LGBT Safe & Supportive Schools

Interim Evaluation

Creating schools that are fully inclusive of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Young People

Six Action Areas

1. Staff
2. Organisation and Development
3. Policy and Planning
4. Curriculum
5. Direct Support to Young People
6. Community Partnership
7. Safe and Supportive Environment
Creating schools that are fully inclusive of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Young People

The LGBT Safe and Supportive Schools Project was established to develop and test a Whole School Community Model designed to create schools that are fully inclusive of LGBT young people. It involved working with teachers, parents, students and the broader community to build a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for LGBT young people.

Kiran Sarma and Michael Barron
April 2016
The recent *LGBTIreland Report*, funded by the HSE’s National Office for Suicide Prevention, detailed the findings of a national study of the mental health and wellbeing of LGBTI people in Ireland. The report showed that many LGBTI people are experiencing positive wellbeing; however, it also paints a stark picture in relation to the vulnerability of LGBTI young people.

The *LGBTIreland Report*, and previous national and international studies, highlight school as a challenging and often hostile environment for LGBT(I) young people. It is well documented that homophobic and transphobic bullying experienced by LGBT students in schools can have a long-term, negative impact on mental health, wellbeing and educational outcomes. It makes sense from both a health and educational perspective to work tirelessly to create a safe and supportive environment for all students, including LGBT students.

It is significant that the LGBT Safe and Supportive School’s ‘Whole School Community model’, jointly developed by HSE Health Promotion and Improvement and Belong To, encompasses the five major themes that LGBTI young people in the *LGBTIreland Report* said would improve their school the most for LGBTI students. “Creating a safe space; affirming LGBTI identity; formal education on LGBTI issues in class; promoting inclusion, diversity, and equality; and teaching the Teachers” are integrated into the model’s 6 key action areas, with promising results in the pilot phase. The pilot schools demonstrated that with strong leadership and whole staff commitment creating an LGBT safe, supportive and affirmative school is possible.

The Safe and Supportive Schools Toolkit, based on the recommendations of the pilot study, provides schools with a practical model for change that supports the Department of Education’s Anti-Bullying Procedures and comprehensively builds on existing initiatives such as Belong To’s Stand Up! Campaign and the HSE’s Health Promoting Schools Framework.

HSE Health Promotion and Improvement are delighted to be involved in this collaboration with Belong To and hope that this work will contribute to a safe, more supportive and inclusive society for all.

---

* Higgins, A; Doyle, L; Downes, C; Murphy, R; Sharek, D; DeVries, J; Begley, T; McCarrn, E; Sheerin, F and Smyth,S (2016). The LGBTIreland report: national study of the mental health and wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people in Ireland. Dublin: GLEN and BeLonGTo.*
# Table of Contents

- Project Partners i
- Executive Summary 1
- Section 1: Introduction, Context and Evaluation 8
  - 1.0 Introduction 8
  - 1.1 Context 11
  - 1.2 Evaluation 14
- Section 2: Inputs 16
- Section 3: Evaluation of the Objectives – Project Outputs and Outcomes 17
  - 3.0 Objective 1: To have an impact on teachers 17
  - 3.1 Objective 2: To have an impact on students 25
- Section 4: Synthesis, Recommendations and Conclusions 29
  - 4.0 Synthesis 29
  - 4.1 Recommendations 32
  - 4.2 Conclusion 33
Project Partners

BeLonG To Youth Services
BeLonG To is Ireland’s national organisation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) young people. It provides one-to-one and group support for those aged 14 to 23 years, to allow them to safely engage with confidence building, personal development and peer support. It also affords young people a space where they can experience inclusion, acceptance, social justice, fun and safety. BeLonG To has developed youth services in Dublin and a national network of LGBT youth groups around Ireland. BeLonG To believes that youth work offers an ideal opportunity for LGBT youth to address their issues and concerns, while enabling them to participate as equal citizens in a society which often denies their rights. BeLonG To also works with government departments, education partners, national and local youth services and other sectors to combat the homophobic and transphobic bullying which are widespread and have a devastating impact on LGBT young people’s mental health. BeLonG To is primarily funded by the Health Service Executive’s (HSE) National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP), the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA). Further information is available at: www.BeLonG To.org

Health Promotion and Improvement Department, Health and Wellbeing Division, HSE West
Health and wellbeing is created in the places where we live, work and play. Health Promotion and Improvement works to enable people increase control over, and improve, their health in these settings. By embedding preventative health measures and messages in models of health, the proportion of people who are healthy at all stages of life is increased and health inequalities are reduced. Health Promotion and Improvement works in schools and education centres, health services and communities, and in partnership with a wide range of agencies to achieve these goals.

Since 2008, the Health Promotion and Improvement Department in Donegal, in partnership with BeLonG To, the national organisation for LGBT young people, has supported LGBT awareness and development through:

- Setting up and participating in the BeLonG To LGBT Steering Group in Donegal.
- Establishing the Breakout LGBT youth project in partnership with Donegal Youth Service and BeLonG To. This project now provides vital supports to LGBT young people and their friends in locations throughout Donegal.
- Providing annual LGBT Awareness training to teachers and Youthreach staff in conjunction with BeLonG To.
- Providing LGBT Awareness training for HSE staff, community organisations and Donegal Youth Council members.
- Developing Junior Cycle SPHE lesson plans on the diversity of family, prejudice and discrimination, and sexual orientation (included in the Lifeskills Series of SPHE resources - Healthy Living, Healthy Times and Healthy Choices).
- Carrying out research into local LGBT issues.
Executive Summary

Introduction
This report sets out the findings of an interim evaluation of the LGBT Safe and Supportive Schools Project, which was run in two Donegal post-primary schools in the 2013/2014 school year. The project sought to develop and test a Whole School Community Model designed to create more inclusive and supportive school environments for LGBT young people by increasing awareness of LGBT issues, and reducing prejudice and homophobic bullying. In this pilot project, BeLonG To - the national organisation that advocates on behalf of and provides services to LGBT young people, and the Health Promotion and Improvement Department of the Health and Wellbeing Division - Health Service Executive West supported two schools to deliver an intensive year long programme.

The findings of the pilot project are promising. From the pilot study, it was concluded that the whole staff training element of the project had a dramatic and wide-ranging impact on staff members in terms of knowledge of LGBT issues and their attitudes towards LGBT young people. Moreover, there was clear evidence that the training enhanced their ability to respond to LGBT bullying in schools. In addition, it would appear that these dramatic improvements in knowledge, attitudes and behavioural self-efficacy were sustained over the course of the project. This finding suggests that the project had succeeded in building the capacity of school staff to both understand and respond to homophobic and transphobic bullying, and that this change was enduring.

The testimony of the students and staff in the pilot schools suggested that the project had impacted on the whole school environment. The students and staff were clear that the project had engendered positive attitudes towards LGBT young people; had improved their knowledge of LGBT issues and had enhanced their sensitivity towards homophobic and transphobic bullying.

It is intended that the LGBT Safe and Supportive Schools Project will be replicated and be subject to full evaluation. Therefore, at this juncture, this report looks to the experiences of the project during 2013/2014 and seeks to bring forward lessons learned to enhance the impact of the project when replicated.
The LGBT Safe and Supportive Schools Project

The LGBT Safe and Supportive Schools Project delivered in Donegal was established to develop and test a Whole School Community Model designed to create schools that are fully inclusive of LGBT young people. In part the project was motivated by findings from listening to teachers at LGBT awareness training and an initial survey of post-primary schools in Donegal. Both suggested that such a project would benefit schools in the county.

The project consists of a Whole School Community model and therefore involves working with teachers, parents, students and the broader community to build a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for LGBT young people.

The project was delivered by BeLonG To and the Health Promotion and Improvement Department - Health and Wellbeing Division (HSE West), with the support of the two schools that agreed to participate in the pilot. It ran in participating schools in the 2013/14 academic year. Staff from BeLonG To and HSE Health Promotion and Improvement provided whole staff workshops; specific training to SPHE teachers; information sessions for the Parents Associations, Boards of Management and community organisations; access to resource materials; advice on policy development in keeping with the revised Department of Education Anti-Bullying Action Plan and Procedures and ongoing telephone support.

In turn, staff from the pilot schools participated in whole staff training and were involved in activities during Stand Up! Awareness Week. SPHE staff delivered the Growing Up LGBT Curriculum resource to students during SPHE. In addition, a core team within each of the pilot schools was supported to drive the project internally and ensure that all elements of the model were addressed from a school perspective.
Findings

Figure 1 presents a graphical representation of the project inputs, outputs, outcomes and impact, as well as project facilitators and barriers. The financial support provided by the HSE was used to fund the project and, in particular, the input of the project partner in providing planning, development, training and ongoing support. In addition, the HSE provided staff time, the majority of which was dedicated to once-off start-up activities. BeLonG To provided project coordination input, training, specialist advice and on-going support.

Figure 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilitators</th>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Key Outputs</th>
<th>Impact/Benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HSE Funding</td>
<td>HSE involvement • BeLonG To expertise • Quality of training • Stand Up!</td>
<td>Whole school training for staff</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSE Staff time</td>
<td>Effective curriculum • Extra-curricular work • Student involvement</td>
<td>Growing up LGBT resource training for SPHE/RSE staff</td>
<td>:: Attitudes toward LGBT young people increases from baseline to end of project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:: project planning and development, and training and support</td>
<td>Awareness session for BoM and PA</td>
<td>:: Knowledge of LGBT issues, homophobic bullying, etc. increases from baseline to end of project</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belong To time</td>
<td>Community awareness session</td>
<td>:: Ability to respond to homophobic bullying enhanced</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:: project coordination input, planning and development, training and specialist support</td>
<td>Growing up LGBT curriculum resource delivered to students</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating schools’ time</td>
<td>Schools participate in Stand Up!</td>
<td>:: During interviews students report benefits in attitudes &amp; knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:: in-school coordination, participation in training and curriculum delivery</td>
<td>Extra-curricular activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Barriers

Sustained over time? | Competing demands | Mainstreaming? | Difficult to monitor | Need for on-going support |
With these project inputs, a range of training events for staff from the two schools was delivered, as well as awareness-raising sessions for the Boards of Management, Parents Associations and broader community organisations. Teachers, in turn, delivered the *Growing Up LGBT* Curriculum resource to students and participated in Stand Up!

Teachers completed questionnaires probing their knowledge, attitudes and ability to respond to homophobic bullying. These questionnaires were administered at four time points – prior to the project commencing, prior to training, after training and at the end of the school year. The findings here were overwhelmingly positive, with large statistically significant improvements in all domains over the duration of the project. In general, this would suggest that the project increased the capacity of the schools to support LGBT young people.

Students also reported positive changes over the school year in their questionnaire responses, though these changes were evident for both students in the pilot schools and a sample from control schools that did not participate in the project. However, it would appear that one of the ‘control’ schools independently ran a series of LGBT-related activities over the course of the previous year and the teachers in this school also completed LGBT awareness training in the past. The increase in attitudes and knowledge in the ‘control’ sample, then, may reflect this work. As such, the pilot schools were not necessarily being compared with a neutral control sample but rather a ‘comparison’ sample involved in a less intensive and structured LGBT programme.

Overall, the testimony of the students and staff in the pilot schools suggested that the project had impacted on the whole school environment. The students and staff were clear that the project had engendered positive attitudes towards LGBT young people, had improved their knowledge of LGBT issues and had enhanced their sensitivity towards homophobic bullying.
Processes

In terms of project facilitators, teachers suggested that the expertise of BeLonG To, HSE involvement in the project, the quality of the training provided and the quality of the Stand Up! Campaign enhanced the effectiveness of the project. This was echoed by the students, who felt that the Growing Up LGBT SPHE curriculum was very accessible (particularly the video sessions), and that the extra-curricular work gave them an opportunity to contribute to a more inclusive school environment. An important facilitator of the project was the involvement of students, through the Health Promoting Schools initiative, in the decision making processes during the LGBT Safe and Supportive Schools Project.

A number of challenges to running the project were also identified. Staff felt that it was difficult to sustain a year-long initiative and that in the future there needed to be some system for improving this. They also noted that there were multiple competing demands for students' time and that consideration needed to be given to mainstreaming the LGBT content into the rest of the curriculum.

The SPHE Coordinators struggled to monitor what exactly was being covered in the different classes and suggested that a monitoring form should be included in the resource materials in the future. They also felt that the sustainability of the project, in its current form, will be determined by the ability of BeLonG To and the HSE to provide on-going support to schools.
Recommendations

1. The findings emerging from this pilot would suggest that there is great value in replicating the project at multiple sites, allowing for a larger scale evaluation of the impact of the project on the whole school environment.

2. The partnership between a national LGBT youth specialist organisation and a regional statutory health promotion service was particularly significant in the programme. This allowed the programme to benefit from national, and indeed international, good practice in policy and curriculum development and to ‘plug into’ highly regarded existing regional health promotion programmes and structures. This form of ‘expert partnership’ could be considered in other areas of the country to maximise the impact of LGBT inclusiveness work in schools.

3. The project team should review the questionnaires and consider including additional items that may ‘tap’ dimensions of knowledge, attitudes and self-efficacy that were not included in the interim evaluation.

4. Additional steps should be taken to increase the sample size for the pre-post evaluation, with a minimum of 50 students at junior cycle and 50 students at senior cycle participating in the evaluation. These should be matched with a similar number of students in ‘control’ schools.

5. The findings of this evaluation demonstrate clearly that staff training had a dramatic and wide-ranging impact on staff members in terms of knowledge of LGBT issues and their attitudes towards LGBT young people. Moreover, there is clear evidence that the training enhanced their ability to respond to LGBT bullying in schools. It is also remarkable that the impact of this training was maintained 9 months after its delivery. This indicates clearly that teacher and staff training is key to creating LGBT safe and supportive schools. As such, consideration should be given to how this training could be delivered to greater numbers of whole school staff across the country.

6. Guidance Counsellors and SPHE Coordinators reported experiencing difficulties monitoring the activities and lesson plans being covered in class. A monitoring form should be included in future resources to aid the monitoring process.

7. Consideration needs to be given to how best to schedule a year long programme of activities. It may be the case that short intensive bursts of activity run at different times in the school year would be easier for schools to schedule e.g. BeLonG To’s Stand Up! Week, Anti-Bullying Week, Mental Health Week, etc.

8. Consideration should be given as to how LGBT content, as well as existing within the SPHE curriculum, can be embedded in other curriculum areas.

9. The LGBT Safe and Supportive Schools Project should be synthesized into a user-friendly toolkit, including a step-by-step guide, an outline of the national policy context, a self-assessment form and monitoring form for SPHE Coordinators and Guidance Counsellors. Such a toolkit, particularly if combined with significant staff training, could have a very positive effect in other schools.
**Conclusion**

The next section of this report sets out the importance of providing school-based awareness raising programmes to combat homophobic and transphobic bullying. The empirical evidence from large-scale meta-analytic reviews is conclusive – where LGBT students feel alienated or marginalised in schools, and experience harassment or bullying of any form, this can lead to the onset of affective disorders such as depression and anxiety. In some cases this ultimately leads to suicidal ideation and/or deliberate self harm.

Against this backdrop, an initiative such as the *LGBT Safe and Supportive Schools Project* has the potential to improve the lives of young LGBT people. Theoretically this can be achieved by teaching young people about LGBT issues and about the impact of bullying on their peers. Ultimately, schools can develop cultures of acceptance and openness, creating a better environment for all students regardless of identity (e.g. sexual orientation, ethnicity or religion).
Section 1: Introduction, Context and Evaluation

1.0 Introduction

The link between homophobic bullying, mental health difficulties and suicidality

Reach Out: National Strategy for Action on Suicide Prevention (2005-2014) notes that marginalised groups, such as LGBT people, ‘often experience discrimination and can be vulnerable to self-harming behaviour.’

This reflects the conclusions reached in a large body of research. A number of meta-analytic and systematic reviews of the empirical literature have consistently demonstrated that LGBT young people are more likely to experience harassment, bullying and other forms of victimization than their heterosexual peers.

These reviews have also concluded that such experiences can lead to mental health difficulties among LGBT young people, and ultimately result in higher levels of suicidal ideation and suicide. Indeed there is universal acceptance in the academic and mental health sectors that there is a direct causal relationship between experiences of homophobic harassment and suicidality – based primarily on a series of high-impact empirical studies that demonstrated this effect in different jurisdictions.

Research in Ireland would suggest that LGBT young people here encounter a range of negative experiences in post-primary schools. The Supporting LGBT Lives Study, conducted under the auspices of Trinity College Dublin's Children's Research Centre, reported that 27 per cent of survey respondents had a history of self-harming and almost 18 per cent of respondents had attempted suicide at some stage in their lives. On average those who reported self-harming had done so for a period of just over four and a half years. Seventy percent of respondents (n=1,110) felt that it was hard for them to be accepted at school, while over 70% of respondents felt they couldn’t be themselves at school. Furthermore, only 40% of respondents agreed that there was at least one teacher or one other adult in the school to whom they could talk.

During interviews many of those who engaged in self-harming or suicidal behaviour directly linked these actions to their LGBT identity and experiences of being gay. The research also reported significant associations between a range of negative LGBT-related experiences (homophobic harassment, assault, etc.) and suicidal ideation.

A recent paper published in the International Journal of Mental Health Nursing examined LGBT individuals’ experiences of mental health service provision in Ireland. Findings indicated that a high percentage of participants had a mental health issue, with 77% having received a psychiatric diagnosis. Fifty-seven percent had been diagnosed with depression.
Finally, a report by the Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI) on the mental health of transgender people in Ireland found that participants (n= 164) were ‘at much higher risk of negative mental health, self harm and suicide than the general population.’ There was a high rate of stress, depression and anxiety among participants, with almost 50% having self-harmed over the course of their lives, and almost 80% having considered suicide. Self-harm and suicidal thoughts were generally higher among participants before ‘transition’.

Overall, the Irish research is very much in line with international studies that have found depression and self-harm to be far more widespread amongst LGBT youth than their heterosexual peers.

**Responding to mental health needs and risk of suicidal behaviour**

*Reach Out: National Strategy for Action on Suicide Prevention (2005-2014)* emphasises the need to investigate the risk of engaging in suicidal behaviour among minority groups, and to develop services to ‘improve mental health and well-being and reduce the risk of suicidal behaviour’.

One setting through which services can be offered is in post-primary education. Over the last three decades a number of countries in the EU, North America and elsewhere have implemented anti-homophobic bullying initiatives in post-primary settings. Meta-analyses of the impact of these programmes on victimisation suggest that they can reduce such experiences by between 17 and 23 percent, and that they can also have a positive impact on attitudes towards LGBT young people, knowledge of LGBT issues and self-perception.

A recent study examining the impact of introducing homophobic bullying initiatives in post-primary schools in British Columbia, Canada, reported positive effects of such initiatives. Based on a survey of more than 21,000 students, the researchers compared mental health outcomes, suicidal ideation and suicidal behaviour among students in schools with a homophobic bullying policy and Gay-Straight Alliance in place for more than three years, less than three years and without any initiatives in place. LGB students attending schools with such initiatives in place for more than three years were less likely to report experiences of discrimination, suicidal ideation or attempted suicide. Importantly, the effect was also present for heterosexual boys, suggesting that building an inclusive and supportive environment for LGB young people can impact on the broader school population.
In an Irish setting, a report by Trinity College Dublin based on questionnaire data from 475 5th year students and 561 2nd year students reported high levels of experiences of homophobic bullying, with 18.2 percent of males reporting having been bullied through name-calling (9% of females), with younger males particularly at risk of these experiences. One quarter (25%) of males in 2nd year reported being bullied by being called “gay”. The report concluded that anti-homophobic bullying interventions should be delivered in post-primary settings here.\textsuperscript{10}
1.1 Context

The LGBT Safe and Supportive Schools Project was established to create schools that are fully inclusive of LGBT young people. In part the project was motivated by findings from a survey of post-primary schools in Donegal which suggested that:

a) Less than half of the schools had a staff member that was responsible for progressing the school’s response to LGBT issues.

b) Less than half of the schools had good practice guidelines for supporting a student who ‘comes out’.

c) Less than one third of the schools participated in the annual LGBT anti-bullying week.

d) No school reported that the members of the school’s Board of Management or Parents Association had participated in LGBT awareness training.

In the planning and development stage of the project, a Whole School Community model was envisioned that involved working with teachers, parents, students and the broader community to build a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for LGBT young people. Drawing on research in relation to LGBT young people in the school setting, as well as best practice in promoting health and wellbeing through the Health Promoting School approach, six areas of action to comprise the model were proposed. The planned approach is illustrated in Figure 2.

After an initial period of planning and development, an open invitation was sent to all Principals of Post-Primary Schools in Donegal to attend a project briefing meeting. Following this, the project partners welcomed expressions of interest to pilot the LGBT Safe and Supportive Schools Project model in the 2013/14 academic year and two schools agreed to participate. The project partners met with key members of staff at each school to discuss the project in more detail and, from this, a core team in each school was formed to drive the project internally and ensure that all elements of the model were addressed from a school perspective.
Using the six action areas of the proposed model, the project partners throughout the academic year, supported the participating schools to implement the model as follows:

1. **Policy and Planning**

All schools are required, by the Department of Education and Skills (DES), to have an up to date Anti-Bullying Policy in line with the DES Action Plan on Bullying and Anti-Bullying Procedures (2014). Schools participating in the pilot had already taken steps to revise their Anti-Bullying Policy and therefore the project partners reviewed this policy (and the School Guidance Policy) from an LGBT perspective and provided feedback. In terms of planning, the project created a specific core team of interested staff comprising the School Principal, Guidance Counsellor, SPHE Coordinator and Home School Liaison Coordinator, who agreed to lead efforts to respond to LGBT issues in the school; to ensure that homophobic bullying is included in the anti-bullying policy and to keep LGBT on the school’s agenda.
2. Curriculum and Learning

Following specific training, SPHE staff were asked to deliver the RSE/SPHE resource *Growing up Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender: A Resource for SPHE and RSE*, which contains 10 lesson plans for Junior Cycle and 8 lessons plans for Senior Cycle. All staff were asked to be aware of and challenge anti-LGBT language in their classrooms and wider school environment.

3. Safe and Supportive Environment

Many LGBT young people report that they do not feel they belong to the school – they lack a sense of acceptance and connectedness. The project sought to address this by encouraging the participating schools to create an environment that supports LGBT identity including displaying information about national and local supports for LGBT young people and LGBT posters. Schools were also encouraged to participate in BeLonG To’s Stand Up! LGBT Awareness Week, which includes activities aimed at making the school environment more LGBT friendly.

4. Community Partnership

The project sought to pro-actively link with those outside the school setting with a view to having a community wide impact. This included linking with youth and community organisations, and with parents and families in the form of an information and awareness session. LGBT information booklets, specifically for parents, were also provided to key personnel to use as appropriate. This approach aimed to create a more inclusive, external environment for LGBT students and teachers, as well as providing information and support for parents of LGBT young people.

5. Direct supports to young people

The project sought to build the capacity of the schools to respond to the needs of individual students. This involved identifying key members of staff who could offer support to young people (e.g. when coming out) and also to ensure that the schools have the referral details for services that can provide support to LGBT young people and their families.

6. Staff Training and Development

The project partners provided full day whole staff training to participating schools to ensure that they had enhanced knowledge of LGBT issues and would feel equipped to respond to homophobic or transphobic bullying when it arises. The training also ensured that staff would be aware of the importance of challenging anti-gay language in class and in the wider school environment.
1.2 Evaluation

The evaluation aimed to assess the effectiveness of the LGBT Safe and Supportive Schools Project in the two pilot sites. The evaluator, working in conjunction with BeLonG To and HSE Health Promotion and Improvement Department, met prior to project commencement and agreed the evaluation methodology. There were two core components to the evaluation:

1. Recording of Inputs

   To record the project inputs (the cost of running the project in financial and staff time). BeLonG To and the HSE Health Promotion and Improvement Department in Donegal provided information on expenditure and the time invested in supporting the project (Reported in Section 2).

2. Evaluation of the Project Objectives

   Each project objective was evaluated (Reported in Section 3). Where relevant this took the form of:

   a) Evaluation of outputs (Output Evaluation) – or the materials that were generated by the project partners, and activities that they engaged in, in order to enhance the successful attainment of the project objectives.

   b) Evaluation of outcomes (Outcome Evaluation) – Working with BeLonG To and the HSE Health Promotion and Improvement, the evaluator designed a series of bespoke measurement tools to measure the impact of the project on teachers and students. These tools were administered at multiple time points over the duration of the project, allowing for an evaluation of the extent and nature of the impact of the project. The tools were administered in-class, either by the project partners or school staff.

   c) Evaluation of the experiences of participants (Process Evaluation) – Interviews were conducted with students in the two sites; the first set by the evaluator and the second set of interviews by a BeLonG To staff member. These interviews were conducted at the end of the project and sought to examine the experiences of the students, the perceived strengths of Stand Up! and aspects that could be enhanced (i.e. a process evaluation). Interviews were also conducted with staff members (Principals, SPHE and Guidance Counsellors and other teaching staff) for the same purpose.

An ad-hoc Research Ethics Committee was formed, comprising research ethics specialists from a third-level institution. This committee made recommendations to ensure that the evaluation conformed to best-practice in conducting research with young people. Parents received detailed information on the project and were asked to consent to their child participating in the evaluation. The student provided written assent. Both parental consent and the participant assent were required before students were allowed to participate in the evaluation.
Belong To Poster circulated to schools as part of the STAND UP! Campaign
Section 2: Inputs

Funding for the project was provided by the HSE and covered the period December 2012 to September 2014. The main costs related to project overheads for BeLonG To, evaluation costs and salary costs associated with training, administration and project coordination.

The time dedicated by HSE Health Promotion and Improvement staff was not quantified in financial terms as these costs would have been incurred, even if the project had not been delivered. However, it is relevant to note that the HSE Health Promotion and Improvement Department estimate that approximately 41 working days were dedicated to the project, including planning and development, meeting with schools and administering questionnaires. It is important to note that there is considerable time-cost implications in planning and preparation of schools-based projects, and that these costs are largely once-off and not incurred when projects are subsequently rolled-out.
Section 3: Evaluation of the Objectives – Project Outputs and Outcomes

3.0 Objective 1: To have an impact on teachers.

Description

The first objective of the project was to increase teachers’ knowledge about homophobic bullying and their efficacy in responding to such issues. It also sought to enhance teachers’ skills in responding to and supporting LGBT young people who are ‘coming out’.

Outputs

Whole staff training

Training was delivered to all staff in both schools, separately, over a full day (9.30 am – 3.30 pm) in August 2013, prior to the commencement of the new academic year. Teachers used one of their allotted DES training days. Training was delivered in the form of a short presentation, small group work, case studies, role-play exercises and BeLonG To’s Stand Up! videos. A strong focus of the training was on experiential learning and staff were encouraged to reflect on their own attitudes and personal experiences of bias towards LGBT people and to work together to reach appropriate solutions in each context. The following areas were covered in training:

i. Understanding our own attitudes and bias, and that of society more broadly, when it comes to LGBT issues

ii. LGBT terminology

iii. Current research on Irish LGBT young people

iv. National policy and legislation as it applies to LGBT young people in schools

v. How to support an LGBT young person coming out

vi. Challenging homophobic and transphobic language and bullying

vii. How to make schools safe for LGBT young people – using the LGBT Safe and Supportive Schools model

viii. Next steps and commitment to work as a staff body to implement the LGBT Safe and Supportive Schools model
**Growing Up LGBT resource training**

Two half-day training sessions were delivered to the SPHE teachers in each school after the whole school training had taken place. This training provided an overview of *Growing Up Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender: A Resource for SPHE and RSE* and teachers considered how best to deliver the resource to students in their school. The video and all sections of the resource were considered and questions, challenges and ideas on teaching *Growing Up LGBT* were then discussed. The feedback from teachers on this resource was very positive with teachers viewing it as solid, practical, and feasible.

**Awareness session for Board of Management and Parents Association**

An information/awareness session was held in each school for the Board of Management and Parents Association. This awareness session introduced the work of BeLonG To and HSE - Health Promotion and Improvement; presented the background to and rationale for carrying out the study; outlined existing policy and legislation on bullying and equality; outlined the *LGBT Safe and Supportive Schools Project* and facilitated the provision of feedback and the discussion of questions and concerns.

**Community Awareness session**

A 2-hour community awareness session was delivered in each school for interested community groups that focused on LGBT awareness and the importance of a whole school community approach.

**Outcomes**

A questionnaire was designed by the evaluator, which probed participant knowledge of relevant policy, and their attitudes towards and knowledge of a range of LGBT issues. Questionnaires were distributed at four time-points. Initially the questionnaires were administered before the programme commenced (‘baseline’). Subsequently, questionnaires were administered both prior to (‘pre’) and immediately after (‘post’) the one-day whole staff training. Finally, questionnaires were administered at the end of the school year, in May (‘follow-up’).

102 school staff took part in this study, 38 of whom (37.3%) were male and 64 of whom (62.7%) were female. Participants had a mean age of 37.26 (SD = 8.15), and a majority (84.3%) were teaching staff. Most participants reported that they had attained a postgraduate qualification (72.5%), and lived in a ‘rural’ area (52.9%).
Of the 102 participants, 30 completed the questionnaire for the first three time-points. We present the findings for baseline to post-training below. Subsequently we report on the impact of the training over the four time points, drawing on data from the 15 individuals who provided information for all four time points. The data presented below are based on these 30 participants.

**Baseline to post-training**

This first set of analyses relates to the 30 staff members who provided responses to the questionnaires at baseline, pre-training and post-training. The findings suggest that there was a significant and large increase in knowledge of LBGT issues and in positive attitudes towards LBGT young people, over that time period. These changes can be attributed to the training provided as the increase in scores occurred from pre-training to post-training (see Table 1 and Figures 3 and 4). Statistically, the magnitude of these changes was large. This finding indicates that the training was successful in increasing both teachers’ knowledge of and positive attitudes towards LBGT young people.

**Table 1: Total Knowledge and Attitude change from Baseline to post-training.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Baseline M (SD)</th>
<th>Pre-Training M (SD)</th>
<th>Post-Training M (SD)</th>
<th>Size of impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge Total</strong></td>
<td>16.97 (2.5)</td>
<td>16.34 (3.04)</td>
<td>19.50 (1.2)</td>
<td>Large**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Attitude Total</strong></td>
<td>151.61 (18.5)</td>
<td>146.68 (21.7)</td>
<td>169.62 (12.0)</td>
<td>Large **</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*<.05, **<.01. Note: ‘Size of impact’ based on Partial h2 effect size (small >.02, medium >.13, large>.26).

**Figure 3: Knowledge**

![Figure 3: Knowledge](image)

**Figure 4: Attitudes**

![Figure 4: Attitudes](image)
When the specific areas of knowledge were examined in more detail, it was clear that the staff had acquired knowledge across a range of areas during the training including awareness of national policy and legislation, as well as of their school’s anti-bullying policy (see Table 2, below). Staff members also reported being more confident in their ability to explain policy to another member of staff if asked to do so – a measure of perceived self-efficacy (see Table 3).

Table 2: Awareness of policy climate (% reporting that they were aware)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Baseline % Aware</th>
<th>Pre-Training % Aware</th>
<th>Post-Training % Aware</th>
<th>Size of impact % Aware</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Policy Awareness</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Large**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Legislation Awareness</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>86.7</td>
<td>Large**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Bullying</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Homophobic Bullying</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>92.9</td>
<td>Large**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Transphobic Bullying</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Medium*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Equality</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>64.3</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Equality LGBT</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>70.4</td>
<td>Medium*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Confidentiality</td>
<td>60.7</td>
<td>65.5</td>
<td>85.2</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*=.05, **=.01. Note: ‘Size of impact’ based on Partial $h^2$ effect size (small >.02, medium >.13, large>.26).
Table 3: Confidence explaining policy to other members of staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Baseline Confidence</th>
<th>Pre-Confidence</th>
<th>Post-Confidence</th>
<th>Size of Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Policy LGBT in school</td>
<td>1.86 (1.57)</td>
<td>1.93 (1.55)</td>
<td>3.97 (0.96)</td>
<td>Large**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Bullying</td>
<td>4.17 (0.71)</td>
<td>4.03 (1.16)</td>
<td>4.47 (0.68)</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Homophobic Bullying</td>
<td>3.07 (1.32)</td>
<td>2.87 (1.43)</td>
<td>4.10 (1.01)</td>
<td>Large**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Transphobic Bullying</td>
<td>2.23 (1.39)</td>
<td>2.53 (1.31)</td>
<td>3.90 (1.06)</td>
<td>Large**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Equality</td>
<td>3.39 (1.29)</td>
<td>3.39 (1.23)</td>
<td>4.17 (0.93)</td>
<td>Medium**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Equality LGBT</td>
<td>2.62 (1.35)</td>
<td>2.70 (1.34)</td>
<td>3.83 (1.15)</td>
<td>Large**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Confidentiality</td>
<td>3.18 (1.49)</td>
<td>3.80 (1.19)</td>
<td>4.17 (0.76)</td>
<td>Medium**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*<.05, **<.01. Note: ‘Size of impact’ based on Partial h² effect size (small >.02, medium >.13, large>.26).

The final section of the questionnaire presented teachers with six different scenarios and asked how they would feel responding to the scenario. The results are summarised in Table 4. As illustrated in the table, the training had a positive impact on the confidence of the staff members to intervene in these scenarios, in their knowledge of how to intervene and their willingness to intervene. The finding is notable as it illustrates that the training had an impact on the skills of the teachers in this area and their perceived self-efficacy in responding to LGBT bullying in schools.

In summary here, we would conclude that the training has had a dramatic and wide-ranging impact on staff members in terms of knowledge of LGBT issues and their attitudes towards LGBT young people. Moreover, there is clear evidence that the training enhanced their ability to respond to LGBT bullying in schools.
Table 4: Impact of the training on confidence and self-efficacy (Sig - significant improvements)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Comfortable Intervening</th>
<th>Knows how to intervene</th>
<th>Would Intervene</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two students call a third student a ‘fag’</td>
<td>Sig</td>
<td>Sig</td>
<td>Sig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two students kick a third student calling student ‘queer’</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>Sig</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student excluded from group because gay</td>
<td>Sig</td>
<td>Sig</td>
<td>Sig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student excluded from group because transgender</td>
<td>Sig</td>
<td>Sig</td>
<td>Sig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff member refers to another staff member as a ‘fag’</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>Sig</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student tells you he/she is coming out</td>
<td>Sig</td>
<td>Sig</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Impact on teachers at follow-up

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>Pre-Training</th>
<th>Post-Training</th>
<th>Follow-up</th>
<th>Size of impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(SD)</td>
<td>(SD)</td>
<td>(SD)</td>
<td>(SD)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge Total</td>
<td>16.60</td>
<td>16.53</td>
<td>19.67</td>
<td>19.20</td>
<td>Large**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.35)</td>
<td>(2.95)</td>
<td>(1.05)</td>
<td>(1.32)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Attitude Total</td>
<td>152.36</td>
<td>147.75</td>
<td>171.54</td>
<td>168.53</td>
<td>Large*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(18.98)</td>
<td>(25.60)</td>
<td>(13.91)</td>
<td>(12.71)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*=<.05, **<.01. Note: ‘Size of impact’ based on Partial ω2 effect size (small >.02, medium >.13, large>.26)
**Follow-up**

Teachers were asked to complete a follow-up questionnaire 7 months after the training took place. The purpose of this questionnaire was to assess whether the learning outcomes evident post-training were maintained. Of the 102 teachers who took part in the study, 51 teachers completed the follow-up questionnaire and a total of 15 of these teachers provided data at all four time points. The data for these 15 teachers were analysed separately to assess the effects of the intervention over the four time-points. The findings suggested that there was a meaningful increase in LGBT knowledge from pre-training to post-training in this sub-sample of teachers and this was maintained at follow-up. Positive attitudes towards LGBT young people also increased from pre-training to post-training and this increase was also maintained at follow-up (see Table 5).

In addition, for the six scenarios the improvement in confidence in ability to respond, and willingness to respond to LGBT bullying, was maintained with follow-up results being more positive than pre-training results and similar to post-training results.

In summary, we would conclude that the dramatic improvements in knowledge, attitudes and behavioural self-efficacy were sustained over the course of the project.

**Facilitators/Barriers**

**Facilitators:**

**HSE Involvement:** The schools reported having a strong relationship with, and trust in, the individuals in the local Health Promotion and Improvement Department. This positive local relationship, coupled with the fact that the HSE has a statutory role in promoting the health of young people, enhanced the receptiveness of schools to the project.

**BeLonG To involvement at national level:** The teachers reported that BeLonG To’s involvement in the National Action Plan on Bullying, and in other work at a national level, gave the project credibility.

**Quality of Training:** Teachers and school staff viewed the training provided by BeLonG To as being of very high quality and effective. This training, according to BeLonG To, has been adapted from existing BeLonG To training, which has been delivered to school staff over the last decade. During this time, the training has been revised based on feedback from school staff.

**Stand Up!:** The Stand Up! Awareness Campaign was an integral part of the LGBT Safe and Supportive Schools Project. The two schools saw value in having a short intense programme of work that brought together many of the elements of the curriculum (*Growing Up Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender: A Resource Guide for SPHE and RSE*).
Barriers/Challenges to the successful implementation of the project:

Sustained activities: One challenge reported by the school staff was that it was difficult to sustain a year-long programme of activities. Some staff found it difficult to maintain focus for the full year. They contrasted this “slow burn” approach with Stand Up!, which was described as a “short-term flurry of activity”.

Competing demands: On a related point, the school staff noted that there are multiple competing demands for students and staff (“the curriculum is jam packed”, one noted). There are a number of themed weeks (e.g. Mental Health Week, Seachtain na Gaeilge, etc.) that are as important for the school as the LGBT focus.

LGBT bullying just another form of bullying: Some of the staff suggested that it would be preferable to cover LGBT bullying within the broader anti-bullying curriculum.

Mainstreaming: More generally, some staff felt that the LGBT Safe and Supportive Schools Project could only be sustainable if it is mainstreamed within the wider curriculum. One proposed that it could be embedded in the SPHE curriculum. Others felt that it could be delivered as part of the Transition Year curriculum, where there is already an emphasis on SPHE, and where students generally have more time for social and emotional development.

Coordination: The SPHE staff, who were responsible for coordinating the project at school-level, reported that it was difficult to monitor exactly what was being covered with each class. This is because the content covered by each class was determined by the class teacher, and with different teachers leading different classes, there was considerable variability in the content being covered. The SPHE coordinators proposed that in future years the support pack sent out by BeLonG To should include monitoring forms that can be completed by the class teachers for each class and returned to the SPHE coordinator for collating.

More support and resources: Staff reported that on-going support in implementing the project, beyond provision of a pack to schools, is essential to the sustainability of the project. This support was provided during the pilot, but one staff member felt that ‘more resources’ and ‘a dedicated phone line’ would be helpful.
3.1 Objective 2:
To have an impact on students

Description
The second objective of the LGBT Safe and Supportive Schools Project was to have an impact on students. The expectation was that students who participated in a curriculum on LGBT issues would have increased knowledge of LGBT issues and more positive attitudes towards LGBT young people. This, in turn, should impact on behaviour, in the form of rejecting and standing-up to homophobic bullying.

The specific objectives were as follows:

i. To enhance understanding of what it is like for young people who are LGBT and the difficulties they face in coming out.

ii. To increase knowledge of what homophobic bullying is and the impact it can have on LGBT young people.

iii. To enhance understanding of what it is like for transgender young people and the difficulties they face in coming out.

iv. To inform students about the impact that supportive friends can have and of ways that LGBT young people can be supported by others.

v. To increase positive attitudes towards LGBT young people.

We evaluated this objective through pre-post testing of knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of students and through interviews with students at the end of the year-long project.

Outputs
Class-room work
Training was delivered to students as part of the SPHE Curriculum at Junior Cycle level and as part of the RSE Curriculum at Senior Cycle level using the Growing Up LGBT resource. Lessons were delivered on respectful communication; gender; coming out to self and to others; friendship; prejudice and discrimination; relationships; transgender identity; supports and celebrations. The content was ‘age appropriate’ and varied from Junior to Senior cycle.
School participation in Stand Up!

Students participated in Stand Up! LGBT Awareness Week, which takes place nationally in schools and Youthreach centres and is aimed at creating positive understanding of LGBT young people and their issues. Stand Up! Week was held from 10 - 14 March 2014. An Educational Pack for Stand Up! including a poster and activities, was available to all post-primary schools. Recommended activities for Stand Up! included putting up posters in the school, holding an assembly in which Stand Up! videos are shown, and holding a ‘Chalk it Up’ event in which students are invited to use coloured chalk to draw and to write positive messages about LGBT and young people in public spaces (e.g. walls and on the pavement).

Other

Posters, other artwork including a colourful zebra crossing and positive messages were painted by 2nd and 4th year students and displayed throughout the school to increase awareness of homophobic bullying and to inform students of events taking place in the school for Stand Up! week, etc. (see Figure 5).

Outcomes

Pre and post measures of attitudes, knowledge and behaviour were administered at the beginning (pre) and again at the end of the project (post). The intention was to match the pre and post responses for each student and measure the impact of the project for students in the pilot schools and compare this to the impact on students in the control schools.

Pre- and post-training questionnaires were matched for 29 Junior Cycle students (16 females, 13 males). Eighteen of these were in the pilot schools and the remainder (n=11) in the control schools. Participants had a mean age of 13.35 years (SD = 1.01) and the majority of these participants (41%) were in their first year of secondary school, with 35% in their second year, and 24% in their third year.
The findings (see Table 6) suggest that overall there was a statistically significant increase in students’ knowledge of LGBT issues from pre-training to post-training. This increase however was seen for all students who completed the questionnaire (i.e., students who completed training and those in the control school). There was also an increase in students’ perceptions of the extent to which the students in their school are accepting of LGBT young people. Again, this increase was evident for students overall. These findings are considered later (Section 4 of this report).

### Facilitators/Barriers

**Effective and Accessible Curriculum:** Students responded in a very positive manner to the video material from the *Growing Up LGBT* resource shown in their SPHE and RSE classes, stating that it was particularly effective in enhancing their understanding of homophobic bullying. The videos were also singled out as being useful in depicting the significance of language used around LGBT issues, of the prejudice and discrimination experienced by LGBT young people and their experiences coming out to family and friends.

**Extracurricular activities:** Students also found the extra-curricular activities to be very effective. During site visits to the schools, the evaluators noted that there were a large number of LBGT-friendly art works on display at prominent positions on the campus. The students reported that they enjoyed spending time working on these projects and that it "made what we were saying seem real — that it wasn’t just words, that there was some action". Sample works of art are presented in Figure 5.

**Student Involvement:** It was notable that the schools had involved students in planning for the project, through the *Health Promoting Schools* initiative. This initiative, which is based on internationally recognised good-practice, involves students, staff and parents working together to promote the health of the whole school community. This provided a mechanism and forum through which the *Safe and Supportive Schools Project* could be introduced to the school, and through which students could take a lead role in directing related activities.

---

**Table 6: Means and standard deviations at pre-training and post-training for each group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Intervention group</th>
<th>Control group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-training</td>
<td>Post-training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>96.06</td>
<td>16.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes</td>
<td>55.89</td>
<td>5.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responding</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>3.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 5: Sample work on display at one school participating in the project.
Section 4: Synthesis, Conclusions and Recommendations

4.0 Synthesis

Figure 6 presents a graphical representation of the project inputs, outputs, outcomes and impact.

Inputs

The financial support provided by the HSE Health Promotion and Improvement Department was used to fund the project and evaluation. Training and support materials were provided by BeLonG To. In addition, the HSE provided staff time, the majority of which was dedicated to once-off start-up activities. BeLonG To provided staff time in relation to project coordination input, training and advice/support.

Outputs

With these inputs, the project delivered training events for staff of the schools, as well as awareness-raising sessions for the Boards of Management, Parents Associations and broader community organisations. Teachers delivered the *Growing Up LGBT* Curriculum to students. Stand Up! was viewed as being an essential element of the project, as were the extra-curricular activities that students engaged in.
Outcomes

Teachers benefited from the project, with the outcomes evaluation suggesting that there were large positive changes in their attitudes towards LBGT young people, their knowledge of LGBT bullying, and their ability to intervene effectively where they witnessed such events. In general, this would suggest that the project increased the capacity of the schools to support LBGT young people.

It is difficult to make assertions as to the efficacy of the project on students, with the outcomes evaluation of this component inconclusive (students in the pilot schools and control schools showed improvements). The absence of evidence of an impact on the students can be interpreted in a number of ways. It may also be the case that the sample size attained for the comparisons was insufficient to detect changes that occurred. Simply put, larger sample sizes allow analyses to be more sensitive to small but meaningful changes that occur over time and across groups. The evaluation had intended to draw on considerably larger sample sizes for these analyses, but difficulties were encountered when matching questionnaires from pre-to-post- matching of individual responses over time.

Second, it may be that the outcomes questionnaires were not sensitive to the changes that occurred. The questionnaires were designed based on a) established measures used in the literature and b) the content of the curriculum. However, this is not to say that other changes that occur more organically throughout the school year are ‘picked up’ in the pre-post testing. Both potential explanations should be considered further when preparing for a full-term future evaluation.

It is important to stress that the students did report positive changes over the school year in their questionnaire responses – the difficulty only arises because the students in the control schools reported similar improvements. Interestingly, it has since emerged that one of the control schools ran a series of LGBT-related activities over the course of the year, including the chalk-it-up event, and the teachers in this school also completed LGBT awareness training in the past. The increase in attitudes and knowledge in the ‘control’ sample, then, may reflect this work. As such, the pilot schools were not necessarily being compared with a neutral control sample but rather a ‘comparison’ sample involved in a less intensive and structured LGBT programme.

Overall, the testimony of the students and staff in the school suggested that the project had impacted on the whole school environment. The students and staff were clear that the project had engendered positive attitudes towards LBGT young people, had improved their knowledge of LGBT issues, and had enhanced their sensitivity towards hurtful behaviour or homophobic bullying.
**Processes**

In terms of project facilitators, teachers suggested that the expertise of BeLonG To, HSE involvement in the project, the quality of the training provided and the quality of the Stand Up! Campaign enhanced the effectiveness of the project. This was echoed by the students, who felt that the curriculum was very accessible (particularly the video sessions), and that the extra-curricular work gave them an opportunity to contribute to a more inclusive school environment. An important facilitator of the project was the involvement of students, through the Health Promoting Schools initiative, in the decision making processes behind the LGBT Safe and Supportive Schools Project.

A number of challenges to running the project were also identified. Staff felt that it was difficult to sustain a year-long initiative and that in the future there needed to be some system for improving this. They also noted that there were multiple competing demands for students’ time and that consideration needed to be given to mainstreaming the LGBT content into the rest of the curriculum.

The SPHE coordinators struggled to monitor what exactly was being covered in the different classes, and suggested that some form of monitoring form should be included in the support packs in the future. They also felt that the sustainability of the project, in its current form, will be determined by the ability of BeLonG To and the HSE to provide on-going support to schools.
4.1 Recommendations

1. The findings emerging from this pilot would suggest that there is great value in replicating the project at multiple sites, allowing for a larger scale evaluation of the impact of the project on the whole school environment.

2. The partnership between a national LGBT youth specialist organisation and a regional statutory health promotion service was particularly significant in the programme. This allowed the programme to benefit from national, and indeed international, good practice in policy and curriculum development and to ‘plug into’ highly regarded existing regional health promotion programmes and structures. This form of ‘expert partnership’ could be considered in other areas of the country to maximise the impact of LGBT inclusiveness work in schools.

3. The project team should review the questionnaires and consider including additional items that may ‘tap’ dimensions of knowledge, attitudes and self-efficacy that were not included in the interim evaluation.

4. Additional steps should be taken to increase the sample size for the pre-post evaluation, with a minimum of 50 students at junior cycle and 50 students at senior cycle participating in the evaluation. These should be matched with a similar number of students in ‘control’ schools.

5. The findings of this evaluation demonstrate clearly that staff training had a dramatic and wide-ranging impact on staff members in terms of knowledge of LGBT issues and their attitudes towards LGBT young people. Moreover, there is clear evidence that the training enhanced their ability to respond to LGBT bullying in schools. It is also remarkable that the impact of this training was maintained 9 months after its delivery. This indicates clearly that teacher and whole staff training is key to creating LGBT safe and supportive schools. As such, consideration should be given to how this training could be delivered to greater numbers of whole school staff across the country.

6. Guidance Counsellors and SPHE Coordinators reported experiencing difficulties monitoring the activities being covered in class. A monitoring form should be included in future resources to aid the monitoring process.

7. Consideration needs to be given to how best to schedule a year long programme of activities. It may be the case that short intensive bursts of activity run at different times in the school year would be easier for schools to schedule e.g. BeLonG To’s Stand Up! Week, Anti-Bullying Week, Mental Health Week, etc.

8. Consideration should be given as to how LGBT content, as well as existing within the SPHE curriculum, can be embedded in other curriculum areas.

9. The LGBT Safe and Supportive Schools Project should be synthesized into a user-friendly toolkit, including a step-by-step guide, an outline of the national policy context, a self-assessment form and monitoring form for SPHE Coordinators and Guidance Counsellors. Such a toolkit, particularly if combined with significant staff training, could have a very positive affect in other schools.
4.2 Conclusion

The introduction to this report sets out the importance of providing school-based awareness raising programmes to combat homophobic and transphobic bullying. The empirical evidence from large-scale meta-analytic reviews is conclusive – where LGBT students feel alienated or marginalised in schools, and experience harassment or bullying of any form, this can lead to the onset of affective disorders such as depression and anxiety. In some cases this ultimately leads to suicidal ideation and/or deliberate self harm.

Against this backdrop, a campaign such as the LGBT Safe and Supportive Schools Project has the potential to improve the lives of young LGBT people. Theoretically this can be achieved by teaching young people about LGBT issues and about the impact of bullying on their peers. Ultimately, schools can develop cultures of acceptance and openness, creating a better environment for all students regardless of identity (e.g. sexual orientation, ethnicity or religion).
References


11. Developed by the Department of Education and Skills, The Health Service Executive through the SPHE Support Service, in conjunction with GLEN (Gay and Lesbian Equality Newtork) and BeLonG To Youth Services

12. Statistical summary: Knowledge: Main effect for Time = partial h2=.35, p<.001). Acceptance: Main effect for Time = h2=.16, p<.05). There was no timeXgroup interaction effects. Thus, both groups increased in these measures over time.
Acknowledgements

HSE Health Promotion & Improvement and BeLonG To Youth Services would like to express their sincere appreciation and gratitude to the participating schools involved in the pilot study.

In particular, the two Principals for having the courage to volunteer as pilot schools and for providing strong leadership throughout the project.

To the core project teams in both schools who had the drive and determination to coordinate all aspects of the project and to sustain it throughout the year.

To the staff (teaching and non-teaching), Board of Management and Parents Association in both pilot schools for supporting your school to fully implement the project.

To the whole student body in both schools who engaged in the Growing Up LGBT Curriculum, participated in Belong To's Stand Up! Campaign, and created and took part in the many LGBT related activities that happened in your schools throughout the year.

To the two ‘control’ schools who took part in the research aspect of the project.

We would also like to express our gratitude to the Donegal BreakOut group and in particular the LGBT young people and their non-LGBT allies who spoke openly and honestly about their experiences in school.

We hope that this project and toolkit helps create safe, supportive and inclusive school environments now and in the future, and would encourage all schools to utilise the toolkit to make a difference in the lives of LGBT young people.