

Welcome to our latest newsletter on LGBTQ



Northamptonshire
Mental Health Gateway

We would like to hear from you.

Ask Normen has many regular visitors every day, and yet we are still seeing an average of 70% of new visitors to the site every month! Please spread the word about Ask Normen so we can keep improving on these figures, and thank you all for your continued support.

We hope you enjoy all of our updates. We would be delighted to hear from you if you have any dates for the diary, news or comments, or important documents that you would like to share.

Contact us at asknormen@nhs.net



When we originally envisaged this issue of the Ask Normen newsletter, it was devised to raise awareness of what services we have for our pan sexual community of young people, those who identify themselves as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Questioning (LGBTQ), and some of the emotional wellbeing implications for the LGBTQ community where depression; anxiety; self-harm; eating disorders; drug and alcohol misuse, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the rate of substance abuse disorders among LGBT individuals isn't well known, but studies indicate it may be 20% to 30%, which is significantly higher than the general population (9%); and suicide attempts, over a quarter of trans young people have attempted suicide; are traditionally much higher than in heterosexual groups. But this was also meant to be a celebration on the run up to PRIDE <http://prideinlondon.org/> and a reflection of how far we have come, and the fun and safe activities we have in Northamptonshire.

Sadly, the events in Orlando have cast a shadow over the LGBT community, indeed over the world, where tragedy has struck an area where the patrons were supposed to feel safe. While the events have taken place on another continent, it has shaken many good friends in my circle as a reminder of the bullying, homophobia, isolation and discrimination still exist. Of course it was perpetrated by just one person, who is not representative of the whole population, but it is a stark reminder of the discrimination that exists.

We hear via feedback from our young people and indeed in academic research, that the quest for identity is so difficult for many of our new millennium children and young people, and many of our LGBTQ young people find it even harder, especially when they do not know where to go. This makes them susceptible to child sexual exploitation if they are unaware of the resources we have in the county, and given one in 10 people are likely to identify as LGBT, it is worth while taking the time to read

through this edition and make young people aware of the resources out there to help. But there is a lot of good news out there and some great work being done to help young people be comfortable in their own skin.

This issue covers a raft of issues from high end gender identity issues, to mental health needs for many people who identify as LGBTQ, the amazing work that is being done through the Out There Group hosted by the Lowdown in Northampton and the Youthworks LGBTQ Youth Group who meet in Kettering.

So this is the season of PRIDE, and rather than focus on all the negative, we should look to celebrate how far we have come, and recognise there is still so much we can do. From recognising and supporting the individual needs of our young people, to sign posting them to the free services they can access that are safe and supportive, to becoming a straight Ally https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/straight_allies.pdf, there are many ways we can help our children, young people and families be comfortable in their own skin, and prevent or intervene early should there be significant emotional wellbeing and mental health issues arising.

As always, if you have anything you would like to include in our newsletter, please contact us at asknormen@nhs.net. And watch this space as we will be updating you over the coming months on the exciting Future in Mind Transformation programme that is seeking to improve children and young people's emotional wellbeing services further by adding capacity and transforming the work we do to help more children and young people with emotional wellbeing and mental health needs.

David Loyd-Hearn

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HIDE AND SEEK LGBT YOUTH GROUP

We are a young peoples group who meet on Monday evenings at the William Knibb Centre or Keystone Centre in Kettering.

We set the group up last September as we wanted a space for young lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgender people and those young people who are questioning their sexuality.

The group is a social group, we discuss issues, put on events and workshops, watch films and do lots of different activities.

A lot of us have found it difficult to find spaces to socialise with other like minded young people. As we run our own group, we are able to make sure it meets our needs and that we have fun! We also talk about personal issues. Quite a few of us have experienced self harm and negative feelings which are difficult, we get support from each other and the workers at Youth Works. We also have visits from the counsellors. We have lots of different people attending the group from age 13 up to 19. Everyone is welcome and we make sure everyone is included in the group and quickly become part of the group.

We wrote a poem that sums up the Hide and Seek group

It's so fun, there's loads to do

We've been through what you've been through

Lesbian, bi, pan or gay

Confused or curious are ok

Come, make friends and have a peek

All are welcome at Hide and Seek.

The Hide and Seek LBTQ group is supported by Youth Works CIC and happens on Monday evenings, 6.30pm – 8pm for young people aged 13 – 19.

For more details call 01536 527960 or contact us via our website

www.youthworkscic.org.uk



Free to be me for everyone?

The subject of homophobia, homophobic bullying, transgender issues and questions around sexuality is widely discussed in this country, now we are in the 21st century. If we go back a few years to when I was at school, in the last century, it would not have been discussed openly at all. This is because the 'unwritten rules' at the time were that 'we don't talk about that sort of thing,' so it was often a hidden secret. How does that feel when we can't talk about something for fear of ridicule by our parents or teachers? This may not be true for all, but it is still quite a big thing for children and young people to share. It is wrapped up in the big questions around identity:

Who am I?

What do other people think of me?

Do I have a 'best' friend?

Who are my friends?

How can I be accepted?

What am I worth?

Am I normal?

Am I different and is that okay?

Do I have to put on a facade?

Who might I be able to tell?

I am no expert in LGBT? But, I do have plenty of life experience and have friends who are openly gay, so I have put together a few thoughts around how we might encourage acceptance and safe language and behaviour in schools and in society with our colleagues, pupils and parents. These thoughts are based on the Protective Behaviours process, which enables people to feel more empowered and safe, whilst responding to the right of other people to feel safe around them.

www.pbpeople.org.uk

If you would like to see a short film clip about Protective Behaviours visit https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0_cSgq9yfSs

Let's start with language. When we use language that feels safe and empowering and respect everyone's right to feel safe all the time, we are very unlikely to use homophobic language and use language in a derogatory way, such as 'You're so gay.' We can model ways of talking that respects all human beings, whatever their differences. In school this could be openly discussed in Circle Time, PSHE lessons and indeed across the whole curriculum. This would help children to understand that understanding our sexuality is part of growing up and is an integral part of developing healthy relationships with each other.

In an attempt to integrate Protective Behaviours across all schools in Northamptonshire, between September 2015 and March 2016 there were 240 senior staff trained in Protective Behaviours representing 120 schools. It is hoped that approximately another 100 schools will receive the same this year. As part of this training each school received curriculum resources to teach Protective Behaviours from Reception Year up to Year 6 and an additional resource on healthy relationships from Barnardo's – Real Love Rocks. Secondary schools also received resources and a drama presentation called Chelsea's Choice, which facilitated a number of disclosures from youngsters.

Not only can we encourage the use of the 'Language of Safety' and the right to feel safe all the time, we can encourage people to talk until they feel safe again. I am passionate that this happens in all our schools, so we can enable young people to find someone to talk with whether it is about their sexuality, their football team or about not feeling safe in certain situations. If we can educate the adults working with

children and young people, modelling the process of Protective Behaviours then we will have a society in which we can feel safe enough to say we are worried or confused or happy to feel..... and then know where to go for support or affirmation. Training is available on Protective Behaviours, visit

www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/tamhs

Stonewall work nationally and I have attended one conference in Northamptonshire at which they were giving away their resources to help schools around homophobic bullying. Their resources are excellent and if you would like to see what is available visit www.stonewall.org.uk/schoolchampions

Here are their top ten recommendations for primary schools:

1. Start early
2. Don't make assumptions
3. Teach about different families
4. Include lesbian, gay and bisexual issues in the curriculum
5. Encourage pupils to be themselves
6. Respond to homophobic language
7. Tackle homophobic bullying
8. Promote a positive environment
9. Send a clear message from the school leadership team
10. Use outside experience

If you are an adult reading this I would suggest starting with reflecting on your own assumptions and beliefs in this area and notice your feelings about it. The next thing could be to think about what happens in your organisation and if it feels safe enough for people to talk about LGBT? We are the people who can do something about this and you may be the one key person that makes a difference to a young person in your organisation or family because you have made yourself open and available for them to talk with.

John Fardon, Education Entitlement Officer – Mental Health.

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Sitting with the Uncertainties of Gender Identity

Gender differences form a running theme throughout our experiences, from the gender roles and associated expectations often observed as part of family life, to the gendering of particular subjects at school and divisions highlighted by religion.

Gender is commonly witnessed as binary (male and female), and those who behave differently to the cultural *norms* may be seen as gender non-conforming. If a child expresses interests typically associated with someone of the opposite gender this does not necessarily mean that they will later associate with a *transgender* or gender-variant identity. Instead they may go on to identify as being bisexual or homosexual.

One of the difficulties associated with the *transgender* label is that it often comes with the assumption that individuals intend to fully transition (i.e. undergo hormone therapy, surgery etc.) to an identity of the opposite gender. This has given rise to an evolving diversity of terminology (including *genderqueer*, *gender fluid* and *Demiboy*) used to describe one's gender identity, and as with the range of terms, each one carries a multitude of subjective meanings. For those who identify as falling somewhere in between or holding a fluid-state of identity reoccurring exposure to gender binaries can arouse distress in association with the conflict between internalised societal attitudes regarding gender *norms* and how they experience their own identity.

However if a young person is diagnosed as experiencing *Gender Dysphoria* (formerly known as Gender Identity Disorder) or self-identifies as having a variant gender identity it does not necessitate having mental health difficulties. As part of the support offered via the *Gender Identity Pathway* (GIP), based in the NHFT Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, young people and their families are given the time and space to talk about and explore their experiences of gender identity.

Part of the work may involve looking at how a young person can retain a stable and authentic sense of self, whilst also forging an identity within their family and among school peers. Young people are becoming increasingly creative in how they express their identities, such as through an androgynous appearance, thereby recognising the masculine and feminine aspects of their gender. Likewise a young person may wish to have their identity recognised by those in their family or community through a change of name or pronoun, forming part of a social transition, which again does not necessarily mean that they intend to pursue physical intervention.

Parents or carers and young people may experience grievance in response to such a transition and in addition to accessing therapy may seek peer support via organisations such as *Gendered Intelligence* or *Mermaids*. This can be particularly comforting for individuals and families who feel isolated in their experiences. For example *The Lowdown* in Northampton boasts an LGBTQ+ youth group for 13-17 year olds, whilst there is also one run by *Youth Works CIC*, in Kettering.

Commonly young people will request a referral to the Gender Identity Development Service (GIDS), at the Tavistock Clinic (in London), which is a more specialist agency that gate-keeps access to hormone therapy and as a result of their assessments can support referrals for sex-reassignment surgery. The GIP is as well distinguished from the GIDS, in that it enables young people to be able to access psychotherapy on a regular basis.

Written by Simon Vickery

Northamptonshire Healthcare Foundation Trust.

Further reading

For information regarding the various services offered by the GIDS see: <http://tavistockandportman.uk/care-and-treatment/information-parents-and-carers/our-clinical-services/gender-identity-development>
<http://genderedintelligence.co.uk/> to access educational resources and support services for professionals, families and young people who may have queries relating to gender identity
<http://www.mermaidsuk.org.uk/> for resources similarly targeted at young people, their families and professionals
See: <http://thelowdown.info/issues/lgbtq/> for details of the *Out There* youth group in Northampton
For further enquiries re Youth Works CIC LGBTQ+ youth group see: <http://www.youthworkscic.org.uk/contact-us/Pages/default.aspx>



Mental health issues if you're gay, lesbian or bisexual

Studies show that lesbian, gay and bisexual people show higher levels of anxiety, depression and suicidal feelings than heterosexual men and women.

Rates of drug and alcohol misuse have also been found to be higher. But the real picture is uncertain because of the reluctance of some patients to disclose their sexuality, and some healthcare staff feeling uncomfortable asking the question.

Poor levels of mental health among gay and bisexual people have often been linked to experiences of homophobic discrimination and bullying.

It may not be easy, but getting help if you're feeling stressed, depressed, anxious or suicidal is one of the most important things you can do.

Dominic Davies from [Pink Therapy](#), a mental health support service for lesbian, gay and bisexual people, says: "As LGB people, our mental health is often under attack from various quarters, and sometimes we can find ourselves being our own worst enemy."

"Counselling or psychotherapy can be a place to take stock and figure out what's going on, and how to better handle the various stresses and strains that surround our lives."

Read about [different types of talking therapy](#) and how they can help.

Although society has changed and homophobic prejudice is less common than it used to be, most lesbian, gay and bisexual people have experienced a range of difficulties in their lives. These can contribute to mental health problems.

For some, other factors such as age, religion or ethnicity can further complicate mental distress.

Many gay people have experienced:

- hostility or rejection from family, parents and friends
- bullying and name calling at school
- rejection by most mainstream religions
- danger of violence in public places
- harassment from neighbours and other tenants
- casual homophobic comments on an everyday basis
- embarrassed responses (and occasionally prejudice) from professionals, such as GPs
- no protection against discrimination at work
- negative portrayal of gay people in the media

The effect on your mental health

Experiencing these difficulties can mean many gay and bisexual people face mental health issues, including:

- difficulty accepting their sexual orientation, leading to conflicts, denial, alcohol abuse and isolation
- trying to keep their sexuality a secret through lying, pretending or leading a double life
- low self-esteem
- increased risk of self-harm and suicide attempts
- damaged relationships or lack of support from families
- post-traumatic stress disorder and depression from long-term effects of bullying

If you think you need help, ask your GP to refer you to the appropriate service.

Now, read [how to access talking therapies on the NHS](#).



The Out There Group

The Out There Group is aimed at Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender (LGBT) young people in Northampton.

Although it's not in South Northamptonshire, it will serve those LGBT young people in the county who need support and advice.

For more information on meeting dates and times please see the Facebook page for The Out There Group.



The lowdown's 'Out There LGBTQ Support Services' were set up in November 2012 following a period of more than 6 years within the county, of a complete lack of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning support groups for young people. The service, originally funded by the NHS as a pilot has grown and expanded to help meet the needs of its members and their families.

When the first weekly support group (for 14-18 year olds) opened at the Roadmender, we had 2 members – a gay man aged 15 and his straight friend of the same age. The group steadily grew in numbers, with people travelling from all parts of the county to

attend and by the end of 2014 we had over 60 on our books and a regular weekly attendance of around 12-15 individuals.

Since Feb 2015, the figures have grown, with particular increase in numbers of young people who identify as trans or non-binary. Calls for supports for under 14's who were questioning their gender began to come in quite fast from parents, teachers and CAMHS. What started as a couple of enquiries, soon grew to quite a few more.

Therefore, after a period of allowing some 13 year olds to attend the group firstly on a monthly basis, then on a fortnightly basis (as we didn't want any young person to feel they had no support at all), earlier this year, we dropped the age range of the group to 13 -17 year olds in order to accommodate a younger age range. We now have 35-40 attend each weekly session!!

Whilst we are aware of a number of excellent LGBTQ organisations across the county such as FAN, we are also aware that there still remained nothing available for over 18's but under 40' within the county. Therefore we set up our 'Out There LGBTQ PLUS Group' for 18 – 25 year olds. This was piloted earlier in the year and thanks to recent NBC Partnership Funding, we have enough funds to run the group for 6 months. Their funding has also enabled us to set up the long awaited 'Out There LGBTQ Parent/carers Support Group' which begins on 15th June and is for parent/carers of LGBTQ children and for LGBT parent/carers.

Each group provides a safe and confidential space for members to meet and socialise with like-minded people. To share similar experiences and to gain support from a trained team of staff and volunteers with personal issues or things affecting the group or LGBTQ community at a national or global level. The youth groups are fun and educational with activities including having a Float at Northampton Carnival, to carrying placards as VIP guests of Brighton PRIDE, to working with local MP's and NHS to influence, suggest and directly input into changes within the county to help improve services for young people – particularly those who identify as LGBTQ or with mental health issues. The Now Is The Time Anti-Bullying Campaign began with input and suggestions of our Out There group.

Some of our young people have spoken on the radio, television and at conferences regarding their experiences.

Jack explained that when they recognised that they were “born in the wrong body” they were 11 years old. Assigned female at birth, they never felt comfortable in their own skin and said they always knew and felt “different” and that something was “wrong”. They didn't feel comfortable in the clothing, with the hairstyle or even with the name they were given. Luckily, when they did realise what made them feel different and were brave enough to speak to their mum about it, their mum was very supportive and immediately let them choose a name they preferred, to choose new clothes and more importantly, to refer to their child in the way that their child identified. Outside of home was a different matter and on a daily basis this young

person was shouted at, threatened, called names or had things muttered by passers-by under their breath. Just imagine, adult strangers shouting at and calling names at a child???

For anyone reading this who has been through a similar experience and was just as supportive to their child or had supportive parents, I salute you and am really pleased that your experience with your self-identity and then telling parents was positive.

Unfortunately this all too often is not the case. Nor does that complete your journey. Once you have identified and accepted your own lesbian, gay, bisexual and gender identity it can and often does take years for you to share that with anyone else.

(Through a straw poll with members of our youth groups, (including the youth workers who identify as LGBT) they told us that it took between 2 years and 15 years for them to 'come out' to anyone). Also, once you do 'come out', this is then something people who identify as LGBT have to do for the rest of their lives.

Whether you choose to come out or not, should be that ... a choice. But unfortunately and as shown in Jack's example, people are quick to judge, often without any understanding of the situation and feel it is acceptable to comment or attack someone because of their identity.

Some stats from the LGBT Foundation (<http://lgbt.foundation/About-us/media/facts-and-figures/>):

- 95% of pupils hear the word 'gay' being used as an insult or something they don't like
- Over half of pupils had witnessed homophobic bullying in school
- 75% of staff had witnessed homophobic bullying in school
- 58% did not feel that their school was a safe and welcoming place for lesbian, gay or bisexual pupils
- LGB people are twice as likely as heterosexual people to have suicidal thoughts or to make suicide attempts
- LGB people are two to three times more likely than heterosexual people to suffer from depression
- Over half of gay young people deliberately harm themselves yet the NSPCC estimates that for young people in general it's between 1 in 15 and 1 in 10.
- 1 in 5 BME lesbian and bisexual (LB) bisexual women have an eating disorder compared to 1 in 20 of the general population
- 1 in 4 gay and bisexual (GB) men report being in fair or bad health compared to 1 in 6 men in general
- A third of GB men who have accessed healthcare services in the last year have had a negative experience related to their sexual orientation
- A quarter of GB men currently smoke compared to 22% of men in general
- Across all age groups LGB people could be seven times more likely to take drugs

As well as coming to terms with their own identities, genders and sexualities our youth group are young people who are also trying to navigate puberty, being a teenager, exams, health, mental health, family life and relationships.

A small example of the things our group tell us they find difficult in traversing these issues are as following:

FAMILIES: Where no-one in the family is supportive, it can lead the young person to feel isolated and unloved. It has unfortunately meant that sometimes the young person has been forced out of the home, family and sometimes the whole community - particularly where things such as religion or culture has played a part. OR, where 1 or 2 members of the family know and are supportive but other members are not. This can cause arguments and family disruption, which the young person can wrongly blame themselves for.

SCHOOLS: Homophobic language is often permitted in schools (particularly around PE) without thought or regard for its offense. For Trans pupils – uniform, toilet facilities, pro-nouns and preferred names can all make school life very unpleasant if mechanisms are not put in place to support a pupil who identifies as trans or non-binary.

GYMS / CLOTHES SHOPS / RESTAURANTS: It can often be difficult for a young person who identifies as trans to access these facilities because they don't know which toilets or changing facilities they will be allowed to use. When changing they are often teased or bullied which again is isolating and often makes individuals feel different and helpless.

The above are just a handful of examples, which can easily be addressed. Some ways you can support young people who identify as LGBTQ include:

Some ways you could help make a difference:

Acceptance - You can "accept" your LGBT friend, colleague or family member, even if you do not understand it.

Find out more about their situation and seek support for them and for yourself if needed.

Remember that they are still the same person even if you don't agree with or understand their new identity.

Listen to the young person – they know what their needs are.

Access outside support to gain a greater understanding of the situation and some tools that will help you support their changing situations.

Set up a Gay/Straight Alliance in school, college or within your business

Have gender-free toilet and changing cubicles which anyone can access

Sometimes the little things really do make a big difference....

"If it wasn't for the [lowdown's Out There LGBTQ youth] group, I wouldn't have any friends or ever leave the house. My anxieties wouldn't allow me to. So thanks for being here, I don't know how I would cope without it!"

Male Service User, aged 17

For further information about the lowdown's Out There LGBTQ Support Services or to join one of our groups, please contact us on: 01604 634385 or 07585 737482 or check out our website at <http://thelowdown.info/issues/lgbtq/>

Dawn Wright

The lowdown



Are you a social worker, a youth worker, a health advisor, an OT etc working with the LGBTIQ community - via counselling skills and providing support? Our Post Graduate Diploma is open to you! Come and study with us. The course is accredited by the National Counselling Society. We're interviewing for a couple of places to start in July

<http://www.pinktherapy.com/.../119/language/en-US/Default.aspx>



A social enterprise, Pride Sports is the UK's organisation for LGBT sports development and equality.

PARTICIPATION & SATISFACTION

Whether it's working with National Governing Bodies, County Sports Partnerships, Local Authorities or grass roots clubs, we are working to make sure LGBT people are able to get into organised sport and have an enjoyable and rewarding experience within sport.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

We believe education is the key to change and offer a range of training products for a variety of settings such as NGBs, CSPs, coaching groups and schools. We also deliver a range of research and fact sheets to raise awareness on key issues of LGBT inclusion.

LGBT SPORTS LINKS

Whether you are LGBT and looking for a club to join or a sports deliverer looking for LGBT community links, this is where you will find information on the UK's many LGBT sports groups.

For more information go to <http://www.pridesports.org.uk>



Self harm toolkit survey undertaken earlier in the year.

We would like to thank all those who responded to the survey.

The report went to the NSCB Board and the NSCB Learning and Development sub-Group. The toolkit is to be further promoted through the NSCB newsletter and on the NSCB website along with the e-learning course.

To access the toolkit go to [Ask Normen](#)

Go to the [NSCB website](#)

To view the latest newsletter from the NSCB and to subscribe [click here](#)



Healthwatch Northamptonshire are on the move!

As from Monday 13th June we will be at:

Healthwatch Northamptonshire CIC

Lakeside House 3rd Floor

Bedford Road

Northampton

NN4 7HD

www.healthwatchnorthamptonshire.co.uk

[Follow us on Twitter - twitter.com/HWatchNorthants](https://twitter.com/HWatchNorthants)

[Find us on Facebook - www.facebook.com/Healthwatchnorthamptonshire](https://www.facebook.com/Healthwatchnorthamptonshire)



What's on the web?

Useful links

NHS Choices links

- [Drinking to excess](#)
- [Mental health](#)
- [Video: depression real story](#)

External links

- [Find your nearest Mind association](#)
- [PACE: counselling](#)
- [Pink Therapy: self-help videos](#)

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