



DEPAUL

Homelessness has no place

THE VISIBILITY GAP

Why LGBTQ+ young people may be missing from the monitoring data of mainstream homelessness services



WITH THANKS TO OUR YOUNG ADVISORS

We would like to thank the Young Advisors who contributed to this project. Their time, openness, and thoughtful input shaped the research in meaningful ways, ensuring it reflected the realities, priorities, and language of LGBTQ+ young people. Without them, this research would not have been possible.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Youth homelessness remains a pressing challenge in the UK. An estimated 118,000 young people aged 16-24 experienced homelessness in 2023–24 (Centrepoin, 2025¹). Amongst this group, LGBTQ+ young people are consistently overrepresented, with research suggesting they make up between 16% and 32% of young people accessing homelessness services, while only making up around 8% of the general youth population (Albert Kennedy Trust, 2021²; McCoy, 2018³; Porchlight, 2015⁴). This disparity reflects well-evidenced challenges that affect LGBTQ+ people, such as family rejection, conflict linked to identity, and wider discrimination, all of which heighten the risk of homelessness⁵⁶⁷.

Creating safe, equitable services that respond effectively to these inequalities depends on visibility, i.e. knowing LGBTQ+ young people are using services. For LGBTQ+ young people, visibility operates at two levels:

- **Individual disclosure** – a young person’s choice to share their gender identity or sexual orientation with a worker they trust, enabling staff to understand and respond to their needs; and
- **Collective disclosure** – where this information is also recorded accurately in monitoring systems, allowing organisations to identify who they are reaching, where inequalities exist, and whether support is equitable.

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- 1 Centrepoin (2025). Hidden in plain sight: Understanding youth homelessness in the UK. Centrepoin. <https://centrepoin.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-02/Centrepoin%20Databank%20Full%20Report%202023-2024.pdf>
 - 2 Albert Kennedy Trust. (2021). The LGBTQ+ youth homelessness report 2021. AKT & University of Kent. <https://www.akt.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/akt-the-lgbtq2byouthhomelessnessreport2021.pdf>
 - 3 McCoy, S. (2018). Danger Zones and Stepping Stones: Phase Two: A quantitative exploration of young people’s experience of temporary living. Depaul UK. <https://www.depaul.org.uk/policies/research-danger-zones-part-two/>
 - 4 Porchlight. (2015). Out of the margins: A study into LGBTQ+ youth homelessness in Kent. Porchlight.
 - 5 Albert Kennedy Trust. (2025). There’s no place like home: LGBTQ+ youth homelessness research report. AKT. <https://www.akt.org.uk/lgbt-youth-homelessness-research-report-2025-theres-no-place-like-home/>
 - 6 Government Equalities Office. (2023). Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people’s experiences of homelessness. UK Government. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/lgbt-peoples-experiences-of-homelessness/lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-peoples-experiences-of-homelessness>
 - 7 McCarthy, L., & Parr, S. (2022). Is LGBT homelessness different? Reviewing the relationship between LGBT identity and homelessness. *Housing Studies*, 37(10), 1697–1718. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2022.2104819>

Crucially, these two levels do not always align. A young person may disclose to a trusted worker but this information may not be recorded; or they may feel unable to disclose at all in environments that feel unsafe or unwelcoming.

Depaul UK's monitoring data shows that only around 8% of young people using its services in 2023/24 identified as LGBTQ+, far below national estimates of the proportion of LGBTQ+ young people experiencing homelessness. This discrepancy raises important questions about what the data is capturing and what it is not.

There are three possible explanations for the data mismatch Depaul UK has observed:

- **Scenario one - Under-representation**

LGBTQ+ young people are genuinely underrepresented within Depaul UK's services, suggesting barriers that prevent them from accessing either homelessness support in general or Depaul UK's services specifically.

- **Scenario two - Non-disclosure**

LGBTQ+ young people are using Depaul UK's services but are not disclosing their identities to staff, possibly due to concerns about safety or potential discrimination.

- **Scenario three - A visibility gap**

Young people disclose their identities to staff, but this information is not consistently recorded at a system level, pointing to issues with data processes and systems.

Each scenario implies a different problem and therefore a different set of solutions.

Supported by The George Michael Fund and managed by The Talent Fund, Depaul UK commissioned Sarah McCoy and Sarah Tayleur to explore what drives the gap between expected and recorded data. With this aim, this research draws on the experiences of young people and Depaul UK staff to examine:

- LGBTQ+ young people's experiences of homelessness services, and how safety, inclusion and trust shape whether they disclose their identities; and
- how gender identity and sexual orientation data can be collected and used more effectively to strengthen support.

An important note on research scope: Although all the young people involved in this research had been supported by Depaul UK, many also spoke about their experiences across a wider landscape of statutory and voluntary homelessness provision. In practice, the boundaries between providers were often blurred in their accounts, with experiences in one setting influencing expectations in another. Because of this, we have not attributed comments to specific services or organisations. Instead, we focus on the broader patterns that emerged – patterns that are relevant to Depaul UK’s data but also reflect sector-wide dynamics around safety, disclosure, and visibility. This approach allows us to explore why Depaul UK’s recorded figures may be lower than expected, while recognising that the underlying drivers are unlikely to be unique to any single organisation.

1.1 WE ARE ALLIES

Although we are not part of the LGBTQ+ community ourselves, we have approached the research as active allies. Allyship, in this context, means listening carefully, centring the voices and experiences of LGBTQ+ people, and recognising the responsibility we have to use our skills to amplify those voices rather than speak for them. Our role is to create safe and respectful spaces for participants, to ensure their insights shape the findings, and to hold ourselves accountable to the principles of inclusivity and equity. We worked closely with colleagues in Depaul UK who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community to deliver the work with young people and co-facilitate the group sessions and focus groups. We hope to contribute to the evidence base and improve support for LGBTQ+ people, whilst acknowledging that the expertise always rests with those who live these experiences.

1.2 TERMINOLOGY

Language around gender identity and sexual orientation is continually evolving, and different individuals and communities may use terms in different ways. In this report, we have sought to use terminology that is both inclusive and respectful, guided by the preferences of the Young Advisors and the young people who took part in the research. While no single set of terms can fully capture the diversity of identities and experiences within the LGBTQ+ community, the language used here reflects the consensus developed through consultation. We recognise that words matter: they shape how people feel about themselves and how they are perceived by others.

The terms outlined in this section therefore provide a common reference point for the report, while acknowledging that some young people may describe their identities differently.

- **Cisgender (cis):** A term for people whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth.
- **Gender dysphoria:** The unease or distress that someone feels due to a mismatch between their gender identity and the sex they were assigned at birth.
- **Gender expression:** How someone presents their gender outwardly through clothing, behaviour, hairstyle, voice, or mannerisms.
- **Gender identity:** A person's deeply felt sense of their own gender e.g. man, woman, non-binary, which may or may not align with the sex they were assigned at birth.
- **Homelessness:** More than just the absence of a roof, homelessness means not having safe, stable housing or a place that feels like home. It can include sleeping rough, staying in hostels, night shelters, or temporary accommodation, or being forced to stay with friends or family because there is no other option.
- **LGBTQ+:** An umbrella term for people whose sexual orientation or gender identity differs from traditional heterosexual or cisgender norms. It stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/ Questioning, with the '+' recognising a wide range of other identities, such as non-binary, intersex, pansexual, and asexual.
- **Non-binary:** A gender identity that is not exclusively male or female. Non-binary people may identify with both, neither, or move between genders.
- **Pansexual:** A sexual orientation describing attraction to people regardless of their gender.
- **Pronouns:** The words we use to refer to someone in place of their name, such as she/her, he/him, or they/them. Using the correct pronouns is an important way of showing respect for a person's gender identity.
- **Sex:** The biological classification of people as female, male, or intersex, usually assigned at birth based on anatomy or chromosomes.
- **Sexual orientation:** Who someone is attracted to emotionally, romantically, and/or sexually e.g. lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, pansexual, asexual.
- **Transgender (trans):** An umbrella term for people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. Some, but not all, non-binary people consider themselves trans.



2. WHAT WE DID

2.1 YOUNG ADVISORS

To undertake this research, we worked with six Young Advisors - all current or former users of Depaul UK services who self-identified as LGBTQ+. They took part in eight online meetings, with two to three Young Advisors present at each session. Their role was to guide and shape the research at key stages, ensuring that methods, language and recommendations reflected the realities and priorities of LGBTQ+ young people.

The Young Advisors contributed to:

- Research design and safety – advising on how to phrase sensitive questions, structure interviews, and ensure appropriate aftercare. Their input directly informed participant information sheets, topic guides and risk-management processes.
- Language and inclusivity – recommending the use of LGBTQ+ as the most inclusive and accessible term, and advising against jargon or abbreviations that might alienate participants.
- Recognising diversity of experience – suggesting dedicated spaces within the research design for trans and non-binary young people. Although low participant interest meant trans and non-binary specific groups did not run, Young Advisors' guidance on this shaped recruitment and analysis.
- Promoting meaningful participation – stressing that young people are more willing to engage with research when they believe their contributions will lead to change; this influenced how we framed the study in recruitment materials.
- Facilitation and positionality – recommending that focus groups be co-facilitated by a Depaul UK staff member who identifies as LGBTQ+, to ensure lived experience was embedded in the process.
- Shaping recommendations – reviewing suggestions emerging from fieldwork and helping refine these into the final recommendations presented in this report.

2.2 RESEARCH WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

The research was underpinned by our commitment to ensuring that young people's voices were central throughout and to creating a safe and inclusive environment that respected young people's identities, experiences, and preferences. We aimed for our research to be youth-led, with the methodology being shaped by Young Advisors.

The eligibility criteria for involvement were intentionally broad, enabling any young person who identified as part of the LGBTQ+ community to participate, provided they had used homelessness services (not necessarily Depaul's) between the ages of 18 and 25. Participants were not asked to evidence or categorise their identity, which helped create a welcoming environment.

The research was designed to offer a range of ways for young people to contribute. These were:

- Focus groups
- One-to-one interviews
- A creative option

Initially, focus groups were planned as the primary method of engagement. However, sign-up was low, with many young people expressing a preference for individual interviews. In response, we flexed our approach to focus mainly on one-to-one interviews. One joint interview was held, with two participants in attendance.

We also offered young people the option to contribute creatively rather than through an interview or focus group, recognising that not everyone feels comfortable talking about their experiences directly. A small number expressed initial interest, but in the end no contributions were received. On reflection, we believe this was because the option was presented only as a written document explaining how to take part, without any dedicated resources, support or facilitation.

In total, nine young people contributed to the research. To protect young people’s identities, we have used pseudonyms throughout this report. The table below lists these, alongside the self-described identity of each young person.

Name	How each young person self-identified
Abi	Cisgender woman, bisexual
Nadia	Cisgender woman, did not share her sexuality but indicated that she was not heterosexual
Indigo	Trans, gay man
Alex	She/her pronouns ‘right now’, said she is often ‘he/himmed’ implying she might not identify with the gender given at birth. Described herself as queer.
Levi	Trans man, does not label his sexuality
Bethan	She/they, pansexual
Sorrel	Female trapped in a male body, experience of gender dysphoria
Catherine	Trans woman
Jamie	Queer

2.3 RESEARCH WITH STAFF

The staff element of the research focused on identity-related data collection and use. We undertook an online survey that was sent to all client-facing staff at Depaul UK and complimented this with a series of focus groups and interviews.

2.3.1 Staff survey

In June 2025, the survey was administered by email to all client-facing staff members working in services that were open to young people.

Of a total of 243 staff members, 74 completed the survey, representing a response rate of 30%. We had hoped for as close to universal completion as possible so that the results would reflect experiences and attitudes of the complete staff team, but response was limited for a number of likely reasons, such as workload pressures and survey fatigue.

2.3.2 Complementary qualitative research activities

All survey respondents who said they were open to participating in a follow-up discussion were invited to attend one of two online focus groups. These focus groups were held in August 2025 and were attended by staff from a variety of Depaul UK services, including supported accommodation projects, prevention services and Nightstop⁸. To ensure we had feedback from staff in services operating in specific contexts e.g. family services, we complimented these general focus groups with a series of group and individual discussions. As outlined below, a total of 18 staff members were involved in the qualitative element of this part of the research:

Activity	Number of staff	Services represented
General focus group 1	4	Mixed
General focus group 2	3	Mixed
Targeted focus group 1	4	Family support/mediation
Targeted focus group 2	4	Supported accommodation for people seeking asylum
1:1 interview 1	1	Floating prevention service
1:1 interview 2	1	Education/prevention service
1:1 interview 3	1	Nightstop

2.4 LIMITATIONS OF OUR RESEARCH

As with all qualitative research of this kind, there are limitations to what can be concluded from our findings.

2.4.1 Young people's participation

Recruiting young people for the research proved challenging, resulting in a small and self-selecting sample. Frontline staff were relied upon to promote the study, and competing pressures may have reduced consistency in recruitment. Young people were also being asked to speak with an external researcher, which may have limited trust and willingness to participate. Practical constraints, such as unstable housing, work and study commitments, and difficulties committing to scheduled sessions, also affected uptake.

⁸ Nightstop is a UK-wide network of same-night emergency accommodation services that support young people in crisis. Nightstop places young people in the homes of volunteer hosts, alongside support to find a permanent housing solution. Find out more: <https://www.depaul.org.uk/nightstop/>

Young Advisors noted that some young people who were eligible to take part may not have identified with the term LGBTQ+, or may not have felt safe, confident, or ready to participate. As a result, those who took part may be those most comfortable discussing their identities, while others may be under-represented. No demographic data e.g. age, ethnicity, socioeconomic background was collected, which limited our ability to explore intersectional differences.

2.4.2 Staff participation

The staff survey achieved a 30% response rate. This is typical for online surveys, but it means that our results may reflect the views of those more engaged or confident discussing LGBTQ+ inclusion. Similarly, the qualitative data we gathered comes from staff who opted in to interviews or focus groups and may not fully represent the breadth of staff perspectives.

These limitations mean the findings we have outlined in this report should be interpreted cautiously. They do not diminish the value of the insights generated, which highlight important patterns, challenges and opportunities, but they do mean the results should be viewed as contributing to the wider evidence base rather than providing definitive conclusions.



3. SCENARIO ONE: UNDER-REPRESENTATION

In this scenario: LGBTQ+ young people are genuinely underrepresented within Depaul UK's services, suggesting barriers that prevent them from accessing either homelessness support in general or Depaul UK's services specifically.

Despite national research consistently showing that LGBTQ+ young people are overrepresented among those experiencing homelessness, this pattern is not reflected in Depaul UK's existing data. One possible explanation is that LGBTQ+ young people are genuinely underrepresented within its services. If so, this would suggest that barriers to access, whether structural, cultural, or service-specific, are preventing some LGBTQ+ young people from approaching or engaging with support. In this scenario, the low proportion of young people disclosing LGBTQ+ identities reflect challenges of entry e.g. young people not finding services, or not feeling willing or able to access them, rather than issues with disclosure.

It is important to note that, because young people drew on experiences across a wide range of statutory and voluntary provision, this research cannot determine whether the access barriers we have identified relate specifically to Depaul UK or are characteristic of homelessness services more broadly. The discussion below therefore focuses on sector-wide patterns that will likely impact access to Depaul UK's services.

The young people involved in this research described a range of barriers that shaped whether, when, and how they sought housing support. Some of these barriers are faced by many young people experiencing homelessness, regardless of their identities; others are specific to LGBTQ+ young people and linked to fears of discrimination, identity-based harm, or previous negative experiences within services.

3.1 INFORMATION BARRIERS AND SYSTEM COMPLEXITY

Several of the young people we spoke to told us they initially had no clear sense of what support existed or how to access it. The housing system was described as complex, poorly signposted, and often only visible once they were already in crisis.

Alex, for example, described feeling overwhelmed and unsure where to go or what to do when she first became homeless. Catherine explained that she only became aware of support once she was rough sleeping, and

Bethan reflected that 'it's not really obvious where to go when you're 15'. Jamie also observed that although charities are often the main providers of temporary accommodation, they are usually seen by young people as a last option and remain poorly understood.

“I just literally didn't know about them [homelessness services] until I was literally rough sleeping”

- Catherine

This lack of early guidance delayed help-seeking and meant many young people only accessed services once they were already at significant risk. It also shaped their first impressions of support, leading them to see the support landscape not as an accessible safety net, but as something distant, difficult to navigate and off-putting.

3.2 REFERRAL SYSTEMS AND ELIGIBILITY CHALLENGES

Young people also described uncertain or inconsistent referral processes, which shaped their access to services in ways that often felt outside their control. They told us that accessing support when they were homeless could feel complicated, with referral pathways and eligibility rules playing a significant role in whether and how they received help.

The stories we heard involved young people:

- feeling judged or misunderstood when interacting with services;
- needing a professional referral to be taken seriously;
- being deemed not eligible for support if they had any potential alternative accommodation, even if that alternative was unsafe; and
- being turned away by services that did not support young people in their specific circumstances e.g. care-experienced young people.

These dynamics were reflected in individual accounts. Abi felt that, without a referral from her mental health support worker, she would not have been able to secure a hostel placement. Catherine told us that, not fully understanding the procedures, she mentioned during a housing assessment that she might be able to stay with a friend. She believed this contributed to the local authority deciding they had no duty to house her, after which she became homeless. Levi recalled being told by a charity he had approached for support that they could not help him as he was care-experienced. He felt that this block in access to charity support contributed to his homelessness once his local authority accommodation broke down.

These examples highlight how easily LGBTQ+ young people can be filtered out of support through processes, judgements or misunderstandings. While such barriers are not unique to LGBTQ+ young people, they can be intensified by fears about safety, discrimination or being outed.

3.3 TECHNOLOGICAL BARRIERS

Digital access shapes young people's ability to connect with services. Whilst there were no specific cases of digital exclusion amongst the stories we heard, our discussions with young people highlighted the importance of being able to stay connected when seeking support. Catherine told us that having a smartphone allowed her to stay up to date and receive news about the support she was receiving around her housing because in-person visits were not feasible for her without transport or funds. Young people reflected that for those without a device or reliable internet, accessing help would be significantly harder, especially as services increasingly assume digital access.

3.4 IDENTITY-SPECIFIC BARRIERS AND RELIANCE ON INFORMAL NETWORKS

Alongside these wider challenges, the young people we spoke to described identity-specific barriers that may affect LGBTQ+ young people's willingness to approach or rely on formal services. These were shaped by both their own experiences and by what they had seen or heard happening to other LGBTQ+ young people in similar situations.

Young people spoke about avoiding services because they feared:

- **Harassment or discrimination from peers in hostels or shared accommodation**

Young people told us they had experienced homophobic or transphobic bullying in services, or in other environments, and that these experiences made them hesitant or unwilling to seek support from elsewhere. Levi's story was among the most severe, involving repeated abuse that forced him to move accommodation several times.

“LGBTQ+ young people are at a higher risk of domestic violence, mental health crisis, and are scared of other people... personal safety impacts why people don't reach out, they are keeping themselves safe”

- Young Advisor



- **Judgement or misunderstanding from staff**

Young people also reflected on previous encounters with staff who seemed unprepared to discuss identity-related issues, sometimes using the wrong language or responding in ways that felt dismissive or uncomfortable. These moments shaped expectations and, for some, made formal services feel like places to avoid rather than sources of help.

- **Being misgendered or outed**

Young people told us that misgendering, whether accidental or deliberate, can have a significant psychological impact. Even the possibility of it made some services feel unsafe. One young person had been outed to his family by professionals without his consent, which was a highly traumatic experience that had stayed with him. Fears that identity information might be shared within their personal networks deterred some from seeking support.

These factors may limit the likelihood that LGBTQ+ young people will turn to formal services when they experience housing instability. Indeed, alongside these observations, young people reflected that LGBTQ+ young people may be more inclined to turn to friends, partners, or informal networks rather than to formal services when they become homeless. This aligns with wider research showing that LGBTQ+ people are far more likely to approach friends or family when homeless than to engage with local authorities or specialist services⁹.

Young people described sofa-surfing with friends or strangers as a preferred alternative to services where they might face judgement or exposure to risk. While these networks can offer short-term protection, they often delay access to the professional help needed to stabilise their situations. In some cases, use of informal networks can also put young people at significant risk. For example, Sorrel described resorting to using dating apps in the past to exchange accommodation for sex. This led to her being subject to several instances sexual assault. These experiences highlight the extreme risks young people may face when safe, inclusive environments are not available.

9 England & Turnbull (2024) LGBTQ+ Housing & Homelessness Survey 2022-2023. Available at: https://housingevidence.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/2022_23-LGBTQ-Housing-Survey_draft_FINALa.pdf

3.5 INTERSECTIONAL BARRIERS COMPOUND EXCLUSION

In line with other research¹⁰, young people highlighted that their LGBTQ+ identity often intersected with other aspects of who they are, creating additional barriers to access. In particular, they discussed:

- culture and religion;
- neurodiversity;
- mental health needs; and
- immigration or asylum-seeking status.

These intersections shaped not only how young people understood their identity, but also whether they felt able to seek help, what risks they anticipated, and how safe formal services felt in comparison to informal networks.

For example, participants reflected on how approaching services could feel particularly risky for young people from asylum-seeking or culturally conservative communities. They also highlighted the impact of mental health or neurodiversity on help-seeking behaviour. For some young people, being neurodivergent or living with mental health challenges made approaching unfamiliar services feel overwhelming, especially when this involved navigating environments that felt busy, chaotic, or unpredictable.

These intersecting factors influenced not only whether young people sought help, but how long they waited before doing so, and which services they felt able to trust. The implications for disclosure - including how cultural, religious and safety concerns shape whether identity information is shared or recorded - are explored in later chapters.

¹⁰ Albert Kennedy Trust. (2025). There's no place like home: LGBTQ+ youth homelessness research report. AKT. <https://www.akt.org.uk/lgbt-youth-homelessness-research-report-2025-theres-no-place-like-home/>

In summary:

Overall, the findings we have described in this section align with national evidence indicating that LGBTQ+ young people encounter distinct barriers when attempting to access formal support. The combination of structural challenges, complex referral pathways, digital and practical limitations, and identity-specific fears means that some LGBTQ+ young people are likely to be filtered out before they ever appear in service data. While we cannot quantify the extent of this from our research, the evidence suggests that genuine underrepresentation is at least part of the picture. However, given many of the barriers described by young people are universally applicable to young people facing homelessness, it is unlikely that this scenario can fully explain the scale of the discrepancy in Depaul UK's data. This points to the need to consider what happens after young people enter services - including whether they feel able to disclose, and whether those disclosures are being recorded.



4. SCENARIO TWO: NON-DISCLOSURE

In this scenario: LGBTQ+ young people are using Depaul UK's services but are not disclosing their identities to staff, possibly due to concerns about safety or potential discrimination.

Another possibility is that LGBTQ+ young people are using services but not disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity. In this scenario, young people's identities remain invisible at the point of support, meaning staff may be unaware of needs that could shape placement decisions, safeguarding, or the development of tailored support. Here, the issue is not access but trust: whether services feel safe, respectful, and inclusive enough for young people to share personal details that carry emotional and social risk.

The findings presented in this section indicate that some level of non-disclosure is very likely. The young people we spoke to described a range of situations in which they had hid or downplayed their identity because they feared discrimination, judgement or hostility from staff or peers. Staff also described avoiding identity-related conversations because they worried about causing offence, harm or damaging trust. This will also lead to gaps in the data.

4.1 WHY YOUNG PEOPLE MAY NOT DISCLOSE

Our findings point to several factors that may reduce young people's willingness to share identity-related information when they access homelessness services:

4.1.1 Environments that do not feel safe or inclusive

Young people told us that when they did approach services, their willingness to talk openly depended almost entirely on whether the environment felt safe, respectful and inclusive. Safety was repeatedly described as the foundation for progress. As Jamie put it:

“Nobody can recover when you are in an environment that you don't feel safe.”

- Jamie

Our findings suggest that many of the factors that deter LGBTQ+ young people from accessing services in the first place (Scenario one) can make

a support environment feel unsafe once they are there, consequently reducing the likelihood that they will disclose their identity to staff. In particular, young people felt that fears of being misgendered, judged or made uncomfortable by staff, or of negative reactions from peers, are likely to influence decisions regarding whether or not to disclose.

For example, Jamie told us that he had 'chosen to lie' to services in the past to protect his physical safety. For Bethan, her decision not to disclose at a shelter for girls was to avoid the isolation that might come from being ostracised for being different. She worried that if she came out to other girls at the shelter, they might 'stay away from me even further'. This belief that in order to protect their physical safety, or their need for acceptance or connection, they need to hide who they really are, is hugely damaging to young people psychologically.

“LGBTQ+ people have had to hide for so long...our identity, our true selves, to the point where now, why would I want to let someone in? Because that's just more time and more trauma and more therapy that I'm gonna have to go to”

- Jamie

For many, the experience of hiding parts of themselves had become second nature, leaving them constantly on high alert for prejudice or rejection. This hyper-vigilance, borne from repeated exposure to discrimination, shaped how young people approached services and relationships. Inclusive, identity-affirming environments offered an alternative. Indigo described the difference this made: 'I was finally... able to explore a bit more within myself and learn more about myself.'

In Chapter six, we consider what young people told us about what makes support environments feel inclusive and, therefore, how the likelihood of disclosure can be increased.

4.1.2 Some young people face additional cultural barriers

In services where there was a high proportion of young people from different cultural backgrounds, it was striking how cultural norms were perceived to affect young people's willingness to disclose identity information. For many young people from refugee/asylum-seeking or minoritised backgrounds, fear of persecution, cultural/religious stigma, and community visibility were perceived by staff to be powerful barriers to disclosure.

Staff described a lack of willingness to disclose from young people from countries where being LGBTQ+ is criminalised or dangerous. They told us the deep-seated fear this instils in young people means they are unwilling to share, even if it would mean they receive more tailored support.

“We suspected some were gay, but because of the fear they had, they would never open up... some of them come from countries where you get stoned to death for being gay.”

- Staff focus group participant

Although they are being supported in the relatively LGBTQ+ friendly UK, many of these young people have strong cultural communities here, which adds another layer to their fear of being outed within their community.

“He didn’t want support in Manchester because he didn’t want to be seen going into the place. We had to arrange it in Rochdale instead.”

- Staff focus group participant

Even when young people from these backgrounds do disclose within the support relationship, staff told us they refuse to have their information recorded because of perceived risks. This contributes to the visibility gap explored in the next chapter.

4.1.3 Perceived gaps in staff knowledge

Several of the young people we spoke to described perceived gaps in staff knowledge about LGBTQ+ issues, particularly those affecting trans and non-binary people. This feeling that disclosure would not be met with understanding from staff, limited the likelihood that information would be shared. Highlighted issues related to staff knowledge included: a lack of understanding about the need for correct, consistent pronoun use; confusion between sex assigned at birth and gender identity; limited awareness of gender-affirming care; and a lack of awareness and understanding about gender dysphoria. In some cases, young people felt that staff attitudes were actively harmful. For example, Indigo recalled telling a support worker about suspected mental health problems and being flatly dismissed, a reaction he found invalidating.



Because of knowledge gaps, some young people felt obligated to educate staff themselves, adding a burden of emotional labour at a time when they most needed support:

“But they also have no idea about trans or non-binary young people. And I actually ended up having to teach a lot of them stuff... my support worker came to me because she had a trans young person. So I would have to signpost her to [LGBTQ+ organisations] because she didn't have an idea.”

- Levi

Participants described how, in some cases, limited staff knowledge made inclusion feel superficial rather than meaningful. They said that when they were met with misinformation or insensitive responses, it affected their confidence in the support on offer and sometimes left them feeling more isolated.

4.2 STAFF HESITATION AND THE IMPACT ON DISCLOSURE

Our findings suggest that in some cases, gaps in identity-related data did not stem from young people's unwillingness to disclose, but from staff hesitation to ask. Workers described a range of concerns that made them avoid or delay conversations about gender identity and sexual orientation:

- **Fear of getting it wrong**

Four in five (81%) of the staff who completed our survey said the statement 'I'm worried about getting things wrong or offending people' applied to them to at least some extent.

- **Uncertainty about terminology**

More than one in five (22%) reported feeling confused about what different terms mean, which made them less confident initiating conversations or answering questions.

- **Not knowing when questions are appropriate**

Staff often felt unsure about timing, context, and how to raise identity-related topics sensitively.

- **A general lack of confidence in asking questions about identity**

Around half of the staff who completed our survey said they felt very confident asking young people identity-related questions. However, the same proportion felt less confident than this, with a significant minority (around 8%) saying they felt 'Not very confident' or 'Didn't ask', presumably because they didn't feel confident at all.

- **Concern about damaging trust or the support relationship**

Whilst staff recognised that identity information can strengthen support, they worried that asking at the wrong moment could undermine rapport or make a young person feel uncomfortable.

- **Safety concerns in sensitive contexts**

Staff described situations where asking identity-related questions could feel high-stakes or unsafe, particularly when working with asylum seekers or young people from culturally conservative or religious backgrounds. This was also a factor in family-services where identity-related issues may be a potential source of conflict.

Timing matters

Staff consistently highlighted the importance of timing when collecting gender identity and sexual orientation data (mirroring young people's views, highlighted in section 6.5). Asking too early in the relationship was seen as potentially damaging to trust. As one staff member explained:

“When people first come into service, they don't know us... asking those things can be quite uncomfortable. It's something you'd build a relationship about down the line.”

- Staff focus group participant

Another added that if such questions are raised in the first few sessions, 'they won't want to engage with you anymore.'

In some cases, anxiety about when the right time to ask should be, made staff hesitant to ask identity-related questions at all. This led to missed opportunities for disclosure.

These reflections indicate that staff hesitation is rooted in care rather than indifference. Workers value identity information, but feel uncertain about how to ask safely, confidently, and appropriately. As a result:

- identities remain hidden
- young people's fears go unchallenged
- opportunities for providing tailored support are missed.

4.3 EXPERIENCES OF DISCLOSURE VARY AMONGST LGBTQ+ YOUNG PEOPLE

Our findings highlight that LGBTQ+ young people do not all experience disclosure in the same way. Factors such as visibility, gender expression, and how easily someone can 'pass' played a significant role in shaping whether disclosure felt safe.

Some young people told us that being assumed to be straight or cisgender offered a sense of protection in shared accommodation or unfamiliar environments. Bethan said that being in a relationship with a man meant others 'don't see beyond that', which made day-to-day life easier (though she still did not feel comfortable being openly herself).

For others, particularly trans young people, identity was much harder to conceal. The physicality of gendered expression meant they were more exposed to questioning or hostility, whether or not they chose to disclose. As Abi put it, 'It's easier for me to hide my sexuality [than for a trans person to hide their gender identity], especially if they are outwardly expressing it. I can conform in group settings.'

These differences mattered. Young people who felt they could keep part of their identity private often delayed disclosure until trust was solidly established. Others described navigating services with heightened vigilance due to past experiences of being misgendered, dismissed, or unsupported.

In summary:

Overall, our findings suggest that an interplay between young people's caution and staff uncertainty is likely contributing to the lower-than-expected number of LGBTQ+ young people shown in Depaul UK's monitoring data. If this is the case, more LGBTQ+ young people may be using services than the data implies, but either they do not feel safe, understood or supported enough to share their identity, or staff do not feel confident or able to ask.

In these circumstances, LGBTQ+ young people may be present within services but remain invisible within support relationships and organisational systems. This limits staff awareness of needs that could influence placement decisions, safeguarding responses and the tailoring of support.

If non-disclosure is widespread, improving data collection alone will not resolve the issue. The priority must be strengthening environments so that they feel safe, inclusive and welcoming enough for young people to be themselves and to build authentic relationships with confident, knowledgeable staff. Chapter six summarises what our findings suggest about how this can be achieved.

5. SCENARIO THREE: A VISIBILITY GAP

In this scenario: Young people disclose their identities to staff, but this information is not consistently recorded at a system level, pointing to issues with data processes and systems.

A third possibility is that LGBTQ+ young people are disclosing their identities within support relationships, but this information is not consistently recorded. In this scenario, the barrier lies not in access (Scenario one) or willingness to disclose (Scenario two), but in the gap between what is known in practice and what is captured in organisational data.

Young people emphasised that sharing personal information in a supportive, conversational interaction with a trusted worker felt very different to being asked for it to be recorded on forms or in systems. Several described being more open once trust was established, and more cautious or uncertain when disclosure was part of formal data collection.

Staff reinforced this distinction. They described many situations in which young people disclosed their identities informally once trust had developed, but information did not make it into case notes or monitoring systems.

When individual disclosure is not translated into recorded data, identities are visible in relationships but invisible at a system level. This creates what we refer to as a visibility gap: services may be more inclusive and staff more aware than their monitoring data suggests, but the organisation is unable to evidence this. As a result, important insights are lost about who is being reached, whether support is equitable, and where additional training or service adaptation might be needed.

5.1 YOUNG PEOPLE AND STAFF AGREE THAT IDENTITY DATA MATTERS

Although identity information is not always recorded, we found that this is not because staff or young people believe it is unimportant. In fact, both groups were overwhelmingly clear that collecting at least some identity-related information matters a great deal. Of the 74 Depaul UK staff who completed our survey, 96% felt it was at least somewhat important to collect information about young people's gender identity and sexual orientation. Despite awareness of the risks involved, some young people also recognised clear benefits to data collection.

However, they tended to think about identity data primarily in terms of its value for enhancing individual support rather than what it might mean for generating collective insight, i.e. for planning or organisational decision-making.

This distinction is important. When identity data is seen mainly as something that helps support one young person, the act of recording it accurately, consistently, and at the right moment, can become a lower priority. Staff may hold the information, use it relationally, and respond sensitively in practice, but still hesitate to enter it onto a system. This contributes directly to the visibility gap.

Across the research, young people and staff highlighted the following as reasons identity information is valuable:

- **Respectful communication**

Knowing a young person's pronouns helps staff avoid misgendering and the distress it can cause. Having this written down and visible to all staff, reduces emotional labour for young people who otherwise may have to repeatedly correct others.

“It's important to know [gender identity], as a young person may have pronouns that aren't fitting in with their appearance, misgendering could cause distress...”

- Bethan

- **Tailoring support**

Identity information can help staff adapt their approach to supporting a young person, signpost to LGBTQ+ specific services, and identify eligibility for particular grants or support, e.g. funds for equipment, counselling, or safety measures.

Abi highlighted that individuals might 'be missing out on a grant for something like a laptop that you might need extra counselling or extra money... or some extra safety' if their identity isn't disclosed.

- **Keeping young people safe**

Staff noted that understanding identity can inform safer accommodation decisions, such as avoiding placements where there is a known risk of homophobia or transphobia.

“If we have a referral that says the client is homophobic, I'd have to consider [an LGBTQ+ resident] a potential victim, and maybe not accept them.”

- Staff focus group participant

- **Building trust and authentic relationships**

Young people said that when staff asked about identity with care and curiosity, it helped them feel seen and able to talk about more difficult issues. For example, Sorrel mentioned that being asked about her gender identity allowed her to feel more comfortable to talk about maybe deeper, darker stuff.

Not all identity data feels equal

Both staff and young people reflected that gender identity and sexual orientation are often bundled together, even though they felt these should be treated separately.

There was broad agreement that it is essential to ask about pronouns and in some cases gender identity more broadly, particularly to avoid misgendering and to help young people feel recognised in day-to-day interactions.

Views on collecting sexual orientation were more mixed. Some young people felt strongly that sexual orientation is 'such a personal thing' and should not be routinely recorded unless there is a clear, specific reason to do so. Others could see value where it directly informs signposting or specialist support.

5.2 WHY DISCLOSURE DOESN'T ALWAYS BECOME ACCURATE DATA

What we heard from both young people and staff suggests several factors that might create a visibility gap:

5.2.1 Young people distinguish between disclosure to a person and disclosure to a system

Several young people said they felt comfortable sharing identity information in conversation but uncomfortable with it being stored in a database. Reasons tended to relate to anxieties regarding how stored data would be used.

Bethan said she would not have felt safe having her data on a system without knowing how it would be used. She said that as a teenager she would have hesitated and questioned 'Why are you asking me this? What's the purpose?' Catherine was also worried about data misuse, perceiving that there were 'data breaches left, right, and centre, all the time'. She talked about data misuse as using the data 'to track us... in a more deliberate way' instead of helping to improve services. Misuse could also involve selling data.

Jamie felt that collecting identity-related data was only done to fulfil requirements and tick boxes for management, and that funding should not be dependent on gathering this information. Whilst this didn't affect his personal choice to disclose, it is likely that similar scepticism about the purpose of data collection may influence others.

Several staff members also recognised the distinction between what young people are willing to share with their support worker and what they are willing to have recorded on a system, suggesting a general suspicion amongst some young people of personal data being held in a place that is accessible to others.

“They might open up to you, but not want it recorded... they don't know who will access it or why.”

- Staff focus group participant

5.2.2 Lack of cohesive messaging regarding why data needs to be recorded

Across the research, both staff and young people consistently said they were unclear about the purpose of recording identity-related information at an organisational level. This uncertainty directly affects whether information that is disclosed by young people gets recorded.

Without a clear organisational message staff lack confidence to explain why they are asking, and young people lack confidence to allow information to be recorded.

Young people told us they had rarely been given a clear or specific explanation of how their data would be used. Staff echoed this, saying that while they could articulate individual-level reasons for asking, e.g. to tailor support, they often did not know what happened to the data at an organisational level. This made their explanations vague and unconvincing:

“When they ask me, I say it's so we can make sure our service is suited to their needs. Which is right, but it's a bit woolly.”

- Staff focus group participant

Staff also highlighted inconsistency across the organisation. Some teams had managers who regularly reinforced the purpose of data collection, whilst others did not:

“Certain projects understand it better because of their managers, but it’s not consistent.”

- Staff interviewee

Multiple staff members said they would be more likely to ask and record identity information if there were a clear, organisation-wide rationale to share with young people and if it were framed as an important organisational need that they understood:

“It would be useful to have something we can use to explain why we’re asking. Then we’d feel confident telling young people.”

- Staff focus group participant

“If we were told we have to sit down and get that data, we’d be more likely to do it... right now it’s not framed as a clear organisational need.”

- Staff focus group participant

5.2.3 Staff may choose not to record what they know to preserve relationships

Staff also described a set of relational reasons for not recording identity information even when it had been disclosed. These decisions were not about dismissing the importance of the information, or about not being able to record the information, but about attempts to actively protect the support relationship.

Several workers worried that documenting identity too soon could feel premature or intrusive, particularly if the disclosure happened informally or in a moment of vulnerability. They emphasised that the early stages of support rely heavily on building trust, and that introducing data entry at the wrong time could disrupt rapport.

“When people first come into a service, they don’t know us... asking those things can be quite uncomfortable.”

- Staff interviewee

Two specific concerns were raised:

- **Not wanting to label a young person too early**

Staff described situations where a young person shared identity-related information in conversation, but they held back from recording it because they did not want to reduce something personal to a category. Moving too quickly from a relational disclosure to a system field felt, to some, like it risked turning identity into a tick-box.

- **Feeling that the moment of disclosure was not the right point to update systems**

Staff explained that disclosures often happened in the flow of sensitive conversations, during moments of distress, trust-building, or while discussing unrelated issues. Stopping to open a laptop or form at that point felt disruptive or inappropriate. As one worker noted: 'You want to stay with the young person, not jump straight to the computer.'

Several staff described making a conscious choice to delay recording until later, but acknowledged that this delay often led to information being forgotten, deprioritised, or omitted entirely. Others felt uncertain about whether it was appropriate to record something that had been shared quietly or cautiously, worrying that formalising it could breach trust.

The result is that identity may be known within a relationship, used to shape sensitive and appropriate support, but still absent from case notes or monitoring systems, contributing directly to the visibility gap.

5.2.4 Limited understanding creates hesitancy and inaccuracies

Our findings suggest that a lack of understanding of identity-related concepts and terminology may affect the likelihood data is recorded and/or lead to data inaccuracies.

Young people's understanding varies by age, culture and context

Staff working with asylum-seeking young people, and an interviewee from a school-based programme, highlighted that some young people found identity-related questions confusing or unfamiliar.

Staff from a service that works mainly with asylum seekers felt that the questions were often confusing to young people, as the concepts of gender identity and sexual orientation are 'important here [in the UK], but not where they're from'.

“They’ve never come across anything like this... all the questions we ask, they don’t have a clue what we mean.”

- Staff focus group participant

A staff member working in a school-based programme reflected on how younger adolescents were sometimes unsure of terms or treated the questions playfully, which led to inaccurate responses:

“Year 8s circle ten things or write NORMAL in capitals - they don’t know what the terms mean.”

- Staff interviewee

“With the younger ones, it’s often a joke - they’ll tick everything or not take it seriously, so the data isn’t accurate.”

- Staff interviewee

With the exception of these groups, most staff felt that gender identity and sexual orientation were well understood by young people and highly relevant to their lives. But where understanding was limited, staff felt it created additional barriers to collecting accurate data.

Staff uncertainty also contributes to gaps or inaccuracies

There were concerns, from both staff and young people, that limited understanding of LGBTQ+ concepts or terminology amongst staff can affect the accuracy and consistency of recorded data. Even when young people disclose their identity in conversation, staff may feel unsure how to interpret or categorise what has been shared. This uncertainty can lead to information being recorded incorrectly, partially, or not at all.

Young people emphasised that terminology is evolving, and staff echoed this, noting that without clear guidance on what each field means or how to record identities that fall outside predefined options, they sometimes hesitate to enter information for fear of getting it wrong. As one put it:

“If staff aren’t sure what terms mean, they can’t explain them properly - and then you’re not confident what they’re actually recording.”

- Staff interviewee



Managers also highlighted variation across the workforce that further contributes to inconsistency in recording. Several noted that younger staff were generally more familiar with identity terminology and therefore more able to translate disclosures into accurate system entries. Older staff, by contrast, were sometimes less confident, partly because these conversations weren't part of their training.

Staff confidence was also said to differ between roles. Day staff, who typically have more direct time with young people, were seen as more comfortable navigating identity-related language, whilst night staff and locum workers were described as less familiar with key terms. As one manager reflected:

“If I was to ask... a night staff or locum staff to describe what pansexual is, they wouldn't have a clue.”

- Staff interviewee

These variations do not always prevent disclosure from happening, but they do increase the risk that identity information will be recorded inconsistently or inaccurately. In this way, staff uncertainty becomes part of the visibility gap: young people share who they are, but the system does not always capture it clearly, reliably, or in ways that reflect their lived identities.

5.2.5 Assumptions happen, which undermine trust and data accuracy

Young people were clear in their advice to services: assume nothing. They stressed the importance of not guessing pronouns, not inferring identity from appearance, and not assuming sexuality based on the gender of a partner. For them, these assumptions, even when made with good intentions, risk erasing or invalidating how they see themselves, and can make services feel unsafe or dismissive.

Whilst rare, staff reflections suggested that such assumptions do occur in practice. One staff member, for example, described taking a young woman's mention of a male partner as an indication that she was both cisgender and heterosexual. This was not framed as prejudice, but as a default interpretation shaped by social norms.

However, the impact for young people can be significant.

Assumptions can:

- undermine trust in the support relationship;
- make the environment feel less safe or less inclusive;
- discourage future disclosure; and
- compromise data accuracy by leading to incorrect recording.

Because assumptions are often subtle and unspoken, they contribute in hidden ways to the visibility gap: staff may wrongly believe they already know a young person's identity, and young people may not correct staff due to discomfort or fear of judgement. The result is under-reporting or mis-categorisation of LGBTQ+ identities within organisational data.

5.2.6 Systems are not designed to capture nuance

Alongside relational and cultural factors, staff highlighted that current data systems themselves create barriers to accurate recording. Several described the existing fields as:

- **too rigid** – offering fixed categories that do not reflect the range or fluidity of young people's identities;
- **too broad** – merging concepts that need to be kept distinct, for example, biological sex and gender identity, creating uncertainty about what should be entered and why; and
- **too limited** – providing no space to record why a question was not asked, why information was withheld, or whether disclosure took place informally but was not documented.

These structural issues flatten young people's identities, reduce the accuracy and usefulness of the data captured, and contribute to staff hesitancy about recording what they know. They also limit an organisation's ability to interpret data meaningfully: a blank field could indicate non-disclosure, a missed opportunity, a deliberate choice not to record, or a system constraint, with no way to tell the difference.

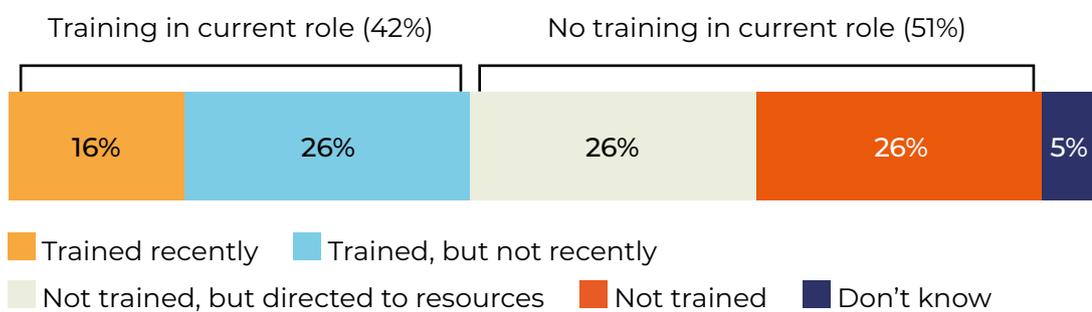
Staff emphasised that clearer, more flexible systems would help them record identity information more confidently and consistently. We return to this in Chapter seven, where we make recommendations for system improvement.

5.3 INSUFFICIENT TRAINING COMPOUNDS INCONSISTENCIES

Staff were clear that the challenges outlined above were linked to limited or uneven training across the organisation. Without regular, practical

guidance on how to ask identity-related questions, or record information accurately and sensitively, staff were left to rely on personal judgement, informal team discussions, or trial-and-error. This variability reinforces the visibility gap: even when young people disclose, the absence of shared training means the quality of recording depends largely on who is asking, when they are asking, and how confident they feel.

Staff members who completed our survey were asked whether they had received LGBTQ+ awareness training in their current role. As illustrated in Chart one, only 16% said they had done so recently. More than half (51%) said they had not received any LGBTQ+ training in their current role, although half of these had been directed to relevant resources to help. A quarter (26%) of respondents said they had received no training in this area or been directed to any relevant resources.



Base: All respondents to staff survey (74)

Chart one: Proportion of respondents to staff survey who had received LGBTQ+ awareness training in their current role

Survey respondents were also asked how much the statement ‘I don’t feel like I’ve had enough training in this area’ applied to them. Almost three in ten (28%) said the statement didn’t apply to them at all, suggesting they felt their training had been sufficient to enable them to undertake this area of their work effectively. The majority, however, suggested there was some room for improvement. A third (34%) of survey respondents said the statement applied to them ‘a little’, and a similar proportion said the statement ‘somewhat’ applied to them. Almost one in ten (8%) staff felt the statement was ‘very much’ relevant to their experiences.

In focus groups and interviews, staff described having very little formal training specifically focused on identity-related data collection. Where training had taken place, it tended to come through Depaul UK’s Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) course or occasional housing-focused workshops delivered by Shelter. These were valued, but seen as limited: the Shelter session was described as brief and not tailored to identity-related conversations, while the EDI training covered inclusion in broad terms, but did not equip staff to ask questions about or record identity information confidently.

In the absence of comprehensive training, staff often filled the gaps themselves, drawing on their own experiences, sharing knowledge informally within teams, or looking up unfamiliar terms online in the moment. While resourceful, this led to significant variation between staff and teams. Again, these inconsistencies do not necessarily prevent identity from being disclosed - but they do increase the likelihood that information will be recorded inaccurately or not at all, further widening the visibility gap.

Staff emphasised three key gaps in relation to training:

1. Lack of practical, data-focused guidance

As one put it, 'the EDI training was about empathy, not about best practice - it didn't help me feel confident in how to ask or record [identity information].' Of the 50 staff who had received some form of LGBTQ+ awareness training or resources, only 16 felt they had been given information on inclusive ways to collect data.

2. Lack of refreshers

Many noted that terminology and good practice evolve rapidly, making frequent updates essential. Staff suggested that refreshers could align with natural points in the LGBTQ+ calendar, e.g. Pride.

3. Training that is not engaging or grounded in lived experience

Staff said they wanted training and guidance in more concrete, relatable formats, such as real-life case examples, short videos, or insights from young people themselves, to bring the issues to life and help build their confidence in both asking identity-related questions and recording information accurately.

In summary:

Overall, our findings suggest a strong likelihood that a visibility gap is contributing to the lower-than-expected number of LGBTQ+ young people shown in Depaul UK's monitoring data. In this scenario, young people are using services and sometimes sharing their identities with trusted workers, but this information does not always become recorded data. When disclosure remains relational rather than organisational, identities are known in practice but invisible in datasets. As a result, organisations cannot fully evidence who they are reaching, where risks or inequalities lie, or whether support is equitable. Addressing the visibility gap requires clear organisational messaging, strong data systems, and training that gives staff the confidence - and the practical tools - to translate trust in relationships into accurate, respectful, and consistent recording.

6. CREATING INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS

Our analysis of the three scenarios shows that safety, trust and inclusion sit at the core of whether LGBTQ+ young people access services, feel able to disclose their identities, and are comfortable with that information being recorded.

In this chapter we explore what young people told us about what an inclusive, identity-affirming environment looks like in practice. We also present some principles for how identity data should be collected from young people's perspective. The insights in this chapter have informed the recommendations we have made in Chapter seven.

6.1 RESPECTFUL AND SUPPORTIVE STAFF

“All services are defined by the staff that work for them... if you have staff who genuinely care and genuinely show up for the sake of the people they're looking after, then the service as a whole is going to run better.”

- Jamie

The young people we spoke to told us that staff members play a critical role in shaping whether services feel physically and emotionally safe. For LGBTQ+ young people using homelessness services, respectful, empathetic, and non-judgemental staff are crucial for creating a sense of safety, inclusion, and trust.

Young people consistently highlighted that being recognised and affirmed in their identities was central to feeling safe, respected, and able to engage with support. When staff got this right, it strengthened trust and created space for positive relationships; when they did not, it left young people feeling uncomfortable or alienated.

6.1.1 Use of correct pronouns and chosen names

“I think the biggest thing [for trans people] is...that they should have the reassurance that that person sees them the way they want to be seen.”

- Indigo

One of the most important elements was the use of correct pronouns and chosen names. Indigo described one service as great, explaining that staff never misgendered him and always respected his chosen name, pronouns, and drag expression. He added:

“They didn't really pry too much into... my sexuality... I get that things are confusing because I do drag and I dress a bit feminine. And they never once saw that as an issue. They never once misgendered or anything like that. And just all in all, they were really supportive.”

- Indigo

By contrast, Alex described the distress she experienced when staff repeatedly misgendered her, and then overcompensated when they realised their mistake:

“[One member of staff] was like, oh, my God, I'm so sorry for he-himing you. And he was, like, so, like, caught up in it. That just made me more upset... it's almost like calling somebody by the wrong name. You just correct it really fast and move along. It's not something you should, like, mull over, because that just makes me more uncomfortable.”

- Alex

6.1.2 Avoiding assumptions

Several young people stressed that staff should not assume heterosexuality or cisgender identity, but instead ask directly and respectfully. Indigo said he deliberately chose one organisation over another because ‘[they] are much more respectful... they do try their best to understand, rather than make their own assumptions.’ For him, being able to present authentically, whether feminine, drag, or ‘tomboy-ish’, without being judged, was essential to feeling secure.

6.1.3 Empathy and understanding

Young people reported much better experiences when staff listened, related, and demonstrated a genuine awareness of LGBTQ+ realities. Where that empathy was missing, they felt dismissed and retraumatised.

Empathy did not necessarily depend on staff sharing the same identity, but on their willingness to learn, use inclusive language, and approach conversations without judgement. Young people valued staff who were curious and open, but not intrusive - those who could hold

space for difficult emotions and respond with understanding rather than discomfort.

Young people linked staff empathy to organisational culture and emphasised that when inclusion is talked about openly, reflected on, and modelled by leaders, it becomes part of everyday practice rather than something left to personal goodwill. They felt this collective approach was essential for ensuring consistency in how staff respond to and support LGBTQ+ young people.

6.1.4 Non-judgemental support

Young people described services as most effective when staff set aside personal beliefs, prioritised professionalism, and created spaces where LGBTQ+ identities were respected and understood.

Several young people spoke about the impact of staff bringing personal or religious views into their interactions. For example, Abi described situations where she felt staff allowed their beliefs to get in the way of their professionalism, noting that subtle cues such as tone or facial expressions created an unsafe 'vibe', making it difficult to trust the people meant to support her. Similarly, Jamie highlighted that subtle forms of exclusion can occur even when services are trying to be inclusive. He felt that in some settings, staff and peers were unsure how to engage with or learn about queer experiences, which he believed sometimes led to quieter forms of misunderstanding, even in the absence of overt hostility.

In contrast, Catherine told us she felt secure in one hostel because the way staff related to her helped her trust that they would support her regardless of her identity:

“[I knew they wouldn’t] kick me out for admitting that I’m trans or put [me] on the streets.”

- Catherine

6.2 DIVERSITY OF STAFF TEAM

The young people we spoke to repeatedly emphasised the importance of staff diversity, particularly the value of being supported by people with shared lived experience. This diversity helped foster trust, relatability, and a stronger sense of belonging within services.

For some, seeing LGBTQ+ staff was particularly affirming. Having staff members who identify as LGBTQ+ reduced feelings of being the only one and signalled that services were genuinely inclusive.

Jamie had a particularly positive experience in this respect:

“I will remember [support worker] forever, because it wasn’t having a conversation with just a support worker, [it was] having a conversation with another gay person who also has been in recovery. And I was actually able to have a heart to heart, genuine conversation about how rubbish the situation actually is, rather than just answer this question on a piece of paper.”

- Jamie

Young people also spoke about the wider value of shared life experiences. Staff who could relate through common ground, whether living as LGBTQ+, or through experiences such as recovery, neurodiversity, or trauma, were often described as easier to talk to and more supportive. As one young person put it:

“Even though it's not 100% the same experience, it's similar sharing experiences... sometimes that does make things a little bit easier when you're trying to talk to someone, especially when you're trying to get them to open up for the first time.”

- Young person

6.3 VISIBILITY OF INCLUSIVE ATTITUDES

Young people told us that physical signs of inclusion within services reassured them that services were safe. Pride flags, posters, rainbow lanyards, and inclusive language were described as small signals that an environment was welcoming to LGBTQ+ young people. For example, Jamie mentioned that even a small space on a notice board can help LGBTQ+ young people feel safe to speak up. Abi cited physically obvious signs like flags and inclusive language as factors that made a service feel more safe to her.

Young people wanted services to be open and transparent about their inclusivity, rather than making individuals feel they had to ask whether they were welcome. When visible signs of inclusion were missing, young people described feeling unsafe and isolated, particularly in the face of harassment from other residents or unsupportive staff. Alex, Indigo, and Abi all linked feelings of exclusion and vulnerability in some services they had experienced to a lack of visible support.

It is important to note, however, that young people consistently emphasised that visible signs are only meaningful when they are backed up by genuine understanding and inclusive behaviour from staff. Flags and posters can signal LGBTQ+ young people are welcome, but it is everyday actions and attitudes that determine whether services feel truly safe.

6.4 PEER ATTITUDES

Young people told us that peer culture plays a major role in how safe or unsafe a service feels. While staff set the tone, the day-to-day experience of living in supported accommodation often depends on the attitudes and behaviour of other residents. Inclusive environments are those where peers help create a sense of belonging and where staff step in quickly and confidently when things go wrong.

6.4.1 Supportive peer relationships make a big difference

The young people we spoke to gave examples of peers actively including them, helping them to feel recognised and safe. Indigo recalled a really good experience in one service where the mostly-male residents welcomed him and involved him in everyday activities:

“The other guys that lived in that house... they really included me and they treated me like I was one of them.”

- Indigo

Abi described how reassuring it felt to live in an all-female hostel where many residents were LGBTQ+. Having someone understanding in the building meant she did not feel like the only one, even when residents had different personal beliefs.

Catherine also highlighted the impact of proactive placement decisions. After feeling unsafe in a male-dominated hostel, she was moved to a flat where her housemate had been picked specifically because they were trans-friendly, which gave her the confidence to express her identity and feel secure day to day.

6.4.2 Visible and responsive staff intervention is essential

Even in inclusive environments, young people said that incidents do arise, ranging from off-hand comments to direct hostility. What mattered most in these situations was how staff responded. When staff intervened early, were consistent in challenging discriminatory behaviour, and followed up afterwards, young people felt protected and secure. When staff ignored

incidents, minimised them, or applied consequences inconsistently, young people felt unsafe and reluctant to report issues again.

The Young Advisors emphasised the need for services to have clear, trusted routes for reporting incidents when they happen. They wanted to know who they could tell if something happened and what would happen when they did report something. Whilst it is important for young people to be able to report incidents anonymously if they want to, the Young Advisors preferred more personal methods of reporting, mainly because it would help create a sense of safety through the process and give a clearer sense of who was accountable for follow-up.

6.4.3 Opportunities for peer connection help counter isolation

Young people also spoke about the importance of having intentional spaces to meet others with similar experiences. This was considered particularly important in services where staff diversity was limited. Levi suggested that services create groups where LGBTQ+ young people could have their own community and have their own space to talk. Others echoed that isolation is one of the hardest aspects of being LGBTQ+, and that having any form of supported community, whether a regular group, informal meet-ups, or peer-led activities, can make a significant difference.



6.5 THE RIGHT WAY TO ASK

In our discussions with young people, we explored what it means to ask identity-related questions in a way that produces robust data whilst also protecting, and ideally strengthening, trust and safety within support relationships. Rather than being a risk to the relationship, young people suggested that these conversations can be an opportunity to build connection when handled well. This section sets out six key principles that capture their preferences and reflections.

1. Emphasise choice

Young people expressed different preferences about the mode that should be used to ask questions on gender identity and sexual orientation. Some valued the emotional distance of a form, while others felt a conversation was more personal.

Specifying that it should be short and simple, Alex said 'I'd feel more comfortable just like having a form to fill in rather than having to have a conversation with someone.' By contrast, Catherine preferred a conversation with a more human aspect to it.

Whatever the method, young people stressed the importance of respectful framing and the opportunity to self-describe. Levi suggested either adapting questions to suit the individual once staff had built some rapport, or using a form that allowed free-text responses. Tick-boxes, he warned, can flatten or confuse complex identities.

2. Keep it personal, not procedural

Young people said that the way questions were asked could sometimes feel alienating and impersonal. Alex described being asked about gender identity as feeling 'medical', giving the interaction a clinical tone rather than one of care. Others felt that tick-box approaches gave the impression that staff were not genuinely interested, suggesting that the data was gathered for purposes other than for the young person's benefit.

Young people also raised concerns about rigid categories that failed to reflect their lived experience. Levi pointed out that some young people might not be able to fill out their sexual orientation 'cause they might not know', highlighting how tick-boxes can misstate or exclude people whose identities are complex, fluid or still forming.

These accounts show how easily questions can take on a bureaucratic, tokenistic, or clinical feel. When this happens, young people are less likely to disclose honestly, which in turn undermines both trust in the service and the quality of the data collected.

3. Ask at the right time

Echoing the staff concerns highlighted previously, young people emphasised the importance of timing when asking about gender identity and sexual orientation. They felt that such questions should be asked at the right stage of the support relationship, usually stressing that too soon can be off-putting, and only to the depth that feels necessary in the moment.

For Indigo, the safest way was just simply asking for pronouns and not prying further, particularly if a young person is not yet ready to share more about their identity. Like others, he felt that it was important to ask about pronouns straight away to avoid misgendering, but that asking about other elements of identity could wait.

4. Ask in the right way

As noted throughout this section, the young people we spoke to had experiences of being asked about their identities in many different ways, positive and negative. Young people were clear that how they are asked, and the language that is used, can be the difference between the experience enhancing a support relationship or shutting it down.

Young people told us that staff should avoid guessing or making assumptions about labels, and, as explained by Jamie, should never trivialise or minimise young people's identities:

“Sexuality and gender for LGBTQ+ people is not a silly question because for a lot of queer people they have been fighting a battle in their head... figuring out who they are for years. You know, it takes years to fully understand yourself whether you're queer or not... it can be even harder when you're sort of brought up in a society that it's not the general norm to be queer. And so to be told, oh, I'm going to ask you just a silly question here... Pronouns, gender, and sexuality for somebody else might be a very, very basic question. But for you, you might have spent four, five years really thinking and deepening that every day for the end point to be, I'm just going to ask you a silly question.”

- Jamie

Instead, they wanted staff to use open, respectful language that invites, but does not pressure disclosure. Tone and delivery were central to this. Young people described feeling unsafe or judged when staff appeared uncomfortable, overly formal, rushed, or hesitant. By contrast, when staff approached these questions calmly, with curiosity, attentiveness, and acceptance, it signalled respect and created the trust needed for young people to share information honestly.

5. Minimise repeated disclosures with care

Young people told us that, where it felt safe and they had consented, having identity information shared between trusted professionals could be helpful. Some described relief at not having to repeat personal details, particularly when coming out to multiple workers felt exposing or exhausting. Indigo, for example, appreciated that his social worker informed hostel staff he was a trans man, as this spared him 'the whole awkwardness of coming out to a bunch of strangers.'

However, staff emphasised the importance of sharing information with care. One worker cautioned against assuming that referral paperwork is always accurate, particularly when it comes from agencies where young people may feel less able to be open. She stressed that services should check information sensitively rather than assuming we know everything already, noting that young people may present differently once they feel safe and seen.

6. Always prioritise transparency

As we've described, young people were clear that transparency is essential for honest and open conversations about identity. They wanted staff to explain why information was being collected, how it would be used, and who would have access to it before any questions were asked. Without this clarity, young people said it was harder to trust the process or feel confident that their information would not be misused. Staff echoed this need for transparency, noting that they sometimes lacked clarity themselves, which made it difficult to communicate purpose and boundaries in a consistent way.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS: TURNING INSIGHTS INTO ACTION

This research suggests that there is not just one explanation for the lower-than-expected reporting of LGBTQ+ identities in Depaul UK's data. Instead, there is evidence of three interconnected issues, each playing their part:

1. It is likely that there is at least some underrepresentation of LGBTQ+ young people within services, largely driven by barriers to access (Scenario one).
2. Barriers to disclosure (Scenario two) mean that whilst LGBTQ+ young people may use services, not all of them feel safe and included enough to share their identities.
3. There is a visibility gap between individual disclosure and organisational data (Scenario three), meaning that there are cases where young people share their identities to individual workers, but this information doesn't make it onto data systems.

Ensuring that LGBTQ+ young people access homelessness services in proportion to their needs depends on services being genuinely inclusive, welcoming, and safe for young people of all identities. The same foundations, combined with clear systems and consistent processes, are also essential for encouraging disclosure at an individual level, and for producing datasets that accurately reflect who is using services. Crucially, these elements reinforce one another: inclusive environments make disclosure more likely, and better data helps organisations strengthen inclusion further.

The recommendations below, which have been developed with Young Advisors, are organised around two areas of practice: fostering inclusive environments; and generating robust identity-related datasets. Implementing the actions outlined will create positive change across all scenarios considered in this research, thereby increasing the visibility of LGBTQ+ young people in mainstream homelessness services.

7.1 FOSTERING INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS

To create environments where all young people feel valued, respected and free to be themselves, service providers should:

1. Embed visible signs of inclusivity across all services

Young people told us that inclusivity needs to be visible and consistent, not hidden or assumed. Clear signals of support and belonging help young people feel safe, reduce isolation, and build trust in services.

Service providers should take steps to embed visible signs of inclusivity consistently across all services. These should include:

- **Visible affirmations of support:** Display flags, posters, inclusive language, and rainbow lanyards across services as everyday reminders that LGBTQ+ young people are welcome and respected.
- **Organisational commitment:** Make a public declaration of support for the LGBTQ+ community and respond visibly to live issues affecting LGBTQ+ young people.
- **Representation in staff teams:** Actively recruit diverse staff, including LGBTQ+ staff members. Where possible, match support workers to young people where some element of identity is shared.
- **Safe and affirming spaces:** Create dedicated opportunities for LGBTQ+ young people to come together, such as groups or forums, facilitated with care to ensure they remain supportive and inclusive.
- **Respecting identity in practice:** All staff should use correct pronouns and provide reassurance that they see young people as they want to be seen, helping to foster trust and belonging. Showing staff pronouns alongside their names on lanyards and email addresses can also show that getting pronouns right matters to them.

2. Strengthen policies and procedures around inclusivity

Young people stressed that inclusivity should not just rely on individual staff attitudes but must be embedded in clear, consistent policies and procedures across all services. These should set expectations for practice, give staff the confidence to act, and ensure young people know their rights and how to raise concerns.

Service providers should review and strengthen their inclusivity frameworks by:

- **Co-producing policies** with young people and staff with lived experience to ensure they are relevant, realistic, and reflect the needs of those most affected.
- **Setting clear guidance** for staff on how to respond to incidents of abuse, discrimination, or harassment from other residents, so that responses are consistent and safe.

- **Improving incident-reporting processes** by:
 - Offering multiple, accessible channels, e.g. WhatsApp, email, direct phone line, emergency out-of-hours contact, rather than relying on QR codes or digital-only systems.
 - Making reporting of incidents personal, with staff names, photos, and contact details displayed so young people know who they can approach.
 - Ensuring designated contacts are trained, approachable, and are ideally people with lived experience.
 - Embedding clear accountability, so that incidents are handled promptly and transparently.

3. Deliver comprehensive, practical, regularly-updated training

Young people told us that inclusive practice relies on staff who are well-informed, confident, and genuinely supportive. Staff also acknowledged that they need more training and resources to feel able to handle sensitive conversations well and be truly supportive to LGBTQ+ young people.

Service providers should provide comprehensive, regularly updated training on diversity, inclusion and LGBTQ+ issues. For Depaul UK, this could mean developing a bespoke, co-created training package that reflects young people's lived experience and the realities of practice within the charity's services. This training should be:

- **Co-created with young people** with lived experience, centring their voices in design and delivery.
- **Broad and intersectional**, forming part of a wider EDI training package covering LGBTQ+ issues alongside racism, sexism, Islamophobia, and other forms of discrimination. Young Advisors felt this would help staff see connections across identities and engage more fully in a single, immersive training session.
- **Practical and skills-focused**, including:
 - Correct use of terminology and pronouns, and the purpose of inclusive practices.
 - Awareness of political issues and challenges faced by different LGBTQ+ groups.
 - Understanding of gender-affirming care, dysphoria, trauma, and neurodiversity.
 - Professional conduct, including managing personal prejudices or religious beliefs.
 - Practical guidance on handling mistakes, e.g. misgendering quickly and respectfully.

- **Delivered in person**, giving space for staff to raise questions, reflect, and debate. Young Advisors stressed that EDI training should not be ‘just another online module’ but an interactive process that engages staff in meaningful discussion.
- **Backed up with resources**, such as signposting packs and links to LGBTQ+ organisations and groups, so staff feel equipped beyond the training itself.

4. Support peers to be informed and supportive

Young people told us that an inclusive environment depends not only on staff but also on the attitudes and behaviour of peers. Service providers should therefore take proactive steps to ensure that all young people using their services understand what inclusivity means in practice and what is expected of them. They should support peer understanding and inclusive behaviour by:

- **Extending inclusivity training** to all young people in services, not just staff, and ensuring ground rules about respect and behaviour are clear.
- **Creating shared expectations** by asking young people to sign an inclusivity agreement when they move in, setting out standards around respect, pronouns, and behaviour towards LGBTQ+ peers.
- **Consciously managing placements** so that young people are not placed in unsafe or hostile environments. Staff should consider potential risks and tensions, e.g. around gender-affirming care access, identity-based prejudice, or previous incidents, when deciding who is housed together.
- **Providing safe spaces and opportunities** for LGBTQ+ young people to connect with one another if they wish, while ensuring that these are facilitated sensitively to avoid unnecessary tensions or exclusions.
- **Promoting peer allyship** by encouraging young people to listen to and respect each other’s experiences, rather than imposing assumptions or stereotypes.

7.2 GENERATING ROBUST IDENTITY-RELATED DATASETS

To generate more robust datasets that more accurately reflect young people’s realities, service providers should:

5. Agree what identity data should be collected and establish a clear, shared rationale for doing so

Before implementing any changes to improve data quality, service providers should work with both staff and young people to agree what identity data is needed, why it is needed, and how it will be used. Without a shared rationale, there is a risk that data collection will feel inconsistent, intrusive, or unclear.

Service providers should co-develop a clear statement of purpose in relation to identity data that underpins all communication materials, training, and system design. This work should involve staff at all levels and young people, ensuring that decisions reflect both operational realities and lived experience.

The shared rationale should clearly articulate:

- Why each data point matters, including how it improves safety, inclusion, and the tailoring of support.
- When and in what contexts questions should be asked, recognising differences between gender identity, pronouns, and sexual orientation.
- How information will and will not be used, addressing fears of surveillance, misuse, or unnecessary sharing.
- The distinction between individual and organisational purposes, explaining why accurate recording is important beyond the immediate support relationship.

6. Support staff to communicate the purpose of data collection to young people consistently

Staff and young people told us that the purpose of collecting identity information was not always clear, particularly in relation to how it is used beyond enhancing individual support. Staff need clear, plain English scripts and prompts so they can confidently explain why each question is asked and what will happen with any information shared.

Messaging to young people should reinforce that:

- Every data request is optional, with the young person free to skip or delay.
- Young people's information is their own, and they have the ability to update, add, or remove details at any time.
- Recorded data is kept confidential, with clarity in messaging about who can see the information and under what circumstances.
- Multiple modes of disclosure are available e.g. if a young person doesn't want to disclose in person, they can do so via a form.

7. Develop and implement flexible data collection processes for collecting identity data

Staff told us that, while they recognised the importance of collecting identity data, they often lacked clear guidance from management about how to do this consistently and sensitively. This left some feeling uncertain or hesitant about asking, particularly when young people might be at an early or sensitive stage in the support relationship.

Service providers should develop standardised but flexible processes for collecting identity-related data, including standard forms where necessary, underpinned by principles of choice, respect, and transparency. This means establishing core expectations, e.g. always asking about pronouns, always explaining why data is being collected, always giving the option not to answer, while allowing flexibility in how the questions are asked.

Different processes will be relevant in different contexts. For example, the extent to which a young person's identity can be openly discussed will be different in a contained accommodation service to in a family service where a young person's identity might be relevant to conflict. Guidance should be provided to staff to help them navigate such nuance, but they must also be free to rely on their professional judgement.

8. Provide adequate training on inclusive data collection

Young people and staff agreed that training is critical to making identity-related data collection both inclusive and effective. The wider inclusivity training recommended above should include elements clearly dedicated to inclusive data collection. This should ensure staff:

- Understand the purpose of identity-related data collection in line with agreed messaging (recommendation five).
- Understand all relevant concepts and terminology used in questions/potential responses.
- Are confident in using data recording processes and software.
- Are able to practice responding to sensitive scenarios, including when young people want to add, remove, or change their information.
- Use respectful, non-trivialising language and avoid assumptions.

9. Introduce fit-for purpose recording systems

We recommend that service providers review and refine their monitoring systems so that identity-related information can be recorded simply, accurately, and in ways that support inclusive practice. Based on staff feedback and our own observations, systems should:

- Balance inclusivity with pragmatism. Long lists capturing every possible gender identity or sexual orientation can feel unwieldy. Use 'Other' options where appropriate, while retaining necessary nuance.
- Provide definition reminders. Include short, embedded explanations of key terms to support accuracy and staff confidence.
- Ensure a complete dataset without forcing responses. Required fields should offer appropriate options, e.g. 'Other', 'Prefer not to say' and 'Did not ask', so staff are not pushed towards inaccurate entries.

- Offer greater nuance in 'no data' categories. Allow staff to specify reasons for missing information, e.g. 'Did not ask – risk to relationship'; 'Did not ask – no contact', helping reduce ambiguity and misinterpretation.
- Reflect relevance. Some young people do not consider all aspects of identity to be personally relevant; systems should include options that capture this.

7.3 BUILDING ON THIS RESEARCH

Through this research, we have provided important insight into why homelessness services may see lower-than-expected levels of LGBTQ+ representation in their monitoring data. It also highlights areas where further research would strengthen our understanding as a sector and help guide future practice.

First, while the young people who took part in this research offered rich and detailed accounts, the small and self-selecting sample means there is more to learn about the full range of LGBTQ+ young people's experiences in homelessness settings. Future research could explore experiences within specific service types, and/or involve a wider group of young people, such as those who are not in contact with services, or those who do not use LGBTQ+ terminology to describe themselves.

Second, the findings point to the value of comparative research. Many barriers to the generation of robust datasets identified in this study - including fears around safety, staff confidence in identity-related conversations, and limitations in recording systems - are likely to be present across the homelessness sector. Exploring these issues across different providers would help identify which patterns are sector-wide and which are more specific to particular organisational cultures, environments, or systems.

Third, this research has highlighted the importance of the distinction between individual disclosure and collective visibility. More work is needed to understand how young people perceive data sharing, how trust influences recording, and how systems and workflows can be designed so that disclosures, when made, can be captured accurately and safely.

Finally, the study demonstrates the significant role of organisational culture. Understanding more about how staff values, leadership practices, and team dynamics shape inclusion and data quality would help refine interventions aimed at strengthening visibility and safety for LGBTQ+ young people. This could include exploring how open and supported staff themselves feel in expressing their gender identity or sexual orientation, as this would have an influence on the environment young people experience.

8. CONCLUSIONS

This research set out to understand why the proportion of young people recorded as LGBTQ+ within Depaul UK's services is significantly lower than national estimates of LGBTQ+ representation amongst young people experiencing homelessness. Our findings indicate that there is no single explanation. Instead, three interconnected issues are at play: barriers that prevent some LGBTQ+ young people from accessing services in the first place; barriers that make disclosure difficult once they do; and a visibility gap where disclosures made in trusted relationships are not consistently recorded.

Across all three scenarios, one theme remains central: visibility depends on safety, trust and inclusion. Young people are more likely to access services if those services feel welcoming. They are more likely to disclose if they feel respected and seen. And information is more likely to be recorded accurately when staff have the clarity, confidence and systems to do so.

The insights from the young people and staff we spoke to demonstrate that the sector is not starting from scratch. Many workers are already creating supportive, affirming environments, with young people describing powerful examples of safety, belonging and trust. But they also highlighted inconsistencies, gaps in training, and system limitations that make disclosure and accurate recording, harder than it needs to be.

Improving visibility requires intervention in two areas: actions should be taken to foster consistently inclusive environments, and to strengthen data systems and processes. This will improve the likelihood that young people will share information about their identities and that when young people do share who they are, that information is captured safely and reliably. The recommendations in this report outline the steps that Depaul UK and other homelessness services can take to achieve this, informed directly by the insights and priorities of young people themselves.

Ultimately, increasing the visibility of LGBTQ+ young people within homelessness services is not only about better data, it is about creating services where every young person feels safe, recognised and supported. Visibility is both the outcome and the driver of inclusive practice. By strengthening relationships, culture and systems, service providers can ensure that all young people, including LGBTQ+ young people, receive the understanding and support they deserve.



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