



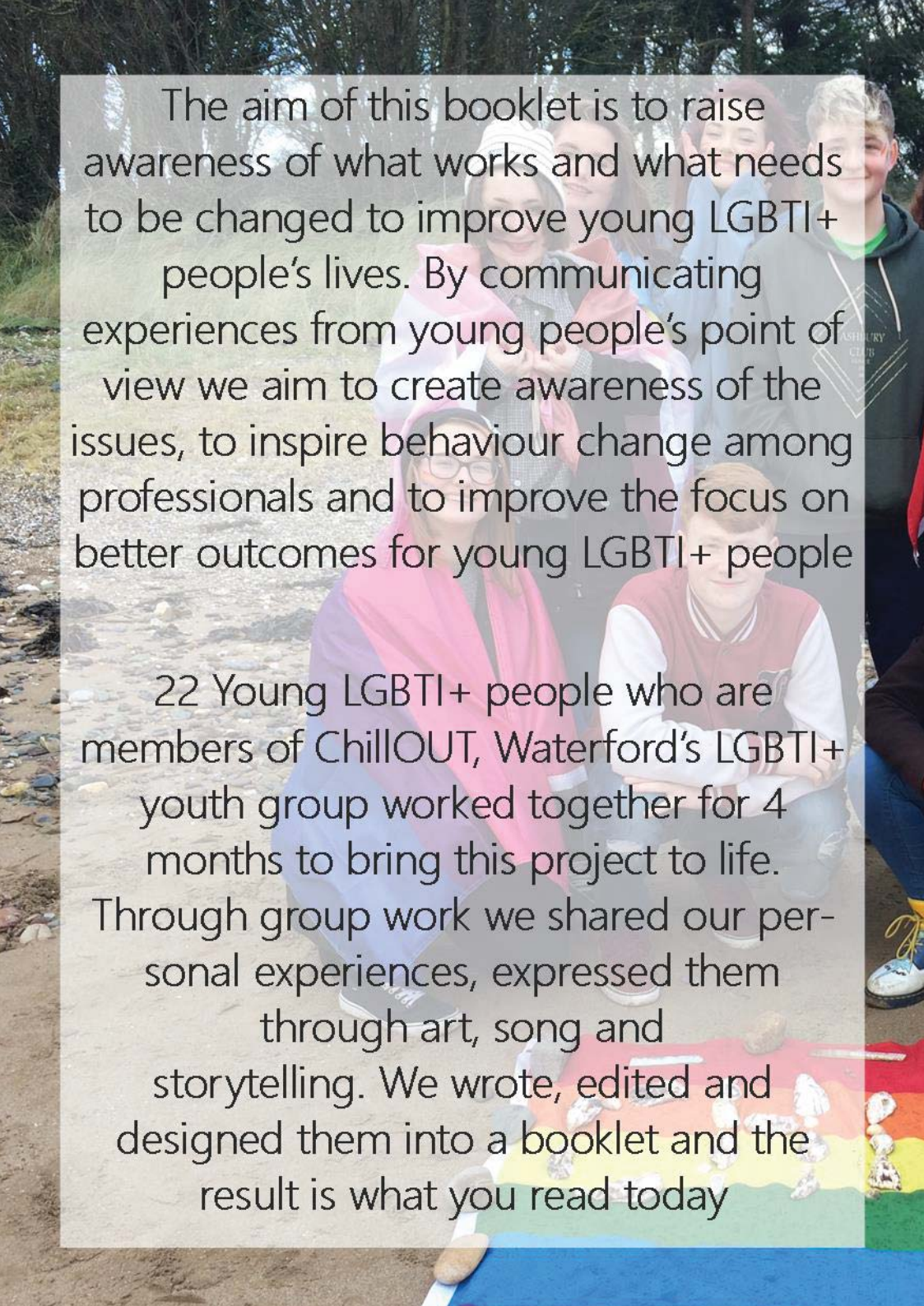
# LISTEN UP

Sharing the experiences of Young  
LGBTI+ People to guide professionals

Supported By:



An Roinn Leanaí  
agus Gnóthaí Óige  
Department of  
Children and Youth Affairs



The aim of this booklet is to raise awareness of what works and what needs to be changed to improve young LGBTI+ people's lives. By communicating experiences from young people's point of view we aim to create awareness of the issues, to inspire behaviour change among professionals and to improve the focus on better outcomes for young LGBTI+ people

22 Young LGBTI+ people who are members of ChillOUT, Waterford's LGBTI+ youth group worked together for 4 months to bring this project to life. Through group work we shared our personal experiences, expressed them through art, song and storytelling. We wrote, edited and designed them into a booklet and the result is what you read today

We would like to give a huge thank you to everyone involved in helping this project come to life

Suirdzign printing for helping to make our idea a booklet you can now hold in your hand and for getting involved with the young people and not just telling us what to do

ChillOUT Youth Project for supporting us get our voices heard and listened to

Waterford and South Tipperary Community Youth Service for making youth work with LGBTI+ young people in the South East a priority

The Department of Children and Youth affairs for giving us a grant to fund this project

And huge thank you to every young person who worked on this project to get our voices out there, for building the confidence to share their stories to make the future of other young LGBTQ+ people brighter and the world more accepting

Waterford & South Tipperary  
Community Youth Service



ChillOUT



An Roinn Leanaí  
agus Gnóthaí Óige

Department of  
Children and Youth Affairs

My experience with professionals in relation to the LGBT+ community hasn't been the most welcoming. When I fully realised that I had even the slightest attraction to the same sex as me, I felt like I had to tell at least someone important in my life at the time. I was twelve and I was in sixth class. I was close to my class teacher. She was youthful, witty and overall, from my perspective, a generous person. She was the first adult I told.

She seemed unaware and shocked. It was like I had told her something life changing that would cripple her. She managed to smile after her mix of emotions finished. All she said was:

"That's okay, I understand"

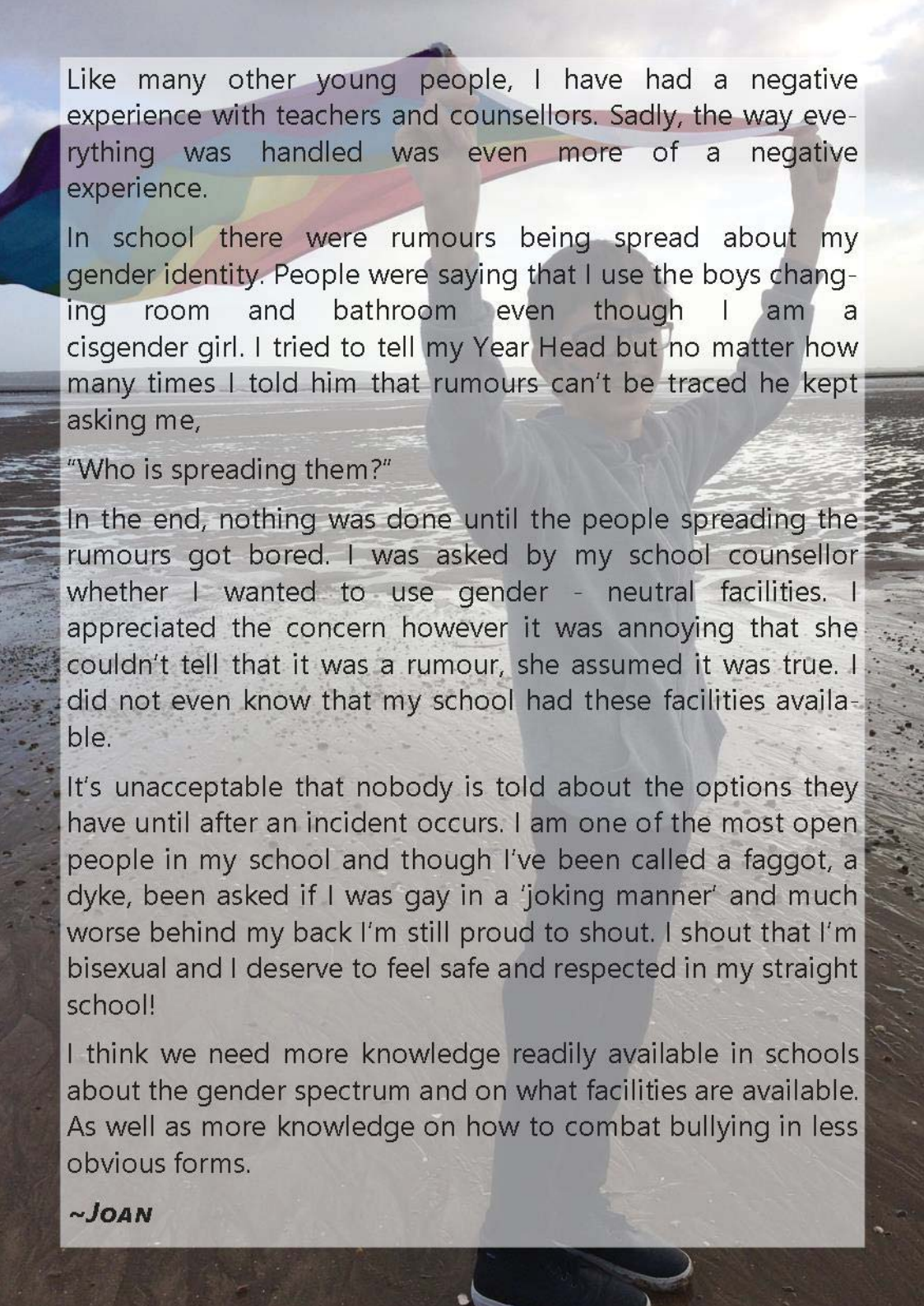
Skip to around six months later. I had never looked gayer in my preteen life. I was struggling on both the social and learning sides of school. I was slowly losing friends, and I wasn't doing too well. One day, I was waiting outside my principal's office for a school note on my own. My teacher, the vice principle and the principle were having a meeting. The walls in my primary school were thin, so I could hear the conversation they were having. I heard my name, some mumbling, and then something that made my skin burn:

"Sure, she's only a child and a devil worshipper"

I didn't know what to make of it. I wanted to run. I respected that she was ageing (my principal) but at the same time, I wanted to storm into the office and scream the school down. It was then that I realised the truth, my teacher had told everyone about my secret. That's when my paranoia started rushing in, who knew exactly? Why did they do that?

I can remember my knees shaking uncontrollably. My mind was going to cynical places that were profound. I couldn't handle that. I wanted to run as far as I possibly could possibly go, but I couldn't. That was possibly the worst day of my primary school experience.

-Seven

A person is standing on a sandy beach, holding a large rainbow flag high above their head with both arms. The flag is spread wide, showing its full spectrum of colors. The person is wearing a dark jacket and dark pants. The background shows the ocean waves and a cloudy sky.

Like many other young people, I have had a negative experience with teachers and counsellors. Sadly, the way everything was handled was even more of a negative experience.

In school there were rumours being spread about my gender identity. People were saying that I use the boys changing room and bathroom even though I am a cisgender girl. I tried to tell my Year Head but no matter how many times I told him that rumours can't be traced he kept asking me,

"Who is spreading them?"

In the end, nothing was done until the people spreading the rumours got bored. I was asked by my school counsellor whether I wanted to use gender - neutral facilities. I appreciated the concern however it was annoying that she couldn't tell that it was a rumour, she assumed it was true. I did not even know that my school had these facilities available.

It's unacceptable that nobody is told about the options they have until after an incident occurs. I am one of the most open people in my school and though I've been called a faggot, a dyke, been asked if I was gay in a 'joking manner' and much worse behind my back I'm still proud to shout. I shout that I'm bisexual and I deserve to feel safe and respected in my straight school!

I think we need more knowledge readily available in schools about the gender spectrum and on what facilities are available. As well as more knowledge on how to combat bullying in less obvious forms.

**~JOAN**

Hi, my name is Saturai Kuyuhiko and I'm gay. I had a crappy experience online concerning coming out and being an LGBT activist. It got to the point where someone private messaged me threatening to kill me and called me lots of slurs. I wasn't exactly offended because I'm not sensitive to those kinds of things. It just kind of hurt to see that people still believe that crap, even if the bible did say that. It was a translation error and the bible is not fact, its fiction.

The worst part of coming out is school. I have a crush on a girl in our school and one day my school called me for counselling and boy, was that awkward. I told the person I was an activist and that I like a girl in our school and they just said;

“This is a phase, this whole LGBT thing, give it a few years”

I feel like my school and other schools promote the “one man, one woman” agenda and assume that being gay is just a phase for teens, but it's not like that at all.

My entire class are homophobic and attack me without knowing I relate to who they are offending.

The staff in my school don't say anything and they have a guidance councillor to talk to, but they don't stop what the other students are saying. I'm an outsider in my place, where I am away from my house.


I came out to a guidance councillor in school to explain why I was eligible for a grant to support me going to college. A few days later I was cuddling my girlfriend, whom I didn't mention to the councillor, and I was told to stop by him because I was making people uncomfortable.

The thing is, I cuddle all my friends, not just my girlfriend – it was only said to me after I had come out to him, which made me feel gross. A few days earlier, I was explaining to him how being out in public had affected me – the stares from people, how people make me feel disgusting and how people whisper about me for being affectionate with my girlfriend in public. He knew how people judging me for my sexuality felt, I had explained it so, so clearly just the week before. The whole experience made me feel dirty and unwanted in my school.

I didn't want to dance with a boy at a ball once and I was told to dance with him because it would upset him, as if I should make men happy.

When someone who is LGBT+ comes out to a professional and says they've been bullied, the lack of support can be shocking – no empathy, no compassion, no sympathy is shown to them. Often times we are told to stop being different, or to stop being out publicly as if we are walking around with targets on our backs. They want me to dull the shine from my eyes so I fit in with everyone else who's deemed normal.

Also, a lot of lesbians (or women who love women / men who love men in general) tend to be gender non conforming. I feel it is important to keep this in mind when interacting with people, and to be respectful of them and their identities. It is important you make sure you're addressing them as they'd like to be addressed – same courtesy that you'd give to anyone!

The background of the text is a photograph of a beach. In the foreground, the lower legs and feet of several people are visible, standing on the sand. A large rainbow flag is draped across the middle ground. In the background, the ocean waves are breaking under a cloudy sky.

My school doesn't have a lot of support for LGBT+ people. LGBT+ people and their issues are never mentioned. Our LGBT+ students are neither seen nor heard. Our issues and discrimination we often face in school are unacknowledged.

Our sex-ed covers bare minimum heterosexual sex-ed and LGBT+ sex-ed is non-existent. In 2<sup>nd</sup> year sex-ed I asked my teacher what lesbians should do for safe sex and she stared at me and said that that was "too advanced" and we wouldn't be covering it. I recently retold that anecdote to my friend in class. The substitute teacher overheard and asked me to repeat what I said. I refused and said it was private. He got up into my face and kept asking me to say it for the class. I finally did and I was mortified. After I said it he stared at me with an odd look on his face and made me really uncomfortable. He asked if I ever did find out for myself how lesbians had safe sex. I didn't know how to answer, I felt the question was really inappropriate and I didn't like the almost leering way he was looking at me. He made my classmates be quiet so they could hear me when I eventually replied that I guess I did find out. He kept looking at me in that really uncomfortable manner for a really uncomfortable length of time.

I came out as bisexual in first year to my close friends. They told the whole school and insisted I was a lesbian. After that things became quite unpleasant for me. Someone scribbled on my face and wrote homo above me on my photo in the science lab. My locker was marked with "gay" in sharpie for everyone to see. Admin refused to look into who did it and didn't help me clean it off. They implied it was my fault for coming out in the first place, as if it had been my choice in the first place. The girls in my school year said they didn't want to go on the school overnight trip because I was going and I guess to them liking girls makes me some kind of dirty predator. They also said they were didn't like me using the same changing rooms as them. A kid shouted "dirty lesbian" at me outside class when my teacher was right next to me and he faced no consequences. My teacher just kind of shrugged at me and ignored me when I looked at her for help.

The worst part was that I attended school with my siblings. My school is small so the rumours and the whispers reached them pretty fast. I was outed to my family long before I was ready and I was still working through who I was. It wasn't a great feeling, I felt like I was plunged in the deep-end.

I received no support from my school. No support from my teachers. I felt alone and vulnerable and my school gave me no help.

The only positive experience I have had with professionals is at my LGBT+ youth group ChillOUT. The leaders are so kind and supportive and I always feel comfortable expressing myself and being who I am.

I was thirteen when I first came out to someone. I had been wanting to say it for a while, I told a friend and it came out so choppy and quick that he almost didn't hear me. The words I'm gay flew out of my mouth almost as shaky as I was. I don't think he even registered what I had said until I abruptly changed the conversation.

He told me how he was proud that I had the guts to tell him and he was surprised I trusted him that much. It didn't change how he would see me and I was one of his closest friends. He made me feel so relieved. The build-up of months of knowing and figuring out how to tell someone. I knew at that moment that not everyone would turn their back on me, like I thought they would. I then got the confidence to tell more friends and eventually my parents, even if it did take two more years.

Although I had the courage to tell people, I know if I had someone to talk to or take advice from even anonymously, it would have helped me so much. I think schools should have that option, a designated teacher to talk to or a place I could go to ask for advice or a chat anonymously. Some schools have a guidance councillor but the option for LGBT advice has never been put out there.

For me I don't want someone else to be alone in trying to tell someone and I want them to have what I didn't. My message is that there are always people you can talk to if you look, don't make the mistake I did and stay silent.

DJ

I don't exactly have an experience to talk about, more so a lack of experience of LGBTQI+ in professional environments. My school doesn't talk about it directly, they acknowledge that it exists and there are posters all over the place, but teachers don't take anytime to speak about it directly with students. I'm not sure how S.P.H.E classes work now but when I was in first year it was mentioned that in our next lesson we would talk about LGBT+ relationships. I personally was not in the class when we were supposed to talk about it, but I was informed by my friend later that it was not even mentioned once.

Sex education was never mentioned either, not even straight sex was brought up. Although I am going to a project this year for sex education, I can't be 100% guaranteed that LGBT sex education will be included. Our teachers seem to be uneducated in the matter and should definitely be trained to deal with LGBT+ related situations, for example supporting Transgender people. The only reason I only mentioned Trans people is because it is so difficult to be yourself in schools that don't have boy's and girl's so it's hard to tell your teacher that you would prefer different pronouns. There are no inclusive bathrooms and it just makes you feel like you are not being true to yourself.

Teachers need to be educated on all LGBT+ matters not just Trans, but it is difficult for the bigger issues, it's hard enough being a teenager especially when you are transitioning.

-Blue



On June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2017 I tried to kill myself by taking tablets. I was self-harming as well. My mum took me to the hospital. I was seen by the nurse after I told her what happened. She said:

"Why did you try to kill yourself?"

I told her my gender dysphoria makes it hard to function as a human. I also told her that I self-harm because of my gender dysphoria. After I was done talking to the nurse, they put me in a small room with a table. It felt like a police investigation. I felt like she didn't care about what I was saying, especially when I told her that I am transgender. They couldn't keep me in because there was no room. I felt the nurse didn't know what to do with me because I am trans. They kept on misgendering me even after I told them I go by He/Him pronouns. Two months later I got a diagnosed with gender dysphoria and I got put on the waiting list to start testosterone.

I'm still on the waiting list. The waiting times have gone up since I was on it. First it was sixteen months, now it's over two years. The Irish transgender community are suffering over waiting times. Something needs to be done, we shouldn't have to wait over two years to get healthcare.

-AD

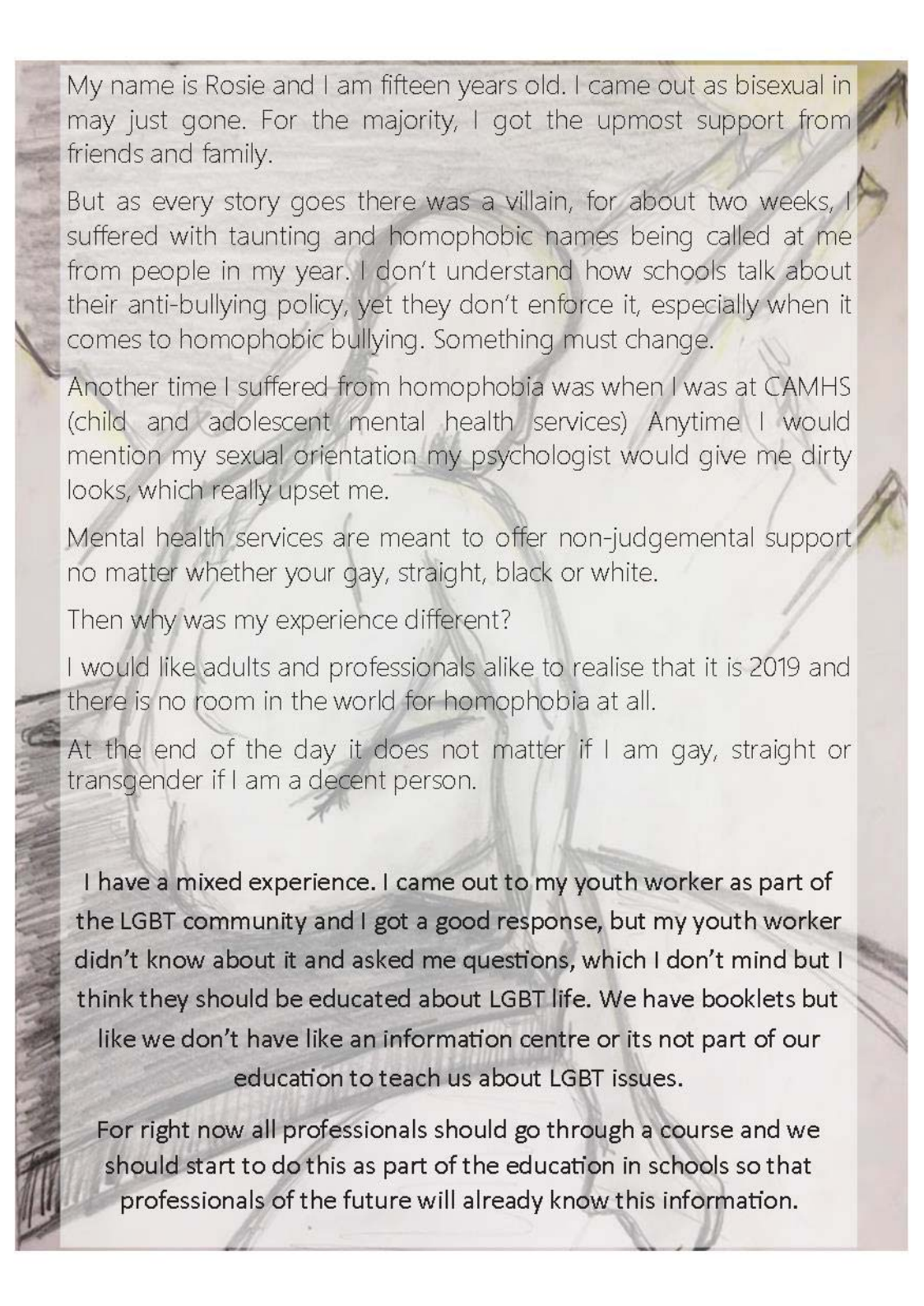












My name is Rosie and I am fifteen years old. I came out as bisexual in may just gone. For the majority, I got the upmost support from friends and family.

But as every story goes there was a villain, for about two weeks, I suffered with taunting and homophobic names being called at me from people in my year. I don't understand how schools talk about their anti-bullying policy, yet they don't enforce it, especially when it comes to homophobic bullying. Something must change.

Another time I suffered from homophobia was when I was at CAMHS (child and adolescent mental health services) Anytime I would mention my sexual orientation my psychologist would give me dirty looks, which really upset me.

Mental health services are meant to offer non-judgemental support no matter whether your gay, straight, black or white.

Then why was my experience different?

I would like adults and professionals alike to realise that it is 2019 and there is no room in the world for homophobia at all.

At the end of the day it does not matter if I am gay, straight or transgender if I am a decent person.

I have a mixed experience. I came out to my youth worker as part of the LGBT community and I got a good response, but my youth worker didn't know about it and asked me questions, which I don't mind but I think they should be educated about LGBT life. We have booklets but like we don't have like an information centre or its not part of our education to teach us about LGBT issues.

For right now all professionals should go through a course and we should start to do this as part of the education in schools so that professionals of the future will already know this information.

I'm going to be real with you, I'm honestly nobody special. I'm just your average 15 y/o male, I like music, video games and hanging out with all the amazing people currently in my life. I'm not that different than you are, though I like all genders, whether you're a boy, a girl. I don't care because I like people for who they are and not because of what they look like, I like people for how they make me feel, how they make me smile and make me feel good about myself.

I'm part of a completely amazing group of people from a relatively large LGBTQ+ group called ChillOUT, here I have been given the opportunity and means to discover who I am and who I'm interested in, with the help of the brilliant leaders and all the amazing people I've come across. I was this stupid self-destructive and angsty teen, who believed the entire world was against him and I was drowning in all this stress. I never really knew what I officially was until recently and I believe I truly know now that I am pansexual.

When I first came out to my friend I made it seem so casual and natural as if it wasn't a big deal to me, though it was. I've given them so much hassle and put them through a lot of drama, they honestly and truly mean the world to me and they're probably one of my closest friends.

So, they had decided to come out to me that they were bisexual. I told them I was bisexual, as it was an easier way of saying I was pansexual and was a lot easier for people to comprehend. The way I told them was once they had said it I just went, oh yeah! me too and that was it, I was out, and I was officially known as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. Maybe for them, they felt happy that they had found someone like them, someone who understood how they felt. I can't say for certain as I am not them and they are their own person who thinks entirely different. Though that was how I saw them, a person who understood me and the first bisexual person I had come across in the entirety of my time living here. This community is so loving and amazing, and I love everyone within it and I hope to make many more positive memories.

Your not so angsty self-destructive teen,  
Redmond

When I first came out as Bisexual when I was 13 I dated a girl. I wasn't used to being in a big school and didn't even consider that there could be judgement. I informed people I was Bi-Curious, but they insisted I was a lesbian. Immediately when people heard the word lesbian, girls were already uncomfortable around me. I'm not a lesbian, but even if I was their behaviours wouldn't be acceptable. The talk of me being a lesbian died down when I dated a boy for a few months. After a while, a friend of mine told me that there was talk about me changing in the same room as them for PE. At first people would only point out things about my physical appearance in PE but now my Bi-curiosity was apparently a problem too. Just because a person is Bi doesn't mean they have interest in every person ever!

It also doesn't automatically mean someone is a pervert. I'm just trying to do PE like the rest of them. When I went to teachers they said that bullying was not acceptable and there would be consequences for it in this school. But all I was told was that they fixed it by mentioning it in a CSPE class, like LGBTQ related things. But these people were never told to apologise, or did they suffer any real consequences. It made me feel like I'm the problem. The school I went to had gay people, but I felt there was nothing for LGBT students who suffered consequences for being open about who they are. Not all hope is gone. There is a youth club in town who gives support and safety to LGBT kids and allies. They are so nice in there and I felt it was really great experience joining this group of people.

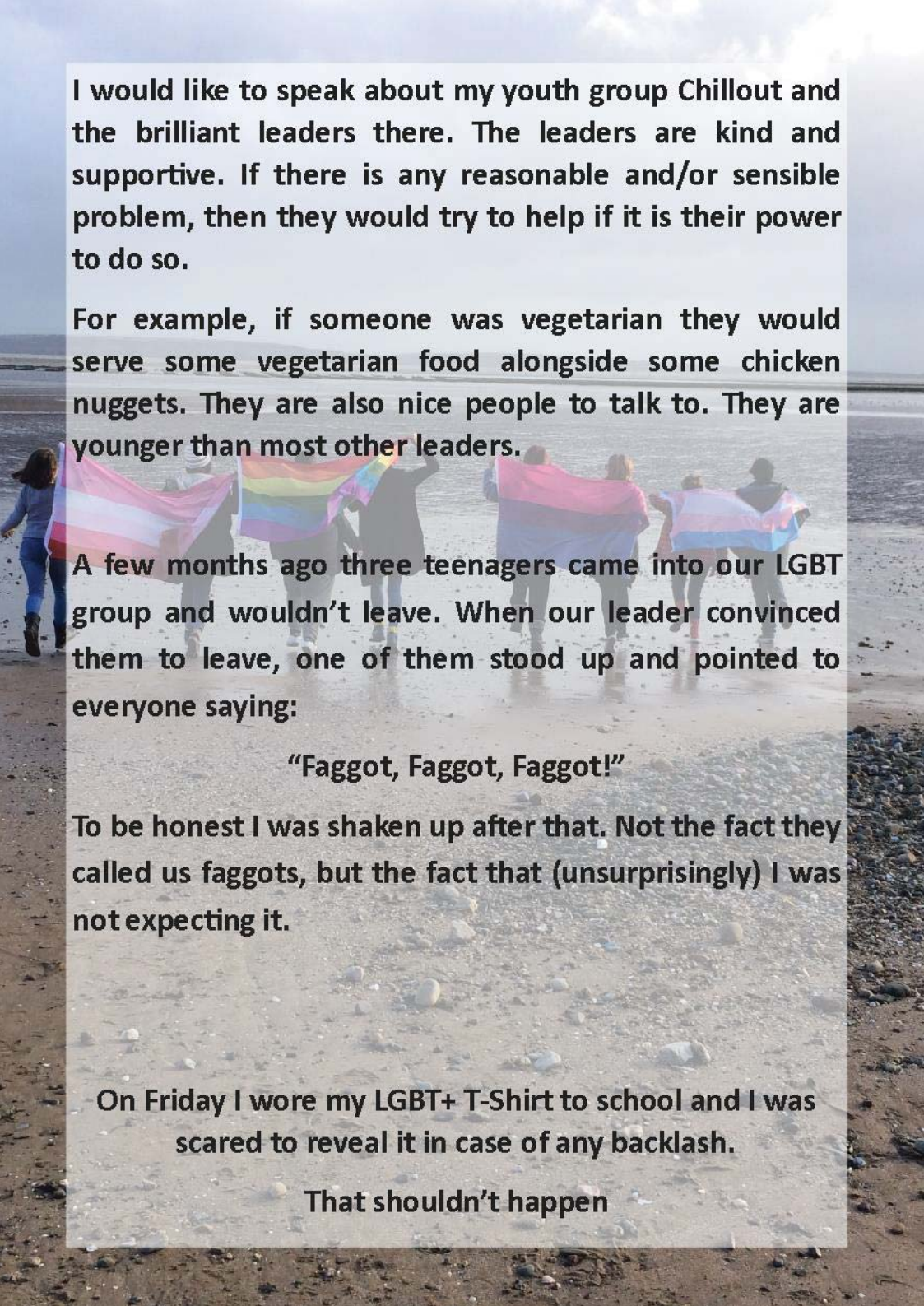
Being the confused teen I am, I was like "Am I Bisexual? Pansexual? Straight? Curious? It made me feel like a poser not being able to confidently say, "Yes! I am Gay, Bisexual, LGBT".

Did I really belong. ChillOUT really helped me to come to the realisation that it's okay not to know or have a label. That is something to be proud of. That reassurance is what brought me to writing in this today. I feel educated enough to support my LGBT friends and be a good ally, while also being okay with questioning my own sexuality. The professionals in my life have (in both good and bad ways), pushed me to speak up for LGBT people. My school experience did hurt me, especially how the teachers handled it, but I want to make something productive out of that, so my friends and gay people don't have to go through that.

In conclusion, gay, trans or confused. Always be educated and respectful to the people you are working with, because everyone should be themselves and proud.

- Your local confused teen school girl



A group of people are walking away from the camera on a sandy beach, holding large rainbow flags. The background shows the ocean and a cloudy sky. The text is overlaid on the top half of the image.

I would like to speak about my youth group Chillout and the brilliant leaders there. The leaders are kind and supportive. If there is any reasonable and/or sensible problem, then they would try to help if it is their power to do so.

For example, if someone was vegetarian they would serve some vegetarian food alongside some chicken nuggets. They are also nice people to talk to. They are younger than most other leaders.

A few months ago three teenagers came into our LGBT group and wouldn't leave. When our leader convinced them to leave, one of them stood up and pointed to everyone saying:

**"Faggot, Faggot, Faggot!"**

To be honest I was shaken up after that. Not the fact they called us faggots, but the fact that (unsurprisingly) I was not expecting it.

On Friday I wore my LGBT+ T-Shirt to school and I was scared to reveal it in case of any backlash.

**That shouldn't happen**

I would like to tell you a story that happened at a camp. There were three or four young people probably in their first or second year and it starts when they came out from the canteen after "Interviewing" my friend on her sexuality.

I was waiting on the couch for her and when they came out they decided I would be their next victim.

They asked questions such as:

"Are you bisexual?" To which I answered No

"Are you gay?" Which I lied and said No

"Are you Trans?" which again, I answered and said No

But what they said next is what annoyed me the most, they said:

"So, you are normal"

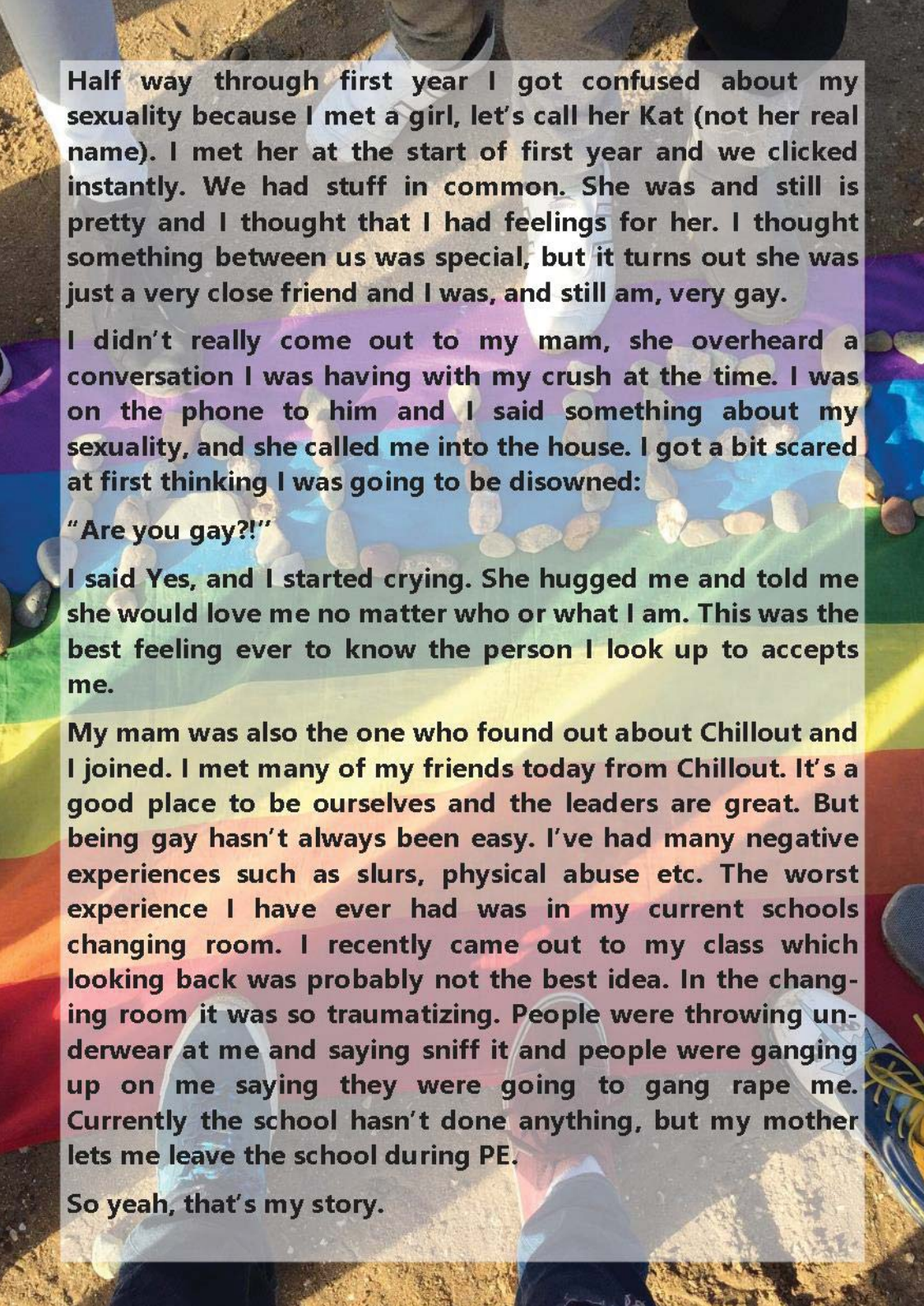
Imagine being five years old, born a male, identifying as male the “Norm” being male and female get married and have a million children and going off into the sunset. Unfortunately, this wasn’t the case for me.

Sounds funny, but I noticed I was different because of a show I used to watch. I had my first crush, but it wasn’t a normal crush, because you see this person was a male, and male wasn’t a thing in 2009. My first crush was from the show, I knew it shouldn’t be normal, so I had to keep it a secret. I didn’t know how my mother would react. My mother has always been my biggest role model as my dad was never present, my older sister was also a big role model in my life. I also was never particularly into boy’s toys or sports, but I loved Bratz dolls. They were my favourite thing in the entire world. I would do their hair, change their clothes etc. But I noticed something, I used to play with my dolls on the porch of my house, but all the boys on the street used to laugh or make sly comments. But Why was that?

My family was so happy that I was happy.

Why weren’t the other boys happy.

My friend was the first person I came out to as gay. Which was in about first year when I realised I was okay to be different and that what I was feeling was normal. It was just that I’m gay, and to my surprise she came out to me as a lesbian. We had stuff in common, I was glad to find someone with a similar situation to me. It made me happy to know I had someone to express my feelings and emotions to.



Half way through first year I got confused about my sexuality because I met a girl, let's call her Kat (not her real name). I met her at the start of first year and we clicked instantly. We had stuff in common. She was and still is pretty and I thought that I had feelings for her. I thought something between us was special, but it turns out she was just a very close friend and I was, and still am, very gay.

I didn't really come out to my mam, she overheard a conversation I was having with my crush at the time. I was on the phone to him and I said something about my sexuality, and she called me into the house. I got a bit scared at first thinking I was going to be disowned:

"Are you gay?!"

I said Yes, and I started crying. She hugged me and told me she would love me no matter who or what I am. This was the best feeling ever to know the person I look up to accepts me.

My mam was also the one who found out about Chillout and I joined. I met many of my friends today from Chillout. It's a good place to be ourselves and the leaders are great. But being gay hasn't always been easy. I've had many negative experiences such as slurs, physical abuse etc. The worst experience I have ever had was in my current schools changing room. I recently came out to my class which looking back was probably not the best idea. In the changing room it was so traumatizing. People were throwing underwear at me and saying sniff it and people were ganging up on me saying they were going to gang rape me. Currently the school hasn't done anything, but my mother lets me leave the school during PE.

So yeah, that's my story.

## Homophobia

**Screw you and your ways**

**You can't control me**

**Or make me change**

**I am who I am**

**And I love who I love**

**If you don't like it**

**Then read the above**

**I'm here and I'm queer**

**So, try to stop me**

**You can't break me down**

**Or make me a carbon copy**

**I'm just as human as anyone else**

**And I'll always stay true to myself**

**So once again**

**Just to make sure you heard me**

**Screw you and your homophobic ways**

**You'll never make me change**

**-Blue**

# **I wish:**

**My school knew homophobic bullying happens in their school**

**My school knew about the rumour**

**My French teacher would stop miss-gendering me, despite me telling her time and time again that I am not a girl**

**My peers knew that I didn't choose to be like this and that I'm proud and they should be happy for me**

**My teacher knew who I was and my identity**

**My teacher knew that I would like to spend more time on LGBTQ+ issues**

**My teacher knew more about LGBTQ+ topics**

**My teacher knew that rumours cannot be traced**

**My psychologist knew that I am like everyone, I am not just that Bisexual girl**

**Doctors know more about gender dysphoria**

**My teacher would stop thinking that I am going to harm myself just because I am an openly gay activist**

**My teacher knew that the other lads aren't messing with me when they call me a faggot**

**My classmates knew it's not okay to bully someone no matter what they identify as**

# WHAT TO SAY:-

I RESPECT YOU, NO MATTER WHAT

THANK YOU FOR SHARING

TELL ME MORE, I WANT TO UNDERSTAND

I'M GLAD YOU TOLD ME

WHAT DO YOU NEED?

DO YOU HAVE ANY FRIENDS YOU CAN  
TALK TO ABOUT THIS?

I WILL WORK ON MAKING THIS A SAFE PLACE FOR YOU

IS THERE ANYTHING WE NEED TO CHANGE?

HOW ARE YOU FEELING?

IT'S PROBABLY JUST A PHASE

WHY ARE YOU TELLING ME THIS?

WHAT DID I/WE DO WRONG?

DOES THIS MEAN YOU'LL NEVER HAVE CHILDREN?

PLEASE DON'T TELL ANYONE ELSE

YOU'RE TOO YOUNG TO KNOW

YOU DON'T LOOK GAY

YOUR LIFE IS GOING TO BE SO MUCH HARDER

HOW DO PEOPLE LIKE YOU HAVE SEX?

WHAT TOOK YOU SO LONG TO REALISE

I AM DISAPPOINTED IN YOU

IT'S NOT A BIG DEAL, WHY ARE YOU SO WORRIED ABOUT THIS?

**WHAT NOT TO SAY:**

# ChillOUT



**ChillOUT Youth Project is an initiative of Waterford & South Tipperary Community Youth Service**

**We are a youth group for LGBTI+ young people, those who may be questioning or learning about their sexuality or gender and their allies**

**We work with young people aged 14-21 every Sunday from 3-6pm in The Manor Youth Café on Manor Street, Waterford**

**Young LGBTI+ people from across the South East take part in weekly groups, special events and activities where they can meet others, learn, share, grow and be who they are!**

**Contact Debbie, Community Youth Worker on 0860218941 or [Chillout@wstcys.ie](mailto:Chillout@wstcys.ie) for more info**

**GenderBlender is our young Transgender peer support group which runs weekly in The Manor Youth Centre, Manor Street, Waterford**



**ChillOUT is accredited by BelongTo, Ireland's National Organisation for work with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender young people**

**belong<sup>TO</sup>**