

Clear Night Sky



A report into the need for Connexions national policy and target setting to meet the needs of young gay, lesbian and bisexual young people.

By John Proctor

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank the workers and volunteers of the Allsorts Youth Project for their help and support in developing this report, especially Jess Wood (Project Manager), also to Susila Silver (Connexions Youth Participation worker for Brighton and Hove) for her guidance. This report forms part of the work by the young peoples' participation form of Allsorts Project, the Coconut Committee, which has received funding from Connexions.

The biggest thanks must go to the young people at Allsorts who have provided such honest and open information, ideas and feedback throughout the project.

Dedication:

This report is dedicated to every young gay, lesbian, and bisexual young person who has suffered at the hands of others and not received the help and support they deserved.

John Proctor
17th September 2004

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Terminology:

Acronyms:

LGB – Lesbian, gay and bisexual

SCYPG – Supporting Children and Young People Group (National Connexions)

NEET – Not in Education, Employment or Training

Summary of Findings

John Proctor, a young person from Allsorts Youth Project has written a report, *Clear Night Sky*

(published September 2004) looking into the need for Connexions national policy and target setting to meet the needs of young gay, lesbian and bisexual young people.

Summary of Findings:

- 15 young people surveyed aged 14 to 21, 40% were out of employment, education or training
- 20% had been made homeless because of issues surrounding sexuality
- Over half the group had self-harmed
- 60% of the group had attempted suicide
- Of those who had attempted suicide 80% had attempted more than once
- 80% had experienced homophobia within the last 12 months, with most homophobia occurring in schools and colleges and around town. 13% had experienced 10 or more incidents of homophobia within the last 12 months.

Introduction

After doing some youth participation work with the Brighton and Hove Connexions partnerships, it came to the attention of the author of this report that there was no official policy or targets on the needs of young gay, lesbian and bisexual young people within the Connexions national framework. This lack of LGB youth in policy-setting can be seen in the Connexions document *Guidance on Setting and Monitoring Targets 2003-04* (Connexions, 2003) which shows the following target areas:

LEA Education Development Plan targets
LSC targets
Cross Government targets on teenage pregnancy
Care leavers
Young people with learning difficulties and disabilities
Young offenders
Substance misuse

On top of this there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that there is a large variation in the quality and amount of support to young LGB people being provided by Connexions partnerships.

It was on this basis that I decided to investigate this further, to establish the needs of young LGB people and explore how Connexions could meet them. This report outlines the feedback from a survey and focus group carried out at the Allsorts Youth Project in Brighton, as well as the views of some people who work within Connexions.

Why Clear Night Sky?

Young people wrote in depth about their experiences in Deep Blue Sea, this report aims to take a snapshot of the experiences of the young people of Allsorts Youth Project, hence Clear Night Sky.

As outlined in the introduction, Connexions is making inroads to supporting young LGB people. However for the reasons mentioned, the support available is nowhere near enough, and not widespread. There are stars of hope in the night sky, but the young LGB people of this country deserve more. They should not have to suffer homophobia and heterosexism leading them to attempting to put out their own light. With the repeal of section 28 and civil partnership rights, now is the time to remove the darkness of homophobia with a floodlight of support, recognition and empowerment.

Facts and Figures – why do we need to support young LGB people?

The figures on the level of trauma that young LGB people go through makes for grim reading. According to the Outproud/Oasis Survey of 1997, 1 in 5 young LGB people will attempt suicide, of these many will go on to make other attempts (Outproud, 1997). Given that an estimated 6 -10% of the population is gay or lesbian with many more bisexual to a varying degree this is a large number of young people who will be affected.

On top of the actual suicide and self harm attempts many LGB young people will go through varying degrees of mental distress including depression. LGB young people have few positive role models, and may not have any peers to be able to connect with. Growing up knowing you are differing can be an isolating experience. This coupled with the homophobia which is rife

in schools and colleges (with only 6% of schools specifying homophobia in anti-bullying policies despite government guidance on the need to address homophobia) means that young LGB people are more likely to fall out of education (into what Connexions identified as NEET).

As if this was not enough, there is the process of coming out. Young people often feel that they are making themselves vulnerable to their peers, having to ask acceptance for who they are. Again, this can result in isolation. Coming out to parents can result in verbal and physical abuse or even being made homeless: again, placing them within the Connexions need groups.

However, for Connexions to address only the issue e.g. homelessness or NEET is to ignore the wider social issues and on going difficulties that young LGB people face. Only by tackling the social issues of homophobia and heterosexism can these issues be tackled effectively.

But there is Guidance...

While this project was underway, Connexions released the guidance on LGB youth. While this paper acknowledged that Connexions has done some work in supporting LGB youth it does not appear to go far enough. The guidance document is only that: guidance. There are not specific targets set for supporting LGB youth, whilst targets are set for other areas such as teenage pregnancy, substance misuse and young offenders. If Connexions does not set targets and collect data on LGB youth then there is not a way of monitoring how effective Connexions is (or is not as the case may be) in supporting this vulnerable section of young people. I have spoken to at least two PA's in Brighton who take a similar view.

This appearance of not taking LGB youth issues seriously can be found in small ways right across the service. After speaking to people who work in Connexions, I have heard of cases where Connexions has groups of young people working on projects and where homophobia has gone unchallenged.

Even in applying for funding nowhere is any reference made to support work of LGB youth, or as LGB youth being a target area for Connexions. This results in LGB youth projects thinking that Connexions cannot be a source of funding for them. (This was a comment born out of a conversation with a youth project represented at a National LGB Youth Summit hosted by the Conservative party in the House of Commons)

Given the widespread day to day suffering and in some cases emotional and physical torture that may LGB youth endure day to day, Connexions needs

to take a more serious methodical approach as to how it can support these young people and ensure a high quality of services across the country.

While some partnerships are doing very good work in this area, others are doing little. This variation in service places young LGB people at risk, management techniques such as benchmarking could be used to spread good practise in this area.

Survey Design and Data Collection

The survey group was decided for ease of data collection to be some of the young people at the Allsorts Youth Project. This allowed a varied group of young LGB people to be surveyed.

Although it would have been preferable to have a larger survey group (15 completed the survey), through Allsorts this was the maximum number of people that could practically be surveyed. Contacting people through e-mail who were receiving one-to-one support was inappropriate. Likewise attempting to survey LGB people in wider society brings out the same problems of exposure and confidentiality, and would have almost certainly led to less reliable data.

While the number of people surveyed is too small to test for statistical significance the small number of the survey group also shows the problems that even a small group of young LGB people have faced. In other words the small survey group can be seen as a strength as well as an analytical weakness.

The survey questions were designed in connection with Susila Silva (Brighton and Hove Youth Participation Worker) to ensure that they would provide the necessary data for Connexions. The questions were also screened by the Project Manager of Allsorts Jess Wood, to ensure their suitability for asking the young people of Allsorts. It was at this time decided that support would be made available for young people if the survey raised any issues for them. The survey questions can be seen in Appendix II.

To accompany the questionnaires, the young people were given background information on Connexions, the survey and how the data would be used.

This is shown in Appendix I.

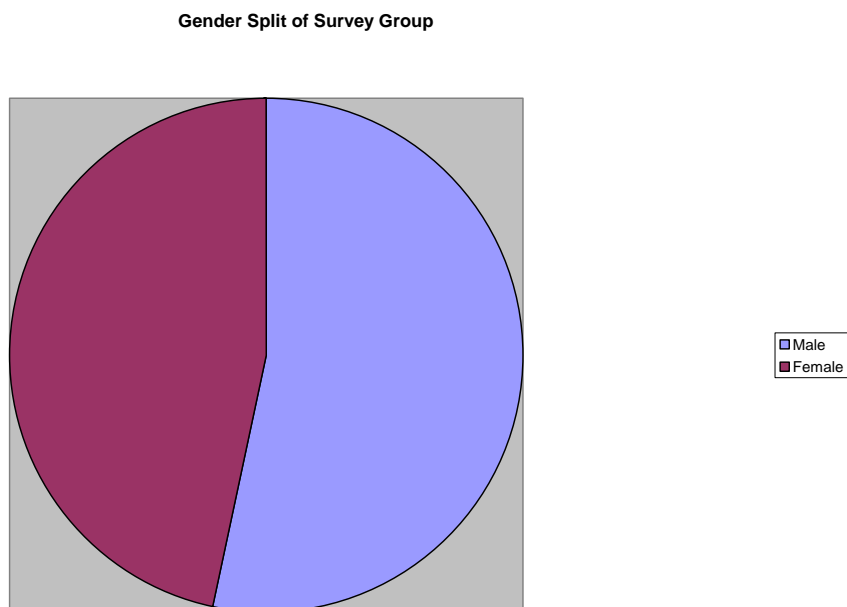
Survey Data

The survey was carried out at a drop-in at the Allsorts Youth Project on Tuesday the 27th of January 2004.

15 out of 16 young people present completed the questionnaires, the data from all the completed questionnaires appeared upon inspection to be of good quality with no obvious bad data.

Gender of Group

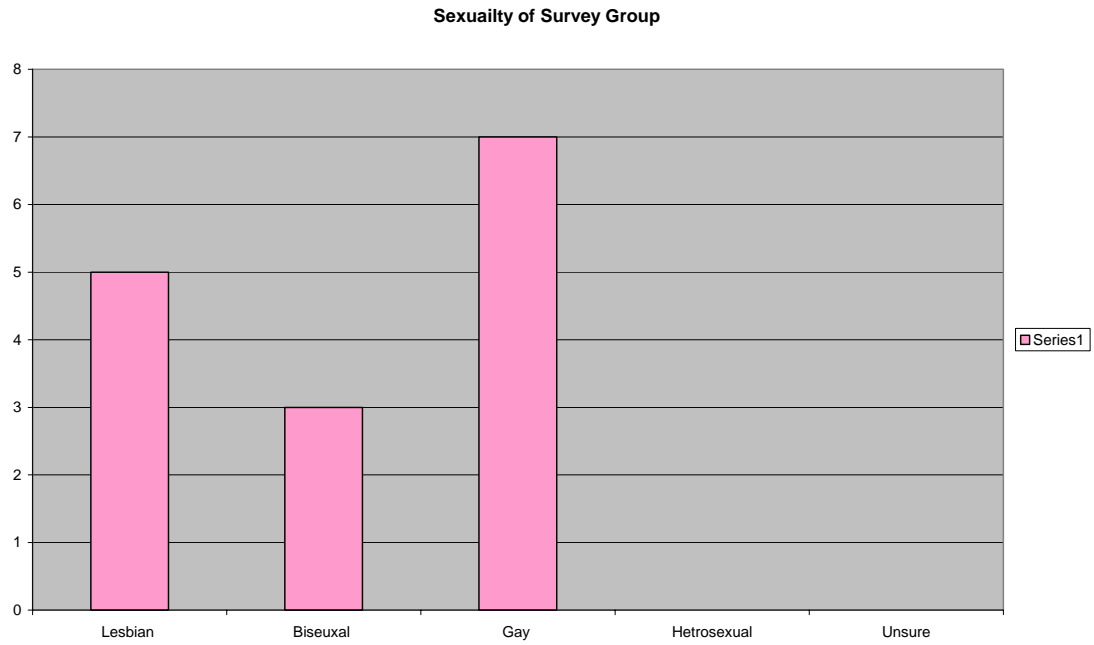
Of the group 8 were male, 7 were female:



This is as equal gender divide as could be hoped from a random survey group, relying upon the young people at the drop in.

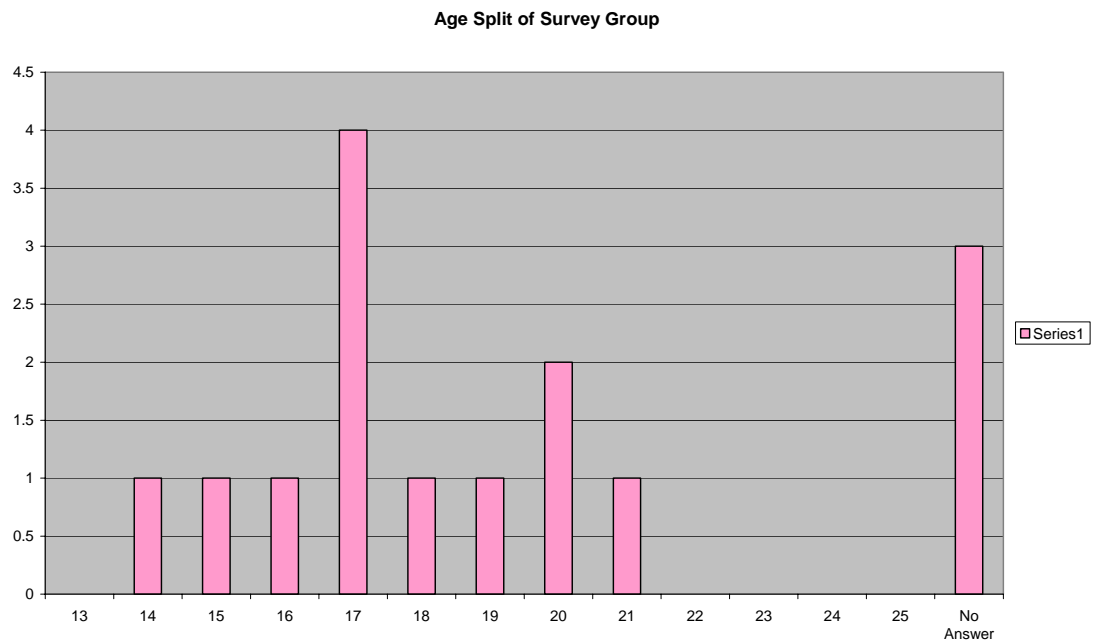
Sexuality of Survey Group

The majority of the group defined as being gay (males), with 5 young women identifying as lesbian, 1 bisexual male and 2 bisexual females.



Age of Survey Group

The median age of the group was 17

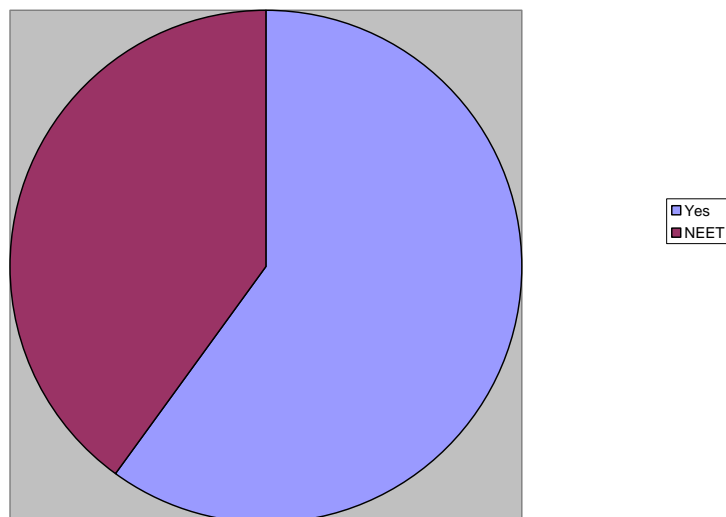


Survey group in Education, Employment or Training

Of the survey group 9 (60%) were in education, employment or training, 6 (40%) were not.

Considering the small number of young people surveyed, 40% NEET appears to be a high figure. Without more data it would be irresponsible to make a link between this high figure and sexuality as the only issue, however this is a concerning figure and cannot be dismissed as coincidence.

Survey Group in NEET Category - are you in Education, Employment or Training?



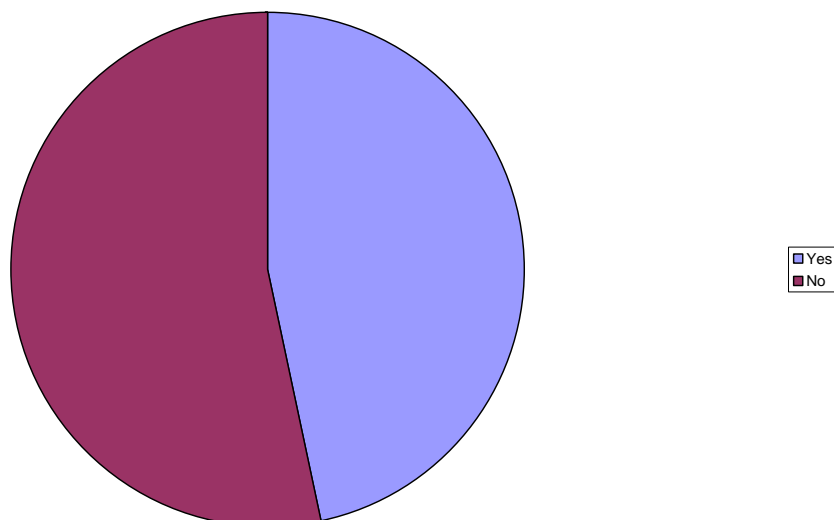
Connexions Service Users within Survey Group

Of the group 7 had used the Connexions service at some point, 8 had not. Again, despite the small survey group, just under 50% accessing Connections services would appear to be well above the general population.

While Connexions aims to provide support for all 13 to 19 year olds, it is assumed the majority of those will not actually go on to use Connexions Services as they will have no substantial problems and will not be at risk of falling into the NEET category.

This high use of the service would indicate the LGB young people suffer more problems than their heterosexual peers and at a higher risk of becoming NEET than their heterosexual counterparts.

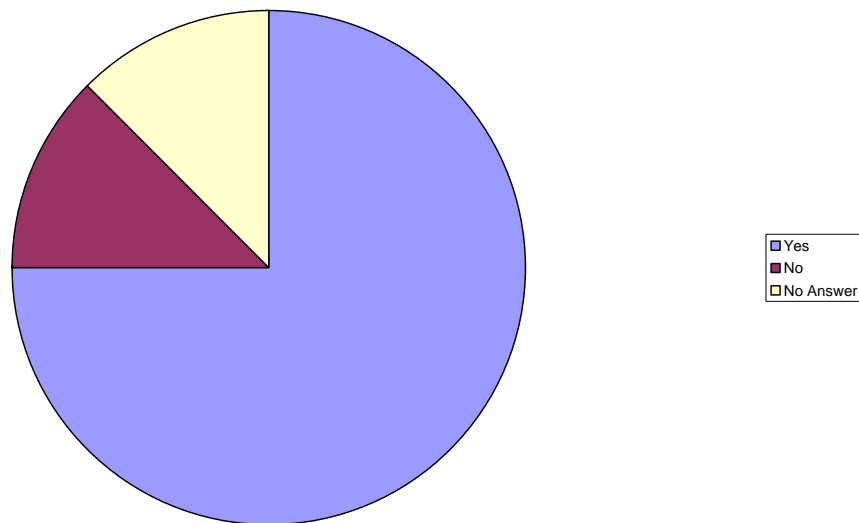
Connexions Service Users within Survey Group - have you ever used the Connexions service?



Connexions policy

Of the group 12 (80%) said yes, Connexions should have a specific policy of the needs of young LGB people, 2 said no, 2 gave no answer. It is clear that the majority of the survey group thought that Connexions should have a specific (national) policy regarding young LGB people.

Do you think Connexions should have a specific policy on the needs of young LGB people?



Comments as why Connexions should have a specific policy on the needs of young gay, lesbian and bisexual young people included:

"Being gay and young is a very difficult thing to get through. People of other minorities are universally supported, why not LGBTU?"
(LGBTU – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Unsure)

"Because a lot of LGBT youth feel confused and scared about their sexuality and coming out"

"Because we may have needs that could not be helped / covered by one wide policy. The worlds of gay and straight youth are very different."

"It can help a lot of people that needs it and don't have it"

"Because there is not many services for us."

"They need an awareness of the issues faced as they can be specific. LGB young people are a minority group and need support." (This young person had used Connexions services)

"Connexions is a service provided to support young people in all the situations they may experience so why exclude those in desperate need of help?"

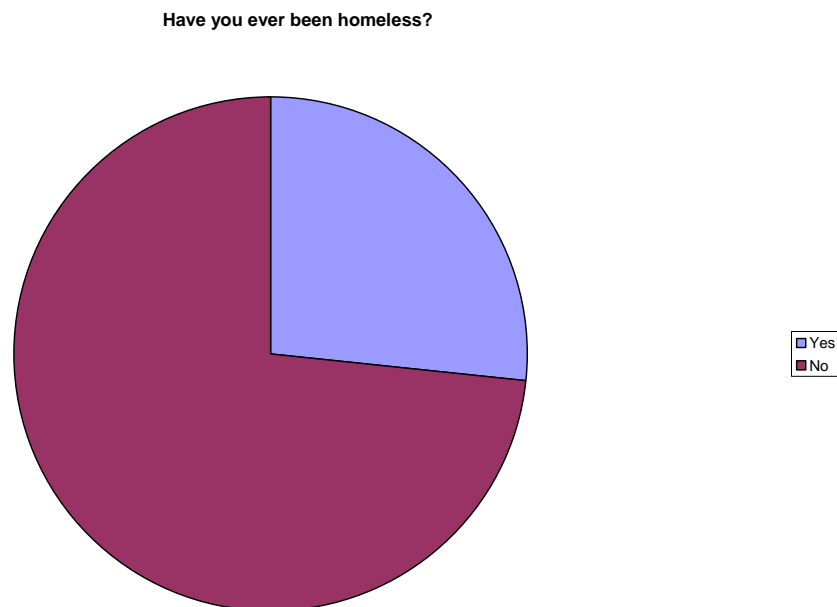
"Because many people who are lesbian and gay and use Connexions need information and help around these issues. And I don not feel that is provided." (This young person had used Connexions services)

"Coz we rock"

Homelessness

Out of 15, 4 had been homeless at some point (26.7%). Of these 3 (75%) indicated that it was due to their sexuality. Despite the small survey group, these are frightening figures. There has been no national research into the connection between homeless and sexuality. This clearly proves the need for further research to be done into this area.

This is important for Connexions as homelessness is a clear potential risk of becoming NEET and puts young people at high health risks and high risk of mental distress.

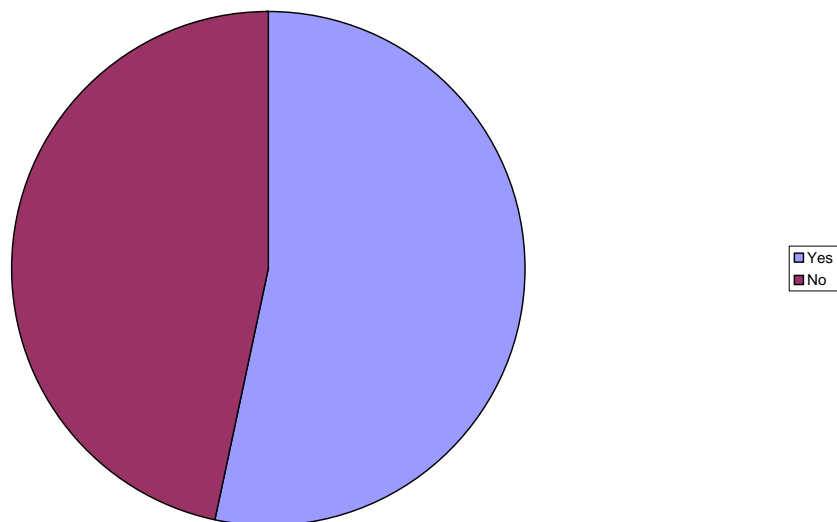


Self Harm

Just over half the group had self-harmed (8 young people), of these 3 believed it was connected with issues regarding their sexuality, 5 did not attribute it to sexuality (although this does not mean sexuality could not have been a contributing factor).

Self-harm as well as being distressing to the young person can also strain relationships with friends and family. There is still huge social stigma attached to self-harming. There is little doubt that a young person who is self-harming is going through high levels of anguish, which is likely to impact negatively on other areas of their life

Have you ever self-harmed?



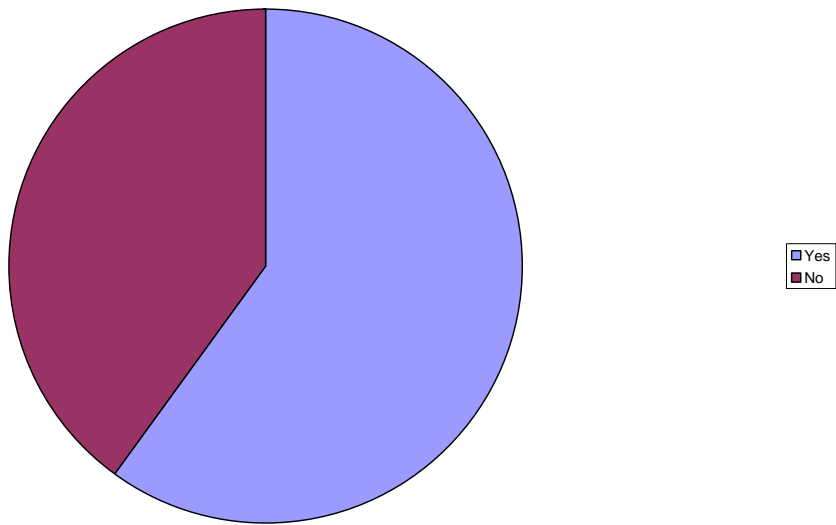
Suicide

In response to the question, "have you ever attempted suicide?" 9 young people (60% of the group) said they had. This is well over the generally quoted figure of 1 in 4 (25%). This could be due to the fact that young people in this situation are more likely to use Allsorts at some point for support. This considered, out of such a small group this is an exceptionally high figure, and should be a cause for grave concern. Of these 9 young people 6 directly attributed suicide attempts to issues related with their sexuality, 3 did not (although this does not rule out it being a contributing factor).

Out of the 9 who had attempted suicide, 7 had made more than one attempt, with 2 young people making more than 5 attempts. The number of young people who have made repeated attempts to take their life again is frightening given the small number of the survey group.

The gender split of those who attempted suicide closely matches the gender split of the survey group, with 5 males and 4 females.

Have you ever attempted suicide?



Clearly not enough is being done to support young gay, lesbian and bisexual people who are considering suicide, and they may also be unaware or unwilling to use services which are available to them.

Homophobia

Of the sample group, 3 had not experienced any homophobia, 12 had. The graph below shows that most homophobia affecting young people occurs at school or college, followed by 'around town'. These high incidents in public places point to the fact that homophobia is accepted. People often ignore homophobia in public places rather than intervening and supporting the young person. It is often the case that homophobia is not an isolated incident, at school and college homophobia is often target to those who appear different. Table 1.0 shows the occurrence of homophobia within one year.

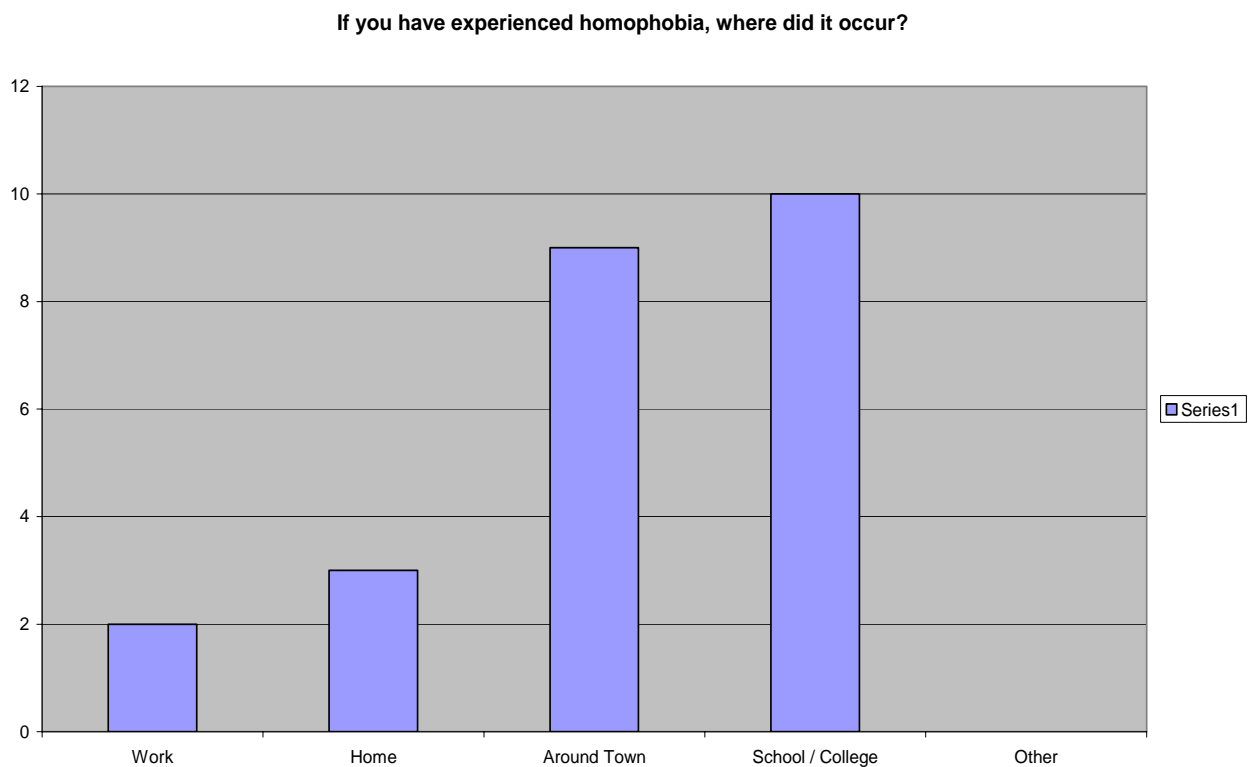


Table 1.0

How many incidents of homophobia did you experience last year?

None	2
1 to 3	2
4 to 6	4
7 to 9	0
10 or more	2
Don't know	2

Conclusions

From the small survey group of a number of young people who feel the need to access an LGB specific youth project, it is clear that there is a demand for youth services that are sensitive to their needs.

While Connexions has made inroads, even while this investigation has been carried out, there is still a long way to go before Connexions is affording the same level of support to LGB young people, as it is to the other sections identified by their core brief.

It is also clear that a lot more research needs to be done on why young LGB people are still suffering so much abuse and prejudice, even from the small survey conducted there are a lot of worrying trends which are married in existing LGB research.

It is my firm belief that Connexions need to add LGB young people as a core target area for delivering services. This would ensure that more information would be gathered on LGB young people who are otherwise still at risk of falling through the net of support systems. Also, more information gathering would allow effective targets to be set at national and local levels to ensure that young LGB people are receiving the specific support they deserve.

Bibliography:

Allsorts Youth Project (2001), Blue Deep Sea, An anthology of writing of LGB Youth

Connexions, (2003) Guidance on Setting and Monitoring Targets 2003-04

Outproud (1997) The !OutProud!/Oasis Internet Survey of Queer and Questioning Youth

Appendix I - Survey Information for young people

Connexions LGB Focus Group

Purpose:

This project aims to provide Connexions with information, experiences and needs from young LGB people.

What is Connexions?

Connexions is a new youth service providing advice, guidance, support and personal development services for all 13-19 year olds. Through Connexions Partnerships it brings together all the services that help young people and give young people access to a Personal Adviser, someone they can trust. Connexions is an innovative and exciting development in the world of young peoples' services. It's about helping young people navigate their way through decisions about studying, jobs and careers.

Through youth work it's about helping young people get the personal development opportunities they need to fulfil their potential and become the active citizens of tomorrow. It's also about helping those who have problems with drugs, alcohol, depression and homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

Connexions is for all young people, helping them to make decisions about their future. One of the cornerstones of the Service is its staff: well-qualified, passionate and enthusiastic practitioners, known as Personal Advisers (PAs). Their role is to really get to know the young person and offer appropriate information and guidance. PAs keep in close contact with the young people they are supporting. They help smooth a young person's path through difficult choices and understand what's on offer.

(From Connexions at a Glance available at www.connexions.org.uk)

How this survey came about:

It was noticed by the author of the survey that Connexions had no official national policy for supporting or monitoring the services needed by young LGB people but had targets and policy for a number of other social groups and minorities.

The author is also aware that there are great variations in the services to LGB people provided by Connexions partnerships. This survey hopes to provide Connexions young peoples group (SCYPG) with up-to-date and relevant information to allow accurate target setting. Also to raise awareness of the need monitor the variation in services provided to LGB young people by Connexions partnerships.

How to Complete the Survey:

Please fill out the attached questionnaire which should take around five minutes. Please answer all questions in as much detail as you have time for and as honestly as possible to provide us with reliable information. This survey has the potential to make changes at a national and regional level to improve services for young LGB people.

Some questions in the survey are regarding sensitive issues. These questions are necessary to support the claim that young LGB youth suffer extreme crisis and are in need of urgent nationwide support. If you do not feel comfortable answering a question you do not have to give an answer

After you have completed the questionnaire there will be time for an open discussion about the points raise and any questions you may have regarding the survey and Connexions in relation to LGB youth.

How the data will be used and confidentiality:

All e-mail addresses will be kept on record for the purpose of giving feedback on the survey, no e-mail addresses will be passed on to any third

party and will be kept in an encrypted format for a period of one year from the closing date of the survey, after this period they will be deleted.

Secure back up copies of the survey data will be kept until the results of the survey have been compiled, after which time the survey files and their backups will be deleted. Paper copies will be destroyed once the data has been compiled electronically.

Information from the survey may be published, but all contributions will be kept completely anonymous, however age, sexuality, and region may be used (for example a 16 year old gay male from Sussex wrote...).

Statistical analysis may be performed on quantitative data; care will be taken to ensure that any statistics produced are accurate and taken in context with the qualitative information gained from the survey.

This survey is being carried out independently of Connexions.

Appendix II – Questionnaire

Please answer all of the following questions as honestly and in as much detail as possible.

1. Please state your gender

<input type="checkbox"/>	Male	<input type="checkbox"/>	Female
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2. Please state your sexuality (check one box only)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Lesbian
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bisexual
<input type="checkbox"/>	Gay
<input type="checkbox"/>	Heterosexual
<input type="checkbox"/>	Unsure

3. Please state your age:

4. Are you in full time education , employment or training?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No
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5. Have you ever used the Connexions service?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No
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6. If you have used the Connexions service how did you find the support you were given?

7. Do you think Connexions should have a specific policy on the needs of young gay, lesbian, bisexual young people?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No
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7.a If yes please state why:

The following questions involve sensitive subjects, if you do not feel comfortable answering a question then you do not have to give an answer.

8. Have you ever been homeless?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No
--------------------------	-----	--------------------------	----

8a. If so was it connected to your sexuality?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No
--------------------------	-----	--------------------------	----

9. Have you ever self-harmed?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No
--------------------------	-----	--------------------------	----

9a. Do you believe it was connected with issues regarding your sexuality?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No
--------------------------	-----	--------------------------	----

10. Have you ever attempted suicide?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No
--------------------------	-----	--------------------------	----

10a. Do you believe it was connected with issues regarding your sexuality?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No
--------------------------	-----	--------------------------	----

10b How many times have you attempted suicide?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Once	<input type="checkbox"/>	2 -3 Times
<input type="checkbox"/>	3 – 5 Times	<input type="checkbox"/>	More than five times

11. Have you experienced homophobia of any form?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No
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11a. If you have experienced homophobia, where did it occur? (Tick as many boxes as relevant)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Work	<input type="checkbox"/>	Home
<input type="checkbox"/>	Around town	<input type="checkbox"/>	School / College
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other please state:		

11b. If you experienced homophobia in school where you forced to change schools?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not relevant
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Appendix III – Raw Survey Data

Below is the data extracted from the surveys which the graphs were compiled from, the actual surveys cannot be reproduced for confidentiality.

"Clear Night Sky" Survey Data

Study into LGB youth and Connexions carried out in Brighton

By John Proctor, Allsorts Youth Project (2004)

Tel: 01273 721 211 E-mail: jcep20@sussex.ac.uk

Please do not use data without prior consent, please reference data used.

		Raw Data
Question 1 Please state your gender	Male	8
	Female	7
Question 2 Please state your sexuality	Lesbian	5
	Bisexual	3
	Gay	7
	Hetrosexual	0
	Unsure	0
Question 3 - Please state your age	13	0
	14	1
	15	1
	16	1
	17	4
	18	1
	19	1
	20	2
	21	1
	22	0
	23	0
	24	0
	25	0
	No Answer	3
Question 4 - Are you in full time education , employment or training?	Yes	9
	NEET	6
	No Answer	0
Question 5 - Have you ever used the Connexions service?	Yes	7
	No	8
	No Answer	0
Question 7 - Do you think Connexions should have a specific policy on the needs of young gay, lesbian, bisexual young people?	Yes	12
	No	2
	No Answer	2
Question 8 - Have you ever been homeless?	Yes	4
	No	11
	No Answer	0

Question 8a -		
If so was it connected to your sexuality?	Yes	3
	No	5
	No Answer	7
Question 9		
Have you ever self-harmed?	Yes	8
	No	7
	No Answer	
Question 9a		
Do you believe it was connected with issues regarding your sexuality?	Yes	3
Data limited to people who had self harmed	No	5
	No Answer	n/a
Question 10		
Have you ever attempted suicide?	Yes	9
	No	6
	No Answer	
Question 10a		
Do you believe it was connected with issues regarding your sexuality?	Yes	6
Data limited to people had attempted suicide	No	3
	No Answer	
Question 10b		
How many times have you attempted suicide?	Once	2
Data limited to people had attempted suicide	2-3 Times	5
	3-5 Times	0
	More than 5	2
Question 11		
Have you experienced homophobia of any form?	Yes	12
	No	3
	No Answer	
Question 11a		
If you have experienced homophobia, where did it occur?	Work	2
Data limited to people who had experienced homophobia	Home	3
	Around Town	9
	School /	
	College	10
	Other	
Question 11b		
If you experienced homophobia in school were you forced to change schools?	Yes	1
Data limited to people who had experienced homophobia at school / college	No	7

Question 11c

What types of homophobia have you experienced?

Data limited to people who had experienced homophobia

Verbal Abuse	11
Physical attacks	4
Threats	7
Other	2

Question 11d

How many incidents of homophobia did you experience last year?

None	2
1 to 3	2
4 to 6	4
7 to 9	0
10 or more	2
Don't know	2