

The BeYou Project

The Gay Agenda steering group: two years on Evaluation report, May 2022

Background

The BeYou Project provides a safe space for LGBTQ+ young people to meet, but we also want to hear their views about the service and how they want it to develop. This collaborative approach helps us make the right changes.

Our steering group which is led by LGBTQ+ young people was launched in May 2020. Its name – The Gay Agenda – was decided by vote. As well as sharing their views about The BeYou Project, the young people discuss LGBTQ+ issues that might be affecting them.



Aims

- The BeYou Project validates young people's views and encourages them to share their opinions
- Feedback is used to help us develop and improve The BeYou Project
- Young people feel part of the service

Outcomes

- The BeYou Project remains relevant for the young people it supports
- Opinions of all age groups are sought
- Young people feel a sense of belonging
- Young people have safe and non-judgemental spaces to be their true selves

Result

The BeYou Project shares the values of the young people it supports.

Overview

- 36 Gay Agenda consultations have been held in the last two years
- Of those, 29 have influenced some form of positive change either within the team or in the wider community
- 251 BeYou clients fed into these consultations. 184 of them were aged 13-17 and 67 were aged 18-25.



The Gay Agenda has been approached by the NHS, the police, Kent County Council, and university students for their opinions on:

- Mental health support in Kent and Medway
- The introduction of pronouns on email signatures across NHS Kent & Medway and Kent County Council
- The police better supporting LGBTQ+ people
- The development of a new BeYou website and its contents
- Local transformation plans around GP involvement via primary care networks and inclusivity of the LGBTQ+ community.

They said, we did

In February 2021 our young people were asked what questions we should include in interviews for LGBTQ+ youth workers

The questions they wrote now form part of our interview process.

At the start of the pandemic, our young people decided how our online groups should be run

The format we now follow – a week of fun and relaxed sessions followed by a week looking at relevant topics and learning more about them – was a suggestion from The Gay Agenda.

For the last three summers, our young people have told us what activities they want on our timetable

These include: a trampoline park, ice skating, escape rooms, and fish and chips by the sea. This year we will do the same with the help of funding from Kent County Council's Reconnect grant.

Our young people fed into the Lancaster Model (a robust step-by-step change management solution to drive service improvement and transform practice for young people who would otherwise go under the radar)

Full results can be found later in the report.

How we're using young people's opinions

We have (with consent) shared our young people's views on The Lancaster Model early needs health assessments with our commissioners. The views sought to influence change in terms of the gender options offered to reception, year six and year nine children.



Guests have attended our Gay Agenda groups to learn more about a range of topics including how LGBTQ+ groups in schools can be as inclusive as possible. The group fed back that spaces need to be welcoming and comfortable, that the speaker should have good knowledge of LGBTQ+ issues, and groups should run after school.

When we returned to in-person meetups after lockdown, we wanted the look and feel of our groups to be just right. By asking the Gay Agenda to tell us what they wanted, we made sure the in-person group relaunch in January 2022 was a success. We've seen group sizes continue to grow since, with the Margate group increasing by more than 50% and the Canterbury group by 40%.

At one Gay Agenda consultation, the young people worked with Kent County Council's emotional wellbeing participation worker to encourage all staff across NHS Kent & Medway, and Kent County Council to include their pronouns in their email signatures. Further work is being undertaken to understand how best to engage GPs in this change.

We have launched an animated film to raise awareness of the inequalities faced by LGBTQ+ young people, available to Kent schools and stakeholders. The Gay Agenda shared their opinions on the content of the animation and who it should be aimed at.

A future Gay Agenda consultation will look at how to better understand LGBTQ+ needs when accessing mental and physical health services.

One young person's story

We are currently working with a young person who joined the BeYou Project to expand their social network within the LGBTQ+ community and access information and guidance in a safe place. When they first attended a group session, they were nervous and quiet, not really engaging and keeping their thoughts and opinions to themselves. However, with gentle encouragement from staff and other young people they slowly came out of their shell.



When we first introduced this individual to the Gay Agenda, they were astounded that young people within the service were given this much freedom and responsibility, and had the opportunity to make their voices heard. They had never experienced this before, in previous youth groups or at school. They were engaged straight away and had lots of ideas to contribute.

In every Gay Agenda that followed, this person's confidence continued to increase. They are now a co-chair of the Gay Agenda and an inspiration to staff and their peers. The extent of this young person's development has surprised themselves and their family.

By providing young people with opportunities to be heard in a safe and welcoming environment, we can help them increase their confidence, self-esteem, self-worth, and feelings of belonging.

The years ahead

We intend to keep growing the Gay Agenda and using it as a platform to influence positive change for issues affecting LGBTQ+ young people.

The success of The BeYou project is testament to the drive and determination of the group, and the insight they offer us.