

Mind Your Mental Health



The Ireland Funds Are supporting

BeLonG To as it creates safe space

and mental health programs for Ireland's

lesbian, gay, bisexual & transgender youth

Navigating the twists and turns of growing up is hard. For LGBT youth, navigating those twists and turns can be even harder.

Homophobic and Transphobic bullying, fear of family rejection and identity exploration are challenges that can take a toll on mental and emotional health. Sadly, higher rates of self-harm and suicide are facts for many LGBT young people across Ireland.

BeLonG To is Ireland's national organization for LGBT young people between the ages of 14 and 23. Across Ireland the organization works to create inclusive, safe space for those young people to find support and access information. In addition, their website fields thousands of emails and calls from families and young people seeking those things as well. A caller may be a mom who has no idea how to respond to her daughter who has just come out, or a transgender young person who is experiencing violence at home. Regardless, BeLonG To is there on the other end of the line to support and advise.

BeLonG To also provides education and outreach to Irish schools to create a more positive and welcoming environment to LGBT youth. The "Stand Up" Campaign to address bullying has been supported by The Ireland Funds. Now, 2,000 teachers use BeLonG To resources in the classroom annually reaching over 123,000 Irish schoolchildren. Awareness has increased around the damage caused by Homophobic and Transphobic bullying and many schools have reported a decrease in all types of bullying thanks to the Campaign.

Irish society is undoubtedly becoming more aware and supportive of its LGBT community. Ireland was the first country in the world to legalize gay marriage by popular vote when the Marriage Referendum was passed easily in 2015. The movement for marriage

equality brought the diaspora home en masse to cast votes that resulted in a milestone for the country. Former Taoiseach Enda Kenny stated, "A majority of people in this republic have stood up for them [those in the gay community]. In the privacy of the ballot box, the people made a public statement. With today's vote, we have disclosed who we are. We are a generous, compassionate, bold and joyful people who say yes to inclusion, yes to generosity, yes to love, yes to gay marriage."

BeLonG To's lobbying and support of the marriage equality movement increased its visibility and thus, the number of young people coming to seek support and services.

"We just exploded after the marriage referendum campaign," explains Oisín O'Reilly of BeLonG To. "We are trying to cope with those numbers because we can't turn young people away. Some young people walk up and down the street here before they pluck up the courage to come in. That moment is when we have to be here for them. So much of our work goes into mental health from resilience-building to early intervention

right through to when a young person is in real crisis and needs additional services."

That increase in needs has resulted in additional support from The Ireland Funds to further BeLonG To's mental health offerings. At 24 youth groups across Ireland, LGBT young people can gather to talk, be themselves and avail of peer support and professional services that address their mental health needs.

"We have the only LGBT drug and alcohol harm addiction youth officer in the country here," says Oisín. "We have special youth workers who work specifically with young trans non-binary people. We have a huge variety of different skills here and we cater as much as we can to a young person's needs. Mental health is complicated for everybody but for young LGBT people it can have unique patterns and we address that."

I would say to The Ireland Funds' donors that through their philanthropy they have certainly transformed the lives of hundreds of young people and saved the lives of many of them as well."

“

I was being bullied and ended up quitting school. I had a safe space in BeLonG To to access information and find people to talk to. I just started up college in September to continue with my education. I wouldn't be where I am now if I hadn't come to BeLonG To.”

— Raz, age 23



“

There are even more supports in BeLonG To for young people now. If people are anxious about something or if they just want information they can book in with a youth worker.

They have access to counselors and information as well as a chance to socialize. This is an environment where you know everyone and you feel comfortable.”

– Harper, age 19



Why Are Mental Health Services Vital for LGBT Youth in Ireland?

- Levels of severe/extremely severe stress, anxiety and depression were **4 times higher** among 14-18 year old LGBT teens in comparison to a similar age group (12-19 year) in the My World national youth mental health study*
- Self-harm was **2 times higher** among 19-25 year old LGBT people in comparison to a similar age group (17-25) in the My World national youth mental health study
- **60%** of LGBT people had seriously thought of ending their own life
- **1 in 3** LGBT 14-18 year olds had attempted suicide

* Figures cited are from The LGBTIreland Report - a national study of the mental health and wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people in Ireland. The study, which gathered data from thousands of people, is the largest study of LGBT people in Ireland to date, the largest study of transgender people, and the first study with a sample of intersex people. The My World national youth mental health study was a separate study done in 2012 with Irish young people aged 12-25 and is cited for comparative purposes.

“We have the chance to make this country the best in the world for LGBTI citizens. It will not happen by chance but by change. We committed to that change last May and now we have to follow through, drilling down through the centuries of sediment, to the heart’s core, releasing the goodness, decency and egalitarian sensibility that Ireland is capable of. The children who are in cots and buggies today, who will discover their sexual identity in twelve or so years time have the right, to grow into mentally healthy and well-adjusted teenagers. What we do now can help ensure that no bully and no homophobic, biphobic or transphobic culture will too easily deprive them of that right”.

— Dr Mary McAleese, Former President of Ireland, speaking at the launch of the LGBTIreland Report, March 2016