

SETTING UP LGBTI+ GROUPS

A GUIDE FOR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS IN
FORÓIGE



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This document has been prepared with guidance and input from Foróige's Youth Reference Panel and from volunteers and staff who have already established LGBTI+ groups nationwide.

INTRODUCTION

Foróige seeks to be a welcoming, safe, inclusive, enjoyable and developmental environment for young people, whether in a club, project, service or specialist group.

We recognise that for all young people there are proven benefits to having a supportive and inclusive place like Foróige within the community, however for some LGBTI+ young people they may need additional support within their community. This has also been recognised in the LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy (2018-2020), in June 2018, launched by Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Katherine Zappone. The strategic goals are to:

- Create a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for LGBTI+ young people.
- Improve the physical, mental & sexual health of LGBTI+ young people.
- Develop the research and data environment to better understand the lives of LGBTI+ young people.

In 2016, the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN), BeLonGTo, HSE, Trinity College and Connecting for Life produced the LGBTIreland Report. This is a national study of the mental health and wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people in Ireland. Key relevant findings included:

- **Isolation years:** 12 years of age is the most common age people discovered their LGBT+ identity, with 16 years as the most common age people 'came out' to someone i.e. told the very first person they are LGBT+. The intervening period have been described as the isolation years due to the feelings of anxiety and isolation which often occur.
- **What helped people to come out:** Knowing that they would be supported and accepted by family, friends and others; greater visibility of LGBTI people; and more accepting attitudes helped most people to come out.
- **Main reason why people said they had not come out:** Fear of rejection and discrimination was one of the main reasons why people who had not come out continued to conceal their LGBTI+ identity. People particularly feared rejection by family and friends especially when they were aware of existing negative attitudes within these groups. The assumption of heterosexuality by family, friends and society also acted as a barrier to coming out.

For more findings from the report please see the full LGBTIreland report at the following link:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/connecting-for-life/publications/lgbt-ireland-pdf.pdf>

WHAT IS A FORÓIGE LGBTI+ GROUP?

A Foróige LGBTI+ group is an accepting, inclusive and safe space for all young people (LGBTI+ and allies¹) to gather, relax, chat and have fun with peers. Young people are supported to be open and discuss their sexuality and their identity. Foróige LGBTI+ groups are firmly rooted in the Foróige Philosophy of the uniqueness of each young person, and the person centred approach this evokes. This space promotes the empowerment of each young person to take responsibility and be supported in their development. It is important to recognise that LGBTI+ young people are already members of Foróige clubs or services and that they may/or may not want to, or need to, access support from LGBTI+ groups also. Furthermore, a young person who joins Foróige for the first time through an LGBTI+ group should be supported to get involved in all other Foróige activities, programmes etc.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS FOR LGBTI+ YOUNG PEOPLE AND ALLIES?

Young people will:

- Experience an open and inclusive environment to develop as an individual and be supported to make a contribution to their community.
- Receive support and understanding from staff and volunteers.
- Share their experiences with other young people and benefit from peer support.
- Engage with others and have the opportunity to develop new friendships.
- Develop from the opportunity to relate to others in the LGBTI+ community.

HOW TO START UP AN LGBTI+ GROUP FOR YOUNG PEOPLE?

LGBTI+ groups are already in operation within Foróige at many locations across the country. These steps have been collated from feedback from staff and volunteers who have set up LGBTI+ clubs or groups already and form the basis for establishing and setting up an LGBTI+ group locally.

7 STEPS TO SETTING UP A LGBTI+ GROUP:

STEP 1. TRAINING: Complete Foróige's Gender and Sexuality Capacity Building workshop.

STEP 2: OUTREACH: Identify local need and current LGBTI+ groups or supports.

STEP 3: RECRUIT: Recruit staff or volunteers to run the group.

STEP 4: LOCATION: Choose a premises and a suitable time.

STEP 5: ADVERTISE: Design a flyer/poster and advertise the group.

STEP 6: SUPPORT: Support young people to get involved and support their parents.

STEP 7: PROGRAMMES AND ACTIVITIES: Plan engaging programmes and activities.

¹ Ally/Allies: someone who supports LGBTI+ people and challenges LGBTI+ phobia.

STEP 1: TRAINING

Complete Foróige's Gender and Sexuality Capacity Building workshop.

The initial step in setting up a LGBTI+ group is attendance at Foróige's Gender and Sexuality Capacity Building workshop for staff and volunteers. This is a mandatory requirement prior to setting up or becoming involved in already established LGBTI+ groups.

The half-day workshop aims to support staff and volunteers in providing an inclusive and open environment for Foróige's LGBTI+ young people whilst developing their knowledge and skills in their capacity to achieve this.

On completion of this workshop participants will be able to:

- List the 9 grounds of discrimination & relevance to LGBTI+ people and describe how Foróige's philosophy is LGBTI+ inclusive.
- Identify specific assumptions we make about people's gender and sexuality.
- Outline what LGBTI+, and corresponding terminology, means.
- Distinguish between; sex assigned at birth, gender identity, gender expression and sexuality.
- Empathise with the experiences of LGBTI+ people and explore their own values/ beliefs in relation to this.
- Apply the learning to real scenarios within their roles.
- Identify positive changes they can make to their work to create a welcoming environment for all our young people.

Please check with your line manager, relevant staff person or contact Foróige's Training, Learning & Development (training@foroige.ie) for details.

STEP 2: OUTREACH

Identify local need and current LGBTI+ groups or supports.

Foróige is not, and does not, need to be an expert in LGBTI+ youth mental health or terminology. There are many needs of LGBTI+ young people which can be met through Foróige's provision of youth work.

There are many established and expert organisations that already exist nationally that can provide support and information. Please see [Appendix 1](#) for signposting and details on LGBTI+ organisations nationwide that you can link in with, or refer young people to for further support.

Most LGBTI+ groups for young people are in reasonably large towns or cities, but that need not be the case if there is sufficient demand. LGBTI+ groups can include allies so young people do not need to have come out to be a member as this could be a barrier for them. The group name need not include the acronym LGBTI+ if this could be a potential barrier also.

Establish if there is a sufficient level of need:

Meet with organisations in the local community: You may organise a meeting with people from local organisations e.g. schools, CAMHS, Tusla, School Completion Programme or other voluntary organisations to discuss if there is a need emerging across the community.

Survey for young people: Create an anonymous survey for young people. Hardcopy print out the survey that they complete in a group or develop a surveygizmo that you post on the Foróige club or community page and see what interest is out there.

Research LGBTI+ supports and services: See what already exists in the area by contacting local LGBTI+ support services or groups and is this meeting the need already or would there be potential for collaboration in creating a space for LGBTI+ young people and allies. (See *Appendix 1*)

STEP 3: RECRUIT

Recruit staff or volunteers to run the group.

Link in with staff and volunteers and explain to them the need that is being highlighted in the community by young people or other professionals. Look for support to build a team to run the group and ensure you have this support in place to meet the need before proceeding.

STEP 4: LOCATION

Choose a premises and a suitable time.

The choice of premises may be outside of your control however there are some things to consider:

Ownership of Space: It is important to provide young people with the opportunity to have ownership of the space. This can be achieved by providing young people with flags or badges or art supplies to create their own, these can be displayed while the group is running to develop an inclusive atmosphere in the space.

Toilet Facilities: It is preferable to have gender neutral toilet facilities where possible, or toilets that can be assigned gender neutral for the group slot. However this may not always be possible or within your control.

Break out Space: Where possible have a small break out room where staff and volunteers can speak to young people discreetly if they wish to discuss any issues or concerns.

STEP 5: ADVERTISE

Design a flyer/poster and advertise the group.

Design: an inclusive advertisement for the group making sure to include; Time, Date, Venue location and a Contact for queries. Please see *Appendix 2* for a sample poster template should you wish to use.

Choose Platform: Advertise the poster or image on social media, printed signage at the venue, in schools, through school completion programme staff etc.

Advertisement Length: Allow sufficient time for the advertisement, suggested 2-3 weeks so there has been enough exposure and reach across the community.

STEP 6: SUPPORT

A. Support young people to get involved.

One to one support: One to one support may be appropriate, or required, for a young person who wishes to join a group but requires extra support to do so. For example a young person may be shy, doesn't know anyone else in the group and may require one to one meet-ups before joining the group.

Anti-Bullying and LGBTI+ inclusive environment²: Staff and volunteers can limit the potential for bullying and LGBTI+ phobia within the group by developing a group agreement with the young people. This is important to promote inclusion and ensure that the group is a safe space for young people. This should be displayed each time the group meets and revisited when new members join and also as required throughout the running of the group.

Naming of the Group: Young people should be involved in establishing a name for the group.

Opening Circle: An opening circle for establishing everyone's pronouns³ and name that they want to be called is important, this opening circle could be done regularly when starting a group and then when the group is established it can be done when new people join. Young people in Foróige LGBTI+ groups have described this as a way to break the ice. However, it is important that young people understand that there is no onus to label themselves or they may pass if they do not feel comfortable with announcing their preferred pronoun.

Programmes/Activities: It is important for young people to feel included within the group and to have a sense of ownership of what happens within it. Young people should be actively involved in selecting which programmes/activities are ran in the group.

B. Support young people's parents.

The level of engagement from parents will vary depending on each young person's circumstances. Parental consent is required for young people to engage in Foróige clubs or services. It is important that parents are provided with information on what the group provides, it is not necessary to explicitly state it is an LGBTI+ group however. There are many LGBTI+ young people who will not have come out to their parents⁴. Please refer to the latest Foróige consent form on the portal and amend as required.

Staff or volunteers should not 'Out' LGBTI+ young people to their parents, or any other person. This confidentiality is very important in contributing to the supportive environment within the group, however the welfare and protection from harm of young people is of paramount importance. Foróige's Child Protection and Safeguarding policies and procedures should be adhered to in all circumstances where you think that a young person is exposed to harm or at immediate risk of harm.

² Research has shown that LGBTI+ young people can be at a higher risk of experiencing bullying: 75% of LGBTI+ people report experiencing bullying or harassment at some point related to their gender or sexuality (LGBTIreland, 2016). It is important to note that bullying is just as likely to come from within the LGBTI+ community as well as the non-LGBTI+ community.

³ Pronoun: Used to refer to someone in the third person. A person may use a different pronoun to that of the sex assigned to them at birth.

⁴ Research shows that 1 in 4 people who had come out had not told their mother or father they are LGBTI (LGBTIreland report, 2016).

How to support parents who wish to access support:

- **Support services:** Research support available locally to parents of LGBTI+ young people and signpost accordingly. Support parents with questions regarding terminology by referring to Foróige's 'Get with the Terms' poster. Familiarise yourself with the journey a trans young person may go on so that you have some awareness of what parents are talking about. e.g CAMHS engagement, hormone therapy. There is no expectation to be an expert in this area but useful to have an overview of the process should a young person or parent approach you to discuss. Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI) is a fantastic organisation to contact for further information and support on this: www.teni.ie.
- **Information Flyers:** Have literature available to provide to parents from organisations e.g. Foróige's 'Get with the Terms' poster, TENI (www.teni.ie) or BeLonG To (<http://www.belongto.org/>).

STEP 7: PROGRAMMES AND ACTIVITIES

Plan engaging programme and activities for the group to consider.

In line with all other Foróige services, young people in LGBTI+ groups should be involved in choosing which activities and programmes the group engages in. Potential campaigns, programmes or activities you could introduce to the group could be:

1. **Events and Initiatives** which promote inclusivity and promote anti bullying may be of particular relevance such as:
 - Foróige Against Bullying (FAB FEB) Month: This anti-bullying campaign is an exciting annual event in the Foróige calendar every February. Please contact training@foroige.ie for further details. There is also a supporting FAB programme that can be run throughout the year to support the FAB FEB, more details provided below.
 - BelongTo's Stand Up Awareness week: This week addresses homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying in second-level schools and youth services by encouraging friendship and positive understanding of LGBTI+ young people. Please contact BeLonGTo for further details. www.belongto.org.
 - LGBTI+ Pride events every year across the country.
2. **Foróige's Manualised Programmes** which explores all different types of relationships and promotes inclusive scenarios which can improve on elements of minority stress of LGBTI+ people⁵ where standard curriculum and educational material is largely geared towards

⁵ Minority stress: direct and indirect forms of LGBTI specific discrimination and victimisation, internalised LGBTI identity shame, and stress associated with LGBTI identity concealment which can come from norms in education, family, law and society. While LGBTI people are not inherently any more prone to mental health problems than other groups in society, coping with the effects of minority stress can be detrimental to LGBT people's mental health (LGBTIreland Report, 2016).

heterosexual and cisgender⁶. Please contact training@foroige.ie or your local youth officer for further details. Some of these programmes are:

- **Foróige's REAL U Programme:** REAL U (Relationships Explored Life Uncovered) is a personal development programme that aims to equip young people with the skills, knowledge and confidence to develop healthy relationships, make responsible decisions in relation to their sexual health.
 - **Foróige Against Bullying (FAB) Programme** was co-created with Foróige Reference Panel in 2013 and updated again in June 2019, which supports the need of young people in gaining the skills and confidence needed to speak about issues of bullying, recognise bullying and empower them to come up with solutions to deal with the bullying.
 - **Foróige's Be Healthy Be Happy (BHBH) Programme:** Foróige's Health & Well-being programme; Be Healthy, Be Happy, is a holistic programme which aims to enable young people to take charge of their health and well-being in order to enhance the quality of their lives. In achieving this it develops strengths and assets in the areas of physical, mental, social and spiritual health.
3. **Guest Speakers:** Inviting guest speakers to talk to the group. Always ensure that external speakers are briefed prior to the talk about what the group represents, the open and inclusive environment that has been established and that they are introduced to the Philosophy of Foróige. Furthermore always remain in the room when guest speakers are present.

⁶ A person who identifies with their sex assigned at birth. Sex assigned at birth is the assignment and classification of people as male or female at birth, often based on physical anatomy.

E- APPENDIX 1: LGBTI+ Signposting: Support and Social Groups

Insert image	Available to view at: Volunteer Portal: need to create this link Staff Portal: need to create this link Or contact training@foroige.ie for a copy of this file.
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E- APPENDIX 2: LGBTI+ Group Poster Template

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E- APPENDIX 3: Gender and Sexuality 'Get with the Terms' Poster

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