OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL

VOXY

Report on VOXY's
'Have Your Say' Questionnaire for Oxfordshire's
Anti-Bullying Week 2018 Youth Conference

February 2019

Engagement Report

Contents

1. Introduction

In 2018, VOXY (Voice of Oxfordshire's Youth) collaborated with Jo Brown, Oxfordshire County Council's Anti-Bullying Co-ordinator (and lead of the Children and Young People LGBTQ+ Inclusion Group) to strengthen VOXY's commitment to ensuring LGBTQ+ young people have a voice at a strategic level, and to improve representation of LGBTQ+ young people within VOXY.

As part of this, VOXY representatives were invited to attend the Oxfordshire Anti-Bullying Week 2018 Youth Conference, to do a presentation to promote VOXY and have a VOXY stand, as well as consult the young people attending, to help understand the challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community.

The stated aims of the conference included the following points:

- 'to support schools and settings to review and improve their strategies to manage LGBTQ+ bullying and language, and empower students and staff to take action'
- 'to provide information and strategies to support schools and settings to promote inclusion of LGBTQ+ young people' and
- 'to consult and involve young people to establish what areas should be tackled as a priority in schools and empower young people and adults to address these back in school'

VOXY created a questionnaire to gather feedback from young people at the conference, to find out what they felt to be the most important issues for LGBTQ+ young people. This included questions linked to two specific topics: mental health and domestic abuse. These two topics were chosen as they have been recent key focus areas for VOXY events for young people and are also two of the priorities of the Children's Trust Board's 2018 - 2021 Oxfordshire Children and Young People's Plan.

This report will be shared widely and will also help inform the Children and Young People LGBTQ+ Inclusion Group's action plan for the coming year by addressing and prioritising the main issues identified by young people in the questionnaire.

2. Methodology

Three VOXY Council members and the VOXY Co-ordinator attended the Oxfordshire Anti-Bullying Week 2018 Youth Conference, which took place in Oxford on Friday 16th November 2019. Sixty-six young people from eleven secondary schools and two youth groups attended.

VOXY Council members gave a presentation to all attendees to promote VOXY which was well received, engaged well with other young people and encouraged them to complete the VOXY 'Have Your Say' questionnaire.

Thirty-three young people (50%) attending the conference completed the questionnaire. All responses were anonymous.

This report details the key points made from all responses.

3. Key messages

All feedback from young people was analysed - drawing out key themes for each of the four questions individually, as well as showing a breakdown of numbers in terms of how respondents answered.

Many of the comments highlighted that: LGBTQ+ young people often do not feel they are treated equally or with understanding, bullying is a significant problem, there are many anxieties around 'coming out' (and a lack of safe spaces), they felt there is a lack of LGBTQ+ sex education in schools, and there are gaps around educating parents.

The majority of young people responding felt that being LGBTQ+ might lead to more strain on young people's mental health, and approximately half of respondents felt young LGBTQ+ people face different or additional challenges in relation to domestic abuse.

4. Analysis of Question One

What are the most important issues facing young LGBTQ+ people today?

4.1 Key findings

- 33 (all respondents) answered this question

4.2 Key themes

Issue which were raised the most included: bullying, homophobia and discrimination (including use of derogatory terms), ignorance of and lack of education for both parents and young people (including lack of LGBTQ+ sex education), lack of safe spaces, fears around 'coming out' and being accepted, LGBTQ+ young people understanding/accepting themselves, confusion around different sexual orientations and genders, society and political influences, and mental health – with general anxieties/worries/insecurities linked to all of these points.

The responses to Question One have been grouped into personal issues, social issues or other issues, as detailed below.

4.3 Personal issues

Personal issues mentioned, focused on feelings, fears and mental health, in relation to: being accepted/understood and coming out, mental health including feeling confused, unsure, insecure and repressed, understanding yourself and your identity, and fears around the future and future opportunities.

> *'The most important issues are mental health and bullying as it affects most people in the LGBTQ+ community.'*

> *'Being accepted for who you are without discrimination. And actually coming out is the most difficult part.'*

4.4 Social issues

Social issues mentioned, focused on the harmful effects of ignorance within society, negative media and the lack of meaningful education around the LGBTQ+ community, in relation to: stigma and stereotypes, homophobia/transphobia, inequality and discrimination (including in schools), use of derogatory terms, bullying (which was perceived to be a big problem in schools), lack of education for young people and adults/parents (including LGBTQ+ sex education) – causing confusion

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and miscommunication. Also mentioned was the lack of understanding and confusion about sex and gender, regressive and far right political forces, misrepresentation and lack of representation, and abuse of the LGBTQ+ community.

> *'I think on a large scale, the most important issues facing LGBTQ+ youth is the stigma and stereotypes of being LGBTQ+ created by the media and society, and how this leads to an uncertainty in what reactions will be to coming out. People aren't fully educated in the history of homophobic slurs (e.g. faggot), thus the negative ideas behind being LGBTQ+ are reinforced, and the LGBTQ+ youth feel unsure and suppressed.'*

> *'No sex-ed for LGBTQ+ community.'*

4.5 Other issues
Other issues mentioned, focused on the significant lack of specific things, including: safe spaces to talk/be yourself (including in schools), genderless facilities, representation, language and customs, and accessibility to the LGBTQ+ community.

> *'Not having safe spaces to talk in/be themselves in.'*

5. Analysis of Question Two
Do you think being LGBTQ+ can lead to more strain on young people's mental health, and if so why?

5.1 Key findings
- 28 (almost all respondents) said Yes - 27 of whom made additional comments
- 5 said 'it depends' or 'sometimes' - and gave reasons (which mostly also indicated a Yes answer)

5.2 Key themes
Key themes which were raised the most, focused on a wide range of anxieties and worries LGBTQ+ young people have from feeling confused, isolated and invalidated (often leading to low self-esteem and depression), as well as fears about coming about and being accepted. The prevalence of bullying was also mentioned many times, as was the additional stress this causes those who are often already dealing with all kinds of other issues. The lack of safe spaces was again mentioned several times.

The responses to Question Two have been grouped into personal issues, social issues, or other issues, as detailed below.

5.3 Personal issues
Personal issues mentioned, focused on emotions, fears and mental health, in relation to: feeling more alone, isolated, confused, self-conscious, invalidated or made to feel abnormal, worries/fears/insecurities around being discriminated against, coming out and people's responses, being accepted by peers and family, pressure to come out (even if not ready and unsure about identity), and anxiety/stress/dysphoria caused by struggling with sex/gender identity (with higher risks of identity issues - e.g. low self-esteem), because of what others think or because of homophobia/biphobia/transphobia, as well as additional stress in addition to existing mental health issues.

> *'Well, it is severely damaging when young people are isolated for their identity and feel discriminated for the way they're born.'*

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'Young people often struggle with mental health anyway due to stress in secondary. Worrying about coming out, and doing so in a safe space, can be even more stressful.'

5.4 Social issues
Comments relating to social issues focused on the harmful effects of ignorance within society and the influence of the media in relation to: stigma and stereotyping, LGBTQ+ young people being more susceptible to bullying, mocking and name calling (or anxiety and worry about being bullied), potentially leading to depression and self-limitation.

'…society says that they shouldn't be who they are and that's hard.'

'LGBT young people are more likely to be bullied, which leads to depression etc. Seeking support from people that understand can be hard too.'

5.5 Other issues:
Other issues mentioned, focused on the lack of support (or difficulty of seeking support) from people that understand, and being able to come out in a safe space.

'…the lack of support is adding to our stress.'

6. Analysis of Question Three
Do you think young LGBTQ+ people face different or additional challenges in relation to domestic abuse, and if so what are they?

6.1 Key findings
- 16 (almost half of respondents) said Yes - 14 of whom made additional comments
- 4 said 'it depends' or 'possibly' - and gave reasons
- 1 implied No - commenting 'the same issues'
- 3 were unsure - but 2 of these commented how LGBTQ+ young people are at risk
- 1 said they didn't know
- 4 did not give a Yes or No answer - but made a comment about the issues and risks LGBTQ+ young people can face
- 4 left the question blank

6.2 Key themes
Key themes which were raised the most, focused on: unsupportive or unaccepting parents or other family members, physical and verbal abuse, examples of specific kinds of LGBTQ+ relationships that can be abusive, fears and mistrust about others (especially homophobic people), lack of support, and stress experienced by LGBTQ+ young people.

The responses to Question Three have been grouped into personal issues, social issues, or other issues, as detailed below.

6.3 Personal issues
Personal issues mentioned, in relation to domestic abuse, focused on: fear of being 'outed' by others when seeking support, fear of homophobia leading to doubt around whether to come out, mistrust of bisexual partners (by non-bisexual partners), having

difficulty communicating and understanding, and stress experienced by LGBTQ+ young people around self-acceptance, being yourself and body issues.

> *'Homophobia; unsurity of whether to come out.'*

> *'Fear of being outed when seeking help.'*

6.4 Social issues
Social issues mentioned, in relation to domestic abuse, focused on: LGBTQ+ young people facing more bullying and domestic abuse than straight people, cyberbullying, domestic abuse of men by females in bisexual relationships, and being more at risk and potentially abused in different ways in attempts to convert LGBTQ+ young people. Also mentioned was experiencing hate crime or discrimination, unsupportive or unaccepting transphobic/homophobic/uneducated parents or other family members (leading to tension and strain at home), physical bullying (including being beaten by family members), being verbally abused and 'kicked out' from home multiple times.

> *'I know that they face more bullying and domestic abuse more than a straight or heterosexual.'*

> *'Yes, speaking from experience, transphobic/homophobic parents limit the happiness of life.'*

6.5 Other issues
Other issues mentioned, in relation to domestic abuse, focused on: the lack of support/help or having someone to talk to, and the general lack of media coverage - making it more difficult to speak out.

> *'More difficult to speak out about it as it isn't spoken about in the media.'*

6.6 Note on definition of 'domestic abuse'
It is worth noting that no definition was provided for the term 'domestic abuse' (which is known to mean very different things to different people) and the various ways this question was answered reflects this.

It is clear from the range of answers given that most respondents thought that LGBTQ+ young people often suffer from significant abuse, bullying, lack of acceptance, unsupportive family members creating tension/stress, discrimination and hate crimes etc. These experiences, do not, however, necessarily fit into the category of 'domestic abuse'. If a definition had been provided, more clear-cut answers/opinions may have been given to the specific question asked.

7. Analysis of Question Four
Anything else you want to say?

7.1 Key findings

- Only 8 (almost a quarter of respondents) young people answered this question.

The responses included these two comments:

'I think educating and diminishing discriminatory individuals will be essential to reducing homophobia/transphobia.'

'Thanks for giving us a chance to speak.'

8. Conclusion and next steps

In conclusion, feedback indicates that there are many issues which LGBTQ+ young people in Oxfordshire struggle with (especially bullying), and they feel that more work should be done to address the problems identified, particularly in schools.

This feedback also reinforces how important it is to enable young people to attend positive and educational LGBTQ+ events such as the conference itself, as evidenced by comments from two young people (from their evaluation forms at the end of the day):

'So inspiring and confidence raising.'

'Helped me realise I really wasn't alone.'

This report will be shared with:

- The VOXY Council
- VOXY partners
- Oxfordshire County Council's Anti-Bullying Co-ordinator, Jo Brown
- The Children and Young People LGBTQ+ Inclusion Group
- The OSCB Safeguarding in Education Sub-Group
- Schools
- The Children's Trust Board

This will ensure the voice of LGBTQ+ young people is being heard and listened to - not only by peers and professionals, but also at a strategic level.

This report will also help inform the Children and Young People LGBTQ+ Inclusion Group's action plan for the coming year by addressing and prioritising the main issues identified by young people.

9. Annex A

The following three 'Wordles' show a visual depiction of the words used by young people in their feedback around the three main questions asked in the 'Have Your Say' questionnaire.

Q.1: What are the most important issues facing young LGBTQ+ people today?

Q.2: Do you think being LGBTQ+ can lead to more strain on young people's mental health, and if so why?

Q.3: Do you think young LGBTQ+ people face different or additional challenges in relation to domestic abuse, and if so what are they?