



What young people think of LGBTQ+ support in Wiltshire

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Report summary

What is this report about?

This report highlights the findings from a project aimed at gathering the views of young people, from the LGBTQ+ community, about the support available to them in Wiltshire. It was carried out by Young Healthwatch Wiltshire in August 2021.

What did we do?


We designed and ran a short survey for young people, aged 11-25. The online survey ran for about 12 weeks and was shared with schools, colleges and the voluntary sector specifically working with children and young people. It was also promoted on the Healthwatch Wiltshire website, BBC Radio Wiltshire, the Wiltshire Together platform and on social media.

What were the key findings?

- There is a need for LGBTQ+ support in Wiltshire and there is currently a gap in services.
- Education was seen as key in addressing the lack of understanding and discrimination faced by the LGBTQ+ community. This included changes in language and normalisation of pronoun use.
- Advice and information was seen as an important area where young people could make informed decisions about the support they needed, but finding support was difficult.
- Sex education was identified as a support need and for sexual health services to be LGBTQ+ inclusive.
- Transgender healthcare was raised as an issue with long waiting lists for HRT (Hormone Replacement Therapy) and a lack of gender reassignment surgeries.

Conclusions and recommendations

The report draws conclusions from the views and experiences that have been shared with us and makes recommendations based on these. The recommendations make suggestions that aim to improve young people's experiences of health and care services going forwards, based on what they have told us.



Introduction

Healthwatch Wiltshire is your local health and care champion, and we are here to listen to the issues that really matter to people.

As an independent statutory body, we have the power to make sure that NHS leaders, and other decision makers, listen to your experiences of using local services and use your feedback to improve health and care for everyone. We can also help you to get the information and advice you need to make informed decisions about the right support for you.

Previous work by our team of Young Healthwatch volunteers on the [Wiltshire Mental Health Support Services List for Young People](#), identified that there was little, or no support available to the LGBTQ+ community in Wiltshire. Feedback from young people and the Wiltshire Mental Health Open Forum also identified this as an issue.

LGBTQ+ is the acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and those Questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity. The 'plus' represents other gender identities and sexual orientations.

What we did

As a result of the feedback, our young volunteers worked with the Healthwatch Wiltshire team to design a short survey. The survey asked young people, aged 11-25, who identified as LGBTQ+ to share their thoughts on the support they had received, and the support they would like to see available in their schools, colleges, workplaces, and local communities.

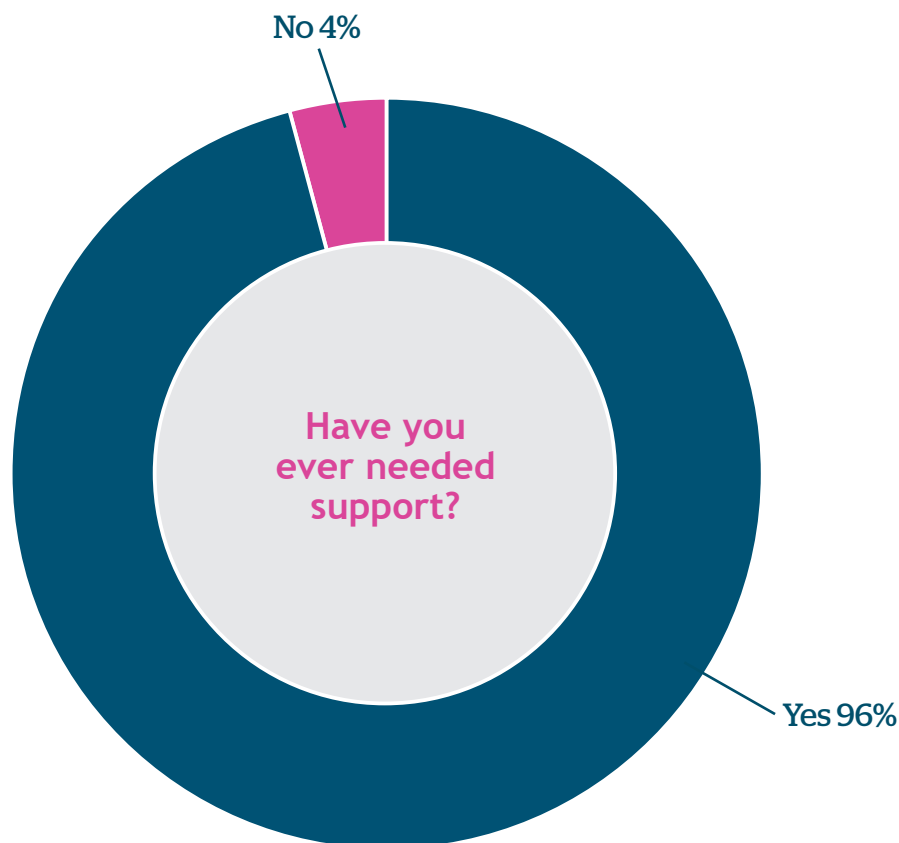
The survey was available online and was shared with schools, colleges and the voluntary sector specifically working with children and young people. It was also promoted on the Healthwatch Wiltshire website, BBC Radio Wiltshire, the Wiltshire Together platform, and on social media.

A total of 28 young people shared their thoughts with us from across the county. 16 of the respondents were aged 16-25 and 12 aged 11-15.

What young people told us

Have you ever needed support, including support for your mental health?

Out of the 28 responses we received, 27 young people said that they had needed support, including support for their mental health.

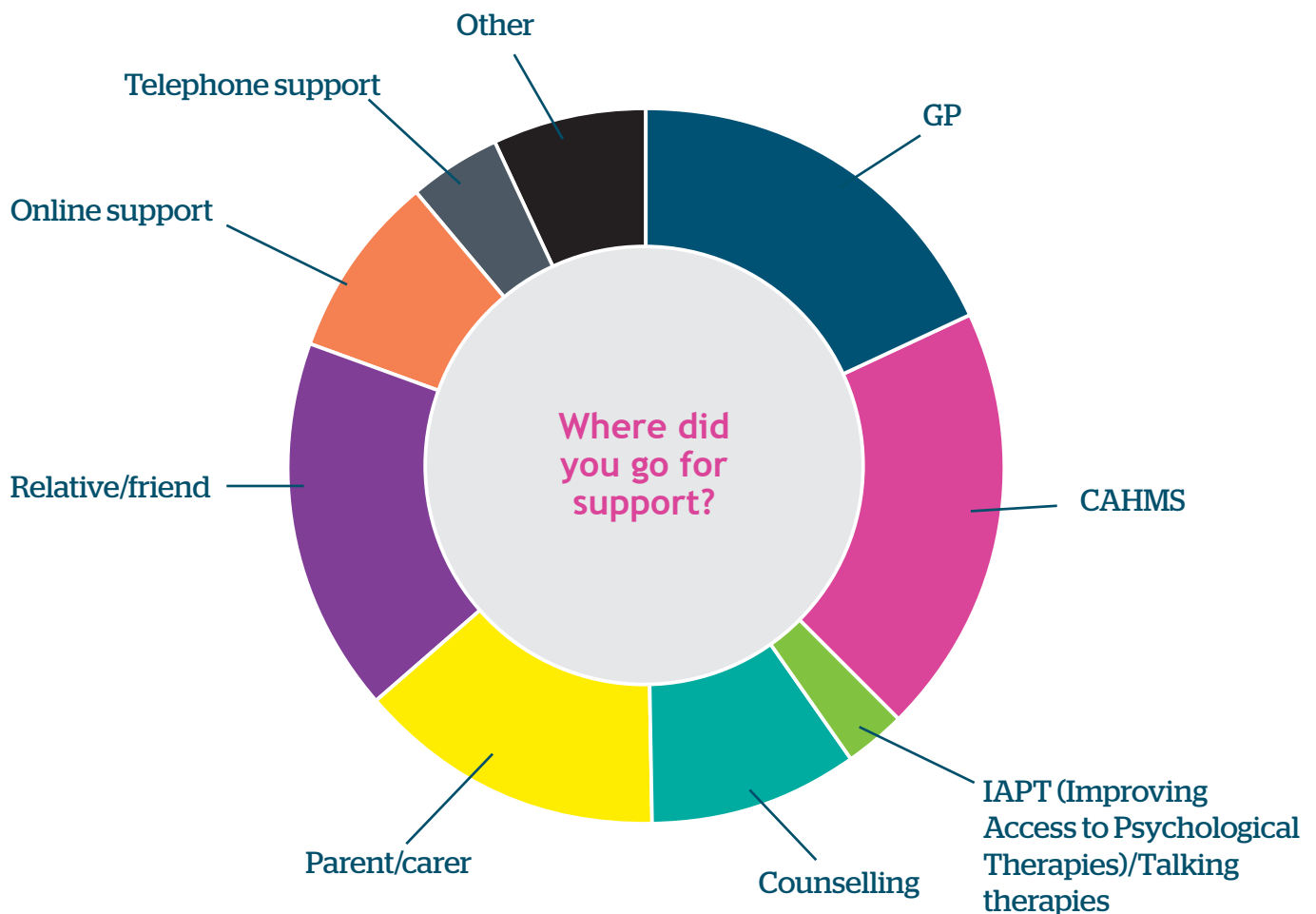


If you answered yes, where did you go for support?

When asked where they had gone to for support, the question enabled the respondents to show all the routes they had taken. 14 young people said that they had requested support from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and 13 said that they had gone to see their GP (General Practitioners).

I was referred to CAMHS by my GP and was on a waiting list for 4 months and then CAMHS asked if there was a school counsellor I could speak to instead. I did get help from CAMHS which I've found quite beneficial, but I still struggle with mental health.

Poor quality service left CAMHS worse than when I went in, GP only talked down on me and didn't help. Only good experience I've had was with Samaritans.



12 young people had turned to a relative or friend for support and 10 to their parents or carers.

I went to my mother for help, and she listened to my rants and cries for hours I really felt someone was hearing me for the first time.

You can't really get in-depth help from your friends, especially if you're trying not to burden them, unfortunately sometimes they do feel like the only people you can talk to without having to explain every label definition and why you identify as it.

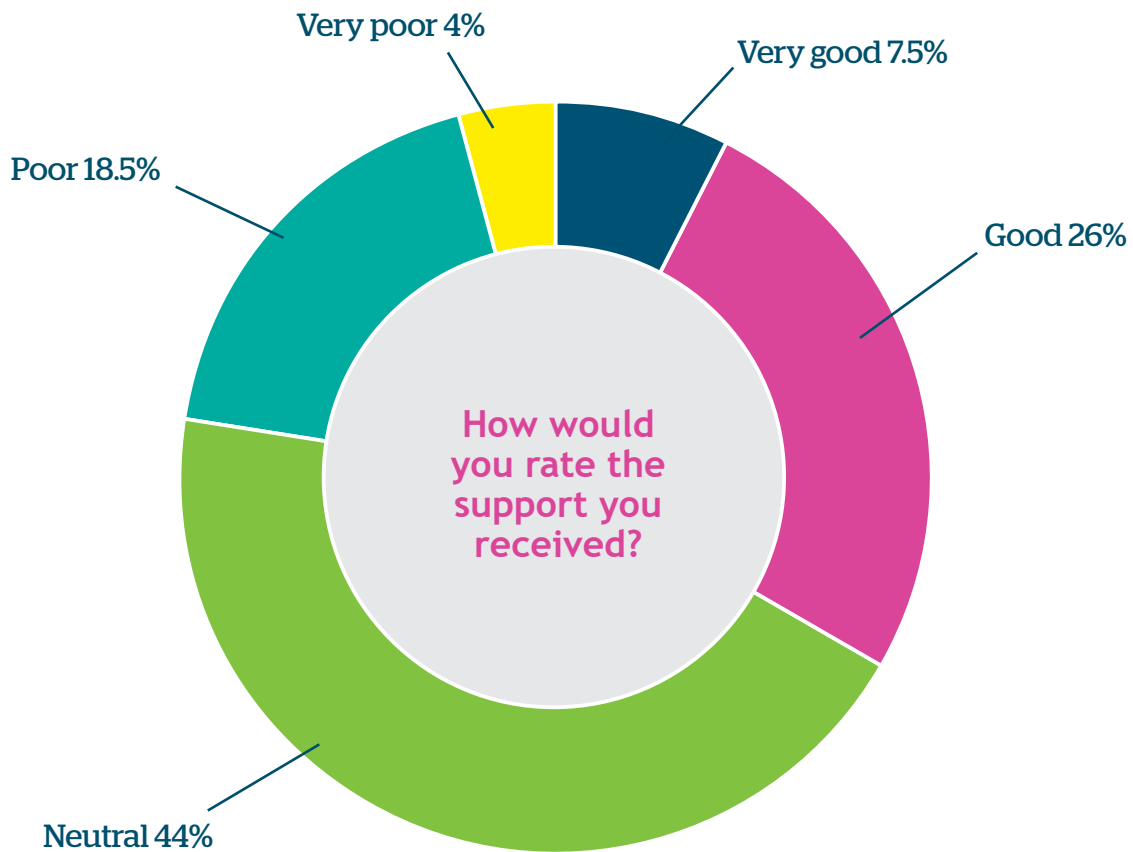
Other sources of support included counselling, online support, and teachers.

GP counsellor was ok but don't think it made much difference.

I went to my teacher as I trusted them the most and they weren't judging of who I was.

How would you rate the support you received?

When asked to rate their experience from very good to very poor, 12 young people felt that the quality of support they had received was neither good nor bad. Seven told us that the support was good and 5 that it was poor. Two young people commented that their experience was very good with one reporting that their experience had been very poor.

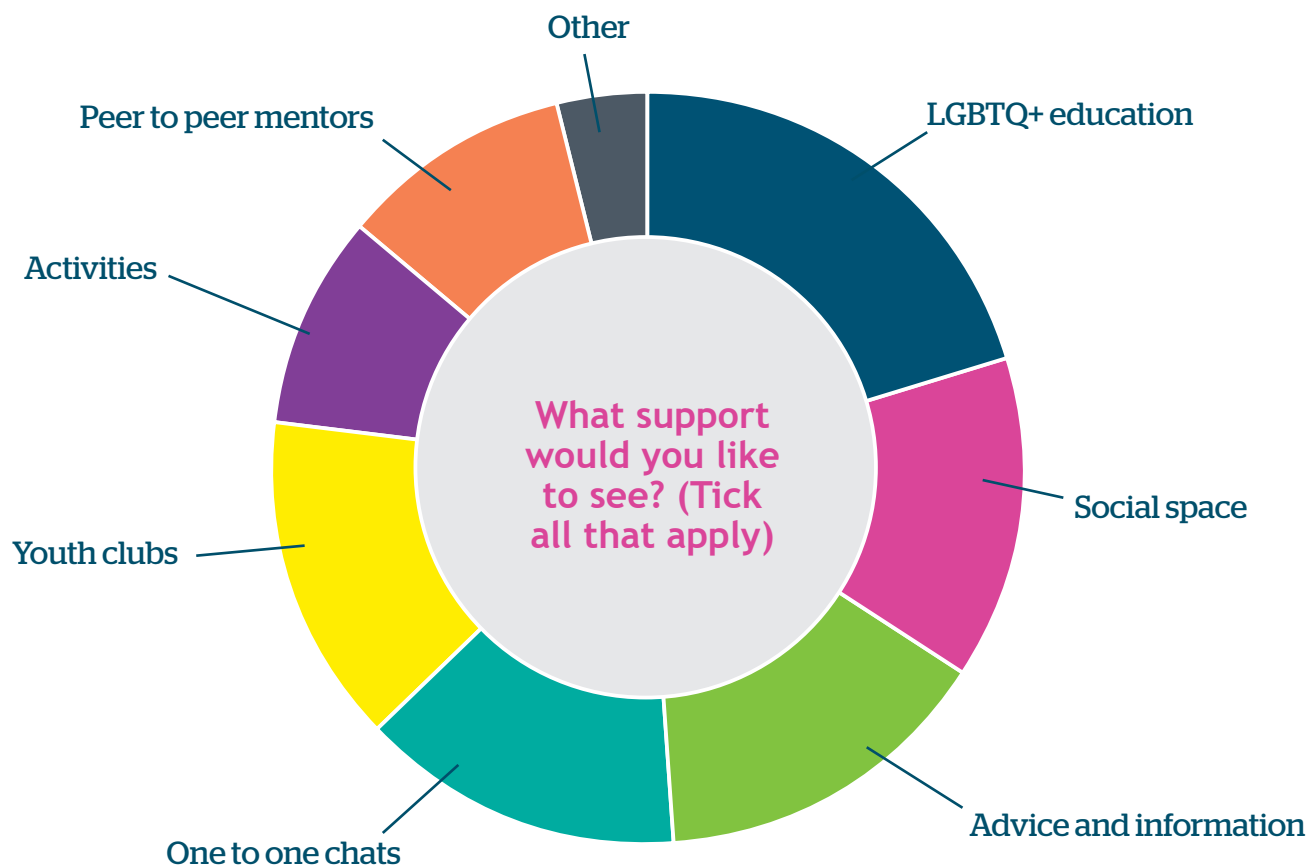


CAMHS has helped me so much.

When I was with CAMHS, I was in group therapy and 1 on 1 counselling, and basically all they did was invalidate my feelings and tell me this is how every teenager feels and that if I take a hot bath and have a cup of tea, I'll be fine, this also happened to me in schools.

What support would you like to see in school/ college/university workplaces, and your local area?

For this question young people were given a list of choices but were also given the opportunity to provide their own suggestions.



LGBTQ+ education

26 respondents wanted more LGBTQ+ education to better support young people. This overwhelming response shows the need for good LGBTQ+ education (including sex education) in schools and is indicative of a current lack of provision.

I think teenagers who are a part of this community, including myself, should be known about, such as teaching what LGBTQ+ is from a young age and being taught how to correctly use someone's preferred pronouns and how to ask them, and also being taught how to respect someone as they are.

In September 2020, LGBTQ+ inclusive Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) became a legal requirement in secondary schools in England. However, these changes only came fully into effect in 2021 and, along with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on teaching, the outcome of this change in the law will need to be analysed further in the future.

The survey shows that young people do not feel they are currently receiving adequate education and there are questions over what the regulations require schools to teach and, how far reaching it is. A large part of RSE relies on specific teachers and their training, therefore the standard of LGBTQ+ education can vary widely leaving many young people feeling disadvantaged.

Environment and resources

The environment and resources that schools provide is seen as central to improving support for young LGBTQ+ individuals. Schools can potentially provide or facilitate almost all the elements of support mentioned in the survey: education, social spaces, advice and information, one-to-one chats, activities, and peer mentors. For young LGBTQ+ people who are being home schooled, access to teaching resources regarding LGBTQ education and sex education should be made available to parents/carers.

The provision of this support, and creating an inclusive and safe environment, was seen as a priority for schools and the education system by our respondents.

Advice and information

Advice and information were also seen as important areas where young people, and their parents/carers could be provided with better support. This could be accessed through schools, youth groups, GP surgeries and online sources.

There is a lack of specific LGBTQ+ online support in Wiltshire but there are online pages for local groups and the CAMHS and On Your Mind websites also have pages with information for LGBTQ+ young people. But there are limits to online support and information including the possible risks for some young people accessing LGBTQ+ specific information in an unsafe home environment, or other unsafe space, as well as the spread of misinformation online.

Please add more support. The suicide rates are going up because of the lack of knowledge and support. Please help the LGBTQ+ youth.

It is clear from the survey that young people want access to advice and information that is actively LGBTQ+ inclusive and saw the benefit of providing advice and information in schools as it avoids singling out LGBTQ+ young people and enables those who are not out, or are still discovering their identity, access to it. It would also educate straight/cis young people and raise awareness and knowledge, fight discrimination and bullying.

I have been bullied and my friends parent told my mum that he is not allowed to be my friend anymore because I am gay.

I've been told by social workers and teachers that being gay is wrong and shouldn't be talked about around teenagers because we are easily influenced.

Social spaces

It was also clear that social spaces and youth clubs were needed for additional support outside of the school environment. This is especially important for young LGBTQ+ people being schooled at home. The provision of social spaces and youth clubs where LGBTQ+ young people could feel safe, make friends, build community, and receive support for individual issues, including mental health, is needed. Youth clubs are also well placed to provide the advice and information, social space, one to one chats, peer mentors and activities that young people said they wanted in our survey. This type of support is often instrumental in helping young people who feel alone and isolated.

There is nowhere where we can get together at a youth club. I am too scared to be me I don't feel safe, and I cry.

LGBTQ+ clubs that are safe for closeted people to join without outing themselves, and trans inclusive language to be used in schools.

There is nothing until you are 13 – it's bad for the younger ones.

While there are some groups in Wiltshire, such as the Malmesbury LGBT youth group, Out of The Can (currently only in Swindon as the Royal Wootton Bassett group has been paused due to Covid-19) and youth groups which are inclusive of LGBTQ+ young people, such as the Rise Trust and Young Melksham, there is still a lack of groups across the county.

The importance of safety at these groups was also highlighted. It may not be safe for individuals to be open about their sexuality or gender identity and young people may still be developing and discovering how they identify. Spaces where this awareness can be safely explored and supported were considered vital by our respondents.

Other support

LGBTQ+ sex education and inclusive language to be used in educational and health settings were other suggestions of how LGBTQ+ young people felt they could be supported.

Many young people will have intersecting identities which could impact on their life experiences along with their mental health and wellbeing. These could include sexuality, gender identity, economic/class background, race/ethnicity, disability, and religion. It is important that support services are aware, educated, and inclusive. One survey response specifically mentioned disability education, highlighting an intersection between disabled and LGBTQ+ young people that could otherwise be overlooked.

A need for LGBTQ+ sex education and sexual health services that include and support them was also mentioned. What can be seen as the heteronormative nature of sex education, which assumes heterosexuality as the norm, can be isolating to LGBTQ+ young people, and a lack of knowledge not only leaves them feeling lost but could also be harmful to their physical and sexual health.

Educating health and social care professionals was also seen as important in addressing lack of understanding and discrimination.

More sexual health/ sex education.

The need for changes in language, particularly to include more trans inclusive language, was raised. This is most visible in school settings but is crucial in any service providing support to LGBTQ+ young people.

Change in language (understanding and asking about pronouns).

Is there anything else you would like to say about health and support services for young LGBTQ+ people in Wiltshire?

The overall theme from those who took part in the survey was the lack of support services available in Wiltshire for young LGBTQ+ people.

Is there any prevailing support and health services for LGBTQ+ people? If so, they need to be louder, more prevalent and not care about what the straight population has to say.

I haven't interacted with much LGBTQ+ support and it would be good if it was made more advertised.

Not even worth looking for help.

I think that transgender healthcare needs to be improved, because currently it can take 13 months + for HRT [Hormone Replacement Therapy] and there are apparently very few surgeons available for gender reassignment surgeries – including 'top surgery' and 'bottom surgery'.

Lack of knowledge and understanding of the LGBTQ+ community by health and social care professionals was also an issue.

They're unaccepting, uneducated on minority groups especially disabled and LGBTQ+ people, and few and far between using age-old resources for healthcare.

Long waiting list, CAMHS counsellor made transphobic comments.

One of the respondents who has recently moved to Wiltshire shared their experience of receiving support in the county.

I haven't lived here very long and so maybe that's why, but it seems really difficult to find support for us here. When I wanted a therapist, it took ages to find one that seemed good and then when I went to him, he didn't understand my gender or sexuality and so I had to be the one helping him with that instead of the other way around.

I'm pretty sure there's a youth group but with Covid its closed to new members, or at least every time I check it is. From conversations with my friends who have been in school here for ages, the sex ed is all heterosexual, which is really dangerous for LGBTQ+ teens, especially if they aren't out at home, because it means they have to learn that information off of the internet which isn't always reliable. Also, as far as I know there is no gender dysphoria clinics anywhere in Wiltshire, which again also isn't great.

As well as all this, school should be a safe space for LGBTQ+ youth just as much as for cis het youth and so having things like gender neutral bathrooms and changing rooms in place as well as having teachers check in with kids for their preferred name and pronouns is imperative.

A lot of LGBTQ+ teens aren't allowed to put the names or pronouns that they prefer onto admissions forms because of unsafe households or conservative parents like my own, but if teachers are asking in class informally the way you would outside of school, it both normalises pronoun use for non-trans individuals which in turn makes things safer for trans kids but it also means that trans kids would be more keen to talk to a teacher if they were having an issue in school, because they feel seen.

Conclusions & recommendations

Young people from the LGBTQ+ community have shared a wealth of useful information which provides a good insight into their experiences of support services in Wiltshire, and we are grateful for their input.

It is clear from the survey that there is a need for LGBTQ+ support, for young people and adults, in Wiltshire and that there is currently a gap in services. The overwhelming majority of the respondents told us they had needed support, but the lack of understanding from health and social care professionals left them feeling unheard and disrespected. Many turned to their parents, relatives and friends for support and others to school staff, further highlighting the need for a LGBTQ+ service provision in Wiltshire.

Education was seen to be key in addressing the lack of understanding and discrimination faced by people from the LGBTQ+ community, with changes in language and normalisation of pronoun use also helping to address these issues. It was felt very strongly that LGBTQ+ education should take place in schools but that health and social care professionals, school staff, support services, emergency services and other professionals would also benefit from this training.

Advice and information were also seen as important areas where young LGBTQ+ people could make informed decisions about the support they needed, but finding support was difficult. There is a need for social spaces and youth clubs where advice and information, one-to-one chats, peer mentors and activities could be provided alongside schools, but there is very little youth club provision in the county and transport issues make them inaccessible to many young people.

Sex education was specifically mentioned by young people as a support need. Although this is being addressed in schools, a review of what advice and information is available from sexual health services regarding the LGBTQ+ community and how this could be made more inclusive would be welcomed.

Transgender healthcare was also raised as an issue with young people reporting long waiting lists to receive hormone replacement therapy and a lack of gender reassignment surgery.

Based on what we heard from the young people who took part in the survey we make the following recommendations:

- Review the support available for young LGBTQ+ people, and their parents/carers, and how it can be improved, including funding.
- Consider more LGBTQ+ education in schools to upskill staff and ensure that health and social care professionals, emergency services and other professionals have mandatory training. This would include the use of inclusive language and using correct pronouns. Ensure that parents/carers of young LGBTQ+ people being schooled at home have access to teaching resources.
- Consider providing safe spaces, advice and information, peer mentors, and activities for LGBTQ+ youth in schools and in local communities.
- Consider including questions about gender/sexual identity in health and care professionals' information gathering to ensure a person-centred approach to care.
- Review the advice and information available from sexual health services to ensure that information relevant to the LGBTQ+ community is included.
- Consider a Wiltshire-based transgender clinic and ways for waiting times for hormone replacement therapy to be reduced.

Glossary

A brief guide to terms referred to in this report. Sources: Stonewall; the Queer Dictionary.

- **Cisgender (or Cis)** – People whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth. Non-trans is also used by some people.
- **Cishet** – A term used to describe someone who is both cisgender and heterosexual. They are the gender they were assigned at birth and are attracted to the opposite gender.
- **Intersectionality** – Multiple aspects of a person's identity and how these can impact on one another, such as gender, race, disability and orientation.
- **LGBTQ+** – The acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and those Questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity. The 'plus' represents other gender identities and sexual orientations. The Q can also represent Queer, but despite this term being reclaimed in recent years, some people still view it as a slur.
- **Pronoun** – Words we use to refer to people's gender in conversation such as 'he' or 'she'. Some people may prefer others to refer to them in gender neutral language and use pronouns such as they/their.
- **Trans** – An umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth. Trans people may describe themselves using one or more of a variety of terms, such as transgender, non-binary or genderqueer.

Thank you

Thank you to all the young people who gave their honest thoughts and to our young volunteers for their time and commitment in creating our survey and writing this report.

Appendix



Share your thoughts on LGBTQ+ services for young people in Wiltshire.

1. Background

Healthwatch Wiltshire is your local health and social care champion. If you use GPs and hospitals, dentists, pharmacies, care homes or other support services, we want to hear about your experiences.

We have the power to make sure NHS leaders and other decision makers listen to local feedback and improve standards of care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.

As part of our Young Healthwatch project we want to find out more about health and support services for young LGBTQ+ people in Wiltshire.

The responses to this survey will be collated and put into a report. All responses will be anonymised and no individuals will be named in the report. The report will be used to help improve services for LGBTQ+ young people.

1. Have you ever needed support, including support for your mental health? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

2. If you answered yes where did you go for support? (Please tick all that apply)

- ☐ GP
- ☐ CAMHS
- ☐ IAPT/talking therapies
- ☐ Counselling
- ☐ Parent/Carer
- ☐ Relative/Friend
- ☐ Online support
- ☐ Telephone support
- ☐ Other (please specify):

3. Was the support you received: *

- ☐ Very Good
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Poor
- ☐ Very Poor

Comments: Please tell us which service and why you gave the above answer

4. What support would you like to see in schools/colleges, University, workplaces and your local area? (Please tick all that apply) *

- ☐ LGBTQ+ education
- ☐ Social space
- ☐ Advice and Information
- ☐ One to One chats
- ☐ Youth clubs
- ☐ Activities

☐ Peer mentor

☐ Other (please specify):

5. Is there anything else you'd like to say about health and support services for young LGBTQ+ people in Wiltshire?

6. What is your age? *

☐ 11 to 15

☐ 16 to 25

7. Which town/village do you live in? *

8. Are you? *

☐ In full time education/training

☐ Employed including self employed

☐ Not in education, employment or training

☐ Other (please specify):

9. What is your gender identity?

10. What is your sexual orientation?

11. What ethnicity do you identify with? *

White

- ☐ British
- ☐ Irish
- ☐ Other

Asian or Asian British

- ☐ Indian
- ☐ Pakistani
- ☐ Bangladeshi
- ☐ Any other Asian background

Mixed

- ☐ White and Black Caribbean
- ☐ White and black African
- ☐ White and Asian
- ☐ Any other mixed background

Black or Black British

- ☐ Caribbean
- ☐ African
- ☐ Any other black background

Other Ethnic Group

- ☐ Chinese
- ☐ Any other Ethnic Group
- ☐ I do not wish to disclose my ethnic origin
- ☐ Other (please specify):

12. Would you describe yourself as any of the following? (Tick all that apply) *

- ☐ Young Carer
- ☐ Living with someone with an illness or disability
- ☐ Living with a mental health condition
- ☐ From a military service family
- ☐ Living in foster care or supported accomodation
- ☐ From a travelling/boating community
- ☐ A new arrival (asylum seeker or refugee)
- ☐ Black/Asian or ethnic minority
- ☐ Living with an illness or disability
- ☐ Homeless
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Other (please specify):



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