

## 2014 Report: 12 Months On

"I find it extremely difficult to accept my sexuality due to the cultural pressures and due to the individual pressures I face myself" – Farouk (male, gay, 24)

"I kind of used to self-harm all the time.... I was stressed about like realising I wasn't straight and not being able to talk to anyone about that and feeling kind of wrong about that... I just basically felt like I was kind of a failure"- Clem (female, bisexual, 18)

> "I guess it's just...reaching a point of such self-hatred that you just want a way out" - Steffi (trans, lesbian, 25)

The Queer Futures research study aims to find out why young LGBTQ people like Farouk, Clem and Steffi (above) become distressed and want to hurt themselves or end their lives. The study also aims to find out how young LBGTQ people ask for help (if they do), from who, when and what would help.

The view of the Queer Futures team is that if we are going to find ways of preventing suicide and self-harm we need to *ask* young LGBTQ people themselves what causes their distress and what type of help and support would help them. The Queer Futures project has officially been running for 12 months and during that time the team has been working with young LGBTQ people to develop and complete the first stage of the research.

#### **Stage 1: Qualitative Interviews**

The team began inviting young LGBTQ people to take part in interviews in March 2014. To make sure we were asking the right questions we consulted with a group of young people about the research aims, objectives and methods, including the interview format and questions. These young people became our 'LGBTQ Youth Advisory Group', which helps us to know and understand what young people may be thinking when they come into contact with our research, and how they might want to take part. They help us by providing advice and

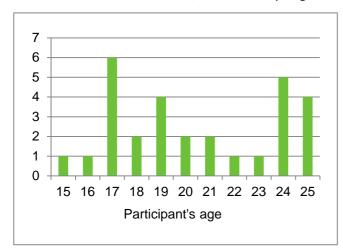


Figure 1: Number of interview participants by age

feedback, mainly via Facebook, but sometimes in person at important research points.

We needed to interview 30 LGBTQ young people so we worked with LGBTQ groups across England and used social media. During this stage, we received very positive feedback about our study, with many youth groups, LGBTQ organisations, mental health groups and service providers stating that our study was badly needed to inform ways of preventing suicide and supporting LGBTQ youth and to 'make things better'.

We thought getting 30 young people for interview

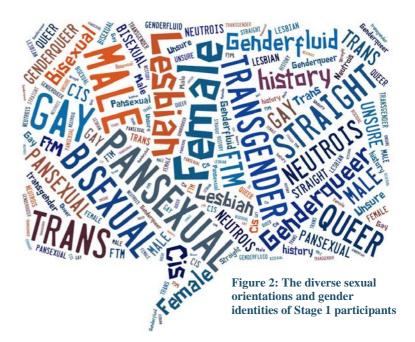
would take a while because we recognised that young people would find it difficult to talk about the sensitive subject of their self-harm, suicide and sexuality and/or gender, and that this may be upsetting. However, we were wrong; the response to our request for young people to volunteer to be interviewed was amazing. The research team was overwhelmed with LGBTQ youth wanting to take part.

Many participants who we interviewed explained that although they had been through hard times, they felt as if their voice could contribute to helping others in the future. One participant explained: *"I hope that my responses can help with your research. I want to be able to do something positive with my negative life experiences"*.

Participants had the choice of taking part in either face-to-face or online interviews (via email). In the end, we included 29 interviews in our data, 13 online and 16 face-to-face. Between March and October participants from all around the country took part in these interviews. They included over 200,000 spoken or written words; these were then coded and analysed by the research team to establish our qualitative findings.

### Stage 2: Online survey

In our interviews, we were told many stories and experiences about self-harm and feeling suicidal. We wanted to use all this real life experience to design a national online survey that would enable a much larger number of LGBTQ youth to tell us



about their experiences of self-harm, suicide and getting help. By asking a large number of LGBTQ youth about their experiences it means we can be more confident that the findings we produce will help to improve LGBTQ young people's lives.

We spent quite a long time trying to understand everything that we were told in the interviews. This analysis led us to concentrate on some important factors such as the causes of distress and self-harm which can be related to hostility towards sexuality and/or gender, it can be because young people feel unable to tell anyone about their gender and/or sexuality, it can because other things are causing problems like family arguments, illness, grief and friendship or relationship problems. We were also told that young people found it really difficult to tell people about their emotional difficulties for many reasons like they didn't want to disappoint people, they felt ashamed, or like a failure, or they did not think anyone would care. This meant in our survey we have focused on young people's views of different causes of self-harm and suicide and asking for help.

# If you would like to take part, or would like to share the link to the survey with someone you know, you can find the survey here: <u>http://bit.ly/1vdzC2V</u>

We have also designed a mental health staff online survey. The purpose of this is to ask mental health staff about the things that they do at work that might affect young LGBTQ people positively or negatively. It is also to ask them how they think they might make services more accessible to LGBTQ youth. Both of these surveys were pilot tested to make sure that they were understandable and appropriate.

#### Working towards preventing suicide and self-harm

An important part of our research is working with providers of services to LGBTQ youth from around the country to improve the support to LGBTQ youth who are distressed. Communicating our research to different audiences increases the visibility of the challenges of providing help to LGBTQ youth and perhaps starts to provide some answers.

In October we assembled members from a range of LGBTQ youth groups in two regional meetings, one for Northern partners held in Manchester, and one for Southern partners held in London. At these meetings we described and received input on some of the research themes that we had encountered so far. We have also participated in the Mind national conference on suicide prevention in LGBT communities (Newcastle, January 2015) and the Public Health England conference addressing the health and well-being of LGBT communities (London, February 2015).