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Sheffield Hallam  
University

(Trans)gender  
identity  
awareness  
and support  
in Rotherham

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## Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the research participants who gave their time to respond to the surveys and/or participate in discussion groups or interviews. Thanks also to those individuals and organisations that supported the project by disseminating information and assisting with the research process.

## **Foreword**

Although lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) youth provision has existed in Rotherham for 20 years, much of this excellent youth work has been done under the radar with little publicity. The Children and Young People's Services Directorate within Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC) took the provision to the next level. A substantial LGBT Youth Worker post was established in October 2008. This position gave the holder an opportunity to develop the needs of the service resulting in specific provision for trans young people to be identified and developed.

It has been discovered that a relatively high number of young people in Rotherham are questioning their gender identity and coming forward for support. As a result, Sheffield Hallam University agreed to undertake some research looking at the needs of Rotherham's trans youth community, as well as ascertaining the training needs of professionals working with young people who may be questioning their gender identity.

Young people have been instrumental in planning this work, including surveys on the needs of young people and of the professionals who work with them. An online training package based on the results of this research will be developed.

After trying to find a specific transgender resource for young people and realising that very few are available, members of the youth group are also working on a leaflet which is young people focused and led, and which will hopefully be available for distribution nationally.

I welcome this report and hope that its findings will be read and used widely to push for more resources to challenge transphobia, and broader gender stereotyping, and ensure that the voices of all young people are heard. Specific work with trans young people and their families is sorely needed given the numbers of young people who are beginning to question their gender identity.

Russell Oxley  
LGBT Youth Worker  
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

February 2014

## Glossary of terms

Bigender - Person who identifies as more than one gender

Cisgendered - Person whose gender identity conforms to society's expectations of their gender. Sometimes referred to as the 'opposite' of transgendered

Genderqueer - Person who does not identify with, or who seeks to challenge, the gender binary ('male' or 'female')

Homophobia - Fear of, discrimination against, or hatred of lesbian and gay people (also sometimes used to include bisexual people)

LGB - Lesbian, gay and bisexual

LGBT - Lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans

LGBTQ - Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer

Pansexual - Person or people who are attracted to people of all genders. Sometimes used as alternative term to bisexual or polysexual

Passing/to pass - Problematic term for trans people to suggest that a person 'passes' as a cisgendered person of their self-identified gender

Polysexual - Person or people who are attracted to multiple genders. Sometimes used as alternative term to bisexual or pansexual

Queer - Alternative term sometimes used for LGB or LGBT by those seeking to 'reclaim' it from previous/current derogatory usage. Also used to refer to those wishing to challenge gender or sexual binaries, as well as other identity categories

SRE - Sex and relationships education

Trans - Umbrella term used to refer to people who may not identify as either 'male' or 'female' and/or who may identify as intersex, transgender, transsexual or transvestite

Transphobia - Fear of, discrimination against, or hatred of trans people

## Executive summary

### Introduction

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC) asked Eleanor Formby from Sheffield Hallam University to conduct research on gender identity awareness and related support needs amongst practitioners and young people in Rotherham in 2013. The aims of the project were to:

- identify and examine what support non-cisgendered young people in Rotherham feel they would like
- assess the needs of 'out' non-cisgendered young people, thus enabling youth workers to address these needs in the future
- identify and support non-cisgendered young people in Rotherham who are not 'out', raising awareness of what structures and support are available
- examine professionals' knowledge and awareness levels regarding young people's gender identity, and to raise the profile of where to signpost if necessary
- raise awareness of non-cisgendered young people's support needs among practitioners.

### Research methods

The study utilised two online surveys: one targeted at young people (37 responses aged 13-21), and one for professionals working with young people (72 responses). Of the young survey respondents, 53% currently identified as female, 22% as male, 16% as 'none of these', and 9% as trans. Historically, 36% had at some point identified as trans.

Of the practitioners, 30% were youth workers or youth support workers, 24% teachers, and 7% social workers (39% described their role as 'other'). Their age groups ranged from 16-24 to 55-64; 81% identified as female, 19% as male.

Follow-up in-depth data was collected from practitioners, young people, and their parents during discussion groups and individual telephone interviews (involving seven practitioners, seven young people aged 14-19, and six parents).

### Findings from young people

- School teachers were not a common source of information about gender identity, though over half (51%) of respondents knew of at least one young person at school who was questioning their gender identity
- Just under half (47%) had witnessed or experienced transphobia, regularly or infrequently. Predominantly this had taken place at school, online, and/or 'on the street'
- Of those aware of transphobia, just under half (46%) said that nothing happened as a result
- Discussion group data highlighted the need for better awareness about gender identity issues, in particular the widespread belief that there are only two distinct genders; group members were clear that more should be done, including within schools, to educate people

- The importance of correct name and/or pronoun use was raised, and how this might be difficult for young people to instigate, at home, school, college or work, which could cause stress, frustration, upset and anger
- Ineffective school responses to offensive language were also noted; sometimes when young people questioned or challenged teachers about their lack of response, they were then chastised or punished, which was not experienced as supportive or helpful
- Participants highlighted the benefits of specialist trans support, for meeting other trans young people, and for support workers assisting with school and/or family relationships

### **Findings from parents**

- Within the discussion groups, wider understanding of gender identity and trans issues was felt to be generally poor, confused, stigmatising and/or based on stereotypes
- Parents voiced scepticism at how well schools deal with ‘difference’ and/or bullying
- There was support for specific provision for parents, to provide a space where they could freely discuss their situation and emotions with supportive workers and/or peers; this is likely to have benefits for both parents and their children
- Parents spoke of their relief at discovering there was a support group for parents available in Rotherham, though ideally this would meet more often, and/or further support would be available online
- There was clear appreciation among parents about the value of specific support for trans young people

### **Findings from practitioners**

- A total of 41% of respondents to the staff survey said they did not feel confident about including or responding to issues about young people’s gender identity within their practice (59% felt somewhat or very confident)
- If a young person came to them for advice about gender identity, 10% said they would tell a senior manager, contact their parents, or would not know what to do, suggesting that some staff may need advice about appropriate and confidential ways to respond in this situation
- Overall, 44% said they were aware of young people they work with who are questioning their gender identity or who identify as trans, which suggests there is a need to support staff if they lack confidence or knowledge in this area
- Just 21% said they had ever witnessed transphobia, which contrasts with young people’s survey data (above) and may suggest a lack of awareness about transphobia that could be rectified in future training or information provision
- In total, 70% of survey respondents said they would like support or training on trans issues, the majority saying they would like local face-to-face training and appropriate resources
- Training and information provision in this area was said to lead to staff confidence, and more effective signposting and support for young people; those who received no training regarding trans young people said they were less confident in this area as a result
- Staff said they often relied on informal sources of information or advice (such as facebook, family or friends) where this was lacking from their employer
- Some staff raised the subject of transphobia among colleagues, and expressed concern about how schools address transphobia or transphobic bullying, and how well they

- support trans young people; some were unhappy about trans young people getting rebuked or punished for responding to (perceived) transphobia
- Some staff suggested that issues of gender identity should be included within the school curriculum, for instance within personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE)
  - The need for specific support for trans young people was acknowledged
  - Staff were aware that some young people find it hard to correct people's use of names or pronouns; educating staff about the potential for greater gender-neutral language use was therefore identified as important, along with combating wider gender stereotypes
  - The rise in e-learning equalities training for staff was of concern to some as it was felt to be less effective than face-to-face provision; at least one dedicated LGBT role within the local authority was also thought to be beneficial to provide information and guidance to staff when required

## **Recommendations**

1. Continue, and where possible expand, the support currently available to trans young people. This should facilitate peer support and access to professional advice and guidance. Yearly visits to specific trans events could be programmed in to existing trans youth provision, such as the annual 'Sparkle' event in Manchester ([www.sparkle.org.uk](http://www.sparkle.org.uk))
2. Maintain, and if possible extend, support currently offered to parents of trans young people. Ideally this would include a designated LGBT parents worker, and the facilitation of peer support among parents of trans young people
3. Investigate the implementation of an ongoing, high-profile programme of training and information provision targeted at improving awareness about trans young people's needs and identities among staff working with young people in Rotherham. This could, for instance, include rolling attendance at individual team meetings. This should increase staff confidence to deal with these issues in their own practice, and ensure clear signposting and referral pathways are in place where necessary. This may necessitate the development of a specific training and professional support role or remit
4. Where possible, work with schools to improve the provision of information on gender identity issues for all young people. This could, for example, be incorporated into PSHE content and/or be made more visible through the display of appropriate posters
5. Where possible, work with staff to increase understanding of transphobia, which could include bullying, inappropriate language use, and unsupportive responses to transphobia which can cause further upset or anger for trans young people
6. Make links within the authority, wherever possible, between provision for young people, and broader equalities provision. In the context of the Equality Act and public sector equality duties, the designation of some gender-neutral toilet facilities could be investigated
7. As much as possible, utilise existing sources of support and information, such as Gender Matters (<http://gender-matters.org.uk>), Gires ([www.gires.org.uk](http://www.gires.org.uk)), and Mermaids ([www.mermaidsuk.org.uk](http://www.mermaidsuk.org.uk)). A simple factsheet could perhaps be developed to signpost staff, parents and/or young people to appropriate websites or other agencies
8. Maintain links with outside organisations and service providers that work with young people, and where appropriate work to improve their awareness (e.g. GPs)
9. Recent international research with parents, transgender adults, and professionals developed the acronym HAPPINESS to describe the needs of gender-variant children which may be worth consideration in future service developments:

- to be **H**eard
- to be **A**ccepted
- to have **P**rofessional access and support
- to have **P**eer contact
- to have access to current **I**nformation
- **N**ot to be bullied, blamed, punished or otherwise discriminated against
- to have freedom of **E**xpression
- to feel **S**afe
- to have **S**upport (Riley et al, 2013).

## 1. Introduction

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC) asked Eleanor Formby from Sheffield Hallam University to conduct research on gender identity awareness and related support needs in Rotherham in 2013. The specific aims of the project were to:

- identify and examine what support non-cisgendered young people in Rotherham feel they would like
- assess the needs of 'out' non-cisgendered young people, thus enabling youth workers to address these needs in the future
- identify and support non-cisgendered young people in Rotherham who are not 'out', raising awareness of what structures and support are available
- examine professionals' knowledge and awareness levels regarding young people's gender identity, and to raise the profile of where to signpost if necessary
- raise awareness of non-cisgendered young people's support needs among practitioners.

Methods employed during this research consisted of online surveys, group discussions, and telephone interviews (see chapter two).

Recent research jointly conducted by the British Paediatric Surveillance Unit and the Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Surveillance System suggests that gender identity disorder affects male and female children equally, which differs from the widely held assumption that it is more common among boys (Jozwiak, 2013). However, whilst gender identity disorder is a medical definition, there is growing acknowledgement of broader gender identity issues, for example people who do not wish to surgically change their bodies identifying as bigender or genderqueer<sup>1</sup>. Bearing this in mind, this study builds on wider research into the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) young people, regionally, nationally and internationally. Recent decades, for example, have witnessed growing acknowledgement of homophobic and (to a lesser extent) transphobic bullying, as well as broader discomfort with, and/or invisibility of, same-sex relationships and identities in education contexts (Douglas et al, 1999; Ellis and High, 2004; Formby, 2011a; Greenland and Nunney, 2008). There is less research evidence, however, about the experiences of trans young people, which this small study begins to address, with a view to informing local service delivery. Recent research regionally has demonstrated that homophobic and transphobic bullying and discrimination occur in schools, and has identified related issues about (in)appropriate support currently on offer (see Formby and Willis, 2011 for a fuller discussion).

Recent large-scale UK research identified that 55% of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) young people experience homophobic bullying in secondary schools and colleges, and that three in five pupils who experience this bullying say that teachers who witness it do not intervene (Guasp, 2012). Research has also suggested that there are discriminatory attitudes among some staff, and poor or inadequate responses to homophobic bullying from some schools (Formby, 2013a; McNamee et al, 2008; Warwick et al, 2001). Additionally,

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'trans young people' is used throughout this report for shorthand, but it is recognised here that this is an umbrella term that can mask the complexity and individuality of young people's gender identities.

studies indicate that LGBT young people are rarely included in the (formal) school curriculum, with some school staff fearful of including issues about sexual identities within their teaching, particularly regarding sex and relationships education (SRE) (Buston and Hart, 2001; Formby, 2011a, b). It has been suggested that homosexuality is viewed as a ‘taboo’ subject, at risk of exclusion due to concerns about tackling it incorrectly by unconfident staff (DePalma and Atkinson, 2006; Ellis, 2007; Formby, 2011a). By contrast, research emanating from the UK and USA suggests that where schools are more supportive environments, they can lessen the potential for negative outcomes for LGBT pupils (Espelage et al, 2008; Rivers and Cowie, 2006; Russell, 2005; Tippett et al, 2010).

Research has consistently demonstrated the potential impact that homophobic bullying can have on young people’s mental health and emotional wellbeing, including higher incidences of self-harm, depression and/or attempted suicide among LGB-identified young people, compared with their heterosexual counterparts (Almeida et al, 2008; McNamee et al, 2008; Robinson and Espelage, 2011). LGB youth are similarly said to be more likely to suffer poorer physical health arising from higher incidences of alcohol, drug and/or tobacco use, related to their experiences of broader society (Espelage et al, 2008; Rivers and Noret, 2008), though there is also evidence to the contrary (Russell et al, 2011). Research suggests that negative experiences in adolescence can impact upon school attendance and educational attainment (Formby, 2014; Rivers, 2000; Robinson and Espelage, 2011; UNESCO, 2012; Warwick et al, 2004). Moreover, research has also indicated that some LGBT young people’s experiences may not be markedly more positive at university (Ellis, 2009; Valentine et al, 2009). It is reasonable to assume that these issues may also have relevance to those young people experiencing transphobic bullying. Caution is needed, however, to not over-state these risks, or portray LGBT people as inherent ‘victims’ (Cover, 2012; Formby, 2013b; Russell, 2005).

Set within this broader research context, this report presents the findings of the Rotherham-based study (chapters three and four), preceded by a summary of how the study was conducted (chapter two), and followed by some conclusions and recommendations (chapter five).

## 2. Research methods

This study received research ethics approval from Sheffield Hallam University's research ethics committee. Online surveys targeted at young people (aged 11-24) and professionals working with young people were hosted on a secure website for a period of approximately three months. The surveys were designed and piloted in consultation with RMBC. The young people's survey had 26 questions in total, the majority of them 'closed' (i.e. tick box), though there were a small number of 'open' questions which allowed respondents to write more, if they wished. Themes covered included knowledge and awareness; accessing information, support and advice; bullying and discrimination. The staff survey had 25 questions in total, which were also a mixture of open and closed questions. Themes covered were knowledge and awareness; professional practice; support and training needs. Survey results throughout are presented in percentages unless otherwise stated, though figures may not always equal 100% due to rounding. The results presented refer to the 'valid per cent', except where specified, which means the figures after the number of non-responses to any particular question have been removed. Because this was not a large-scale study, some caution with the findings is recommended, but the data do offer some Rotherham-specific evidence that can be used in future service planning and delivery.

In-depth data was also collected via discussion groups and individual telephone interviews (see Figure 1) conducted by the researcher (the author of this report). These were digitally recorded, written up, and subsequently analysed. Extracts from this qualitative (verbal) data are presented alongside the quantitative (numerical) data from the surveys within chapters three and four. Participants were ensured confidentiality; most names used within this report are therefore pseudonyms. Partly as an ice-breaker before the discussion group began, and partly for practical reasons to enable them to choose an appropriately (un)gendered name, young trans participants were allowed to pick their own pseudonym. However, one participant (aged over 16) was certain that they did not wish to be given a pseudonym. Because of the broader context in which trans young people may not always be (able to be) known as the gender or name they desire, this wish has been respected. There is support for waving the use of pseudonyms in certain circumstances within the academic literature (Giordano et al, 2007; Grinyer, 2002; Tilley and Woodthorpe, 2011).

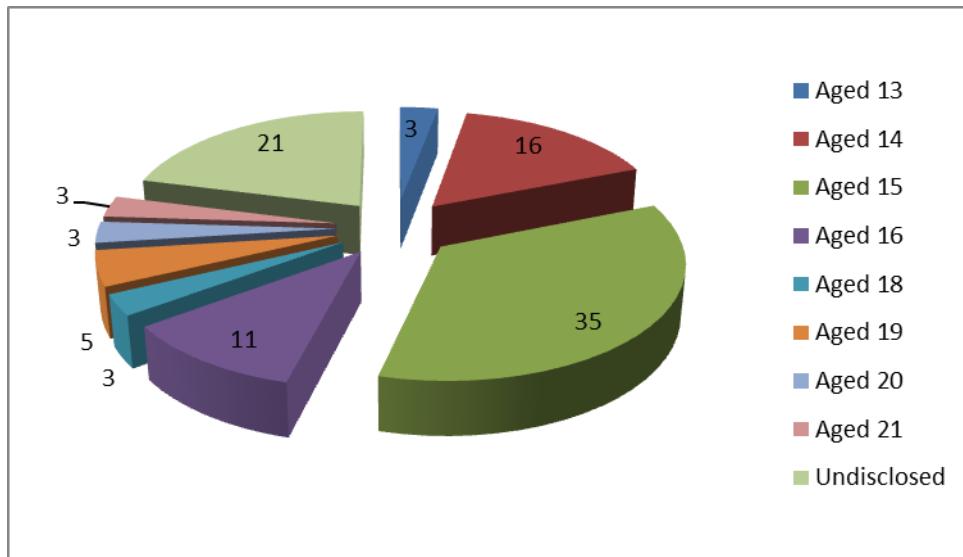
### 2.1 Research participants

**Figure 1: Participant numbers**

Methods used	Numbers of young people	Numbers of adults	
		Staff and volunteers	Parents
Online surveys x 2	37	72	-
Discussion groups x 3	7	3	6
Telephone interviews x 4	-	4	-
Sub-totals	44	85	
<b>Total</b>		<b>129</b>	

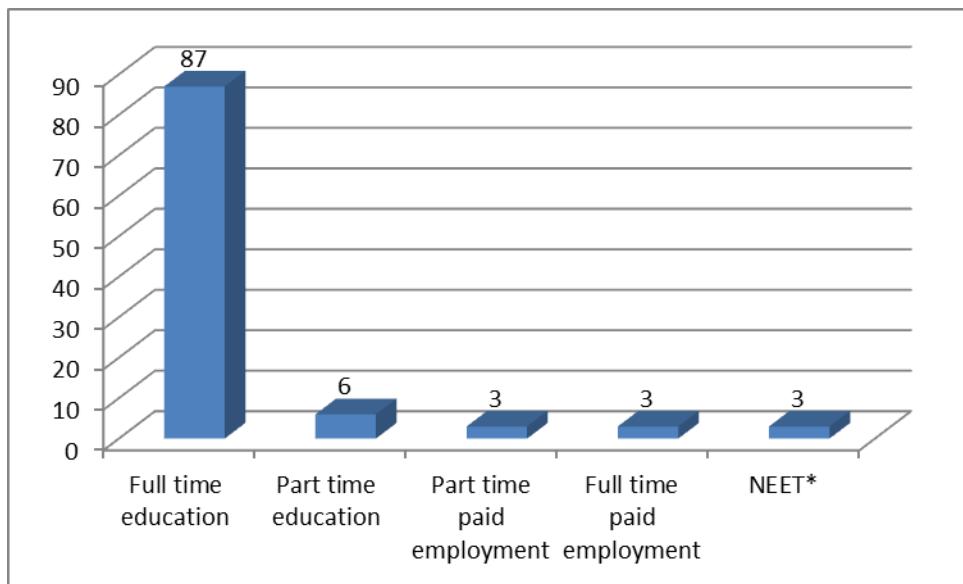
Both surveys collected some demographic information about respondents, presented below (first for young people, and then for staff).

**Figure 2: Young people's age**



The age of respondents ranged from 13-21 (with just under a quarter not disclosing their age). The most common single age group was 15; the (mean) average age was 16.

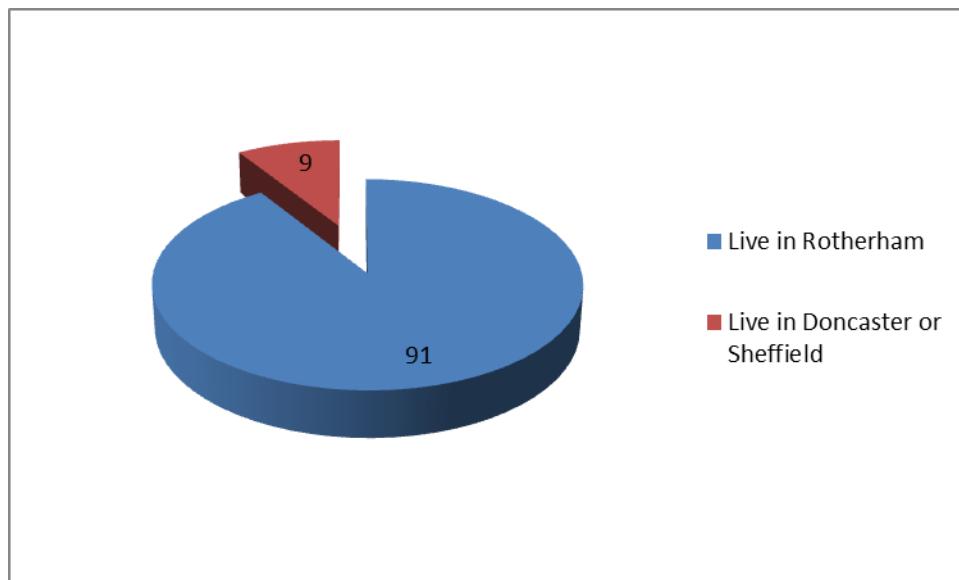
**Figure 3: Young people's participation in education or employment**



\*Not in Education, Employment or Training

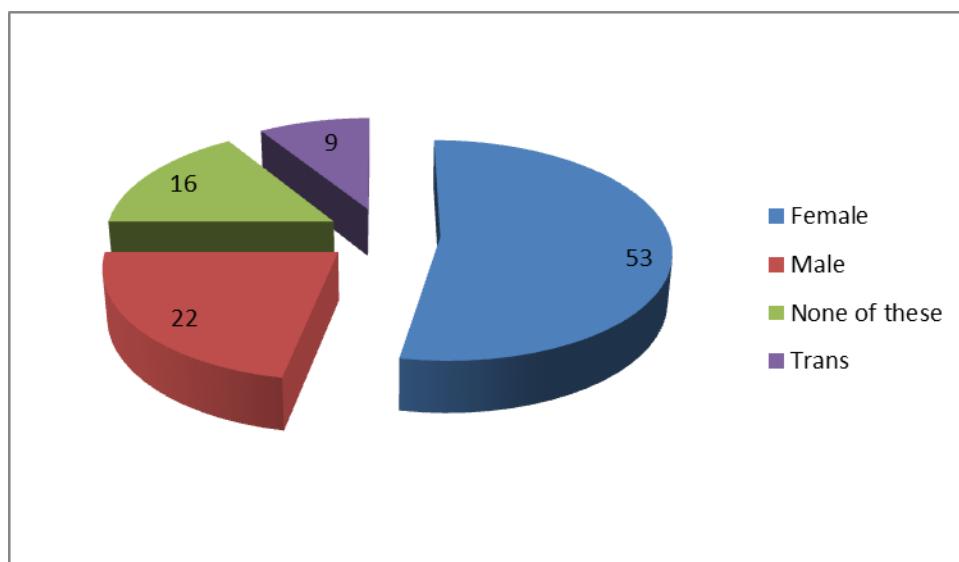
Though responses were not mutually exclusive for this question (i.e. participants could be involved in both education and employment), the vast majority of respondents were engaged in full time education (87%), with only small numbers involved in part or full time employment. This is indicative of the age range of respondents, the majority of who were of compulsory schooling age (see figure 2).

**Figure 4: Young people's place of home**



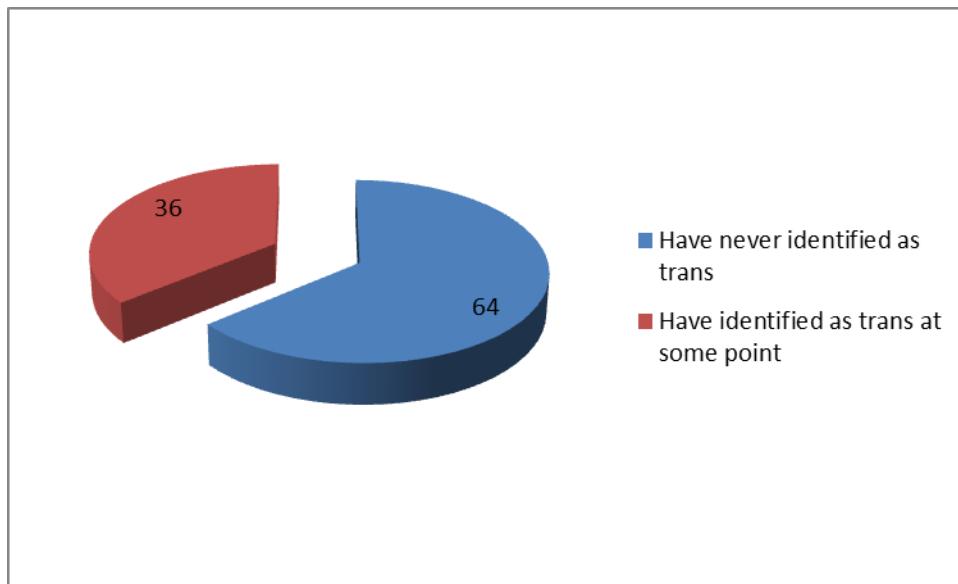
As shown, the majority of respondents lived in Rotherham (91%).

**Figure 5: Young people's self-identified gender identity**



Just over half of respondents identified as female, with just under a quarter saying they were male. A quarter identified as trans, or in some other - often more specific - way, such as in this response: *"Biologically male, but identifying as female and trans"*. It is interesting to note that less young people identified themselves as currently trans (9%) compared with previously (36%), suggesting that a number of young people in Rotherham may be post-transition (which is not to say that they may still not require or want specific trans-identified support).

**Figure 6: Young people's identification as trans**



As the above graph shows, just over a third of participants have ever identified as trans.

In a final (open) question some respondents noted additional detail about themselves, and/or their relationships with trans people:

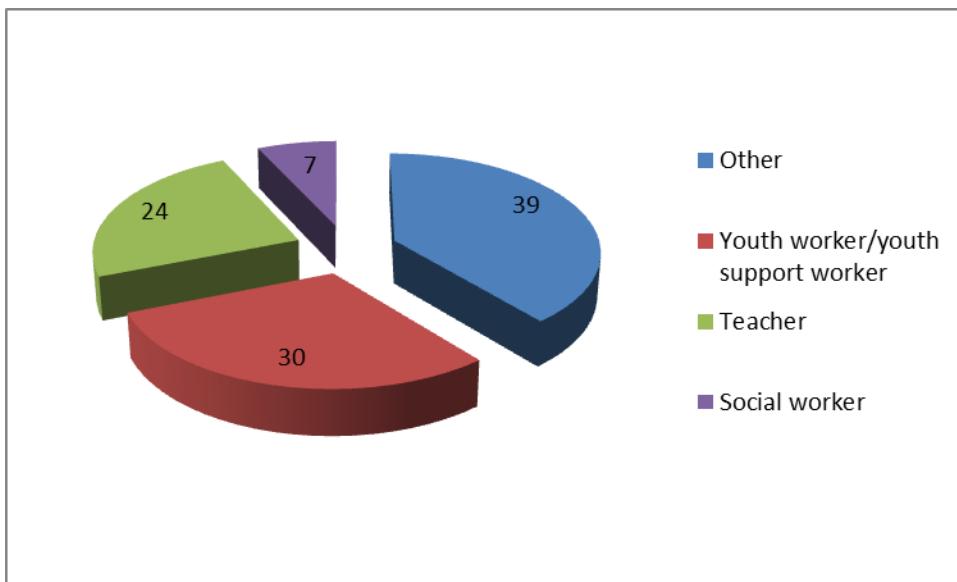
*"I've felt like this for a number of years, since early childhood. I think that more awareness needs to be raised of early intervention as far as young trans people go"*

*"I did not choose to be like this, that is a common mistake"*

*"I have a friend, I would class as close, who is transgender"*

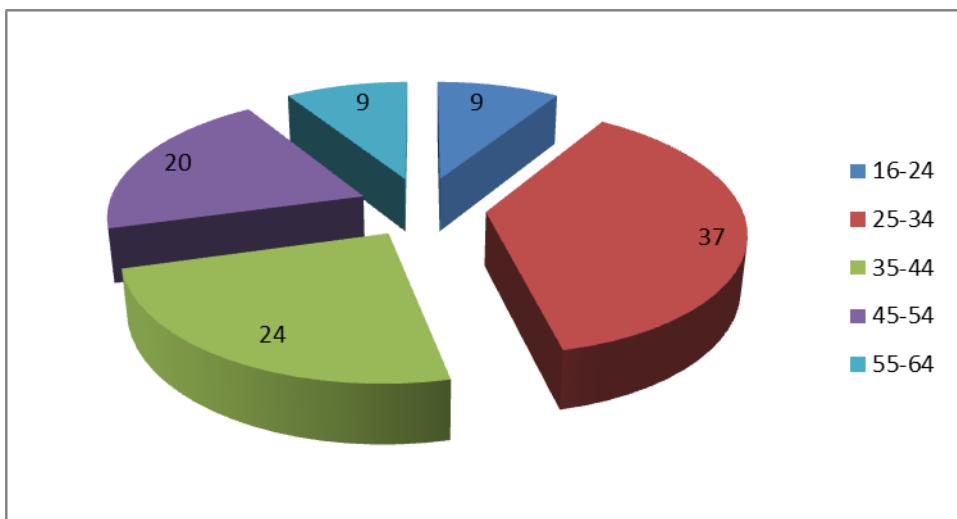
*"[I am a] friend of people who identify as trans".*

**Figure 7: Staff roles**



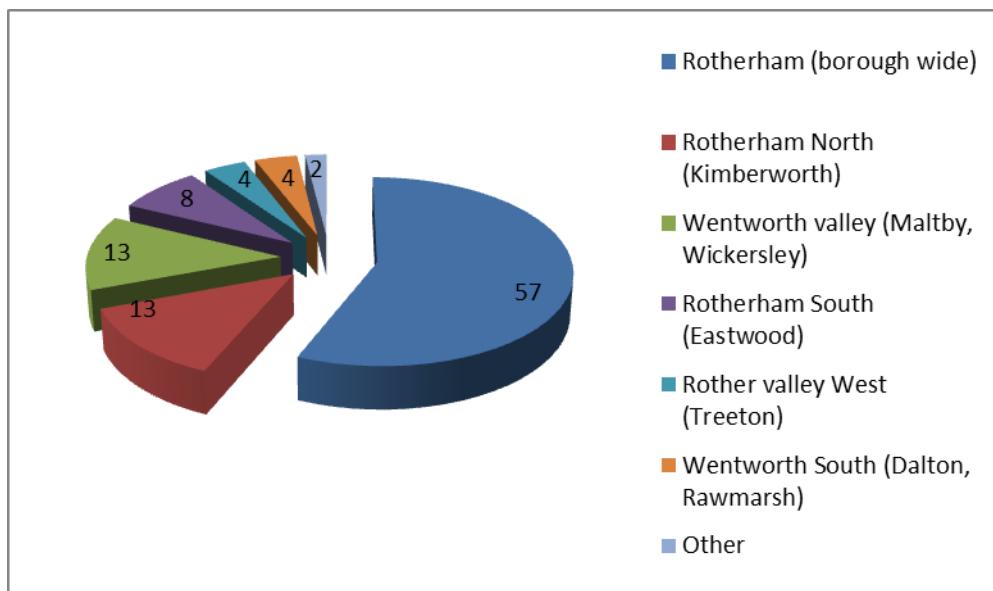
Just over half (54%) of respondents to the staff survey were youth workers/youth support workers (30%) or teachers (24%), with a small percentage of social workers. The largest single group identified their role as 'other': these included "advocate", "centre manager", "connexions adviser", "connexions manager", "council officer", "emotional health co-ordinator", "head of student services", "learning mentor", "manager", "outreach worker", "parent support adviser", "project worker", "school counsellor", "support worker", "team leader" and "YOT worker".

**Figure 8: Staff age**



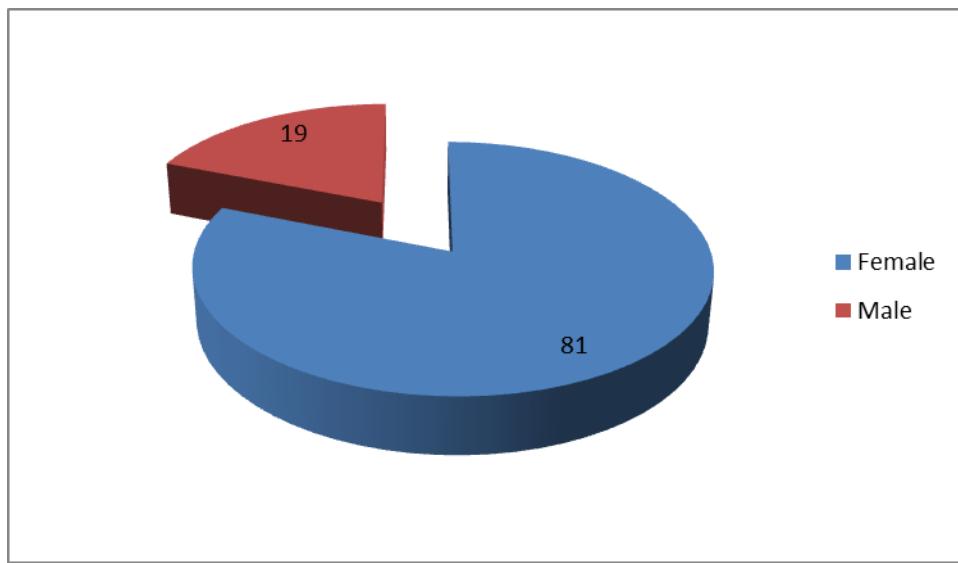
Staff age groups ranged from 16-24 to 55-64. The largest single group (over a third) were aged 25-34. The next largest (just under a quarter) were 35-44.

**Figure 9: Staff work locality**



Staff were asked to identify the area they worked in from a list supplied by RMBC. None worked in Rother Valley South (Kiveton Park) or Wentworth North (Wath). The majority (over half) said they worked borough-wide. ‘Other’ areas identified were Brinsworth and Aston.

**Figure 10: Staff gender identity**



Over three quarters of staff identified as female. No staff identified as trans.

In the final (open) question some respondents noted additional detail about themselves, including:

*“As a gay teacher I am more heightened to issues around sexuality”*

*“I am homosexual”.*

This also included close relationships to people identifying as trans:

*"I have two sisters, one who is [male to female] trans".*

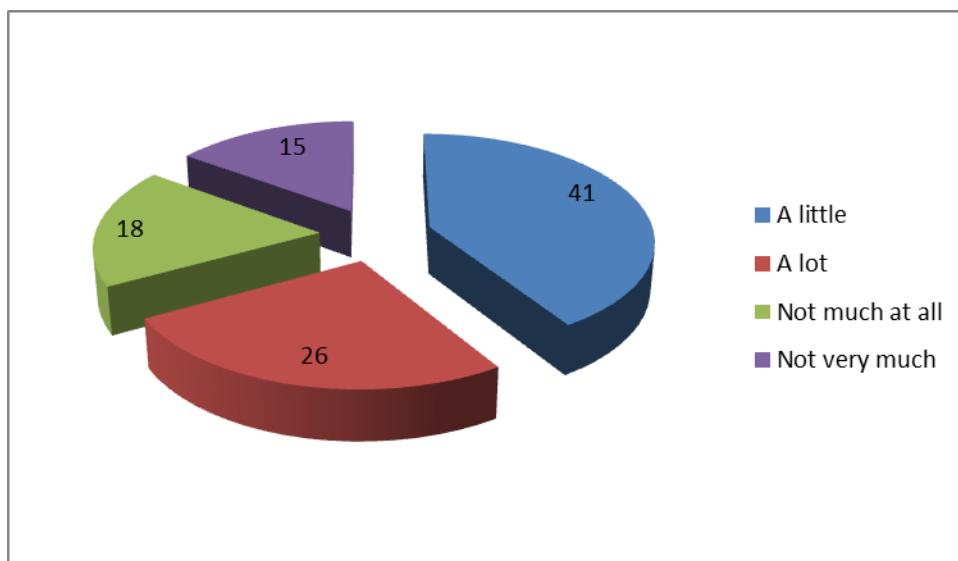
### 3. Findings from young people

This chapter reports the findings from young people, drawn from 37 survey responses and contributions to group discussions held during youth group meetings. In total, seven young people were involved in this in-depth stage of the research. All discussion group participants identified with the trans umbrella to some degree, but they also acknowledged some fluidity and uncertainty with specific language that could be used to describe themselves, which often goes against some researchers' desires to 'fix' their participants with a 'label' (McDermott, 2010). Participants were aged between 14 and 19 inclusive. Six were at school or college, or on a youth training scheme at the time of the research; one was looking for work. Participants had been in touch with the service for between approximately one month and four years. This may have contributed to differing confidence levels within the group, impacting upon uneven levels of contributions to discussions, where young people were supported (but not pressured) to respond within particular debates.

#### 3.1 Survey data

The survey results are presented below; for each chart, the corresponding question forms the title.

**Figure 11: In general, how much do you think you know about gender identity and/or trans issues?**



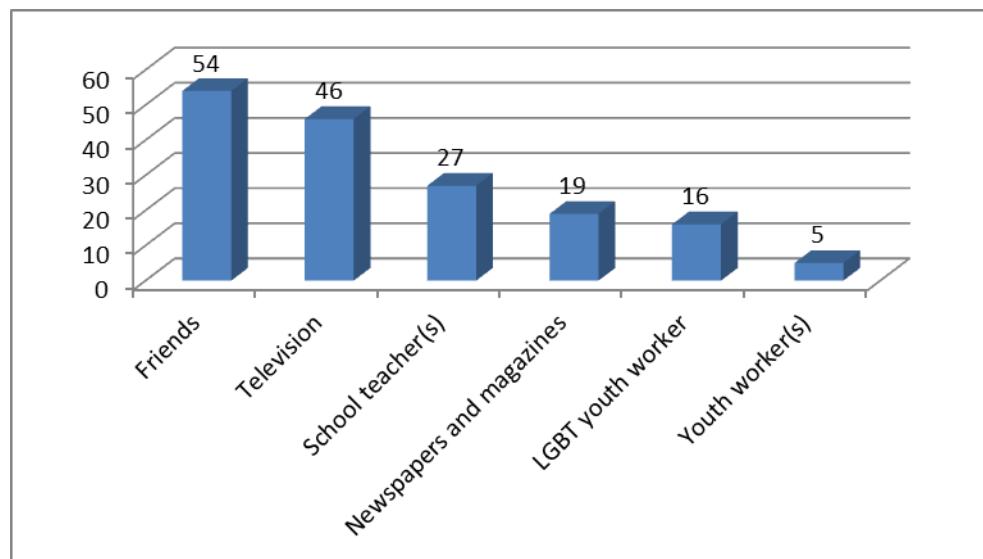
As the chart demonstrates, awareness of gender identity and/or trans issues varied, from those that knew 'a little' (the largest single group), to those that knew 'not very much' (the smallest single group).

**Figure 12: Please tell us how familiar you are with the following terms**

I understand and use this term	I understand this term but don't use it often	I've heard of this term but don't know what it means	I've not heard of this term
Transsexual	Transgender	Gender variant	Cisgender
Transvestite	Bigender	Intersex	Genderqueer
Trans	Transvestite	Genderqueer	Hermaphrodite
Transgender	Transsexual	Hermaphrodite	Gender variant
Gender identity	Trans	Transphobia	Bigender
Transphobia	Intersex	Gender identity	Intersex
Intersex	Transphobia	Bigender	Gender identity
Gender variant	Gender identity	Transgender	Transphobia
Genderqueer	Hermaphrodite	Cisgender	Trans
Bigender	Gender variant	Transsexual	Transvestite
Cisgender	Genderqueer	Transvestite	Transgender

The above table shows that the most commonly used and understood words were (in this order): ‘transsexual’, ‘transvestite’, ‘trans’, ‘transgender’ and ‘gender identity’. This is not surprising given that these words are generally in current usage. Words less commonly heard or understood included: ‘cisgender’, ‘genderqueer’, ‘hermaphrodite’, ‘gender variant’, ‘intersex’, and ‘transphobia’. Most of these words are academic and/or medical (and hermaphrodite is rather dated) so it is perhaps not surprising that they are less commonly used, with the possible exception of transphobia.

**Figure 13: Where do you think you currently get most information or knowledge about gender identity and/or trans issues?**

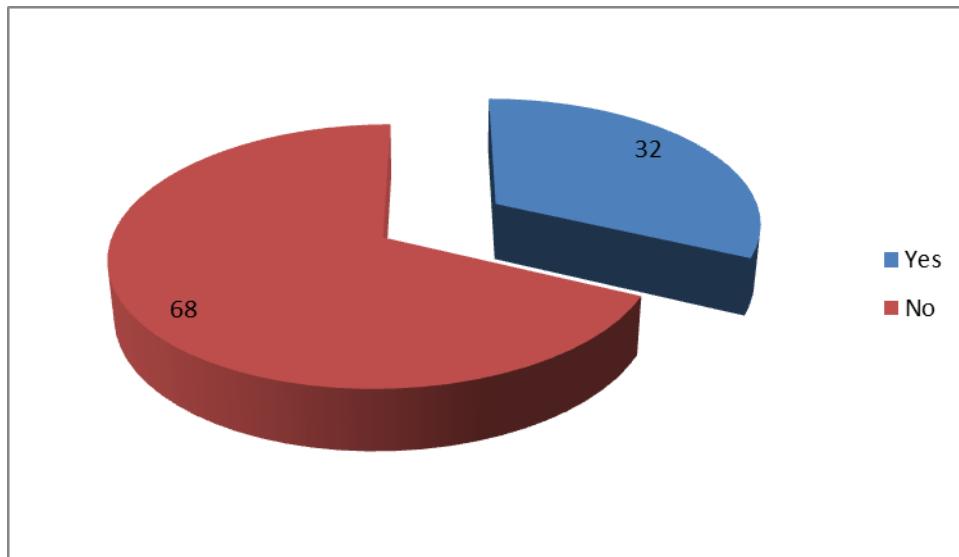


Responses were not mutually exclusive for this question, but the chart above indicates that friends and television were more dominant sources of information than teachers or

newspapers. When asked, the main other source of information suggested was the internet, such as in this example:

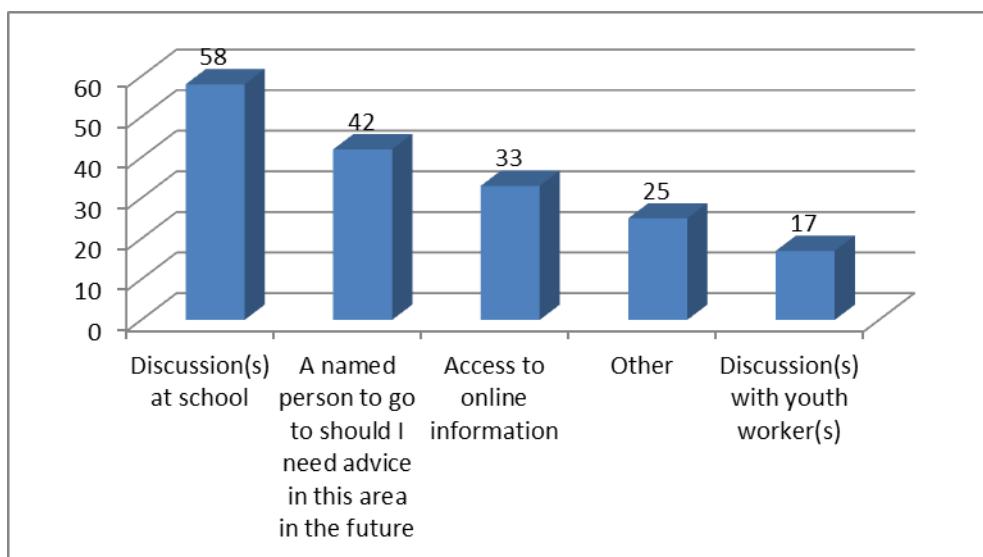
*“I'm a regular viewer of many LGBT news websites such as Pink News”.*

**Figure 14: Do you feel you would like any information about gender identity and/or trans issues?**



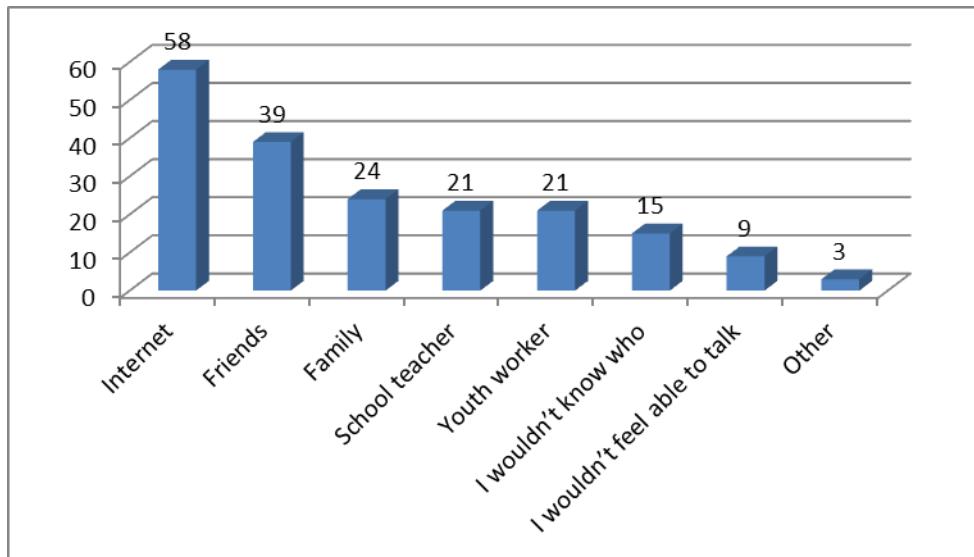
The majority (just over two thirds) said they would not like information on gender identity and/or trans issues, but this might be because over a third (36%) of the respondents had identified as trans at some point, and therefore may not have felt they needed information, or did not want it in a public setting such as school.

**Figure 15: What would you like?**



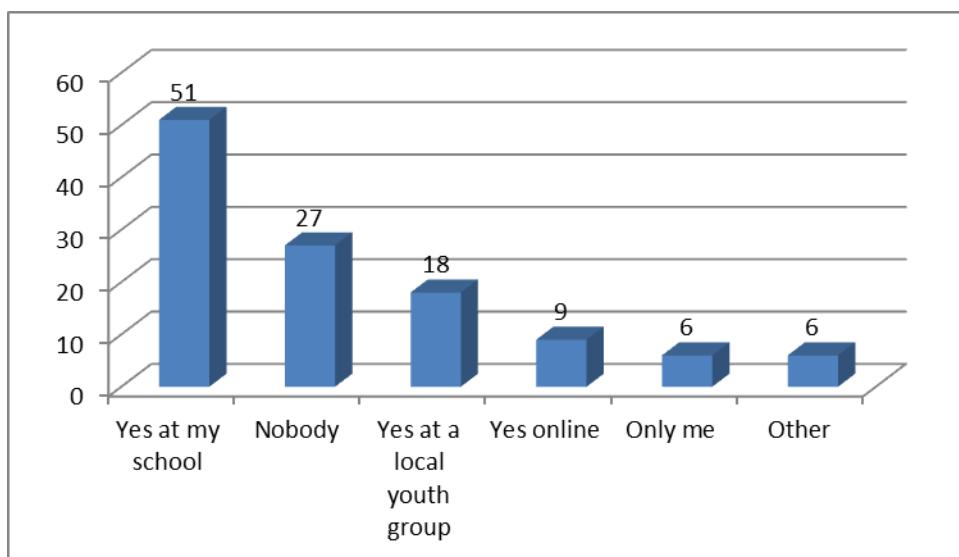
For those who did want information, discussions at school were the most common form requested (by over half), followed by a named person for advice in this area (responses were not mutually exclusive for this question).

**Figure 16: Where would you currently go for information or advice if you wanted to learn about, or talk to someone about, gender identity and/or people identifying as trans?**



Responses were not mutually exclusive for this question, but sources of advice if people currently wanted it were suggested as the internet (over half); and friends and family (over a third, and just under a quarter, respectively).

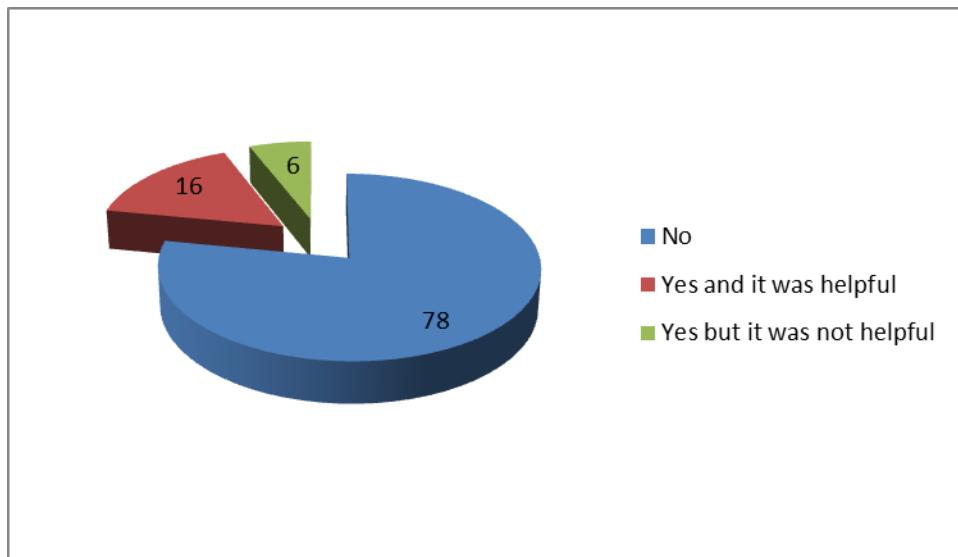
**Figure 17: Do you know any young people who are questioning their gender identity or who identify as trans in some way?**



Over half of respondents were aware of other young people questioning their gender identity whilst at school, suggesting that this is an issue that professionals should not ignore. Just

over a quarter were not aware of anybody. Responses were not mutually exclusive for this question.

**Figure 18: Have you received any individual advice or support about gender identity and/or trans issues?**



The majority (over three quarters) had not received any individual support in this area (which may be because they did not require it). Those who had received advice or support and who had found it helpful were asked to explain why or in what way it had helped. Themes included being listened to, gaining a fuller understanding, being signposted or referred to the gender identity clinic or other source of help, and having support with/by speaking to family members. Other comments included:

*"It helped me to gain a sense of my gender identity and find out more about developing my own identity, as well as being aware of the gender identity of others"*

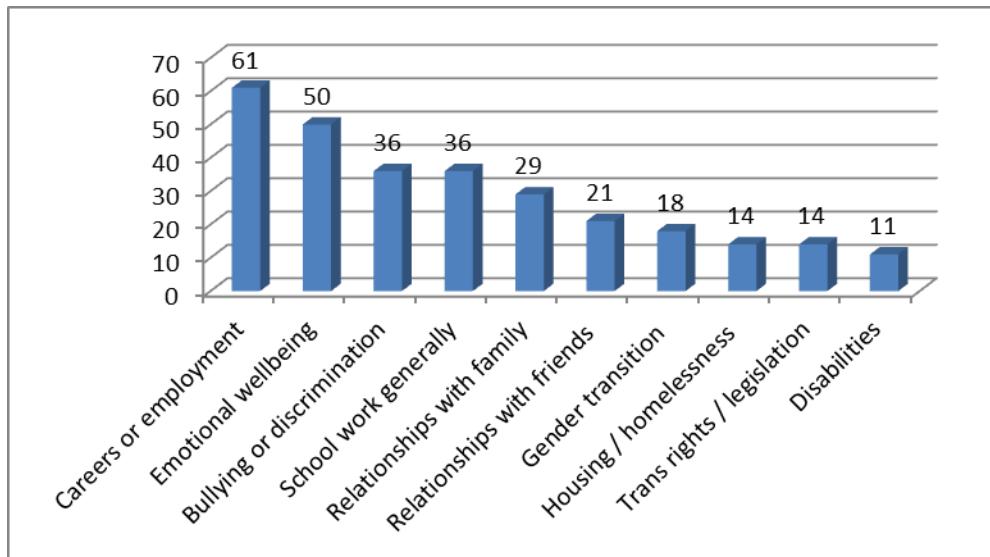
*"Learning more about the struggles trans people go through"*

*"Learned a lot of terms and things and have been supported by my youth worker, friends and family. All this has helped me become a happier person and to become more comfortable in my body".*

Those who had not received any advice or support, or who had not found it helpful, were asked what they thought would be helpful, and why. A respondent answered:

*"Just somebody sitting down with me and fully explaining all about it and how some transgender [people] feel... I find a lot of people get bullied because of being transgender but I feel it may help if everyone understands what people go through".*

**Figure 19: Are there any other areas of your life as a young person that you'd like information about or support with?**



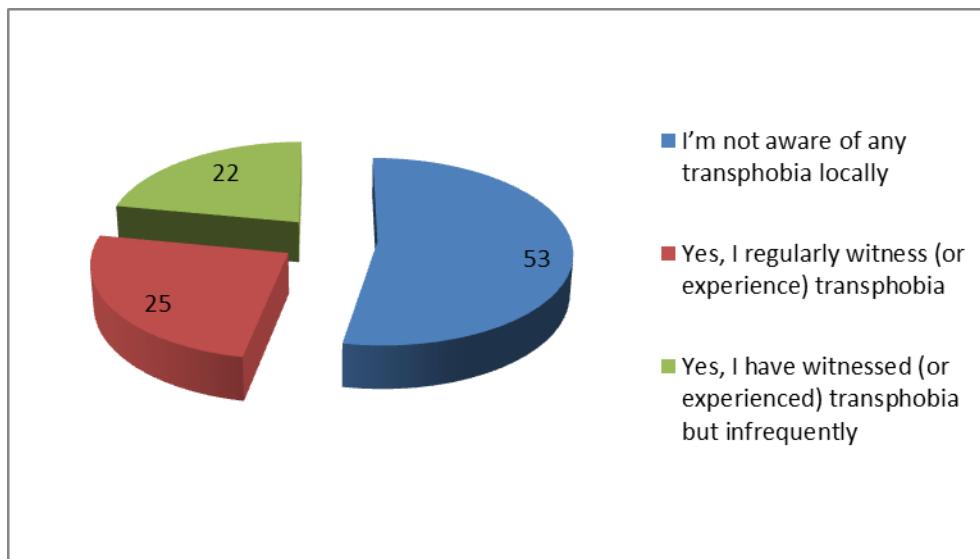
Responses were not mutually exclusive for this question, but the above chart shows that over half of the young people responding to the survey would like support with careers or employment issues, followed by half who also identified wanting support regarding emotional wellbeing. This was the case for young people who identified as trans currently or previously, and for those who did not, though it is perhaps worth noting that recent research with LGBTQ young people across Europe showed that there were particular concerns about potential difficulties or barriers to gaining employment as an LGBTQ person (Formby, 2014). Over a third also identified wanting information or support about bullying and discrimination, and school work.

Other comments or suggestions included:

*“People are who they are, let them be”*

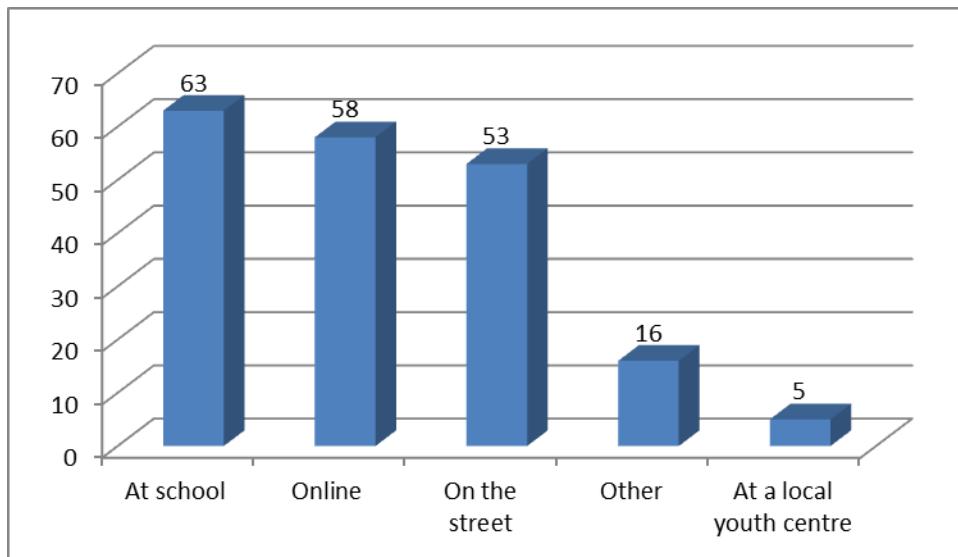
*“I’d like to be able to access a youth group that runs weekly, in parallel to the LGB youth group. It would be a huge help”.*

**Figure 20: Transphobia refers to fear, hatred or discrimination towards trans people. Are you aware of any transphobia in your local area? This could include, for example, language use, bullying, or discriminatory policies and practices**



As shown above, over half of respondents were not aware of any transphobia locally, but just under half (47%) had witnessed it or experienced it, regularly or infrequently. This was reported by both those identifying as trans currently or previously, and by those who did not.

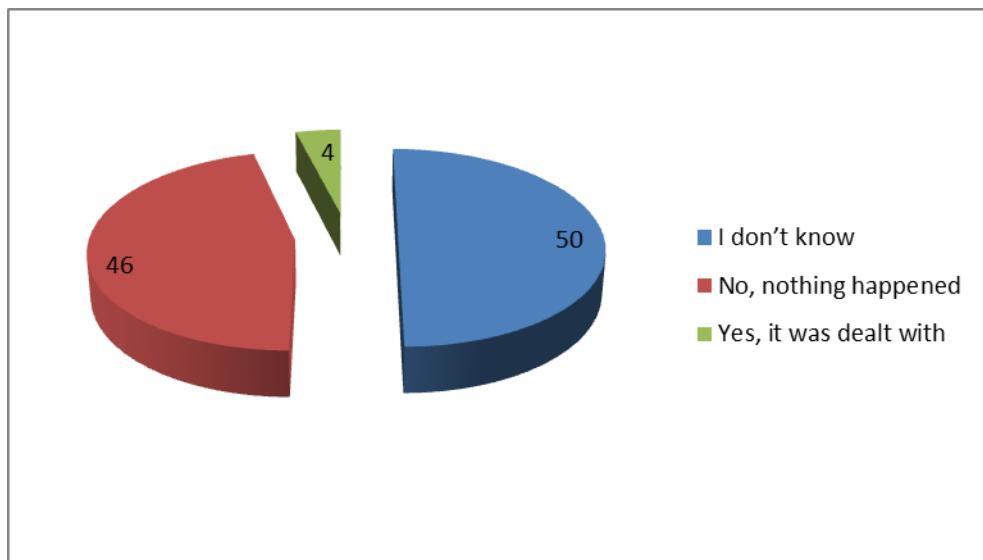
**Figure 21: If you have witnessed or experienced transphobia, please tell us where this occurred**



Responses were not mutually exclusive for this question, but the above chart indicates that transphobia was most often witnessed or experienced at school, online, and on the street. Taken together, these clearly represent a large proportion of the social lives of young people, suggesting that for some, transphobia is an important component of the social context in which they are growing up. Some people provided further commentary:

*“...people talking about it all the time saying that it is ‘wrong’... I feel like just shouting at them saying you don’t even know how the people you’re talking about feel... Everyone can have their own opinion but they shouldn’t be turning it into bullying. Nobody deserves to be discriminated against”.*

**Figure 22: If you have been aware of any transphobia, was this dealt with at all?**



For those who were aware of transphobia, just under half said that nothing happened as a result (46%). Just one explained that *“Facebook removed comments but before this everyone grouped together to tell the culprit to sling their hook”*. In a final open question, someone also suggested *“People need to be made aware of what transphobia is, how it should be reported, and how it should be dealt with”*.

### 3.2 Discussion group data

#### AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING

Turning now to in-depth data drawn from the discussion groups, a clear theme highlighted was the need for better awareness about gender identity issues, in particular the more narrow understanding that there are two distinct genders (i.e. a gender binary) and that identifying as trans means individuals want to switch ‘from one to the other’:

*“The term transgender in general, right, when brought up in public or in a public place... people would immediately think of a man dressing up in women’s clothes or men that want to be women... what they don’t realise is... a range of gender expression and gender identities apart from just not being comfortable with your birth gender. I mean it can mean gender non-binary, bigender” (David)*

*“Bigender is basically both, and you know again there’s a spectrum of that because it might be like you feel both at the same time, or you feel one one day and one the next... it depends really on basically... whatever you feel describes you” (Archie).*

In this way, some members of the group demonstrated awareness of broader debates within LGBT communities. Whilst they were comfortable with the terms gender expression and bigender, for instance, this was not replicated with ‘genderqueer’, suggesting that academic debates about reclaiming ‘queer’ are not duplicated in the environments in which these young people lived:

*“I hate it, it makes my skin crawl... it scares me”* (Chantelle).

Debates about ‘passing’ were also acknowledged. Whilst some did not like the term, others emphasised the importance of being ‘recognised’ that this term reflects:

*“Passing to me is having... everybody instantly recognise me as male not female... that makes me smile... It’s such a good feeling”* (Archie)

*“I can remember the first time I was called she by someone that didn’t know me, I felt right good... I walked home with [the] biggest smile”* (Chantelle).

There was a consensus among the group that more should be done, including within schools, to educate people:

*“They need educating really”* (Chantelle)

*“I think we need a lot more education... educate people who are younger so that they don’t develop these stereotypes and these stigmas”* (David)

*“It’s not something that’s taught about properly in school, it’s like you might get a half an hour lesson on it in your five years at comp”* (Archie).

David also identified a theme of invisibility, which reoccurs in the findings of much LGBT research (see e.g. Formby, 2012):

*“I mean LGBT in general, people only tend to focus on L and G, they don’t even focus on B or T”.*

He went on to discuss (mis)understanding and discrimination within LGBT communities:

*“I think there is actually discrimination against trans people from within LGBT because I think LGB people to a certain extent... they don’t understand what trans people go through... trans people can’t just be their gender identity whereas gay, lesbian or bisexual people can be their sexual orientation”* (David).

However, Chantelle also identified potential difficulties for LGB people:

*“I disagree with that... in some cases they can’t because of cultures and religions so there’s some circumstances where you can’t be [your sexual orientation]”.*

These debates echo broader themes within LGBT research about the complex relationships between self-identities, and behaviours or sexual practices.

The relative in/exclusivity of the term ‘LGBT’ was similarly explored:

*“I don’t like using the term LGBT, I use GSM, gender and sexual minorities, because that [is] everybody... or LGBTA+”* (Archie).

‘LGBT’ was acknowledged as more convenient than longer alternatives, however, echoing other recent research (Formby, 2012).

### ***UNSUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS***

It was not uncommon for young people to transition between school and college, or between different years within school. Group discussions examined the responses of schools and colleges to young people’s identities and experiences when these transitions occurred. Recent research indicates that increasing awareness about homophobic and transphobic bullying may lead to a context where young people and/or staff members working with them assume that they will face bullying (Aiden et al, 2013; Formby, 2013a). Whilst this may be the case for some, it is not the case for everybody, as Brody suggested:

*“As soon as I went back to school I was expecting... being shoved into lockers and things... and it didn’t happen to me. I got a couple of weird looks when I walked in the classroom because I hadn’t told anybody and I basically came back from the six weeks and everything had changed... I feel almost bad that it hasn’t happened now ‘coz I feel like I braced myself for it and I’m still waiting for it to happen”.*

The impact of young people unnecessarily preparing themselves for bullying when making any gender identity transitions may be worthy of some reflection on the part of staff working with them. It is likely to require a fine balance between managing, but not directing, young people’s expectations (see also Formby, 2013a). Other participants talked in detail about their experiences:

*“When I came out and I was wondering what kind of reaction am I gonna get from the people who’ve known me for a year as [former name] and, you know, I was slightly nervous about that... I got a few people who were a little bit confused about it, and you know, some people had trouble with the name at first. The only real problem I had was that they called me she the whole year despite my correcting...they called me [new name] but they still called me she, even the ones who’d only ever known me as [new name] and I couldn’t fathom why, but that was really the only problem there was”* (Archie).

The importance of correct pronoun use, and how this might be difficult for young people to instigate, was also raised by Chantelle:

*“When I first started college last year... I told them I were trans... but I still got he, I got she off a few people who actually got it, but they kept calling me he and I were too scared to correct them... and my liaison officer... he used to call me mate and he all the time and he used to do my head in... I’d be there with bright red lipstick,*

*double D cup and women's clothes and he'd sit there and say 'alright mate' and everything and I'm like, do I look like your mate? ...he didn't say it to women".*

Young people noted the complexity of explanations for the responses they experienced, with most distinguishing between deliberate, and accidental, prejudice. As Archie commented:

*"There is kind of the spectrum of ignorance".*

David felt prejudice formed a part of some 'everyday' language:

*"I think people have kind of normalised homophobia and transphobia to a lesser extent".*

The potential difficulty in challenging it was also reported:

*"I don't like being aggressive... I'm terrified of conflict" (Archie)*

*"I didn't like want to correct them [using my old name] in case it caused anything. I feel like it should be the tutor's place to correct them... I think there should be punishments in place if I'm honest, if they're deliberately doing the wrong thing or if they've been told loads of times, corrected loads of times" (Chantelle).*

Ineffective school responses to peer prejudicial language use were also noted. When a young person challenged the teacher about their perceived lack of response to the term of offence they were sent out of class. The young person was disappointed with this but did not find support elsewhere in the school:

*"[The] pastoral manager said... you're making a big deal of something that doesn't need to be made" (Chantelle).*

Archie had experienced a similar incident:

*"On the first day as [new name] one of my class... said 'well I know you as [old name] so I'm going to call you [that]'... [I said] 'no, no, it's not [that] anymore and I'm going to ignore you if you call me [that]'. And one of the tutors said [to me] 'oh you're causing trouble with this'".*

Experiences of negative language or treatment within school resulting in LGBT young people being punished or rebuked has also been evidenced previously (Formby and Willis, 2011).

This did not mean that young people were unsympathetic about mistakes, rather than prejudice:

*"Sometimes you've got to respect that people might slip up" (Chantelle).*

The potential emotional or social impact of their experiences were highlighted by the young people, with references to stress, frustration, upset and anger:

*"One of my colleagues was talking about when their college tutor came out as a trans woman and they said it was weird and I'm like 'whoa, whoa, whoa, why is it weird?' and then he's like 'because it just is, a man in a dress'. And I says, 'it's not a man in a dress if they're trans though, it's a woman in a dress'... I ended up like going in toilet and crying, I was that stressed... I said to him it were offensive and I were offended by what he was saying and everyone were sticking up for him saying 'why does it offend you, you're not trans'... in my head I were thinking 'ha, that shows how much you know', but then I said to him 'I don't have to be trans for it to offend me'"*

(Chantelle)

*"I've lost friends because... who I like knew in school, we've not fallen out but they refuse to call me a different name. They said 'I'm always gonna remember you as a little boy running round in primary school'... it right annoyed me, it's like, how can you forget I'm trans? It's a bit of a thing to forget!"* (Chantelle).

Discussion also took place about responses within families, with the importance of pronouns and chosen names again emphasised:

*"I've had people get pissy with me when I correct them, like Mum and Dad sometimes do it, you know, they'll go 'yeah, whatever' and it's like this is something important, they don't seem to realise that I'm serious about it and they don't think I'm taking it seriously and it's like well yeah it is a big thing to me, you know, I don't like the fact you're always calling me [my old name]"* (Archie).

## SUPPORT SERVICES

Given the above context, the role of appropriate support was often emphasised. Frequently this concerned the ability to meet other young people:

*"Basically before the group even started I was the only trans person in an LGB group... I'd never even met another trans person so it's nice to come somewhere where there's a few trans people"* (Logan)

*"This group to me, it's been almost like a lifeline to me in my struggles... in fact it's opened my eyes 'coz I've come out of this group more educated... it's just been so beneficial to me in a lot of ways"* (David)

*"It's nice because I have been talking to people here"* (Brody)

*"This group means so much to me... hanging around with a few outsider groups, it means so much... It's like a second home to me, and it's like being in a family"* (Chantelle)

*"Basically I know people now who are going through the same thing that I am going through... and it's fun to come to. It's somewhere where I can come, be with like-minded people and I can be a bit more myself and I feel safe. It's just generally fantastic"* (Archie).

The role of support workers in assisting young people's relationships with family and/or in school around the time and following transition was also highlighted.

In addition, there were some suggestions for improvements to current support services. These included more support for parents, more specific support with transitioning at a younger age, and more medical advice and information on offer to young people (e.g. on hormone blockers and hair removal options) so that they did not fall down a 'gap' between child services and adult services.

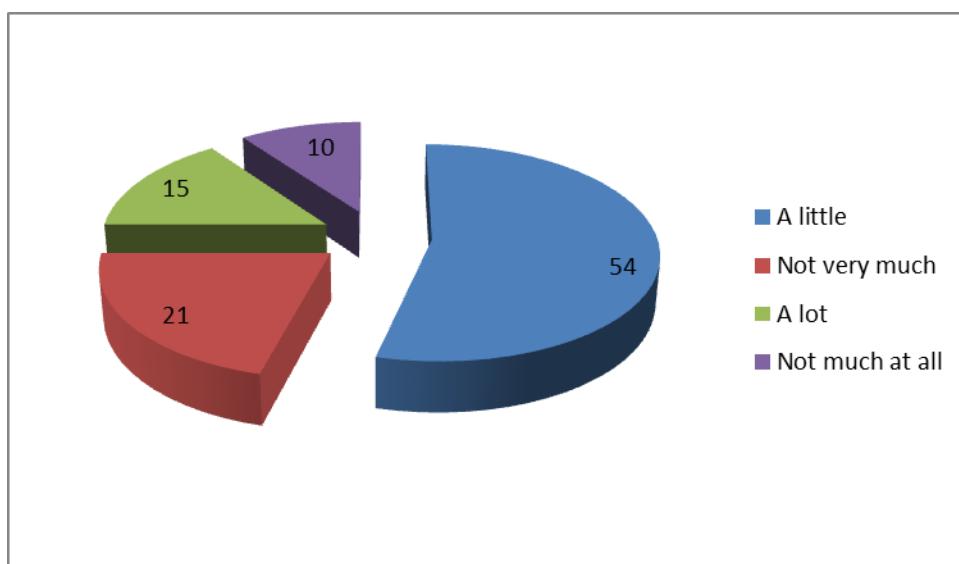
## 4. Findings from practitioners and parents

This chapter reports the findings from adults (both staff working with young people and some parents). These results were collected from survey completions online (72 respondents), and via people's participation in a group discussion or individual telephone interview. In total, seven members of staff participated in in-depth methods: three of these had experience of working closely with trans young people; four had limited or no experience. Job roles were within the broad fields of social work, teaching or youth work. In addition, six parents of members of the trans youth group were involved in the research (four mothers and two fathers). Most of these had started attending the parents group within the last year, but two had been in touch with the service for two to three years.

### 4.1 Survey data

The survey results are presented below; for each chart, the corresponding question forms the title. Where possible, comparisons are drawn with results from the young people's survey, which for the most part used similar questions.

**Figure 23: In general, how much do you think you know about gender identity and/or trans issues?**



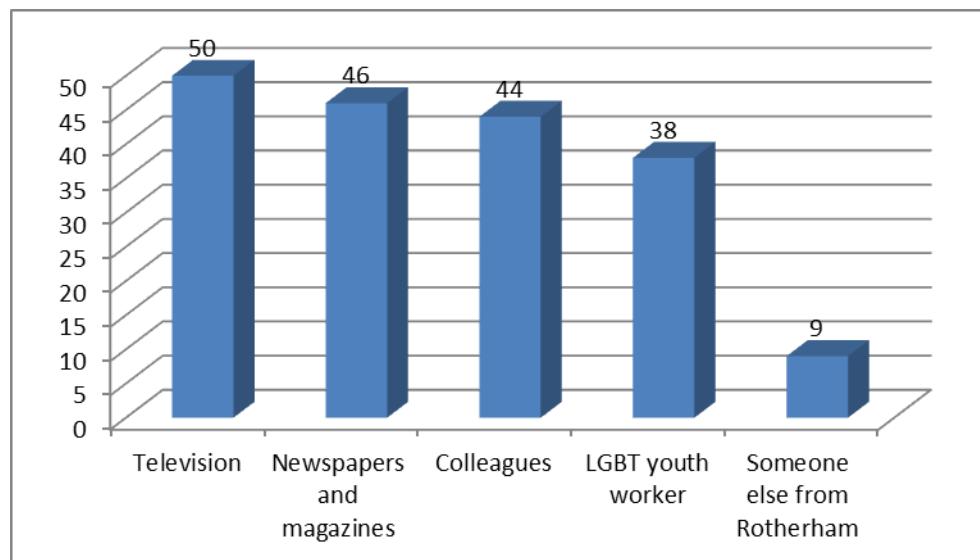
Though 5% more young people knew 'a lot' than the adults above, the results are not very dissimilar, with a total of 31% of staff knowing 'not very much' or 'not much at all' compared with 33% of young people.

**Figure 24: Please tell us how familiar you are with the following terms**

I understand and use this term	I understand this term but don't use it often	I've heard of this term but don't know what it means	I've not heard of this term
Transgender	Gender identity	Gender variant	Cisgender
Transvestite	Hermaphrodite	Genderqueer	Genderqueer
Transsexual	Bigender	Intersex	Intersex
Gender identity	Trans	Bigender	Gender variant
Trans	Transgender	Trans	Bigender
Transphobia	Transsexual	Cisgender	Hermaphrodite
Hermaphrodite	Transvestite	Transphobia	Transphobia
Bigender	Transphobia	Hermaphrodite	Trans
Gender variant	Gender variant	Transsexual	Transvestite
Intersex	Intersex	Gender identity	Gender identity
Genderqueer	Genderqueer	Transgender	Transgender

The above results are similar to young people's, though there are some likely age differences in relation to language use, with staff more likely to understand (though not use often) the older (and to some, offensive) term 'hermaphrodite'.

**Figure 25: Where do you think you currently get most information or knowledge about gender identity and/or trans issues?**



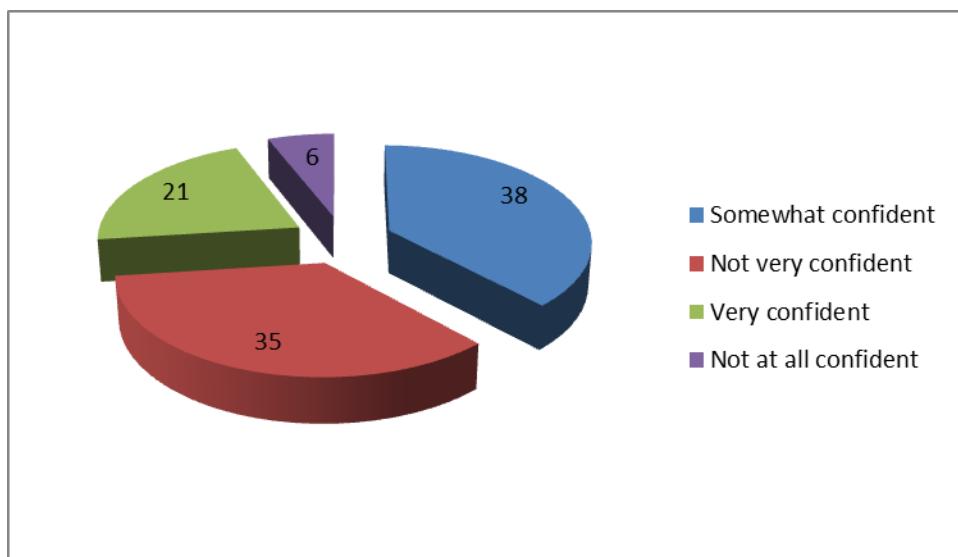
The above results are comparable to young people's, though the LGBT youth worker was a clearer source of information for staff (38%) than for young people (16%), likely related to his involvement in awareness raising among staff within the local authority. Staff (46%) also used newspapers and magazines for information more often than young people did (19%). Other sources of information about gender identity and/or trans issues were identified. These have been coded below.

**Figure 26: Where else, if at all, do you currently get information about gender identity and/or trans issues?**

Source	Number of responses
Online	11
Organisations other than RMBC	7
Family/friends/LGBT people	5
Nowhere	3
Printed material	3
Stonewall	3
Television and popular culture	3
Clients/colleagues	2
Training	2
LGBT youth worker	1
Pride	1

It is interesting to note above that Stonewall was suggested as a source of information on gender identity and/or trans issues, because they specifically work on LGB equality, suggesting that there may be some confusion among some staff.

**Figure 27: Would you say you feel confident about including or responding to issues about young people's gender identity within your practice?**



As shown above, just over a third of staff (38%) felt 'somewhat confident' about including or responding to issues about young people's gender identity within their practice, but a similar proportion felt 'not very confident' or 'not at all confident' (41% in total), suggesting that there is a clear training need as only 21% felt 'very confident'.

**Figure 28: What would you do, at work, if a young person came to you for advice about their gender identity?**



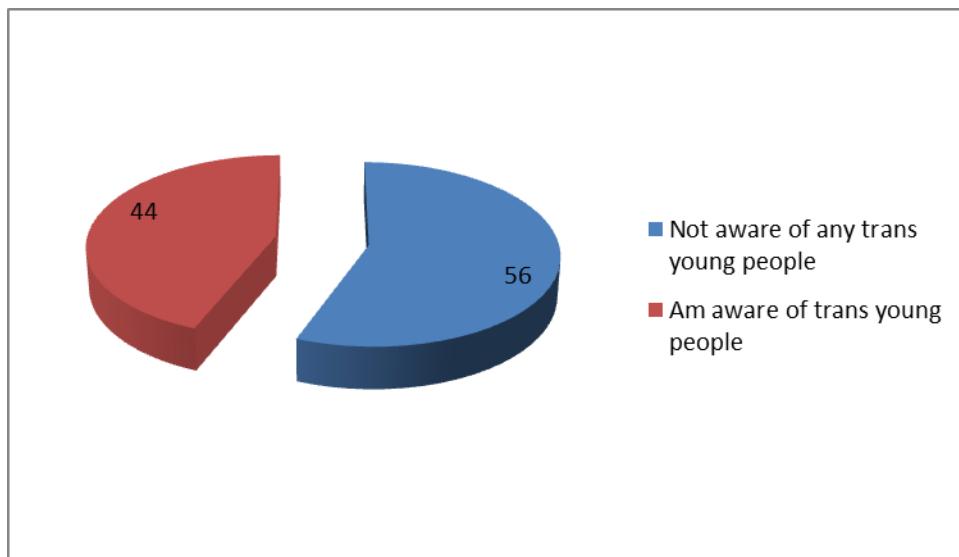
If a young person came to them for advice about their gender identity, three quarters of staff would discuss it with them, and two thirds would signpost them to a specialist (responses were not mutually exclusive for this question). However, a total of 10% would tell a senior manager, contact their parents, or would not know what to do, suggesting that some staff may need advice about appropriate (confidential) ways to respond in this situation.

Additional comments provided included:

*"I would feel comfortable talking generally about this with a young person, but would not directly advise them as I don't feel confident enough that I know enough about the subject"*

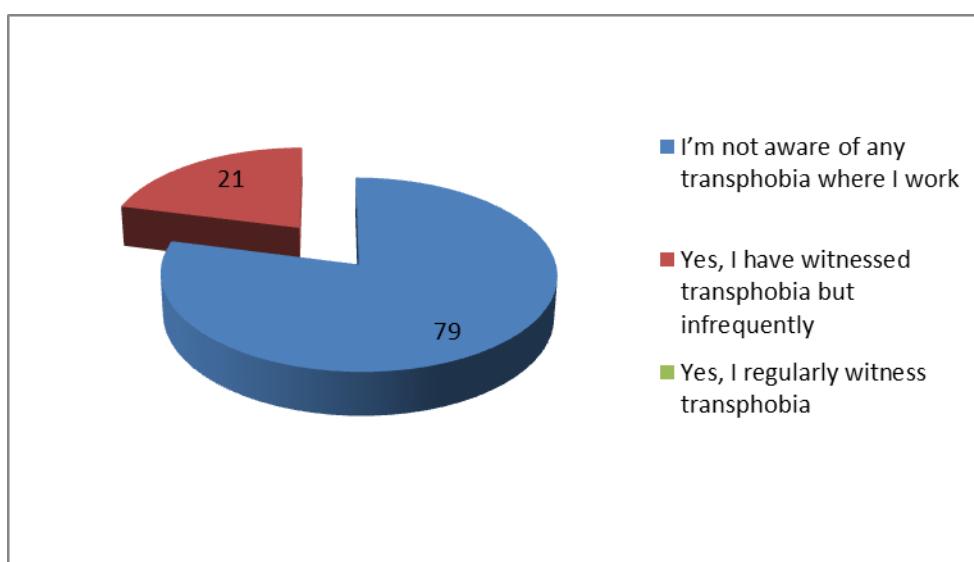
*"I would have protocol that I would have to follow. If the person is younger than 16, before I make any referral I would need consent from their parent/guardian".*

**Figure 29: Are you aware of any young people you work with who are questioning their gender identity or who identify as trans in some way?**



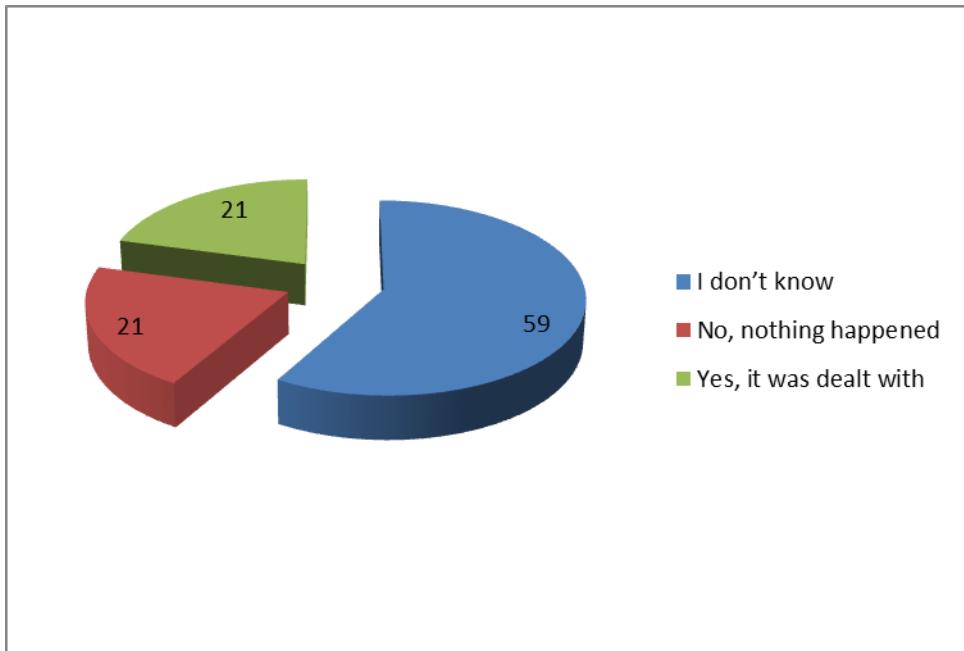
The importance of this area is highlighted by the finding that just under half of staff reported being aware of young people questioning their gender identity among those they worked with.

**Figure 30: Transphobia refers to fear, hatred or discrimination towards trans people. Are you aware of any transphobia within your workplace? This could include, for example, language use, bullying amongst peers, or workplace policies and practices**



Staff were noticeably less aware of any transphobia than young people were; less than a quarter said they had ever witnessed any, whereas 47% of young people said they had.

**Figure 31: If you have been aware of any transphobia, was this dealt with within your workplace?**



Of those who were aware of any transphobia, just under a quarter said that it was dealt with; exactly the same proportion said that it was not (21%). In comparison, more than twice that level of young people said that it was not dealt with (46%). Details on how it was dealt with included:

*"It was challenged in a positive way and discussed with young people"*

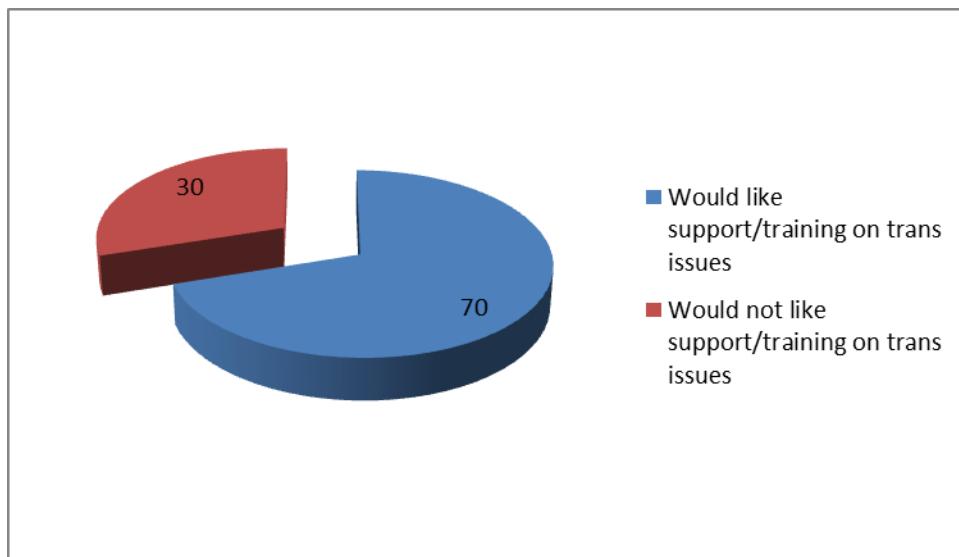
*"Challenging the young people involved and supporting all involved to raise awareness"*

*"Use of transphobic language - student used language without understanding meaning. This was explained in detail. No further action was needed"*

*"Staff in the student referral office investigated the incident and all pupils involved were dealt with"*

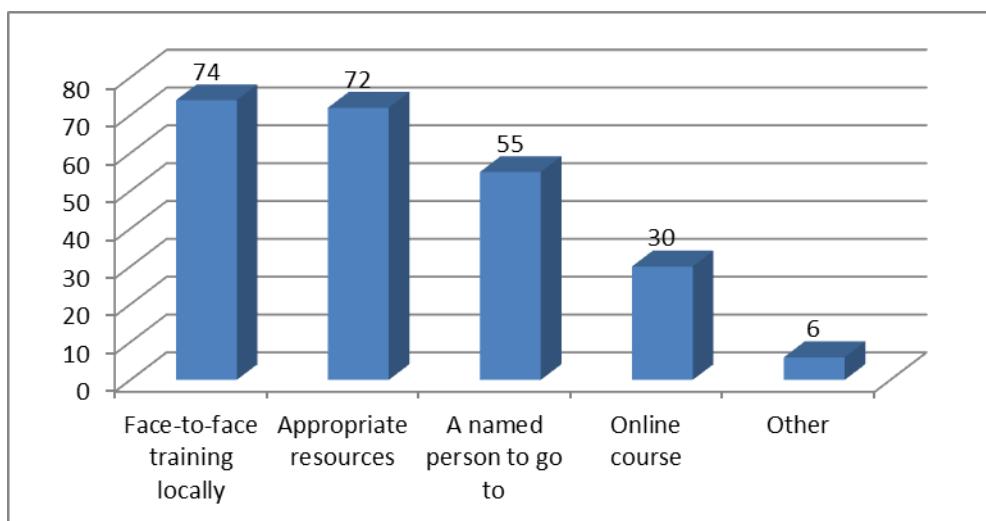
*"1 to 1 support was provided and a hate crime reported".*

**Figure 32: Do you feel you would like any support or training on gender identity and/or trans issues?**



Over two thirds of staff would like support or training on gender identity issues, a finding that the local authority should consider implementing where possible.

**Figure 33: What would you like?**



Though responses were not mutually exclusive for this question, the majority of staff (just under three quarters) wanted face-to-face training locally and/or appropriate resources to use. Other comments provided included:

*"Would like to invite [the LGBT youth worker] to a team meeting"*

*"Training within schools, regular updates and material to be issued".*

Existing sources of advice about gender identity and/or trans issues were identified. These have been coded below.

**Figure 34: What, if any, advice or support about gender identity and/or trans issues have you received already?**

Source	Number of responses
LGBT youth worker	8
In-service training	7
Unspecified training	7
Online/personal communication	4
Sheffield-based training	2
Printed material	1
Youth work qualification	1

The desire for continued/further training and/or support was highlighted in more detailed responses:

*“Training sessions delivered by [LGBT youth worker]... are great but things change so quickly with use of language and legislations changing... we need these to be more often with catch-ups throughout the year”*

*“I have worked with a trans young person previously. [LGBT youth worker] gave substantial advice and support regards medical and social support available for this young person”*

*“I have just completed my teacher training and in the three years I have worked in education have never received any information about gender identity”.*

When asked why or in what way advice or support had helped them, respondents identified the following examples:

*“Reassurance I am doing things right. Knowing who to contact. Hearing young people’s stories and take on how we support [them] as a service. Discussing the issues that are faced with like-minded workers”*

*“A sentence I used was discussed and after a discussion around it, I understood I had been wrong and [it] put me on a learning curve, taught me a hard lesson adults get it wrong too”*

*“Found the training course really useful to give me an overall awareness of LGB & T issues. Have spoken to [LGBT youth worker] on several occasions for advice, on what terminology to use and to make sure we are not excluding anyone”*

*“It was useful to learn the newest words young people are using to describe themselves and their identity”*

*“It helped to have a clearer sense of what the issues might be for a young person, what sort of things I might need to be aware of, etc, for example asking how*

*someone would like to be referred to. I think it also taught me not to make assumptions as each young person is different and their trans journeys can be hugely different also”*

*“It helped me to not come across as being too sharp with young people when they are being transphobic, and give them the chance to think and explore about people who are transgender”*

*“It enabled me to be able to support a young person, and signpost to specific services”*

*“The training with [LGBT youth worker]... made it safe to explore ideas, stereotypes and language and ideas that would not offend people within the trans community. This enables more of a level playing field in the delivery of work, and caseload management”.*

These illustrative extracts emphasise the importance attached to reassurance/confidence for staff, access to current language use, and the ability to more effectively/appropriately support young people. Only a few individuals suggested ways any advice or support had not been helpful:

*“The session that was covered with the Level 2 course was useful, but in my opinion did not go far enough into detail and only covered the very basics of what terms mean. I think we should have more than one session on the subject, learning more about what support is available to young people, how this can be accessed and how sexuality and gender related issues impact upon young people, because it's a real issue and this would enable us to give young people the support they need”*

*“As a family we did not receive very much help... I do know other families struggle to deal with/understand it... At present a lot of information is aimed at the transgender community, it would be nice to see some aimed at family and friends”*

*“I have forgotten all the terms as trans issues are not a main part of my work”.*

Other comments or suggestions provided included the following:

*“I think there should be more family support, as a family we found it difficult... and have muddled our way through”*

*“I would like to suggest that the local authority consider non-gender specific toilet facilities in council buildings and public toilets as this can be a big issue for transgendered people, as this can be the main issue that leads to them becoming victims of violence and abuse. I think all staff at Rotherham council should attend an LGB&T training course to give them basic knowledge and awareness of LGB&T issues”*

*"I just think there is a general need for more information/training about the issues for young people with gender identity/trans issues - so workers can be better equipped to support young people"*

*"It does not get taught enough in school"*

*"I don't think many students know where to turn so more signposting of advice would be good"*

*"Just keep it high on the agenda so people feel comfortable discussing it"*

*"Whole staff training needed in all schools"*

*"I feel this is a neglected area of discrimination and the more education and information that is produced for staff and the public, the better the support and help will be for transgendered people"*

*"[LGB] is more accepted in this day and age as it is more common and more known to people. This leaves the trans facing the majority of the stigma out of [LGBT] groups... I feel this research... can help make awareness for people and help how people look at trans people".*

The comments above suggest the need for greater family support, and continued improvements in information and training provision for staff and within schools more broadly.

#### **4.2 Discussion group and interview data**

##### **AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING**

Moving now to in-depth data from staff and parents, some themes echoed those raised by young people. Understanding of gender identity and trans issues was said to be generally poor, for example:

*"Man in a dress is that common theme, or it's not even thought about... It's not like LGB stuff which has been out there for longer" (James, practitioner)*

*"I don't think the awareness is very good... I think because transgender issues do make people, still make people, very uncomfortable it's harder to get the media to talk about it which helps get people to start thinking about it really... what we do hear is very derogatory, you hear people use statements of he/she/it, you know, and it's not helpful to raising awareness" (Jessica, practitioner)*

*"It's new to a lot of people and they've not really come across it before... There's the giggly side... there's a lot of that about... mis-information I think comes from [social networking]" (Sue, practitioner)*

*“People are not very knowledgeable... People might see somebody that’s transgender on TV that’s really flamboyant and over-the-top and then think all trans [people] are the same”* (Janet, parent)

*“To most people it’s something... that can be an object of fun which is very different to having somebody sitting at the side of you who’s telling you that they’re trans... to most people it’s outside of their experience... so it does become something that you can laugh about and poke fun at”* (Jenny, parent)

*“I think there’s also like a stigma because you say trans and people go ‘trannies’, ‘transvestites’... I want to poke them in [the] eye!”* (Kate, parent).

The potential for stigma was implicit in the way people discussed whether/when they had talked about their child or family member’s identity to friends, family, colleagues or pupils:

*“[Colleagues are] so careful about being politically correct now ‘coz they’re that frightened of losing their jobs, and they daren’t say anything... you’re generally getting nice reactions but what [you hear is said] when you’re not there is totally different”* (Janet, parent)

*“I must admit I haven’t mentioned it at all at work”* (Jenny, parent)

*“[I’ve talked to] one or two people at work... I’ve been fairly selective about it”* (Paul, parent)

*“I’m quite happy and confident to talk to kids about [my family member]... I think they’re quite surprised that I’m pretty open about it”* (Sue, practitioner).

Similarly to young people, parents noted the potential confusion within an LGBT ‘umbrella’:

*“We need to get it across that gender identity disorder is not about your sexuality. That’s what people think, don’t they, straight away”* (Janet, parent).

The lack of awareness about gender fluidity that young people identified (above) was evidenced in some staff discussions where people referred to the ‘opposite gender’ which does not reflect the complexity of some young people’s gender identities:

*“I do know of one younger child who has always felt they are the opposite gender to the one they’ve got the body for”* (Keely, practitioner).

Staff noted that their knowledge came from a variety of sources, often outside their work role:

*“I belong to a few kind of issue-raising groups, one in particular, Wipe Out Transphobia, who have a facebook page... I’ve actually learnt quite a lot from it... you know, how do you address a transgendered person”* (Jessica, practitioner)

*“I’ve got a lot of information through [my children]”* (Keely, practitioner)

*"I think I'm probably a bit more confident and knowledgeable than maybe a lot of other people because of my family situation, 'coz [a family member] is transgender"* (Sue, practitioner).

### **UNSUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS**

Adult participants also demonstrated awareness of the negative experiences that young people might have in school. This was where there was the most animated and fullest discussion from some staff. Like the young people, some differentiated between intentional and unintentional prejudice:

*"Sometimes that's done on purpose, people being malicious, but sometimes... it's done because people just don't get it, don't get it or lack the knowledge... there are two quite distinct groups of people, people who don't get it and people who go out of their way to be ignorant... If you carry on using those words when you've been challenged then it becomes intentional"* (James, practitioner).

Another worker identified the rise in awareness of homophobic and transphobic bullying but that reporting systems had serious implications for young people:

*"That then means young people have got to be brave enough to stand up and go 'I can't take this anymore', now that in itself takes an awful lot"* (Sam, practitioner).

Parents voiced scepticism at how well schools deal with the subject of bullying:

*"A lot of schools don't even admit that they've got a bullying problem"* (Janet, parent)

*"[My child] had five years of hell at [school]... because... [they were] a bit of a square peg in a round hole and didn't quite fit in... I mean they've got all these grand policies that aren't worth the paper that they're written on... I don't know whether they're not allowed to tell us what kind of action they take against the kids but we were never told 'oh so-and-so was excluded, or got a detention, or even got some kind of reprimand', so we have no idea what action was or wasn't taken... it just went on year after year after year"* (Jenny, parent).

Similar views were shared by some staff, though they also raised the subject of transphobia among staff in addition to transphobic bullying among peers (see Formby and Willis, 2011 for similar themes in relation to homophobia among staff working with young people):

*"I don't think it [transphobia] is handled very well... the teachers themselves, you know, will use inappropriate language to describe transgendered individuals and, you know, they are quite derogatory, you know they call them trannie, they use the he/she/it terminology themselves... from what I've heard teachers in the moment with the child will go, you know, you can't do that, it's bullying... but they don't challenge the actual, you know the transphobia around that. They focus on the bullying and not the cause because I think they're uncomfortable"* (Jessica, practitioner).

Staff also raised concerns about how trans young people were supported by schools during or following any bullying experiences:

*"What I found was that they would get bullied to a point, and school would keep talking to the bully and talking to the bully and talking to the bully, but nothing would really happen until the bullied child would snap and retaliate and then they would be punished... they need to be punished if they've turned round and slapped somebody but nothing's happened to that bully who's driven them to that point, and I think what we need to change in terms of bullying is... how we support the bullied child"*  
(Jessica, practitioner).

The ability of workers to support young people to develop their own 'resilience' was highlighted by some:

*"As well as somebody else dealing with it you need to learn ways of dealing with it as well because otherwise you do become a victim and you do see yourself as a victim"*  
(Keely, practitioner).

In addition, some suggested that these issues should be included within the school curriculum, for instance within personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE), not just within bullying incidents:

*"I'd need to be [Michael] Gove for this [to happen] but [in the future] what I'd want is transphobia issues, transgender issues to be part of our curriculum"* (Jessica, practitioner).

#### SUPPORT FOR PARENTS

As with the young people, both staff and parents raised issues that occurred at home. From Sam's perspective:

*"I think sometimes as well... that actually they [young people] could stand some of the outside bullying if at home parents would call them by their preferred name or parents would call them by their preferred pronoun... [they feel] 'I can't do it because it's outside and then I go home and I get it at home'"* (Sam, practitioner).

By contrast, Jenny argued:

*"It's trying to get [my child] to understand that we're still unhappy about it as well, we're not against [them] but we have reservations about what she/he feels [they] want to do"* (Jenny, parent).

Anna and Paul concurred:

*"At home it's [birth name] until I'm ready... when we're out, such as at clinic, that's different but until I'm ready for that..."* (Anna, parent)

*"That's the thing, you know, if you try and kind of talk about it, it just becomes an argument of 'you're not listening to me, you're not taking in what I'm saying' but then there's no recognition on the other side that 'well you're not actually listening to me either or taking in what I'm saying'... what I want is to get some kind of compromise that we can live with"* (Paul, parent).

This compromise is not easily found, suggesting that there is a need for specific (and separate) support for both young people and parents to provide a space where they can each freely discuss their situation and how they feel about it, with supportive workers and/or peers (see also Riley et al, 2013). This is likely to have benefits for the child-parent relationship in a context where parents acknowledged it was not necessarily easy or appropriate for them to voice their doubts to their child(ren):

*"It's good for them [young people] as well to have somebody outside, somebody more impartial and objective than you to talk to as well"* (Jenny, parent)

*"As a parent your emotions get in the way sometimes, you can't see clearly for them"* (Janet, parent).

Parents spoke of their relief at discovering there was a support group for parents in Rotherham:

*"When we first started off there wasn't anybody for us to talk to... there's quite a few groups out there online for the kids... there's just nothing out there for the parents... we're 100% more confident now than what we were... It's scary that initial first, it's like panic stations... so you need somebody"* (Janet, parent)

*"I felt quite relieved [there was a group] because I'd already been looking online for information for parents but if you put parents and trans in google it comes up with trans people who want to be parents... I was finding it quite frustrating actually"* (Jenny, parent).

Nevertheless, the potential for more frequent or prominent parental support was also indicated:

*"My problem with it is I'm not convinced yet that it's the right thing for [my child] and there doesn't seem to be anywhere to go with that or anybody to say that to... this [the group] has been like the only place but, you know, it's only once a month and I can't even make it every month"* (Jenny, parent)

*"In my role I do have a lot of contact with parents as well and once or twice parents have said to me, a particular student we had last year, 'I know there's something with him'... she thought it was trans but she didn't know how to broach it... families don't know where to go for the support. It's making sure that people have got that, you know, know where that support is"* (Sue, practitioner).

One possibility would be for a specific online peer support forum to allow easy remote access, locally or nationally, but clearly this requires an organisation to have the funding and capacity to develop this provision.

At the same time as discussing support regarding their child's trans identity, parents often also acknowledged other issues in their child's life, such as disability, mental (ill)health, and body dissatisfaction, emphasising how young people's needs may be complex and should not just be understood as solely being about gender identity:

*"I've always brought [my child] up in the sense that... I've never thought male or female, I've just thought my [child] who's got [a disability]" (Kate, parent).*

#### **SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

The importance of trans-specific provision for young people was noted by some workers, though they acknowledged some 'common ground' with LGB young people. It was also suggested that some young people initially identify as lesbian or gay before then self-identifying as trans, so having clear relationships between any LGB or trans-specific provision is important. The required scale of support in this area was a surprise to some:

*"I was surprised actually, that was one of the things that surprised me the first time I came, was how many kids were here. I mean Rotherham's not a big place" (Jenny, parent).*

There was a clear consensus among both staff and parents about the value of support in this area:

*"While [my child] has been coming to this group, we had an unhappy little girl beforehand, and now we've got a happy young man, so we're pleased" (Janet, parent).*

Others suggested that a more remote service could also be offered:

*"From a young person's point of view... a telephone number that they could call... just something so they could feel safe, or somewhere where they can go or get a quick piece of advice and continue to be anonymous... some kind of phone, text service, sms, whatever" (Kay, practitioner).*

The need for broader visibility for trans young people was also highlighted:

*"Posters are effective once you get to clinic 'coz you don't seem them anywhere else" (Janet, parent)*

*"There's so much [RMBC] could do for the young people... I think in terms of information and normalising it... we need to get information out there and educate so it becomes that transgendered issues become something that's not hidden, it's something that kids talk about... so it's not something funny... [and] just letting transgendered youth know they're not on their own" (Jessica, practitioner).*

## **SUPPORT FOR STAFF**

When discussing support needs, staff suggested that they thought young people found it hard to correct people's use of names or pronouns, which supports the young people's reflections (above). Educating staff that work with young people about the potential for greater gender-neutral language use was therefore identified as important, along with combating gender stereotypes (e.g. about 'masculine' strength and 'feminine' caring attributes). The influence of broader gender constructions were acknowledged by both staff and parents, for instance about children's toys and the colours of children's clothes.

The Equality Act was named as an important lever to use in schools to bring about appropriate support or improvement regarding homophobic or transphobic bullying. At the same time, it was suggested that staff (such as teachers, social workers, and counsellors) need empathic understanding to work with potentially vulnerable young people, not just policies that require certain practices, which staff may or may not be familiar with. The rise in e-learning equalities training was also a concern as it was felt to be less effective than face-to-face provision. Mirroring the survey findings, there was strong support for trans-specific training for staff. At least one dedicated LGBT role within the local authority was also thought to be beneficial to provide information and guidance to other staff when required. If this role incorporates supporting young people, training and advising staff, and potentially supporting parents as well, it is likely that there may be capacity issues, and service provision could suffer as a result. Support needs for staff outside the local authority were also identified:

*"I think it's surprising as well, I've found, the people that are out there that could help you that don't, like GPs, they're ignorant to a lot of things"* (Kate, parent)

*"Doctors just aren't well-informed at all"* (Janet, parent).

A number of staff said that they had never received any training or information on gender identity issues:

*"I've been in the authority seven years now and I've never been offered training on trans issues"* (Jessica, practitioner).

Others were complimentary about the impact of training or advice they had received from the LGBT youth worker:

*"I think everybody found it really helpful, definitely"* (Keely, practitioner)

*"I didn't really know what I was looking for to start with, and how to classify that as transphobia"* (Kay, practitioner).

Some thought that perhaps there could be more publicity about his role, or the training and advice available within Rotherham:

*"I didn't know he existed... I wasn't really aware of what the service was so I wonder if there does need to be more publicity... within the council for staff to be aware... that*

*actually should be part of the equality training... that you have to do every so often... I think it should be face-to-face and it should be once every two to three years*" (Keely, practitioner)

*"I'm not sure what the other services within the local authority for example know about [him]... so for example I don't know if social workers know about him, I don't know if the housing department [know]"* (Kay, practitioner)

*"I know Rotherham council have got something but I wouldn't know where to find the information out for contact details or anything"* (Sue, practitioner).

Others wondered how to access more detailed training, or how to improve colleagues' awareness:

*"I feel like now I do want to take it further... I just think I need to access something a little bit more in-depth... I don't want to be a specialist in it but I want to be a bit more than a 'oh I went on a two hour training course'"* (Kay, practitioner)

*"I think much more information is needed within the council itself... a recent transgendered lady who came forward... it became apparent that quite a few of my colleagues just didn't know how to go about things, language and stuff... maybe if they did some drop ins at Riverside House or something to promote what they do I think that would help"* (Jessica, practitioner).

Particular issues in schools were identified:

*"I think it's a lack of funding [in schools]... it hasn't got the lesson time to fit everybody in, so I think that's a major issue... getting the support into schools... I think the other thing that I have noticed is that schools are very reluctant to ask for outside people to come in... it is getting them to be more open to the outside agencies... I think as well schools tend to, [they] don't broach it do they, unless they've got somebody in that situation... and obviously you've got your newly qualified teachers coming in all [the] time as well so it's making sure that... they are aware of the things that are out there... maybe offering some training for while they're going through that first year"* (Sue, practitioner).

Whilst raising a number of issues, including a crowded curriculum, potential isolationism, and a revolving staff-base, the above comment highlights that sometimes LGBT issues are only considered to be relevant to (known) LGBT people. This is an issue that has also been reported in previous research (Formby et al, 2011; Formby, 2013a).

Those that had not received any specific training linked this to their lack of confidence in relation to this area, should a young person ask them for support:

*"I think I'd probably have a moment of panic of what do I do"* (Jessica, practitioner).

Some staff that had received training were still unsure about potential aspects of supporting a young person:

*"I'm not sure I'd be comfortable taking it any further than actually having a discussion with them about just everyday life but then referring them on to our specialist worker"* (Kay, practitioner)

*"What I'm not confident about is where does that leave me... the level of my confidence [is] that I would be able to do the initial bit but if they didn't want to talk to anyone else about it... I'd have to check on that protocol for myself"* (Keely, practitioner).

Others said that they knew not all staff would take up training on offer:

*"Not everybody takes it up because not everybody is completely comfortable with it... I think everybody should have the right to say I don't want to deal with that for whatever reason they've personally got, but I think everybody should be aware of the service and be able to refer that young person somewhere"* (Kay, practitioner).

Workers also raised broader desires to address transphobia in the future:

*"I would like to see teachers trained better, definitely, because I think that's one of the big issues... I also think there's practical things the council could do like unisex toilets... it's not just about information"* (Jessica, practitioner)

*"I think as well the media need to be more aware, but the media aimed at, you know, the younger age group"* (Sue, practitioner).

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

The importance of tackling homophobic and transphobic bullying is evidenced in current policy frameworks (see Ofsted, 2012, 2013). In this context, this report sheds light on the broader issues and awareness levels for young people and the staff working with them in the Rotherham area. The research has highlighted the following key themes:

### *For young people*

Survey results suggested that there was a desire for further information in schools on this area among both trans and non-trans young people. Over half were aware of trans young people at school, which may account for this interest. Those that received information or advice said that it helped because they were listened to, gained a fuller understanding, were signposted or referred to additional support, and/or had support with speaking to family members. Just under half had witnessed or experienced transphobia (including non-trans young people), suggesting that this is a current issue in young people's lives. This most often occurred at school, online, or 'on the street'. For those who were aware of transphobia, just under half said that nothing happened as a result.

Discussion group data emphasised the need for greater awareness about gender identity. Findings also illuminated the sometimes unsupportive environments in which trans young people live. Often this related to incorrect use of pronouns or names which was said to cause stress, frustration, upset and anger (see also McConnell, 2014; Riley et al, 2013). This occurred at school, college, workplaces, and at home, but is not often acknowledged as important within people's understandings which are frequently limited to (intentional) 'bullying' amongst peers. In addition, trans young people being chastised or punished within education contexts for challenging either their peers or staff on pronoun/name usage was felt to be unhelpful. In this context, the value of specialist and peer support was clear. Participants highlighted the benefits of meeting other trans young people, and of support workers assisting with school and/or family relationships.

### *For their parents*

Discussions with parents of trans young people suggested that trans issues or people can be seen as a source of amusement in wider society, which they had concerns about. They also expressed concern about school contexts which they were not confident dealt with 'difference' or bullying adequately. Some parents expressed anxiety about their children's decision(s) which they often only felt able to share with other parents, for the desire to protect their children from their feelings. This suggests the importance of support provision for parents, both for the benefits for parents and young people (Riley et al, 2013). Parents spoke of their relief at discovering there was a support group for parents available in Rotherham, though ideally this would meet more often, and/or further support would be available online. They also appreciated the specialist support on offer for their children.

### *For staff*

Survey results indicate that a proportion of staff who work with young people (just under half of respondents) do not feel confident about gender identity or trans issues. This is most clearly illustrated in a minority of cases that said they would inform the parents and/or colleagues should a young person approach them for support in this area. A breach of confidentiality such as this may not be what the young person wants or needs, but research suggests it does occur more frequently in an education context than a medical context where the importance of confidentiality is much more clearly enshrined (Formby et al, 2010).

Similarly to the young people's survey results, just under half reported being aware of young people questioning their gender identity among those they worked with. By contrast, however, staff were noticeably less aware of any transphobia than young people were, which may suggest a lack of awareness about transphobia that could be rectified in future training or information provision.

Over two thirds of respondents would like support or training on gender identity issues, the majority via face-to-face training locally and/or the provision of appropriate resources.

Though staff were positive about awareness raising training they had received within RMBC, there was a feeling that it could be more detailed and/or delivered more often. This is likely to have capacity implications for staff who are also responsible for supporting trans young people and their parents. Nevertheless, the local authority should heed that training and information provision in this area was said to lead to staff confidence, and more effective signposting and support for young people.

As also found with parent interviews, some staff expressed uncertainty about how well schools address transphobia or transphobic bullying, and how well they support trans young people. Similarly to the young people, some were also unhappy when trans young people get rebuked or punished for responding to (perceived) transphobia. The need for specific support for trans young people was acknowledged, within a context where their needs may not always be understood in broader environments.

Supporting the survey results, staff interviewed highlighted the importance of training on gender identity issues, including gender-neutral language use, and the need to target gender stereotypes more broadly. Routine equalities training delivered via e-learning methods was not thought to be effective in this regard. The benefits of an LGBT support/advice role within the authority were expounded. Those that had never received any training regarding trans young people said they were less confident in this area as a result. Staff also suggested that more publicity and more frequent or detailed training on gender identity issues would be beneficial. The provision of gender-neutral toilets within the authority was also raised within both the staff survey and interviews.

## **5.1 Recommendations**

A number of recommendations for RMBC can be drawn from the research results:

1. Continue, and where possible expand, the support currently available to trans young people. This should facilitate peer support and access to professional advice and

guidance. Yearly visits to specific trans events could be programmed in to existing trans youth provision, such as the annual ‘Sparkle’ event in Manchester ([www.sparkle.org.uk](http://www.sparkle.org.uk))

2. Maintain, and if possible extend, support currently offered to the parents of trans young people. Ideally this would include a designated LGBT parents worker, and the facilitation of peer support among parents of trans young people
3. Investigate the implementation of an ongoing, high-profile programme of training and information provision targeted at improving awareness about trans young people’s needs and identities among staff working with young people in Rotherham. This could, for instance, include rolling attendance at individual team meetings. This should increase staff confidence to deal with these issues in their own practice, and ensure clear signposting and referral pathways are in place where necessary. This may necessitate the development of a specific training and professional support role or remit
4. Where possible, work with schools to improve the provision of information on gender identity issues for all young people. This could, for example, be incorporated into PSHE content and/or be made more visible through the display of appropriate posters
5. Where possible, work with staff to increase understanding of transphobia, which could include bullying, inappropriate language use, and unsupportive responses to transphobia which can cause further upset or anger for trans young people
6. Make links within the authority, wherever possible, between provision for young people, and broader equalities provision. In the context of the Equality Act and public sector equality duties, the designation of some gender-neutral toilet facilities could be investigated
7. As much as possible, utilise existing sources of support and information, such as Gender Matters (<http://gender-matters.org.uk>), Gires ([www.gires.org.uk](http://www.gires.org.uk)), and Mermaids ([www.mermaidsuk.org.uk](http://www.mermaidsuk.org.uk)). A simple factsheet could perhaps be developed to signpost staff, parents and/or young people to appropriate websites or other agencies
8. Maintain links with outside organisations and service providers that work with young people, and where appropriate work to improve their awareness (e.g. GPs)
9. Recent international research with parents, transgender adults and professionals developed the acronym HAPPINESS to describe the needs of gender-variant children:
  - to be **H**eard
  - to be **A**ccepted
  - to have **P**rofessional access and support
  - to have **P**eer contact
  - to have access to current **I**nformation
  - **N**ot to be bullied, blamed, punished or otherwise discriminated against
  - to have freedom of **E**xpression
  - to feel **S**afe

- to have **Support** (Riley et al, 2013).

This may be worth consideration in any future service developments.

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### **About the author**

Eleanor Formby is a Senior Research Fellow at Sheffield Hallam University. Her research interests centre on lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) wellbeing and health inequalities, and on young people's learning about sex and sexualities. She has published a range of journal articles and research reports in these fields. Prior to conducting this work for RMBC, she led research on the impact of homophobic and transphobic bullying for IGLYO (the International LGBTQ Youth and Student Organisation), and an Arts and Humanities Research Council project on understandings and experiences of LGBT 'communities' in the UK.

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