Working with the local community

Rural workers can be supported and trained to better support LGBT+ young people. For example, staff from statutory services such as health, housing, education and social care. If a young LGBT+ person is not supported in their family, there is a risk of homelessness – the support and training for rural workers should reflect this.

In addition, there are opportunities for training and support for staff in private business, such as the Post Office, bus companies and staff in religious, voluntary and charity sectors institutions including third sector partners and within existing youth provision. There may be opportunities to partner with third sector organisations such as Agrespect (a rural LGBTQ+ network, www.agrespect.com), the National Federation of Young Farmers’ Clubs and local mental health organisations providing support in rural communities.

Suggestions:

Offer training in LGBT+ awareness to upskill staff from key health, education, housing and social care organisations. Provide clear pathways for signposting and support.

Encourage educational establishments to work towards a quality assurance framework that promotes LGBT+ inclusion, such as The Rainbow Flag Award for schools developed by The Proud Trust, or The LGBT Charter by LGBT Youth Scotland.

Encourage and support the development of LGBT+ groups in rural schools. Support can be offered here through the Groups in Schools Alliance. Guidance can be found here:
[www.lgbtyouth.org.uk/media/1290/developing-a-gsa.pdf](http://www.lgbtyouth.org.uk/media/1290/developing-a-gsa.pdf).

Some schools may develop an ‘Equalities Group’ rather than an LGBT+ specific group to avoid inadvertently outing young people.

Encourage local school and public libraries to stock books for a range of ages that include LGBT+ identities.

Working with uniformed/specifed youth groups and organisations such as Scouts, Guides, cadets, Woodcraft Folk and Young Farmers to promote LGBT+ inclusion. This may also include local sporting teams such as local football clubs.

Reaching LGBT+ Young People who live in rural settings

A priority area that emerged from the 2019 I.U.K.I LGBT+ Youth Workers’ Conference concerned the strategies, techniques and activities that could be used to help reach LGBT+ young people who live in rural settings, and better enable them to access LGBT+ youth services and support. The following ideas offer some ways forward in addressing this, many of which come from collaborative discussions at the I.U.K.I LGBT+ Youth Workers’ Network meetings.


[www.lgbtyouth.org.uk/media/1290/developing-a-gsa.pdf](http://www.lgbtyouth.org.uk/media/1290/developing-a-gsa.pdf).
Utilising facilities in rural settings

Facilities in rural setting range from religious buildings, schools including private schools, GP surgeries/clinics, public transport buildings and vehicles, local shops, public houses, farms, national charity facilities such as National Trust, RSPB sites, RNLI sites, Landmark Trust sites and sports clubs such as football, rugby, golf, rowing, horse riding and cricket.

Suggestions:

Link to travel services and support them to be more aware of LGBTphobia – what it looks like and how to report it to local and British Transport Police. Consider whether they could advertise or provide visual material on buses including school buses about where LGBT+ young people can get support.

Seek opportunities within church/religious spaces to develop rural provision, as well as existing general youth provision. Considering how to make this accessible for all young people, from all faiths if housed in a particular religious’ organisation. Consider whether there is visual material that can be displayed about where LGBT+ young people can get support. Even small acts can have a huge impact: a rainbow flag on a noticeboard, for example, can signify an inclusive space for a young person.

Work with NHS staff to ensure facilities are safer spaces for LGBT+ young people. In addition to training, encourage display of LGBT+ specific material including information on where young people can go to for support. Again, small acts can make a huge difference such as rainbow flag window stickers, lanyards etc.

Working with national sport infrastructure bodies such as Sport England, Sport Scotland / LEAP Sports Scotland, Sport Ireland and county sport partnerships to enable rural sports clubs to be open and accessible for LGBT+ membership/ and use of facilities.

Hold LGBT+ Pride stalls at village fetes, church fayres, rural school events.

Digital interventions

The increasing use of digital interventions has great potential; however, good internet infrastructure cannot be assumed and, in rural areas, signal strength may not be ideal.

Suggestions:

Be aware that basic digital systems are likely the best option for communicating with young people currently due to poor coverage, such a text messaging. We will need to consider whether this method of communication is financially accessible for all.

Consider peer support “chat” services, utilising trained young people and closely monitored by a youth worker. This may be via dedicated platform or via an existing platform such as FaceBook. It will be important that the youth worker is able to monitor communications, so some platforms may not be suitable (such as Snapchat).

In Scotland, LGBT Youth Scotland offer an online digital chat service available for young people to access support from a youth worker. Similar platforms may be possible on a local or regional level.

As it is rolled out, we need to understand better the capabilities of 5G capabilities and how this can improve our digital reach. We are also mindful that in future there may be possibilities with augmented reality, in particular to help develop supportive relationships with LGBT+ young people who are isolated by geography or otherwise.
Making our LGBT+ youth work sessions in urban settings more inclusive

Across the I.U.K.I footprint, there are numerous LGBT+ youth groups. Travel to these groups can be costly and lengthy for young people who live in rural settings.

We should also be aware that folk in rural communities may well know each other which may create barriers for participation. It will be important to consider how to mitigate the risk that a young person will inadvertently be outed by virtue of attending a group, for example.

Some suggestions for improving access to existing groups include:

⭐ Offer longer sessions on a Saturday or Sunday.
⭐ Offer school holiday activities during the day time.
⭐ Always add in a travel sum in any grant applications and commissions to enable rural young people to travel into groups and be reimbursed for their travel. Consider also whether some young people need to be able to be reimbursed for phone credit so that they can access support. Again, this may be worth considering in grant applications and commissions.
⭐ For some young people, the bus stop in a rural setting may be an hour’s walk away, so consider other options such as how to facilitate lift sharing for group members that is safe.

Being creative with your delivery

Virtual youth groups facilitated in a digital space may be the future for some providers. However, it will be important to develop and maintain human contact in face-to-face environments where we can.

Some suggestions for adapting our delivery:

⭐ “Walk and talk” type provision in the areas where young people are; i.e. a worker meets young people and the group walk along a route local to those young people.
⭐ Use a minibus to pick LGBT+ young people up and run a session from the bus.

The I.U.K.I. (Ireland, United Kingdom and Islands of Britain) LGBT+ Youth Workers’ Network is a network of people in the sector engaged in youth provision.

For further information, please contact Sally Carr sally.carr@theproudtrust.org