



Evaluation: Pride Youth Network Programme

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Introduction

The Pride Youth Network (PYN) Programme supports schools to develop an LGBT+ support group for young people. Often run as a lunchtime club, these groups are supported by a member of staff trained by Educate & Celebrate to develop targets, activities, staff training sessions, assemblies and campaigns, all aimed to improve inclusion for LGBT+ people in their school. PYNs are part of a national network of over 100 groups. They can take part in award programmes, network campaigns, and conferences. Educate & Celebrate works with PYNs to address issues of inequality, working within the institutional framework to change the discourse from the inside out. PYN targets are:

- Target 1:** Secure a space and time for meetings
- Target 2:** Engage with social media
- Target 3:** Increase visibility in the school environment
- Target 4:** Check your school policies
- Target 5:** Lead a campaign of positive change
- Target 6:** Make a positive change to the school curriculum
- Target 7:** Lead a staff meeting
- Target 8:** Engage with parents
- Target 9:** Attend a Pride Youth Network Conference
- Target 10:** Organise an event

Some PYN facilitators are employees of the charity. However, those interviewed for this evaluation were volunteers and university placement students. The placement students are also young people aged between 18 and 25 who are studying youth and community work, social work or education at university. Their role is to go into schools and facilitate the development of campaigns for change. The PYN groups they facilitate consist of four to thirty members aged between eleven and eighteen. Some of the groups had young people who were out to everyone as LGBT+, some were only out in the group, and some were keen allies to the LGBT+ community. Some of the schools were academies and some comprehensive. Through the PYN work the facilitators have also developed an enhanced set of facilitation, leadership and advocacy skills. Their observations have been invaluable in gathering insights into how the PYNs have achieved their goals.

Evaluation Team

The Goldsmiths Department of Educational Studies has a well-established record of research and research-informed teacher education programmes. This work focuses on teaching excellence through attention to issues of student voice and creative expression, social justice, inclusion, equalities and community cohesion in schools.

The external evaluator and lead author of this report, Dr Anna Carlile, is experienced in working with schools, originally working as a secondary school teacher of both mainstream students and those with special educational needs- particularly those at risk of permanent exclusion. Her research has been focused particularly around inclusion in relation to discipline and behaviour management; ethnicity, faith and culture; socio-economic class; gender, gender identity and sexual orientation; and special educational needs. This has included close analysis of the process through which school policies are created, discussed, and applied, and the ways in which this intersects with or challenges the inclusion of student voice in schools' organizational planning and development.

Additional data was collected and written up by a volunteer facilitator for the programme, Tallula Carlile, based in the Department for Social, Therapeutic and Community Studies.

The Mentimeter survey was developed by Educate & Celebrate.

The Evaluation

Data for this evaluation is drawn from surveys of teachers and students, participant observation and interviews with volunteer PYN facilitators, a Mentimeter digital response survey at a PYN conference, focus groups with students at their schools and at the PYN conference, and evidence folders submitted by the schools. The evaluation text below references a set of evaluation codes in bold in brackets (**1a-4f**; see Appendix on p.11).

1. Enabling leadership in inclusive practices and decision making

The PYNs created a commitment to develop and implement inclusive policies and procedures, and enabled support and motivation to embed an ethos of inclusion. Having ownership of the process was really powerful. Between pre-PYN and post PYN measurements of confidence, the PYN conference Mentimeter data showed an increase in confidence to 'make positive change' from 2.9/5 to 4.4/5 (**1c**). A volunteer facilitator explained:

On the first session, after the schools sign up, I would ask students how they would like to run their programme. They suggest having a chairperson, or teams and roles (1e). Once they decide that, it gives the students ownership of the group. Many of the PYNs are wholly run by students, giving them a sense of empowerment. In these groups, teachers are just available to facilitate access to rooms and materials where needed. This meant that many of the groups were really independent. Wearing their PYN badges with pride, students took on their advocating role enthusiastically. They were almost ready to do it before I even got there! They were nervous, but excited (1b, 4a, 4c).

PYN participants were asked whether their PYN had created actual change at their schools. Students responded:

There is better visibility. The PYN has allowed people to be more open about their identity.

People feel free to be who they are.

No homophobic comments around school!

We had assemblies about LGBTQ+ and people have been more respectful towards LGBTQ+ people (3d).

Our school has just recently brought in gender inclusive toilets and we are forwarding a motion to bring in pronouns on emails of staff (1d, 4c).

Because of some fantastic staff and their ongoing support we are able to really change the school environment for the better. I've seen an unbelievable change in just my last six years here (1e, 4a).

Administration staff are excited about the suggestions our PYN makes and try to help out with our initiatives.

The participants felt that the PYN offered a space where they could develop visibility strategies, and that it had created a better environment for LGBTQ+ people.

A volunteer facilitator talked about how the PYNs were effectively changing teacher practice:

The PYNs were able to call teachers out ... about how they dealt with homophobic language. In the classroom, when it was happening, the teachers would behave differently to how they had before. One of my groups wrote a lesson plan to deliver to teachers which included what the effects of hearing homophobic language in the classroom could be, and I think that was very effective (1b).

Minutes from a PYN meeting shared as part of an evidence folder demonstrate a real awareness of legal obligations and the development of inclusive policies **(1a, 1e)**. For example, they record:

*Policy documents – the anti-bullying/discrimination policies were looked at and the group was positively surprised how comprehensive it was, listing 'gender identity' and 'sexual orientation' separately as protected characteristics **(1b)**.*

The minutes also demonstrated a clear commitment to develop and implement inclusive policies and procedures **(1b)**:

The goal of the meeting was to think about how the school operates, its premises and policies and how they could be made more queer-friendly.

*2nd Gender Neutral Toilet on Campus: the group spoke strongly about the need for this and suggested the existing second floor girls toilet in the main building as a possible location **(1d)**.*

- The group said that more gender-neutral or accessible toilets the better, but felt very strongly about that location in particular.

*- The trans students in the group spoke of the fear they had of being abused for using the male toilet as well as how uncomfortable it felt for them to use the girl's toilet **(2b, 2c)**.*

*- Cis-gendered students did not have to worry about the accessibility of a toilet; in some schools that don't have neutral toilets, trans students would not go to the toilet for the duration of the entire day **(2b, 2c)**.*

- the trans students in the group described how frustrating it is to have to walk through cold weather, rain, snow, etc to use the toilet

2. Developing an awareness of a commitment to challenge social institutions and environments which can present as hostile

The PYNs are designed to help students and staff understand how behaviours reinforce discriminatory practices. They also carry out activities and campaigns to challenge discriminatory language and practices.

One volunteer facilitator explained the impact of the programme:

*Due to my own experience at secondary school I perhaps thought that young people might not be interested in learning activist skills or being active LGBTQ allies. I feel now that given the space and guidance young people have incredible insight and ideas, and drive to make their culture and systems to be more inclusive. I am privileged to have been what I hope to be a stepping stone for these young people to realise their identities and values and to be members of a less oppressive society **(1b, 1c, 3c, 4c)**.*

Students were asked whether their school delivered equal rights for LGBTQ+ people. They talked about how the PYN had become not only a place where they could develop campaigns, but a symbol of the school's commitment to change:

*Yes, because of the club we do deliver equal rights. [PYN] club is on the message board and teachers promote it. There are posters in class and halls and unisex toilets. Bullying is always supported, and there is always someone to talk to **(1b, 1c, 2c, 3d, 4c)**.*

Our school has a PYN club, and the teachers support us no matter what sexuality we have I love it, everybody has a say and next week we are having a Pride diversity day.

*Some schools will shut you out but everyone is like one big family at [our school], also the wellbeing room was created as a safe space for kids and no one will judge you if you are part of LGBTQ+ **(3b)**.*

The PYNs seem to have become a reliable part of the institutions' approaches to challenging discrimination. Their workshop sessions also helped to raise awareness among other students. After one session, many students not in the PYN fed back that they had learned about 'heteronormativity', denoting a raised awareness of the roots of gender inequality.

A volunteer PYN facilitator reported the growing awareness she saw among students:

*I gave a workshop about gender and sexual orientation. As usual, I invited the students to submit anonymous questions at the end the session. There were lots of questions about gender and sex- for example, why do people feel they aren't male or female? Can you reproduce if you are a transgender and changed your private parts? How many genders are there? Why are girls slut-shamed, and not boys? **(2a)** Other questions were about sexual orientation. Students asked, what does it mean when you are attracted to women, yet you go out with boys? Do people feel like they have to come out? They also asked about other equalities things, like one said, many people find it difficult to come out as #LGBT because of their religion what will you advise them to do if they're confused about their gender? How do you deal with a sexist person in Fortnite? **(2c)** Why do we have inequality, and how can we prevent further problems? **(2b)** We took these in on slips of paper, and responded to them.*

Having the space to ask questions, understand the impact of heteronormative language **(2a)**, share experiences, and learn new concepts helped students to learn about discriminatory environments **(2b)** and to challenge their own and others' behaviour **(2c)**.

The PYN target requiring groups to look at school policies also raised awareness. In one PYN evidence folder, the group's meeting minutes reported their conversations about the school's Code of Conduct:

Pupils raised that perhaps there could be a specific page on the code of conduct about challenging Homophobic/Racist language (there is a banned items list but not a banned language list??) (1b, 2a)

3. Enabling personal development and positive self-esteem

The PYN programme aims to help students develop confidence in being themselves and to feel happy and valued at school. Between pre-PYN and post PYN measurements of confidence, the PYN conference Mentimeter data showed an increase in confidence to 'be yourself at school' from 2.6/5 to 4.4/5 **(3a)**. This is very much needed. As one PYN facilitator explained:

A young transgender person said in a group discussion that they are only called by their preferred name by their parents if they do a satisfactory number of chores around their home. This was quite disappointing to me as the parents of this young person are using their gender identity as a reward for good behaviour where in fact, I believe identity expression is a human right. This person's oppressive experience led them to use their personal struggle to empower a group to lead positive change and so to incite change in wider society.

The facilitator explained how the PYN supported these students to be themselves at school **(3a)**:

We promote self-esteem by giving people who might feel a little bit of an outsider at school some purpose; discussions with facilitators and each other validate their own experiences and sexual orientations. The PYN conference was a good opportunity to meet with other groups and make connections, and it also led to them marching with Educate & Celebrate at Pride, which was the next day.

Students shared what it meant to be confident at school, having been involved in the PYN. They responded:

Your life has changed and you can stand out.

*I stand up for what I believe in. I stand up to more people and ... am open about who I am without feeling judged. I can talk about my relationships with my friends and feel included **(3b)**.*

*PYN is good for mental health; it is good to have support **(3b)**.*

*At College I feel like I am able to be myself without fear of judgment. Thanks to my friends and members of staff who help me be proud of who I am **(3a, 3b)**.*

It is also important that PYNs have an impact on the core work of the school and on students' ability to achieve their full potential and contribute effectively.

Students were asked: How is your learning going? Does the PYN have anything to do with this? They responded that due to the more inclusive environment, this had impacted on their school work:

It is good. The PYN does help, because people are accepting. My learning has improved since I have joined. Everyone feels included, and the atmosphere is good (3c, 4f)

It is going well, as we have all the help and support that we need (3c, 4f)

The PYN leaders also work to empower participants to challenge the status quo, and effect change. We asked participants whether this relied on the actions of one supportive teacher, or whether the work had been adopted as a more generic staff responsibility. Between pre-PYN and post PYN measurements of confidence, the PYN conference Mentimeter data showed an increase in confidence to 'have a conversation with teachers' from 2.3/5 to 4/5 (3d).

Students felt that the PYN work started by one teacher had impacted on others, and that there was more support from a range of adults at their schools, as a result:

Ms X does assemblies and trips to conferences about LGBTQ+. But all teachers are supporting, not just PYN teachers (1c, 4c).

Other teachers give advice to students so there is more support available.

Teachers are quick to stop homophobic comments.

We also have a lovely group of ally staff.

Students felt that while having one PYN supporting staff member was important to help them facilitate change through assemblies and campaigns, other teachers had appreciated the benefits and had consequently taken on the work of inclusion right across the school.

PYN members were able to share and learn some useful skills. A volunteer facilitator explained that they develop:

Personal development skills like activism, organisational skills – if they want to, they can all bring something to the group that is focused on their skills. So if I say is there someone who wants to design the logo, there is always one or two kids who put their hands up and are excited, they was to show their biggest skills and that's quite empowering (3c, 4e).

One set of PYN minutes demonstrates a plan to update the school bullying policy. They

read through the existing policy, identified gaps, and made suggestions for change **(1d, 2c, 3d)**. After reading the policy, they noted:

We Dislike:

- *not specific. Does not specify what bullying is. Racism, sexism, homophobia **(2a)**.*
- *students are afraid of reporting.*
- *sometimes incidences are not dealt with.*
- *some teachers said 'I didn't see it so I can't do anything about it'*
- *some teachers seem like it is waste of time.*
- *some teachers do not know how to deal with incidences of bullying.*

Steps forward:

- *students need to be educated on what bullying is. The signs to look for.*
- *teachers need to be educated on what bullying is, how to speak to students about taboo subjects **(4f)**.*
- *students to be told that they have confidentiality*
- *Preventative strategies instead of reactive*

The Educate & Celebrate initiative works with the structure of a school as a small community, where the members of the PYNs are recognised as having the same standpoint as concerned members of any community.

4. Work-related skills development

One of the things the PYNs seek to develop in both youth and teacher participants is a range of leadership approaches; project management strategies; and negotiation, campaigning and advocacy skills.

One PYN facilitator talked about how the students had gained the confidence to speak up for themselves:

*PYN students learn about working in a team, organisation, and maybe how to negotiate with members of staff and get themselves taken seriously. There was one incident where they wanted a shelf in the library with LGBT+ books on it. I hadn't been to the school for a while, and they told me they were trying to do that but they told me ... the librarian ... hadn't been putting the barcodes on the books, or putting them out. And I said well what do you want to do about it, and they said we think we should go and have a chat with her **(4a, 4c)**. So I said 'alright, I'll come and I'll stand behind you for a bit of moral support'. She ended up doing it the next day, because they all went together and stood together and spoke to her about it. I think she was going to do it, but they really speeded up the process and they learned how to speak professionally and support each other **(1b, 2c, 3c, 3d, 4a, 4c)**.*

PYN participants were asked about whether they had delivered a project, campaign or assembly at your school with their PYN, and whether anything had changed as a result. Students mostly talked about assemblies:

We had multiple assemblies about LGBTQ+, the history of it, acceptance, how

to stop homophobia. This has affected the way many people behaved. More people were open about their sexuality. There was more acceptance in our school **(1b, 2a, 3d, 4c, 4d)**.

We have had assemblies about to respect people part of LGBTQ+ and it has meant people are less homophobic.

As well as assemblies, PYNs developed and delivered workshops and leaflets. One PYN delivered a workshop to a year 8 class about gender identity and gender equality on International Women's Day **(4d)**. One student explained:

We have our [PYN] which encourages people to come out. We have assemblies, we are planning to do citizenship lessons on gay pride and our history **(1c, 2c, 3d, 4d)**.

Another group developed leaflets about the PYN to explain to parents about the project. As a volunteer facilitator explained:

The students also did fundraisers, and decided as a team what they would do with the money. One group did a rainbow cake bake sale and then decided they wanted to have an outing to the theatre. And they went to a West End production! **(3b, 4b, 4e)**

These assemblies and training sessions also supported students' presentation skills and gave them experience of managing and working in teams. As a facilitator outlined:

The young people learn about their rights, the law **(1a, 4c)**, vocabulary around gender identity and sexual orientation and breaking down the barriers of the old-fashioned idea that gender is binary **(2a, 2c)**.

The volunteer facilitators also developed work-related skills and this had a positive impact on their self-esteem. One explained:

Something I have always struggled with is self-confidence. Being the sibling of someone who is an extremely high achiever and often being compared by annoying family members, this instilled in me the notion that my voice didn't deserve to be heard and that I was a bit of a failure. However, through this placement I have developed skills which have built up my confidence **(3a)**. For example, I have developed my public speaking skills, as young people can be the least forgiving of audiences and I learned that you can't show fear **(4d)**. I am proud to say that I now don't shake and sweat before addressing a large group. Due to my dyspraxia, I have always struggled to get my point across concisely. Realising that I was able to successfully answer complex questions and my answer be understood was a real triumph **(3a)**. Through seeing and realising my own oppression I feel I have been able to instil a philosophy of anti-oppressive action **(4f)**.

Conclusion

The Pride Youth Networks supported students to become active citizens in their schools, updating and implementing policies and changing institutional practice to make it more inclusive. The students' leadership in terms of challenging prejudice and discrimination made the project especially effective. Through changing school culture, they found an empowered space for themselves, and this has a positive impact on their emotional wellbeing. The PYNs helped students, facilitators and teacher to develop a range of skills, including in terms of negotiation, campaigning, practical support, presenting information, and developing inclusive environments.

By gathering together students in Pride Youth Networks, the programme facilitates students' experience of leading change at their school; developing new inclusive practice, and enacting real change within their institutions. One of the first steps of the PYN Year 1 Plan is to look at the school's policies on things like gender, homophobic bullying, uniforms, segregation and to point out these disparities to teachers. Coming from the young people, this can be very effective in inciting institutional change.

The PYNs seem to be particularly effective in changing the broader culture of the school. In the process, they develop a good range of work-related skills, and experience improved emotional wellbeing and confidence in the personal, social and academic realms.

The volunteer PYN facilitator element of the programme also enables young people from the LGBTQ+ community to develop their own leadership and facilitation skills. As one facilitator explained:

Throughout my time at Educate & Celebrate, through workshops and my PYNs, we were to give them the tools to do their own learning and prepare them for active participation as global citizens (1a, 1b, 2c, 3d, 4c). In the workshop we used statistics and talked about people like Caster Semenya. Educate & Celebrate uses empowerment through information by teaching activist skills to young people alongside real issues that matter to them.



Appendix

Evaluation codes

1. Enabling leadership in inclusive practices and decision making

- a. Awareness of legal obligations
- b. Creating commitment to develop and implement inclusive policies and procedures
- c. Enabling support and motivation to embed an ethos of inclusion
- d. Development of inclusive policies, procedures and practices, including templates and materials
- e. Supporting governance and other functions to increase representation in decision making

2. Developing an awareness of a commitment to challenge social institutions and environments which can present as hostile

- a. Understand the impact of heteronormative language
- b. Understand how behaviours reinforce discriminatory practices
- c. Challenge discriminatory language and practices

3. Enabling personal development and positive self-esteem

- a. Confidence in being myself
- b. Feel happy and valued in place of work/education
- c. Able to achieve my full potential and contribute effectively
- d. Empowered to challenge and effect change

4. Work-related skills development

- a. Leadership skills development, including chairing responsibilities
- b. Project management
- c. Influencing and negotiation, including campaigning and advocacy
- d. Presentation skills
- e. Managing and working in teams
- f. Other role-specific skills, such as curriculum development for teaching staff

