Queer Youth Work:

Resource on LGBTIQ+ Youth Affirmative Mental Health Approaches

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction to LGBTIQ+ Youth Affirmative Approach

At their core, LGBTIQ+ Youth affirmative mental health approaches are about creating an environment that accepts, affirms, celebrates and uplifts the identities of LGBTIQ+ young people in a culturally sensitive way. These approaches strive to offer a positive attitude towards the young people's experiences of their own gender, sexual and romantic attraction, relationship diversity; rather than pathologizing or trying to change aspects of these diversities. An effective LGBTIQ+ affirmative mental health approach has several dimensions: on the one hand, the affirmative aspect signifies a supportive and compassionate approach to mental health; on the other, it also encompasses several other reflective features critical for development of a truly affirmative space, for example:

- *knowledge of the unique developmental cultural aspects associated with the various LGBTIQ+ identities,*

- *self-knowledge on the part of those offering support, particularly in relation to their own attitudes towards the LGBTIQ+ spectrum,*

- *a degree of socio-cultural awareness on the larger environment within which the LGBTIQ+ young person operates,*

- *awareness regarding practitioner's own conditioning, biases and potential prejudices when it comes to this group.*

The foundational affirmation of the LGBTIQ+ affirmative approach is that no one gender or sexuality is better than another, but rather that they all are part of the larger diversity and variation associated with being human. Although this might sound simplistic on paper, it is much harder in practice; one only needs to consider a few of the most visible societal attitudes and cultural values to realise that there, in fact, is a clear hierarchy of genders and sexualities permeating through the world, with cisgender people and heterosexuality positioned at the top. LGBTIQ+ affirmative approach, thus, not only actively works towards promotion of the equality of all sexualities and genders, it also considers the potential impacts that the current state of inequality has on young LGBTIQ+ people. This means that although the approach regards each LGBTIQ+ young person as a unique individual, it is not individualistic in nature, that is in addition to the unique individual aspects, it also considers the larger relational, societal and cultural contexts and their positive and negative impacts on the LGBTIQ+ person.

It is also important to note that the LGBTIQ+ affirmative approaches are approaches in the utmost sense of the word. Rather than a manual of specific tools or steps to follow, they are a set of values, attitudes, and perspectives, a lens that can be applied to already existing methods and techniques used to work with LGBTIQ+ youth. As demonstrated in the further sections of this material, the affirmative lens can indeed be applied to a wide plethora of different way of working with LGBTIQ+ youth - from dance and drama to peer support and counselling, the LGBTIQ+ affirmative approaches can be used to create a truly welcoming space, offering LGBTIQ+ young people an opportunity to experiences themselves fully and authentically in a supportive environment affirming all of their diverse identities.

1.2. Historical background

The affirmative approach towards LGBTIQ+ people is inextricably connected with the mental health setting from which it originates. For much of its history, formal mental health establishment used to view sexual and gender diversity as negative and unwanted disorders, with widespread attempts to change gender and/or sexuality of those who were deemed "sick" due to being outside the cis-/hetero "normal" (Drescher, 2015) This pathologizing outlook was even formally enshrined in the diagnostic manuals and internal classifi-

cations of diseases of the time, with homosexuality categorised as a mental health disorder (Drescher, 2015). Thanks to the incredible efforts of the LGBTIQ+ liberation movement, this outlook slowly started to change in the early 1970s, following the infamous Stonewall riots (Drescher, 2015).

However, it was not until the early 1980s that LGBTIQ+ affirmative approaches started developing. In 1982, psychotherapist Alan K. Malyon (1982) introduced the notion of "gay affirmative therapy", positing that rather than attempting to convert the gay client's homosexuality into heterosexuality, practitioners should focus on valuing and celebrating the client's identity while working with the sexuality-based discrimination and stigmatisation experienced by the client. He argued that the client's sexual identity needed affirming rather than pathologizing because it is not the client's sexuality but the negative societal attitudes towards it that cause the client's mental health to suffer.

At that time, this was a radical idea, especially when considering that the primary course of action for LGBTIQ+ people suffering with mental health issues was attempting to change their sexuality or gender identity since these were seen as the cause of their suffering. The widespread "treatment methods" used were what we would nowadays describe as conversion therapy practices, all of which have been proven to cause significant harm (Haldeman, 2022). Malyon's 1982 suggestions to shift the focus away from changing to affirmation and to see homosexuality as one of the natural variations of human sexual diversity were even more radical given the fact that they came five years before ego-dystonic (experienced by the person as unwanted) homosexuality was removed from the third version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders (Drescher, 2015).

Although originally associated only with homosexuality, affirmative approaches nowadays encompass all identities of the LGBTIQ+ spectrum, including those associated with other sexualities as well as sex and gender.

1.3. Different terminology used in connection with LGBTIQ+ Affirmative approaches

There are many terms used to delineate one's commitment to work in a LGBTIQ+ affirmative way. What follows is an overview of these different terms used to describe the affirmative approach when working with LGBTIQ+ issues. Although many of these are used interchangeably, it is crucial to have awareness around the subtle differences and connotations associated with each.

- *LGBTIQ+ friendly: - oftentimes used to indicate LGBTIQ+ welcoming public spaces, such as bars, cafés or restaurant; despite its amicable connotations towards LGBTIQ+ people, this term does not reflect the current understanding of the affirmative approaches due to its lacking the critical awareness and knowledge of LGBTIQ+ specific issues which are a standard feature of the affirmative approach.*

    o *Simply put: it is not enough to be only friendly, one also has to have the knowledge and self-awareness of the LGBTIQ+ specific issues to be affirmative.*

- *LGBTIQ+ positive: - also often used to signify a welcoming space for LGBTIQ+ people; however, it implies that positive attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ people are something of an additional choice and an extra effort that needs to be made rather than a norm we should all strive towards. It also omits the knowledge and awareness aspects of the affirmative approach.*

    o *Simply put: it is not enough to be only positive, one also has to have the knowledge and self-awareness of the LGBTIQ+ specific issues to be truly affirmative.*

- *LGBTIQ+ validating: - this terminology implies that LGBTIQ+ identities need "validating" or approval from outside, taking away from the affirmation that being LGBTIQ+ is a variation of the human gender and sexual diversity rather a "special identity" in need of validation.*

    o *Simply put: LGBTIQ+ identities do not need approval or validation, they exist as a natural variation of the human gender and sexual diversities.*

- *LGBTIQ+ affirmative: - standard terminology for affirmative approaches; it is important to note that in this context, "affirmative" means "positively supporting", not "confirming", as in "establishing validity or truth". The point of an affirmative approach is not to "confirm" anyone's identity, it is to allow for true exploration by non-prioritising any one identity, sexuality or gender over another.*

    o *Simply put: to affirm is to positively support without prejudice or bias preferring one sexuality and/or gender over another.*

- *LGBTIQ+ informed: standard terminology for affirmative approaches; the description "informed" is meant to express awareness and knowledge of the specific issues that LGBTIQ+ experience in addition to those experienced by the general population, for example, coming out, transitioning or specific forms of social stigmatisation.*

    o *Simply put: to be informed is to have specialist knowledge about the specific issues experienced by LGBTIQ+ persons in addition to the general populations.*

To conclude, in this resource we use the following (wide) definition of affirmative mental health approaches:

Affirmative mental health approaches are about providing and advocating services or an environment that accepts, affirms, validates and uplifts the identities of young people in a culturally sensitive way. These approaches validate experience of one's own gender, sexual and romantic attraction, relationship diversity and validate those in need of support rather than trying to change them. On one hand, it is a compassionate approach to mental health. On the other hand, it is the integration of knowledge and self-awareness by those who offer support, unique developmental cultural aspects of LGBTIQ+ individuals, their own self-knowledge, and the translation of this into effective mental health approaches.

1.4. Aims of the resource

The main aim of the resource is to provide methods, techniques, and tools of affirmative mental health approaches, which can be used to increase the quality of mental health in the young LGBTIQ+ population. LGBTIQ-affirmative mental health approaches can

enhance youth workers' and mental health professionals' attitudes, knowledge, and skills for working with sexual and gender minority youth. These approaches are derived from sports, embodiment, dance, trauma sensitive yoga, movement, peer support, theatre and culture. The resource might also be useful for non-LGBTIQ+ youth workers for developing and communicating LGBTIQ+ sensitive dialogue.

The resource does not provide a comprehensive in-depth review of affirmative mental health approaches for working with LGBTIQ+ youth. Due to the fact that the content of the resource is based on qualitative data collected from LGBTIQ-oriented non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from five partner countries (Croatia, Greece, Ireland, Scotland, and Slovakia), the content reflects experiences, opinions, and views from various practitioners working with LGBTIQ+ youth on a daily basis.

1.5. Data collection

Qualitative data collection was conducted in 2022. Each project partner recruited LGBTIQ+-oriented NGOs from its country. The participation in the study was completely voluntary. The project partners developed a survey with open-ended questions covering the following topics: organisation information, awareness about affirmative mental health approaches, description of affirmative mental health approaches (methods, techniques, or interventions), ways of addressing principles of affirmative mental health approach, unmet needs (professional and institutional), self-assessment of affirmative mental health approaches, and national policy framework. In total, 12 NGOs participated in the study.

Using a funnel approach, the collected data was summarised in two steps: within country and across countries. First, each project partner summarised the data from its own country. The purpose of this summary was to highlight (and extract) information that was particularly important for the resource, and possibly country-specific. Summarising helped identify recurring information, thus reflecting the importance of it. Further, it helped identify specific methods, techniques, approaches, or interventions for providing mental health support, thus allowing us to document the diversity of these mental health support activities. Second, each questionnaire topic was then summarised across countries. Final content (i.e., summa-

ry of summaries) was discussed during partner meetings before including it in the resource, and all the data will be represented in the following chapters.

1.6. Unmet needs

To get the sense of NGOs' daily work with LGBTIQ+ youth, professional and institutional unmet needs were examined. Participating NGOs highlighted a number of (unmet) needs of LGBTIQ+ youth, related to their mental health. These needs were grouped in five different support types: emotional, mental health, community-level, legal, and sexual health. Beside LGBTIQ+ youth's needs, NGOs have the needs of their own. These were grouped into six types of needs: personnel, education and competence improvement, continuous education, community of practices, and support and state recognition.

Individual needs

1. *Emotional support:* the need to be heard and seen, feeling accepted, feeling supported and validated, feeling of belonging, free expression in public, exploration of family and relationship issues, psychological support (mood management, partnership issues, self-image and self-worth).

2. *Mental health support:* dealing with bullying and similar harassment, overcoming traumatic experience of violence or discrimination, issues of gender identity and/or sexual orientation, minority stress, family or relationship issues,anxiety, personal struggles.

3. *Community-level support:* Socialisation, entertainment, seeking company, developing skills for peer support, arts, project/event management, offering a "safe (queer friendly) space", space to safely question their identity and acquire information.

4. *Legal support:* Legal protection in cases of homophobic incidents, recognition of human rights (conditions to marriage, in case of divorces, equal rights to parenting), advice on transitioning.

5. *Sexual health support:* seeking health information or advice, testing and treatment, access to condoms, PreP, support for people living with HIV.

Institutional needs

1. Need for more personnel: youth workers and peers/volunteers (both LGBTIQ+ and non-LGBTIQ+), workers that have the capacity to build rapport with clients so that the youth feel safe and seen.

2. Need for additional education and competence improvement: profession-oriented needs such as supervision, new methods and approaches that could be used in support services and be transferred easily to those interested in this work.

3. Need for continuous education: for youth workers, peer workers, and mental health professionals (e.g., issues that affect the queer community, gender diversity, self-assessment, aspects of mental health related to youth's families, media literacy).

4. Development of a community of practices: a network for education, supervision, co-reflections (peer supervision).

5. Support and state recognition: of needs for mental health support in the LGBTIQ+ population (funding, legislation, etc.).

6. Need for spaces: for example, LGBTIQ+ resources centres.

2. ADDRESSING PRINCIPLES OF THE AFFIRMATIVE MENTAL HEALTH APPROACH

Participating NGOs were asked to explain how they (or how they would) address various principles of affirmative mental health approach. We used affirmative psychotherapy principles from the work of Proujansky and Pachankis (2014) and Maradi and Budge (2018). Beside summarised data from the questionnaire, a short description of each principle is also provided.

1. Be aware of the iImpact of stigma and additional LGBTIQ-related stressors (i.e., minority stress) on mental health

It is important to distinguish young people's minority stress-related difficulties from difficulties that are based on other psychosocial mental health factors. Minority stress can impact various aspects of young people's life by inducing, for example, feelings of guilt or shame, self-silencing, fears of negative evaluation, or staying "in the closet". Although some of these symptoms might seem unrelated to the young person's sexual orientation, it is important to conduct a careful assessment of the minority stressors.

1. *Understand your own personal struggle as a youth worker/mental health professional, and, as a starting point for counselling, coaching, or supporting young LGBTIQ+ people, be aware of the trauma you have suffered.*

2. *Normalise stress factors and stigma as social scripts that are imposed on LGBTIQ+ young people.*

3. *Take your own cultural background into account.*

4. *Be aware that sexual orientation and gender identity/expression are a valid part of the human experience.*

5. *Conduct promotional campaigns and provide educational material.*

6. *Actively name and bring up stressors into the discussions/work with LGBTIQ+ young people.*

7. *Suggest journal writing.*

8. *Celebrate adversities that have been overcome.*

2. Facilitate emotional awareness, regulation, and acceptance.

Minority stress might affect mental health by constraining LGBTIQ+ young peoples' emotional awareness, regulation, and acceptance. Due to the social factors and non-accepting cultural messages, LGBTIQ+ people tend to avoid or hide their emotional experiences. If proper support is missing, they may attempt to regulate their emotions in other ways such as overeating, excessive exercising, work overload, self-isolation, use of substances and sexual activities. Emotional regulation is especially important for young people with symptoms of anxiety or depression.

1. *Provide positive feedback and appreciation of the person.*

2. *Actively listen and do check-ins.*

3. *Slow down the process, and use breath work, or some other grounding practices to link mind and body as means of observing, expressing and accepting feelings.*

4. *Offer tools such as image cards, modelling clay or similar to assist disclosure of feelings.*

5. *Learn how to reconnect after disconnecting (what happened, own your part, ask, apologise, express your needs, etc.).*

6. *Provide workshops and education on the topic of emotional literacy.*

3. Decrease avoidance

Minority stress and sexual minority stigma can induce avoidance in somewhat expected ways, such as avoiding romantic relationships or other LGBTIQ-specific concerns due to shame and fear of rejection. More subtle ways are also possible, such as perfectionistic behaviour at work or home, thus creating means for compensation for feeling inferior to the majority group (e.g, heterosexual peers).

1. *Raise awareness of the importance of mental health.*

2. *Emphasise mutuality.*

3. *Remember the importance of incremental growth (small steps).*

4. *Build resilience.*

5. *Support self-confidence.*

6. *Promote community support, resources and activities.*

7. *Support sharing feelings, either on a one to one basis or in small groups (or pairs). For example, they could share what they made with clay or the card they chose and how that relates to what they are going through or feeling.*

8. *Support group sharing and discussion (for example, to feel less isolated when they understand that they are not alone).*

9. *Understand the role that minority stress and other complex (past) experiences, such as trauma, plays.*

10. *Refer to personal experience (give emotional support while sharing your own experiences).*

4. Empower through assertive communication.

Assertiveness is a skill trained through communication. In many cases, LGBTIQ+ young people are aware of the right to express themselves or the right to set boundaries, but the question is how frequently do they assert these rights. On the one hand, coming out as a LGBTIQ+ individual may be a profound act of self-assertion, on the other, concealment can shape one's self, leading to feelings of guilt and shame, fears of being discovered, identity ambivalence, decreased self-esteem, and distorted perception of self.

1. *Role-play to help LGBTIQ+ young people to practise skills for bolstering their sense of self-efficacy to assert their wants, needs, and rights.*

2. *When necessary, refer to facts rather than feelings.*

3. *Promote and facilitate open and honest communication, trust and respect of individual boundaries.*

4. *Practise active listening and ask open-ended questions (i.e. be curious).*

5. *Acknowledge the importance of silence.*

6. *Learn how to take responsibility for ourselves and our actions without judging or blaming other people or ourselves.*

7. *Form small groups so individuals can share their feelings more openly.*

8. *Hold space and create a safe place where participants can gently challenge themselves and also communicate their feelings, thoughts and needs more efficiently.*

9. *Practise saying no to assert boundaries, asking for help to communicate needs, accepting criticism and expressing opinions appropriately to navigate conflict and confrontation.*

5. Validate the unique strengths of LGBTIQ+ individuals.

Beside addressing consequences of minority stress, enhancing resilience and promoting acceptance, LGBTIQ+ individuals should be guided to recognise the historical legacy of which they are a part, and what kind of (minority) strength LGBTIQ+ people are able to demonstrate through courage, pride, and shamelessness. This may include various forms of social creativity, social activism and volunteerism.

1. *Refer to personal experience as an LGBTIQ+ person.*

2. *Use inclusive language and demonstrate respect for diverse identities.*

3. *Foster positive social institutions, positive subjective experiences and character strengths, celebrate their unique experiences, and validate their resources and abilities.*

4. *Remain curious, open and investigate, together with LGBTIQ+*

young people: what is their sexual or gender identity or gender expression, how it manifests, how it feels in the body, how it reflects in their behaviours, why is it hidden, how does it unfold to become a strength.

5. *Learn queer movement history in the both global and local context*

6 *Breathwork and body awareness (in a group setting) could support them in recognising, acknowledging, and integrating their strengths.*

7. *Provide workshops and education on the topic.*

8. *Encourage activities on understanding your own and others comfort/stretch/panic zones.*

9. *Foster a good understanding and knowledge on the different learning styles.*

6. Facilitate supportive relationships.

Compared to their heterosexual peers, young LGBTIQ+ young people usually have less social support – an essential buffer against adverse effects of minority stress. Social rejection may even come from the LGBTIQ+ community, for example, by being marginalised based on age, looks, race, effeminacy, or HIV status. To recognise and embrace the diversity across the community, opportunities for support and companionship should be promoted, within the community and outside of it.

1. *Ask about an individual's family dynamics and upbringing, because it may shed light on needs and boundaries that very often are key to successful supportive relationships.*

2. *Enquire about the individual's support network and support their efforts to expand and/or better it.*

3. *Be aware of issues that may be specific for LGBTIQ+ young people.*

4. *Stay away from assessment, evaluation, and judgement.*

5. *Listen to "an untold story", show appreciation, and provide validation.*

6. *Encourage non-formal learning activities in a group setting to 'get to know each other' in a safe (but also challenging) way so they can become more supportive and understanding of both themselves and others.*

7. *Help improve verbal and non-verbal communication skills (assertiveness, awareness of one's own needs, ability to provide positive feedback, showing appreciation, active listening).*

8. *Establish a positive, trust and honest practitioner-participant relationship to model other relationships in the participant's life.*

7. Affirm healthy, rewarding expressions of sexuality

Due to the feeling of shame, young LGBTIQ+ young people might avoid sexual attractions and behaviours, or mitigate the feeling of shame by using substances before or during sexual contact, or avoiding sexual contact in general, thus stepping away from healthy sexual expression. Sex-positive approach should, on the one hand, return the focus on sexual expressions as being healthy and natural, and, on the other, promote sexual expressions as a personal right and a right of all others involved.

1. *Embrace exploring sexuality and sex positivity as an important component of overall health.*

2. *Promote embracement of healthy sexual behaviour as an important component of sexual health by stressing the importance of consent, enabling exploration of sexual needs, wants and desires without shame or judgement, promoting sex-informed practice, discussing possible risks, consequences etc.*

3. *Suggest exploring rewarding ways of sexual expression.*

4. *Make sure all feelings and their expressions are welcome (especially the more difficult and negative ones: including shame, guilt, anger, etc.)*

5. *Work on relational trust, body awareness and body safety.*

6. *Explore the importance of awareness and assessment of communication styles.*

7. *Explain internalised homophobia, stigma, shame, and fear commonly related to bodily and sexual expressions.*

8. *Explore the role of substance use in sexual expression.*

8. Acquire and integrate knowledge about LGBTIQ+ people's experiences and their diversity

To recognise potential strengths and means to enhance resilience of LGBTIQ+ young people, one should acquire knowledge about minority stress and stigma, peer and family structures, romantic relationships, sexual expression, workplace experiences, both positive and negative life experiences, etc., thus comprehending the full scale of the diversity among LGBTIQ+ young people.

1. *Expand knowledge and awareness about the LGBTIQ+ spectrum. Whenever possible, ask questions if an unfamiliar term should pop up.*

2. *Promote awareness and advocacy on different ways in which sexual orientation and gender identity can express itself.*

3. *Use lack of experience in working with specific cohorts and the need for supporting them as a general motivation to gain additional knowledge and expand your worldview.*

4. *Attend happenings organised by LGBTIQ+ communities, NGOs, grassroots, self-organised, autonomous collectives*

5. *Explore Queer Intentional Peer Support approach (QIPS) or Intentional Peer Support IPS* *(https://www.intentionalpeersupport. org/what-is-ips/?v=b8a74b2fbcbb)*

6. *Become a part of a community and network of national LGBTIQ+ support and advocacy organisations.*

9. Recognise and counteract potential heteronormative privilege and bias that may emerge in your behaviour as a mental health professional or a youth worker.

Our own experiences, beliefs and attitudes could result in (communication) bias that might end up additionally oppressing young LGBTIQ+ individuals, particularly if those attitudes and beliefs emerge from heteronormative privilege. For example, assuming someone's sexual orientation or gender before disclosure, assuming that sexual orientation is the cause of all problems and conflicts, overidentifying with LGBTIQ+ individuals, presuming what kind of support is required, warning about the potential harms derived from self-identifying as LGBTIQ+, affirming stereotypes, even if they stem from LGBTIQ+ community, and so on.

1. Remember key recommendations for practising affirmative approaches.

2. Explore heteronormative social issues in educational and therapeutic settings.

3. Try to recognise when your projections start, and clients' needs end.

4. Cultivate empathy and open-mindedness.

5. Disclose your background and attitudinal aspects that are or might be perceived as heteronormative.

6. When you realise that your bias was expressed, try to restart the conversation and be honest about it (and apologise).

7. Recognise and be aware of your own privilege and biases and how they affect your perspective.

8. Remain connected to the community of practices, engage in professional supervisions/co-reflections.

9. Reflect and be open to learn and be aware how much space you take.

10. Counteract anti-LGBTIQ+ attitudes induced by heteronormative social norms.

Raising awareness about the diversity of LGBTIQ+ young people is important for challenging anti-LGBTIQ+ attitudes. Heteronormative social norms often have only LGBTIQ+ identity in the forefront, thus neglecting other relevant life aspects of LGBTIQ+ individuals, such as age, health, ethnicity, race, religion, education, socioeconomic status, mother tongue, physical capabilities, etc.

1. Acknowledge and celebrate diversity of human existence in all its colours and shapes by advocacy, education, raising awareness, and campaigning.

2. Empower people to find their voice and find ways that are safe and appropriate for them to counteract anti LGBTIQ+ attitudes and to find their strengths from inside and outside.

3. Remain connected to the community of practices, engage in professional supervisions/co-reflections, explore heteronormative social issues in educational and therapeutic settings.

4. Adopt as an overarching principle that heteronormativity is not the be-all and end-all of what it means to be a human being.

5. Challenge potential unconscious re-enactments or internalisations of oppressive dynamics.

6. Recognise the intersectionality & diversity of experiences despite identity.

11. Promote LGBTIQ+ affirmative attitudes beyond an individual in need (family, friend, community).

To challenge restrictive norms and power inequities, affirmative stance toward LGBTIQ+ people should be fostered even outside the support space. This may include using LGBTIQ+ inclusive language consistently, refusing to contribute to or participate in organisations with anti-LGBTIQ+ agenda, pointing out heterosexual-dominant bars, clubs or venues, etc. When possible, affirmative reach out should also include LGBTIQ+ individuals' close circle (family, friends, work colleagues).

1. Plan and run projects that promote LGBTIQ+ affirmative attitudes either locally, nationally or internationally.

2. Draw attention of the non-LGBTIQ+ population to the issues and problems faced by queer people, sharing own experiences, communicating with parents, raising media awareness, by conducting promotional campaigns and providing educational material, do media interviews, podcasts etc.

3.DESCRIPTION OF AFFIRMATIVE MENTAL HEALTH APPROACHES

Key benefits and limitations of affirmative mental health approaches

Benefits:

- *Giving young people a safer and supportive space to be their authentic selves in whatever way that is meaningful for them.*
- *Creating space for youth workers to be learners too where both the young person and the youth worker are able to learn from each other.*
- *Creating conditions to be culturally aware and sensitive to different realities.*
- *Supporting environment where the process could be led by the young person.*
- *Helping person to express their true emotions (in a number of ways - not just verbally)*
- *Helping to accept LGBTIQ+ young people as who they are, and create conditions that accept and validate them.*

- *Supporting awareness of youth workers limitations and for them to know when a young person might need support from a psychotherapist.*
- *Understanding that any mental health approach has its limitations (being it it does not fits well to the young person, or it is not executed well or just it is not appropriate at any given time), and it's to be aware of these limitations and try to work in a multidisciplinary way with others to provide stronger support to the young person and to the practitioners.*
- *Understanding that any mental health approach requires a certain degree of self awareness that the practitioner must have (if practitioner is not a mental health worker, this awareness may be limited).*
- *Supporting signposting to other professionlas if issues are very acute.*
- *Understanding also that support for the practitioner may not be there, and respecting it.*

Affirmative mental health approaches are grouped in the following sections: 1) arts and mindfulness; 2) assertive communication; 3) body awareness and movement; 4) outdoors practices; and 5) reflective practices.

3.1. Arts and mindfulness

Argentine Tango

Description: The exploration of leading and following in a couple's dance beyond the stereotypical gender roles.

Advantages & why are they suitable for LGBTIQ+ youth: Dance embraces the uniqueness of each body. Participants can lead or follow, or keep switching between those two. There is gender neutrality and the terms used are "leader" and "follower". People explore themselves and their fears, see if they feel more comfortable as leaders, followers or both, and get in physical contact with another person which helps to heal depression, reduce anxiety and increase oxytocin, which can help us bond with loved ones and can

be released through touch, music and exercise.

Li Points of awareness: It might be challenging especially for people with body discomfort.

Recommendations & further references/links:

https://nuevasmilongueras.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/anthropological_notebooks_xvi_3_savigliano.pdf

https://www.ultimatetango.com/blog/the-transformative-power-of-tango

Clowning

Description: Techniques derived from physical theatre and clowning. Participants get their noses red and following the instructions of the facilitator they create their own clown character.

Advantages & why are they suitable for LGBTIQ+ youth: Clown has neither gender nor race. A clown lives in the here and now. They are present. With this technique we encourage humour to allow space to express freely, accept vulnerability, promote wellbeing by focusing on the humorous self.

Points of awareness: Some people might find it difficult to let themselves be "silly" or act in a way that is not socially acceptable.

Recommendations & further references/links:

https://www.nosetonose.info/articles/jbarticle.htm

Creative arts

Description: Art work such as drawing, painting, collage, colouring, doodling and scribbling. Clay sculpting, mask making, photography, poetry, self portraiture, mandala making, film making.
Advantages & why are they suitable for LGBTIQ+ youth: Creative art activities can be a helpful way to express oneself and one's emotions. IN addition, dance has a capacity to increase resilience and give space for exploration. Especially if the process of dancing, as this one is, is stripped of the gender roles and heteronormative

rules where young LGBTIQ+ people can dance in the safer environ-ment without being pushed into gender roles that do not fit them personally.

Points of awareness: Many young LGBTIQ+ young people are having distorted beliefs that they are lacking skills in art making. Their fear of failure and receiving judgement could be highlighted in contracts to nonqoueer peers. Very important is to be aware of physical, mental or educational limitations of the young person and adjust this approach accordingly.

Recommendations & further references/links:

https://positivepsychology.com/expressive-arts-therapy/

Drama techniques

Description: Theatrical techniques and concepts that help to bring about meaningful change, self expression, exploration & group co-hesion, including methodologies such as Theatre of the Oppressed (Augusto Boal). These creative methods include:

- *storytelling.*
- *games.*
- *play acting.*
- *improvisation.*
- *role-playing.*
- *puppetry.*
- *creative writing exercises.*
- *guided visualisations.*

Advantages & why are they suitable for LGBTIQ+ youth: To help the person explore their emotions and work through challenging life experiences. To increase resilience and give space for explora-tion.

Points of awareness: In many cases lack of space, fear of failure, unfamiliarity with the techniques, or embarrassment of a young person could set them back from even trying this approach. There-

fore patience is required and starting with the small steps like expressing something with the finger only and then building it further. By using the arts, Beauregard & Long (2019) believed that identity development and coping could become more accessible for the queer population due to words not always being accessible or seemingly enough to describe and explore the situations at hand.

Recommendations & further references/links:

https://www.youththeatre.ie/resources/introducing-forum-thea-tre-workshop-resource-pack

Mindfulness

Description: Mindfulness is a way of paying attention to the present moment, using techniques like meditation, breathing, yoga, walk-ing, painting & other expressive arts practices.

Advantages & why are they suitable for LGBTIQ+ youth: There are positive effects on several aspects of a whole-persons health, including the mind, the brain, the body, and behaviour, as well as a person's relationships with others.

Points of awareness: For some people, mindfulness practices could increase the stress response, negative emotions, dissociation, and even inhibit sleep.

Recommendations & further references/links:

https://psychcentral.com/health/the-benefits-of-mindfulness-medita-tion-for-teens

3.2. Assertive communication

Active Listening

Description: Active listening is a pattern of listening that keeps you engaged with your conversation partner in a positive way. It is the process of listening attentively while someone else speaks, para-phrasing and reflecting back what is said, and withholding judge-ment and advice.

Advantages & why are they suitable for LGBTIQ+ youth: When one is practising active listening it also makes the other person feel heard and valued. Active listening improves communication and builds positive relationships with LGBTQI+ youth. Helps build the resilience of the young person and lets them know you are there for them and support them. Gives space to talk in a non-judgemental way.

Points of awareness: Need to understand the principles of active listening such as paying attention, withholding from judgement, clarifying, summarising etc.. Also need time and space to talk and listen. Need to understand respectful boundaries and what to do around safeguarding and disclosures.

Recommendations & further references/links:

https://www.safeguardingireland.org/safeguarding/

https://www.mindtools.com/az4wxv7/active-listening

Create a group contact

Description: When the group gathers, everyone introduces themselves by name and pronoun. After a couple of icebreaking exercises, the group cooperates to create a group contract which includes the rules to follow throughout the workshop/course. Very shortly a group contract is a document that a group creates to formalise the expectations of group members.
Advantages & why are they suitable for LGBTIQ+ youth: The safe space and group contract can be very beneficial especially when working with LGBTIQ+ people. It is the time and space for people to express what they need in order to feel safe and respected by others. It is also the moment to establish a common understanding and set the ground for the rest of the day/week.

Points of awareness: Sometimes, some participants might agree on things that they later on forget or do not follow. This might create frustration to other participants or even conflicts.

Recommendations & further references/links:

https://www.rw.org.au/creating-safe-environments-for-lgbtiq-people/

Debriefing time

Description: Debriefing is a time dedicated to talking about the experience that participants previously had. It's the moment to sit down in a circle, talk and share opinions in a controlled, structured environment.

Advantages & why are they suitable for LGBTIQ+ youth: Debriefing gives participants the opportunity to think deeper on what they did, to reflect on what they may have learned from their experience.

Points of awareness: If instructions are not given properly and a safe space is not established, participants might not participate/talk at all.

Recommendations & further references/links:

https://www.playmeo.com/how-to-conduct-a-debrief/

Group work

Description: When we experience group work we test and shape what it means to belong to something outside of ourselves and our primary unit. When starting groupwork it is important to observe the following guidelines:
  • *Everyone is welcome to have a say if the intention is to support the group rather than having negative intentions*

  • *We listen to each other, and show respect for each other.*

  • *We have one person speaking at a time in groups.*

  • *We work to a consensus when decisions are to be made.*

  • *Even if we disagree, we don't judge others.*

  • *We always treat each other with respect.*

Advantages & why are they suitable for LGBTIQ+ youth: Listening and understanding other people in a group is a great way to understand others and yourself. Removes the feelings of isolation. Helps us to cope more effectively, learn and solve our personal, group or community problems.

Points of awareness: Youth may be shy or hesitant to engage in a group setting, some youths may be disruptive, boundaries of confidentiality may be an issue. Space to set up and run a group is needed.

Recommendations & further references/links:

https://prezi.com/hii9kh8d7ctm/pros-and-cons-of-group-work-with-youth/

Intentional peer support (IPS)

Description: IPS is an approach that offers a safe space, where young LGBTIQ+ people can express all of their feelings without any prejudice or devaluation in return. They have time to work on their problems and understand the emotional processes behind them and learn how to be empowered in their own skin. Some key guidelines are as follows:

- *Encouraging positive resilience strategies through, for example, prioritising relationships. Connecting with empathetic and understanding people can remind people that they are not alone in the midst of difficulties.*
- *Exploring the self-discovery and coming out processes through perhaps seeking supportive environment and relationships*
- *Talking about sexual orientation, preferred pronoun use with closer friends or family members that are supportive of you*
- *Validation of the lived experiences and identities in peer groups that matters, and are supportive of ones identity and sexual orientation*
- *Exploring the influence of shame and auto stigma by talking openly about these experiences in supportive and safer spaces but also becoming conscious of the language one is using to express these feelings.*
- *Recognizing the ways in which the media, religion, and popular culture affect LGBTIQ+ youth identity*
- *Exploring awareness of personal boundaries and limits through openly becoming aware and expressing one's needs, discussing*

it in the thrusted circles and finally setting few boundaries to a closer friends or family members to practise it

- *Acknowledging impact of trauma/abuse/violence on our everyday life through perhaps expressing one's vulnerabilities, experiences and imperfections in supportive environments.*

Advantages & why are they suitable for LGBTIQ+ youth: In peer support, everybody is encouraged to re-evaluate how they've come to what they are. In other words, the way they see the world and make sense of things is based on everything they have ever experienced, so just thinking this way supports young people to consider the possibility that there are many truths out there finding empowerment and liberation in it but also letting go of these internalised images about themselves, respecting others and their choices and worldviews.

Points of awareness: Even with the best results of this approach, when a person goes back home to a complicated and often hostile family surrounding and toxic and stigmatising society it is hard to keep their ground and be resilient and stay self confident and empowered. It takes work with both families and society but also some serious work to ensure political and social change to happen.

Recommendations & further references/links:

https://www.intentionalpeersupport.org/?v=b8a74b2fbcbb

Provide a safe space

Description: A safe space is defined as a place or environment in which a person or category of people can feel confident that they will not be exposed to discrimination, criticism, harassment, or any other emotional or physical harm.

Advantages & why are they suitable for LGBTIQ+ youth: A safe space in which they can bring their "full selves' ' without having to "filter" what they say, it's necessary to ensure mutual learning is possible and risk is mitigated. To feel less alone and accepted.

Points of awareness: Be aware that a safe space can mean different things to different people meaning that everyone's rights and

liberties are protected as long as they don't infringe the rights and liberties of others. Have procedures in place if anyone feels their 'safe space' has been violated. Safe space can also be called a 'brave space' to acknowledge this difficulty.

https://training.yipa.org/blog/developing-brave-spaces-dia-logue-youth-work/

Recommendations & further references/links:

https://spunout.ie/lgbti/lgbti-resources/school-safe-space-lgbti-students

https://www.oregon.gov/DHS/CHILDREN/FOSTERPARENT/Documents/foster-care-16-ways-safe-space.pdf

Reflection of the whole workshop/course
(assertive communication)

Description: Reflection is the act of thinking about our experiences in order to learn from them for the future. Being able to reflect is a valuable skill to have. It helps you to think about your experiences, why things happened the way they did and how you can improve on these experiences in future.
Advantages & why are they suitable for LGBTIQ+ youth: Some of the benefits are the following: it allows us to look at the bigger picture. Undertaking regular reflection, for example once a term, can help us to think about our goals and plans for the future. It gives us areas to improve on or develop. It can help us to be more creative and try new things, and see things from a new perspective. Last but not least, it is a key part of emotional intelligence.

Points of awareness: Some common limitations might be the lack of time, the environment, one's motivation to self-reflect, and ourselves. Another key awareness point is over reflection/ getting stuck in analysing the situation and one's emotions without going into contextualisation and conclusion of applicability further on.

Recommendations & further references/links:

https://libguides.cam.ac.uk/reflectivepracticetoolkit/models

Signposting for further support

Description: Signposting to mental health services is simply directing someone to the services that are available to them. Signposting means informing people about where they can access more information and help from appropriate people/services.

Advantages & why are they suitable for LGBTIQ+ youth: One of the good elements of this exercise is about providing LGBTIQ+ young people with the information needed, and giving them access to the expert knowledge and skills from an adviser trained specifically to deal with their particular issue or problem. Avoiding the young person having to search through vast amounts of information themselves. Some young people might not have the skills or facilities to make their own appointments or find the right information, due to learning or language difficulties, disability or illness or lack of finances, housing, a telephone or computer, or transport.

Points of awareness: Youth workers need to have knowledge and access to further help because specialised youth, LGBTIQ+ or mental health organisations may not exist in certain countries or regions.
Recommendations & further references/links:

https://www.wefindanylearner.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/InformationAdviceGuidanceSample.pdf

3.3. Body awareness and movement

Body literacy group work

Description: Some elements of body awareness group work/therapy have been used in general work with young LGBTIQ+ people as this approach "is based on the hypothesis of the person's lack of contact with and awareness of the body concerning physical, mental, and relational factors' ' (Dropsy, 1973). In addition, it is the lack of wording that could follow sensations in the body, emotions and feelings related to it. This leads to disconnection from the Self and understanding what is really going on for the young person.

Advantages & why are they suitable for LGBTIQ+ youth: Body awareness and movement bring us back in contact with our emotions and feelings. It brings into the play the understanding of how our bodies react to certain situations, stimulations, emotional inputs, people surrounding us etc. It brings awareness into the past felt experiences that have been either traumatic or joyful so clients can understand they can always check how they feel within the body in order to make actions. This approach ensures safety in our own bodies and trust that the body will support us. It also brings relaxation, a sense of self, sense of right to be in the body and in the present feeling. In addition, it invigorates curiosity and playfulness.

Points of awareness: In general this approach has been under-researched or underrepresented in the different settings working with young LGBTIQ+ people where their body is included a lot of shame and fear surfaces. In addition, if we include sexuality, sexual orientation and gender identity/expression there are a lot of issues around establishing trust and bonds between young LGBTIQ+ people and those offering mental health support.

Recommendations & further references/links:
https://www.ibk.nu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/avhandling_roxendal.pdf

Breath work

Description: Working with the breath in body psychotherapy (BP) also enjoys a long and rich history (Lowen, 1975; Reich, 1949; Smith, 1985; Totton, 2002). This method has been known for many centuries now and with mindfulness, yoga, and other body-oriented approaches its effect has been researched and has been demonstrated to have a positive effect on the population. This work in general has been used to calm the nervous system and restore balance.

Advantages & why are they suitable for LGBTIQ+ youth: Breathwork can resolve psychological pain, soften character armour, release tension in the body, and create a sense of embodiment and equanimity (Benz & Weiss, 1989; Braddock, 1995; Christiansen, 1972; Keleman, 1985; Rosenberg, Rand, & Asay, 1985) which we can witness in working with the young people. We use this approach as a way to charge up the body for physical and emotional processing, to use breath to calm and centre a psychologically and emotionally activated young person.

Points of awareness: This approach may be difficult to use as it requires a slow and spontaneous way of working that can generate resistance to it.

Recommendations & further references/links:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233258821_Breathwork_in_body_psychotherapy_Towards_a_more_unified_theory_and_practice

Get in touch

Description: Physical contact/touch plays an important role in the healing practices and religious ceremonies of various cultures, and many research studies have validated the importance of touch for physical and emotional well-being (Hunter & Struve, 1998; Levitan & Johnson, 1986; Miller, 1997). Contact approaches are often used in collaboration with other approaches to well being such as yoga, movement, mindfulness. When introducing contact to the young person please follow some guidelines:

1. *We suggest introducing contact with consent, meaning that a young person has been introduced to the process and fully understands and agrees what will be happening.*

2. *We recommend this approach be used in the group setting for the sake of safety.*

3. *We suggest having at least one other youth worker/mental health professional with you to support the process.*

4. *We constantly check in with each other and negotiate the whole process through introducing consent, asking about the feelings of the young person, introducing next steps before applying them to check if the person fully understands what comes next.*

5. *We always treat each other with respect, meaning being present and listening to each other's needs but also respecting boundaries.*

Advantages & why are they suitable for LGBTIQ+ youth: Touch as an affirmative intervention appears to be effective and in turn leads to greater self-esteem and reinforces trust and bonding between young people and youth workers/mental health professionals. Many young people were found to perceive touch as nurturing and communication enhancing.

Points of awareness: Bonitz (2008) notes the importance of having a clear rationale for using touch and that it should be embedded in a larger therapeutic context, where permission is always requested and the clients are made aware that they have the right to refuse and set boundaries. Therefore, some clear intentions around the appropriate use of contact/touch in working with young LGBTIQ+ people should be part of the daily practice of those that are offering this kind of support as it could easily slip into abuse of power.

Recommendations & further references/links:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/247719387_Validation_of_the_Body_in_Psychotherapy

Movement

Description: Movement approach is centred around concepts in three areas: the use of the body (what moves), the use of space (where you move), and the quality of the movement (how you move). This can be done through dance, yoga, Tai Chi, etc **Advantages & why are they suitable for LGBTIQ+ youth:** Movement supports mental health through the release of endorphins and helps relieve stress but it also allows for a break from everyday challenges and responsibilities. Different movement practices helps emotions move through our bodies which provides an outlet for self expression but also it increases resilience and gives space for exploration.

Points of awareness: Lack of space, fear of failure, unfamiliar with the techniques, embarrassment of a young person or to be seen.

Recommendations & further references/links:

https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/live-an-embodied-life

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7476461/

3.4. Outdoors practices

Nature and the outdoors

Description: It can be as simple as going for a walk in your local park or green space or hiking in your local hills/mountains. In addition could be activities around growing plants and/or vegetables in the local community gardens. If the local community gardens are not available those activities could be around urban foraging or planting trees, species spotting or natural habitat restoration. In addition to exercising outside, bringing a dog for a walk or eating meals outside are just a few more ideas on how to create a space for young LGBTIQ+ people to spend time outdoors, and this could easily be linked to drawing or painting animals or nature scenes, or let them inspire a poem or song lyrics.

Advantages & why are they suitable for LGBTIQ+ youth: Nature can generate a multitude of positive emotions, such as calmness, joy, creativity and can facilitate concentration. Nature connectedness is also associated with lower levels of poor mental health; in particular lower depression and anxiety which helps to increase resilience and give space for exploration.

Points of awareness: It is crucial to think about having access to green spaces but also to think about weather conditions and proper outdoor clothing. There could be cases where young people are struggling with for example agoraphobia or general anxiety about high places therefore it is important to think of physical and mental limitations of the young person.

Recommendations & further references/links:

https://www.teachoutdoors.co.uk/outdoor-activities-to-promote-positive-mental-health/

Peer Walk & Talk

Description: This method allows young people to work together to solve a problem or respond to a question. Participants walk around while having a structured talk with a partner, providing an opportunity to move and process their learning. Prepare a prompt or question that has multiple answers and requires discussion, pose the

prompt to young people and tell them how long they will have to discuss with a partner. They can then walk around the room, around the park, around the local area - depending on your environment and the type (length) of issue that needs discussing.

Advantages & why are they suitable for LGBTIQ+ youth: Overall it brings a disrupted element to the activity and inspires different ways of thinking. It doesn't have one purpose i.e. it can be used for problem solving, for reflection, for analysis etc. It encourages young people to be healthy and active. When practised in a local neighbourhood or community space, it enables a different perspective on that space and can support greater connection amongst those who feel disenfranchised from a place. When practised in a natural environment such as a park or along a riverside, it brings more relaxation and calm and builds the association between the outdoors and mindset and thinking patterns.
Points of awareness: It can be difficult for those with mobility problems and may need more careful planning for young people with disabilities. If practised in a space where contact with the public is likely, this could be a barrier for some, and particularly those who may have had poor experiences in local areas.

Recommendations & further references/links:

https://www.greenspacescotland.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?ID-MF=53ccf72a-b767-456e-bfcc-2e9fb51fef97

https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/07916035221088408

Supported Walk & Talk

Description: This method is similar to above but connects young LGBTIQ+ person in a one to one conversation with another young person. It is a deliberate conversation where the participant walks around while having a structured talk with someone supportive. It is most effective outside and can be around the park, around the local area or in a local natural environment. Natural environments are closely connected to spiritual wellbeing and mindfulness and walking can mimic the rhythm of life.

Advantages & why are they suitable for LGBTIQ+ youth: The activity offers a space where young people can express how they are feeling and receive support and/or guidance to process their experiences or to progress towards their aspirations and goals. It's a disruptive activity which inspires different ways of thinking. Walking side by side can be less intense than eye-to-eye, and it is seen as a less formal yet still structured environment.

Points of awareness: It can be difficult for those with mobility problems and may need more careful planning for young people with disabilities. If practised in a space where contact with the public is likely, this could be a concern for young people.

Recommendations & further references/links:

https://www.yomo-online.co.uk/mental-health-well-being/walking-talking

https://www.maryshull.com/blog/the-benefits-of-walk-and-talk-therapy/

Walking Football

Description: Now taken off as a sport in its own right, Walking Football is also an excellent youth work activity with many adaptable variations and purposes. Participants in 2 teams should be set up in a small hall or outdoor space similar to traditional football but not allowed to run, tackle or touch opponents, only to pass, intercept and touch the ball. You can adapt further by adding other playful or disruptive rules (e.g., you must sing/make an animal noise when you have the ball).

Advantages & why are they suitable for LGBTIQ+ youth: So many LGBTIQ+ youth have been traumatised by sports and football in particular. Yet it's never the sport that's the problem, it's the behaviours and cultures of those who protect it. Activities like this begin to deconstruct that trauma and help young people to understand that it's not necessarily 'football' they hate - and ultimately enables young people in that process of reclaiming sport.

Points of awareness: Convincing young people to participate when they've had negative experiences and when there are so many difficult connotations of sport can be a barrier. Those with disabilities, mobility challenges and body image difficulties may need additional support to participate. Also, so many practitioners have had similar experiences to young people and may not see the value in such activity.

Recommendations & further references/links:

https://www.scouts.org.uk/activities/walking-football/

https://data.londonsport.org/download/walking-football-evaluation-/c16d4b56-bc74-4a35-942c-35cfbfc2e334/Walking%20Football%20Evaluation.pdf

3.5. Reflective practices

Affirmative learning about queer identities (reflective practices)

Description: With the help of prompts (e.g., film, book, visual material, short video, etc.), opening up a wider group discussion around the larger socio-cultural issues perceived, which might also be relatable for LGBTIQ+ young people. Sometimes this activity can also be done in the context of the "LGBTQ+ alphabet soup": splitting into smaller groups, each group being given a blank sheet of paper and assigned one of the letters/identities from the LGBTQ+ acronym. The participants are then asked to brainstorm, discuss and free associate, noting down whatever comes to their mind regarding the topic.

Advantages & why are they suitable for LGBTIQ+ youth: Helps build awareness and knowledge around the different LGBTIQ+ identities and specific joys and struggles that come with each of the unique identities but it also reflects on heteronormativity and patriarchy as part of this process. Also helps those perhaps not very familiar with inclusive language to develop a sound vocabulary for naming different experiences, often even those they can relate to but could not previously find the right words for. Common myths surrounding different identities tend to come up during brainstorming sessions, which creates a space for addressing and dispelling many of the misconceptions and stereotypes.

Points of awareness: Requires youth workers to have a good working knowledge and understanding of the different identities and myths associated with them. As with any group discussion, there may also arise a need for the youth worker to monitor the group process and facilitate the discussion if required.

Recommendations & further references/links:

https://www.michaelbach.com/alphabet-soup

Journaling

Description: Journaling is the act of keeping a record of your personal thoughts, feelings, insights, and more. It can be written, drawn, or typed. It can be on paper or on your computer.

Advantages & why are they suitable for LGBTIQ+ youth: Journaling is an incredible stress management tool, a good-for-you habit that lessens the impact of physical & emotional stressors on your health. To increase resilience and give space for exploration.

Limitations: Time commitment, vulnerability, risk of confidentiality, literacy skills.

Recommendations & further references/links:

https://www.createwritenow.com/journal-writing-blog/how-journaling-can-benefit-your-teens-mental-health

https://tillyslifecenter.org/2022/10/25/journaling-for-teens-mental-health-resources/

Role Models

Description: Have young people working together in small groups or pairs, ask them to share who their role models are and why. It is important to remind young people that role models do not have to be just celebrities or well known people but could be peers, friends or people from a closer environment. Ask them to create a poster of their role models using A3 size cards. They can print off photos, use words and phrases, and stick items on to the posters. Bring everyone back together to share and explore.

Advantages & why are they suitable for LGBTIQ+ youth: This is an especially useful exercise for LGBTIQ+ young people and indeed all minority identified people. People are able to see others who are like them or who have similar characteristics to them in different walks of life. But also it helps young people to find out about other people they didn't know before by hearing about other people's role models and it can be an incredibly revealing and empowering experience.

Points of awareness: Sometimes we may seek role models who are like us and they just may not be visible in a particular walk of life such as has been the case in the past with high profile gay football-ers. Practitioners need to be skilled enough to be able to facilitate discussions on exploring why this might be the case.

Recommendations & further references/links:

https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1054139X11002813

4. WORKING REMOTELY WITH LGBTIQ+ YOUTH

The Covid-19 pandemic, with its social distancing rules, large gathering restrictions and lockdowns, introduced a sudden need for youth workers to find remote ways of staying engaged with young people. While allowing us to stay connected, the move to online came also with a unique set of challenges and issues that needed to be considered to ensure safety and wellbeing of those engaged in youth work. In addition to the general challenges associated with remote work, some additional ones, related specifically to LGBTIQ+ youth work, arose. This section thus outlines some of the issues particularly relevant to working remotely with LGBTQ+ youth. Please note that this is meant to be a conversation starter rather than an exhaustive list that captures every nuance; it is meant to serve as a point for reflection around the different aspects of relevance to remote work with LGBTQ+ youth, allowing the youth worker to seek further information in the areas which they deem particularly relevant to their specific way of working.

Internet security and Encryption

LGBTIQ+ youth are at a higher risk of facing discrimination, stigmatisation or victimisation due to their minority status. Unfortunately, this also applies when it comes to their home environment, which too can be queerphobic, meaning that the fact that the LGBTIQ+ young person is surrounded by family or friends is not always a guarantee of their safety from abuse or harm. For this reason, many LGBTIQ+ young people choose to hide their identity from those around them, and it is thus of utmost importance that this is respected, and that they are protected from any accidental outing when it comes to remote youth work. For these reasons, the youth worker should only use secure online platforms that come with robust security measures against hacking or intercepting, and they should ideally discuss using these with the young person as well. Depending on the social and national setting from which the young person connects (some countries have overt anti-LGBTIQ+ laws and censor/monitor internet use), it is also advisable to use a platform offering end-to-end encryption which would prevent any monitoring or interference from a state level and ensure privacy. Similarly, the use of anti-virus and firewall software is encouraged for these very reasons.

Emergency and technology breakdown protocols

The move to the online space comes with larger reliance on technology which is in danger of failure or breakdown. It is thus a good practice to have emergency protocols in place for such occasions, and to discuss these with the participants at the start of remote work, providing information on what to do in case of sudden disconnection, internet outage, software malfunction or the like. Some suggestions could be to use alternative methods of connection (such as phone or computer, if available), let other participants from the group know the person experiencing technical difficulties, or to have a protocol for who reaches out to whom and how in case of internet failure.

Confidentiality

It is of utmost importance that young people feel safe when it comes to sharing in an online space. However, such a confidential space might be more difficult to create when working online, due to fears of being overheard/eavesdropped upon when discussing private subjects in a home environment. This is particularly relevant to LGBTIQ+ specific groups and those LGBTIQ+ young people who live in hostile environments where being overheard might lead to direct endangerment. For these reasons, it is good practice to overtly address confidentiality concerns at the beginning of remote work

with the young person by checking in with them and collaboratively assessing the safety of their space. If possible, it is also advisable to try and see if there is a more suitable time for the online activity, perhaps access to a better suited space without the fear of interruption or being overheard. Even with all such considerations having taken place, it is good to remember that sudden emergency situation related to confidentiality, such as unexpected/sudden arrival of a family member to a room next-door or a sense of being listened to/eavesdropped on, might arise at any point, and it is thus advisable to create an agreement with the young person on how to approach these, for instance by agreeing on a safe word that would signify sudden disruption to the confidentiality of the space or by encouraging the young person to type into the chat that their space is no longer confidential and they might thus not be able to speak freely.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is a term used primarily in the UK and Ireland to denote the need to protect vulnerable populations from harm, abuse or maltreatment and to ensure promotion of wellbeing and healthy development. Although laws and regulations concerning youth work and safeguarding duties vary from country to country, all youth workers have an ethical duty to protect young people from harm. As LGBTIQ+ youth are at higher risk of abuse due to prejudice and discrimination, it is highly advisable that youth workers working with this population familiarise themselves with the safeguarding protocols and options when it comes to working remotely with the population. It is understood that sometimes the national safeguarding institutions might also play a part in the systemic and institutional queerphobic practices, and for this reason, it is highly recommended that the youth workers be aware of the LGBTIQ+ specific organisations and networks which could be used for referral in case a safeguarding concern arises during remote youth with an LGBTIQ+ young person.

Other general (non-LGBTQ+ specific) issues relevant when working remotely

- *Online disinhibition effect and the disembodied self - it has been noted that everyday Internet users say and do things in cyberspace that they wouldn't ordinarily say and do in the face-to-face*

world. They loosen up, feel less restrained, and express themselves more openly.

- *Increased potential for social isolation and loneliness - in many cases Internet or online environments can further isolation and loneliness for reasons such as lack of direct contact but also in many cases can support those to whom this way of support is the only option.*

- *Online communities and false sense of belonging - belonging to a virtual communities can support individuals to connect to other like minded people or to receive support needed however due to lack of personal bonds, physical contact and face-to-face relationship it can be difficult to build trustworthy and long term relationships that can potentially lead to this sense of a fake belonging.*

5. SELF-ASSESSING AFFIRMATIVE MENTAL HEALTH APPROACHES

As the need for supporting LGBTIQ+ young people becomes more apparent, so does the need to assess mental health providers' ability to deliver competent and ethical LGBTIQ+ affirmative services. The increased recognition of support needs and mental health disparities in this population led to a recent development of three counsellor assessment tools grounded in LGBTIQ+ affirmative approaches. In-depth presentation of these tools goes beyond the scope of Resource, but more information is provided in Bidell and Whitman's review (2013) or in original articles describing these tools, which are:

1. *LGB Affirmative Counseling Self-Efficacy Inventory (LGB-CSI; Dillon & Worthington, 2003);*

2. *The Sexual Orientation Counselor Competency Scale (SOCCS; Bidell, 2005);*

3. *The LGB Working Alliance Self-Efficacy Scale (LGB-WACES; Burkard et al., 2009).*

Although the majority of NGOs had not been using formal affirmative self-assessment tools, some described the use of supervision/co-reflection, while others described seeking feedback directly from clients. Some did unstructured or informal efficacy assessment, which includes in-house supervision/co-reflections, paired with results from short evaluation forms administered to LGBTIQ+ youth. The majority of NGOs stressed the importance of supervision/co-reflections as an absolute must, which had a positive impact on NGO personnel, and influenced their work and approaches with young people. NGOs also highlighted the need to develop (and implement) a self-assessment tool and regular supervision/co-reflection procedures and practices. Finally, they stressed the importance of the chosen supervisor to be LGBTIQ+ informed.

6. EXTERNAL BARRIERS

Participating NGOs stressed a number of external barriers which limit or complicate development and implementation of affirmative mental health activities aimed at LGBTIQ+ young people. On a societal level, generally invalidating, hostile, and oppressive cultural environments characterise a context in which NGOs are usually operating. Therefore, stigma and prejudice towards sexual minorities, and internalised homonegativity are being addressed on a daily basis, often including unsupportive family, bullying peers at school, discriminating workplace environments, or insensitive health professionals. On the one hand, this context may interfere with development and implementation of affirmative mental health activities; on the other, it accentuates the need for affirmative mental health approaches. Furthermore, a common issue NGOs are faced with is a lack of funding, as well as insufficient recognition and/or institutional support.

NGOs also stressed several community-level barriers for affirmative mental health activities aimed at LGBTIQ+ youth. For example, rare opportunities for professional developmenton the topic, acute shortage of LGBTIQ+-informed mental health professionals (when existent, they are often scarcely paid and localised in bigger cities), lack of opportunities for exchanging good mental health practices, lack of external supervision, difficulties to gain visibility and reach within the community, and difficulties in ensuring accessibility to existing mental health support.

7. POLICY FRAMEWORK

It is the unfortunate fact that discrimination, inequalities and violence based on sexual orientation, gender identity, sex characteristics, or gender expression still affect LGBTIQ+ people in Europe but also worldwide. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has stated that anti-LGBTQ violence is here, it's everywhere, and it isn't going away any time soon which is what has been witnessed in and around Europe in the last years and decades. Even though sexual orientation/gender identity are now recognised in EU law as grounds of discrimination and hate crime still not many EU countries are having mechanisms in place to ensure those policy measures are implemented in all aspects of life from education and employment to family life.

Therefore, this chapter and overview of some policies and practices in six partner countries have been shortly presented. Chapter is then concluded with some recommendations to improve the lives of LGBTIQ+ people, and to support their mental health.

IRELAND is the only country in the EU that has an **LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018-2020.**

This Strategy was a first for Ireland and for the world and was informed by the views of thousands of young people and by those who work with them, and on their behalf. This strategy was extended to 2021 due to the pandemic.

Further in 2019 the Irish Gov also launched a National **LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy 2019 – 2021.** Both strategies are currently being reviewed as part of the process of developing the successor strategy. In 2015 Ireland became the first country in the world to pass marriage equality by popular vote, which was then followed by the Gender Recognition Act. Trans people in Ireland can apply to have their preferred gender legally recognised by the State. This is set out in the Gender Recognition Act 2015. Anyone over 18 can apply to change their gender.

Published by the Department of Justice and Equality, the National LGBTI Inclusion Strategy aims to promote inclusion, protect rights

and to improve quality of life and wellbeing for LGBTI+ people enabling them to participate fully in Ireland's social, economic, cultural, and political life. The strategy included four thematic pillars that provide a vision of an Ireland where LGBTI+ people are (1) Visible and included; (2) Treated Equally; (3) Healthy; and (4) Safe and Supported.

The Strategy contained over 100 actions that were aimed at promoting inclusion, protecting rights and improving the quality of life and wellbeing of LGBTI+ people. It reflected the commitment in the Programme for Government (IRE) to create an equal, fair and inclusive society for all, target discrimination and enable LGBTI+ people to overcome the barriers they face. At its launch the Minister said 'I want to set an ambitious vision for Ireland, where the end goal is full equality for LGBTI+ people. The aim is for Ireland to be a place where everyone, regardless of their sexuality, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics, can reach their full potential to live healthy, safe and fulfilling lives and participate fully in Ireland's social, economic, cultural, and political life."

No successor strategy has been launched as yet, but in Jan 2023 by the Irish Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth launched the, **LGBT Ireland Strategic Plan 2023 to 2027** *(LGBT Ireland is a national support service for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender people and their families and friends.)*

The ambitious plan, titled 'Making Ireland the Best Place in Europe to be LGBTQI+' sets out a framework which is centred around supporting and empowering LGBTQI+ people to be visible, safe and to have their voices heard in the policy and practices that affect their lives.

Commenting on the plan, **Paula Fagan, CEO of LGBT Ireland**, said: The historic Marriage Equality referendum sent out a message of hope to LGBTQI+ people across the world and with two National LGBTI+ Strategies creating an increased openness to partnership-working between Government Departments, statutory bodies and LGBTQI+ organisations, there is a great opportunity now to unite behind one shared goal."

This new strategy sets out to create and drive a shared momentum towards making Ireland the best place to be LGBTQI+ in Europe in the next five years.

In Jan, 2023, The Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth vowed to bring forward legislation to ban so-called 'conversion therapy' in Ireland by latest 2024. The minister has previously spoken about the harm conversion therapy can do to the LGBTQ+ community, branding it "a cruel process rooted in the promotion of shame".

CROATIA
The recent National Health Care Strategy (2021-2020) did not include LGBTIQ+ as a specific health and mental health category. Draft of the Strategic framework for the development of mental health 2022-2030 has been conducted. The only mention of the LGBTIQ+ population in this draft is described as "a certain minority of individuals who differ from the dominant social group according to certain characteristics and values and who may be subject to social pressure with negative effects on mental health, and this group includes LGBTIQ+ persons, persons of minority nationalities in the Republic of Croatia and persons deprived of liberty in the prison system." Although the New Youth Strategy is still in development, LGBTIQ+ mental health issues are scarcely mentioned. There is also a draft Proposal of the National Youth Program (2022-2024), which does not mention the LGBTIQ+ population.

GREECE
On March 17th 2021, by decision of the Prime Minister, a committee was established with the aim of drafting the *National Strategy for LGBTIQ+ Equality.* Apart from this, there is a support system for LGBTIQ+ people through Orlando *https://orlandolgbt.gr/*, the first recognised non-governmental organisation which specifies in promoting the mental health of LGBTIQ+ people in Greece, as well as a *hotline* where LGBTIQ+ people can find support.

National Strategy for LGBTIQ+ Equality
https://www.primeminister.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/ethniki_statigiki_gia_thn_isothta_ton_loatki.pdf

Orlando
https://orlandolgbt.gr/

hotline
https://11528.gr/about-2/

SLOVAKIA

There is very little attention to mental health issues at the national policy level in Slovakia. When mentioned, LGBTIQ+ specific issues are not included. Unfortunately, proposals in the area often have the potential to decrease quality of life for LGBTIQ+ population. There is a Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Youth, 2021 – 2028, which includes Healthy lifestyle and psychological health, but LGBTIQ+ youth is not mentioned. Recently the Research Institute of Child Psychology and Pathopsychology prepared new manuals for psychologists on how to work with LGBTIQ+ youth, and some mention of affirmative approaches is included. It is stated in this manual that many support workers lack knowledge about LGBTIQ+ people and their realities therefore they fail in supporting this cohort.

SCOTLAND

Scotland previously had a specific LGBT national strategy Hearts & Minds. There is no current standalone strategy for LGBTIQ+ people, but there are commitments within areas of national policy to drive forward equality for LGBTI people. The current national *Mental Health Strategy* states that sexual orientation and gender identity should not be barriers to good mental health support; and that it is to be understood alongside the *Fairer Scotland Action Plan* which sets out the current national priorities for equality for LGBTI people. Those current priorities are:

Mental Health Strategy
https://www.gov.scot/publications/mental-health-strategy-2017-2027/

Fairer Scotland Action Plan
https://www.gov.scot/publications/fairer-scotland-action-plan/

blocked by the UK Government
https://www.stonewall.org.uk/about-us/news/statement-uk-government%E2%80%99s-decision-block-scotland%E2%80%99s-gender-recognition-reform-bill

LGBTI Inclusive Education
https://www.gov.scot/publications/lgbti-inclusive-education-working-group-report/

Non-Binary Working Group
https://www.gov.scot/publications/non-binary-working-group-report-recommendations-march-2022/

	Progress at April 2023
A commitment to bring forward reform to legislation for gender recognition	The Scottish Parliament legislated for reform to Gender Recognition processes at the end of 2022. This was *blocked by the UK Government* in January 2023 and the future of the reform is currently unclear.
To accelerate and implement a nationwide approach to LGBTI inclusive education	An *LGBTI Inclusive Education* Working Group concluded with the production of an Action Plan, and funding for specific new LGBTI curriculum development and schools work which is now being implemented.
Establishing a working group to consider ways to improve the lives of non-binary people in Scotland	The *Non-Binary Working Group* produced its report in 2022 and the *Government accepted* 24 of their 35 recommendations, and committed to further consider another 8. Group is consisted of the idividual non-binary community members, workers at charities which support non-binary people, and academics with expertise in non-binary issues.
A consultation on banning harmful conversion therapy practices	A Government consultation took place and *a report* is now currently making its way through the Scottish Parliament which includes legislation to ban conversion therapy.

Government accepted
https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/corporate-report/2022/07/scottish-government-response-recommendations-working-group-non-binary-equality-july-20222/documents/scottish-government-response-recommendations-working-group-non-binary-equality-july-2022/scottish-government-response-recommendations-working-group-non-binary-equality-july-2022/govscot%3Adocument/scottish-government-response-recommendations-working-group-non-binary-equality-july-2022.pdf

a report
https://www.gov.scot/publications/expert-advisory-group-ending-conversion-practices-report-recommendations/pages/1/

The report on conversion therapy includes some *helpful definitions* and states "The Group recognises the need to facilitate, enable or encourage efforts which take place in a supportive and affirmative environment, and are led by the recipient's autonomous decisions. These actions are not to be considered conversion practices as they do not seek to change, suppress or inhibit that person's sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or gender expression".

Despite some progress in these areas, there are generally concerns of backsliding of equality and LGBTIQ+ Youth providers in Scotland state that they would like to see more explicitly inclusive references to LGBTIQ+ young people in the forthcoming update to the National Youth Work Strategy.

Recommendations for improving future LGBTIQ+ national and EU policies

- *The needs of LGBTIQ+ young people should be represented in a standalone LGBTIQ+ youth strategy, but also incorporated into other national and EU youth or mental health related strategies.*

- *The purpose of a strategy should be to respond to the needs of LGBTIQ+ young people, to provide guidelines for interventions to those who are at risk, and to interrupt the structural factors that contribute to inequalities in outcomes for LGBTIQ+ young people.*

- *Establish a clear action plan for coordinated action and a commitment to the prevention of mental ill-health and suicide for LGBTIQ+ young people and communities*

- *Services for children and adolescents should maintain an awareness of the minority stressors faced by LGBTIQ+ young people, including issues to do with 'coming out', experience of bullying and the potentially traumatic experience of puberty for gender diverse young people*

- *Standardise the practice of medical professionals towards LGBTIQ+ children and youth and diminish any regional differences as a precondition to constitutionally guaranteed universal health care and protection.*

- *Improve education of experts working with young LGBTIQ+ people in an affirmative approach to mental health. This includes youth workers, teachers, school psychologists, psychotherapists, educators, health professionals, parents, peer support professionals etc.*

- *The protection of the mental health of young LGBTIQ+ people should also be carried out in the community (where young people live, work and study), in order to strengthen individuals and the entire community in the awareness and protection of mental health.*

- *Introduction of legal recognition of same-sex relationships including civil partnership, same-sex marriage, and adoption by same-sex couples.*

- *Making transgender youth healthcare affirming and accessible (currently completely absent)*

- *Ensure these strategies are followed with action plans and allocated budgets, so those documents and actions can be implemented.*

helpful definitions
https://www.gov.scot/publications/expert-advisory-group-ending-conversion-practices-report-recommendations/pages/4/

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9. ABOUT THE PROJECT

LGBTIQ Youth Affirmative Mental Health Approaches is a Key Action 2 Strategic Partnership project that aims at exchange of good practices through the development of innovative project results based on the concept of Body oriented mental health as a tool for working with LGBTIQ+ youth mental health in Europe. The main objective of the project was to increase the quality of mental health in the young LGBTIQ+ population in the EU. A specific objective was to develop an innovative model of affirmative mental health approach to the LGBTIQ+ youth population based on the partners experiences in using such approaches with LGBTIQ+ young people in disciplines such as: sports, embodiment, dance, trauma sensitive yoga, movement, theatre and culture Specific objective; to strengthen the capacities of the organisations in the LGBTIQ+ mental health field.

- *LGBTIQ Youth Affirmative Mental Health Approaches has been funded by the European Commission through the Erasmus+ programme.*

- *The total duration of the project was 24 months. Implementation started in November 2021.*

- *The coordinator for this KA2 Strategic partnership project was Queer Sport Split from Croatia with five partners: Broader Horizons Plus (Ireland), Creative YouthLand (Greece), The European Gay & Lesbian Sport Federation (the Netherlands), Feniks (Croatia), Saplinq (Slovakia).*

- *Additionally this project included many associated partners: Zagreb Pride (Croatia), Iskorak (Croatia), GOOSH (Ireland), Centrum (Slovakia), Inakost (Slovakia), Prizma (Slovakia), LEAP Sports (Scotland), LGBT Youth Scotland (Scotland).*

Project coordinator

- **Queer Sport Split** started as an initiative in 2005 (initially as qSPORT volleyball team) and only later in 2011 registered as non-profit organisation empowering LGBTIQ* young people and community through inclusive sport, culture and social activities, combining well-being, psychosocial support, and personal development.

Project partners

- **Broader Horizons Plus** was set up to facilitate the involvement of young people (aged between 18 and 35) in Ireland to learn and understand more about their European neighbours. It is a member-led collective of young people who wish to learn more about and be involved in European projects, and to learn more about: Culture through intercultural dialogue, understanding more about the social systems that exist in each country , and how to promote inclusion, equality and diversity.

- **Creative YouthLand** is a Greek Non-Profit Organisation aiming to empower young people, engage communities and raise environmental awareness through arts. They create learning experiences based on theatre, circus, movement, music, crafts and other creative approaches. Creative Youthland was founded in September 2014, after having acted as an informal group of young people for a few years. It is based in Egio and it acts on a local, regional, national and international level.

- **The European Gay & Lesbian Sport Federation** (EGLSF) was founded in 1989. Its aims are to: fight against discrimination in sport on grounds of gender identity or sexual orientation; stimulate integration in sport and emancipation of athletes regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation; enable and support the coming out of athletes; exchange information and enable coordination between European sport groups and tournaments; support the founding of new gay / lesbian / bisexual / straight / transgender / queer and mixed sport groups.

- **Feniks**, although formally legally registered in March 2020, has been committed to providing assistance and support to people with mental disabilities / illnesses and their families since January 2014. The activities of the Association are based on the values of volunteer work and solidarity, so all members of the Association are proud volunteers with the mission of creating a community in which there are no socially excluded citizens and which fosters respect for diversity and authenticity.

- **Sapling** was established in April 2012 with the aim to develop young LGBT+ leaders and LGBTIQ* youth communities. They organise workshops and discussions for young people on topics related to LGBTIQ* identity, both trying to educate the broader public and creating community spaces for LGBTIQ* youth. They are the only NGO focused on LGBTIQ* youth in Slovakia and one of the very few organising international trainings for their young people.

10. GLOSSARY

Bias — is a tendency, inclination, or prejudice toward or against something or someone. Some biases are positive and helpful—like choosing to only eat foods that are considered healthy or staying away from someone who has knowingly caused harm. But biases are often based on stereotypes, rather than actual knowledge of an individual or circumstance.

Cis — people whose gender identity matches sex assigned at birth.

Culturally sensitive — also referred to as cross-cultural sensitivity or cultural awareness, is the knowledge, awareness, and acceptance of other cultures and others' cultural identities.

Deadnaming — calling a person by their birth name when they have changed their name as part of their gender affirmation.

Gender — is a term used to exemplify the attributes that a society or culture constitutes as "masculine" or "feminine". includes the social, psychological, cultural and behavioral aspects of being a man, woman, or other gender identity. Depending on the context, this may include sex-based social structures (i.e. gender roles) and gender expression.

Gender expression — is how a person publicly expresses or presents their gender. This can include behaviour and outward appearance such as dress, hair, make-up, clothing etc.

Gender identity — is the personal sense of one's own gender. Gender identity can correlate with a person's assigned sex or can be different from it.

LGBTIQ+ — is an abbreviation for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and/or questioning. The 'plus' is used to signify all of the gender identities and sexual orientations that are not specifically covered by the other five initials. An example is Two-Spirit, a pan-Indigenous American identity.

Minority stress — refers to the unique stigma-related stress that sexual minority individuals face because of their sexual orientation that additively combines with general life stressors to confer disproportionate risk for certain mental health disorders for sexual minorities as compared to heterosexual individuals (Meyer, 2003).

Misgendering — occurs when it's intentionally or unintentionally referred to a person, or used language to describe a person that doesn't align with their affirmed gender.

Neopronouns — a category of new(neo)pronouns that are increasingly used in place of "she," "he," or "they"when referring to a person. Some examples include: xe/xem/xyr, ze/hir/hirs, and ey/em/eir Non-binary – a gender identity that is outside of the binary "female" and "male".

Non-comforming — an umbrella term that includes people who identify as non-binary, genderfluid, agender, etc.

Projection — is the process of displacing one's feelings onto a different person, animal, or object. The term is most commonly used to describe defensive projection—attributing one's own unacceptable urges to another. For example, if someone continuously bullies and ridicules a peer about their insecurities, the bully might be projecting their own struggle with self-esteem onto the other person.

Supervision/co-reflection — is a process of professional or peer learning and development that enables individuals to reflect on and

develop their knowledge, skills, and competence, through agreed and regular support with another professional or peer.

PreP — (pre-exposure prophylaxis) can reduce likelihood of contracting HIV from sex or injection drug use. When taken as prescribed, PrEP is highly effective for preventing HIV.

Sex characteristics — Each person's physical features relating to sex, including chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones, genitals and secondary physical features emerging from puberty.

Sexual orientation — is a term used to refer to a person's pattern of emotional, romantic, and sexual attraction to people of particular sex or gender.

Trans — it is an umbrella term but also an identity for those whose gender doesn't match the sex they were assigned at birth.

11. APPENDIX 1 (IMPORTANCE OF IDENTITY AND HOW TO USE PRONOUNS: A Personal Experience)

When it comes to queer people, and especially trans or gender non-conforming, things can get complicated if you're used to trusting your guts about your assumptions. Guessing someone's identity based on their looks needs to stop. One of the most important parts of queer people's identity is pronouns which are very often mistaken. We immediately judge people in order to see how we want to interact with them, so we tend to rush our speech and speed up, as assumption makes things faster and easier, but pronouns could slow us down.

The most usual pronouns are she/her, he/him and they/them, but also neopronouns* are getting more spotlight as well. Choosing your pronouns is something that could be very fluid. Some people change them from time to time, some use all pronouns and some prefer to not use any pronouns. It's common to experiment with them and it should take as much time as needed until you find out what makes you feel more like yourself.

Misgendering is a very harmful thing to do to non-cis people, even if it happens unintentionally, as it causes lots of gender dysphoria; a very painful feeling. It can be considered as an act of violence, denial, and refusal of someone's identity. It can be a whole battle just with yourself to accept and even realise that the way you feel about your gender does not correspond with the sex you were assigned at birth. It's a shocking experience, most of the time, because nobody could prepare you for something like that. It's even a whole process to find out how you could possibly identify as and then a long journey on deciding your pronouns. Society can also badly influence your personal exploration, as we live in times very much focused on stereotypes and standards. Imagine having to go through all of this tough process, without even having a supportive environment around you.

What is the right way to react if you misgender/deadname someone? First of all, let's replace "if" with "when", because you are going to make this mistake even if you didn't mean to. We are humans and we do make mistakes while practising or being introduced to something new. There is not a "right" or "wrong" way to handle this, as it clearly depends on the person. Most people state that when this happens, they expect a brief apology from you, to correct yourself and then just move on. Don't make it a big deal and do not put your weight of guilt in them. When you witness someone else misgendering/deadnaming a person, then you should make them aware of their mistake and correct them. Make sure you practise and try to unlearn gendered assumptions. When you meet someone you wouldn't guess their name based on their look or vibe. Same thing should apply for pronouns as well.

Transitioning is a common next step for most trans people, but not always necessary. Unfortunately, many people judge trans folks based on their journey so far. Society will insist on using the wrong pronouns if you don't "pass", creating again expectations about your transition process. Feminising/lowering your voice enough, dressing and acting more "femme"/"masc", surgeries and even from body hair. Some people don't even want to transition in any way. Some desperately want and need to transition but don't have the money or the support they need. For some it could even be illegal to do something like that. And some could transition ending up passing as cis. All of these people should get the same amount of validation and respect for their trans identities and not be misgendered because of the way they look or if they have transitioned or not. Being trans doesn't have to look a specific way. And that applies for non-binary people as well.

Non-binary people or at least those who use they/them pronouns, also struggle in another way. Neutral pronouns are something very new to some. Society complains of being grammatically wrong when they use neutral pronouns, since "you are referring to one person, why use plural?". Many languages, if not most of them, don't even have neutral pronouns and besides this, they are deeply gendered and affected by patriarchy as well. Language is and should keep evolving based on people's needs; And we need a more inclusive language.

Adopting a more inclusive speech can be difficult and may take some time, but it is necessary because you might misgender someone without even realising it. For example, referring to a group of friends, avoid saying "dudes" or "guys" because it could be triggering for some if they don't feel included in those terms. You can use "folks" as it is more neutral and inclusive. It is good to be flexible with your speech and pronouns.That way you are creating a safer space. Using the right pronouns for people, something that should be taken for granted, shows that you validate them and want to communicate with them; Shows that you respect them. Another reminder for the youth workers especially, is to state your own pronouns when you are presenting yourself;Either in person or in emails or in a nametag. And it is okay to forget someone's pronouns. You can always kindly ask them again,to make sure you got them right. Also, keep in mind that mainly for non-binary people,gendered toilets can be a challenging and triggering experience. Let them know and warn them if they are separated by gender. It helps a lot and builds trust.

All in all, the aim and the point is to change your perspective. Not make assumptions or judge by what you see. It makes no sense to remember everyone's name but not their pronouns when the most common are only three instead of the thousands of different names. The aim is to stop trying to remember the pronouns, but actually see them and validate them,the way they are.

Written by Sunny Paparose

Youth
Affirmative
Mental
Health
Approaches

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