



HEALTH REPORT

YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES OF MENTAL
HEALTH, BEING LGBT+ ACCESSING SERVICES
AND RURAL ISOLATION

02

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FOREWORD

Off the Record (OTR) are a Charity and registered company limited by guarantee who have been supporting young people since 1994. The focus of our work has been within the area of Bath and North East Somerset. We have a brief to provide a range of free, confidential, and independent services for children and young people that support the development of their emotional health and well-being. OTR offers a service whereby children and young people can access services and find someone to listen, understand, and help them to find their own way to improve their emotional health and well-being. Our approach is based on the principles of young person-centred, holistic, creative, participative, collaborative, good practice, and working in partnership. We provide a range of free services including counselling, listening support/coaching, youth participation, advocacy and specialist groups, support for care leavers and an LGBT+ focused youth group. Imperative to our practice is to remain responsive to the needs of all young people.

In 2017, Public Health England and the Local Government Association produced a report entitled; Health & Wellbeing in Rural Areas which looked at the need for a greater understanding of the rural communities of England and the need to address the ill health inequalities that exist.

There is limited research about the impact on children and young people and rural isolation, or the connectivity of this to the challenges relating to health, and specifically mental health services. The latest population statistics for BANES (2014) shows that there are 58,668 children and young people under the age of 25 years.

Public Health England predicts that Mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, and conduct disorder affect 1 in 10 young people – in BANES that's nearly 6,000 young people who have a mental health problem.

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We know that 50% of lifetime mental health problems are established by age 14 and 75% by age 24. Additionally, 45% of LGBT+ young people have experienced harassment/threats and 23% physical assault (Youth Chances, 2016). Half of the LGBT+ pupils are bullied in school (Stonewall, 2017).

We know that there is much work to do to provide better support and agency for young people from all areas of Bath and North East Somerset so that we can ensure that ALL young people have the opportunity to lead healthy lives.

We feel it is important that young people feel listened to and heard and we continue to develop services in response to their needs.



Phil Walters

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

In the 2012 paper “Investing in mental health’ The World Health Organisation identified three areas that may lead to the development of mental health difficulties in children and young people:

- Social circumstances such as loneliness, bereavement, neglect
- Environmental factors such as injustice, discrimination and exposure to trauma.
- Individual factors such as cognitive/emotional immaturity, medical illness

<i>Level</i>	<i>Adverse factors</i>		<i>Protective factors</i>
Individual attributes	Low self-esteem	↔	Self-esteem, confidence
	Cognitive/emotional immaturity	↔	Ability to solve problems and manage stress or adversity
	Difficulties in communicating	↔	Communication skills
	Medical illness, substance use	↔	Physical health, fitness
Social circumstances	Loneliness, bereavement	↔	Social support of family & friends
	Neglect, family conflict	↔	Good parenting / family interaction
	Exposure to violence/abuse	↔	Physical security and safety
	Low income and poverty	↔	Economic security
	Difficulties or failure at school	↔	Scholastic achievement
	Work stress, unemployment	↔	Satisfaction and success at work
Environmental factors	Poor access to basic services	↔	Equality of access to basic services
	Injustice and discrimination	↔	Social justice, tolerance, integration
	Social and gender inequalities	↔	Social and gender equality
	Exposure to war or disaster	↔	Physical security and safety

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In July 2017, the Government launched the National LGBT Survey to gather information about the experiences of LGBT people in the UK. The survey received 108,100 responses from individuals aged 16 or over who were living in the UK and self-identified as LGBT or intersex. The focus of the survey centred around questions about living in the UK, education, healthcare, employment and personal safety.

The survey tells us that LGBT respondents are less satisfied with their life than the general UK population (rating satisfaction 6.5 on average out of 10 compared with 7.7). Trans respondents had particularly low scores (around 5.4 out of 10). Among cisgender respondents, gay/lesbian people had the highest scores (6.9) and pansexual or asexual people had the lowest scores (both 5.9). Trans people had low scores: trans men scored 5.1, trans women scored 5.5 and non-binary people scored 5.5.

The Youth Chances report (2016) raised concerns about the experience of LGBT+ young people in this society. This report included a survey of 7,126 young people, aged 16-25 years, of whom 6,514 were LGBTQ young people. 612 were heterosexual non-trans young people and 956 were trans young people.

The report identified high rates of poor mental health in the whole sample, but significantly higher levels, including depression, anxiety, self-harm and suicidal thoughts, were reported by LGBTQ young people.

LGBTQ young people are twice as likely not to feel accepted in the area where they currently live, compared to heterosexual non-trans young people.

42% of LGBTQ respondents report going for medical help for depression or anxiety, compared to 29% of heterosexual non-trans respondents. Over half of LGBTQ respondents (52%) report self-harming, either now or in the past. This compares to 35% of heterosexual non-trans young people. 44% of the LGBTQ respondents report having ever thought about suicide. This compares to 26% of heterosexual non-trans respondents.

THIS STUDY

In 2019 Off the Record was commissioned in partnership with Healthwatch Bath and North East Somerset to complete a piece of research into the experiences of young people, mental health, LGBT+, and rural isolation. This report is a summary of that research.

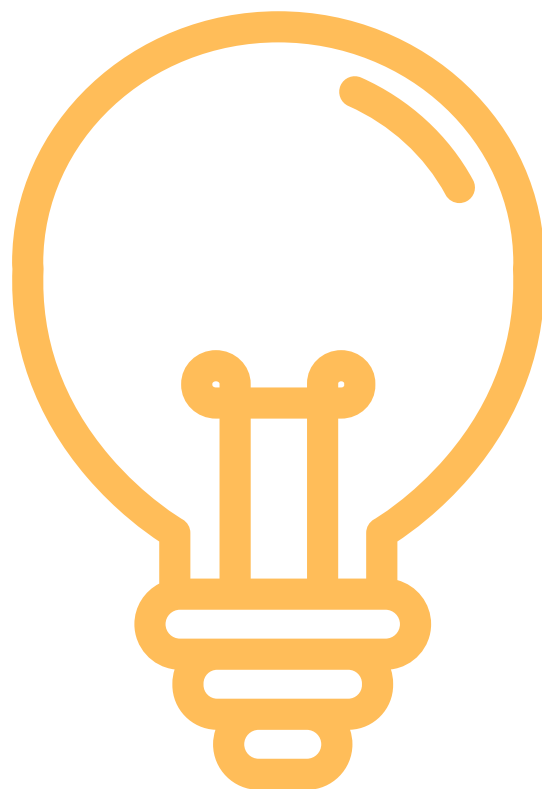
The research has been led by Off the Record's youth voice coordinator Alice Hoyle who worked in collaboration with 5 young people from the Your Voice group. This report provides an overview of the key findings of the experiences of young people, young lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and questioning people (LGBTQ) aged 16-25-year-olds in Bath and North East Somerset.

Methodology

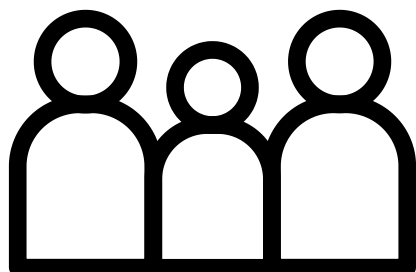
During June 2019 to September 2019, young people aged 11- 21 from across Bath and North East Somerset were asked to take part in focus groups, questionnaires, and online polling. 245 young people took part in our research.

The ethos of the research has been to ensure that questions are considered collectively, appropriately, and are inclusive of a wide audience. The team used three main sources of data gathering; Focus groups, survey monkey questionnaires, and social media polling. The data was collated and organised according to three main areas:

- Young people's experiences of mental health and mental healthcare
- Experiences of LGBT+ and LGBT+ services
- Young people's experiences of rural vs urban living



FOCUS GROUPS



105 young people participated in the focus groups.

47% of the focus group participants identified as LGBT+



10 focus groups were carried out in schools and youth settings across Bath and North East Somerset with young people from 11-21 years of age.

A mix of genders and sexual identities were surveyed which included four LGBT+ groups;

- Two settings in Somer Valley (one youth setting and one school lunchtime Pride group)
- One school-based in Chew Valley
- One LGBT+ youth group Central Bath

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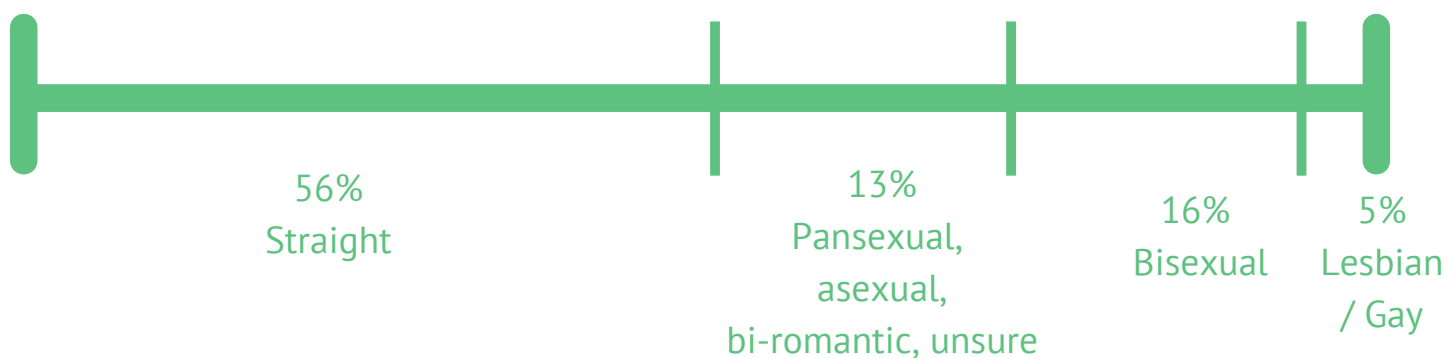
ONLINE SURVEY QUESTIONS

Age of respondents



60% of the respondents identified as female, 27% of respondents were male, 10% of respondents were non-binary, 1% preferred not to say. 2% stated they were questioning. 84% stated their sex-matched their gender, 11% stated their sex did not match their gender and 5% preferred not to say.

Sexual identity of respondents



57% of respondents reported they lived rurally and 33% that they lived in an urban environment.

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SOCIAL MEDIA POLLING

Polling Tools

We used the following polling tools;

- Survey Monkey
- Twitter
- Instagram
- Private Facebook groups
- Space LGBT+
- OTR Youth Voice



OTR used social media polls under the @OTRBanes twitter account. While many of our followers are based in Bath and North East Somerset, we do not have any data on individual demographic information and therefore these polls may draw from a wider area of data.

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WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE TOLD US?

Would you consider yourself to have a mental health issue?



Yes

29%



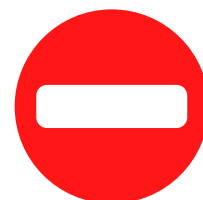
No

25%



Not sure

39%



Prefer not to say

6%

What are the issues facing young people?



Anxiety

54%



Relationships

42%



Stress

41%



Exams

37%

How does your emotional wellbeing affect every day life?

Participants were clear that emotional wellbeing had a significant impact on their everyday life with 92% reporting their emotional wellbeing affects everything or affects some aspects of their lives.

70% of trans young people reported their mood impacts on everything they do.

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MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Have you ever needed to access support for your mental health?



Yes

60%



No

40%

How does your emotional wellbeing affect every day life?

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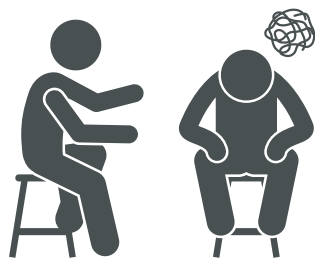
70% of trans young people reported their mood impacts on everything they do.

What are the barriers to accessing support?



Worried about
what to expect

58%



Worried about
opening up to a
stranger

74%



Location of
service

48%



Lack of
knowledge about
support available

37%

KEY FINDINGS

The OTR consultation was effective at engaging young people to explore and understand some of the key issues affecting young people in BaNES. Young people's experiences of mental health, being LGBT+, accessing services, and rural isolation tells us a number of important things.

We know from wider evidence that LGBT+ young people experience a greater incidence of depression, anxiety, suicide, and substance misuse.

However, the findings from the OTR research also indicates a number of ongoing concerns about how and when young people access support, trust, and the stigma can be attached to reaching out to support services as well as ongoing mental health needs.

In today's society, the need to connect, build relationships, develop trust, and talk and share our lives is vital for human development. We can see from our findings that some young people are not seeking support for their wellbeing when they need it. Yet 92% of respondents felt that their wellbeing had a significant impact on their everyday life.

There is increasing attention and focus on young people's wellbeing and how organisations can best support them. It remains paramount that ALL services need to connect better to support young people at different and difficult times.

Without consultation and open transparent dialogue with young people, concerns can develop further into more challenging issues across the school, home, and wider networks.

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A 2016 Office for National Statistics report showed that the national average of people identifying as lesbian, gay, and bisexual was two percent. In London, that figure was 2.7 percent, while in parts of the country, such as the East of England, this dipped as low as 1.2 percent. From our consultation, young people stated that the lack of transport services and of accessible mental health support services compounds isolation further.

Of those who had experienced rural services, the feedback showed that 15% felt that services were poor, and only 9% feel that the service to support them was good.

54% of young people experience anxiety, with over 40% of young people facing worries around relationships and stress.

Asking for help can be challenging and difficult for all of us. This is mirrored in our consultation with young people who listed the following challenges when considering or seeking help:

- Feelings of embarrassment to connect with services
- Negative feelings that nothing will change
- Simply feeling too bad to connect and reach out for support.
- Lack of knowledge about the support available

A number of respondents expressed concern that their conversations would not remain confidential which raises questions around how organisations foster trusting relationships as well as the rigor and transparency of staff practice. It can be daunting to step into an unknown space and ask for support. This is echoed with 74% of young people who are worried about opening up to strangers.

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It is important to highlight that over 76% of young people consulted did not feel that their issues were serious enough to seek help. 53% of young people were concerned about the stigma of accessing services.

Accessing services when you don't have the support of a parent or guardian can be very difficult for young people. This is further compounded for those in rural communities who may rely on a parent/guardian to drive them to appointments or meetings.

The preference for support for mental health is as follows;

- Having someone to talk to that can listen non-judgmentally 74%
- Having supportive adults (eg teachers, youth workers) 72%
- Getting enough sleep 64%
- Having supportive friendships 63%
- Access to counselling or therapy 63%

Creating and maintaining healthy social networks is important when you are experiencing challenges. Social relationships need to be developed on trust and positive connection, therefore in rurally isolated areas, LGBT+ young people may struggle to share their identities without visible support and acceptance. Without good social support networks and connections, young people can experience further social isolation and loneliness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

An important cornerstone of wellbeing for everyone is through the five ways to wellbeing;

- Connect with other people
- Be active
- Learn new skills
- Take Notice
- Learn
- Give

Yet, for many young people connecting and reaching out remains a challenge. From our feedback, Young people expressed a need for the first contact for support to take place through an online form with text messaging and face to face contact happening afterward.

Despite the popularity of our phone call service, making contact through a phone is a very low preference for many young people who have suggested email, messaging services, or through better use of social media.

Once contact has begun, there is a clear need for face to face contact for mental health services. For rurally isolated young people accessing support can be incredibly challenging. Services need to remain more visible yet discrete with considered attention to travel arrangements for those in villages or with limited family/home support.

As with all services, ensuring that all staff demonstrate awareness of LGBT+ needs in a safe supportive environment is very important to young people. Additionally, for those young people in challenging situations within the home accessing support that is both considered, sensitive, flexible, and bespoke is vital.

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If services are to develop, young people, have suggested the following;

- Better support with transport/connecting with services
- Youth clubs/workshops as well as access to peer connection/friendships within their local areas
- Mental health training/information guidance for a wider cohort of communities/schools
- School counselling for issues around anxiety, illness, sexuality, and gender, eating disorders, OCD
- Bespoke creative arts offers as well as exercise guidance
- LGBTQI+ support networks as well as better support locally in villages and communities.
- Online services of support/social groups/connection

We must continue to develop work that remains responsive to a changing climate for young people as they progress into adulthood. The need to connect, feel listened to, and supported remains key for all people. We should continue to work together to create spaces in which young people co-produce the way in which organisations support them.

COVID 19 AND YOUNG PEOPLE

OTR completed this report in 2019, we're releasing our findings in a very different world. We've added this section to acknowledge the significance of the pandemic for young people.

The pandemic continues to have a big impact on young people and those that surround them. UK Youth carried out a survey with young people between March 20-27 2020 to explore and understand the impact of COVID-19 on young people. In order to ensure a wider perspective, UK Youth reached out to the UK Youth Movement for support. 252 respondents, representing 235 organisations, including network, membership and infrastructure organisations that further represent another 1,848 organisations completed the survey. The respondents represent organisations that engage young people across all English regions and the four nations. The report highlighted the following:

“Whilst every effort is already being made to continue vital support services by moving them online, for some young people there are huge barriers to digital engagement. Youth organisations have been quick to adapt their services and have been at the forefront of supporting the wider emergency response, often redeploying their staff to distribute emergency care packages, support emergency services and transform their buildings into foodbanks.”

One of the UK's leading LGBTQ+ Charities Mermaids added their voice to UK Youth”

“We are so worried for our young people. They are already a very marginalised and isolated group and now that has intensified greatly. Many exist in unhappy homes with little chance for escape or support. With the whole nation now being told to stay at home these young people are left trapped with the people they are desperate to escape from and even less able to be who they are.”

UK Youth Movement predicts that the impact on young people will include the following, ranked by order of importance (based on number of responses).

1. Increased mental health or wellbeing concerns
2. Increased loneliness and isolation
3. Lack of safe space – including not being able to access their youth club/ service and lack of safe spaces at home
4. Challenging family relationships
5. Lack of trusted relationships or someone to turn to
6. Increased social media or online pressure
7. Higher risk for engaging in gangs, substance misuse, carrying weapons or other harmful practices
8. Higher risk for sexual exploitation or grooming

There are valid concerns for young people and their future. For us all to remain responsive to the needs of young people and the people around them, we need to adapt our services. There is clearly a need to drive digital innovation as 81% of respondents said that unreliable or no access to IT infrastructure (such as phones, Wi-Fi, or mobile data) could pose a barrier to young people engaging in youth services digitally. 69% also indicated that unreliable or no access to a private space could also be a challenge to engaging in digital services.

Finally, If we seek to innovate our practice by reaching across digital platforms, we will have to develop better infrastructures and support methods for us all. We need to pay close attention to wellbeing for everyone, consider carefully safeguarding support and guidance structures as well as wider family setting support. It is a time to think and work differently, out of silo and into a space which is an inclusive collaborative space for all.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

OTR could not have completed this report without the 245 young people that attended a focus group, completed a questionnaire or responded to our social media polls. Special thank you to them for taking the time to help us learn about their experiences.

Thanks to Healthwatch Bath & North East Somerset (www.healthwatchbathnes.co.uk) for funding the research, and a big thanks to the secondary schools and partners in Bath & North East Somerset that supported the project and hosted focus groups. Without Alice Hoyle doing the focus groups and collating the questionnaires and social media feedback - this report would not have happened; and big thanks to Carrie Creamer for putting the findings together into this brilliant report format.

And huge thanks to all involved for making the report look brilliant with infographics and branding. Lastly, a huge thanks to all the staff and volunteers across OTR who champion young people's access to mental health services everyday by empowering them to have a voice, grow in confidence and become leaders.



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