmatisation associated with gender nonconformity or minority sexual orientation may intensify their stress.

The model of minority stress, created in 2003 to explain the higher rates of mental health issues such as suicide, substance misuse, and affective disorders observed among lesbian, gay and bisexual populations, attributes many mental health problems to the hostile and stressful social environment created by the stigma, prejudice, and discrimination commonly experienced by minority groups.

The Higgins report (2016) found that young LGBTI+ people experience much higher levels of suicide ideation, self-harm, severe/extremely severe stress, anxiety and depression than their peers, with intersex, transgender and bisexual people recording the highest levels. The survey showed that young people who discover their LGBTI+ identity typically delay telling others, and this can range from a gap of one or two years among 14-18 year olds to an average of 4 years for 19-25 year olds. During this time, many go to lengths to conceal their identity from family and friends due to fear of rejection and discrimination.

The *LGBTI+ Youth Strategy* lauds Ireland as a world leader in legal rights for LGBTI+ people but acknowledges that legislative provisions do not address some of the issues facing young LGBTI+ people in their daily lives. Gaps in infrastructure, supports, resources, training and

funding are identified as contributing to the ongoing problems that young LGBTI+ people negotiate in their homes, schools and communities.

Young LGBTI+ people evidence the effects of these gaps in their life satisfaction, which is consistently lower than their peers in the general population. When the *Growing up in Ireland 2016* survey<sup>8</sup> asked young people aged 17-18 to rate their life-satisfaction on a scale of 1 - 10:

Non-LGBTI+ youth's mean rating was 7.2

LGBTI+ youth's mean rating was 6.3

Transgender and Gender Other youth's mean rating was 5.1

LGBTI+ young people were almost one and a half times as likely to report feeling unfairly treated, and reported significantly higher rates of feeling disrespected and being treated as not smart enough, compared with non-LGBTI+ young people.<sup>9</sup>

The 2019 BeLonGTo report on LGBTI+ young people's experience in Irish schools found that in the 2018-2019 school year:

- almost three quarters of LGBTI+ students felt unsafe at school
- the majority of LGBTI+ students experienced homophobic remarks
- many experienced harassment
- some experienced physical and sexual assault.

In the study, many LGBTI+ young people found school an unwelcoming and excluding environment and displayed increased levels of absenteeism. These factors impact on educational outcomes and young people's future ambitions.

These findings are consistent with the results of *The LGBTIreland report*<sup>10</sup>, which included findings from 1,064 LGBTI+ people aged between 14 and 25 years in the survey. In this study, school was cited as a particular site where young LGBTI+ people felt excluded, with just 20% feeling that they belonged in their school. Most had witnessed homophobic bullying (67%), with half having personally experienced this, leading to skipping school and in some cases leaving school altogether, as a result of these negative experiences.

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<sup>8</sup> 6,216 families took part in the third phase of the study (ESRI, 2018).

<sup>9</sup> Ceatha, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Higgins et al 2016.

LGBTI+ youth are overrepresented in the youth homeless population, a fact which is often overlooked by service providers who do not record sexual identity and may lack understanding of the particular needs of this group.

LGBTI+ young people themselves may also conceal their identity when seeking housing support as a way of protecting themselves from stigmatisation and discrimination.<sup>11</sup>

The National Office for Suicide Prevention report *Connecting for Life*<sup>12</sup> profiles young people and LGBTI+ people as being among the groups most vulnerable to suicide in Ireland.<sup>13</sup>



*Image: Rainbow on the River Lee*

## **Current Supports for LGBTI+ young people**

Libraries are one of the most accessible sources of information for people from all backgrounds and across a range of interests. Free library access, online resources, and the removal of fines has opened up libraries in Ireland to anyone who can either walk to their local branch or who has access to a device and to an internet network. In a review of collections of LGBTQ\* inclusive materials for children and teens in UK public libraries<sup>14</sup>, the authors found that although in North America it was increasingly recognised that libraries should make available services and materials aimed at LGBTI+ young people, the UK appeared to be lacking in such awareness and provision in public libraries. Addressing gaps

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<sup>11</sup> In February 2020, the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG) reported that 881 young people aged 18-24 were 'officially' homeless. Service providers who took part in the research estimated that LGBTQI+ young people account for between 7% and 50% of the youth homeless population (Quilty & Norris, 2020).

<sup>12</sup> NOSP 2015).

<sup>13</sup> The report also highlights the intersectional nature of social categorisations which means that young LGBTI+ individuals may simultaneously belong to other at-risk cohorts such as people with alcohol and drug problems, people who have been abused, people in contact with the criminal justice system, lower socio-economic groups, Travellers, people who are homeless, and other vulnerable groupings such as refugees, asylum seekers and sex workers. Individual characteristics such as mental health problems, socio-cultural influences like stigmatisation, and situational conditions including relational losses and stressful events, may also combine in complex ways to increase vulnerability to suicidal behaviours.

<sup>14</sup> Chapman and Birdi, 2016.

such as these, Cork County Library Service Inclusion and Diversity Committee has invested significantly in LGBTI+ youth provision and Cork Library Service now offers talks, videos on YouTube, rainbow stickers on LGBTI+ youth books as well as displays in libraries. Libraries are also working towards making more resources available for LGBTI+ adults - including the families of LGBTI+ young people.

BeLonGTo Youth Services, the national organisation supporting LGBTI+ young people, provides a wealth of information and support services, both online and through local LGBTI+-friendly services where these exist. BeLonGTo supports LGBTI+ youth groups nationwide and helps new youth groups to establish themselves and open their doors to young LGBTI+ people. They provide a step-by-step guide which centres on BeLonGTo's National Quality Standard for LGBTI+ Youth Work. This ensures that LGBTI+ youth groups are safe, education-focused spaces centred on the needs of young people. The *Supporting LGBTI+ Young People* training is available free to youth workers via the online eLearning Platform: <https://training.belongto.org/learn>.

Cork CYPSC (2019) noted the presence of one LGBTI+ youth group in the county, the city-based 'Up Cork' group. Attempts to set up an LGBTI+ youth cafe in Youghal in February 2020 under the *Great Big Creative Project* were frustrated by the onset of the Covid pandemic, although there are plans to restart this group in 2022. Previously, a youth group was run by YMCA, Rainbow Folx, in Clonakilty, and at time of writing, a new YMCA youth worker has been employed in Carbery UBU to serve young people in West Cork, primarily in the town of Clonakilty, with satellites in Skibbereen and Dunmanway. They now support an LGBTI+ youth group in Skibbereen in collaboration with Skibbereen FRC.

The CYPSC report (2019) found that LGBTI+ youth felt challenged by insecure funding for their services and poor access to psychological supports, and the report recommended providing greater support for LGBTI+ youth with more resources for community-based services. The report argues that although based on the scale of disadvantaged children and young people, Cork City requires more targeted services, the higher numbers in the county require universal services, and it was suggested that targeted services need to be built on these universal services.

A CYPSC 2018 consultation ( found that LGBTI+ parents and parents supporting children exploring their LGBTI+ identities, especially in rural areas, were struggling to get the supports they needed. Existing services were viewed as overly complicated and as providing inadequate coverage, and parents had difficulty finding information about where to access what services there are. Parents in rural areas identified a need for more youth services and

for schools to celebrate diversity. They also stressed a need for drop-in services with a personal, warm and friendly approach where they could meet face to face, in addition to online supports. Phone lines were viewed as a last resort option, and parents didn't know which ones to trust. The report recommended that a summary of trustworthy resources be collated for parents, as well as increasing capacity and providing more joined-up service provision in existing services. The need for mobile service provision in rural areas was also highlighted. One unanticipated outcome from the consultation was the establishment of three support groups for LGBTI+ parents or parents of LGBTI+ children, by LINC and Cork Gay Men's Health project in response to an identified lack of support, although these are not rurally based, and Seeding the County instigated an online peer support Parents Group in late 2021, which enables participation from around the county.

On 19 March 2021, Minister Roderic O'Gorman, T.D., announced a joint initiative from the Department of Children, Disability, Equality, Integration and Youth and Tusla: Child and Family Agency, which aims to build capacity among providers of family support services to work with LGBTI+ young people and their families and, where relevant, in collaboration with youth services at the local level. The initiative aims to provide funding to implement evidence-based LGBTI+ training and guidelines for professional service providers of family support along with youth services, with a focus on Trans and gender-related issues.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Press release Minister O'Gorman announces the 2021 LGBTI+ Capacity Building Initiative Funding Scheme for service providers to families and young people available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/6c107-minister-ogorman-announces-the-2021-lgbti-capacity-building-initiative-funding-scheme-for-service-providers-to-families-and-young-people/>

# Examples of Strategies for LGBTI+ Youth Social Inclusion

*Increasing Visibility:* Since its inception, *Seeding the County* has been successful in



engaging service providers in online and physical visibility projects run through the programme. For example, posters and Pride flags were distributed to Cork county service providers who created a number of excellent displays during Pride month in June. In addition, a coordinated digital campaign for IDAHOBIT day in May saw service providers join together online in a message of solidarity with LGBTI+ people across the county.

## Consulting with LGBTI+ Young People and Families:

In its consultations to inform the development of its Children and Young People's Services Plan 2019-2021, Cork CYPSC held consultations with a range of stakeholders, including a youth-led Youth Convention at City Hall in May 2018 (Cork Youth Con), a meeting with the facilitator of the LGBTI+ youth group Up Cork, and consultations/focus groups with parents regarding supporting their LGBTI+ child's social and emotional wellbeing. Findings from the consultations included:

- The need to examine the city and county differently and to devise strategies which, for example, take account of the accessibility challenges.
- Many difficulties are due to structural inequalities (for example poverty, social exclusion etc.) and solutions need to take this into account.
- A need for greater collaboration between agencies and community-based responses and early intervention when possible.
- The role of locally based organisations, such as Family Resource Centres, was identified as important in supporting appropriate interventions.

- Participation and consultation with children, young people and families together with practitioners were regarded as being of paramount importance in both designing and delivering solutions.
- A priority identified by Cork CYPSC was to improve and increase the social and emotional well-being of children and young people. The rationale for this being that if children and young people's social and emotional wellbeing is increased this will have a positive impact on all the other outcomes under the National Children's Strategy, *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014 -2020*.

## **Creating Resources**

Roscommon CYPSC launched a range of materials developed for 'LGBT Friendly Roscommon 2017' which consist of a LGBT+ poster, a postcard and a sticker for services to display to show their support for the LGBT+ community; and a Code of Practice to guide services, community groups and sports clubs engaging with young people.<sup>16</sup>

## **Providing Information and Training**

The national organisation for LGBTI+ young people, BeLonGTo, offers online advice, resources and support, including counselling, sexual health, and drug and alcohol support to LGBTI+ young people. It also offers a range of information, advice and support services for parents and families. The organisation also supports a number of youth groups around the country, including *Up Cork* in Cork city. BeLonG To offers interactive online training for those working in the education, youth, and corporate sector to enable them to create inclusive schools and youth services, as well as offering a sexual health and wellbeing programme aimed at those working with young GBT (gay, bisexual, Trans) men and Trans women. In collaboration with Jigsaw, BeLonGTo offers free training for adults who work or volunteer with young people in their communities on the topic of supporting LGBTI+ young people's mental health. BeLonG To also run an annual anti-bullying campaign Stand Up! which offers training and materials to participating schools.

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<sup>16</sup> Roscommon CYPSC: SUPPORTING ROSCOMMON'S LGBT YOUNG PEOPLE IS EVERYBODY'S RESPONSIBILITY available at <https://www.cypsc.ie/news-events/supporting-roscommon%e2%80%99s-lgbt-young-people-is-everybody%e2%80%99s-responsibility.2339.html>

## **FRC Western Region LGBT+ Network**

In 2010, with the support of West Training Specialist Support Agency, the Network produced a Code of Practice for FRCs, CDPs and Integrated Development Companies, which provided guidelines and encouraged commitment from these organisations by signing up to this Code.



*Youghal Credit Union supporting Youghal Pride by the Sea 2021*

## **Findings from Consultations**

The consultation conducted for this piece is supplemented by the results from the Seeding the County / CnD needs assessment report distributed online to service providers in the county in 2020; a series of interviews undertaken with members from the Core Group in the first months of the Seeding the County project, and a youth survey in 2021.

In the consultations carried out prior to this research, young LGBTI+ people and their families were among the groups identified as vulnerable, with high levels of isolation for LGBTI+ individuals not living in the city area. While most service providers reported having LGBTI+ individuals accessing their services, the consultations found few specific services for this group.



Most FRCs/CRCs reported a lack of capacity to host LGBTI+ youth groups or refer LGBTI+ youth to relevant local services. The majority were very willing to work at developing their LGBTI+ services and improving upon visibility in their local area, although a minority were not aware of their duty of care towards the LGBTI+ community.<sup>17</sup> Some FRCs expressed concern

about 'old school' apprehension among their Board members, having experienced resistance to the organising of LGBTI+ actions and raising LGBTI+ visibility within the community.

Faced with a constantly evolving vocabulary and social, medical and legal environment in relation to LGBTI+ issues, service providers reported feeling ill-equipped to deal with more nuanced issues and questions among LGBTI+ young people in their areas.

An urgent need for LGBTI+ education and support in schools was noted, and while some service providers were attempting to work with their local schools on LGBTI+ education, they feared resistance from parents and school management. Guidelines, training and materials for working with schools and families were seen as essential for this work to proceed.

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<sup>17</sup> As identified in the FRC's objectives of inclusion and the *2010 Code of Practice for LGBT Inclusion*.

## Findings from interviews and focus groups

The youth survey, together with interviews and focus groups conducted in December 2021 and January 2022 confirmed and expanded on the findings from the earlier consultations.

While most respondents felt that society was fairly open to LGBTI+ people, it was generally agreed that there is a reluctance among most people to talk to young LGBTI+ people about their identity or about LGBTI+ issues generally. One respondent said that she felt that there was huge acceptance at one level, and then not much at all. Many suggested that increasing visibility by having more Pride (rainbow) flags, shop window stickers and displays, as well as corporate-sponsored events like An Post's T-shirts and stamps, and hosting LGBTI+ events would normalise LGBTI+ issues and increase acceptance.

Experiences of schools were mixed, with some levels of acceptance side by side with reports of daily homophobic taunting and bullying. Parents expressed frustration with schools for not dealing with these incidents despite claiming to be supportive of their LGBTI+ students. For example, one school hosted a Pride event but did not support or protect a young person who was then bullied for how they dressed for the event. Respondents said that they felt that there was homophobia at all levels in the schools, including in some cases, among the staff and management. Parents and young people in some cases could not approach the school directly because the young person was not 'out' to other students and staff. It was generally felt among adults and young people that schools need to do more - including educating school management and teachers as well as students at both primary and secondary level about LGBTI+ issues, identities and language.

Where young people were struggling to come to terms with their identities and may not yet be 'out' at school or to wider family and friends, accessing their usual support networks was difficult for them and for their parents. Young people and their parents reported few, if any, services in their areas and expressed frustration with having to rely on poor public transport and unreliable internet connections to access what supports were available elsewhere.

Young people wanted LGBTI+ specific youth groups where they could go and spend time with other young people like themselves, safe from the daily homophobia most of them were living with in their schools and communities. There were no active LGBTI+ youth groups in the county, since those that were in existence had closed during the pandemic, although there were plans to restart the YMCA LGBTI+ youth group Rainbow Folx in Clonakilty and hopes to expand this service into Dunmanway. One parent stressed the need for trained youth workers to run the youth groups so that young people could receive the support they

needed. Service providers pointed out that volunteer-led groups would be unsustainable due to the heavy workload they inevitably involved.

Most parents were struggling with the changes in their child and all said they had difficulties learning the language they needed to communicate with them as they went through these changes. Parents wanted local LGBTI+ parent groups where they could get information and meet other parents who were in a similar situation for mutual support. Some mentioned the need for an information campaign for parents, professionals, and other adult stakeholders, including information on LGBTI+ health & wellbeing.

A number of parents mentioned that their child was on the Autistic spectrum, which made communication difficult and which was compounded in some cases by also having to deal with their child's anxiety and depression without professional support.

GPs were cited as good sources of support, information and referral to further services such as transitioning services in Dublin, and GPs had also pointed the way to youth counselling services such as Jigsaw and made referrals to CAMHS<sup>18</sup> and SHIP<sup>19</sup>. However, CAMHS were considered very limited, with gaps in the services. The waiting list for all of these services was long, and parents and young people said they needed information and support while they waited.

In Youghal, where the library had a highly visible LGBTI+ presence, this had raised awareness of the library as a welcoming place and an information resource for LGBTI+ youth in the area. Parents in all parts of the county expressed the wish for more books and information aimed at adults to help them and their families navigate the changes their LGBTI+ child was going through. In areas where libraries did not display materials or run LGBTI+ events, parents said that they felt that young people didn't see the library as relevant to their LGBTI+ experience.

FRCs felt that the public were not aware that there was support for LGBTI+ young people and families available within their existing services, and suggested that public workshops would improve communication and increase connections between the LGBTI+ community and the general population would help to raise awareness. It was also suggested that FRC policy in relation to the LGBTI+ population needed to be highlighted within the service as a way to bring the issues to the attention of staff and clients.

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<sup>18</sup> HSE: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

<sup>19</sup> Public Health Agency: Self Harm Intervention Programme

## **Summary and Conclusions**

In line with the findings in the literature, LGBTI+ young people in the county are experiencing isolation and homophobia, and many feel vulnerable and stigmatised in school both by their peers and by staff and management. Parents report feeling overwhelmed by the challenges facing their child and their families, by the lack of support from schools and inadequate counselling and psychological services and youth services. They also report an absence of local services where they or their child could go for information, referrals and professional or peer support.

Across the consultations, a major issue for LGBTI+ young people and their families in the county is access to specific LGBTI+ services, supports and community, which are largely based in the city or further afield in the capital. A poor and unaffordable public transport service exacerbates these problems, and frequently unreliable broadband makes accessing online services hit and miss. Online and phone services were also viewed as unfamiliar and too remote from the communities in which families were living, and there was a desire for youth and family supports to be located, or provided via a mobile service, in the localities where people lived and where they could make meaningful and longer lasting connections.

Relying on local services which struggle to secure funding for this work, young LGBTI+ people and their families living in the county encounter numerous obstacles to obtaining information, services and support and in finding communities they can connect with. Service providers generally report that they feel ill-equipped and under-resourced to provide the supports that might be needed.

A number of concrete suggestions as to how the situation could be improved emerged from the research and from these, a number of recommendations are outlined below.

## **Key Recommendations**

- Training for service providers - from Board level to frontline staff in order to create a culture of awareness, inclusion and diversity. BeLonG To offers a wealth of [resources and training](#) for creating an LGBTI+ youth-friendly service.
- Create links with other service providers to share learning and experiences - join the [BeLonG To National Network](#).
- Increase visibility by hosting events, displaying Pride paraphernalia, proactively encouraging the participation of LGBTI+ young people and their families in services.
- Provide accessible information for parents and young people on a range of issues including how to access counselling services, transitioning health and wellness information; local, regional and national support and information services such as [Jigsaw](#), [BeLonG To](#), [Linc](#), [TENI](#), [YMCA](#), [Up Cork](#), Gay Project Cork and others.
- Address the gap in provision of targeted support for parents and families of LGBTI+ young people who may be struggling, both to support the young person and to navigate unfamiliar changes in their family relationships.
- Explore the possibility of providing mobile LGBTI+ family services in rural areas.
- Work with local youth services to help set up an [LGBTI+ youth group](#) and [apply for accreditation with BeLonGTo](#).

# Good Practice Toolkit



As a service provider, it is highly likely that you will encounter LGBTI+ young people and their families in your work. LGBTI+ young people account for up to 10% of youth, so you can assume that at some point, your services will be required and used by LGBTI+ young people or a family member requiring information or support in relation to this issue.

It is important to be aware that LGBTI+ young people may be disproportionately affected by issues such as isolation and bullying, mental health, and substance use issues, and may be questioning or struggling with their emerging sexual identity. As such, LGBTI+ young people will benefit enormously from an informed, welcoming and safe environment where they can access appropriate information and supports. Parents and families will also frequently need information about LGBTI+ issues as they relate to their child's development, and may also require support from service providers as well as from other professionals and peer groups.

Working within your own service, and networking with other service providers to raise awareness in society more generally, helps create a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for LGBTI+ young people, in line with the goals of the LGBTI+ Youth Strategy.<sup>20</sup>

In order to create and maintain such an environment within and outside your own organisation, a number of key actions are recommended:

## Internal Actions

1. Each organisation's Management Committee/Board will appoint one member to monitor and oversee the implementation of this Toolkit.
2. LGBTI+ young people's views will be sought where actions to be decided upon may affect this group. Where possible, an LGBTI+ inclusive youth advisory panel will be included in decision-making at whatever level is mutually agreed upon. The appointed Board member will liaise with the youth panel to bring views, concerns and ideas to the Board.

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<sup>20</sup> LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018-2020.

3. The organisation will identify, acknowledge and address LGBTI+ youth exclusion, discrimination or homophobia in its work, and will include this in its workplan.
4. Organisations will proof their policies and practice relating to all activities to ensure that a culture of respect, empathy, openness and ongoing learning relating to LGBTI+ young people and their families is maintained at all levels.
5. Organisations will reflect an LGBTI+ youth-friendly ethos across services, including in the recruitment of staff and volunteers and reflect this in publicly-displayed policies.
6. All staff will ensure complete confidentiality and will respect the privacy of all clients at all times, within the parameters of the Child Protection Policy of the organisation and other relevant legislation.
7. Training to be provided and recommended to Board members, management and all staff and volunteers working within and with the organisation. This training will incorporate bias awareness, gender and sexuality language, research and data about LGBTI+ young people's experiences and the challenges they face, as well as confidence-building workshops so that staff can develop the skills they need to support young people and their families in their journeys, and know where to refer young people who require additional supports. Training will be sourced from national or regional organisations who are experienced in this delivery. New appointees will also be requested to undertake this training. HSE e-training 'LGBTI+ Awareness and Inclusion Training: the basics': (catalogue Human Resources) can be accessed [here](#) and BeLonGTo training can be accessed [here](#).
8. Organisations will take all necessary steps to ensure that the physical and online environment is welcoming to LGBTI+ people and their families by making a range of identities and lifestyles visible, for example through the provision of informational leaflets, display of posters, flags, inclusive signage, mixed gender bathrooms, and any other features that might add to this.
9. Organisations will commit to proactively seeking the views, assessing the needs and encouraging the participation of LGBTI+ young people and their families in current services and endeavour to tailor specific services to the needs of this population where possible.
10. Organisations will familiarise themselves with referral services relevant to LGBTI+ youth and their families and will provide signposting to these.

## External Actions

The primary aim must be to create a more inclusive society where LGBTI+ young people feel valued and accepted, and where targeted services are tailored to the particular needs of LGBTI+ young people and their families, as individuals and as a group or groups.

1. Organisations will engage with fora for FRCs, CDPs, libraries and other organisations to cooperate and jointly develop approaches and supports targeted at LGBTI+ young people and their families, based on up-to-date data and research.
2. Organisations will work to raise awareness of LGBTI+ youth issues and concerns among other service providers in their networks, and share learning and examples of good practice.
3. Organisations will create and maintain links with local, regional and national LGBTI+ and key youth organisations in order to stay abreast of information, supports and developments in the area of LGBTI+ issues generally and LGBTI+ youth issues specifically.
4. Organisations will promote wider awareness among the general community, in particular schools and GPs, of services and supports as they relate to LGBTI+ young people and their families.
5. Organisations will play an active role in organising and participating in community events and initiatives that increase the visibility of LGBTI+ young people, such as Pride, Stand Up and other anti-bullying campaigns, mental health campaigns and events, and other initiatives like these.
6. Organisations will participate in local, regional and national fora and consultations where relevant to ensure that policy is LGBTI+ youth proofed and that LGBTI+ youth issues are kept on the table.

I agree to abide by the terms of this Code of Practice in my work with [Organisation Name]

Board Member Signature: ..... Name.....Role.....

Staff Member Signature: ..... Name..... Role.....

## National & Regional Organisations

BeLonG To LGBT+ Youth Services	<a href="http://www.belongto.org">www.belongto.org</a>
LGBT Ireland	<a href="http://www.lgbt.ie">www.lgbt.ie</a>
LINC (supporting LBT women)	<a href="http://www.linc.ie">www.linc.ie</a>
Gay Project Cork (supporting GBT men)	<a href="http://www.gayproject.ie">www.gayproject.ie</a>
Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI)	<a href="http://www.teni.ie">www.teni.ie</a>
Gay Community News (GCN)	<a href="http://www.gcn.ie">www.gcn.ie</a>

NATIONAL LGBT HELPLINE  
Freephone 1800 929 539  
Monday to Thursday: 6:30pm to 10:00pm  
Fridays 4.00pm to 10:00pm – Saturday & Sunday 4.00pm to 6.00pm

TRANSGENDER FAMILY SUPPORT LINE  
01 907 3707  
Sundays, 6pm to 9pm



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## Suggested Resources

BeLonG To (2019), *Supporting LGBT+ Young People: Universal LGBT+ awareness and skills training for professionals working with young people in community or education settings Handbook to accompany online training programme*. Dublin: BeLonG To.

DCYA (2018), *LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018-2020 - LGBTI+ young people: visible, valued and included*. Dublin: Govt Publications.

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## Videos

BeLonGTo: *Come In During Stand Up Awareness Week* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TNH01o---lQ>

BeLonGTo: *Dear Ireland 2020* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=53avF50tiGo>

Stand Up! Campaign Against Transphobic and Homophobic Bullying <https://lgbt.ie/stand-up-campaign-against-transphobic-and-homophobic-bullying/>

BeLonGTo and Irish Congress of Trade Unions: *Stand Up at Work* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lfesuLQLnzw>

Youth Work Ireland: *Bi Tusa: Be Proud to be You* <https://youtu.be/fMIGSD8Vggs>

## Other Resources

Youth Work Ireland in collaboration with TENI has produced two resources to raise awareness of trans issues and how society and those working with young trans people, can better support this group in collaboration with TENI. Available at <https://www.youthworkireland.ie/youth-work-centre/lgbt-youth-projects>

## **Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms**

While this current document provides a list of definitions, terminology is constantly shifting and it is vital to check up to date language by regularly referencing reliable sources.

The following was sourced from BeLonGTo<sup>21</sup>:

- **Androgynous:** This describes someone who has a gender expression that is both masculine and feminine.
- **Asexual:** Someone who is not sexually attracted to others, or who has no (or low) interest in having sexual experiences.
- **Bisexual:** Someone who is attracted to more than one gender e.g. both men and women.
- **Cisgender:** a person whose gender identity and/or expression matches the sex they were given at birth
- **Gay:** Someone who is mainly attracted to people of the same gender. Gay usually refers to men, as many women prefer to call themselves Lesbian.
- **Gender expression:** How we show our gender through our clothing, hair, behaviour, etc.
- **Gender identity:** A person's deeply felt internal identity as female, male, or another identity such as non-binary.
- **Genderfluid:** Someone who does not have a constant or fixed gender identity.
- **Genderqueer:** An identity commonly used by people who do not identify or express their gender within the gender binary. Those who identify as genderqueer may identify as neither male nor female, may see themselves as outside of or in between the binary gender boxes, or may simply feel restricted by gender labels. Many genderqueer people are cisgender and identify with it as an aesthetic. Not everyone who identifies as genderqueer identifies as trans or nonbinary.
- **Heterosexual:** Someone who is attracted to people of the opposite gender.
- **Intersex:** This is an umbrella term used to describe a wide range of natural bodily variations that do not fit typical binary notions of male and female bodies. In some cases, intersex traits are visible at birth while in others, they are not apparent until puberty or later in life. Some intersex variations may not be physically apparent at all.
- **Lesbian:** A woman who is primarily attracted to other women.
- **LGBTI+ bullying:** Bullying based on prejudice or discrimination towards LGBTI+ people.

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<sup>21</sup> BeLonG To (2019).

- LGBTI+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex people. The plus sign includes people with other minority sexual orientations and gender identities.
- Pansexual: An individual who may be attracted to any person, regardless of their sex or gender identity.
- Pink-washing: in the context of LGBTI+ rights, is used to describe a variety of marketing and political strategies aimed at promoting products, countries, people, or entities through an appeal to LGBTI+ friendliness, in order to be perceived as progressive, modern, and tolerant.
- Queer: A term for people of marginalised gender identities and sexual orientations who are not cisgender and/or heterosexual. Some people use this term as an alternative to LGBTI+. This term has a complicated history as a reclaimed slur.
- Sexual Orientation: This is a term used to describe someone's emotional, romantic, and sexual attraction to other people.
- Transgender or Trans: An umbrella term for those whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were given at birth.
- Transition: A process in which Trans people begin to live as the gender with which they identify, rather than the gender they were given at birth.

Alternative sources include:

Trans Student Educational Resources: definitions page  
at <https://transstudent.org/about/definitions/>

BeLonGTo Let's Talk Terminology page at <https://www.belongto.org/parents/lets-talk-terminology/>

## **Appendix 2: Excerpts from Library Services Development Plan**

Relevant to this study, some objectives of the *Cork County Council Library Services Development Plan 2020-2025* include:

- Ongoing review of all service points to ensure that we respond to changes and developments in demographics and communities across the county in consideration of our social inclusion and creative partners.
- The development of an awareness programme to increase the visibility of the library branch in the community by making the library a focal point for information and for meetings.
- The development of work with marginalised groups and communities and strengthening of input into connection with local festival groups to enhance the service offered to all.
- The review of collections within the scope and size of the buildings and all other services and programmes within to ensure a quality collection of stock for borrowing. Review branch layout, stock levels, furnishings etc. so that space is suitable and appropriate for the staff and users' needs.
- The development of book collections to anticipate and to reflect user needs including the multicultural nature of Cork county. This will require constant endeavour to increase per capita book spend in line with budgetary allocations.
- Development of a range of books and information leaflets and resources to aid parents with parenting. The areas being explored include sexual health for teenagers.
- Development of teenage services programme in consultation with young people in Cork county.
- The identification of funding opportunities to promote and encourage staff training, learning and development.
- The identification of opportunities to promote and encourage staff development through enhanced communication, peer support and targeted learning.

- The expansion of the *Your Good Self* collections to cover other areas including LGBTI+.
- Further development of the online content available
- The review and revision of the current *Your Good Self* collections.
- Further development of links with suitable partners to provide appropriate, informative events.
- Expansion of technology and other digital platforms to provide more health related information and events.

The Library Services must by its nature be inclusive and it is vital to the Service's relevance that it proactively seeks ways in which it continues to be so to all the community. Over the years 2020-25 Cork County Library Service will proceed with:

- The development and implementation of an Inclusion Policy and Strategy within the context of both the National Library Strategy and Cork County Council's inclusion objectives so that service to marginalised people will be delivered in a cohesive manner.
- The pro-active engagement with organisations and groups who represent the disadvantaged and marginalised citizens in society. We will look at ways in which the Library service can actively improve their relevance to those communities and individuals.
- The initialisation of partnership opportunities with third level colleges to offer facilities in the areas of digital literacy language learning. The provision of meeting spaces and those who are marginalised geographically, economically, educationally or socially.
- The engagement of speakers, educators and experts in the various fields to provide seminars and awareness raising and training for staff or public regarding services available and opportunities to be of service to marginalised peoples.
- The seeking of input from all the community to identify all barriers that hinder people's use of the service be those barriers physical, social, or educational and the constant striving towards total removal of those barriers.

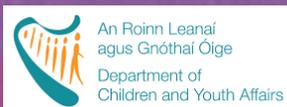
# Seeding the County Cork 2021

Creating LGBT+ Networks across the county

Building Community  
Increasing Visibility  
Creating Networks  
Training, Activities & Supports

Young LGBT+ people -  
we want to hear from you!

A multi-agency initiative to  
promote LGBT+ visibility,  
awareness & communication  
across the county led by  
Cumann na Daoine CTR



'Building Blocks for LGBT+ Inclusion' funded by LGBTI Youth Capacity Fund

Contact us at:

✉ [seedingthecounty@gmail.com](mailto:seedingthecounty@gmail.com)

☎ 087 9890336

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Check us out on Instagram and Twitter

This project is supported by  
the LGBTI+ Community Services Fund 2020



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,  
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige  
Department of Children, Equality,  
Disability, Integration and Youth