



Youth Work Ireland

PROUD SPACES

Creating Proud Spaces in Rural Communities
Model of LGBTQI+ Youth Work Practice



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Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth

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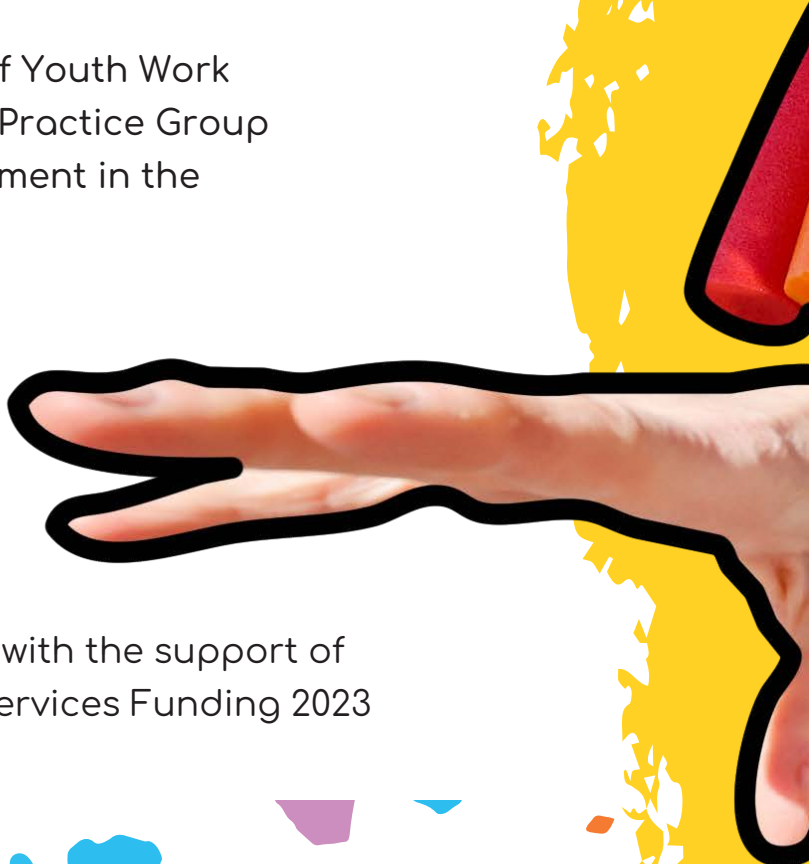
This model of LGBTQI+ youth work practice has been developed with the input and guidance of youth workers, young LGBTQI+ people, volunteers from Youth Work Ireland's 20 member youth services; and external experts, through a range of consultations, surveys, interviews, workshops, trainings, research and discussions.

What this has revealed is a distinct model of LGBTQI+ youth work practice which is unique to Youth Work Ireland members, is embedded in our Integrated Youth Services Model, guided by the values and principles of youth work and achieves positive outcomes for young LGBTQI+ people.

Special thanks to the members of Youth Work Ireland's LGBTQI+ Community of Practice Group for their support and encouragement in the development of this resource.

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Proud Spaces Vision

An Ireland where all young people are valued, respected and embraced, regardless of their sexuality or gender identity.



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About Proud Spaces

Youth Work Ireland and its member youth services are the largest providers of LGBTQI+ youth work supports in rural Ireland. These supports are provided through what we describe as a 'Proud Spaces' model of practice. This model is supported by trained and professional youth workers, guided by youth work values, principles and processes and has been shown to create safe, inclusive and brave spaces for young LGBTQI+ people.

Proud Spaces was originally formed as part of an Erasmus+ project between Youth Work Ireland, Youth Work Ireland Laois, Growspace (Poland) and the European Confederation of Youth Clubs (ECYC). The partners worked together for a period of three years to develop European guidance and best practice resources for LGBTQI+ youth work.

Now, Proud Spaces is an Irish model helping Youth Work Ireland's member youth services deliver the best possible services for young LGBTQI+ people in rural Ireland. It is funded by the Department of Children, Equality, Diversity, Integration and Youth.

What is a Proud Spaces Model?

Proud Spaces is an evidence based LGBTQI+ model of best practice for youth workers and others working with young LGBTQI+ people in Ireland. The Proud Spaces model is informed and guided by the values and principles of youth work and grounded in an Integrated Youth Service model. This ensures that a range of services and policy objectives can be delivered and achieved by one community-based youth service in a seamless manner.



Methodology

In our development of this model of practice we have worked and consulted closely with all 20-member youth services, young people, volunteers and external experts through a range of consultations, workshops, interviews, community of practices, training, surveys and discussions. Accordingly we can now clearly articulate the best praxis informed approaches of practitioners and the needs, challenges, and aspirations of young LGBTQI+ people in our youth services.

What has been revealed is a specific, distinct model of practice which we refer to as the Proud Spaces model. This is a model of practice we feel is unique to Youth Work Ireland as it sits alongside, and is complementary to our Integrated Youth Services Model in achieving positive outcomes and impact for young people.

The steps taken in developing this document are as follows:

- Extensive consultations and research to evidence the practices, activities, methodologies and approaches that achieve safe and inclusive spaces for young LGBTQI+ people.
- Community of Practice group meetings to build a network of youth workers working with LGBTQI+ youth groups across our membership.
- Focus groups to identify the areas where youth workers need support and training.
- Survey of rural LGBTQI+ young people to evidence their distinctive needs and wants.
- Workshops delivered to youth workers on the gaps of knowledge identified through the above. Training delivered to youth workers on the needs of young LGBTQI+ people.
- Workshops with young LGBTQI+ people to support them articulate the elements which create inclusive spaces.

The underlying Premises that guides a Proud Spaces Model of Practice

- Young LGBTQI+ people are as varied in their needs and strengths as all other young people; meeting their needs and assisting them to achieve their aspirations requires a full range of services and opportunities.
- Young LGBTQI+ people face more challenges than their peers and those LGBTQI+ people living in rural communities face additional challenges in relation to isolation, exclusion and loneliness.
- Youth work offers a space which is inclusive, accepting, non-judgmental and can meet the young person where they are at.
- Youth workers take a holistic approach to supporting, empowering, and advocating with and for young LGBTQI+ people, their families, community, and allies.
- Youth workers in Youth Work Ireland member youth services are advocates, supporters, allies and non-formal educators, who recognise there are limits to their role.
- From our research we have found that a high level of young LGBTQI+ people presenting in our groups are also neurodivergent, and so require additional supports.



Proud Spaces Aim and Objectives

- To clearly evidence and describe the praxis of LGBTQI+ youth work that exists, and is unique to Youth Work Ireland member youth services.
- To contribute to the creation of safe and inclusive spaces for young LGBTQI+ people, as defined and described by them.
- To evidence and share methods and practices of inclusive youth work which achieves positive outcomes for young LGBTQI+ people in rural communities.
- To contribute to community spaces in rural Ireland becoming safe, inclusive and welcoming to young LGBTQI+ people and their families.
- To provide training, know-how and support to those supporting young LGBTQI+ people in rural communities including methods and activities to create safe spaces within their communities.
- To build on recent findings from a European project which has identified ways to create safe and proud spaces and adapt the practices to suit Irish rural communities.



Proud Spaces Values

- 1. Empowerment
- 2. Empathy
- 3. Equity
- 4. Belonging
- 5. Intersectionality
- 6. Equality
- 7. Respect
- 8. Inclusivity
- 9. Safety
- 10. Non-Judgemental
- 11. Fun
- 12. Gender Joy
- 12. Acceptance
- 13. Advocacy
- 14. Positivity

Proud Spaces Principles

- 1. Youth Led
- 2. Young Person Centred
- 3. Promoting Equality and Inclusion
- 4. Safety and Wellbeing of young People.
- 5. Informal and Developmental Educational
- 6. Promoting LGBTQI+ joy in youth spaces and practices.
- 7. Giving young people a voice and platform.
- 8. Strengths based approach.
- 9. Meeting young people where they are.
- 10. Positive views of young people.



Proud Spaces Model of Youth Work in Practice

A Model of Practice provides direction, guidance, and support to those who want to understand, develop and deepen their practices in working with young LGBTQI+ people.

Practical guidance evidenced from the Proud Spaces process can build the capacity of youth service providers to promote equality, inclusion and address discrimination and includes:

- Responding to the needs, aspirations, and challenges of young LGBTQI+ people in a wholistic way taking into account the whole young person and not one aspect of their identity.
- Recognising young LGBTQI+ people as rights holders in the face of those who do not respect or believe in those rights existing.
- Advocating with and for young LGBTQI+ people for their rights and aspirations.
- Challenging words and behaviours that are disrespectful, bullying or motivated by hate and responding to any incidents with unconditional positive regard, providing young people with opportunities for learning and development (with more serious incidents dealt with through a restorative justice approach).
- Supporting young LGBTQI+ people to take a critical approach to the social, cultural, and political environments they are growing up in.
- Recognising we may have unconscious assumptions and biases, and identifying training or supports needed to overcome these.

- Recognising that the young person is the expert in their own lives and even if you are an LGBTQI+ individual, the young people you are working with may have had different experiences to you.
- Recognising that young LGBTQI+ people have agency and strengths that when supported through youth work processes can enable them to actively contribute to solving their own problems and reaching their own goals.
- Recognising that LGBTQI+ identifying youth workers working to support young LGBTQI+ people may be in need of additional personal and/or professional supports.
- The Integrated Youth Services model brings other specialist providers into the process to enhance our provision of support for LGBTQI+ young people.
- The Proud Spaces model builds networks with allies, peers and organisations who share our values and principles.



Proud Spaces Theory of Change

The theory of change shows Proud Spaces step by step logic behind its ultimate vision.

Assumptions:

- Young LGBTQI+ people in rural Ireland are a marginalised minority at high risk of isolation, mental health issues and bullying.
- LGBTQI+ youth work has the capacity to significantly increase positive outcomes and improve the quality of life for young LGBTQI+ people in rural areas of Ireland, by providing supports, connections, safety and community links.

Inputs:

- Youth workers.
- Young LGBTQI+ people.
- Time and space.
- Financial resources to provide groups and spaces.
- Training and development.

Long Term Outcomes:

- Young LGBTQI+ people feel increasingly safe and supported in their communities.
- There is well-funded, consistent and long-term LGBTQI+ youth work that can be relied on by young LGBTQI+ people.
- Barriers for young LGBTQI+ people attending youth services are reduced.
- Rural Ireland is a safer place for young LGBTQI+ young to grow up in.

Activities:

- Group Work.
- One-to-One Sessions.
- Pride and other events.
- Arts, crafts & youth work activities.
- Sexual Health Education.
- Campaigning and Advocacy.

Mechanisms of Change:

- Model of Practice.
- Theory of Change.
- Communities of Practice.
- Social media campaigns.
- Survey results.

Medium Term Outcomes:

- Young LGBTQI+ people have safe spaces where they can gather and be themselves.
- There is enhanced visibility of LGBTQI+ youth services in rural Ireland.
- Centralised resources and training to build capacity of LGBTQI+ youth workers are provided.
- Online supports are developed and provided for young LGBTQI+ people in rural Ireland.
- Young LGBTQI+ people have increased knowledge of LGBTQI+ culture, community and history.

Short Term Outcomes:

- Young LGBTQI+ people can connect with other peers in their area.
- Young LGBTQI+ people feel safe and supported.
- Awareness of barriers to young LGBTQI+ people attending youth services is understood.
- Community of Practice for practitioners is developed.

Proud Spaces in Ireland

Youth Work Ireland Member Services LGBTQI+ Groups



Youth Work Ireland Member Youth Services

- Youth Work Ireland Cavan/Monaghan
- Youth Work Ireland County Longford
- Youth Work Ireland Galway
- Youth Work Ireland Laois
- Youth Work Ireland Louth
- Youth Work Ireland Meath
- Youth Work Ireland Midlands
- Youth Work Ireland North Connaught
- Youth Work Ireland Tipperary
- Canal Communities Regional Youth Service
- Carlow Regional Youth Service
- CDYS Youth Work Ireland
- Clare Youth Service
- Donegal Youth Service
- FDYS
- In Sync Youth and Family Services
- KDYS
- Limerick Youth Service
- Ossory Youth
- Waterford & South Tipperary Community Youth Service



Proud Spaces Checklist

Here are some suggestions from youth workers and young LGBTQI+ people who say can and do contribute to creating safe, inclusive and proud spaces.

<i>Actions</i>	<i>y</i>
There is visual representation that your space is safe and proud, examples given are rainbow flags, posters etc.	
Staff, volunteers and young people check their unconscious bias.	
Staff and volunteers have a general understanding of LGBTQI+ history, issues, topics, or have a willingness to learn more.	
Use of pronouns is common practice, used and welcomed.	
Diversity in all forms is welcomed, accepted, embraced and celebrated.	
LGBTQI+ events are celebrated in conjunction with the young people.	
Confidentiality in relation to a young person's sexual or gender identity is treated with the utmost importance.	
Is it possible to provide transport so young LGBTQI+ people can get to the group.	
It is possible to organise a one-to-one meeting for a young LGBTQI+ person prior to them joining a group.	
Design and plan activities with the group's input and say.	
Have one-to-one slots available to support young LGBTQI+ people throughout the year.	
Provide information, literature, flyers on rights and sign-posting to services outside your group or service.	
Provide leadership skills for young LGBTQI+ people.	

Proud Spaces Survey Analysis

120 young LGBTQI+ people from member youth services around the country completed this survey aiming to find out their experiences, what a proud space is for them and how we can improve and equip member youth services to provide proud spaces.

Geography of participants

Young people are represented in this research from services in the following counties:



When asked what the barriers are for rural LGBTQI+ young people attending LGBTQI+ youth groups, the top three issues identified were:

1. Transport
2. Unsupportive Family
3. Not enough information about groups

Respondents were then asked for ideas on how we can break down these barriers:

1. Buses offered to LGBTQI+ groups from rural areas
2. Advertising of groups more widely
3. Having more LGBTQI+ groups available

Difficulties in being LGBTQI+ in rural Ireland:

The four main themes in response to this question were:

1. Homophobia
2. Safety
3. Lack of support or safe spaces nearby
4. Bullying

Positives to being LGBTQI+ in rural Ireland:

Responses to this question were mixed and no clear themes were identified. Answers were wide ranging and included:

- Unsure
- Youth Groups
- Sense of Community
- Stronger bonds with LGBTQI+ people in the area
- More rural prides happening
- Getting to live in more scenic locations

Describe your dream Proud Space:

Very cozy room, with like a mystical forest vibe to it. A small bar area to make hot drinks whether that be tea, coffee or hot chocolate. And some small snacks to nibble on. Plenty of comfy seats to sit and chat. Activities and ideas on a board. And some small garland with some of the LGBTQI+ flags hanging around.

A place where I can be myself

My dream proud space is somewhere where everyone is free and safe to be themselves. Somewhere where everybody is welcome and no one is judged no matter what. Where everyone can be themselves without feeling anxious or afraid. Literally any accessible space with transport and support. Somewhere you can be fully yourself.



“ My proud space would be a place where I could exist without judgement, and I wouldn't have to pretend to be something or someone I'm not.

I could be me, and that'd be enough lots of diversity, easy access by transport. A space with equal amounts of queer people as trans people, dedicated activities and opens 2 days a week.

”

“ A place I could attend without being outed. ”

“ A place were you can feel safe to talk about the person you are and want to become. ”



What in your LGBTQI+ youth group makes it feel like a Proud Space?

- The people.
- Support from youth workers.
- Respect and used of pronouns.
- Pride flags.
- Open mindedness.
- Inclusivity.
- Peers.

What does your youth service do to make you feel safe?

- Welcoming space.
- No discrimination tolerated.
- Everyone is respectful
- Closed groups.
- Youth workers advice and guidance.
- Feeling safe to be yourself.
- Confidential.
- Having visible pride flags and posters.
- No judgement.



What would you like to see covered in your LGBTQI+ youth group



What would you like workers to know so they can best support LGBTQI+ young people?

Answers included (in no particular order)

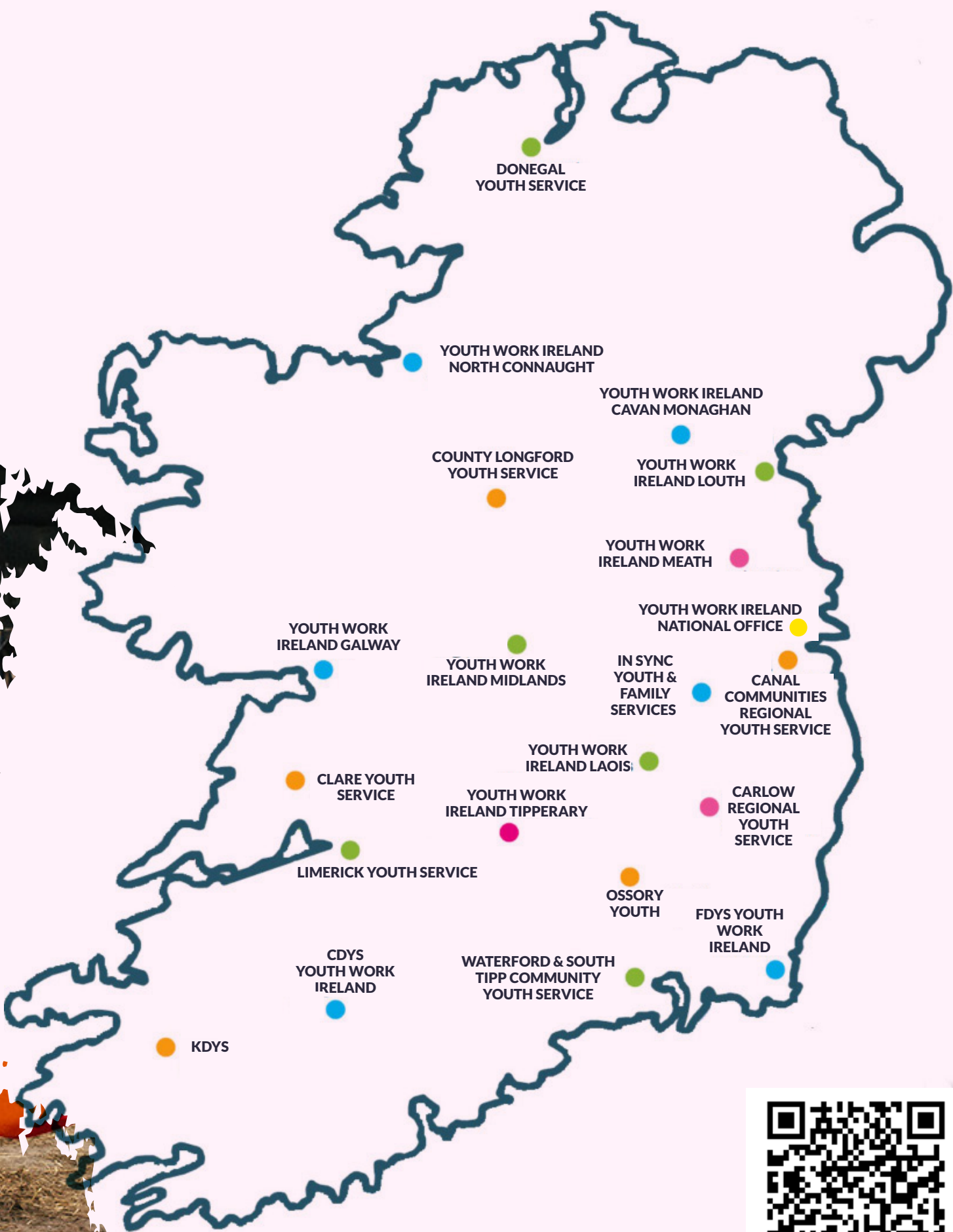
- Everyone is different.
- That some people may not be out.
- Education on the intersectionality of neurodivergence, disability and LGBTQI+ people.
- LGBTQI+ history.
- Use pronouns.



What have you gained from being part of an LGBTQI+ Youth Group?







www.youthworkireland.ie/proud-spaces



