



The Sussex

LGBTU

(Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Unsure)

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT
RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP



University of Brighton

International Health
Development Research
Centre (IHDRC)

SUMMARY



What was the research about?

This was a piece of research done in Sussex to find out about...


- what it's like for young people who are either lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or unsure and what they wanted from services that they use – like schools, youth clubs and so on.
- what training would be useful for professionals who work with young people (e.g. youth workers, teachers) to help make them more able to offer LGBTU young people what they want and need.

Who did the research and why?

- The research was carried out by the University of Brighton and was supported by local organisations in the area, including Young People in Focus and Allsorts.
- We did it because young people who are LGBTU often feel isolated and don't feel safe enough to use services openly. This is particularly the case in non-urban areas, outside towns like Brighton.
- There is also a lack of awareness about the experiences of LGBTU young people and stereotypes held about them.
- We wanted to understand how this can be changed, and in particular how we might develop training for professionals who work with young people.

Who did we interview?

We interviewed 11 LGBTU young people who live in West and East Sussex and 18 practitioners, including teachers, social workers, youth workers and police workers.



What did we find?

What young people and professionals say about 'coming-out'

Young people had mixed experiences of 'coming-out' – ranging from very positive and accepting, to very rejecting. The response of family members was particularly important in terms of how young people felt and how they dealt with any homophobic bullying. Relationships with friends were also very important. They often found it harder to come out to professionals they had contact with than to friends.

'My Dad was really rude; he cried and told me I wasn't his daughter'

YOUNG PERSON

Professionals on the other hand found it difficult to raise the subject of sexuality and often said they felt they lacked the right language or enough confidence to do so.

'It's very hard to turn round and ask the question because you don't know if you are treading on very sensitive ground'

WORKER

Professionals also lacked confidence in raising the issue because they feared that parents might be angry with them or accuse them of influencing the young person.

'I think as a gay man my biggest fear is always accusations 'cos we have some parents that are quite difficult to work with... some parents believe people can make people gay.'

WORKER

Gay male professionals had particular concerns about this. They also had questions about whether and when it was useful to disclose their own sexuality to young people.





School and sixth form college experiences

Young people's experience of school and sixth form college was very mixed in terms of whether they felt their sexuality was accepted. Many young people said that it would have been useful to have had a specific adult in school or college that they could talk to.

'I think it would have been useful to have someone to have spoken to at school because that's where it was kicking off...'

YOUNG PERSON

Many young people felt that sex education in school focused too much on sex and prevention and not enough about sexuality and relationships. Some young lesbians said they would have liked some focus on lesbian safe-sex because they felt that most information was only given about having sex with men.

Homophobic bullying

Almost all young people interviewed had experienced some sort of homophobic bullying and violence and for some, this almost became a normal part of life.

'I have been physically attacked and verbally attacked... but I think it's made me a stronger person because I'm not afraid to be who I am. I'm not trying to hide myself, lock myself in cupboard. I'm just there in the open.'

YOUNG PERSON

Many felt that schools didn't take it as seriously as other forms of bullying. Some young people turned to self-harm as a result of being bullied.



'I think at school a lot of the teachers tended to ignore these things... the bullying - and that was never really addressed.'

YOUNG PERSON

People also commented on how the use of homophobic language was very common. Although many professionals said they would always challenge homophobic language, comments like "you're so gay" were heard so often that, some said they just let it go.

'You get the odd comment, like 'oh you're a homo'...and I don't think people take it as homophobic abuse, but it is because it escalates into other things.'

YOUNG PERSON

What young people want from services

Opinions were mixed on whether there should be separate LGBTU services or whether this should be linked into existing services for young people.

Web sites and text messaging were favoured over leaflets to promote LGBTU issues.

Qualities that young people said were needed in staff included good listening skills, showing respect and having self-confidence.

'I think one of the most important skills are that they are comfortable working with that group. That they're accepting of that. They don't have any issues themselves.'

YOUNG PERSON

Training for professionals

Current experiences of diversity training don't include much about LGBTU young people – in particular, the needs of trans young people are rarely addressed, and the needs of young lesbian women and bisexual young people are less visible.

'I think for the benefit of all those trans peoples' sense of identity it really needs to be recognised that the experiences within these groups are massively different. So that's a big training need really.'

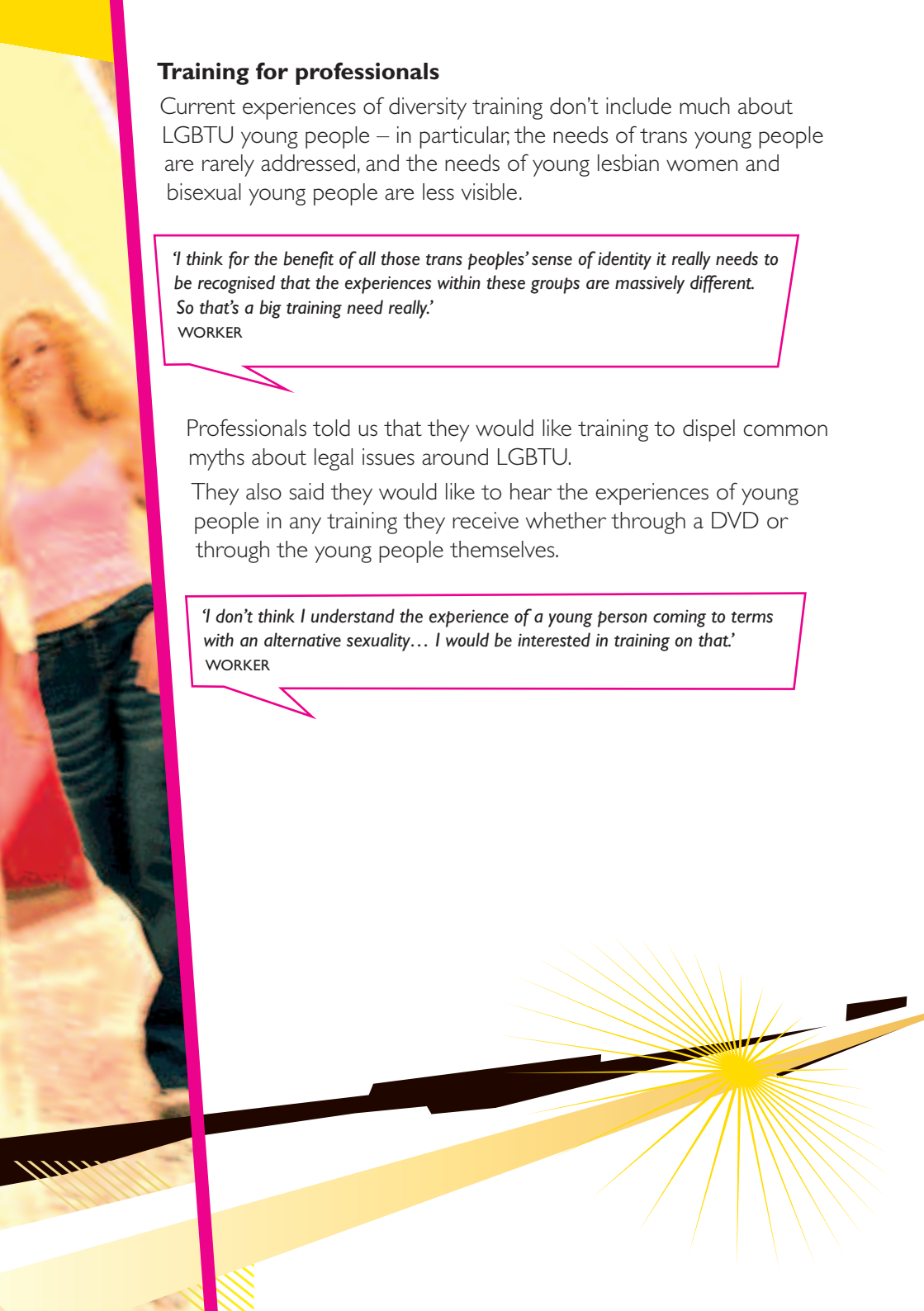
WORKER

Professionals told us that they would like training to dispel common myths about legal issues around LGBTU.

They also said they would like to hear the experiences of young people in any training they receive whether through a DVD or through the young people themselves.

'I don't think I understand the experience of a young person coming to terms with an alternative sexuality... I would be interested in training on that.'

WORKER



Recommendations

- Training around LGBTU issues need to be made widely available to all staff working with young people
- The needs of LGBTU staff, and in particular gay men, should be addressed in relation to fears around accusations if they work with young people or disclose their own sexuality
- A regular and accessible support service for LGBTU young people needs to be developed across East and West Sussex – young people should be consulted in this process
- Discussions about sex and sexuality in schools to cover LGBTU issues as well as heterosexual and include a focus on relationships
- Awareness of the extent and nature of homophobic bullying to be raised amongst all staff
- All services for young people across Sussex should provide appropriate advice, information and guidance for LGBTU young people
- Workplace environments to be welcoming and provide posters and leaflets to make it clear that it is an LGBTU safe space
- Any service for young people needs to consider the role of new technologies in reaching out to LGBTU young people
- Training for staff around LGBTU issues should be challenging and involve real LGBTU young people in delivery – either via DVD or in person.

What happens next?

We are now applying for grants to use the results of this research to develop training that we would like to make available to all staff working with young people in Sussex.

We will send this report out to all relevant agencies and hope that it will be used to inform the development of services in the area.

Copies of the full research report can be downloaded from www.lgbtu.co.uk

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About the Partnership

The Sussex LGBTU Training and Development Research Partnership was formed in 2008 to address the needs of young people who may be LGBTU. It aims to do this in two stages:

Stage One (now complete) aims to:

- Conduct research to understand the needs of LGBTU young people living in Sussex
- Conduct research to understand the training needs of practitioners working with young people across Sussex (e.g. teachers, youth and social workers, Connexions etc)

Stage Two aims to:

- Develop a training programme and materials to meet the training needs of practitioners working with young people across Sussex

The Partnership represents organisations including the University of Brighton, Young People in Focus, Allsorts, Terrence Higgins Trust, Dorman Arts Youth Centre, and West Sussex Primary Care Trust.

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All photographs in this publication are posed by models.



University of Brighton



International Health Development Research Centre (IHDRC)
University of Brighton, Brighton, BN1 9PH, UK

www.lgbtu.co.uk