



Annual Report **2020**

For Inclusion For Equality For Everyone



LGBT
IRELAND

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Message from CEO & Chair

2020 was an unprecedented year dominated by the Coronavirus pandemic which has caused incredible hurt, damage and loss across all aspects of society and has impacted deeply on the LGBTI+ community. As a frontline provider our initial focus was to keep our services open, accessible, and responsive to the needs of those most at risk from the virus itself or by its knock-on effects. Thanks to a coordinated effort by our incredible staff and volunteer teams we quickly adjusted to working remotely, ensuring our helpline, online chat, and peer support services continued without interruption. We developed innovative online wellbeing and social activities for older LGBTI+ people to help them stay connected while having to remain apart, and we launched an interactive portal for our LGBT Champions to help them to continue to drive LGBTI+ inclusion within mainstream healthcare services. We also provided one to one support to LGBTI+ people living in Direct Provision centres who were unable to access our peer support group, so vital to their mental health and wellbeing.

Later in the year, together with the NXF and GNC, we conducted an *LGBTI+ Life in Lockdown* survey, to gather evidence of the impact of restrictions and the emerging needs of our community arising from the pandemic. This revealed a higher rate of mental health decline among LGBTI+ people (62%) compared to the general population (51%*) and showed those already at increased risk of social isolation were the worst affected. The survey found that restrictions had a significant impact on the ability of LGBTI+ people to interact with their community which, combined with a general lack of awareness of LGBTI+ supports, served to increase feelings of loneliness, isolation and despair. With the report clearly showing better health and wellbeing outcomes among those who engaged with community supports during lockdown. The findings point to an urgent need for widespread promotion of LGBTI+ services to encourage those who are struggling to seek out help.

However, despite the unprecedented challenges, 2020 was a landmark year for LGBT Ireland. Marking the 10th anniversary of the National LGBT Helpline we gathered feedback from our volunteers' past and present, and through their experiences plotted a decade of incredible change in LGBTI+ rights and visibility here in Ireland. The service has evolved,

adding online and specialist face to face supports, to meet the emerging needs of our diverse community. However, while our services have expanded what we offer remains the same; confidential, non-judgemental listening, underpinned by deep understanding and empathy. These potent forces for change have helped thousands of LGBTI+ people to overcome stigma and discrimination, enabling them to live more open and authentic lives. And of this achievement we are very proud!

2020 was also a historic year for LGBTI+ family rights. With the full implementation of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015, it became possible to register two mothers on an Irish birth certificate, enabling hundreds of same sex female parents and their children to have their families legally recognised. However, despite this achievement many LGBTI+ families remain in legal limbo, this includes gay dads who have created their families through surrogacy, lesbian mums who have used a known donor, and those who conceived via non-clinical settings. For these parents, the fight to establish a legal relationship with their children continues and therefore remains an advocacy priority for us in 2021.

Keeping a sharp focus on LGBTI+ people who face intersectional discrimination, much of our work sought to amplify the issues for vulnerable populations within our community. More LGBT Champions were added to our growing network of health and social care professionals who are key in driving LGBTI+ inclusion within older people's healthcare services. We continued to offer vital support to LGBTI+ people living in Direct Provision through our *Is Rainbow Muid* peer support group and created opportunities for group members to have their voices heard at a national policy level. We also continued to play an active role in the National Action Group on LGBT+ Travellers & Roma, helping to grow LGBTI+ awareness and inclusion across Traveller organisations and communities.

2020 was also an election year. And, as we witnessed the further regression in rights and protections of LGBTI+ people in many countries across the world including some EU Member States, we were determined to keep LGBTI+ equality on the political agenda here. Calling for a sustained commitment to tackle LGBTI+ inequality, we launched our *LGBT Ireland Recommendations and Priorities for General*

Election 2020 document and held a series of regional hustings. We also asked party leaders to publicly set out their priorities in relation to LGBTI+ rights, helping to secure significant commitments on key legal and policy reforms in the programme for Government.

Moving into 2021, we will continue to strive to make a positive and lasting impact on the lives of LGBTI+ people. We will campaign for legal reform that provides safety, security and inclusion for all. We will provide training that grows awareness and understanding of the needs of our diverse community. And we will reflect on what we've learned as we develop our new Strategic Plan.

Most of all we will be here to listen to those who need us and support them to be who they are.

We would like to thank the staff, volunteers, board members, network members, donors, partners, and supporters who help us to achieve greater visibility, rights and inclusion of LGBTI+ people across Ireland. We are enormously grateful to all of you for your support and dedication to equality.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paula Fagan".

Paula Fagan
CEO



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Orla Howard".

Orla Howard
Chairperson

Who we are

LGBT Ireland is a national charitable organisation which provides quality services to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex + (LGBTI+) people across the country. Informed by the issues and experiences raised through our frontline services, we also undertake extensive training and advocacy work to enhance the visibility, inclusion and rights of the LGBTI+ people living in Ireland.



What we do



Our services

LGBT Ireland provides confidential and non-judgemental listening, support and information by phone, online, and face to face.



Our services are accessed by LGBTI+ people, their family members, and a host of professionals who contact us for support and information on a range of issues relating to sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

The services we provide are:

- The National LGBT Helpline: 1890 929 539
- Online chat support
- Peer to peer support groups

In partnership with TENI we run the Transgender Family Support Line, which is a confidential support and information helpline for family members of people who are Transgender or gender non-conforming. All the volunteers on the support line have a family member who is Transgender or gender non-conforming.



All our services operate to LGBT Ireland's national quality standard, which includes an extensive training programme and vetting procedures for all volunteers.

Training and education

LGBT Ireland provides training and education programmes to a range of public, voluntary, community and private services.

A total of 905 people were trained across priority sectors of mental health services; health and social care services; community services; third level student support services; and public sector services. LGBTI+ awareness training to Traveller organisations and our first LGBTI+ People in International Protection Awareness Training was delivered. The pilot LGBTI+ International Protection Training was well-received and LGBT Ireland aims to build and expand on this during 2021.

The pandemic created increased demand for internal training also as our services transitioned online.

Advocacy

Informed by the issues and experiences raised in our frontline services, LGBT Ireland advocates for

the equality and inclusion of all LGBTI+ people living in Ireland.

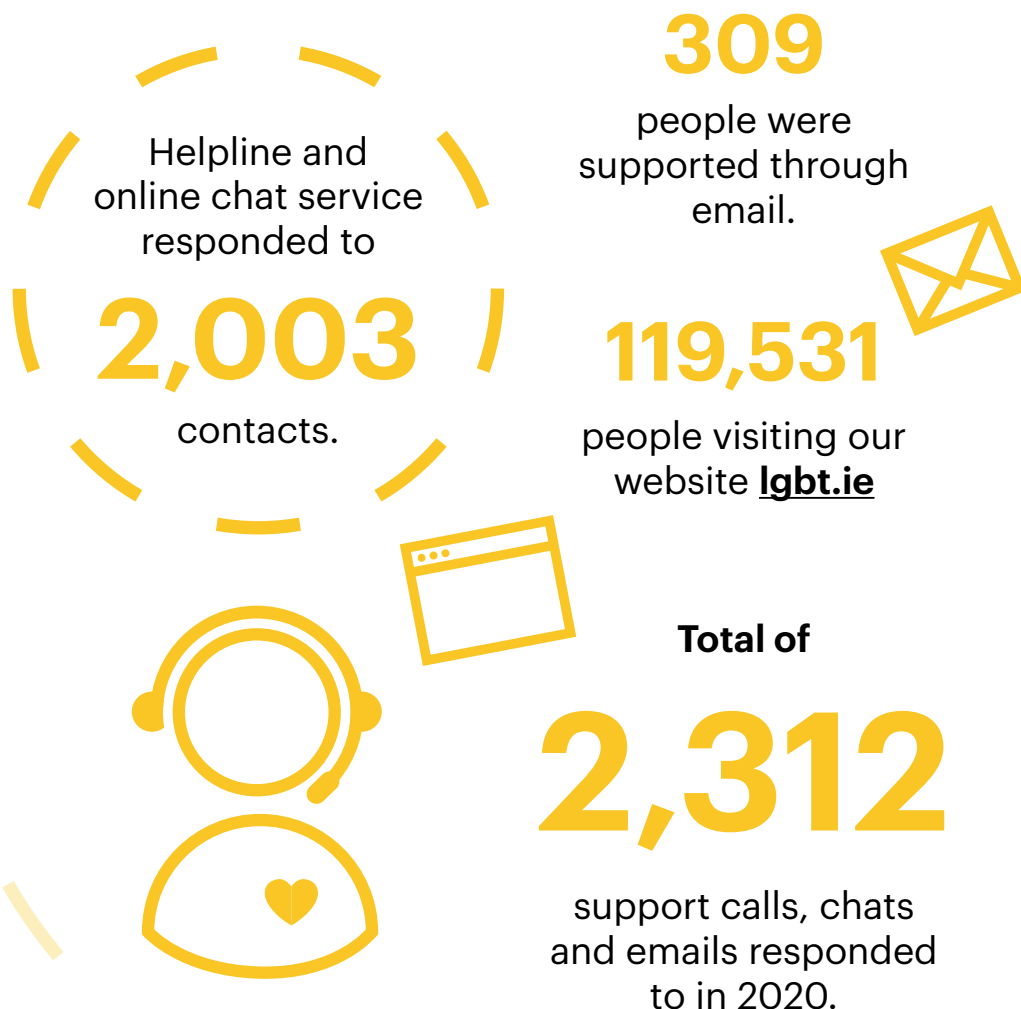
In 2020, our aim to achieve legal recognition for all LGBTI+ families felt one step closer, with the full implementation of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015. The historic milestone of two mothers being recognised on an Irish birth certificate, was the culmination of years of campaigning to establish the legal and infrastructural change needed to recognise same sex parents here in Ireland. Much legal reform is still needed and to achieve equality for all LGBTI+ families and remains a key advocacy priority for 2021.

Keeping a sharp focus on LGBTI+ people who face intersectional discrimination, much of our work sought to effect legal and policy change for vulnerable populations within our community. In doing so we engaged extensively with politicians and policy makers to ensure that LGBTI+ equality remains on the political agenda, securing significant commitments on legal reform in the programme for Government and progressing key policy actions through the National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy.

Statistics from our support services for 2020



A snapshot of support provided



in 2020 and adapted during Covid-19 restrictions to delivering peer support online.

In response to the Pandemic, we created an online community for older members of the LGBTI+ community, called Older and Bolder which now boasts

261

members.



We continued to run monthly peer support: First Out Groups, Married Women's Group, Straight Spouse's Group and Is Rainbow Muid for LGBTI+ people seeking international protection here in Ireland.

Learn more about [peer support](#)

LGBT Ireland partnered with Turn2Me.ie to provide 24/7 mental health support, individual and couples counselling and peer support groups for members of the LGBTI+ community.

Learn more about [Turn2Me.ie](#)

National LGBT Helpline and online chat support

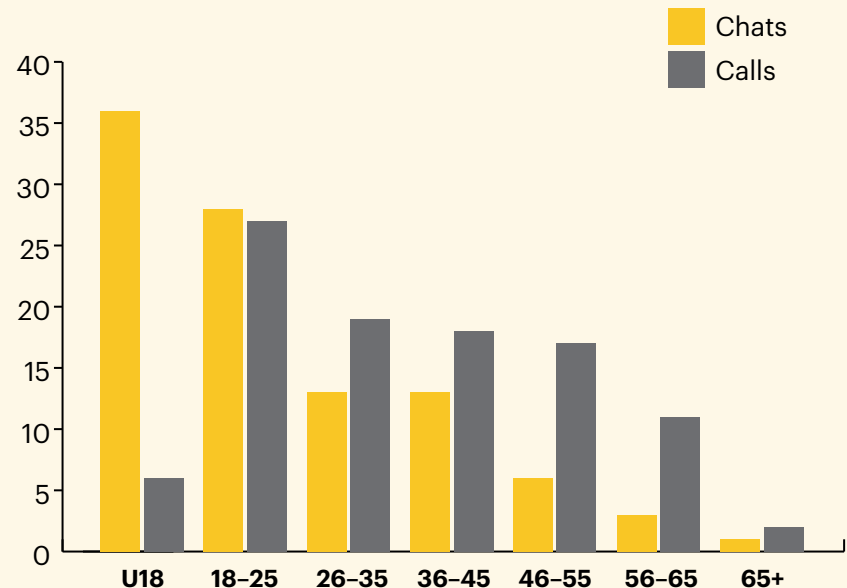
Being able to talk to someone who will listen without judgement can be a lifeline for people who are confused or struggling with their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

Our National Helpline Volunteers are trained to deliver confidential, non-judgemental, listening, support and information by phone and our online chat service.

Open daily, for 30 hours each week, the National Helpline and Online Chat Service responded to 2,003 calls and chats with a further 309 people supported through email contact.

This year we saw an increase in the number of young people contacting us through both our helpline and online chat service. And while the reasons for contacting our services were similar across all age categories, young people were more likely to need support with relationship problems, including with family members and peers.

Age Profile of Contacts



In 2020, volunteers spent a total of 367.83 hours responding to online chats. The most common chat locations in 2020 were Dublin, Kildare, Cork, Limerick, Drogheda, Laois, Carlow, Kilkenny, Kerry, Waterford/Wexford, Galway, Louth, and Wicklow.

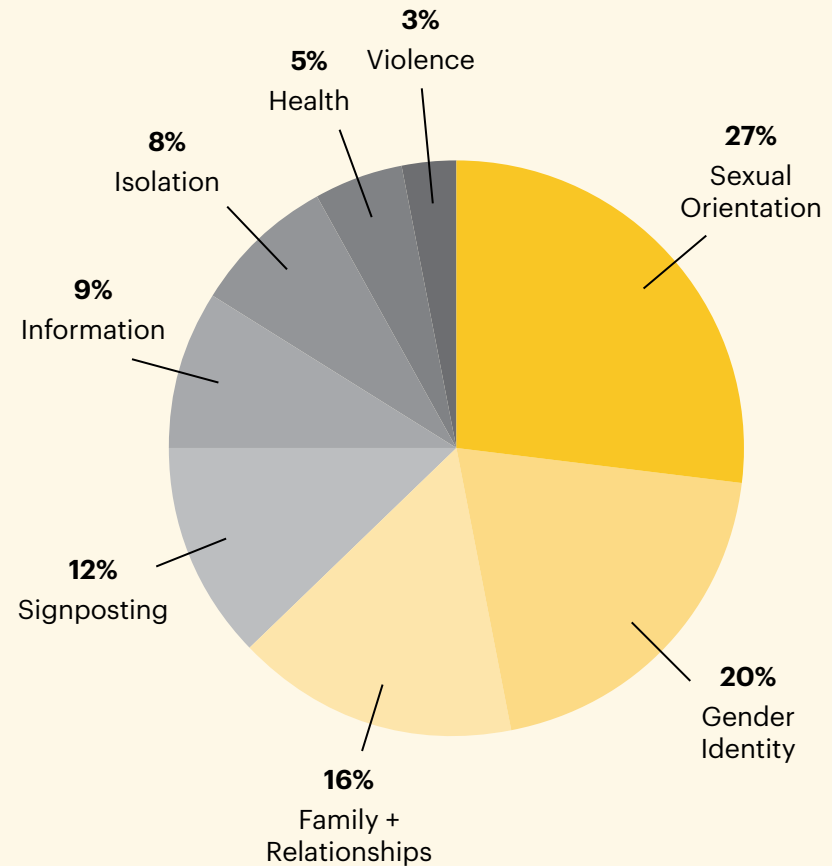
For those whose age was known, **64% were 25 years of age or younger and 36% were under 18 years of age.** For these young people support with 'coming out' as LGBTI+ was the most common reason for contacting the service, bullying and relationship

problems including difficulty with family members featured strongly as a reason for seeking support.

Of the 1,059 calls answered through the National LGBT Helpline, there was also a **notable rise in young people calling the helpline for support**, with 26% of callers to the Helpline aged 18 to 25 years compared to 16% from this age category in the previous year. The Covid-19 restrictions were particularly difficult for younger LGBTI+ people as they felt cut-off from LGBTI+ supports and community spaces.

For those aged **35 years and older**, while main reasons for calling were similar to younger people, information on legal rights, questions about gender identity, access to appropriate transgender healthcare and dealing with loneliness and isolation featured more often.

Reasons for contacting



Support with **sexual orientation** was the top reason for contacting the helpline and online chat service. People of all ages looked for support around the discovery and acceptance of themselves, or a loved one, as being lesbian, gay, or bi+, or questioning of their sexual orientation. Many callers in this category had experienced mental health difficulties resulting from the stress of concealing their sexual orientation and from the stigma they had experienced or associated with being LGB+.

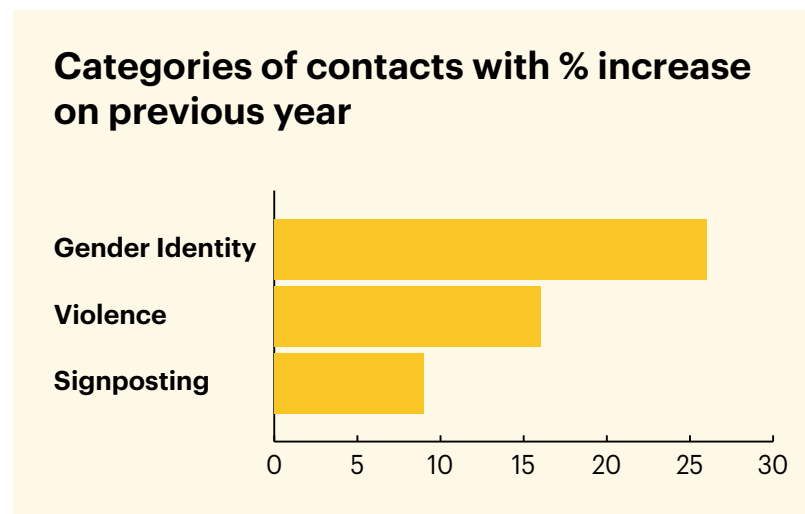
Gender identity and gender expression was the second most common reason for people contacting our services. For many callers under this category, simply being able to express their true gender identity or gender expression to another person, in confidence, and without judgement, was very significant. Many callers were not out to anyone about their true gender identity or expression and as a result felt extremely isolated and battled with depression and hopelessness about their situation. For others, who could be more open, the issues that arose related to coming out to family members including children, seeking information on medical services, and on trans support groups.

Family and relationship issues continue to feature very strongly as reasons for contacting the service. Of those contacting our services about relationship challenges 57% talked about relationships with family members, 23% of callers talked about relationship with a spouse and 19% of callers spoke about their relationships with friends. For younger people support around telling parents or other family members about their sexual orientation or gender identity featured strongly, while in older age categories support with coming out to a heterosexual partner or spouse was common and LGBTI+ couples seeking information on relationship counselling supports.

Often, particularly for callers living in rural areas, **loneliness and isolation** are of great concern. Fear of rejection and discrimination forces many to hide their sexual orientation, and for those who are out, a lack of local LGBTI+ services and social supports contributes to a heightening sense of alienation experienced by those living outside urban centres.

Health concerns prompted many people to contact the helpline and chat. 2020 was an incredible challenge for us all, but particularly for those already suffering with mental health issues. While sexual and general health concerns featured across various

categories of calls, LGBTI+ people struggling with their sexual orientation or gender identity reported feeling depressed, anxious, isolated or hopeless and it is not uncommon for people to be dealing with suicidal ideation and/or self-harm.



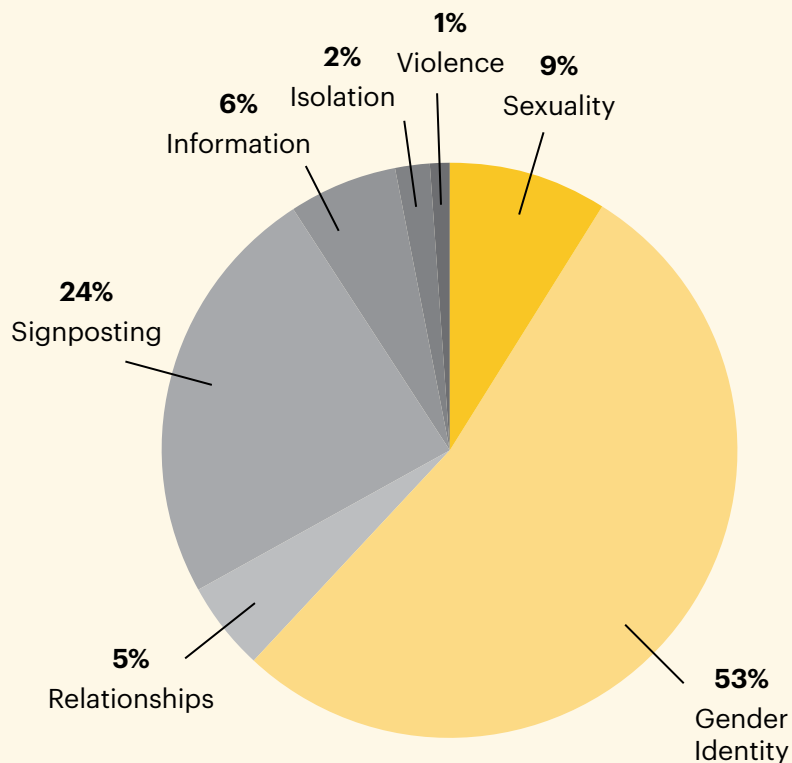
The greatest category increases were among contacts for support with gender identity, violence and signposting.

Increases in contacts for support regarding **violence** are concerning and LGBT Ireland are working with other LGBTI+ and civil society organisations and An Garda Síochána to develop ways to tackle hate crimes and hate speech against our community and

to enhance the reporting and recording of such crimes.

Signposting contacts to appropriate services and supports also featured highly among reasons to contact the service. Many LGBTI+ headed families find themselves in legal limbo in terms of parental rights and are unsure where to turn to get accurate legal advice. There is a large immigrant LGBTI+ community living in Ireland, and many contact our service for advice on where to find answers to their questions on immigration issues. Our volunteers are skilled at identifying the best possible supports for contacts.

Breakdown by reasons for calling Transgender family support line



Transgender Family Support Line service

The Transgender Family Support Line in association with Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI) has been providing support since March 2018 and celebrated 3 years in operation in March 2021.

The Transgender Family Support Line is run by volunteers who themselves have trans or gender non-conforming family members and are there to provide confidential and non-judgemental support to other families who are supporting a loved one with their transgender or gender non-conforming journeys. The support line operates twice weekly on Tuesday (10am-12pm) and Sunday (6pm-9pm).

On the Transgender Family Support Line, 53% of callers were family members calling to ask questions and information about their loved one's gender identity and gender expression. Many family members simply needed listening support with 24% of callers asking for gender related information and signposting to services. In terms of gender identity, 60% of calls and online chats service-users identified as male, 20% identified as female, 20% as transgender.

On the Transgender Family Line, 9% of callers spoke about their or a loved one's sexual orientation, 6% sought information with 2% spoke about isolation and 1% discussed violence. Many other calls were received from professionals such as teachers, school Principals and organisations wanting information and resources to support transgender and gender non-conforming staff, students and service-users including information on navigating the healthcare system for transgender people nationwide and abroad.

LGBT Ireland peer support groups

As our in-person interactions moved to online platforms due to Covid-19 restrictions, so did our monthly peer support groups. Our five peer support groups; First Out for Men/Women, Married Women, Straight Spouse Group and Is Rainbow Muid are normally located in Dublin, but the move to online platforms meant we could offer access nationally. In 2020, we provided 60 Peer Support groups, and thanks to the move online we experienced a significant uptake in participants to the groups.

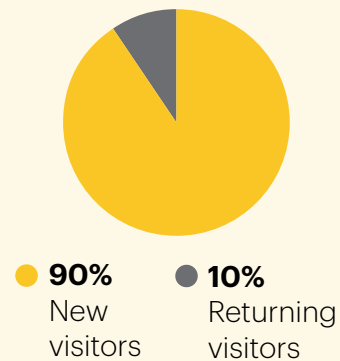
Is Rainbow Muid supports the LGBTI+ community living in Direct Provision. Often, individual and peer support members need intensive support in order to cope with their particular challenges, strengthen resilience and personal confidence and connection in their LGBTI+ identity. This includes in person meetings that could be conducted when health guidelines allowed, more frequent online meetings, providing for the purchase of smart phones capable of supporting zoom to enable some members access the meetings, emergency welfare checks for members suffering from depression and isolation.

LGBT Ireland website

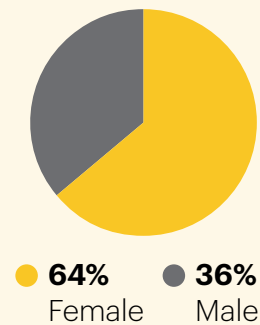
The LGBT Ireland website provides information on a range of LGBTI+ issues and details of support available nationwide.

119,531 visits to lgbt.ie

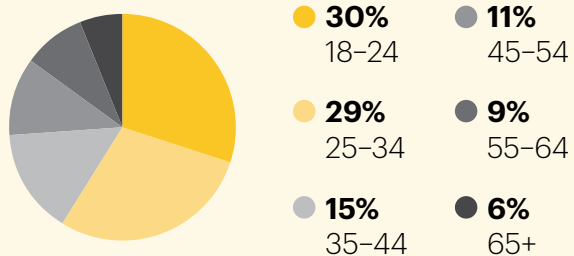
Type of Visitors



Gender

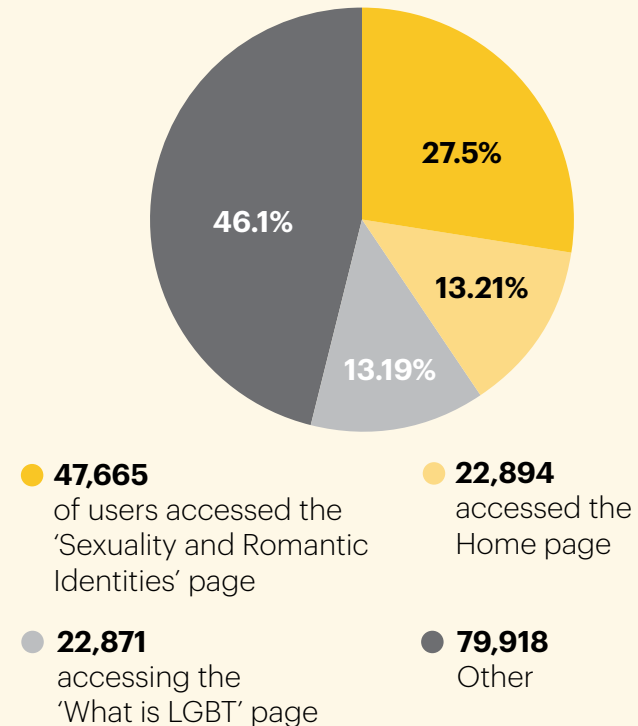


Age of visitors



173,348 lgbt.ie page views

Types of pages



Training



Training to support LGBTI+ inclusion

2020 was another successful year for LGBT Ireland's training department despite the obvious challenges the pandemic presented. When Level 5 restrictions began, various training offers were swiftly adapted to online versions which best fitted the trainee profiles. A total of 905 people were trained across our main priority sectors of mental health services; health and social care services; community services; third level student support services; and public sector services. Noteworthy of specific mention is the strong progress made during 2020 in bringing LGBTI+ awareness training to Traveller organisations with a top focus being on Traveller mental health services once the pandemic hit and services closed. Also as the transition to alternates to the current Direct Provision system comes ever closer with the publication in October of the Day Report, our first LGBTI+ People in International Protection Awareness Training was delivered to one such alternative. This

pilot training was well-received and LGBT Ireland aims to build and expand on this during 2021.



308

staff in health and social care services, including 35 LGBT Champions in older people's services



113

staff working in mental health services

90

staff working in Travellers mental health services



153

staff working in community services



241

staff working in public departments

905

Total staff trained

INMO / LGBT Ireland webinar

LGBT Ireland jointly organised our first conference with INMO, entitled Delivering Healthcare to Be Proud Of and working closely with Steve Pitman, INMO Head of Education and Professional Development.

The planned 1-day conference smoothly transitioned to a 3-hour webinar with three key panel discussions focusing on Why LGBTI+ inclusive healthcare matters; Championing Older LGBTI+ People; Pre- and post-natal Care for Rainbow Families.

It was significant and encouraging for our community that meaningful participation took place by senior health systems figures such as then Minister for Health, Simon Harris; HSE CEO Paul Reid; INMO General Secretary Phil Ni Sheaghda and INMO then President Martina Harkin-Kelly. The conference was hugely successful and another joint venture is planned for Pride 2021.

Mental Health Reform / LGBT Ireland webinar

LGBT Ireland, Mental Health Reform and Belong To hosted a free webinar to explore the topic of mental health and the LGBTI+ community.

The event explored themes such as the prevalence of mental health difficulties within the LGBTI+ community, access to services and supports, early intervention and prevention for young people and how services can be delivered in a manner sensitive to the needs of LGBTI+ people. A range of expert speakers with lived experience of seeking out and accessing mental health services & supports presented on various mental health topics.

The event was Chaired by Dil Wickremasinghe and the conference was opened by Minister of State for Mental Health & Older People, Mary Butler TD.

Training to support our national volunteer team

As demands and pressures on our services grew during the pandemic, the need to continue to recruit and train new and existing volunteers remained constant. This internal training also transitioned to online and when possible under Level 3 public health guidelines included some outdoor socially distanced sessions.

During 2020:

- a total of ten new helpline volunteers were successfully recruited, trained and rostered for LGBT Galway, Outwest and Cork;
- additional three peer support facilitators were successfully recruited, specifically for the Married Women's peer support group and generally for FirstOut groups;
- with the ongoing increased attendance at the online FirstOut group, further peer facilitation training is planned for the first half of 2021.
- Annual Volunteer conference

National Volunteer Annual Conference 2020

In October 2020, LGBT Ireland held its fifth National Volunteer Annual Conference in a virtual format with over 70 attendees on the day. The well attended conference offered speakers across a wide range of topics that our volunteers had requested to learn more about. Speakers included representatives from Intersex Ireland, Focus Ireland, Chrysalis Community Drug Project, Samaritans and Childline. All speakers offered volunteers best practices, tips and advice for dealing with the most challenging contacts.

Dr. Tony Bates, Clinical Psychologist provided an interactive session with a focus on the purpose, meaning and value of how talking helps with an emphasis on volunteer wellbeing.

Panti Bliss, the Queen of Ireland, attended as Keynote Speaker and to announce the recipient of the Above and Beyond: Dave Roche Memorial Award, for an individual who has gone "above and beyond" in their role to support, serve, advocate for LGBTI+ people anywhere in Ireland.

LGBT Champions Training Programme

In a year that highlighted the vulnerability of older people in Irish society, LGBT Ireland continued to work with healthcare providers to deliver training and supports to help create a more inclusive, welcoming Health Service for older members of the LGBT community.

By end of Spring 2020 it became apparent that the pandemic was simultaneously impacting the ability to deliver in person training as well as the availability of Health and Social Care Professionals working in older people's services. Adapting to a rapidly evolving situation, LGBT Ireland, with input from the newly formed LGBT Champions Expert Steering group, modified the LGBT Champions Training delivery to an online format. Altogether, 132 LGBT Champions, working across 90 services received training, considerably outperforming our initial target of 60 services. Substantial pre-development, engagement, and promotional activity to highlight this new online training commenced in Summer 2020, with CPD accreditation for the Champions Programme secured from both the ICGP & NMBI.

OLDER AND BOLDER SUPPORT GROUP

LGBTI+ Support for people aged 55+ who are isolated during covid-19 including weekly coffee mornings, mindfulness sessions, gardening lessons and cooking demonstrations



Strengthening collaboration within our existing network of LGBT Champions was also a significant feature of our work during 2020. In September we commenced our series of quarterly online LGBT Champions Network events, these events provided members of the LGBT Champions network with an opportunity to showcase and discuss their activities. In December 2020 work was completed on the LGBT Champions Online Forum, this new online platform will enable LGBT Champions communicate effectively through discussion forums supporting and enabling collaboration in the provision of care to older LGBTI+ people.

Continuous feedback from our LGBT Champions, particularly about the positive benefits for LGBTI+ Staff, with members of our Champions Network instrumental in the organisation of socially distanced Pride events throughout their services indicated the wider impacts of the programme.

The pandemic also highlighted the need to support older LGBTI+ people directly. It was identified that social distancing and a lack of physical contact was leading to a rise in anxiety and isolation, with many older LGBTI+ people feeling cut off from friends and family. In response, LGBT Ireland launched the Older and Bolder online community, a moderated Facebook group that created a safe space for older LGBTI+ people experiencing isolation or loneliness. Throughout 2020 the group went from strength to strength with over 260 members using the group as a source of support and friendship. Group events included a weekly online coffee event, film screenings, cooking and gardening demonstrations that proved extremely popular with members, the group will continue to grow in 2021.



St James Hospital Staff Pride event

Advocacy



Advocacy

Keeping a sharp focus on LGBTI+ people who face intersectional discrimination, much of our work sought to effect legal and policy change for vulnerable populations within our community. Having secured legal recognition for some LGBTI+ families, a commitment for a review of the remaining gaps by the Special Rapporteur on Child Protection was also secured. Our work ensured that LGBTI+ Refugees and Asylum Seekers had their voices heard as part of the Government consultation on alternatives to Direct Provision and through our work and participation on the National Action Group on LGBT+ Travellers & Roma we helped to grow awareness of the experiences of LGBTI+ members of the Traveller and Roma communities.

Extensive engagement with the Government and opposition parties ensured that LGBTI+ equality remained high on the political agenda, gaining significant commitments in the Programme for Government following our General Election 2020 campaign. LGBT Ireland continue to participate in several national fora to ensure that the rights, visibility and needs of the LGBTI+ community are

progressed, including on the National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy Implementation Committee, the National Garda Diversity Forum.



Cork GE2020 Hustings

Legal and policy reform

LGBTI+ Family Rights

As a direct result of our advocacy efforts the final provisions of the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015, were signed into law in May 2020. This made it possible to register two mothers on an Irish birth certificate, enabling hundreds of same sex female parents and their children to have their families legally recognised. To expedite this process, we worked extensively with the District Courts and the General Registration Office securing six days of dedicated online hearings. However, despite this achievement many LGBTI+ families remain in legal limbo, this includes gay dads who have created their families through surrogacy, lesbian mums who have used a known donor, and those who conceived in non-clinical settings. For these parents, the fight to establish a legal relationship with their children is ongoing and we will continue to campaign on this issue until all families have a pathway to legal recognition.



National Garda Diversity Forum

Hate speech and hate crime

The level of hate speech and hate crime against our community is of huge concern and was a core element of our advocacy work last year. Leading on the development of an LGBTI+ sectoral working group focused on improving policing and victim support for our community, we worked alongside the Garda Diversity Unit to improve the Garda response to and recording of hate crimes. Our campaigning for effective legislation to combat incitement to hatred and hate crimes continued across 2020 and is now due to be published in April 2021.

Protection for LGBTI+ people seeking international protection here in Ireland

Our work supporting Is Rainbow Muid (IRM) continued to strengthen during 2020 and adapted and adjusted according to public health guidelines. As evidenced in the LGBTI+ Life in Lockdown report, LGBTI+ asylum seekers living in Direct Provision are disproportionately negatively impacted by the pandemic (92% reporting a decline in their mental health) and this impact continues to worsen and deepen the longer Covid-19 restrictions persist and limit in person meetings and inter-county travel.

LGBT Ireland approached advocacy for this vulnerable group targeting multiple strands. LGBT Ireland participated in the consultation process informing White Paper on Alternatives to Direct Provision and ensured the Direct Provision Residents were given a voice in the process. An increased focus on communications, including virtual meetings with Minister O' Gorman and his advisors to discuss issues arising for LGBTI+ asylum seekers within the Direct Provision system and with interactions with the International Protection Office.

Increasing public awareness of issues is key, and support was given to group members to create a video *No Pride in Direct Provision* as part of Dublin Digital Pride, which aired on RTE TV as well as Facebook. IRM members joined various online webinars, regional digital Pride festivals, fielded article requests from journalists and participated in podcast interviews.

Increasing visibility of LGBTI+ members of the Traveller and Roma community

LGBT Ireland is an active core member of the National LGBT+ Traveller & Roma Action Group. 2020 was a busy and successful year for the group, which delivered a comprehensive response to challenges arising in 2020. LGBT Ireland supported the group to adapt and problem-solve against the backdrop of severe strains due to Covid-19 restrictions and subsequent lack of privacy for LGBTI+ Travellers. A noteworthy achievement was the delivery of the first ever LGBTI+ Traveller & Roma Calendar (for 2021) creating positive visibility, awareness and information.

Political engagement

LGBT Ireland continues to work to ensure commitment to LGBTI+ equality is sustained by the current and future Governments. Tackling discrimination, stigma and inequality LGBTI+ people continue to face requires consistent work towards visible milestones. This includes the full implementation of national strategies which will advance LGBTI+ inclusion and the development of legislation and policies that fully recognise and protect our diverse community.

Recommendations and Priorities for Government: General Election 2020

2020 was a general election year and LGBT Ireland delivered a 'Recommendations & Priorities for Government' Strategy document. This document highlighted key issues facing the LGBTI+ community in Ireland such as Hate Speech and Hate Crime, LGBTI+ Family Rights, Conversion Therapy, LGBTI+ community members living in Direct Provision and a healthcare service that meets the needs of the entire LGBTI+ population to name a few. Hustings were held at LGBTI+ services around the country which were well attended by local candidates who committed to support our recommendations.



LGBT Ireland engaged all major political party leaders to commit to the recommendations in the document, delivering recorded statements of support from Sinn Féin, Labour, Social Democrats, Green Party, Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and People Before Profit. Link to videos:

<http://bit.ly/LGBTSupportGE>

Ministerial meetings

LGBT Ireland engaged with various Ministers throughout 2020 ensuring the LGBTI+ perspective was prioritised during the political and legislative processes on issues such as legal parental protections for same sex families, the LGBTI+ Community in Direct Provision, delivery of the National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy and Hate Speech and Hate Crime.

Submissions and Publications

[Submission to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth on its Departmental Statement of Strategy](#)

[Guide for Providing Care for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Patients in Primary Care Quick Reference Guide](#)

[LGBTI+ Life In Lockdown Snapshot Survey Report](#)

[FAQ on Parts 2&3 of the Children and Family Relationships Act](#)



Celebrating
10 years of the
National LGBT
Helpline



CELEBRATING NATIONAL LGBT HELPLINE



Ten years of a listening ear and a compassionate response

**A reflection by CEO of LGBT Ireland,
Paula Fagan**

Every time the phone rings, you wonder who is going to be on the other end. You wonder about the voice you will hear, where they are calling from, the reason they dialled the number. Every time it is different, but every time you are ready to do the most important thing you can do in that moment. You are ready to listen, and to give them the space to be heard, sometimes for the first time in their lives.

That is the role of an LGBT Helpline volunteer, and it has been for 10 years now, to listen to the wide range of experiences the members of our community across Ireland have had, and to provide them with a compassionate response in a moment that can be so vulnerable.


The phone lines have existed for decades. Even back when it was illegal to be gay, there were people there to help, to lean on their own experience to guide others on their journey. But the problem was these important services were scattered around the country, often operating one evening a week, and not giving the accessibility to those who really needed them. That is why in 2010 all these groups came together to form the national LGBT Helpline.

With some great determination from staff and volunteers of various services, and some critical investment from the Community Foundation of Ireland, we were able to create a listening service that was truly responsive, operating every evening when people really needed it.

The reasons people call are as diverse as the LGBTI+ community itself. For some they are in a moment of great difficulty, and desperately need someone who they can reach out to. Others are looking to talk openly for the first time and take this moment to explore who they are. For some they are looking for someone to confide in, they have met someone and are so excited, but can't share this with those closest to them, so you celebrate the moment with them.

This act of listening is powerful. Not only in the moment itself but in the lessons, we've learned from it. Over the years we've listened to the needs of our community and responded. It has allowed us to inform the creation of peer support groups across a wide range of issues. It has allowed us to hear the voices of the more marginalised members of our community to create specialised responses like our groups for Asylum Seekers and Older LGBT+ People. It has fashioned and informed our training programmes, working to improve the awareness of LGBT+ issues in healthcare settings and our LGBT Champions programme to ensure better health and social care for older LGBT+ people. It has driven our work in advocating for the issues that matter and ensuring that these voices we hear are represented in the policy decisions our Governments make.

Ireland has changed a lot in the 10 years we have existed, as a community we've made huge strides: Marriage Equality, Gender Recognition, and continuous steps toward true equality in the law and in society. But these achievements sometimes mask the fact that the same old issues are still there. Ten years ago, I would pick up the phone and hear from parents who were worried about their child who has



come out to them. That they would not be safe, that they would not be happy, that they would have to live with stigma. Those parents still call today, with those same concerns, but they find themselves struggling with those worries as they thought they would not feel them. We strive for the day we will not be needed, but that day has yet to come.

We are proud. We are proud of the work we have done; we are proud of the 80 volunteers who work with us to answer these calls, and we are proud of those who pick up the phone or send us an instant message, these are acts that take bravery. This is a life changing service. Whether someone needs support coming out or are dealing with any range of issues that affect them as an LGBT+ person, we are here.

It's been many years since I first picked up that phone, but it was the most powerful action I ever took. Sometimes that is all people need, to be given space, to be listened to, to be heard. We know these ten years have made the world of difference, and we will still be here for the next ten years, we're only a phone call away.

Our volunteers reflect on what the Helpline means to them

I think you always benefit from helping, **it makes one's own experience more valuable** in a way, because it can be a resource to other people.

There are many supports available, I suppose **the most valuable resource and support we have is each other.**

It's the **only fully LGBT staffed helpline** in the country so all the volunteers will be able to identify in some way with what you're going through.

The helpline itself is there to allow you to be heard, to give yourself a voice, to allow yourself to be listened to. To know that **people out there care about you** and **you're part of a much larger community.**

If someone is struggling and wondering whether to phone the helpline I would say that dialing the number is definitely the **hardest and the bravest part but it's well worth it.**

Acknowledgements



Staff and Board

As well as our wonderful volunteer team, LGBT Ireland consists of our staff team and Board of Directors.

In 2020, the staff team was made up of our CEO, Senior Training and Advocacy Coordinator, Champions Programme Coordinator, Services Development Coordinator and Administrative Officer. All staff reported directly to the CEO, with the CEO reporting to the Board of Directors.

The Board of Directors consisted of eight Board members in 2020. Two board members stepped down and a new Chair was elected. All of the Directors have a wealth of skills and experience including delivering frontline services, law reform, governance, and strategic communications. The Board met seven times in 2020 and plans are in place to expand the Board membership in 2021.

Network member organisations

To our amazing network member organisations: Gay Project, LINC, Outcomers, Outwest, LGBT Kilkenny, LGBT Dublin and AMACH LGBT! we are enormously grateful to you for your dedication to supporting the LGBTI+ community and to supporting us.

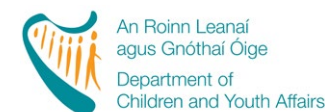


Our funders

LGBT Ireland are very grateful to the funders who have supported our work this year. We could not have continued to deliver and grow our services, training and advocacy initiatives without your help. Thanks to POBAL, HSE's National Office of Suicide Prevention, Social Innovation Fund, HSE Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme, Department of Justice and Equality, Department of Children and Youth Affairs and The Community Foundation for Ireland.

Our financial statements 2020

[Click here](#) to view our financial statements 2020.



Contact:

Info@lgbt.ie
01-6859280



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