



# YOUTH ACCESS

Championing Youth Advice and Counselling

# Equity scoping

Addressing inequity in service provision for

**Trans and gender diverse  
young people**

February 2024

# About Youth Access

Youth Access exists to ensure that every young person has access to the support they need, when and where they need it, to thrive on their journey into adulthood.

Alongside our member network of 128 youth advice and counselling services, we champion young people's right to access high-quality services providing a range of support, from mental health and wellbeing to housing and employment, all under one roof, in their local community.



# Introduction

All young people deserve access to support that respects their rights and meets their needs. Yet, too often, the very systems created to support young people perpetuate inequality and reproduce systems of oppression. Put simply, many young people remain under-heard and under-served, facing barriers to services often not designed for or reflective of them.

Addressing entrenched inequalities in service access and experience is complex, requiring a sophisticated understanding of the needs, cultures and help-seeking behaviours within each specific group as well as the reasons for the shortcomings within services.

This is one of five accompanying briefings covering the key findings from our equity scoping review, which focus on addressing inequity in service provision for the following young people:

- **Black young people and young people from racialised communities**
- **Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people**
- **Refugee and asylum-seeking young people**
- **Trans and gender-diverse young people**
- **Deaf young people**

Whilst young people with shared identities or with shared experiences often have a distinct pattern of needs that must be understood in depth by any service attempting to address their marginalisation, our broader mapping also identified some common factors useful to consider in developing an appropriate approach. These findings are featured in our [overview report](#).

*About*

# Trans and gender diverse young people

The umbrella term 'trans and gender diverse young people' is in common use amongst Youth Access members, many local LGBTQ+ services around the UK and some (although not all) national organisations, including Mermaids.

- 'Gender diverse' relates to people whose gender identity, including their gender expression, does not conform to socially defined gender norms, including those who do not place themselves in the male/female binary (Government Equalities Office / Gendered Intelligence).
- 'Trans' is more specific, but is itself an umbrella term and is used to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth. Trans people may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms, including (but not limited to) transgender, transsexual, gender-queer (GQ), gender-fluid, non-binary, gender-variant, crossdresser, genderless, agender, nongender, third gender, bi-gender, trans man, trans woman, trans masculine, trans feminine and neutrois (Stonewall).

Figures from the 2021 Census (the first to ask about gender identity) show that 1% of 16-24 year-olds reported their gender identity as different from their sex registered at birth. That compares with 0.5% of the overall population. Young people aged 16-24 were more likely than other age groups to identify as a trans woman (0.15% of 16-24 year olds), as a trans man (0.22%), and as non-binary (0.26%) (ONS, 2023).

These figures are likely to include a significant level of under-reporting. In polling by Ipsos in 2022, 9% of young people aged 16-24 reported their gender as something other than 'man' or 'woman'. Two per cent of 16-24 year olds answered trans woman; 1% trans man; 2% non-binary; 2% gender queer/gender-fluid; 1% agender; and 1% another gender identity (Ipsos, 2022). A further 3% answered 'don't know' or 'prefer not to say'.

# Service needs



## Discrimination and bullying

- Trans and gender diverse young people experience high levels of discrimination and bullying, which have been exacerbated by the nature of the public discourse around trans issues.
- 64% of trans pupils are bullied at school for being trans, with 46% saying they hear transphobic language “frequently” (Stonewall, 2017).
- 53% of trans people aged 18-24 have experienced a hate crime or incident based on their gender identity (Stonewall, 2017).
- Trans and gender diverse young people from racialised communities are at particular risk from discrimination. There is a need for a focus on the intersection of race/ethnicity and gender identity, exploring how being trans and from a racialised community impacts young people’s experience of accessing health care (Kattari, 2016).



## Family and social relationships

- Many trans and gender diverse young people often need support around family and social relationships, particularly for those whose parents or communities are not understanding or accepting of their identity.
- When young people’s genders and sexualities are not acknowledged, or respected, by loved ones, this can lead to isolation, feelings of loneliness and relational trauma (Ball, 2021).



## Health

- LGBTQ+ people experience significant health inequalities, which impact both on their health outcomes and their experiences of the healthcare system.
- Younger trans and non-binary patients are more likely to report a long-term condition, disability or illness compared with other patients of the same age (Saunders et al, 2023).
- 58% of trans adults in one study had a disability or chronic health condition, including 8.5% who were deaf and 5% who were visually impaired, whilst 18% were carers (McNail et al, 2012).
- Trans young people may need specific medical support, including access to GPs for puberty blockers or HRT, and referrals for specialist healthcare or, occasionally, gender reassignment surgery.



## Mental health

- Trans and gender diverse young people experience a higher prevalence of mental health issues, with the discrimination they face being a significant underlying cause.
- Young LGBTQ+ people are two- to three-times more likely to experience anxiety, depression, suicidal behaviours, substance use and eating disorders (Just Like Us, 2021).
- 80% of trans young people have self-harmed and 40% have attempted to take their own life (Stonewall, 2017).
- 24% of trans young people had accessed mental health services in the preceding 12 months (National LGBT Survey, Government Equalities Office, 2018).

# Barriers to access to services

Whilst there is a general lack of data on trans and gender diverse young people's access to services (National Institute of Economic and Social Research), the existing evidence from the literature and anecdotal evidence from members highlight a range of barriers.

- There is a **lack of service options** for young people in many areas, and young people often don't know where to go for help.
- However, the overarching issue is a lack of **trust** in services.
- Many young people avoid services due to a fear they will encounter ignorance, prejudice or **outright discrimination**, whether from staff or other young people, or will be misunderstood or unsupported.

**Any experience of services being exclusionary or discriminatory risks young people disengaging.**

- Indeed, many services are **not responsive** to the specific needs of trans and gender diverse young people or knowledgeable about gender identity issues.
- Staff may **lack understanding** of young people's needs and the journey they have been on.

- The **service environment** young people encounter can be critical to their continued engagement. This includes the physical environment (including gender-neutral bathrooms and LGBTQ+-affirming notices), the organisational environment (including intake forms, policies, and mission statements), and the interpersonal environment (including language use).
- Staff may not respect young people's identity, or may deliberately or accidentally **misuse pronouns** or use 'dead names' (the birth name of a transgender person that they no longer use or identify with).
- Depending on the age of the young person, services may need to obtain **parental consent**, which may not be forthcoming where the parent/carer lacks understanding or has concerns or anxieties in how to navigate support for their child.
- **Communication across services** (e.g. GPs, specialist services, youth services, VCS) can be poor.
- All of these barriers can be multiplied where the young person experiences additional barriers or needs, such as **neurodiversity**, which is not uncommon.

**The overarching issue is a lack of trust in services.**

# Methods of improving access and service quality

The evidence review and interviews with managers and practitioners in frontline organisations identified a number of ideas for ways of improving access to information, advice, counselling and support and the quality of services for trans and gender diverse young people.

## Assert leadership to drive change

Given the toxic nature of the public discourse about trans rights, service leaders need confidence and resilience to tackle service gaps and develop a trans-inclusive culture. Leaders should accept that it is a journey for the organisation, and some staff might not be comfortable with it initially.

## Establish a culture of inclusion

It is necessary to raise awareness across the team regarding the importance of inclusive language and terminology, treatment pathways, and the landscape of provision for trans and gender diverse young people. This may require specific training to ensure the whole service respects all young people. Having some staff with lived experience or who have undertaken more advanced training on gender dysphoria and body dysmorphia can be helpful.

## Create an inclusive, supportive environment

It is important to create inclusive and safe spaces, where young people will feel comfortable to talk and think things through. This also requires designing an inclusive physical environment, with gender neutral options for facilities such as toilets and signs signalling inclusiveness.

# Engage young people in decision-making

Before developing new services, it is important to involve trans and gender diverse young people in decision-making processes. This will help to ensure that their voices are heard and their needs are met.

One key question over which to involve young people may be whether it would be better to establish distinctive provision for trans young people or to include them in more general LGBTQ+ provision.

# Provide a range of interventions

It is important to offer a range of easy access entry points to support. This may include:

- Support groups - where young people can come together in a supportive and affirming environment, share their experiences and feelings, and develop networks of support and a sense of community and togetherness. Access can be maximised by providing both online and in-person sessions and offering a variety of access routes (e.g. self-referral, walk-in, drop-in or referral from parents/carers, colleagues or other professionals).
- Specialist LGBTQ+ Information, Advice and Guidance.
- Counselling with specially training counsellors.
- Sexual health services.
- Wellbeing clinics and educational sessions in schools.
- Social activities.

## Celebrate gender diversity

Many YIACS get involved regularly in events such as Pride, LGBT+ History Month or Trans Day of Visibility. By celebrating gender diversity, services can develop young people's confidence in their identity whilst demonstrating their commitment to equity.

## Develop partnerships

Reaching out to develop links with local trans and LGBTQ+ organisations and community groups will improve access and trust, and will open up new opportunities for effective working.

## Champion trans people

Services should become champions of young trans and gender questioning people – potentially by advocating for their rights; challenging transphobic behaviour, ignorance or prejudice; and challenging gender stereotypes and binaries.

## Communicate your inclusiveness

Trans and gender diverse young people tend to look for clear evidence that service providers are a safe space for them. Services should promote their inclusivity and be confident about it. This should include not only developing robust policies that support trans and gender diverse people, but displaying a visible statement of inclusion to show commitment to the policy.

## Review your data collection

Services should ensure they are capturing and analysing data which enables them to identify what is working and any gaps in services. Any forms young people are asked to fill in should be reviewed to ensure they are appropriate and inclusive for trans and gender diverse people.

## Ensure your workplace is inclusive

When thinking about making services accessible, it is essential to think about trans members of the workforce as well. It is necessary to work with staff to make sure that trans staff have a positive experience at work. Services should also have a workplace policy to support and protect trans and gender diverse people.

# Key sources & further reading

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