More than a Youth Project

Ten years of LGBT Youth North West
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It may not sound that long ago, but 2005 was a different world. There was no such thing as an iPhone. Nobody had heard of Justin Bieber (he was only eleven). MySpace was massive, Facebook was barely known outside of American colleges, and Twitter did not even exist. No-one made a living out of being a social media manager, or a blogger, and online bullying and trolling were not things that most people had to navigate.

2005 saw the launch of YouTube and the Xbox 360. Prince Charles and Camilla Parker-Bowles got married. The first same-sex civil partnerships took place, and just prior to that, the Gender Recognition Act came in to effect, which enabled transsexual people to have a reassigned gender legally recognised. Section 28, which forbade councils and council-run schools from ‘promoting’ homosexuality, had been repealed two years earlier, but the spectre of it still hovered over schools throughout Britain.

Amidst all of this, LGBT Youth North West (LGBTYNW) was born. It was established as a company in October 2005, with no employees, no premises, few resources, and just £10 in the bank. It is also used by some as an umbrella term to collectively refer to the LGBT community.

Queer = A word that has been reclaimed from its former derogatory use to describe identities that do not conform to what society expects of LGBT people. It is adopted by many as a political identity and is often used by people who challenge gender and sexual orientation stereotypes – in lifestyle, politics and/or appearance. Although it has been reclaimed, some people do still use this as an insult or to offend. It is also used by some as an umbrella term to collectively refer to the LGBT community.

Intersex = A person is assigned intersex, often at birth, when their sex characteristics don’t align with the medical definitions of male or female. The external and internal body, along with chromosomes and hormones, can all be factors when assigning someone as intersex.

The ten year anniversary of LGBTYNW also marks its transformation into The Proud Trust. The new name has been chosen to reflect the scope and nature of the work that comes under the umbrella of this organisation. When communities come together, they are stronger and achieve more. LGBTYNW, now The Proud Trust, is a community – of groups, places, and people. This is a celebration of that community. We spoke to people to ask them how they feel about LGBTYNW. We contacted patrons, partner organisations, trustees, staff, volunteers and young people of LGBTYNW and let them tell us what they thought. What follows is what they had to say.

We would like to thank all of those who took part in this project, and are only sorry that we have not been able to include everyone’s responses. We recognise the time and thought that contributors have put in, and greatly appreciate the trust shown to us by those who have shared their personal thoughts, feelings, and stories. We would also like to thank those who helped to create these stories – all of the staff, volunteers, partners, supporters, allies and young people of LGBTYNW.
LGBTYNW runs several groups for young people, including Lesbian and Gay Youth Manchester (LGYM), and Afternoon TEA (which stands for Trans Education and Action). They also run Fusion, a group targeted at LGBT+ Black and Asian Minoritised Ethnic (BAME) young people, the Young Women’s Project which aims to improve the health and wellbeing of lesbian and bisexual women, and a number of other LGBT youth groups throughout Greater Manchester. New projects and events are being developed all the time. But why do we need organisations like LGBTYNW? Surely young people already have plenty of opportunities for education and social activity? We asked several young people the same question – imagine a world without LGBTYNW: what would that mean for you?

“For me, it would mean I would be more alone in the world, I wouldn’t have the connections I have and I certainly would not have the confidence to put myself out there and be proud of who I am. It has had a huge impact on my life. Because of them I have been able to meet more people like me, as well as others who identify as genders I knew little about, or nothing at all. My knowledge of the trans and non-binary community has increased tenfold and I am far more confident in my identity now than I ever have been.” - Kieran, aged 20

“I think it would have taken me a lot longer to discover who I am, and I would have struggled with it a lot more due to a lack of support. I think without it people would feel a lot more alone. It has provided me with a safe place to explore who I am and be accepted for who I really am. It has greatly affected my life and my understanding of myself. I feel better about myself due to knowing that other people have experienced similar things to me, and has assured me that the world is more accepting of difference, and that I shouldn’t be afraid to be me.” – Nash, aged 18

“I would either be very alone or not here. There are a lot of people who I think, would say the same. Almost a year ago I was struggling with mental health problems, and was advised to look at groups at the centre by my mother. I first came to a Tuesday LGYM session, and have come to every session I could since. It is one of the best things that has happened.” – Nic, aged 17

“I think I would still have a lot of issues surrounding my confidence and anxiety. I know a lot of people who would really struggle to cope without LGBTYNW. Afternoon TEA has given me so much more confidence, the workers there encourage me to take part and beat my anxiety. I’ve met my best friends through the group and the support I get from them is more than I can put into words.” – Adam, aged 18

“The world for me would be a lot darker, filled with despair and misery probably. I might sound dramatic but I’d be in a much worse place and I’d feel completely hopeless.” – Tal, aged 15

“If we had no LGBT youth groups, I don’t know where I would be. It would mean that I would feel more alone than I have ever felt and I would probably still feel depressed. It felt really good when I found out about it because I finally felt like I could go somewhere to be myself and be accepted. LGBTYNW has helped me so much. It has helped me to be comfortable with who I am. It has helped me come out to my family and friends and it has made me a much more open person. I felt like I was hiding before, and now I’m not. It has had a huge impact on my life because it has given me so much confidence. It has made me feel like I am not the only one who feels this way and it has made me think that people in the world can and will accept me for who I am. It has changed my view on the world as I don’t feel alone any more. It has made me believe that the world can be changed.” – Hanna, aged 14

“I feel like if there were no LGBT youth groups some LGBT individuals would feel very lost and lonely and it means a huge deal for me to have that connection with other people that are in the same boat as I am.” – Becky, aged 17
One of those who has been with LGBTYNW from the start is Myrtle, the very first employee on the LGBTYNW payroll.

I got involved in LGBTYNW through accessing Lesbian and Gay Youth Manchester (LGYM) as a young person. I had attended LGYM since late 2003. Soon after I became involved in training as a young leader and volunteer through the organisation, and in 2008 I became a paid staff member working on an equalities project. The passion and compassion of LGYM and LGBTYNW staff helped me to identify my calling to do similar work.

Starting out as a young youth worker, my skills and experience have grown as the organisation has grown. I have developed projects in Rochdale and Stockport which have aided the range and reach of the quality services LGBTYNW delivers. My delivery of LGBT awareness work with young people and professionals in the early days of LGBTYNW set the foundations for the development of our current training offer which has since been enhanced massively by other staff. Alongside coordinating the Stockport group I also coordinate the young women’s provision. This work means that young people access youth work that enables them to be themselves, and be challenged and celebrated at the same time. My hope is that the work I do now contributes to enhancing all young people’s lives and that it impacts positively on them in the same way the LGBT youth work I accessed when I was younger has had such a lasting effect on my life.

It is not unusual for people to associate notions of ‘home’ and family with LGBTYNW and this is to do with the way the organisation works and our view of young people and identity. People are loyal to LGBTYNW, respect its purpose, and whether you’re a young person or youth worker you feel as though you have a support network just by being part of the organisations work. LGBTYNW is resourceful and in the face of adversity has overcome to meet the needs of its young people and to impact positively on the world around us. LGBTYNW does so much on relatively little resourcing compared to other organisations. People put a lot of their own time and energy into the work of LGBTYNW because they have seen or experienced for themselves, perhaps first hand, the important and life changing work the organisation does. LGBT young people (and LGBT people in general) are still under-represented and under-supported and our work is centred around addressing this. Perhaps it’s not usual to feel about a place of employment the way I (and others do) about the organisation but for me it feels like I grew up with LGBTYNW. Going to work often feels like returning home. I have met life long friends and ‘family’ with LGBTYNW and this is to do with the way we work and our view of young people and identity. People are loyal to LGBTYNW, respect its purpose; in a world without LGBTYNW I doubt that I would be alive, and an out and proud lesbian working towards a career as a youth worker.

As a young person at LGBTYNW I found somewhere that was so safe, welcoming and nurturing. Somewhere that gave me space to process the homohobic bullying I faced at school and negative attitudes from parts of my family. It showed me what healthy relationships look like, that it was okay, and in fact an amazing thing to be a lesbian. It showed me feminism, and opened me up to a culture of radical self-love and acceptance that I don’t believe I would have found elsewhere because I would not have known to look for it. Seeing the commitment of other women who love women to educating others and challenging oppression like sexism is what helped me to build a more feminist world view and in turn become a feminist myself.

I’m so truly proud to work for LGBTYNW, particularly their young lesbian and bisexual women’s project. I will always do a little bit more, with the knowledge that I am mirroring what I benefited from myself. Going from how isolated and closeted I felt that first time I came through the door, hiding in my long hair, to how I feel now going to work and seeing similar young people begin their own journeys is a privilege. In a world without LGBTYNW I doubt that I would be alive, and an out and proud lesbian working towards a career as a youth worker.

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Another young person has gone on to work for LGBTYNW as Hebe. She told us about her journey.

“When I arrived at LGBTYNW seven years ago I hadn’t knowingly met another lesbian, let alone a lesbian my age with similar life experiences and views of the world. Looking at my life now, it’s hard to believe that’s true. However, nothing in my life at that point told me that being a lesbian was a possibility. I felt embarrassed and terrified to be open about my sexuality. Even today the voice of a young lesbian is not often heard unless it is specifically encouraged, nurtured, and she is told she has important opinions and insights that have the potential to change the world around her. Even something as simple as feeling comfortable in saying the words ‘I am a lesbian’ still took me a few years, so I am very lucky to have had LGBTYNW as a place that acknowledges that as important."

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So what makes LGBTYNW different? What is it that keeps young people coming back week after week, and drives them to become volunteers, staff members, and trustees? We spoke to John Swallow, Young Persons’ Mental Health Worker with Rochdale and District Mind. John attended LGYM in the 1990s, and he stays in touch with LGBTYNW through his current role and the occasional bit of volunteering.

“LGBTYNW has] never lost sight of its participative and educative role in enabling young people to get involved, learn, grow and develop personally. It] has always been built on peer led, peer education models, enabling young people to get involved, learn and develop their social and technical skills through participatory group education. This enables young people to share skills and interests they have, develop new skills, in particular communication and interpersonal skills, enabling them to develop pro-social behaviours within a safe and peer supported environment. With many other children and young peoples services becoming more targeted and focused around ‘managing risk’ particularly in the statutory sector, but more so recently in the third sector, most early intervention models are based on a need to engage with services rather than a young person led educational framework, where participation is a choice to engage based on activity being something children and young people want to do.

So LGBTYNW seeks to engage young people by providing an environment where they choose the extent of their own involvement, and where they can have a say in how things are run, rather than just reacting when a young person is experiencing a crisis. Through fostering a young person-centred approach, LGBTYNW can avert crises in the first place, by building confidence and reducing isolation."

This is a word that came up time and again when discussing these issues with all participants – isolation. Young people spoke of feeling isolated, and isolation was seen as particular consequence of a lack of youth groups such as LGBTYNW.

John gave us his view on this.

“Adolescence is a key time when children and young people develop their sense of self and begin to grow independent from their parents and family. For young LGBT children and young people, this is also a complex time where they ask questions of their own sexual identity and begin to define their sexuality. Without contact and positive role models of other LGBT people, character development can become problematic, particularly in terms of self-esteem and confidence in their own self and abilities. LGBT young people need to be able to positively identify with others, to grow and develop as other young people and children do.”

So whilst young people these days have more and more scope to connect with others online, this is no substitute for human contact in a safe environment where everyone has your best interest at heart, and wants to listen to you.

Mandy, a trustee with LGBTYNW told us more about the importance of the young person-centred approach.

“I have been involved with various youth projects at the centre since 1989, originally as a volunteer, but later as a paid member of staff and more recently as a trustee. I have always believed that the work undertaken was vital in order to support and help LGBT young people to grow and feel cherished and important. Whilst changes to legislation can make it look that the world has moved forward, the experiences of young people on a day to day basis show that there is still a long way to go.

Consultation with young people has always been a fundamental part of the group, not just as an after-thought.”
One such person who has moved through the organisation in this way is Jake, a former young person and young leader who has gone on to become a volunteer. He told us his story.

“I first came to LGYM when I was 14 years old and in my first year of GCSEs in school. I’m now nineteen years old. I went with my best friend of the time when the LGBT Centre was facing closure.

We walked up and down Oxford Road for half an hour before realising it was tucked away behind the 8th Day shop. Since then I’ve never left! I became a young leader after three years. After that, I became a volunteer. I’ve always said – what LGBTYNW gave me in four years I would never be able to give back in a lifetime of volunteering. I like being assertive and having a facilitator role and being a volunteer allows me to do that. I wanted to support the people that remind me of myself. I want to give back what I got as a young person here. I deliver sessions to groups of young people to empower them and give them more key skills. I support people one-to-one to help them on their journey. I work in the cafe to help fund the centre. I do administration stuff... All sorts really!

LGBTYNW provides a community ‘family’ feeling that no other place can do quite as well. We have certain ground rules and expectations that people either follow or decide to leave. For this reason, we have an educational environment that doesn’t feel like a school. People can come here and be accepted regardless of who they are. We do not tolerate racist or misogynistic or offensive language, and so all people can always feel comfortable and not at risk. It is important because it provides almost everything that queer young people need to get by. We have one-to-one support, trained workers, a safe space with people to talk to, therapeutic activities, sometimes food – everything but accommodation and GCSE qualifications!”

With that in mind, we asked Jake what else LGBTYNW could offer if it had more resources? Are there gaps in services offered to LGBT+ young people?

“We have young people facing homelessness, young people that can’t cope in group situations, young people that struggle to do well in school as a result of bullying or mental health issues. With more funding, we would be able to offer emergency accommodation, offer more professional one-to-one services, and offer an alternative educational environment for anyone who struggles in school.”

There is so much support needed. Television programmes, magazine articles and so on often focus on the struggles of LGBT+ people, but LGBTYNW also seems like such a positive place. What are your thoughts on this Jake?

“I think it’s key to note that the media is looking for sales, whereas we have a more realistic stance. At whatever way we look at things, it’s not all doom and gloom for young LGBT people. Most of them have positive role models and the rise of social media gives them a chance to connect with more and more people. However, LGBTYNW does offer support, especially in terms of abuse, homelessness and other serious matters. We set out to educate people on the risks of a range of things: sex, relationships, substance abuse... but at the same time we are here to help people make friends, form positive relationships, give accredited qualifications, play games, have discussions about everything. It’s definitely a place where people learn but most people learn through these positive experiences.”

One of the many ways in which LGBTYNW has encouraged this positivity, confidence and participation is through training young people to become LGBTYNW Young Leaders. These are young people trained to help staff run the youth work sessions and events. During sessions they might do anything from making drinks for people, to helping with the logistics of the session. At events they might have a similar role, along with carrying out other tasks such as helping to lead the event. Alex, a young leader, told us about his experience.

“LGBTYNW has given me a place to meet new people both similar and very different to me. The majority of these friends, from all aspects of the LGBT+ community, I probably would not have otherwise met. The Sidney Street Cafe provides me with a safe space to express myself with how I feel comfortable and I know that the staff are on hand to provide excellent support. Through the last year I’ve grown so much as a person, pushed myself and learnt so many new things that, without the organization, I probably wouldn’t have been able to do.”

“...I like being assertive and having a facilitator role and being a volunteer allows me to do that. I wanted to support the people that remind me of myself. I want to give back what I got as a young person here.”
As we have heard, it’s not all doom and gloom. Although LGBT+ young people may have to confront serious issues and situations at a young age, LGBTYNW has provided a place for them to have fun as well as to receive support. When we asked young people about their experiences of LGBTYNW they frequently singled out fun, happy memories and positive feelings.

"I was super excited to meet other people who understood me and I thought it would be a good opportunity to make friends as I don’t really have many. I came out to my parents specifically to come to LGYM. I’ve been canoeing and we’ve done sports, gone to the allotment, cooked, played games, thought about politics (this is very important because its often not done at school), had debates, and done so many more interesting things! I love it so much. It has definitely helped me because at my old school I was being bullied and I had no friends at all. I thought there was no way that I’d feel happy again, but I went and now I have friends that are supportive and fun. I remember waiting the whole school week away just to come to the group. Everyone there is so kind and sometimes it’s just a safe place to take your mind off things. At the end of a session I don’t want to leave! Every memory created in that centre will probably not be forgotten. I loved going to the allotment and befriending wooden fish sculptures. Also, the time when we were making things out of clay and I put the deathly hallows on it but it was mistaken for the illuminati symbol. We also all (mostly) share a love for making puns." - Tal, aged 13

"I have been involved in LGYM for nearly a month. We do lots of things from baking crumble with soya spread (don’t do it!) to talking about Doctor Who. I don’t really get the chance to do this anywhere else. After my first LGYM session on the bus home I came out to my parents via email. Without LGYM I don’t think I would have ever come out to them." - Jennifer, aged 16

"We do a bit of everything, from talking about trans issues to going swimming, something I could never do anywhere else due to confidence issues. We also play games and get involved in community events, such as the Manchester Day Parade. My favourite memories come from the trans residential, where we did a drama workshop and I worked with loads of young people and couldn’t stop laughing." - Adam, aged 18

"We do sports such as ice skating, frisbee, swimming, rounders, canoeing, football, touch rugby, cycling. I don’t get the chance to do much sport outside LGBTYNW because I don’t feel comfortable doing sport as a trans person. It provides the opportunity to take part in sport without being judged and with people you trust. Swimming with Afternoon TEA is particularly useful because swimming was a huge part of my life growing up and I swam at least once a week before I transitioned but I had to stop as I was becoming increasingly uncomfortable with my body." - Nathan, aged 17

"I have met my best friend through Afternoon TEA. The residential really helped this as usually I am not very confident with new people. It made life better for me as now I have someone to talk to about LGBT issues which many people don’t understand." - Nash, aged 18

Shoa, a trustee of LGBTYNW also recalled a story that brings a smile.

"My favourite memories are the introductory games we used to play. A close friend of mine came along, who was really shy around new people and large groups, and took some persuading to attend the session. We all had to say our name and favourite supermarket. He was thinking so hard about his name and favourite supermarket that he got up and said Hi, my name’s Kwik Save... Everyone was in fits of laughter including him and it broke the ice for him."
We have heard from a few people about how they went from using the services of LGBTYNW as young people, to taking on a role within the organisation. However, along with encouraging the young people to become volunteers and young leaders, LGBTYNW has a history of taking young and Community Work students on placements. Maoliosa Clarke was such a student and told us about her experience.

“I got involved with LGBTYNW when in my second year at University. I choose this placement as LGBTQ issues were an area where I previously had little knowledge and I wanted to learn from young people and experienced staff on how I could be a better support for young people. What I experienced was amazing. This organisation, the family, work to support each other. The young people and staff involved were inspiring and demonstrated a selflessness in their work which I strive to achieve myself.

LGBTYNW is vital for the young people they work with. For some young people it is a place where they can be themselves, a place where they learn, a place where they can support others and themselves to be comfortable and confident with who they are. It's a place where parents and care givers can get support for young people. It's a place to hang out with friends, its a place where a person can feel less lonely. It is an anchor, and sometimes it's the difference between life and death. LGBTYNW is unique as their only agenda is set by their young people for young people; genuine participation is achieved here.

“The biggest lesson I got was to see for myself the capacity of young people to make a positive difference to other young people and adults. Their resilience and bravery is inspiring”

This organisation gives back to the community, supporting students to gain essential skills in working with young people, challenging ideas in a positive manner and supporting people to think more inclusively. The knowledge and skills learnt here are extremely valuable as a youth worker since leaving placement I have utilised the knowledge gained on a daily basis in my job and home. I hope that LGBTYNW continues forever. It is already awesome and has a great staff and volunteer team. I hope to use the knowledge I have gained to enable me to facilitate a safe place for LGBTQ young people in my area of work.

In my time at LGBTYNW I learnt so much from the team of youth workers but the biggest lesson I got was to see for myself the capacity of young people to truly make a positive difference to other young people and adults. Their resilience and bravery is inspiring. I will say that LGBTYNW is more than a youth project; it is a family where everyone is made to feel welcome and at home. I will always be grateful for my time there.”

In addition to offering work placements to students, LGBTYNW has supported academic partners in other ways, such as through assisting and facilitating research. Dr Elizabeth McDermott, Senior Lecturer in Health Research at Lancaster University had this to tell us.

“I am a public health academic that, for the last decade, has been researching why young people who are LGBT have high rates of suicide and self-harm. LGBTYNW have always been willing to assist with the research through advocacy, advice and participation. I am running the Queer Futures Research Project which is a national study, the first funded by the Department of Health, investigating LGBTQ young people. Suicide, self-harm and help-seeking. LGBTYNW have been pivotal in facilitating the LGBTQ Youth Advisory Group that assists the research team to conduct the research. This has included advice on research project information, the naming of the project (Queer Futures), research tools (interview questions and survey questions), the website, assisting with online sampling, and they will have input into the research outputs (e.g. youth ‘fact-sheet’ expert conference). In addition, LGBTYNW staff and I will be running a LGBTQ youth workshop at a North West young people and self-harm mental health professionals

“LGBTYNW have always been willing to assist with the research through advocacy, advice and participation”

The work of LGBTYNW is invaluable. They save young peoples lives. LGBTYNW and other LGBT youth groups are incredibly under-valued; they are often the only place that young LGBTQ people who are struggling with sexuality, gender, poverty, homelessness, and family problems can feel safe. LGBTYNW provide the space and support for young people to work out their own solutions to life difficulties that are sometimes about being LGBTQ, or life difficulties which are complicated by being young and LGBTQ. Another important aspect of LGBTYNW work is their education and training in schools and health services. They present the wider community by creating the possibility of safe spaces where issues of sexuality and gender are accepted and understood.”
Involvement in research projects is just one aspect of the holistic approach of LGBTYNW. It came into being to unite smaller groups and to create a strong support network of different organisations across the region: for young people, for youth groups, and for youth workers. Networks and mutual support are essential elements of youth work. We spoke to Paul Rooney of Warrington Youth Service who explained the benefits that LGBTYNW has brought to him as a youth worker, and to the youth groups that Paul supports.

“Just as I started my role with Warrington Youth Services LGBT youth group, I was given the opportunity to visit a youth group run by LGBTYNW where part of the session was delivered by young leaders. The numbers attending the group, the confidence of the young people and the safe and inclusive environment was inspiring and motivational for me as a worker.

LGBTYNW is also important [as it offers] a regional network for youth workers and youth groups. For the latter this provides opportunities for youth groups to come together to celebrate diversity, increase visibility and reduce feelings of isolation. A story that illustrates this is the Pink Box Competition that brings together a number of youth groups around The International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOBIT). For the young people who attended from Warrington Youth Service’s youth group (GLYSS) this was the first time that they had been involved in a visible LGBT youth event of this size and nature and met other LGBT young people from across the region. It also helped them to see how they can make a positive impact upon issues for LGBT young people.”

So if you imagine a world without LGBTYNW, what would that mean?

“IT would mean the lack of opportunities for young people from different youth groups to come together to become involved in LGBT issues and participation in affecting change for themselves and other young people.

LGBTYNW has benefited myself through training, support via their workers, access to a regional network and links in to events. This has opened up opportunities for young people who attend Warrington Youth Service’s LGBT youth group to visit other groups and be a part of regional events and campaigns.”

LGBTYNW trustee Shoab also recognises the importance of the network that the organisation creates.

“I became a trustee for LGBTYNW about 3 years ago after one of the directors approached me in relation to some issues that I could have helped give some guidance to. I was also a trustee of a LGBTQI Muslim support group called Imaan and had some knowledge and experience around this. This enabled joint group collaboration leading to invaluable opportunities that otherwise would never have happened, such as liaising with high schools on how to help Muslim pupils who identified as being LGBT, and representing minority groups at a hugely successful youth conference. LGBTYNW is vital because it provides much needed support to young people of a variety of backgrounds, needs and identities. It is welcoming and non-judgemental to all its users. It works at a grass roots level. They are there for the young people, but not in a dictatorial, authoritative way. More so as an organic and cohesive unit where the overriding qualities of care and concern and support are apparent as soon as you step through its doors.”
We have heard so far that LGBTYNW supports young people through good times and bad, but it also supports young people to be independent. It is not just a place to make friends or to find help with a problem. It's a place that aims to help young people grow. We heard from a lot of the young people about the balance of activities they became involved with at LGBTYNW.

Nathan, aged 17, has been involved with different groups and has been on residential trips with LGBTYNW. Nathan told us how the young people do workshops and educational sessions on a variety of topics.

"Emotional well being, budgeting, physical health, identity etc. We also talk about random stuff like 'the story of your shoes'. I don't really get the chance to talk about political/social justice stuff as openly outside LGBTYNW groups as I never know how people will react; whereas with the people who are part of the groups I know that they'll probably already know about these things and will be bursting to discuss them.

From LGBTYNW I have gained an invaluable support network that has had a really good impact on my life and has made me more confident within myself and has given me the opportunity to truly be myself. When I go to Youth Out In Oldham (YOIO) and LGYM and stuff I always come away feeling better about myself and the world at large and like this earth isn't such a terrible place to be because nice little spaces like this exist with these wonderful people."

Another young person, Chris, also aged 17, told us more.

"We do life skills stuff like cooking, relationship education, internet safety etc. while also talking about random stuff like 'the story of your shoes'. I don't really get the chance to talk about political/social justice stuff as openly outside LGBTYNW groups as I never know how people will react; whereas with the people who are part of the groups I know that they'll probably already know about these things and will be bursting to discuss them.

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LGBTYNW has many patrons; people from different walks of life who support the work of the organisation and speak out on their behalf. One of the patrons is Christine Burns MBE, a now-retired equalities specialist, LGBT activist and author. She gave us her view on LGBT+ youth groups.

"Young people grow up in a society that is only very belatedly adjusting to the idea of LGBT+ people as people. Education, in particular, still bears the legacy of Section 28 with some teachers and youth leaders being ignorant of the needs of LGBT+ young people; their hopes, fears and challenges in a world that can still look hostile. We need groups like LGBTYNW. They are focussed on understanding that landscape, and are prepared to reach out and support young people as they discover their sexual orientation or gender identity and confront the possibly hostile reception they are brought up to know is there. Society still has a long way to go but, in the meantime, LGBTYNW can help immeasurably by ensuring the process of growing up and coming out does not mark young people in a way experienced by previous generations.

A world without such organisations? Well, it would be one in which we would be extremely unlikely to hear happy stories about LGBT+ young people. There would be no voice pointing out their existence in forums where equality and diversity policy is made. There would be no support and education for teachers and youth leaders to spot kids at that most vulnerable time when they most need a friendly hand. Those same teachers and youth leaders would not have the resources to prepare themselves. There would be no safe space where young people could learn about themselves, have questions answered and discover it is OK to be as they are."
THE END. AND THE BEGINNING.

We hope that we have provided you with a sense of what this organisation is all about, and why it must march on. LGBTYNW is immensely proud of the work that has been carried out over its first ten years, and now, as The Proud Trust, is looking forward to many more years of welcoming and supporting LGBT+ young people. Sadly, prejudice and hate do still exist, and until they are eradicated there will be a need for organisations like The Proud Trust. However, if we look at the changes in attitudes and equality legislation that have taken place since the inception of this organisation, then there are reasons to be optimistic. You can be sure that The Proud Trust will be working hard to ensure that these positive winds of change continue to blow.

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

I am not and never have been an employee of LGBTYNW, and although I knew of the organisation before compiling this booklet, I have never been closely involved. I have been moved by the eloquence and bravery of the young people who have contributed, and it has given me some understanding of why this organisation inspires such loyalty and commitment.

Staff at LGBTYNW suggested some individuals that I might approach for their views, but the young people who responded to my request for contributions were not hand-picked. The responses are their own. They may have been slightly edited for clarity, but have not been re-worded or re-written. In some cases a pseudonym has been used after a comment if a young person wanted to remain anonymous.