

New film reveals experiences of LGBTQ young people in care

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Experiences of LGBTQ young people coming out in the care system are revealed in a new animated film premiering this weekend. Credit: University of East Anglia

Experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and questioning (LGBTQ) young people coming out in the care system are revealed in a new film premiering this weekend.

The six-minute animation promotes the findings of SpeakOut—a national study led by researchers at the University of East Anglia's (UEA) Centre for Research on Children and Families (CRCF).

The research focused not only on vulnerability and risk, but also on the strengths and resilience of these [young people](#) and the support offered by foster families and professionals working with them. It is the first and largest research project of its kind in England.

Six young researchers, who identify as part of the LGBTQ community and spent time living in care, made the film with UEA and the Creative Research Collective (CRC). They were keen to use their own experiences to help others in care, and to raise awareness of the needs of LGBTQ people in the care system and improve services.

The film will be screened at a public launch event on Saturday, July 28, as part of Norwich Pride celebrations.

The study itself involved interviews with 46 LGBTQ young people, together with 26 foster carers with experience of caring for LGBTQ young people. There was also a survey of 152 local authorities and focus groups with professionals, including social workers and those working in education and youth offending.

Lead researcher Dr. Jeanette Cossar, of CRCF and UEA's School of Social Work, said: "The responses from the young people in particular provide powerful insights into both their personal journeys and their varied experiences of services. Their contribution enhanced every stage of this project.

"We hope the film and the recommendations we've made for those working in the care system will lead to a better understanding of the issues facing LGBTQ young people in care and ultimately improve

services and support."

One of the young people involved in the project and featured in the film is Brett Service, from London. He said: "As a gay care leaver I got involved in this amazing project to improve services offered to both the current generation of LGBTQ children in care and care leavers, as well as any future generations.

"It is important that LGBTQ young people get the correct support from professionals involved in their care so they don't feel alone, unwanted or unsupported. In this project we have all been able use our expertise as care leavers as well as our expertise as members of the LGBTQ community to advocate on behalf of other young people who are LGBTQ to make the changes needed."

Findings from the project include:

- Support for LGBTQ young people was said to be limited by a lack of both knowledge and confidence and [local authorities](#) were keen to improve practice.
- Several young people concealed their sexual orientation from carers and professionals resulting in isolation, increased vulnerability and sometimes placement breakdown.
- Some young people feared that coming out in care would result in rejection and placement breakdown, but for others living in care offered an opportunity to explore their LGBTQ identity.
- When young people came out in care as LGBT it helped when foster carers were accepting and reassured the young person of their commitment to them. However, several young people had experienced reactions which they found unhelpful.
- Across the interviews with the young people there was widespread experience of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia.

- There was recognition among professionals of inter-generational differences in understandings of sexuality and gender and the need for them to examine, and sometimes re-evaluate, their own attitudes.
- It was felt that professionals might avoid discussing sexuality with young people because of a general cultural unease about talking about sexuality
- Young people said that social workers were not overtly homophobic but that some were awkward and uncomfortable when discussing sexuality with them.

The process of making the film involved three full-day workshops, during which the young [people](#) gathered with researchers and the CRC team to explore both their experiences and the main themes to emerge from the research. Through group exercises, discussions and interviews they decided on the message, the audience and the tone of the film. Artwork created by the young researchers was then animated and edited by CRC's Lizzy Hobbs.

More information: The film will be available from July 28 on the SpeakOut project website: www.uea.ac.uk/speakout

Provided by University of East Anglia

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