

LGBTQ

HERTFORDSHIRE



EVALUATION REPORT 2018

Who Not What Project





“ Everyone needs a boost of a regular place you can always go to that is safe where no-one will judge you and everyone is friendly, and lovely. ”



“ I really love the Youth Workers. They are more like friends. Am I meant to say that? I love them. ”

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1. Introduction

This is the second report of evaluation of YC Hertfordshire's Big Lotto funded Who Not What Project (WNW) that launched in November 2016. The Project offers social and personal development through informal education and support to young people living, working or educated in Hertfordshire who identify as lesbian, bisexual, gay or transgender or who are questioning their identity (LGBTQ).

2. The Who Not What Project and its aims

The Who Not What Project is aimed at LGBTQ young people aged between 13 and 24, providing them with safe and confidential places to meet, socialise and talk about issues of interest and relevance to them as young LGBTQ people, with the support and guidance of trained Youth Workers.

Three key aims of WNW established at the outset are to foster:

1. Improved mental health and emotional wellbeing;
2. Increased confidence to report victimisation and hate crime;
3. Increased awareness of and confidence to access support services.

Additionally in 2018 more attention has been brought to bear on:

- Providing early intervention for mental health/emotional wellbeing issues before they escalate;
- Fostering a peer support network that extends beyond the groups themselves;
- Undertaking more dissemination/advocacy work to build up the network of support for LGBTQ young people, for example with other organisations.

3. Need for Who Not What

The first report of evaluation outlined both national and local evidence supporting the case for Who Not What. Key points were as follows:

- There is an increasingly open-minded approach to sexuality and gender, especially among younger people. However, there remains a 'distressing side to life for LGBT young people today', in the form of poor mental health, self-harm and attempted suicide, bullying and lack of age appropriate LGBTQ-inclusive relationship and sex education.
- LGBTQ young people in Hertfordshire have significantly lower self-esteem than the population at large and are more likely to have suicidal thoughts, a finding that is consistent with national evidence from multiple sources.
- They also experience bullying and victimisation and this is largely unreported. The Stonewall report cited above (footnote 3) found that verbal abuse, being gossiped about, isolated or ignored, physical bullying and assault, having possessions stolen or damaged, and even death threats are still part of the everyday experience of young LGBTQ people at school in the UK.
- LGBTQ young people in Hertfordshire are more uneasy about visiting, and less likely to have seen their doctor than non-LGBTQ young people. A review of evidence published in 2016 by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research – covering LGBTQ people of all ages – concluded that:

Heteronormative assumptions as well as experiences and/or fears of discrimination prevent LGB&T people from accessing mainstream services.

Surveys carried out in June 2017 and again in June 2018 among young people attending the groups provide a 'snapshot' of the needs of young people attending the WNW groups.

- Eighteen of the 43 LGBTQ young people who responded to the YC Hertfordshire baseline survey of WNW group members carried out in June 2017 said their current mental/emotional health was poor or very poor, as did 26 out of the 62 LGBTQ young people who responded in June 2018 (a similar proportion of around two-fifths);
- In both years, only around a quarter of those responding said that their current mental/emotional health was good or very good;
- Offered a list of six services in Hertfordshire that provide mental health/emotional support to LGBTQ young people, only a quarter of respondents in 2017 said they knew how to access four or more of these. In June 2018 the percentage who said they knew how to access four or more of these was substantially higher - 56 percent (35 out of 62 respondents). Nonetheless, a majority in both years said either 'no' or 'maybe' when asked if they personally would 'feel comfortable' accessing any of these services (61 percent in June 2017 and 56 percent in June 2018).
- Key barriers to accessing mental health support that were mentioned by respondents included:
 - Scared/Unsure/Social anxiety/Shy/Nervous/Embarrassment/Having to explain why there/ Difficulty 'explaining' myself/Issues seem silly or irrelevant/Worried I am not 'bad' enough (to warrant support);
 - Mental health holds them back/Thinking they aren't worth recovery/Lack of self-worth/ Self-esteem/Suffer from anxiety;
 - Don't like talking about problems/Taboo subject/Sexual stuff;
 - Having to come out/Fear that people will know/Scared parents will find out or have to get involved/Fear of being judged/Confidentiality/Other people finding out/Letters being sent to my address;
 - Not informed or educated (about mental health and available support)/Not told where to go/ Not advertised enough/don't know about them/Don't know they exist/ Don't know who their GP is/Not knowing if parent needs to be there/Don't think they can access support without parents knowledge.
- In June 2017, 88 percent (38 of 43) of young people who replied to the survey of WNW members said they had experienced bullying or other hate crime because of their sexual or gender orientation. In June 2018, 49 out of 62 respondents said they had experienced such behaviour (79 percent), and 87 percent (54 out of 62) said they knew someone else who had experienced bullying or a crime against them because of being part of the LGBTQ community.
- In both years of the survey, around three quarters of respondents said they knew where to report such behaviour (typically mentioning either the police, school or both) although about half said either that they would not feel confident about making such a report or didn't know if they would. Around half in both years were not aware that the Hertfordshire Police has LGBTQ Support Officers (LAGLOS).

- Respondents to the YC Hertfordshire baseline survey in June 2017 were asked about their use of services specifically for support with LGBTQ related issues (other than mental health). Only nine people (under a quarter) said they thought it was easy to access support for LGBTQ issues and just under half (20) that they feel comfortable doing so. In June 2018, one third of respondents (22 out of 62) said they thought it was easy to access support for LGBTQ issues and just over a half 35 out of 62) that they feel comfortable doing so.

4. How Who Not What works

The first report of evaluation described the WNW project in some detail. Key features are summarised again below, together with updated figures for the number of groups currently operating across the ten districts of Hertfordshire:

- WNW was co-designed by YC Hertfordshire together with young LGBTQ people;
- Sixteen groups, split by age group, currently meet regularly under the guidance and supervision of trained Youth Workers;
- Five transgender groups cater specifically for transgender/non-binary young people living, learning or working in Hertfordshire;
- A county-wide strategy group (WNW Voice) meets regularly in Hertfordshire co-producing plans to improve services for LGBTQ young people;
- Groups range in size (see Table 3 Section 6), with regular attendance from many of those who have signed up, demonstrating young people's commitment to the Project;
- The Project is publicised through a variety of channels though many young people first hear about it through friends and other word of mouth, including from parents;
- Groups meet weekly (LGBTQ) or once a month (Trans);
- Curriculum plans reflect project aims and provide a broad framework for group activities over the year;
- Session plans tailored to the needs of each group are co-produced by Youth Workers and group members. General youth work activities such as cooking, games and creative projects are fun, relaxing and entertaining and help build a positive social context in which personal and more general issues are addressed;
- Young people struggling with particular issues are offered one-to-one support or may choose to share their problem with other group members informally or in a moderated session;
- External speakers may be invited to talk to the group about, for example, mental or sexual health or hate crime;
- Some groups organise off site visits for members, for example to the theatre or museums to explore LGBT history.
- Groups from across Hertfordshire get together for an annual Prom and represent the project at Hertfordshire Pride and other local events.

2018 saw the introduction of a three-day residential weekend offering members of a number of groups the opportunity to get away, have fun together and explore positive ways of improving their mental health and emotional wellbeing.

5. Who attends

Young people attending the WNW groups live, work or are educated in Hertfordshire, are aged between 13 and 24 and identify as lesbian, bisexual, gay or transgender or are questioning their identity. Some of them are 'out' to their family, school and friends and others are not. Groups are split into two age ranges; 13 – 17 yr olds and 18 – 24 yr olds. Of 53 young people who filled in a self-completion survey distributed to group members in December 2018, the majority were under 18 years old and there was a wide range in terms of gender and sexual identity and preferred pronouns (See Table 1).

Table 1: WNW participants who responded to a survey in December 2018

Characteristic	No.	%
Age		
13	1	2
14	12	23
15	10	19
16	14	26
17	9	17
18+	4	1
NA	3	1
Preferred pronouns		
He/him	22	42
She/her	12	35
They/them	7	13
She/him	1	2
She/her/they/them	1	2
He/him/they/them	3	6
He/him/she/her/they/them	1	2
NA	5	1
Gender ID		
Male	15	28
Female	9	17
Non-binary	6	11
Trans/FTM	6	11
Gender fluid	3	6
Agender	3	6
Questioning	2	4
Queer	2	4
Cis	1	2
NA	6	11
Sexual ID		
Pansexual/romantic	15	28
Gay	11	21
Bi	11	21
Straight	3	6
Asexual	2	4
Lesbian	2	4
DK	2	4
NA	7	13
N=	53	100

YC Hertfordshire statistics show that young people attending the groups included 24 with a learning difficulty or disability, one care leaver, 5 looked after young people and 5 young carers. Table 2 shows the self-reported ethnicity of 359 young people who were in contact with the project during 2018.

Table 2: Young people in contact with WNW in 2019 – self-reported ethnicity

Ethnicity	No.
White British	277
Other White Background	27
Not Known	12
Mixed White/Black Caribbean	8
Other Mixed Background	6
Other Asian Background	5
White Irish	4
Black-Caribbean	3
Black-African	3
Mixed White/Asian	3
Mixed White/Black African	3
Indian descent	2
Pakistani descent	2
Not Disclosed	2
Bangladeshi	1
Other Ethnic Background	1

6. Evaluation method

Findings in this second report of evaluation are based on: observation of a small number of local group sessions; qualitative interviews with young people carried out between November 2018 and January 2019; and some feedback sessions with group leads conducted over the same time period. Other information used for the evaluation includes routine project data collected by YC Hertfordshire (for example about group size and attendance), baseline survey data collected by YC Hertfordshire from young people in June 2017 and again in June 2018, and the results of the short survey of WNW participants conducted in December 2018 .

7. Activity

Between the start of January and the end of December 2017, 490 young people came into contact with the WNW project. Table 3 shows that, over 12 months, 667 sessions were held across the County with an average attendance of five young people per session (range across groups from 1 to c.15).

Table 3: Registration and Attendance 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018

District	Group	Total attended	No. sessions	Average attendance	No. YP in contact
Broxbourne	Be yourself, be proud LGBTQ	117	42	2.8	27
	LGBTQ 18-24	156	33	4.7	49
County-wide	Herts 1125 Who Not What/Voice (LGBTQ)	150	21	7.1	24
Dacorum	Gendered Intelligence LGBTQ (Monthly)	18	4	4.5	9
	Happy As I Am 13-17 LGBTQ (Weekly)	316	30	10.5	37
	Happy As I Am 18-24 LGBTQ (Weekly)	697	47	14.8	64
	Transgender Project (Monthly)	9	4	2.3	5
East Herts	Gendered Intelligence LGBTQ (Monthly)	48	12	4.0	18
	Northgate LGBTQ (Weekly)	36	40	0.9	16
	Ware LGBTQ (Fortnightly)	152	36	4.2	19
Hertsmere	Arcus Project 13-17 LGBTQ (Weekly)	36	18	2.0	7
	LGBTQ 18-24 (Weekly)	11	8	1.4	3
	LGBTQ 18-24 (Weekly)	29	37	0.8	3
North Herts	Free 2B LGBTQ (Weekly)	81	51	1.6	14
St Albans	LGBTQ 13-17 (Weekly)	173	46	3.8	17
	LGBTQ 18-24 (Weekly)	86	42	2.0	6
	Transgender Project (Monthly)	8	2	4.0	5
Stevenage	Gendered Intelligence LGBTQ (Weekly)	66	10	6.6	29
	Identity LGBTQ (Weekly)	124	50	2.5	34
Three Rivers	POWWA. LGBTQ (Weekly)	185	39	4.7	17
Watford	LGBTQ+ Older Group (Weekly)	45	12	3.8	8
	PACT LGBTQ (weekly)	384	41	9.4	34
Welwyn/Hatfield	Breaks Manor Evening Serenity Project LGBTQ 13-17	477	42	11.4	45
TOTALS		3404	667	5.1	490

As well as the support offered in group sessions to LGBTQ young people, the WNW Project has continued to pursue initiatives affecting the community across Hertfordshire, including attending events and working in partnership with a range of other local agencies. Just some examples from 2018 are outlined below :

- Herts MIND Network delivered one Mental Health Awareness session per group, and a series of six sessions to one group in particular;
- The LGBTQ residential weekend for 13 – 17 year olds mentioned in Section 3 above involved working in partnership with Herts Police Hate Crime Officers and Herts MIND Network;
- The WNW county-wide (Voice) group together with local groups created a ‘pop-up’ exhibition for LGBT History Month. The general public joined in across several local venues including secondary schools, theatres, colleges and the university;
- The Voice group completed its Hate Crime Awareness short film which was distributed to schools, colleges, partners and other organisations and premiered at the Hertfordshire Constabulary’s IDAHOBIT day event;
- The WNW Project was among the finalists for the Youth Work Award at the Children and Young People Now Awards;
- Two of YC Hertfordshire’s Access Point venues became third party online reporting centres for Hate crimes/incidents in 2018;
- Two members of the Voice group attended meetings with service leads/commissioners and WNW members were also consulted via email;
- 150 young people were sent information online after attending awareness raising events and film viewings;
- Staff and young people from the Project have presented at school conferences and meetings, and operated an information stand at Herts Pride, engaging with 183 young people.

8. Key outcomes for young people

8.1 Overall response to the project

In terms of overall response to the WNW Project, the previous report highlighted the Project’s success in terms of:

- Providing an important ‘safe space’ outside of home or school where LGBTQ young people can be themselves;
- Establishing welcoming and inclusive social settings in which group members have found friends they can trust and who understand them;
- Creating effective forums for young LGBTQ people to talk about their experiences, feelings and concerns, either in one-to-one sessions with youth workers, or in moderated or informal conversations with their peers.
- Dramatically improving the quality of some young people’s lives and helping others to feel more fulfilled and happier in general, not only when they are at group;

- Fostering a wider sense of community through occasions such as the annual Prom, and participation in local and national events such as Hertfordshire Pride and LGBT History Month;
- Encouraging group members to develop a sense of purpose and agency by considering how issues important to LGBTQ young people can and should be addressed at local or national level;
- Supporting individuals who want to be involved actively in county-wide strategic planning and campaigning.

Table 4 shows that these outcomes continue to be important. In a short self-completion survey conducted among 53 group members in December 2018, respondents were asked how much each of a series of statements applied to them personally. Answers were on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 means 'Does not apply at all' and 5 means 'Applies a lot'. The top answers from respondents emphasised meeting other people, having fun and relaxing in a safe space, 'being myself', feeling happier, celebrating and feeling more confident about being LGBTQ, being understood, having a trusted adult to talk to, and getting support with LGBTQ issues. Also important to respondents to the December 2018 survey was learning how to support and signpost other young LGBTQ young people.

Table 4: Survey December 2018 - top ten answers

	Score of 4 or 5 %
It is somewhere to meet other LGBTQ people my age	91
It is a safe place to have fun and relax	91
I can be myself at group	89
My emotional wellbeing has improved due to attending the group.	89
I have learned to celebrate my sexual/gender identity	88
There is always a trusted adult at group that I can talk to if something is bothering me	87
Other people at group understand me	79
I am generally happier and more relaxed since I started coming	79
I have learned to be proud of my identity as an LGBTQ young person	77
I get support with my LGBTQ issues	75
I have become more confident in my identity as LGBTQ	75
I have developed as someone who can provide peer support to other LGBTQ (and non-LGBTQ) people	73
I have learned how to support and signpost other young LGBTQ young people	71

Findings from qualitative interviews conducted towards the end of 2018 also underline how important the groups continue to be for the young people who attend them. For some, going to group is the most important fixture of the week.

I am here almost every week. It definitely helps with my weekly life. If I am having a bad week I feel I can come here and share about it. It is definitely a safe place for me.

This group is my favourite time of the week. I am very friendly and comfortable with everyone here and have been for more than a year.

I come pretty much every week. I love coming here it is the highlight of my week and I look forward to it all the time. My best friends are here. They are an amazing bunch of people. I just like the social interaction. The atmosphere. Coming here and talking to everyone and having a good time.

The open-weave, relaxed social setting and the sense of security and acceptance which the groups engender, encourage young people to be open and receptive to the support that is available to them, whether of a personal or more general nature.

My Mum found out about the group and contacted them. She thought it would be everyone sitting down talking about trans issues. In fact we have free reign over what we do and it lets us get closer to people. We all talk to each other a lot and discuss what has been going on recently in our lives.

It is fun here. We do cooking. Last week we made mac and cheese and ate together and it was like being in a big family. Sometimes we have discussions. The youth worker will make prompt cards and we will pick one out and start a discussion around it. For example, what is your favourite thing about yourself? And it reminds you to stay positive and thoughtful.

It is a big part of my life. It is like a second home. I love all the people here. We are very open with each other. If anyone comes with an issue and doesn't know what to do we offer our advice and if they don't want to take it at least they have been able to offload and get it off their chest. Anything that is said here stays here. They are an amazing group of people who are so supportive and trustworthy and without them I don't know what I would be doing.

As previously reported, there has been:

- Positive change in the quality of young people's lives as a result of the WNW Project;
- Participants have made new friends and are happier as a result;
- They are more confident in themselves and have improved self-esteem;
- Some have been helped to tackle deep-seated personal issues;
- They have learned facts that are useful and/or empowering;
- And developed skills in listening and talking to other young people and providing support;
- Members have met people from very different backgrounds with different stories and different futures in store for them, and say they are more open-minded as a consequence;
- For some young people the groups have provided a springboard to take on new challenges. For example, one young person who has been a group member for a few years is now helping out as a volunteer youth worker at the group.

Case study 1

She likes to attend group because it is a change of scenery but also I feel it is a bit safer here (than the LGBT group at school) because it is run by adults who have had experience so you can tell them things if you have a problem, whereas school is run by sixth formers. I don't find it too easy to talk to adults about my problems, like lots of people, but when I do it actually helps me to destress so having access to people who understand what I am going through and can give me advice is great and a resource I like to use.

She says she doesn't get fine-tuned support at school or home. At school they say it is fine to be gay, and everything, but they don't go into it. Her parents know that she is LGBTQ and are there for personal support but they can't give me support for my issues that are to do with me being part of the LGBTQ community.

Here it is mainly a safe space to come and be ourselves, have fun and be with our friends with common interests. We do lots of fun activities like cooking, art and skating but we also do activities talking about things that are happening among young people and in the year like trans remembrance day, sex and safety, safety and social media and things like that. Sometimes we fix an agenda but sometimes if we want to talk about something we will raise it.

Case study 2

He is 14 years old and transgender and found out about the group through a friend. He is a shy person. There wasn't much about (the location of) the group online which was reassuring because it shouldn't be easy to find out about. The group has transformed his life.

I didn't really know many other LGBTQ people so when I came here I made a whole new bunch of friends; before I didn't have many things to do.

They do cooking and fun group activities to help them build on themselves. He doesn't mind what they do because he just enjoys being there. Anything they do is fine by him. He sees it more as a place he comes to for social stuff than as a place to learn but he has learned a lot.

In terms of learning I am more involved here and I can talk about things rather than just reading about them on the internet. I have learned about other people and their identities and just sort of gender and sexuality based things I didn't know about before. As well as learning about other issues such as staying safe on line. So he has been exposed to a lot of relevant information through the group members and the youth workers and has been able to ask questions and hear other people's viewpoints.

I wouldn't change anything. I love it the way that it is.

Case study 3

He is transgender and describes the area where he lives as homophobic. You can't walk round the town and be you (so) it is good that I can come here and I have met some totally great people.

We bake a lot. We have people come in a lot like mental health people, sexual health people. We listen and ask a lot of questions and like to have fun with them. We can be totally open.

You get to be around other people who are like you. It replaces school for me where I don't have a friend group. This is my friend group – and my school – because we also learn things here and the Youth Workers are like our teachers.

Case study 4

She is bisexual and has been coming to group for 18 months after being introduced by a friend. She started because it sounded like fun and they do a lot of cooking and I hadn't learned much about LGBT stuff. We do lessons on things like mental and sexual health and it was a chance to get focused education around these areas. She says there is sex education at school but it is all straight so you don't really learn much... They will brush over it at school but not go into as much depth as they do here.

It is really nice coming here because it is a bit of a community. Although things have changed in school and more generally in terms of acceptance of LGBT and people feeling comfortable about being out, it isn't quite as close here. Also people come from all over the place and you don't know them so it is out of the context of your own life and that is good. At school it can be a bit awkward coming out. Her parents are completely supportive, especially her mother.

They cook, do arts and crafts, play games, whatever we feel like. It is comfortable which is why it is so nice. It isn't like there is a lesson plan every week. I come every week if I can.

Sometimes the youth worker will introduce a topic or bring someone in from outside. It will still be informal like a chat between friends, which makes it a comfortable place or way to ask questions. In a classroom at school you kind of more likely to sit there awkwardly. Here it is a small group and everyone is comfortable with one another.

Even the second time I came here it was like I had known everyone for years. It is the place we come in order to feel comfortable and that affects even more how we are with one another.

8.2 Emotional wellbeing and mental health

The previous report noted that the WNW Project had contributed significantly to the mental and emotional wellbeing of the young people attending the support groups.

Table 4 shows that nearly 90 percent of young people who responded to the survey of group members conducted in December 2018 explicitly reported improved emotional wellbeing/mental health because of the project and more than two thirds said they had got support with emotional wellbeing issues that were not related to being LGBTQ. Many of the top answers from the survey indicated that members felt happier, supported and understood as a result of the Project.

One young person interviewed for this report explained:

If you have a bad week it gets you out of the house instead of wallowing in your room at home. And it is a very positive space, so you never leave feeling down. You always leave feeling happy. It is a broad range of people and you never feel alone with a problem. There will always be someone saying 'yeah me too, let's do this together'. It is very warming.

One transgender young person was being home schooled and didn't have many friends. His father found out about the group and encouraged him to go along to meet more people:

I think pretty much everyone who knows me can say I have completely changed. I wasn't going to school. I was really depressed and not confident in myself. And now I am in college. I am doing a course in media and doing really well. I am confident and can talk to people easily. I have gained so much from coming here. I have come out as a much better person from being here.

Another respondent was 'feeling bad' about not being out to his parents, and therefore not able to be himself around his family. With support from a Youth Worker eventually he was able to express himself to his parents. It went well.

One young person who is transgender described having a number of mental health issues including anxiety linked to body dysmorphic disorder. *Sometimes it is uncomfortable feeling that I shouldn't have this kind of body. Sometimes I have panic attacks. At group he gets support mainly through conversations with others. It is mainly just talking. I am closer with some people here and I would talk to them about dysmorphia. This is an area that people understand and some experience it as well so they know what to say and what not to say. He says that one of the best things about the group is that people know or learn how to talk to each other with sensitivity, empathy and careful use of language.*

Another young person said: *We often discuss (mental health and emotional wellbeing issues). Like how our weeks were. If there are specific things bothering us or personal problems. If we don't feel comfortable talking to the whole group there is usually someone who you can talk to one to one. You aren't shamed for taking up either option. Mental health is a persistent issue for them. But I am definitely a lot better than I was. I have dealt with depression and anxiety (for many) years. And within the past year I have been diagnosed with OCD. Whenever I have (worrying) thoughts I know I can talk to people here. And the Youth Worker really understands. They seem to make allowances and are very accepting of what your issues are to make you feel more comfortable. It definitely makes me accept my issues more, rather than just pushing things away. Being accepted takes the pressure off and gives me coping mechanisms for my day to day life.*

Case study 6

He is 16 and was first interviewed a year ago. He has attended weekly since then. He was very enthusiastic about the group when first interviewed, because I had never been to anything like it before. Now he says because I have been coming so much it seems more like a second home so I am calmer with it. It is more routine. But he remains very positive about the Project. I have found great people here including a friend who is like my brother. The youth worker is also helping me one to one. She is going the extra mile to help me so it is really great. She is helping me with lots of things. I am a very depressed boy. It is a mixture of things that have been problematic for a while but new things emerge continually.

Although his LGBTQ status is not the only factor related to his mental health issues, it is important. He has body dysmorphia which he says has improved a bit now that I have a binder and a packer which I didn't have before. But it still reminds me of what I don't have and this links to why I self-harm because I hate my body so much. So if I could get comfortable with my body some other things might improve.

He wasn't out to his family last time. They knew he was 'in to' girls, but not that he identified as a boy. Now they know both that he identifies as a boy and is in to girls but also boys. However, he says he doesn't talk to his family that much.

The Youth Worker helps him with his mental health issues. The group has become a safe space where we can talk about everything. He also now attends two further groups including a group dealing specifically with transgender issues and which therefore feels very relevant to him.

The group has been a big part of his life in the last year. The mental health issues have been in the foreground and he has leaned on the support of good friends he has made at the group. Half of my support system has come from this group. If I need adult support, I hate my school so I am not going there. I don't communicate with, my parents so I am not going there. There is a limit to what you can say to counsellors... Youth Workers are closer to counsellors, but they don't hold back like counsellors. They are chill people to hang out with and because of that you can become more open and honest with them. They are like another friend.

Not all of us are sit down, counselling session types. Counselling is very formal and lasts a set amount of time. They ask you questions and you have to talk to them for an hour. It can get annoying and boring. Here is just a safe space to go and you have the added benefit of if you want to talk to them they are there for you. So that may be what they are there for but we don't necessarily see them like that. It is because how nice they are and stuff like that.

The group gives him something to look forward to and a happy place to go. It is an essential part of his current life. This is a place I look forward to. I would like to feel that I have grown a lot in the past year.

Case study 7

He has been helped by the group with mental health and wellbeing issues that have been a big part of his life since an early age. He has Asperger's – a label he has always carried. He has also had low points, depressive and – at one point – suicidal episodes. He eschews labels but says the group has helped a lot. The Youth Worker specifically, and the counselling he has accessed as a result of attending the group. He doesn't think he would even have known that was available if he hadn't started the group. The youth worker has helped him by arranging quite a few things for the group and he has gone to her for advice knowing that whatever she has to say is valuable and trustworthy and useful. Even recently, I have had a few issues with family and during that time I know I can turn to the Youth Worker who is an 'outsider' and therefore not likely to be biased. She is completely unrelated and can therefore give insight from an outside perspective and also tell me if I am being ridiculous.

Residential weekend

As mentioned in Section 3, 2018 saw the introduction of a three-day residential during half-term, offering members from different groups the opportunity to get to know each other and have fun, extending their peer support network. The weekend incorporated emotional wellbeing, peer support, team building and social sessions. Activities included police drills (organised by Hertfordshire Police), yoga, Mindfulness (HertsMIND Network), archery, low ropes, film night, peer support activities and a pamper session.

Feedback from eleven young people who attended was very positive and all said they would like to do it again. Most of the activities were popular and the majority thought that emotional wellbeing tools they had learned, such as mindfulness, would benefit them in the future. They also thought they had acquired peer support skills that would help them to support other LGBTQ young people. Overwhelmingly, however, the weekend provided a powerful experience for those who attended where they could extend their social network and deepen their friendships:

We stayed overnight and we did outdoor activities and stuff like that (e.g. low ropes). It was really good. We were with people we were close to, doing activities we were interested in. It was a nice break with everyone you are safe with and can talk about anything with. It was a bonding experience. The activities were good, but it was really that they provided a framework for the social exchange. It was really nice just spending time with people I care a lot about, but somewhere else rather than just at group on a Monday. We played games and we also got into some deeper conversations.

8.3 Victimisation and Hate Crime

The previous report noted increased understanding of the negative effects of LGBTQ related victimisation and hate crime among group members, as well as increased knowledge about and confidence in reporting such behaviour.

Of the young people who took part in the survey in December 2018, more than two thirds said they had found out where to report hate crime if it happens to them or someone else and that group had made them more confident about reporting hate crime. More than half said they get help with bullying and hate crime that affects them personally (see Table 5).

Table 5: Survey December 2018 – Hate crime and access to services

	Score of 4 or 5 %
I have found out where to report hate crime if it happens to me or someone else	69
Group has made me more confident about reporting hate crime	66
I have found out about local services, activities and organisations for LGBTQ young people that I can access	63
I feel more confident to access other LGBTQ support services e.g. LGBTQ sexual health clinics, Police LAGLOS, LGBTQ charity orgs services, Gender clinics.	62
I get help with bullying and hate crime that affects me personally	58
I now signpost other young people to local LGBTQ services and activities	52
I feel more confident to access other general support services e.g. GP, Emotional Wellbeing, Sexual Health Clinic, Housing support.	51

According to young people interviewed for this report experiences of LGBTQ-related victimisation and hate crime are commonplace among group members. Incidents occur in the general community and at school, in spite of the fact that more young people are 'out and proud' at school and schools implement clear policies on LGBTQ-related bullying and hate incidents.

For example people on the school bus calling you out for being transgender; shouting and saying 'you can't just change your name' and 'you can't just change your gender'. People purposely talk about me in front of my face saying 'you are a tranny and you aren't valid'. Here I can talk about it and people will listen.

At school the teachers are supportive, but they (can) have trouble controlling (bullying and homophobia). I feel completely unsafe at school. I don't like to be at school because of the people. So I tend to be quite late and I spend a lot of time out of school. A lot of time last year I wasn't at school. It is causing problems now because my attendance figures for last year are really bad and I am applying to college... For quite a few years when I was hanging around with other gay people at break time we would have food thrown at us and there were a lot of physical fights. The hallways are the worst place to be. People don't even have to know me to be abusive. For example someone I don't know at all walked past me last week and was just like 'fat dyke'. And I get pushed into walls. It affected me a lot last year because I didn't have any friends and I was alone and depressed and horrible to my parents. I don't like to think of myself as having depression or a mental illness but (before the group) I realise I was unhappy and I hung around toxic people on line and I was self-harming. But... the group has helped me be in a happier place. It has kept me up. If I was sad I would force myself to come here and talk about it. (The group members support each other). We make a joke out of everything and it fixes things. I love it. I learn some stuff and they give us free stuff, free food and gay prom every year.

Groups have been visited by Hate Crime Liaison Officers from Hertfordshire police force. One respondent who has experienced LGBTQ bullying, for example being called faggot when walking down the road holding hands with her girlfriend, didn't know that hate crime was taken so seriously. Knowing that was quite comforting.

Leaflets and other information about hate crime is available at group venues and Youth Workers are experienced in signposting young people to sources of help and support. During sessions, young people have a chance to talk about their experiences, offload and be advised and supported by their peers and Youth Workers.

We always talk about harassment and hate crime and we are educated here on how to spot it and who to talk to. I have definitely learned things here that have been important. And you get that education here that you won't get in school.

One young transgender person said he would rather deal with (bullying and hate crime) himself than report it. The way people's minds work is that if they got into trouble it would make them worse. He is trying instead to find ways of becoming more resilient. At the group, the young people share stories of those kinds of experiences. It helps to talk to other people and see what they have done about it.

Over time, participants have become more informed and experienced at helping each other. Friends who have started an LGBTQ group at school say they have learned a lot from the way the issues are dealt within the group and are more confident now about what they know, how to lead their school group and how to support their peers.

8.4 Accessing LGBTQ (and other) services

The previous evaluation report noted increased awareness of LGBTQ support services among group members and increased confidence in accessing them. The WNW Project itself is regarded as a key support service by those attending regularly.

Table 5 in the previous section shows that half of respondents to the survey in December 2018 agreed they were more confident about accessing general support services such as GP, emotional wellbeing, sexual health and housing support services. Nearly two thirds had found out about LGBTQ specific local services, activities and organisations, and felt more confident about accessing them

Young people attending the WNW groups learn about LGBTQ and other local activities and services through formal sessions delivered by youth workers and others (for example on sexual health). They also acquire information opportunistically from Youth Workers, through leaflets and other information available from group venues, and from each other.

We have learned a lot more about local services that we can access that are both specifically for LGBTQ young people and more generally available. This can come up spontaneously or as a more formal agenda item.

Through coming to the group I have found out about a lot more. The group itself is a safe space to learn about all sorts of different things run by YC Hertfordshire. On top of that there are all the other groups. For example the Fire Brigade came to talk to the group and included a homosexual firefighter and a gay admin officer. They were modelling careers for LGBTQ young people in the fire service.

Over time participants have developed trust in the WNW groups as a source of information and advice curated for their situation when and if they need it.

All sorts of services and places where I can go (have been brought to my attention), which I find comforting and potentially useful even though I haven't tapped into them myself yet.

The group is like a hub where I can find out about services that are available. For example police officers have come in and talked to us and given us the addresses of useful websites. I have... found out about 'stuff' that could be useful in the future.

There are always leaflets we can see and the Youth Worker helps find different groups (like for mental health) if we need them.

8.5 Peer support and advocacy

Over time, participants in the WNW project have become more confident in themselves, more skilful in befriending and supporting others and more knowledgeable. Longer standing members 'enrich' the groups by providing effective support for new people. They are also able to 'cascade' their influence more widely.

One young person is able to support LGBTQ peers at school as a direct result of attending the group because we talk a lot about how to help each other and I have learned a lot about how to support other people. She is confident and has an accepting home, so sometimes it is shocking to hear how other people's parents don't accept them because I am, not used to that. For me, I have learned about other people's experiences and learned how to listen to other people.

Another young person says his confidence outside of group has grown over the past year and, at group he is now quite extrovert. He says I have realised where I have gone wrong in the past and what I can do to help myself and I am taking it on board and starting to do it piece by piece. He now feels that he is someone who is able to help others, both in the group and outside. He has learned support skills within the group. He has also brought quite a few others into the group.

Others say:

I consider myself to be quite a supportive person to everyone in the group and also outside the group. Inside and out I have grown to be a more understanding and supportive person.

I was shy but now I can have a conversation with anyone. It helped me realise how I wanted to be treated when I come out. So it helps me in how I talk to people who come out to me.

I am a lot more open and social. Not so closed in. Open to making new friends and trying new experiences. I am more sorted and more in my own mind. I know what my views are and I am not afraid to say them. I am more open now about my views but also respectful of other people's too.

Case study 8

He feels he has been built up by the group and is better able now to support others. I have met a lot of people and they have confided in me and trusted me and that makes me feel good as well. Because we are all so close and don't share each other's secrets, it is like everyone is OK talking to each other so I have learned skills about how I can help others. Peer to peer support is massive in our generation because going to adults can be so scary and annoying. I know so many people who hate the adults in their life. Like I hate the teachers at school and wouldn't go to them with anything. So because of that we confide in each other and I have built skills in that through this group.

Even outside of this group he is able to support people with both LGBTQ and other issues. It is a bit of both because we talk about a lot of things here. The LBGT struggles aren't the only things we face. So I have become more educated on lots of things and have learned how to help people more. I came here very clueless because I was socially very anxious. So how to deal with things that people tell me in a 'normal' manner is something I have learned. If others can entrust things to me then I have learned how to deal with them more. For example, it can go from minimum struggles of stresses at school to someone about to commit suicide and needing someone to talk them down. I have been there at both ends of the spectrum.

This group has been very useful in helping to model the best way to respond to people in need.

Case study 9

They have been part of the Project for a few years. When they joined aged 15, their sexual preferences were ambiguous and they hoped to meet like-minded people. They wanted to learn more about the LGBTQ community and become better informed. Back then it was sort of a grey area to me. Plenty of people I knew were homosexual from a young age, but I wouldn't say I had much in-depth knowledge. The Internet had failed to provide the kinds of answers they sought. It was all sorts of mess on there; all sorts of confusing text with all sorts of words, abbreviations and acronyms that I didn't necessarily understand. I find I learn better from questioning things and in a more practical way by interacting and asking questions. Then you can get the exact answer you are after. On line it can be a bit hit and miss. In person it sinks in better; rather than just reading through a wall of text.

They have made some very good friends through the group that has also 'opened doors' to much else for this community-minded person. I have gone on to join the media group on Tuesday nights, the strategy group, young commissioning, and recommissioning for the drug and alcohol services in Herts. A few years ago I never thought I would remotely have got involved in anything like that. At the end of the day one group ends up being a gateway to all the other things that are going on. Each (activity) has introduced me to so many other Youth Workers and I have found out about more and more interesting groups.

This is the third year that they have worked at Herts Pride and they were also involved in the shooting of a film on hate crime through the WNW group in partnership with Hertfordshire Police. They have acquired confidence and skills and uncovered capabilities of which they were unaware. They have discovered a talent for bringing people together and helping them work towards shared goals.

Young people bring their problems and issues to group which may be dealt with on a one to one basis or may be aired more widely in the group. So there is a process of enrichment for group members that can also spread beyond the group. They say they have built up a repository of knowledge that they can use to signpost group members and non-group members. And if they don't have the knowledge personally, they always know someone who does.

When I first started my knowledge was very small compared to what it is now. Coming here has opened up a bigger picture. There is much more going on that you know about. The groups are like information hubs. Like a hive linked to lots of interconnected things going on.

9. Parents and carers

Parents/carers of WNW participants generally know their child/young person is attending a youth group and often know that it is for LGBTQ young people, but this may not be explicit.

My parents know I come to a group but I am not sure that they know/understand exactly what sort of group it is. I haven't hidden the group from them but we just don't talk particularly about things. There is no secrecy, but I haven't gone out of my way to discuss it with them.

Some young people found out about the Project through their parents. Some parents offer help for example by providing transport to and from group.

Parents/carers who know about the project are generally supportive. They appreciate the service in a safe context that groups offer and notice the positive impact on their child/young person.

My Mum thinks it is great. She loves the confidence thing; making you feel more included and boosting your self-esteem. My Mum worries that when I go to uni there won't be something like this and I won't be so accepted. I am not worried though because I think young people are much more accepting than they used to be.

My parents think it is a really great resource to me and they understand it isn't always easy for me to come to them, so they really value the support I get here.

Case study 10

Her family are religious, so it was hard to come out and say I like girls as well, even to myself. So when I started coming here it was nice to find other people who were struggling like me and I found the confidence to say what I am, who I am.

She has now talked to her family about her sexuality and says if I hadn't been coming here I don't think I would have had the confidence to say it. They are pleased I come here. They would rather I was here and safe and having a good time and finding new people without being on the street and being called names and everything.

Case study 11 – a parent’s perspective

She is a working mother who lives with her husband and non-binary young person (X). She says X seemed bi-curious and bi-romantic from a very young age and finally came out to the family as non-binary after they started attending the WNW group.

She thinks they picked up a leaflet about the groups while at school in 2017. We didn’t know anything about it and they asked if they could go. We thought it would be a good idea and were quite keen on it.

As a family they are very accepting. They are also aware that there is still of a lot of bigotry surrounding the LGBTQ community, which she finds upsetting.

She thinks the WNW group is important. When X first started going it was a real boost of confidence for them. And because they are in a nominally single gender school it gave them an opportunity to meet other people in the area. Socially it is very important. The group gives them a safe space.

She also says that the group has given X opportunities and experiences that will stand them in good stead in other ways, for example connecting to a music project that was part of the wider YC remit and wasn’t specifically an LGBTQ thing.

It has been a really good, positive experience. The activities they do and all the trips they have been on. We are really lucky that that exists in Hertfordshire and that X has been able to take advantage of it.

They talk about the Project with X, but just as ordinary end of day discussion. We don’t really get involved in it all that much, partly because X was at an age when they first got involved when people hardly talk to their parents. It all comes down to social and pastoral. They can express themselves at group and be understood.

X has had some ‘social upheavals’ at school but whenever there has been anything going on the youth worker has been supportive and helpful and is someone X feels they can look up to and talk to.

It is a really important part of X’s life. They have had space to express themselves and meet other people experiencing similar things so it is a really good platform for them and I have nothing but praise.

The group offers another base outside of the home. No one wants to tell their parents everything even if their parents are supportive. Any youth space in that respect away from parents to help them find their feet and their identity is brilliant.

My final word is that the group has been invaluable I don’t know what they would have done without it. It has transformed their life and I am really grateful they found it.

10. Youth Workers

WNW is a youth work project and, as such, engages with young people who attend the groups because they choose to. Even targeted projects such as WNW emphasise the voluntary nature of the support on offer. Specific project goals and objectives are pursued as part of a wider curriculum that emphasises personal and social development and boosting the skills and attributes of young people. WNW engages with young people to deepen their understanding of themselves, their community and the world in which they live. It aims to support them proactively to bring about positive change and to provide a safe place where young people can be creative and develop a social network and friendships with support from a trusted adult.

In interviews with young people, they consistently emphasise the important role that the Youth Workers play in creating the positive experience that the groups deliver.

The Youth Workers are a catalyst. They provide the space and the opportunity for young people to get together, along with something to do – whether ‘serious’ or more fun (e.g. making tee shirts for Pride). They cover an agenda in a relaxed informal environment; unlike school where it is a very ‘stiff environment’ in which to receive information. If anything it feels like the youth workers are members of the group. There is still that degree of professionalism, but it is done in a very relaxed way. The borders are clear but they aren’t hard borders. You can be relaxed around them. They sensitively walk a line.

If you are having a bad week you can go to her. She feels like one of us but also tells us what to do if we go off track. She has things for us to do. She is really well educated so even though she is straight she is a strong ally. She would never judge us for anything. I have lots to learn from her. She is more like a role model. If you have an issue you can go to her.

They are like a friend and if something has happened we wouldn’t bottle it up. When we get here we will always be asked how we are and if something has happened we will be encouraged to talk about it. It is helpful to have someone who is of authority but not scary and who you are comfortable with who knows things and can help you. You can talk to your friends, but they don’t know any more than you do, it is good to be comfortable with your parents but there are always some things you can’t talk to them about. They will always want to fix it and that can sometimes be detrimental. I have had a teacher who I have bonded with, but the relationship with teachers is quite formal. The Youth Workers are very accepting. They will definitely support you but not push you to do anything you don’t want to do.

Even if there was an LGBTQ group at college I would still come here. It is still managing to improve my life and I am still reaping the benefits. The Youth Worker is someone who is trustworthy. She has adult authority but is someone you can talk to who isn’t your parent. It is really easy and helpful to talk to someone like her.

For their part, group leads are enthusiastic about the Project and the work they do with LGBTQ young people. They are confident of the need that is being met and of the impact that the groups have on people who attend them. Being able to continue the Project in successive years has helped extend its reach more widely.

Case study 12 – Youth Worker perspective

She has been working on the project for more than two years. The young people who attend love it and come regularly unless there are other more pressing things going on in their lives, like exams. News about the group spreads by word of mouth, which shows how much young people value the group.

Although schools are more understanding of LGBTQ issues and groups are being set up at school, the WNW Project offers a more informal setting where young people can meet people from different areas and backgrounds and get a wider experience of LGBTQ across the County.

This year the Project organised a residential weekend, enabling young people from groups across the County to connect in one place. The weekend offered an opportunity to deliver team building skills and enhance young people's confidence and self-esteem. We did workshops around mental health awareness, self-image and how you feel in yourself.

The informal setting of the group means that young people don't feel they have to act in a particular way, although there are still rules and boundaries. Some young people she has worked with are not out at home or school and here they can talk to people, find knowledge and discover their identity with the support of other people in the same situation. Some people say this is the only place they feel accepted and can belong. A lot feel this is a place they can literally be themselves.

I have a policy here that everyone knows that it is a safe place where anyone can talk about anything and if I don't have information I will get it for them. They know here that if they want to ask something they can, and I will give them practical help if I can. For example they all know we have hate crime stuff here and are good with our local police, so they have the comfort of knowing where to get support.

They have been informed enough (on hate crime for example) to know how to deal with that situation as much as they can do. But we also talk about how they feel about it, and how they handle it, and how to build confidence so can be more sure of themselves when they are out and about and don't have the youth worker available, or the police.

I have seen a massive increase in self-confidence, self-esteem and self-worth from people who struggle with their identity. They can carry that out into the community and say I am LGBTQ and I am happy. Some have carried it out to schools and done presentations. And I have also gone into schools as well and helped them develop LGBTQ groups. So the work isn't just on this ground.

Building people up and generating resilience is core to youth work. What I love is it isn't one way. For example, they will teach me things about what is happening so I can keep up with what is new. So that is nice.

They will also come up with things they want to do. For instance we now have talk time; so every two weeks we sit in a circle and converse about different topics. They wanted specific time for emotive conversations, LGBTQ specific or emotion specific.

I have been able to work with a lot of young people who are navigating through finding themselves. I am glad that I can provide that support for them.

Continued...

Case study 12 – Youth Worker perspective

She develops themes according to group needs. It could be about mental health or self-esteem it will totally depend on who is there as to how we tailor-make the group. In addition, she responds to new issues coming up in society and in the community, for example changes in policy, Pride, Transgender Day and so on. The landscape is constantly evolving and we evolve with that change.

This group is important. The young group who attend value it. For some it is the only space where they can be themselves, get that support, or feel comfortable and have those conversations. There have been friendships built. Young people have gone from here to university to support LGBTQ young people at their universities. They have grown as a group and individually. The funding has been important for that to make sure that LGBTQ people have the same opportunities and that they have the confidence to access support not only here but elsewhere as well.

11. Key points and observations from 2018

- YC Hertfordshire's Who Not What Project continues to meet an important need by providing holistic support to Hertfordshire's LGBTQ young people in ways they respond to.
- It connects with large numbers of young LGBTQ young people every week, who benefit significantly.
- Positive changes in self-esteem, self-confidence and general emotional wellbeing are notable outcomes for group members, potentially 'heading off' the development of emotional wellbeing/mental health issues.
- Growing numbers of LGBTQ young people in Hertfordshire have acquired the knowledge and skills they need to support, befriend and signpost their peers both in group and the wider community.
- Partnerships with organisations and agencies across Hertfordshire are building up through the Project with benefits to all.



LGBTQ
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