



# The Impact of LGBT Youth Scotland's Digital Youth Work on Young People

1 December 2020



THE UNIVERSITY  
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## Significant Change Story

### Young person's story, aged 19 (Story 1)

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Without LGBT Youth Scotland lockdown would have been horrible. I would not be communicating with anyone outside my immediate family and like two friends, so being able to communicate with the other people I normally see at group is good. And getting support from youth workers has helped a lot too, my mental health would have been in a much worse state than it is now, and I am not sure I'd be safe or alive right now. I've not used the pride and pixels server much, but I've been interacting in there, a group of us actually all met up in Dundee when the restrictions were lifted a bit. I've been engaging in 1.1 more recently and they've been good and helped a lot, I don't think anything has been taken away from doing them in person.

### Youth worker's commentary

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We have supported [him] through several 1.1's and the group throughout lockdown to try and better understand his route into support from the local adult mental health which has involved some advocacy work on his behalf. We have supported them with creating a safety plan to reduce self-harm and suicidal ideation and linking in with their college councillor. [He] has been a regular attender at our Digital youth group through our Pride and Pixels platform. Through this support I have seen them slowly become less stressed about the support being offered by the mental health team. This has been done through 1.1's by planning and setting goals for each mental health appointment. The evidence is clear the impact this work has had on [him] through his own words "I am not sure I'd be safe or alive right now"



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# Statement of Endorsement

When future generations review events of the early 21st century, 2020 will forever be synonymous with the coronavirus pandemic. Over the past few months, restrictions on social interaction have transformed our everyday lives. Local community services, including the youth work sector, have responded as best they can to an ever-changing and increasingly challenging situation. For many youth work organisations this has meant adapting and moving provision online in an attempt to keep young people engaged with practitioners and their peers.

So what has been the impact of these recent changes for youth work and the young people with whom they work? This report presents the findings of a study of the impact of digital youth work on the lives of young people accessing the services of LGBT Youth Scotland. Evidence gleaned from the stories of 22 young people demonstrates the value and impact of digital youth work in supporting them during the pandemic.

Practitioner researchers, who utilised methods characterised by the principles of Transformative Evaluation, gathered the data through reflective conversations with young people living across Scotland. Undertaking research with young people online requires careful consideration of ethical dimensions; it is clear from my review of this study that the care and protection of the young participants has been uppermost in the research process.

I endorse the timely publication of this report, as the youth work sector in Scotland continues to be responsive to young people's needs through the ongoing pandemic. Evidence of the impact of digital youth work holds particular importance and offers insight to the potential for technological creativity and innovation as the sector moves forward.

Dr Ian Fyfe

University of Edinburgh

November 2020

# Executive Summary

This report details the findings of a qualitative research study on LGBT Youth Scotland's digital youth work. The study explored the impact of digital youth work on young people who participated during the coronavirus lockdown from March to July 2020

The study used Dr Sue Cooper's Transformative Evaluation methodology<sup>i</sup>. Youth workers from LGBT Youth Scotland were trained to become research practitioners and gather impact stories from 22 young people. Young people shared their reflections of significant changes they had experienced as a result of participating in digital youth work during lockdown. The stories were then contextualised by the youth workers to generate rich, co-authored significant change stories.

Qualitative analysis of the stories revealed the following impact of digital youth work on young people:

- Reduced isolation
- Improved wellbeing
- Personal growth
- Increased resilience

The study also tried to identify which aspects of digital youth work practice supported delivery of this impact, of particular importance were:

What youth work does

- Group work opportunities
- Individual support
- Participation opportunities

How youth work delivers

- Safe and inclusive digital space
- Regular scheduled youth work

# Introduction: Youth Work and LGBT Youth Scotland

## What is Youth Work?

The Statement on the Nature and Purpose of Youth Work defines youth work as “an educational practice contributing to young people’s learning and development.

Youth work engages with young people within their communities digitally and physically; it acknowledges the wider networks of peers, community and culture; it supports the young person to realise their potential and to address life’s challenges critically and creatively; it takes account of all strands of diversity.”<sup>ii</sup>

All youth work is underpinned by three key principles:

1. Young people choose to participate
2. The work must build from where young people are
3. Youth work recognises the young person and the youth worker as partners in a learning process

Youth work can be targeted or universal, provided by local authorities or voluntary organisations. Targeted youth work involves focussed and tailored interventions aimed at specific groups of young people to bring about often pre-agreed outcomes. Universal youth work can be defined as open access with an open purpose and curriculum however, in reality universal youth work can also often have a specific focus responding to young people and community needs. This study focused on the universal youth work delivered digitally by LGBT Youth Scotland.

Digital youth work focuses on the digitalisation and digital transformation of the youth work sector and youth work practice. It means proactively using and/or addressing digital media and technology in youth work practice as a tool, an activity and/or as content. It includes a broad range of methods and approaches that can be employed in any youth work setting. Digital youth work has the same aims and is underpinned by the same ethics, values and principles as youth work in general. It can happen in face-to-face situations as well as in online settings<sup>1</sup>.

# LGBT Youth Scotland

LGBT Youth Scotland is Scotland's national charity providing spaces for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex young people age 13 to 25 to explore who they are in a safe and affirming way. LGBT Youth Scotland's mission is to play a leading role in the provision of quality youth work to LGBTI young people that promotes their health and wellbeing, and to be a valued and influential partner in LGBTI equality and human rights and inclusive education.<sup>2</sup>

## Youth Work in LGBT Youth Scotland

LGBT Youth Scotland delivers youth groups across Scotland. The organisation aims to remove barriers to attainment, build confidence, resilience and skills and support LGBTI young people to move on to positive destinations. Youth workers support young people through weekly youth-led group work and sessions focus on forming relationships, building confidence and resilience, and developing skills in an informal environment. Alongside this LGBT Youth Scotland delivers one to one support using an asset based coaching model which focuses on young people's strengths and builds their capacity from a positive, rather than deficit, model. This was originally run as a pilot after exploring different models. It was decided over the course of three years to use the GROW (Growth, Reality, Opportunities and What actions) model with input and feedback from the young people, working in partnership with them to develop it. Sessions provide an opportunity for youth workers to help young people identify their own strengths and empower them to use these to realise their goals and reach their potential in their day to day lives.

Due to COVID-19 and the restrictions put in place LGBT Youth Scotland were unable to deliver face to face youth groups or 1:1 support for young people. The organisation transitioned quickly to digital youth work responding to the needs of young people through the new digital platform Pride and Pixels on Discord. This platform began development in 2019 as a tool to integrate more young people into youth groups, removing barriers presented by location, lack of confidence or support at home or challenges with transport and access.

In 2019 LGBT Youth Scotland consulted with young people across all of their youth groups to find out what platforms they were using and what their ideal online community space would look like. Young people shared that they wanted a safe space online where they could be themselves without having to worry about bullying or safety and where they could talk about topics important to them without judgement. When asked what platforms they used a large number of them mentioned Discord, a communications tool used widely by gamers and young people. Discord is a flexible platform which uses a role and permission-based system to manage access and moderation. This provided a safe space where LGBT Youth Scotland could control entry and include the necessary safeguarding measures for youth work.

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<sup>2</sup><https://www.lgbtyouth.org.uk/about-us/>

The Pride & Pixels Discord server is private which ensures that access can only be granted via an invite link which can be tailored to have a limited time usage or limits on number of uses. Permission settings only allow LGBT Youth Scotland staff to create invite links. To access Discord young people need to set up an account with an email and password and they can choose to switch on 2FA (Two-Factor Authentication). LGBT Youth Scotland have enforced 2FA through server settings for all staff and moderators as an extra layer of security. LGBT Youth Scotland follow the same process for young people accessing the server as they do for face-to-face services. The young person has to initiate contact through their website and then meet with a youth worker to discuss their needs. This one-to-one would normally take place face-to-face but currently is being carried out via video call. Only then is the young person given access to the server. Young people can see their information channels and can choose to have access to general chat channels and the youth worker will also grant the young person access to the youth group channels of the group geographically closest to them.

Youth workers moderate their own group channels where youth groups run at the same time as they did in face-to-face services, there are three staff admins who manage the server overall and oversee the general chat channels. These general channels have a group of 20 youth moderators who are there to help other young people navigate the server and deal with any minor issues. The youth moderators were recruited through an application and interview process and were given training on their role. They meet with the staff admins on a weekly basis to discuss any issues raised and feed in suggested improvements or changes to the server.

All LGBT Youth Scotland youth groups moved online running digitally at the same time as normal with the same youth worker ensuring young people had a consistent and a safe space to connect with staff and other young people.

Whilst the online platform enabled LGBT Youth Scotland to continue to deliver youth groups throughout COVID-19 restrictions, it was designed to be more than a temporary replacement for face-to-face youth work. The long term aim is for digital and face-to-face work to dovetail and complement each other, providing new opportunities for engagement, social action and interaction and innovative youth work practice.



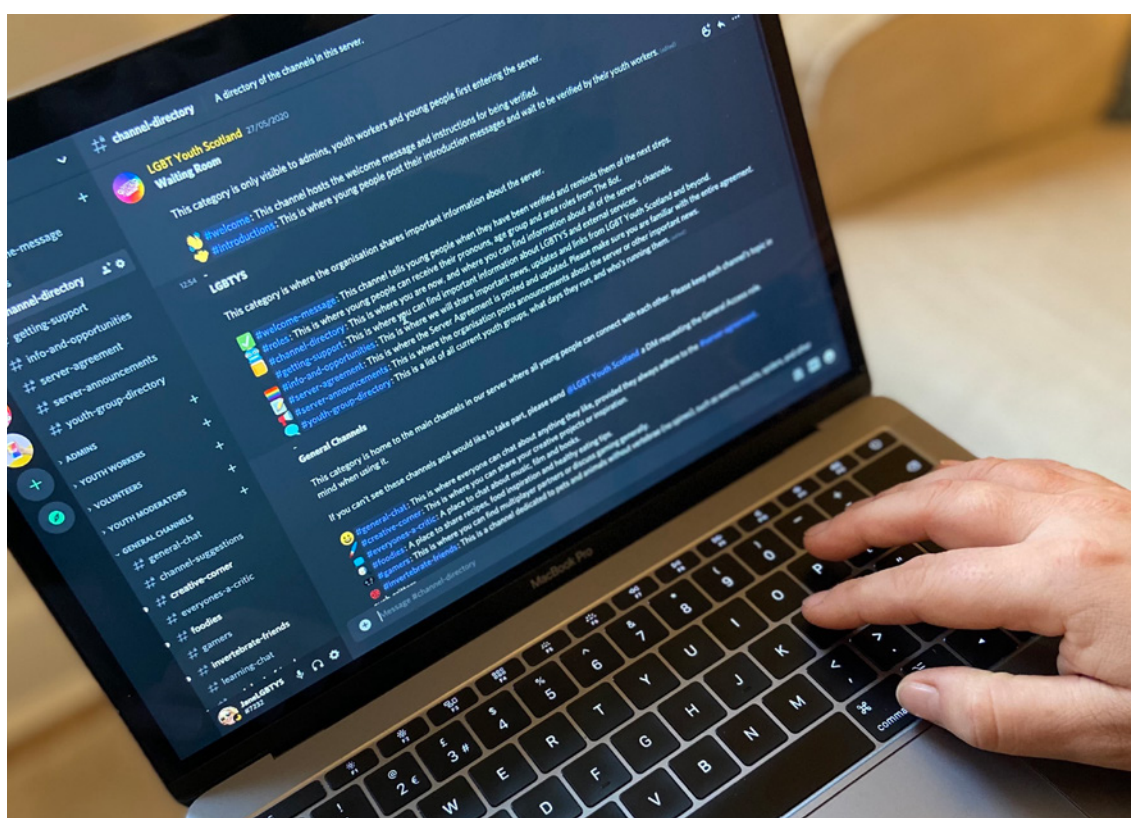
# Purpose of the Research

In spring 2020, coronavirus and lockdown meant that LGBT Youth Scotland had to move all of its youth work online. The speed and scale of the move from offline to online youth work was unprecedented in LGBT Youth Scotland and the wider youth work sector. This was set against a volatile and uncertain backdrop of a global pandemic.

LGBT Youth Scotland and YouthLink Scotland were keen to use the Transformative Evaluation methodology to better understand the impact this digital youth had work on young people who engaged in it. Partners were also keen to ensure that the process of evaluation gave youth workers the opportunity to build their research skill set, reflect on their practice, understand what works and understand the difference their practice makes on young people.

This research set out to answer two main questions:

1. What was the impact of digital youth work on young people in LGBT Youth Scotland?
2. How was that impact achieved?



# Methodology

The Transformative Evaluation methodology used in this research was used in three previous studies *The Impact of Community-based Universal Youth Work in Scotland*<sup>iii</sup>, *The Impact of Community-based Universal Youth Work in Dumfries and Galloway*<sup>iv</sup> and *The Impact of Community-based Universal Youth Work in Edinburgh*. The methodology developed by Dr Sue Cooper (Cooper 2012) is based on a reflective conversation between a young person and the youth worker. The methodology enables wider stakeholder engagement through the analysis of stories and seeks to provide both evidence of impact and development of practice through the process of evaluation. This research was conducted entirely online.

This methodology is consistent with the values and approach of youth work, as it provides an opportunity to listen to the stories of young people about what they think they have gained from taking part in youth work. It is a method which encourages practice development:

- youth workers receive authentic feedback from young people about how their practice has impacted on their lives;
- both youth workers and stakeholders have an opportunity to reflect on ‘what is working’ and therefore improve and develop practice accordingly;
- it facilitates wider development of organisational learning and knowledge creation in the longer term; and,
- it creates a culture of evaluation built on collaboration and trust between all stakeholders which supports organisational learning and sustainable practice.<sup>3</sup>

## Data collection

In June 2020, YouthLink Scotland provided online training for youth workers from LGBT Youth Scotland to become practitioner researchers and collect stories from young people who accessed their digital youth work provision during lockdown (March to July 2020).

Following initial training, practitioner researchers identified young people to participate in the research. Young people were selected based on the practitioner researcher’s perception that the young person had experienced a change as a result of their involvement in youth work during lockdown. Between June and July 2020, a total of 10 practitioner researchers aimed to gather three stories each giving a total of 30 stories.

The figure of three per researcher was negotiated with LGBT Youth Scotland based on what they considered appropriate given the time and resource available. In total 22 stories were gathered from young people by 9 practitioner researchers. In previous studies, data collection was offline and face-to-face but in this study, by necessity, data collection was online and practitioner researchers found it more difficult to gather stories. One of the challenges was that it was more difficult for youth workers to arrange an interview with some young people who were not always checking their messages regularly. Another challenge was that some young people did not want to contribute because of their anxiety of online communication. Not meeting in person, also created an added challenge to providing support to young people to feel confident to share their story.

LGBT Youth Scotland works across a number of local authorities in Scotland and the study explored the digital offer across a range of locations to reflect the consistency of their digital approach. Stories were collected from young people in the following Local Authorities: Falkirk, Perth and Kinross, Glasgow and Greater Glasgow, Dumfries and Galloway, Fife, Renfrewshire, Edinburgh, Scottish Borders and Highlands. This range of geographical locations meant stories from both rural and urban areas. The study included young people who previously couldn't participate fully or found it difficult to attend face to face groups because of limited access to transport.

Practitioner researchers asked the same question to each young person during the data collection:

**“During lockdown, what do you think has been the most significant change that occurred for you as a result of engaging with us online?”**

Practitioner researchers arranged a time to meet the young person to discuss the research and to provide them with a consent form (parental/guardian for under 16). Once the consent form had been signed and returned, a date and time to collect the story from the young person was organised, using MS Teams, phone or Messenger.

MS Teams was used because LGBT Youth Scotland have been using Microsoft 365 for a number of years as Microsoft makes its basic level tools available for free to non-profit organisations. This ensures that all users accounts are linked to the organisation and controlled at a central level when it comes to security and access. Use of MS Teams was guided by LGBT Youth Scotland's internal security needs, confidentiality and safeguarding of data.

Messenger was used as LGBT Youth Scotland have also been using Facebook to communicate with young people for some years, including the Groups and Messenger features. As such, it is a familiar platform for young people to communicate with their youth workers.

Where the young person consented, the interview was recorded and then transcribed by the practitioner researcher, otherwise written notes were taken. Young people were asked to check that the story accurately represented what they had said and suggest any amendments which were then made.

Once the stories had been gathered, the practitioner researchers contextualised each story with their own commentary. The significant change stories consist of the young person's input and the practitioner researcher's commentary which the young person approved. Young people were also asked for their consent to share their stories in the final report. The stories were anonymised before analysis and young people were asked to choose a pseudonym to use in their story.

## Coding and Analysis

Analysis of the significant change stories initially involved reading each story and identifying key themes and trends known as codes. This process is called coding.

Coding generated two types of codes:

- Impact codes that described the difference digital youth work had on young people. There were 28 impact codes.
- Process codes that described what it is about the youth work process that generates the impact. There were 15 process codes.

Youth workers from LGBT Youth Scotland were a key part of the coding process which also took place online. Youth worker's involvement helped them to develop research skills, have the time and space to reflect on youth work practice and shape the language used for coding.

There were four main phases of analysis. Phases 1, 2 and 3 took place in August 2020, whilst phase 4 took place in August and September 2020.

Phase 1 - members of the research team<sup>4</sup> came together online to read and review 4 stories and identify the key codes emerging. The stories were randomly selected at this workshop and the research team identified an initial set of codes for impact and process.

The coding days for Phase 1 and 3 took place online using Zoom, chosen for its ease of use and access. Coding online meant that the project could continue despite the coronavirus restrictions, however it also presented a number of challenges:

- Length of coding session – coding the stories is a tiring process even more so when using Zoom. To counter this the sessions were shorter and more structured with regular scheduled breaks
- Session materials –in previous studies the research team used paper copies of the stories and flip charts and pens to record codes so that the whole team could see and refer to them throughout the session. For the online coding sessions, the research team were emailed the stories in advance of the session and codes and notes were stored on Padlet, an online bulletin board, which all members of the research team had read access to. Padlet worked well and is a more environmentally friendly way of working but does require participants to work on two separate devices or move between screens during a session
- Gaining consensus - gaining consensus on each code was a challenge. Each practitioner researcher needed the opportunity to discuss and agree on a code and discussions don't flow as well on Zoom as they do offline. For this reason, the research team coded less stories than they would have done in a face-to-face session
- Wellbeing – Some of the stories were emotional to read and analyse and it was more challenging to provide support if required via zoom. The research team took regular breaks and checked in with practitioner researchers throughout the session.

Phase 2 - practitioner researchers coded the remaining 18 stories using the codes identified in phase 1 plus noting any other codes that arose in these stories.

Phase 3 – a second online workshop with members of the research team to:

- Consolidate the initial codes into final, overall domains. This process involved organising the codes into groups called domains and agreeing an overall name for that domain. Domains help to summarise and describe the findings of the study. A domain will have a number of codes attached to it.
- Select stories that exemplify these final impact and process domains

Phase 4 - all of the data and codes were independently checked and verified by the independent researcher from Northern Star. This process ensured that the codes were applied consistently across stories, that there is enough evidence for application of codes and that the initial codes contribute to the relevant final domain.

## Stakeholder Workshop

The 10 stories selected by the research team as exemplifying the final impact and process domains were reviewed by a stakeholder group in September 2020. The stakeholder group was made up of LGBT Youth Scotland staff, partner organisations and YouthLink Scotland. Please see Appendix 1 for more detail on the stakeholder group.

The stakeholder group reviewed all 10 stories and chose 4 stories that they considered to demonstrate the most significant change that digital youth work has delivered and these are featured in full in this report.



# Summary of Transformative Evaluation Methodology for LGBT Youth Scotland



## Ethical Considerations

Practitioner researchers had long standing relationships with young people and had a duty of care for the young people participating in the research. All stories were anonymised, and young people were asked to select a pseudonym to use.

Practitioner researchers worked with young people to explain the purpose of the research, how their stories would be used and to gain informed consent from young people. The consent form used in the study can be found in Appendix 2. Once youth workers had added their commentary to the young person's story, the young person was asked to approve the significant change story before being submitted for analysis. In the report, pseudonyms and other identifying details have been removed to protect the anonymity of the young people.

## Limitations of the study

Young people were asked specifically to focus on digital youth work and its impact during lockdown in their significant change stories. However, almost all of the young people involved in the study had been participating in LGBT Youth Scotland's offline youth work provision before coronavirus and as such it is difficult to disentangle and attribute online and offline impact. It is highly likely that the successful switch to online was in part due to successful offline engagement during which young people built positive relationships with youth workers based on trust and respect.

This study is based on 22 stories and this small sample size should be kept in mind when reading the findings, particularly where percentages are used. The young people selected to participate in the research were those known to the practitioner researchers though their involvement in digital youth work and deemed to have experienced some kind of change as a result of their involvement. The research only focussed on a small sample of young people who had engaged in LGBT Youth Scotland's digital youth work and the findings should not be generalised to digital youth work in other organisations or face to face youth work.

The research did not set out to measure the number of young people that had experienced change as a result of youth work but rather to better understand the extent to which digital youth work impacts young people engaging with the service.





## Significant Change Story

### Young person's story, aged 17 (Story 3)

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The most significant change for me has been that I have been able to meet so many new people from all over Scotland that I would not have met if it hadn't been for the discord server. Having the youth group on discord has helped because it gives me something to look forward too. I haven't had much to keep me going in lockdown so I really look forward to coming to it every week. It's also helped me stay in touch with more people & given me a way to have social interaction which I wouldn't have had otherwise. We have also been involved in the development of Discord. I found this really good as it felt like I was able to help out with improving the server & making it a better place for others to join in. I think that I would have struggled a lot more than I have because I wouldn't have really had anyone to talk to or anyone to help me through stuff had LGBT Youth's digital work not been here.

### Youth worker's commentary

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[They] have engaged with LGBT Youth Scotland for just over two years through our 1.1's and youth groups. During lockdown they have engaged each week with the Digital groups via our new Pride & Pixels platform. [They] have been a lot more vocal with the group setting in this way and has been able to express their views and opinions much more due to the online setting of groups. [They] have also been informed in focus groups to look at shaping how our online youth moderators for the Discord server will work. Having this platform has increased [their] ability to communicate with not only their friend group but also to extend it across the country while also helping to shape the service. This in turn has reduced [their] isolation during lockdown and will hopefully continue to do so beyond lockdown given they live in a rural community



# Findings

## Analysis of stories

LGBT Youth Scotland practitioner researchers gathered 22 stories from young people across Scotland.

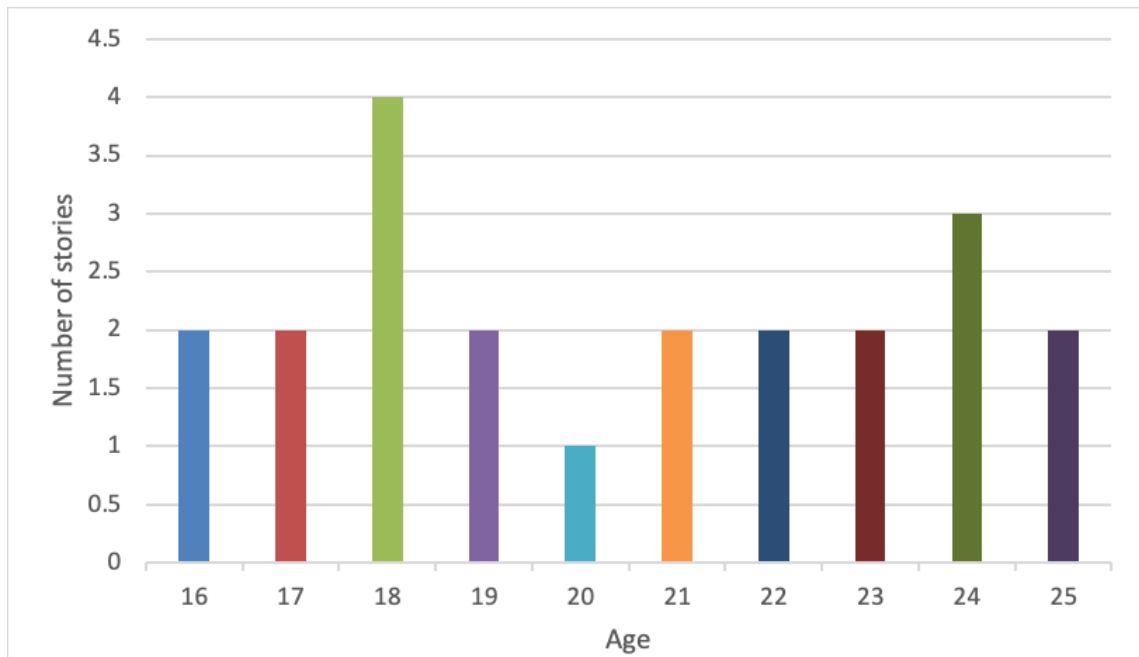
**Table 1: Number of stories by location**

Organisation	Number of Stories
Dumfries and Galloway	3
Edinburgh	4
Falkirk	2
Fife	1
Glasgow City	1
Greater Glasgow	4
Highland	2
Perth and Kinross	1
Renfrewshire	1
Scottish Borders	3

### Age of participating young people

The significant change stories were generated by young people aged 16 to 25.

**Chart 1: Number of stories generated by age**



### **Stories and codes**

There were 43 initial codes identified – 28 impact codes and 15 process codes. Each individual code can only be applied once to a story. The average number of codes per story is 10.

# The impact of digital youth work on young people

During the analysis process there were 28 impact codes generated which were grouped together into 4 main impact domains. A fifth impact domain was identified to capture the challenges young people identified with digital youth work so that LGBT Youth Scotland can use this learning in future work.

Table 2 below shows both the impact codes and the impact domains. Please note that like the codes, each domain can only be applied to a story once. For example, if a story has both the Connection and Making new friends codes applied, this will only count as one application of the Reduced isolation domain. For this reason, the percentage of stories in which the impact domain is present (final column of the table) is lower than the sum of the impact code percentages (second column in the table).

**Table 2: Impact codes and domains**

Impact Codes	% of stories the impact code is applied to	Impact Domain	% of stories the impact domain is applied to
Connection	86%	Reduced Isolation	86%
Feeling part of a community	23%		
Increased engagement	23%		
Making new friends	14%		
More aware of other groups and events	9%		
Enjoyment/fun	50%	Improved wellbeing	77%
Sense of stability/normality	50%		
Feeling supported	32%		
Positive impact on emotional wellbeing	27%		
Positive impact on mental health	27%		
Something to look forward to	18%		
Feeling safe	14%		
Positive impact on physical health	5%		

Impact Codes	% of stories the impact code is applied to	Impact Domain	% of stories the impact domain is applied to
Confidence	32%	Personal Growth	68%
Leadership	32%		
Communication skills	23%		
Volunteering	18%		
Taking social action	14%		
Digital skills	9%		
Recognising of the value of youth work	9%		
Being a role model	5%		
Positive destination	5%		
Sense of purpose	27%	Increased Resilience	36%
Setting goals	14%		
Coping strategies	9%		
More able to access support services	9%		
Difficulty in engaging with others online	23%	Impact Challenges	32%
Barriers to being online	9%		

Engagement in digital youth work through LGBT Youth Scotland reduced isolation in 86% of stories. Young people felt more connected, improved their wellbeing, and developed new skills and attributes through digital youth work during lockdown.

This section provides more detail on each of the impact domains and illustrative quotes from young people and practitioner researchers. The quotes from young people and workers are not from the same story unless this is explicitly indicated. Any names of people or organisations have been removed to protect the anonymity of the young people participating in the research.

When reading this section, it is important to remember that rarely do the codes or domains occur in isolation. The impact of youth work on young people is multi-faceted and multi-layered with many connections between codes and domains.

## Reduced Isolation

The majority of young people (86%) participating in this study highlighted that participating in digital youth work through LGBT Youth Scotland reduced their isolation during lockdown. The imposition of lockdown in March 2020, meant that young people were physically cut off from friends and social contacts. Most were no longer able to attend school, college, university or work. This coupled with the uncertainty and worry of living in a pandemic had the potential to leave young people anxious and isolated with little opportunity to engage socially. Most young people in this study used the LGBT Youth Scotland digital platform to engage in structured group work sessions with their peers, 1-2-1 sessions with a youth worker or connect with other young people informally through the digital platform communication channels. The ability to connect with other young people and youth workers and a reduction in isolation contributed to increased wellbeing for the young people in the study.

Just under a quarter of young people (23%) increased their engagement and felt part of a community. A smaller proportion of young people (14%) were able to make new friends through digital youth work. Through their engagement in LGBT Youth Scotland digital youthwork, 9% of young people were able to find out about other groups and events they could take part in.

**“During lockdown one of my main worries was not being able to see my friends, who I would always see at group if we didn’t have time to meet externally through the week. The biggest change that has happened for me during lockdown as a result of engaging with LGBTYS, [the] Youth Group and my youth worker has been that I have not become isolated as a result of lockdown. Also as an essential worker I was worried about getting stressed with my job with no opportunity to relax with my friends or generally distract myself. Having digital group added a sense of routine and regular life into my schedule, making the days less jumbled together and giving a chance to still talk about activism and other things that are still important to me. Additionally, through the LGBTYS online server, I have made a few new friends, who I typically chat with every day and play online games with once a week, which has given me the relaxation time I was worried I’d be missing. Being able to plan and record a podcast as usual has definitely given a stable feeling to my group, and is keeping me keen to return to group as soon as we can.”**

Young person, Aged 21, (Story 20)

## Improved Wellbeing

Over two-thirds of young people (76%) who shared their stories reported an improvement in wellbeing. Young people enjoyed their time online and participating in digital youth work gave them something to look forward to. The ability to have fun with others and enjoy the sessions contributed to improved emotional wellbeing in young people. Using the online platform gave young people control of how they engaged – video, voice only or using the chat/text function. They were able to meet with friends and peers and have fun in a safe and inclusive space and the importance of this should not be underestimated in the lockdown period. Young people's wellbeing was improved by their ability to digitally meet and socialise with others, take part in both structured activity as well as informal chat.

**“I've been less bored, and I have something to look forward to. It makes me excited for lockdown ending and when we can finally see each other again. It's helped me to learn more about local events.”**

Young person, ages 16 (Story 4)

LGBT Youth Scotland's digital youth work was a constant in young people's lives and provided a sense of normality and stability during an unsettling time. Whilst the youth work moved online, the timing and content of youth groups remained constant helping young people feel secure. Young people felt supported by their peers and by their youth workers.

**“Yet with the...digital group, whether sessions are over a video call or just typed messages, I feel I have my voice. That I have the confidence to be myself, laugh and joke with the others, even when I may not be physically capable of doing so. That I have the support of my friends and am not judged for the methods I use to take control of my disfluency. My youth group leader has also been a great source of support and help over this time too, filling me with confidence and encouragement to try and bring back some normality. Something I can't thank him enough for.”**

Young person, aged 22 (Story 13)

For some young people, engagement in digital youth work led to improvements in their mental health. They were able to access support from their LGBT Youth Scotland youth worker, their peers or where appropriate were referred to other services.

**“Taking part in regular online sessions with LGBTYS has definitely helped my mental health in lockdown, especially now that university has finished and there’s no coursework or exams to keep me busy. Weekly meetings at LGBTYS have always given me a sense of stability and belonging, and now more than ever, when the days tend to merge into one another, they are a lifeline back to reality and a reminder that life continues despite the current pandemic. Chatting on Discord isn’t like meeting up in person and sometimes there are long, awkward lulls that don’t tend to happen in real life conversations, but there have also been some really great online activities and the audio channel allows us to banter more freely! I miss my friends from group and can’t wait to meet up with them again, but I’m extremely grateful that in the meantime we’re being provided with a virtual space that allows us to safely communicate and do activities together.”**

Young person, aged 24 (Story 5)





## Personal Growth

Over two thirds of young people (68%) in the study thought they had experienced personal growth and skills development through their engagement in digital youth work. Young people were able to develop and practice their digital skills and their online communication skills to meet new people from across Scotland.

Just under a third of young people (32%) were more confident. With practice and support from youth workers they were able to feel more confident to access online groups and chat with other young people in the communication channels. One young person had secured a new job and a new home helped by the confidence they had developed through digital youth work.

“During lockdown and with us starting our groups on Facebook, following a digital 121 session he felt confident to be added into the closed group and attended group for the first time. Understandable he was nervous for his first engagement however throughout the session his youth worker checked in with him in messenger while group was running, and he said he felt very welcomed by the group. Since his first visit to our online groups he has now also moved over to join our Discord server and often attends our weekly groups even if just to say hello and take part in the icebreakers if he has other commitments on... Through attending groups, we have saw a huge increase in [his] confidence and sense of self as he pops in to groups and initiates conversations with ease whereas pre lockdown this would have felt too overwhelming for him.”

Youth worker, (Story 7)

Young people were given opportunities to shape the development of the online platform as well as leading sessions for youth workers and other young people helping them to develop leadership skills, volunteer their time and make a difference.

“At the start of lockdown, it was really good to be able to take more lead in group when I was teaching staff some BSL which I wouldn't have felt confident to do face to face.”

Young person, aged 24 (Story 8)

## Increased Resilience

Resilience is the ability young people have to cope with and recover from challenges and difficulties. It means dealing with stressful or difficult situations in a positive or constructive way.

Coronavirus and the resulting lockdown was a difficult and isolating experience for many young people and LGBT Youth Scotland's digital youth work helped young people to cope with and navigate the challenges of living through a pandemic. Just over one third of young people's stories (36%) talked about improved resilience in a variety of ways. Participation in digital young work gave young people a sense of purpose, a reason to get up in the morning. Regular participation was a coping strategy for young people helping them to have fun, stay engaged and optimistic. Where relevant, young people were supported to set goals around mental health and access other support services where needed.

**“It's been good that we've still been able to do it[. . .]It gives you a purpose, a reason to get up and make yourself presentable as opposed to sitting in your pj's all day. It's been helpful to have routine, I'm someone who likes routine and routine's been difficult in lockdown. Overall it's been a positive experience, I'm not the most comfortable on video calls but the more I've done it the more comfortable I've been with it. It's something I wouldn't have done before. It's helped me push my own boundaries. I've been struggling living on my own and not being able to see my family and seeing familiar faces has helped. It's something to focus on, if you feel rubbish it gives you something to focus on and say I've got that to do in a few days so that's ok. It gives you a purpose.”**

Young person, aged 23 (Story 9)

## Challenges with digital youth work

A small number of young people participating in the study reported little or no impact from their engagement. For other young people, whilst they valued the youth work offer during lockdown and recognised an impact in their own lives they also noted challenges with digital youth work:

- A move from face to face meetings to online meeting meant they were more likely to forget about sessions
- Online engagement with other people is different from face to face engagement. It's harder to read body language and facial expressions, conversations don't flow as well and can be stilted. Some young people were uncomfortable seeing themselves on screen (although the ability to turn the camera off was appreciated)





## Significant Change Story

### Young person's story, aged 22 (Story 18)

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From a very young age I knew I was trans FTM. I came out when I was 15 and had a long hard struggle up until recently with my family. It took me years to accept maybe a support group would help me out. In fact it did! Having only been with LGBT Youth Scotland for little over a year, I'd already felt a connection to everyone there. LGBT Youth Scotland gave me a sense of safety and happiness. Not being able to see my friends and the workers dampened my moods. Not having things to look forward to or activities to plan for.

During lockdown I was having weekly 121s in order to help me gain routines with things. During that time me and [my youth worker] decided to run some workshops with other groups on the new Discord server. These were so fun! I also gained so much more understanding of youth work and thoroughly enjoyed them. I created videos for LGBT Youth Scotland and also ran live workshops. We had a few young people join in and also give some help to others as well! It was truly wonderful to see everyone come together via social media and technology. Even though I feel like I've been visiting LGBT Youth Scotland a short amount of time, I feel like I've flourished as a person and gained skills I never thought I could have. Being through this I feel as though LGBT Youth Scotland has supported me enough to look into the future and me aspiring to work for them. I'd like to thank everyone who has supported LGBT Youth Scotland through this very odd time in our lives.

### Youth worker's commentary

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[He] is a very outgoing and gentle person, sociable and with a great sense of humour. This can sometimes make it hard to spot when he's having a hard time. It took a bit of time for [him] to accept some support and to work through some of the issues he was struggling with. During lockdown, [he] started running online workshops on trans topics, where he volunteered to answer questions [from] other, often younger, people using our services. [He] has now become a very confident young person and an excellent role model to many young trans people. This confidence has led him to many positive destinations, such as a new job and a happy home with a friend.



## How was the impact on young people achieved?

This section of the report looks at the elements of the digital youth work process that were identified as supporting delivery of impact with young people. Any themes that emerged during the analysis process that were concerned with the nature, purpose and practice of youth work were recorded as process codes. Process codes describe what it is about the youth work process that generates impact. There were 15 process codes identified which were then grouped together into 5 process domains. The process domains have been organised in to two overarching categories:

1. What youth work does
2. How youth work delivers

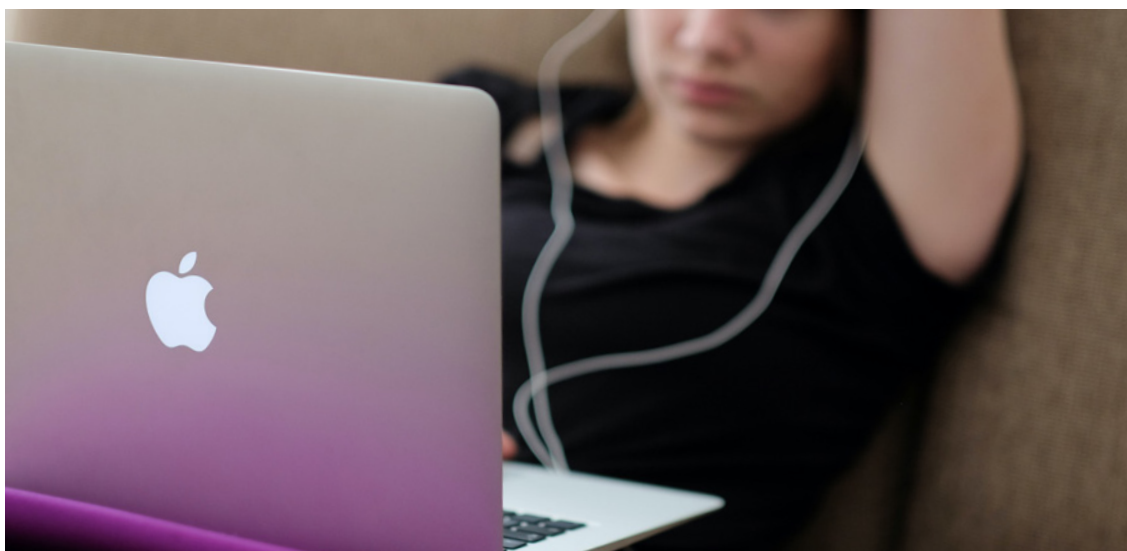
**Table 3: Digital youth work process codes and domains**

Process Codes	% of stories the impact code is applied to	Process Domain	% of stories the impact domain is applied to
<b>What youth work does</b>			
Hosting groups	77%	Group work opportunities	77%
Peer support	36%		
<b>How youth work delivers</b>			
1-2-1 sessions	41%	Individual support	50%
Mental Health Support	18%		
Advocacy	9%		
Joined up working	5%		
Information and signposting	5%		
<b>How youth work delivers</b>			
Opportunities to lead	27%	Participation opportunities	45%
Opportunities for activism/ social action	14%		
Opportunities to shape service development	5%		

Process Codes	% of stories the impact code is applied to	Process Domain	% of stories the impact domain is applied to
<b>How youth work delivers</b>			
Reducing barriers/increasing accessibility	50%	Safe and inclusive space	73%
Opportunities to interact with peers outwith a formal youth group	41%		
Safe digital space	18%		
Understanding young people's needs	18%		
Regular scheduled youth work	59%	Regular scheduled youth work	59%

This section provides more detail on each of the process domains as well as illustrative quotes from young people and practitioner researchers. The quotes from young people and workers are not from the same story unless this is explicitly indicated.

The impact that youth work has on a young person is often achieved over a period of time using a variety of tools, methods and approaches. There is no one-size-fit-all in youth work and support is tailored to a young person's needs and this is highlighted in the significant change stories.



## What youth work does

A core part of youth work is providing opportunities and activities for young people. Very often these opportunities are shaped by young people themselves and are responsive to their communities and needs.

## Group work opportunities

A key part of the impact on young people was delivered through group work. Over three-quarters of the stories included attendance at digital youth work groups. LGBT Youth Scotland hosted digital groups and gave young people the opportunities to meet their friends and peers in an online safe space. For some of the young people involved in the study these online groups were critical for tackling isolation during lockdown as they were unable or uncomfortable to share their identity with those they live with. The online groups were a space where they could be themselves, engage with youth workers and get peer support. They were a place to have fun and relax.

**“I think that if we did not have the Pride & Pixel’s server my lockdown would be way more boring because I love going to youth group so much and having fun and chatting to all my friends. I can keep in touch with people from group and have fun at group because if I did not have group online, I would have less things to do in lockdown which would make me feel like a chunk of my life has been taken away.”**

Young Person, aged 18 (Story 22)

## Individual support

In addition to group work, young people had the opportunity for online one-to-one sessions with their youth worker. These sessions enabled the young person to share their challenges and problems in a confidential and safe environment. Youth workers were better able to understand the needs of young people and offer appropriate support. LGBT Youth Scotland’s one-to-one provision aimed to improve young people’s mental and emotional wellbeing. It took a holistic approach, focusing on young people’s needs and using their strengths to help them set goals and achieve them at their own pace. One-to-one support for young people was based on an asset based coaching approach and was available as needed by young people.

**“121’s has been easier as its easier to type what I want to say as sometimes face to face I find it hard to say what I mean. It’s also allowed me to just have a quick chat with my youth worker more regularly on days that I may be feeling low it’s good to have someone to reach out to knowing they are online each day.”**

Young person, aged 24 (Story 8)

Young people received specific mental health support where required through digital one-to-one sessions with youth workers and were referred on to other relevant information and services.

## **Participation opportunities**

Through engagement in digital youth work, young people were able to access opportunities to take action on issues important to them as well as take a lead within LGBT Youth Scotland’s youth work provision. Young people were able to lead online group sessions for other young people and shape the new digital platform.

**“It was good to be able to know that places like LGBTYS were doing things to support BLM, otherwise I wouldn’t have felt so involved, I feel more able to keep up with current events [because of online youth work]. If I hadn’t been part of the youth commission I would have felt my time would have been wasted.”**

Young person, aged 18 (Story 11)



## How youth work delivers

### Safe and inclusive space

Over two thirds of stories identified that the safe and inclusive space provided by LGBT Youth Scotland's youth work was an important driver of impact. Young people had the opportunity to engage with others in a safe and moderated digital space. Young people's ability to switch off their camera and or microphone, gave them control over what others see of them and made some young people feel more confident about engaging.

The shift to digital youth work within LGBT Youth Scotland was accelerated by coronavirus. For some young people, they preferred face to face engagement over online but for others a shift to digital, meant they had increased opportunities to participate. Where young people lived rurally, had limited access to public transport or were unable to ask their families for transport, digital youth work reduced barriers to attendance in that young people could access from home.

**“The biggest change that occurred for me was that I felt like it was easier for me to connect to the group as I didn't have to be able to travel to still be able to participate which is having a slightly positive effect on my mental and physical health as my stress levels are lower than normal which reduces the physical side effects of having high stress levels.”**

Young person, aged 23 (Story 16)

## Regular scheduled youth work

Coronavirus and lockdown created uncertainty for many young people. They were unable to go to school, work or training in person, see friends and family or take part in youth work, hobbies and sports. In a time of change and upheaval, LGBT Youth Scotland committed to delivering consistent youth work where groups and activities took place at regular scheduled times during the week. This helped to foster a sense of stability and normality in young people.

**“Because of where I live, seeing friends is very difficult during lockdown so having a time and a space every week where I am able to socialise online has been really nice. It has also meant that there is a structure to that day which is especially good when so many other things are uncertain at the moment.”**

Young person, aged 18 (Story 15)

**“The routine, sense of purpose and social contact offered by online youth participation mitigated some of the negative impacts of lockdown for [him], and while adapting to online working presented a challenge for him, [he] has consistently attended youth participation workshops online, which has improved his confidence and resilience.”**

Youth worker (Story 9)

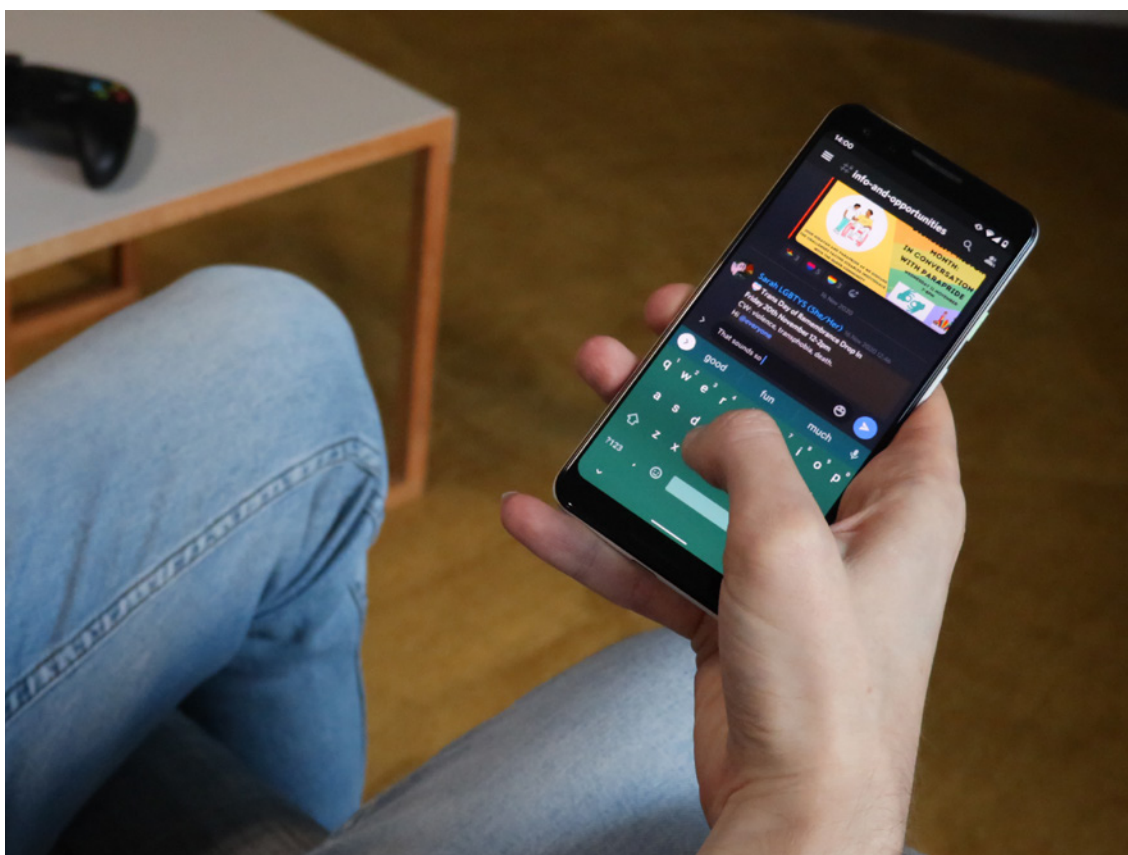
# Conclusion

This research study set out to try to answer two key questions:

1. What was the impact of LGBT Youth Scotland's digital youth work on young people during lockdown?
2. How was that impact achieved?

For the young people involved in the research, digital youth work made a real impact on their lives during lock down. Young people felt better connected and more able to mix with friends, other young people and youth workers online. This reduced the isolation they felt and improved their wellbeing. The digital space that LGBT Youth Scotland created was safe and supportive, helping young people to navigate the uncertain and complex world of a pandemic.

Young people were able to access formal youth work groups, one-to-one sessions with youth workers and chat informally with other young people through the chat channels on the digital platform, all of which made an impact on them. The regularity of youth work provision helped to provide stability in unstable times.



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## Significant Change Story

### Young person's story, aged 18 (Story 21)

If LGBTYS hadn't been there for me to access during lockdown I think it would have been devastating. Before lockdown I really did use LGBTYS and [my youth group] as a crutch to keep regularity in my life, especially if I hadn't gone to school that week or that day! I think that the biggest change for me has come in recognising fully how much I do rely on my youth worker and youth group providing me with that stability. Before I may well have taken this routine, structure and consistency in support for granted. Being able to sit and be in an environment where I can be completely out and myself is crucial as I can't be fully out as non binary to my full family. Having other young people to talk to as well is a great help when I don't want to be sociable. LGBTYS being virtual over lockdown was certainly something to get used to but having the structured workshops and sessions was really great because it gave some sort of structure in lockdown, where previously there wasn't as I am a school leaver and I was on furlough from my job, so my days were pretty empty. Knowing that I also have 1-2-1s that I can access through my youth worker is also so great because it means that no matter what's going on my youth worker will always be there to help me and they will make time for me when perhaps no one else will. I love group and my youth worker so much and I honestly don't think I would have been able to get through lockdown quite as well as I did if LGBTYS hadn't been there.

### Youth worker's commentary

I have been [their] youth worker for about 4 years now and am very much aware of how much they need structure and routine in order to thrive. Prior to lockdown [they] attended [the] youth group at LGBTYS almost every week and has come to look at that time as a cornerstone to their week. When we went into lockdown I worried that some of that structure and routine which the group offered would be lost to [them]. As they mentioned, with leaving school and being furloughed [they have] not had near so much structure in their life at this time, and so it has become even more important than ever for LGBTYS to provide a sense of routine for [them], and our young people more generally. Through running sessions first on Facebook, and then Discord I have deliberately kept the same weekly time slot as once held by our face to face youth group. Where possible I have made the sessions themselves very structured.

”

“

Familiarity, as well as structure is something that [they have] been appreciative over this time. I have been offering digital 1:1 sessions over Facebook Messenger as well as over the phone or via video call. [They have] welcomed this as it has meant that a familiar form of support has remained in place over a particularly challenging time such as lockdown, all be it that the system of accessing support has altered. This project is aimed at discussing and evidencing change, however [they are] right in pointing out that it has been the consistency and push back against too much change that has been so effective for them in engaging positively with us over lockdown. [They] rightfully point out that there have been a few challenges in moving to a digital platform, this is to be expected and we can never fully replicate what has been offered on a face to face basis. However in trying our best to maintain a sense of normality for young people like [them] over what has been a really difficult time for them and us, it heartens me to know that [they] believe we have largely been successful in maintaining a sense of routine as this, as [they] point out, goes some way in making a lockdown a far lesser hardship than it ultimately would be without that routine in place.

”

# Appendix 1

## The Research Team

Dr Amy Calder, Senior Policy and Research Officer, YouthLink Scotland

Nicola Booth, Head of Youth Work, LGBT Youth Scotland

Dr Ian Fyfe, University of Edinburgh

Kelly McInnes, Director, Northern Star

## Practitioner Researchers

Steven Graham, Youth and Community Development Officer

Martin Innes, Youth and Community Development Officer

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Julie-Ann Lyons, Youth and Community Development Officer

Socks Rolland, Youth and Community Development Officer

David Shields, Youth and Community Development Officer

Julia Vidania, Youth and Community Development Officer

Mathew Wilkie, Youth and Community Development Officer

Nikki Nathan Darling, Sessional Youth Worker

Sarah Anderson, Policy and Participation Officer

## Stakeholder Group

Jennifer Layden, Councillor, Glasgow City Council

Julian Heng, Health Improvement Lead, NHS

Paul Sloan, LGBTI Equality Policy Adviser|Equality and Human Rights Division,  
Scottish Government

# Appendix 2 – Consent Form

YouthLink Scotland  
Rosebery House  
9 Haymarket Terrace  
Edinburgh  
EH12 5EZ

## Consent Form – Impact of Digitally-Based Universal Youth Work in LGBT Youth Scotland

We are delighted that you/your young person has volunteered to participate in the impact of digitally-based universal youth work in LGBT Youth Scotland research. The research aims to better understand the impact of open access digital youth work (like online youth clubs) has had on young people during Covid-19.

This research will involve young people sharing a story about significant change they have experienced as a result of attending their youth group.

These stories will be collected online and digitally recorded by their youth worker and then transcribed. The transcriptions will be anonymised to ensure the young person cannot be identified in any way. The stories collected from the young people will help inform the writing of the final report, and some of the stories will be included in the report. Involvement in this research is entirely voluntary, the young person is free to ask any questions and stop the process of telling their story to a youth worker at any point even after the story has been recorded. After the story has been digitally recorded and transcribed, the youth worker will arrange to meet the young person online to check they are happy with it and they can make any changes.

YouthLink Scotland and LGBT Youth Scotland may use the young person's story in:

- A final report
- A presentation at a conference or event
- Our social media channels, including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram
- Our website, partner websites, project website and blog
- Our toolkits and resources
- Business reports

We will keep and use this information for 5 years, where the content is part of a written publication or report the content will remain in the public realm beyond this period.

Please see the YouthLink Scotland Privacy Policy link:

<https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/legal/privacy-policy/>

Every young person/parent/guardian has the right to easily edit and delete all content they create. If you have any questions please feel free to talk to a youth worker or you can get in touch with YouthLink Scotland who are coordinating the project:

- Email Amy Calder from YouthLink Scotland at [acalder@youthlinkscotland.org](mailto:acalder@youthlinkscotland.org)
- Write to us at Rosebery House, 9 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh EH12 5EZ



## Impact of Digitally-Based Universal Youth Work in LGBT Youth Scotland - Consent Form

### Complete and Return

Please return and complete a copy of this consent form and keep a copy for your records.

Please can everyone complete section 1 and 2. Section 3 only needs to be completed if the young person is under the age of 16.

### Section 1

Please tick the boxes you agree with:

I am happy to take part in sharing my story about the impact of universal youth work.

I understand that taking part is voluntary and I can change my mind and stop taking part at any point.

I understand that I just need to let my youth worker know if I no longer want to be part of the research.

I am happy for the youth worker to record my story and understand that the recording will be destroyed when no longer needed.

I understand that I won't be identified in the final report. My name will not be used in any report or any other materials written as a result of the interview unless I give permission.

### Section 2

By signing this form I, the volunteer participant, acknowledge that I have completely read and fully understand the consent request and agree to be bound by it.

I confirm I am aged 16 or over

Full Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Section 3

If this consent is obtained from a participant under the age of 16, then the signature of that participant's parent or legal guardian is also required.

Parent/Guardian Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Please complete and return to the young person's youth work organisation**

# References

- <sup>i</sup> Cooper, S. (2012) *Transformative Evaluation: An interpretive study of Youth workers' experience of using participatory evaluation, Doctoral Thesis*. Available at: <https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/handle/10036/3759> (Accessed: 21 November 2018)
- <sup>ii</sup> YouthLink Scotland (2005) *Statement on the Nature and Purpose of Youth Work*. Available at <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/1255/statementonthenatureandpurposeofyouthwork.pdf> (Accessed November 2019)
- <sup>iii</sup> UofE/Plymouth Marjon University/YouthLink Scotland (2018) *The Impact of Community-based Universal Youth Work in Scotland: A study commissioned by the Scottish Youth Work Research Steering Group*. Available at <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/3183/impact-of-community-based-universal-youth-work-in-scotland-november-2018.pdf>
- <sup>iv</sup> Dumfries and Galloway Council/YouthLink Scotland/Northern Star (2020) *The Impact of Community-based Universal Youth Work in Scotland*
- <sup>v</sup> Cooper, S. (2012) *Transformative Evaluation: An interpretive study of Youth workers' experience of using participatory evaluation, Doctoral Thesis*. Available at: <https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/handle/10036/3759> (Accessed: 21 November 2018)



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