

HEALTH &
INCLUSION
PROJECT

JUNE 2021



IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON LGBTQ COMMUNITIES OF BRIGHTON & HOVE



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Brighton and Hove
Clinical Commissioning Group


Brighton & Hove
City Council



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The Covid-19 pandemic is unique because it affects the entire population in a way very few events do. However the stark reality laid bare by the past 18 months is that the fault lines of inequality underlie even the most universal of challenges.

Before the pandemic Switchboard supported around 3000 people every year, and demand for our services has continued to rise. We are seeing people with increasingly complex needs and are supporting more people in crisis than ever.

This report makes for uncomfortable reading and confirms both national data, and our experience at Switchboard; from mental health to housing, and from drug use to job opportunities, LGBTQ people are struggling uniquely and disproportionately.

If we look closer, we also see that the most marginalised of LGBTQ people have struggled the most. That includes people of colour, people living in poverty, insecurely housed people, young people, people without internet access, and trans and non binary people.

Despite these stark findings, when it comes to building resilient communities we have much to learn from the LGBTQ population. The care and generosity demonstrated and received by so many of our respondents shone throughout the stories they shared with us.

While it is easy to see marginalised communities as victims or as a problem to be solved, we should ensure we value the assets, ideas and solutions that these communities bring, without which our findings would surely be far graver.

A difficult funding landscape for the voluntary community sector and statutory organisations alike can make finding a strategic approach to ending these inequalities challenging. We do, however, see many opportunities to address these challenges together as a city. We must move forward creatively, collaboratively, and with the most marginalised communities at the centre of our work and investment.

Brighton & Hove has one of the largest LGBTQ populations in Europe. For many of those who live and work here this is a point of pride. As a city we often lead the way when it comes to improving outcomes for these communities.

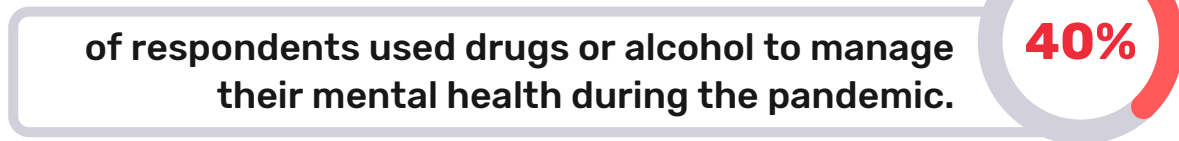
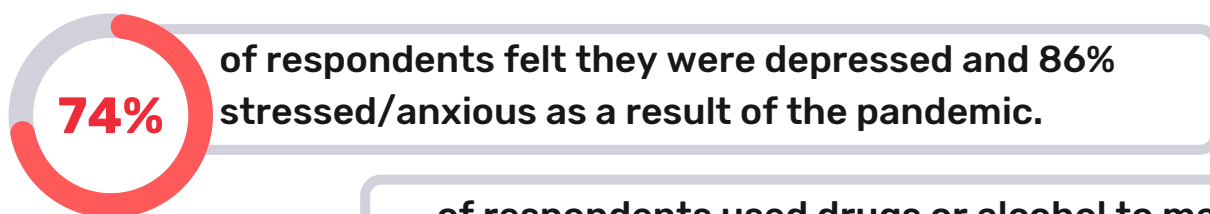
We have a once in a lifetime chance to emerge stronger from the pandemic. As we start to shape our city for the future, this data gives us a way to advocate for LGBTQ people in that future.

Please read it, please share it, and please use it to drive change and improvement; addressing the real and pressing challenges of Covid-19, but also as a further catalyst in reducing the pre-existing inequalities the pandemic has worsened.



Jacob Bayliss
CEO

KEY FINDINGS



"The pandemic has removed my previous support structure and isolated me from my queer community. I've felt lonelier this year than any other time in my life."



This increased to 87% of people aged 18-24 and 73% with a disability, mental or physical health condition or neurodivergence.



Factors included feeling there was no one to talk to, a home environment where they couldn't speak in case they were overheard, no appointments being available, worry about putting pressure on health services, financial barriers due to loss of income, and professional boundaries due to working in the sector.



This rose to 68% of 18-24 age group and 43% among trans and non binary respondents.



Rising to 60% of those aged 24 or under and 40% of trans or non-binary people



Compared to 23% of all respondents.

"I have felt so lonely without the support of my friends, groups or people. It's not the same without being able to gather in one place, even a park has been out of bounds. I have been cruising as it's the only place to feel I am 'with' other gay men and see some happy gay faces and safely pass the time of day with other gay men. The loss of this feels like going back 40 years."



ABOUT US



Our Vision

Our Vision is an inclusive and diverse society in which all LGBTQ people can realise their own unique potential.

Our Mission

Our Mission, as a charity run by and for LGBTQ people is to work to understand and respond to the needs of all LGBTQ+ communities.

Our Story

Switchboard has been listening to, supporting & connecting LGBTQ people in Sussex since 1975. We focus on the health and wellbeing of multiply marginalised communities. As well as our volunteer-led helpline we deliver 10 other services across Sussex, including dementia support, bereavement support, social prescribing, older peoples and disability projects, and trans specific services.

Our Health & Inclusion Project supports and informs organisations to better involve and affirm LGBTQ people in what they do; working for better access, experiences and outcomes for the communities we serve.



BACKGROUND

Switchboard were commissioned by Sussex NHS Commissioners and Brighton and Hove City Council to explore the experience of the LGBTQ community through the Covid-19 pandemic in order to inform and influence priorities for the 'recovery period'.

The pandemic has exacerbated inequalities across socio-economic status, education, age, gender, ethnicity and geography across all of society, and this intersects with the longstanding inequalities we know already that LGBTQ people face.

The Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) has stressed that the impact of Covid-19 will emphasise inequalities across a range of life domains. People of colour will be hardest hit economically with young people, lower paid people and women being challenged most by business closure. People with disabilities, older people and people with long term health conditions are not only impacted most by Covid-19 itself but by the national lockdown.

There is mounting national evidence that LGBTQ people have been disproportionately impacted across a range of aspects of life and wellbeing, with multiple marginalised groups being particularly impacted.

While this report focuses on the key issues and areas of need faced by LGBTQ communities and businesses, we also found throughout this research a great deal of resilience, informal networks of support, and community assets that have proven hugely valuable and effective during the Covid-19 crisis.





The survey was open to people who lived, worked or studied in Brighton & Hove and identified as LGBTQ. A total of 595 people responded during March and April 2021

We wished to explore the general health and wellbeing of the community during the pandemic but there were also key areas that we were asked to research by Brighton & Hove City Council and Brighton and Hove NHS Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG).

These included:

- Impact on mental health
- Access to health services and telehealth
- Housing
- Vaccination attitudes and uptake
- Impact on LGBTQ business and community sector



We asked 26 questions plus demographic data. We offered respondents entry into a prize draw, and people were also asked if they would be happy to be contacted for further interviews or focus groups. It was acknowledged that reflecting on the past year could be difficult for some and resources for support were given.

We used our existing networks across the city, including our own online reach and projects, as well as local trusts, local authority networks and large local businesses with LGBTQ Networks such as Govia Thameslink Railway, AMEX, and Bupa.

We would like to thank all of the organisations and individuals who shared and responded to our survey, and particular thanks to those who then gave further time to focus groups and interviews.

We'd also like to thank our funders, Brighton & Hove City Council and Brighton and Hove CCG.





74% of all LGBTQ people
92% of 18-24s,
81% of trans and non binary people, and
81% of disabled and neurodivergent people
told us they experienced depression during lockdown.

33% of all respondents had considered suicide, rising to 68% of 18-24s,
43% amongst trans and non-binary people and 41% amongst people of colour.

24% of people could not access support when they needed it, rising to
35% of trans and non binary respondents.

In the recent Just Like Us study 68% of young people said their mental
health worsened in Covid-19 compared to 49% of their peers.

*"It's ripped my heart out, I have lost myself in anxiety and become
deeply mentally unwell like I haven't been in twenty years. Without
[LGBTQ] community support I am in crisis"*

*"Being in a home where I constantly get dead named and
misgendered has made my gender dysphoria much worse, affecting
my mental health as I haven't been able to reach out to friends as I
normally do"*

*"I have had increased periods of destabilisation in terms of mood.
My PTSD symptoms have increased since the therapy I was having
stopped and has been on pause since the beginning of the
pandemic. I have had two periods of Crisis Intervention in the last
eight months and one brief hospital admission."*



ACCESSING SUPPORT



8% of respondents contacted an emergency helpline rising to 15% of trans and non binary people. 27% contacted their GP or NHS Mental Health Services with 25% starting or continuing with medication, and 25% with counselling.

53% of respondents thought the NHS priority should be mental health. The importance of choice with online and face to face support was important to many of the respondents. Many people commented that counselling by Zoom was not as effective or they felt unable to talk about their feelings over video, whilst some felt they had been able to access more support because of the move online.



There was a desire for greater availability of counselling and transparency about waiting times. A large number of people raised the issue of the need for more long term counselling than many services provide, particularly trans and non-binary people, especially related to survivorship and PTSD.

Accessing support was explored within focus groups with suggestions of more explicit information about LGBTQ affirmative services available and that shared values and perspectives with the therapist was important.

Only 8% of people contacted LGBTQ charities. Reasons given for not contacting were people worried they were needed for those worse off than them or they did not know about them.

Organisations positively mentioned were Arch Healthcare, the NHS Mental Health Crisis Team, MindOut, Mind, The Clare Project, Switchboard and Trans Survivors Project, Samaritans, Cruse, University or Employee Assistance programmes.

"I have contacted 3 places for mental health support on the suggestion of my GP, the first suggested I contact the second instead, the second it turned out did not actually provide mental health support and suggested the third. I am now waiting for an appointment with the third. The process has taken around 6 months so far"

MENTAL HEALTH



Despite many people struggling, lockdown measures also contributed to some positive outcomes for mental health and wellbeing.

23% of people had enjoyed not having to navigate spaces where they felt uncomfortable or unsafe because of their identities, rising to 45% of trans and non-binary respondents.

33% of people stated their mood improved during lockdown. This could be attributed to other positive outcomes such as spending more quality time with their household (34%), enjoying working from home (40%) and not commuting (41%).

35% felt that lockdown meant they had paid closer attention to their mental health, had time to reflect on their gender or sexuality and/or spend time doing positive activities.

Less time in public has meant less public toilet/changing room decisions.



One interviewee was severely mentally ill and had to be admitted nearly 40 miles away in order to have access to gender neutral toilets. They also felt unsafe due to experiencing transphobia from other unwell patients.

The pandemic has had a massive impact on the mental health of the population as a whole, however our survey reflects the national picture from multiple organisations that LGBTQ communities have been disproportionately affected.

The Queerantime study found particularly high levels of stress and depression in the younger, trans and gender diverse respondents and there is evidence that minority stress is a key factor.



LGBT people get a lot of our resilience from each other, whether that is at venues or by gathering with chosen family. Without our communities many of us don't have another person to look out for us, to notice when we are struggling or to offer support."

"I'm a teacher and think our LGBTQ students have struggled without the peer support that school and their friends/teachers offer. I can only imagine that is also true of the wider community"

DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

(THIS IS THE USE OF PHONE OR VIDEO FOR HEALTH APPOINTMENTS)

75% of respondents had accessed telehealth during the pandemic. Those who were disappointed with consultations cited the inability to articulate a physical conditions, not feeling listened to or feeling rushed, inadequate phone signal or a lack of privacy/safety.

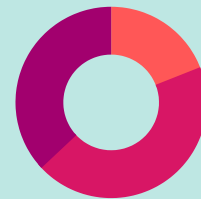
Some preferred phone or video as it saved time, avoided travel and felt less intimidating

26% of people of colour preferred consultations by email/text/phone compared to 8% of other respondents

On average people felt 64% able to explain the issue that was concerning them.

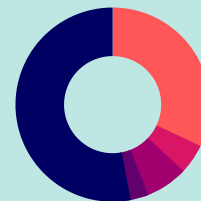


Did the consultation achieve what you hoped?



19% No
44% Yes
37% Somewhat

What's your preference for consultations?



3% Text
32% A Mix
53% In person
5% Don't Mind
7% Phone/ Video

"I should just be able to see my consultant by a phone call, take myself to get my bloods - if there is a problem they will get a flag and call me. This happened because of the pandemic. I would add a facility to text photos of rashes"

"It was harder to communicate how I was feeling without the visual cues. It's been more challenging to access support virtually, especially as i'm moderately deaf. It's been hard to access mental health support and has led to me only getting support when it is nearly too late"

"I actually liked it better, I'm always nervous with health professionals and feel intimidated, so for me this was a much more relaxing a system"

"Seeing the counsellor remotely wasn't helpful. I wasn't feeling comfortable discussing my problems from home where other people may overhear what I say."



LGBTQ+ ATTITUDES & UPTAKE OF COVID-19 VACCINATION



98% of respondents had either had or were happy to have the Covid-19 vaccine




"My lovely vaccinator had a rainbow lanyard!"

There were no reasons given for not having the vaccine related to sexual orientation or gender identity.

Second Vaccination  **95%**

Of those vaccinated 95% received or would be receiving their second dose. Reasons given for not having it were side effects, allergy and pregnancy.

 **17%** of trans or non- binary people were misgendered or addressed incorrectly during their vaccination.

The majority of people were extremely complimentary about their experience of receiving the vaccine.

Some respondents cited difficulty making or getting to the appointment and insufficient information about the vaccine, while others were anxious about the risks of getting Covid-19 on their way to or at the appointment.

"I can't be more complimentary of the NHS staff and volunteers running the venue."





SUBSTANCE USE



Previous national research by Stonewall and YouGOV. has shown that LGBTQ people are more likely to drink alcohol every day and to take illicit drugs.

40% of all respondents used alcohol or drugs to support their mental health. and this increased to:

50% of 18-24 year olds

49% of people who reported having a mental health condition

47% of trans and non-binary people.

13% reported worsening of an addiction and this increased to:

29% of 18-24 year olds

28% people of colour

18% of trans and non binary people.

"Employment sector (arts/culture) in continuous rolling crisis - lost my place in the world for a while and coped with daily/daytime cannabis & wine - unhealthy behaviours. First proper experience of mental health issues and so far not sought professional support."



RELATIONSHIPS, FAMILIES AND SEXUAL HEALTH

34% of people had experienced grief or loss of a loved one with many not knowing where to access LGBTQ affirmative services.

"The rise in domestic abuse disproportionately affects all women (particularly trans and bi women) and gay men. It took a long time for the gov't to acknowledge that the home is not the safest place for many people"

14% felt less able to manage their sexual health.

4% of respondents reported being unable to access PrEP or PEP.

2% had taken part in more chemsex while 1% had taken part in less.

"Often LGBT people aren't in traditional family groups or have strained relationships with family. This has led to more isolation during lockdown"

27% experienced relationship issues with an established partner and felt there was nowhere to access support for queer couples

5% had experienced domestic abuse

"I took the option to come off prep temporarily and avoided meeting guys but when I felt it was safe to resume sexual activity I was still unable to get a routine sexual health checkup"

A national study reported that many were unaware that PrEP and PEP could be obtained from GUM services or A&E during lockdown. Others chose not to access it there for fear of discrimination, and many stopped event based PrEP during lockdown.

"I've been told [PREP is] available now, but can't seem to find where to access it..."



"The LGBTIQ community needs to talk more about loss, dying, dignity and ageing."

We have no plans for social care in old age as a community and we are going to be left vulnerable.

It is a fear I hold deeply. Who will wash my trans body when I am old?

What if my partner dies before me?

Losing people over Covid made me starkly aware of how desperately unprepared I am to cope with grief and ageing."





"We moved to Brighton to be in a city we knew was very gay-friendly and had a huge community of lesbian mums, schools etc. We have been hugely affected by not having safe spaces and lgbt community spaces to be in. I have felt the huge loss of meeting with other mothers and lgbt families all year. It feels like a form of grief. Only knowing that it would eventually change has made the loss bearable. We have a lot of rebuilding to do, and not just entertainment venues, but places for all types of lgbt people to meet and socialise. Community means meeting other people and sharing a bit of ourselves."


27% of 18-24 people reported having to return to living with families. Many were in the closet or experiencing bi/homo/transphobia

7% of LGBTQ parents and young people had experienced challenges with home schooling

LGBTQ parents identified they and their children missed the support of meeting other queer families.



"I was forced back to my parents' house ... which greatly worsened my depression, anxiety and PTSD.... put into emergency accommodation after deeming my parents' place an unsafe living situation. Being homeless and living in a damp dark basement with black mould for 4 months did bad things for my mental health, and it is only now I have found a private rented, safe place to live that I am starting to be able to recover. However, my PTSD has increased significantly."

 **60% of young people were experiencing an unsafe living situation** including bi/homo/transphobia in the home, worry about becoming homeless or had been made homeless during the pandemic. This was the case for **43%** of trans/non binary people and compared to **22%** of all respondents.



Akt (formally Albert Kennedy Trust) found that **61%** of young people feared their families, or were threatened or abused by family before becoming homeless. This included emotional, physical and sexual abuse by family members or romantic partners.

The high prevalence of LGBTQ homelessness is often invisible, with few services collecting data about sexual orientation or trans status. LGBTQ people (particularly trans, disabled and/or people of colour) are less likely to go to local authorities for assistance, fearing discrimination. Additionally, many LGBTQ people feel vulnerable in social or supported housing.

"I have ended up in an unsafe environment at homophobic parents' home. I have become out of work, and continually scared and stressed out."

"I have had no indoor space to go at all other than in my homophobic parents' home. I am not even welcome there..."

"I have been unable to be in a safe environment to apply for jobs or reach for help. Phone calls have had to be made out in the rain, wind, and cold."

"This has all hugely affected my self-esteem and self-worth and confidence... I went from being super happy and confident in life and work to this awful situation."

68%

of LGBTQ people felt lonely or isolated during the pandemic rising to 87% of those aged 18-24, 73% of people with a disability, 72% of trans/non-binary people and 72% for people of colour.



There were numerous comments about missing the positive impact of local LGBTQ choirs, churches and sports groups.

"I feel part of my identity is gone, and i can't celebrate being me, or meet with anyone like me. I know i am lucky as many people have had a terrible time during the pandemic, but not having any space to be me, to be gay, with other gay people feels crushing."

79%

Impacted by LGBTQ community events not taking place

This rose to 89% of trans and non binary respondents. Events such as Pride, Trans Pride and Bears Weekend remain really important to local LGBTQ+ communities.

74%

Impacted by not being able to attend LGBTQ specific entertainment such as comedy and theatre



40%

Impacted by being unable to access LGBTQ specific sport.

This rose to 53% of trans and non binary respondents.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING SHARED LGBTQ COMMUNITY SPACES AND EVENTS WAS A STRONG THEME IN THE SURVEY.

 **72%**

Were impacted by not being able to go to LGBTQ venues such as pubs and clubs

Several of these venues have now closed during the pandemic

"Spaces that are accessible and appropriate for LGBTQ disabled people - for socialising rather than support. Wholesome daytime activities that don't involve alcohol and loud noise. I've developed a long term health condition this year and I'm struggling to see a place for myself in the LGBTQ community now that bars and clubs are too overwhelming and I know a lot of people who feel the same - whether they be neurodivergent, chronically ill or in other ways disabled."

 **30%**

Identified a need for non-alcoholic LGBTQ space such as cafes, accessible spaces and family space

 **75%**

Accessible community venues and events are essential, many commented that there are very few in the city.

Of respondents told us that they had a physical impairment or mobility issues, a physical/mental health diagnosis, neurodivergence, or were living with a long term condition.





IN SPITE OF ALL THE CHALLENGES THERE WERE SO MANY EXAMPLES OF RESILIENCE AND CONCERN FOR EACH OTHER WITHIN THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY.

"My mental health got to crisis level, so I had to address it and began crisis counselling. I have made good progress and have more control over my addictions that flared in the first lock down and my mental health is improving because of the concerted effort I have been making"

"A real roller coaster of emotions, even day to day. Sometimes doing ok, coping and surviving, other times very low mood, despair, fear, anxiety, hopelessness. Somehow managing to keep it all from spiraling. Using skills I've learned re mental health management- exercise, doing fun things, getting in the fresh air"

"My wife and I went through IVF in November and I successfully got pregnant on our first try so this has been a really wonderful and positive time for us despite the pandemic."

52% told us they were able to speak to family and friends for support.

"Local charity Trans Can Sport has been an amazing support."

"We had our first picnic together last weekend. Just the joy of being in a public space with other same sex parents was energising."

"I have been supporting unpaid carers in an LGBTQ peer support group. We started the group due to the acute isolation that some were feeling during the pandemic"

"Our house is daily pride, we have flags and lights up and each Sunday we have a 'pride march' around the garden, just to share with friends on Zoom, some silly time."



"It's so needed to feel part of something bigger."

We moved here for the sense of being with others like us, we so miss that meeting up with others like us.

To be LGBT is to be part of something bigger."

POVERTY EMPLOYMENT AND BUSINESS



It is difficult to ascertain whether businesses owned or frequented by LGBTQ people have been disproportionately affected as this specific data is not currently collected. We know some LGBTQ businesses have applied for and received financial support, administered by Brighton & Hove City Council.

32% of all respondents reported loss of earnings rising to 38% for people of colour and 37% of people aged 18-24 .

12% of all respondents had lost their job rising to 18% of non binary people and 13% of women compared with 9% of men.

Many charities rely on funding from businesses and organisations such as Pride for keeping services running. Pride estimate that there was a reduction in money raised by them in excess of £186000 in 2020.

Fundraising events have been cancelled and at least 5 LGBTQ charities have needed to access additional grants from the council.

"I have enjoyed working from home to some extent... and although I saved money I also lost my job and all my self-employed earnings so I lost more money than I saved."

"Job market is awful, making trying to find work as a gay trans person with a foreign name even harder :("

"I work at a zero hours contract and have been given no shifts since March 2020. I was on furlough until October 2020 when my employer took me off furlough without telling me. This has caused a lot of stress and uncertainty".

"I know many, many LGBT creatives who have lost jobs or been forced to move out of the area due to the financial impact of Covid-19."



We already knew LGBTQ people had poorer outcomes in many of the key areas identified throughout this report and that their needs are not widely understood. This consultation, however, has helped us to understand that the pandemic has further exacerbated these inequalities, leading to poorer outcomes and experiences across LGBTQ communities, but particularly for young people, trans and non binary people, and people of colour.

Respondents were generous with sharing their experiences, but also their ideas about what's needed to reduce these inequalities at a local level.

Communities Called For:

- 1** Increased access to timely LGBTQ+ affirming mental health support.
- 2** Provision of safe housing for LGBTQ people in unsafe or insecure living situations, such as homophobic or transphobic environments or domestic abuse.
- 3** Access to gender affirming care for trans and non-binary people.
- 4** Support for LGBTQ venues in recognition of their importance as a protective factor in peoples health and wellbeing - reducing social isolation and fostering informal community support.
- 5** Provision of LGBTQ affirmative support around specific issues such as grief and loss, relationships, ageing, and disability, from Switchboard and other community organisations.



"Give us the tools to 'build back better' ourselves and to think about new ways of using space, outdoor space and unusual & unused space for communities.

Clear away red tape, make it easy for groups to get space and make it work for everyone.

We need gay family space, space for older women, space for trans people, space for people of colour, space for HIV groups, there is great need.

The council should do what it does well; enable local communities to do what they do well."

DEMOGRAPHICS



595 people completed our survey, 100% of respondents lived, worked or socialised within the city of Brighton & Hove.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

22% identified as lesbian
40% identified as gay
20% identified as queer
19% identified as bisexual
14% identified in another way including asexual, pansexual or unsure
1% identified as heterosexual

ETHNIC BACKGROUND

Asian/Asian British - Chinese 0.20%
Asian/Asian British - Indian 0.80%
Asian/Asian British - Other Asian background 0.40%
Asian/Asian British - Pakistani 0.20%
Black/Black British - African 1.0%
Black/Black British - Caribbean 0.60%
Black/Black British - Other Black background 0.20%
Mixed - White and Asian 1.0%
Mixed - White and Black African 0.2%
Mixed - White and Black Caribbean 0.6%
Mixed - Other Mixed background 1.41%
Other Ethnic Group - Arab 0.40%
Other Ethnic Group - Turkish 0.20%
White - British 71.69%
White - European 11.65%
White - Irish 5.42%
White - Gypsy/Traveller 0.60%
White - Other white background 4.82%
Preferred to self describe - 1.81%

We use the term people of colour when referring to people of Asian, Black, Mixed Asian and Mixed Black ethnicity.

GENDER

44% identified as a man
37% identified as a woman
13% identified as non-binary
6% identified in another way

22% were trans
1% had an intersex variation

AGE

12% were aged 18-24
27% were aged 25-34
23% were aged 35-44
20% were aged 45-54
12% were aged 55 - 64
6% were aged over 65

DISABILITY & HEALTH

31% had a long-term illness or health condition
51% had a mental health condition
21% were neurodivergent
10% had physical impairment or mobility issues
8% had a social or communication condition
10% had a specific learning condition
7% have visual or hearing issues



This data represents 595 voices that were able to talk to us.

We know there are many more that still need to be heard and are committed to amplifying those whenever we can.

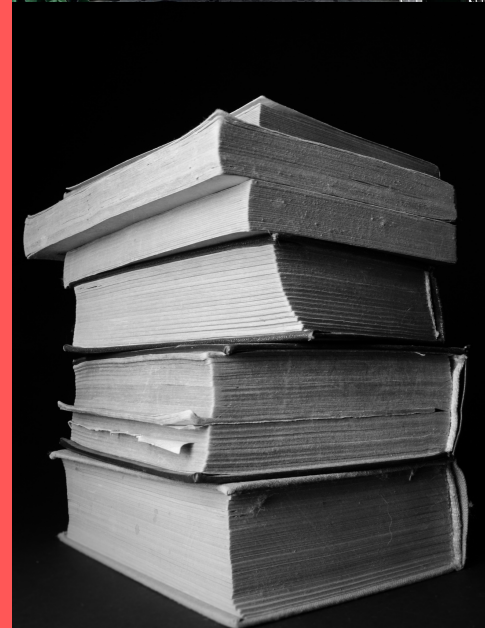
We would encourage further engagement both at Switchboard and elsewhere with LGBTQ young people, people of colour, and older people.

BIBLIOGRAPHY & FURTHER READING



To support you with wider reading around the issues raised in our report we recommend visiting some of these sources:

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Switchboard



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