

Supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual &
Trans Young People in Ireland



**Submission to
Seanad Public Consultation Committee on Children's Mental Health
4th May 2017**

BeLonG To is Ireland's national organisation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Non-Binary (LGBT+) young people. BeLonG To's youth services in Dublin and around Ireland provide vital supports to LGBT+ young people. BeLonG To also works with government and other partners so that Ireland will be safe, equal and welcoming for LGBT+ young people. BeLonG To is pleased to make a submission to the Seanad Public Consultation Committee on children's mental health.

Ireland changed what it means to grow up LGBT+ in Ireland in 2015 with a resounding Yes in the marriage equality referendum and with the Gender Recognition Act. However, recent Irish research confirms BeLonG To's experience from our frontline work with young people. We have seen a **doubling in the numbers of young people in crisis who have come to our services, especially those who are under-18**. Our dedicated youth workers and our resilience programmes are working all out to meet the need.

In March 2016, former President of Ireland, Dr Mary McAleese, launched a large groundbreaking report on the mental health of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people in Ireland. *The LGBTIreland Reportⁱ* was funded by the HSE's National Office for Suicide Prevention. It was conducted by Dr Agnes Higgins and colleagues in the School of Nursing, Trinity College, and had a special focus on LGBTI young people.

The LGBTIreland Report found that:

1. 56% of LGBTI who were aged 14 to 18 years had self-harmed, 70% had suicidal thoughts and one in three had attempted suicide.
2. In comparison, UCD/Headstrong's research found 21% of 17–25-year-olds overall engaged in self-harmⁱⁱ.
3. The **LGBTIreland** report showed a link between a young person having experienced LGBTI-based bullying and serious mental health difficulties.
4. 67% (of those in school now or in past 5 years) **witnessed** anti-LGBTI bullying. And, 50% of LGBTI students **experienced** bullying.
5. In comparison, NUIG/DCYA's research found that 24 % of school pupils overall were bulliedⁱⁱⁱ.
6. 1 in 4 missed or skipped school to avoid negative treatment due to being LGBTI.
7. Those who had experienced anti-LGBTI bullying had much higher levels of depression, anxiety, stress and alcohol use. They were also more likely to self-harm or have suicidal thoughts.

In summary, compared to the wider population of young people in Ireland, LGBTI young people had:

- **Two times** the level of self-harm.
- **Three times** the level of attempted suicide.
- **Four times** the level of severe or extremely severe stress, anxiety and depression.

LGBT+ young people need to feel safe, equal, welcome and supported in their schools, families and communities. They need access to specialised services such as peer support, resilience, suicide and self-harm prevention programmes and counselling. BeLonG To provides these supports in partnership with Pieta House, at our flagship service in Dublin and we support a network of LGBT+ youth groups who provide a variety of these and other mental health supports for LGBT+ young people throughout Ireland. LGBT+ young people need to know they are not alone.

A major initiative with highly beneficial outcomes is BeLonG To's annual Stand Up LGBT+ Awareness Week. This anti-bullying week takes place in 35 percent of schools around Ireland and is endorsed by the National Association of Principals, the Institute of Guidance Counsellors, the Joint Managerial Body, the National Parents' Council – post-primary, the Irish Secondary School Students Union, the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools, the ASTI and TUI, the Education and Training Boards of Ireland, Educate Together, the National Youth Council of Ireland, Foróige, Youth Theatre Ireland, Youth Work Ireland, and Loving Our Out Kinds (LOOK). Stand Up Week combats bullying by promoting friendship between LGBT+ young people and other young people. Please see attached, Stand Up poster in Irish and English.

In response to the significant needs of trans and non-binary young people (and the upcoming review of the Gender Recognition Act) BeLonG To has recently launched a Trans Visibility project, with five videos available from our YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ZBUjPn5A8c&list=PLGrGry8CZLNn7vcVgBbgqQpXUMfd5i26O>

BeLonG To would very much welcome an opportunity to provide an in-person briefing to the Seanad Consultation Committee on the mental health of LGBT+ young people.

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ⁱ **Higgins, Agnes**, Doyle, L, Downes, C; Murphy, R; Sharek, D; DeVries, J; Begley, T; McCann, E; Sheerin, F & Smyth, S (2016). *The LGBTIreland report: National study of the mental health and wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender & intersex people in Ireland*. Dublin: www.glen.ie , www.belongto.org

ⁱⁱ Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012, *My World Survey. National Study of Youth Mental Health*.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Health Behaviour in School Age Children 2010*, Colette Kelly et al, NUIG, 2012; *State of the Nation's Children 2012*, DCYA, 2012.