



Proud Spaces: LGBTQI+ & Neurodiversity Research Project

Project Overview

Proud Spaces, a national LGBTQI+ youth initiative of Youth Work Ireland, will undertake a national research project exploring the intersection of LGBTQI+ identities and neurodiversity among young people in Ireland.

The research will seek to better understand the experiences, needs and barriers experienced by neurodivergent LGBTQI+ young people and examine how youth services currently respond to neurodivergent LGBTQI+ young people and identify practical changes that can make youth work and youth services more accessible, inclusive and neuro-affirming.

The research will culminate in a national research report containing evidence-based recommendations for youth services, organisations and policymakers.

Project Budget: *€10,000.00

Research Completion: 30 April 2027

National Launch: May 2027

**The proposed budget is €10,000 inclusive of all fees and expenses. Tenderers are invited to propose a proportionate methodology that delivers the project objectives within the available budget.*

This project is funded by the DCDE's LGBTQI+ Community Service's Fund 2026-2027

Background and Rationale

Through Proud Spaces and the wider Youth Work Ireland network, there has been increasing recognition of the significant intersection between LGBTQI+ identities and neurodivergence.

Youth workers and LGBTQI+ youth services are reporting increasing numbers of young people who identify as both LGBTQI+ and neurodivergent. This includes young people who have a formal diagnosis, young people awaiting assessment and young people who identify as or believe themselves to be neurodivergent without having received a formal diagnosis.

Proud Spaces has already begun responding to this need through the development of a national online LGBTQI+ neurodivergent youth group for young people aged 18–24. This work has highlighted both the demand for neuro-affirming LGBTQI+ spaces and the need for greater knowledge and resources across the wider youth sector. However, there remains a need for a stronger evidence base regarding the experiences of neurodivergent LGBTQI+ young people in Ireland and how youth services can best respond. There is a particular need to better understand the experiences of trans and non-binary neurodivergent young people. The research will therefore ensure that trans experiences are intentionally represented throughout the project.

This project provides an opportunity to bring together lived experience, youth-work practice and existing national and international evidence to inform the future development of Proud Spaces and contribute to wider policy and practice.

Primary Research Question

The research will be guided by the following indicative research question:

What are the experiences and support needs of neurodivergent LGBTQI+ young people in Ireland, and how can youth services and policy better respond to them?

Research Objectives

The project will aim to:

1. Explore the lived experiences of neurodivergent LGBTQI+ young people in Ireland.
2. Examine the intersection between neurodivergence, sexual orientation and gender identity.
3. Give particular attention to the experiences of neurodivergent trans and non-binary young people.
4. Identify barriers experienced by neurodivergent LGBTQI+ young people when accessing youth, LGBTQI+ and community services.

5. Identify the characteristics of services and spaces that neurodivergent LGBTQI+ young people experience as accessible, safe and affirming.
6. Explore the experiences, knowledge and confidence of youth workers in supporting neurodivergent LGBTQI+ young people.
7. Identify gaps in current youth-work practice, training, resources and supports.
8. Identify examples of effective and promising practice in Ireland and internationally.
9. Develop practical recommendations for youth organisations and youth workers.
10. Develop recommendations for policymakers, funders and relevant statutory bodies.

Key Areas of Inquiry

The research should explore a number of interconnected themes. These may include:

- Experiences of recognising and understanding LGBTQI+ and neurodivergent identities.
- Experiences of coming out and identity development.
- Experiences of youth and LGBTQI+ services.
- Barriers to participating in youth groups and services.
- Sensory and environmental accessibility.
- Communication preferences and needs.
- Social interaction and group environments.
- Experiences of inclusion, exclusion and belonging.
- Mental health and wellbeing where relevant to participants' experiences.
- Rural and geographical barriers.
- Experiences of education and other services where these intersect with youth work.
- Experiences of trans and non-binary neurodivergent young people.
- What young people consider a neuro-affirming LGBTQI+ youth service.
- Youth workers' experiences of supporting neurodivergent LGBTQI+ young people.
- Training and resources needs within youth services.
- Referral pathways and access to specialist supports.
- Gaps in current policy and service provision.

The final research framework will be agreed between the Proud Spaces team and the appointed researcher.

Proposed Methodology

A mixed-method research approach is proposed, combining quantitative and qualitative research. Rather than prescribing exact participant numbers at the outset, applicants/researchers should be invited to recommend an appropriate methodology within the available budget and timeframe.

A. Literature and Evidence Review

The researcher will undertake a focused review of relevant Irish and international research relating to:

- LGBTQI+ young people and neurodivergence;
- Autism, ADHD and other forms of neurodivergence within LGBTQI+ populations;
- Trans and non-binary neurodivergent experiences;
- Barriers to accessing youth and community services;
- Neuro-affirming practice;
- LGBTQI+ inclusive youth work;
- Relevant Irish policy and service provision.

The literature review should provide context for the primary research rather than becoming the main focus of the project.

B. National Survey of LGBTQI+ Young People

A national online survey will be developed to gather quantitative and qualitative information from LGBTQI+ young people. The survey should be accessible to young people with different communication and accessibility needs.

Participation should not be restricted to individuals with a formal neurodevelopmental diagnosis. Where appropriate, the research should distinguish between young people who:

- Have received a formal diagnosis;
- Are currently awaiting assessment;
- Self-identify as neurodivergent;
- Suspect they may be neurodivergent;
- Do not identify as neurodivergent.

Proud Spaces and Youth Work Ireland can support national dissemination through member youth services and existing community of practice networks.

C. Qualitative Research with Young People

Qualitative engagement should provide young people with opportunities to describe their experiences in greater depth. The researcher may recommend a combination of:

- Small focus groups;
- Individual interviews;

- Online consultations;
- Written or alternative methods of participation.

Multiple participation methods should be considered in recognition that traditional focus groups may not be accessible or comfortable for all neurodivergent participants.

A specific mechanism should be included to ensure sufficient participation from trans and non-binary neurodivergent young people.

D. Youth Worker and Youth Service Consultation

The research should explore the experience of professionals supporting LGBTQI+ young people. This could include a national youth-worker survey, focus groups, interviews or a combination of approaches.

Areas explored should include:

- Confidence supporting neurodivergent LGBTQI+ young people;
- Common challenges experienced in practice;
- Accessibility of existing youth provision;
- Knowledge and training needs;
- Resources required by youth workers;
- Organisational barriers;
- Referral pathways;
- Examples of effective practice.

E. Stakeholder Consultation

A small number of interviews or consultations should be undertaken with relevant organisations and professionals working across LGBTQI+, trans, neurodiversity, youth work and related sectors. These consultations should help contextualise the research findings and identify wider service and policy implications.

Focus on Trans and Non-Binary Experiences

Trans and non-binary participants should be intentionally recruited rather than relying on sufficient representation emerging through the general survey. This may include targeted recruitment, dedicated qualitative consultation and engagement with relevant organisations.

The final report should clearly identify findings relating to trans and non-binary neurodivergent young people and include relevant recommendations.

The research should adopt a respectful, rights-based and affirming approach to both neurodivergence and gender diversity and should be informed by current good practice in participatory research

Participation and Co-Design

The principle of "**nothing about us without us**" should underpin the project. A small Research Advisory Group should be established to support the project.

This could include:

- Neurodivergent LGBTQI+ young adults;
- Trans/non-binary representation;
- Youth-work representatives;
- LGBTQI+ sector expertise;
- Neurodiversity expertise;
- Proud Spaces/Youth Work Ireland.

The group would not be responsible for conducting the research but could contribute at key stages.

Three meetings are proposed:

Meeting 1 – Research Design: Review the research questions, methodology and research tools.

Meeting 2 – Emerging Findings: Discuss initial findings and identify areas requiring further consideration.

Meeting 3 – Recommendations: Review draft findings and help ensure recommendations reflect lived experience and youth-work practice.

Accessibility

Accessibility should be built into the research methodology rather than added at the end. The research should consider:

- Clear and plain language;
- Accessible participant information;
- Advance information about interviews/focus groups;
- Opportunities to participate online;
- Individual participation as an alternative to group participation;
- Breaks during consultations;
- Flexibility around communication methods;

- Sensory needs for any in-person research;
- Allowing additional processing time where required.

Participants should have clear information about what participation involves and how their information will be used.

Ethics, Consent and Safeguarding

The appointed researcher will be expected to demonstrate appropriate experience in ethical research involving young people and potentially vulnerable populations. The final methodology should address:

- Informed consent;
- Confidentiality and anonymity;
- GDPR and data protection;
- Secure data storage;
- Safeguarding;
- Managing potentially sensitive disclosures;
- Withdrawal from research;
- Participant wellbeing;
- Appropriate signposting to support services.

The primary target group for the research is LGBTQI+ young people aged 12-24.

Researcher Responsibilities

The appointed researcher will be expected to:

- Participate in an inception meeting with Proud Spaces to agree project scope, timelines and expectations.
- Refine and finalise the research methodology in partnership with Proud Spaces.
- Undertake a literature and evidence review.
- Develop all research tools, including survey instruments and qualitative research guides.
- Develop participant information, consent and data protection materials.
- Advise on ethical, safeguarding and accessibility considerations throughout the project.
- Design, administer and analyse the national survey.
- Facilitate agreed qualitative research activities, including interviews, focus groups or other participatory methods.
- Undertake relevant professional, stakeholder and sector consultations.

- Analyse quantitative and qualitative findings and identify key themes.
- Present emerging and interim findings to Proud Spaces and the Research Advisory Group.
- Develop evidence-based conclusions and recommendations.
- Prepare and submit a draft research report for review.
- Incorporate feedback from Proud Spaces and the Research Advisory Group.
- Produce a final written research report and executive summary suitable for dissemination to stakeholders and policymakers.
- Deliver all agreed project outputs by the project completion date.
- Present findings at the project launch event, if required.

Key Deliverables

- Inception meeting and agreed project plan.
- Agreed research methodology and research tools.
- Literature and evidence review.
- National survey and analysis.
- Qualitative research findings.
- Interim findings presentation.
- Draft research report.
- Final research report.
- Executive summary.
- Presentation at launch event (if required).

Proud Spaces will support participant recruitment, promotion through the Youth Work Ireland network, stakeholder introductions and overall project coordination.

Research Outputs

The primary output will be: **One national research report on the intersection of LGBTQI+ identities and neurodiversity among young people in Ireland, with a particular focus on trans experiences.**

The report should include:

- Executive summary;
- Background and context;
- Review of existing evidence;
- Methodology;
- Participant profile;
- Research findings;

- Lived-experience perspectives;
- Specific consideration of trans and non-binary experiences;
- Findings relating to youth services and youth work;
- Examples of good practice;
- Conclusions;
- Practical recommendations for youth services;
- Policy recommendations;
- Recommendations for future research.

The researcher should also provide a concise executive summary suitable for dissemination to stakeholders and policymakers.

Graphic design and publication of the final report will be managed separately by Youth Work Ireland

Project Timeline

November–December 2026

- Finalise project specification.
- Advertise/appoint researcher.
- Establish Research Advisory Group.
- Confirm research methodology.

December 2026–January 2027

- Literature and evidence review.
- Develop survey and qualitative research tools.
- Complete ethics, consent, data protection and safeguarding processes.
- Advisory Group Meeting 1.

January–February 2027

- Launch national survey.
- Recruit qualitative research participants.
- Conduct interviews/focus groups.
- Conduct youth-worker/service consultation.
- Undertake stakeholder consultations.

March 2027

- Complete fieldwork.

- Analyse quantitative and qualitative findings.
- Identify emerging themes.
- Advisory Group Meeting 2.
- Begin report drafting.

Early April 2027

- First full draft of research report.
- Review by Proud Spaces.
- Advisory Group Meeting 3.
- Finalise recommendations.

By 30 April 2027

- Final research report delivered.
- Executive summary delivered.
- Report passed to designer for publication.

May 2027

- Publication of research.
- National launch.
- Stakeholder and policymaker engagement.
- Communications campaign.

Intended Impact

The project should move beyond simply documenting the experiences of neurodivergent LGBTQI+ young people. The research should provide Proud Spaces, Youth Work Ireland and the wider youth sector with evidence that can be translated into practical change. It should enable Proud Spaces to:

- Strengthen its own neuro-affirming practice;
- Develop future training and resources for youth workers;
- Inform the development of LGBTQI+ youth services;
- Identify gaps in existing provision;
- Advocate for appropriate resources and supports;
- Engage policymakers using Irish evidence;
- Contribute to wider understanding of the intersection between LGBTQI+ identities and neurodivergence.

Most importantly, the project should ensure that the experiences and recommendations of neurodivergent LGBTQI+ young people themselves inform how services designed to support them develop in the future.

Submission Requirements

Tender responses should include:

- Understanding of the brief;
- Proposed methodology;
- Project plan and timeline;
- Experience conducting research with LGBTQI+ communities and/or neurodivergent people;
- Experience conducting research with young people;
- Ethical approach;
- Proposed budget breakdown;
- Details of personnel involved;
- Examples of relevant previous work;
- Two referees.

Assessment Criteria

Criteria	Weighting
Understanding of the brief	20%
Quality of methodology	30%
Relevant experience	25%
Participation and accessibility approach	15%
Value for money	10%

All data, reports and materials produced under this contract will become the property of Youth Work Ireland.