

You, Me & Us - Wellbeing & the LGBTQ+ Community: Event Report

YOU, ME & Us



Edinburgh Health and
Social Care Partnership



Event summary

With support from the [Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership](#) in September 2021, we hosted two safe and collaborative discussion spaces for any LGBTQ+ people (16+) living in or around Edinburgh, to explore what wellbeing currently means for them, both as an individual and for us, as a community.

The first discussions took place on **Wednesday 22 September**, with 8 individuals from the LGBT Age project. Participants were 50 years and over, with the majority being 70 years +. To ensure we reached these community members, we hosted these discussions in person while community members attended a monthly social group called Coffee Posse. Discussion revealed that community members were not able to access, or interested in, attending events online and otherwise would not have been able to have their say.

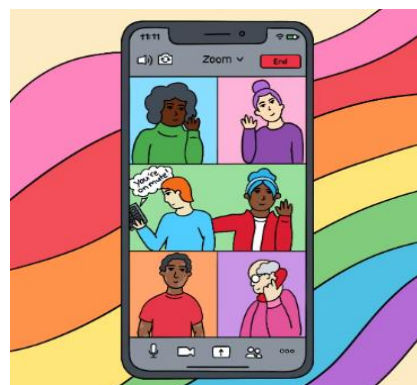
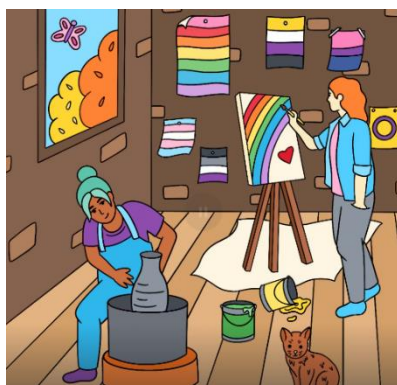
On **Wednesday 29 September**, we hosted the online event for 19 people, creating a supportive, validating framework to hold discussions with the wider community, with respect to all LGBTQ+ identities and experiences. Attendance reflected a wider trend of 'Zoom fatigue' The discussions took place in break-out rooms and the main space and included guided prompts to explore the theme of 'Wellbeing'

and what people's current needs are. We have been able to collate these contributions and are delighted to be able to capture discussions in both a community poem, curated by [Gray Crosbie](#), and a graphic illustration by [Madeleine Leisk](#) to accompany this report. To help us create a relaxed atmosphere during the event, Edinburgh based singer-songwriter [Adonye B](#) also performed two songs live, including his new single 'New Life'.

Key emergent themes from both discussions



- ❖ Covid-19 Pandemic has increased social isolation and feelings of loneliness in the community. It continues to negatively impact health and wellbeing
- ❖ There is a strong need for community connection
- ❖ Digital delivery creates connection for some and barriers for others
- ❖ Without digital and in-person delivery, some would be excluded
- ❖ The needs of the LGBTQ+ community are varied
- ❖ Accessibility is crucial in order to reach the most under-represented and those more likely to experience multiple layers of discrimination
- ❖ There is a strong need for LGBTQ+ safe, accessible spaces
- ❖ Trans and nonbinary people need purposefully affirming and safer spaces



You, Me and Us: Conversations with LGBT Age

LGBT Age works with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBTQ+) people aged 50+ throughout Scotland delivering social events, offering opportunities for community activism, creating resources and volunteering opportunities.



A relatively new project stemming from LGBT Age is our [Telefriending](#) service, which offers regular phone support to older community members. Here are the key quotes representing the issues addressed through the contributions of LGBT Age community members in a guided discussion with Development Worker, Jules Stapleton Barnes.

Discussing wellbeing

“What comes to my mind is the lack of company.”

“You just have to get on with.... I find when I’m on my own, I’m dealing with the problems of society and myself in relation to that. But when I’m on a train, speaking to somebody, that all fades away”

“I have to have a routine because of my health”

“You can do nothing about what people see or what they will say...”

“Here’s me. I’m 67 and enjoying life and I feel young now. You know the song ‘Sweet Sixteen’? Well it was anything but for me, it was the worst time in my life. I’m in the prime of my life now.”

Discussing the importance of hobbies...

“My photos show people how I’ve coped through lockdown.”

“I have enjoyed sitting at the piano some afternoons. I’m not very good but I really enjoy it.”

“I wrote a poem for Stonewall’s 75th anniversary. I came out, I got involved and I never looked back.”

Discussing the importance of a social life...

“My family don’t want to know me or understand this”

“I need it <LGBTQ+ social space> I really do, but I don’t have the energy. By the time I’ve done my chores and the garden, plus the fact I don’t have transport, plus the fact I’ve no one to go with and I don’t like being out at night anyway”

“Why live at all if not for others?”

“This <Coffee Posse> has been great. It’s lovely to be here, just having people around me. I took 3 buses to get here, which tells you how important it is”

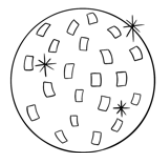
“Let’s never forget the importance of speaking and listening to others”

“There’s a need for ‘normalisation’ and Coffee Posse is particularly good at that”

“Thinking about others makes life worth living”

Discussing the role of the Telefriending Project in 2020 and beyond...

“On the behalf of those in the Telefriending project the word “lonely” comes up a lot. There are people who are actually house-bound and it’s about how we reach out and include these people. We need a way of reaching out and Telefriending is doing that.”

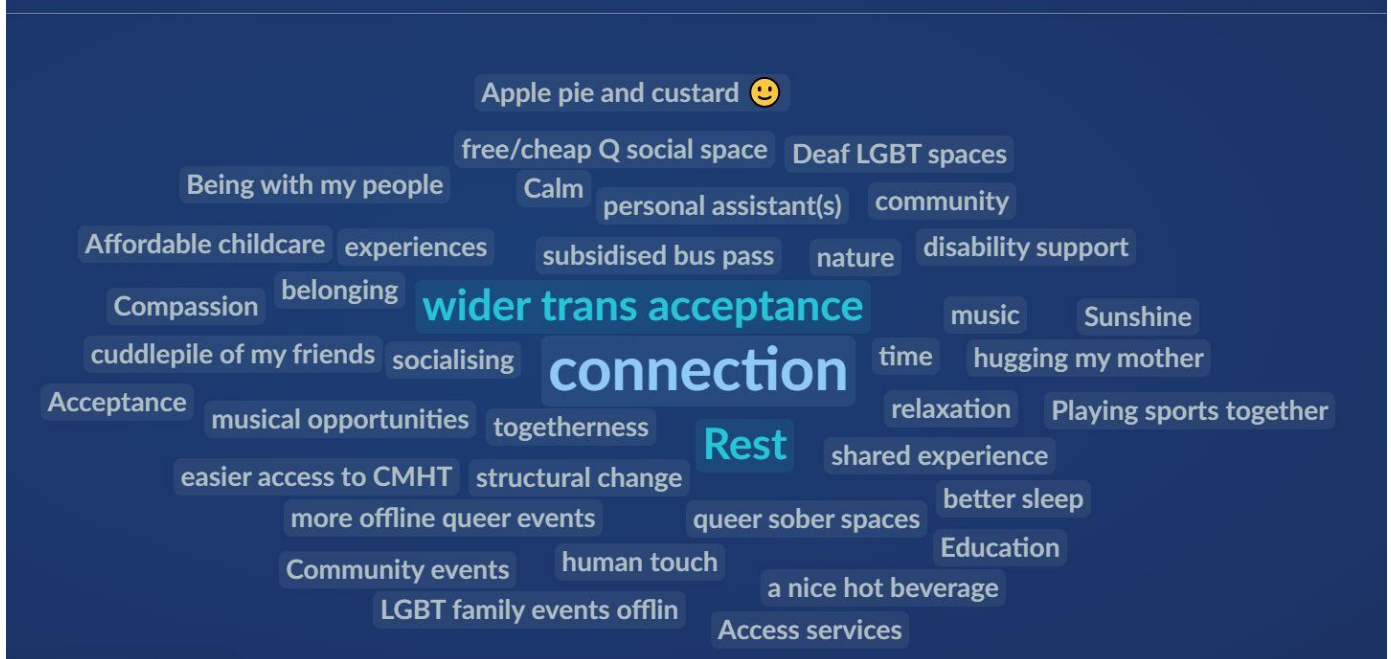


You, Me and Us: Conversations online with the community

We began the online event by posing a general question for attendees, to help capture the mood and situation within the community. The word cloud below, along with contributions from the facilitated break-out discussions, have been interpreted by our creative collaborators, Gray Crosbie and



What would boost your wellbeing right now?



Madeleine Leisk. The words and pictures featured in this report, help to tell the stories and share the hopes of those attending the event.

Wellbeing as a feeling, an experience and an aspiration, was explored through a range of theme prompts, however the conversations were organic and flowed where the community wished them to go.

Discussion Prompts used by facilitators:

What do these mean for you & what do you need?

- Community & Connection
- Mental & Physical Wellbeing
- Interests, inspirations and anything left unsaid

Key themes at a glance



Accessibility

- **Wheelchair access**
- Neurodiversity
- **Hidden disabilities**
- **Financial barriers**
- **Dry / sober spaces**
- **BSL** interpreters and BSL learning in community
- **Trans and nonbinary** safe spaces



Wellbeing of community

- Covid-19: horrific impact for many
- Income & **livelihoods affected**
- Many feeling **Isolated**
- Many feeling **scared / anxious**
- **Long Covid** causing disability and health barriers
- **Pre-existing mental health problems** have gotten worse
- Greater need for **support**



In person events

- Physical social **Connection**
- physical activity / fitness
- Nature
- **Access** without tech / wifi
- more range of activities and hobbies to try
- **LGBTQ+ Safe spaces** away from home / computer
- More opportunities for people offline
- **Increase barriers** for neurodivergent people
- Music, theatre & live performance



Online digital events

- **More inclusive** for autistic and neurodiverse people
- **Reduces barriers** for people with social anxiety
- **Increase barriers** for Deaf people
- **Increase barriers** for older community
- Creates **access to community** when Covid-19 restrictions prevent in-person events



Wellbeing & the LGBTQ+ Community: In their own words

Activities to improve LGBTQ+ wellbeing

- A big celebration event, music & dance. Just a big inclusive celebration of JOY. We need a sense of togetherness
- Art / photography, walking photography with other people
- Picking flowers, bringing them home arranging them indoors and bringing them indoors. Dancing groups! Art spaces too
- We need CONNECTION! Fun activities that spark joy but with a queer/trans layers. Doing fun things that you'd enjoy anyway but with your people
- Walks, quizzes, cinema nights, musical events!
- not just community events but things that are active and enjoyable, enriching but "being with family"
- Safe and accessible fitness spaces: for walking, swimming, gyms and classes where you are surrounded by your own community and feel safe to ask questions
- Continuity: longer-term groups and activities
- A member of the group suggested events based around an activity. They sometimes struggle to connect with others when it just a space to chat, and find it easier to bond with others when the event is centered around an activity that everyone is taking part in

"Swimming is anxiety evoking at a normal pool session"

- More physical activities to enhance physical and mental wellbeing. Through doing exercise, learning, supporting and socialising in a safe and accessible space. Examples given were boxing, swimming, walking
- Through lockdown with gyms closed and being encouraged to socialise in outdoor spaces, some people took up walking more and enjoyed discovering new green spaces to be in
- Musicians really missed performing and going to hear live music. This impacted on their mental wellbeing via isolation and not connecting with community. Therefore, a need of spaces for making music together or more live music community events
- Creative spaces to explore in a safe space
- A party to feel connected have fun and get people back together

LGBTQ+ Deaf inclusion

- More LGBTQ+ Deaf community events with BSL interpreters
- A safe space for Deaf LGBTQ+ people to come and connect. Community group? Perhaps in connection/partnership with Deaf Rainbow Scotland? But also, a mixed space with non-BSL users
- Accessible events/workshops for the Deaf community who face double discrimination which impact mental health
- Training for community/workers to learn how to sign
- We need better access to BSL fluent counsellors for the Deaf community: Aware of counseling, which is great. But more of that with more funding, bring down waiting list times and grow the services.

Trans (including nonbinary) inclusion

- An intergenerational social group for the trans community where trans people can come to socialise in a safe space. Also a peer support trans group where people at different stages in their journey can share and learn/support from each other
- More inclusive spaces in the trans community for people of colour, culture and age
- Prioritise people who don't get to speak in other spaces where trans and nonbinary people feel safe
- Trans community-focused space for fun, to try new things, learn and develop hobbies
- Trans swimming sessions

Safety and safe spaces

- Posters on the street promoting queer love, normalising us - lots of queer people don't feel comfortable showing affection in public. I don't want to be a thing of interest
- LGBTQ+ safe spaces are great but how to we feel ok venturing further out?

Is there actually a broader desire to move out of just being in a charity provided space and in to a more public setting?

- Financially accessible spaces were mentioned. Safe community spaces where you don't have to buy anything

- A need for dry/sober spaces, especially late-night spaces. There is a lack of late-night dry queer spaces to find community and make new connections

Digital vs in-person events and connection online

- A community member mentioned that their autism has in the past been a barrier to making new connections due to social anxiety. They feel safe in online spaces and hope they continue. They have grown confidence in online spaces and hope to transition to offline spaces in the future. Replicating some of the online events to in-person might help them as familiar faces may be there. They have felt more part of the community and that they belong since online events started during lockdown
- Deaf LGBT+ community are fed up being on zoom and online all of the time. There is fatigue watching interpreters online through zoom at the end of a day after doing it all day at work.

“Online doesn’t always work, fed up with it. All events seem to be online. Too many. I need the social aspect back, meeting people in the flesh.”

- For neurodivergent people, sometimes Zoom is better than in-person events

“I’m crap at in person events as there are lots of overwhelming things. Listen-only events, where you know the programme, can actually be quite a welcome change as it’s more manageable to deal with.”

- Someone felt strongly about supporting those that aren’t yet ready physically or emotionally to meet in-person/in groups. They deserve a safe community space too (online) and we should all be mindful of peoples differing comfort levels

Beyond the event

The Edinburgh Community Programme team have been reflecting on the take home messages of these important discussions with the community. Despite the uncertain global context of the Pandemic, we move forward to explore the combination of both digital and in-person event delivery, to ensure we continue to aim for ambitious outcomes for improved wellbeing and leave nobody behind in the process. The contributions highlight a wide range of needs and experience, but also many feelings and aspirations of a community strongly in need of connection.

Digital events have opened up opportunities for many LGBTQ+ people who previously experienced barriers to attending events in person. We've listened to a significant number of people expressing how their current health and circumstances make it impossible for them to socially engage in person. The barriers range from physical access and travel to anxiety and other mental health conditions; put under considerably more strain due to Covid-19. Discussions and social spaces via Zoom create a safe, accessible space for these people to find connection, feel part of their community, build confidence and feel less alone.

In parallel to this, we continue to explore how to reduce barriers for in-person delivery, including but not limited to using accessible venue spaces, BSL interpreters at events and being mindful of the needs of neurodivergent people or those with hidden disabilities. To do this effectively there are funding challenges, and the You, Me and Us project has accented the need for adequate service provision. But continuing to strengthen our diversifying skillset and heightened awareness of the varied needs of the community, we're embracing these challenges and the opportunity to create safe, accessible LGBTQ+ spaces.

We are also undertaking **Annual Feedback Survey** from early November 2021, which offers us detailed information on our impact in the community, as well as affording us the opportunity to further understand the needs, experiences and wants from our community. This will, as ever, allow us to develop and design an informed and meaningful approach going forward.

As LGBT Health settles into a new community hub in Leith, we are delighted and proud to display the work created through this project, by Gray Crosbie and Madeleine Leisk. The poem and the illustrations have captured contributions beautifully and provide a rich insight into the needs of Edinburgh's LGBTQ+ community, at this extraordinary time in history. By sharing the words and images created by them we hope to bridge the digital world with our physical spaces, remind ourselves how far we have come and where we wish to go from here.

Creative Collaborators

Gray Crosbie (they/them)

We invited Gray Crosbie to collaborate with us to curate a short poem to capture the tone and contributions of the online discussion. They attended the session to listen and make notes.

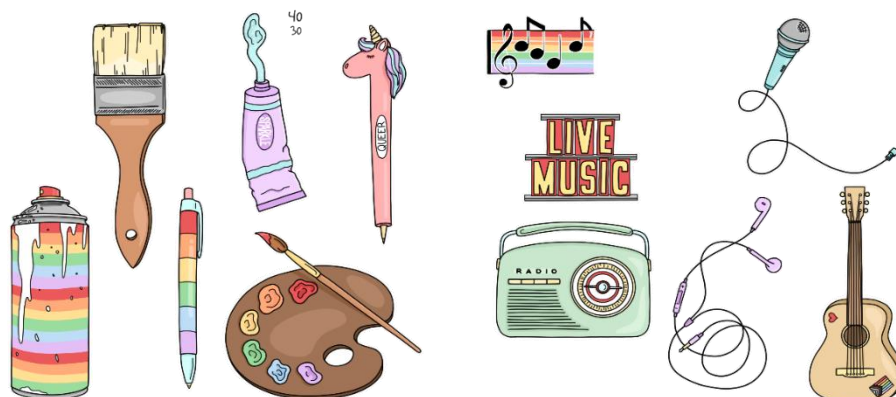
Gray is a queer writer and spoken word poet based in Glasgow. They perform regularly at poetry and cabaret nights around Scotland and have been published widely throughout the UK, including pamphlet 'Love, Pan-Fried' published by Knight Errant Press in Edinburgh.



Madeleine Leisk (she/her)

To provide a more visual representation of the discussions, we invited Madeleine Leisk to create a graphic illustration of the event, to be printed and displayed at LGBT Health and Wellbeing's Edinburgh office. The poster will be displayed in our social spaces, for members of the community to enjoy and reflect upon – drawing together our digital and in-person worlds and our wellbeing concerns in 2021.

Madeleine is a Canadian illustrator based in Edinburgh who works predominantly within the local and LGBTQIA+ communities.



Host's reflections

“I am energised by the kindness shared by our community at events like these. As contributions began to unfurl and experiences filled the space, I noticed how hard it is still, for individuals to say what it is that they really need. I'm compelled to ask, what is not being said and whose voice are we still not hearing? I hope this report, captures the ally-ship, resilience, strength and community-mindedness of many of our LGBTQ+ family here in Edinburgh and our strong desire for connection and safe, accessible spaces. Going forward, I continue to be motivated to make space, listen harder and reach further, so everyone feels able to name all the things that they need to thrive in this world.” – Jules Stapleton Barnes, September 2021

Useful contacts for LGBT Health and Wellbeing (Edinburgh)

Jules Stapleton Barnes

(Development Worker, Edinburgh Community Programme)

E: jules@lgbthealth.org.uk | W: www.lgbthealth.org.uk

Jean Monaghan

(Development Worker, LGBT Age Project)

E: jean@lgbthealth.org.uk

Diane Lee

(Development Worker, Mental Wellbeing Programme)

E: diane@lgbthealth.org.uk

LGBT Counselling

Information and referrals: <https://www.lgbthealth.org.uk/services-support/lgbt-mental-health/lgbt-counselling/>

Claire Black

(Counselling Coordinator)

E: claire@lgbthealth.org.uk | T: 0131 564 3970

Keith Paterson

(LGBT Age Telefriending Coordinator)

E: keith@lgbthealth.org.uk

LGBT Helpline Scotland

0300 123 2523 | Open Tuesday & Wednesday between 12-9pm, Thursday & Sunday 1-6pm with special winter break opening hours

W: <https://www.lgbthealth.org.uk/services-support/lgbt-helpline-scotland/>

FROM HERE

by Gray Crosbie, and the LGBTQ+ community of Edinburgh

Where do we go from here?
After all these months and that endless year
locked down, pandemic stuck.

Now we're ready
excited, nervous, desperate
to be together.
For new friends and familiar faces,
safe spaces to take it slow,
or to jump back in,
to jog, run, box, swim,
dance and sing our way back to ourselves.

To share the ways we endured the days
the discovery that flower-picking and photography
can be survival skills.
Our new favourite movies,
the best forests and hills.
To tell of the things piano keys can unlock
and talk about how it's not only time
that's been lost.

Now we're ready to be with our people,
to laugh and worry over a shared apple crumble
and tangle ourselves in cuddle-pile jumbles.
To relearn the energy of bodies,
to remember how company in itself
can be a cure.

We need music to close the meters
activities to ease anxieties.
We need journeys that are worth the three buses.
To buy tickets, hold programmes and run fingers
over plans for the future, to embrace our city
in a big queer takeover and have parties in the street.

We need the calm of nature,

and a good night's sleep.

And some of us, we need
to know we won't now find ourselves alone.
That the virtual rooms where we found connection,
that sparked with joy
won't go dark and empty.

And some of us, we need for things to be different,
better, fairer.
Back to normal isn't as exciting
when "normal" wasn't always inclusive.
We need the same changes we did before:
affordable childcare, help with the bus fare,
spaces to be social while sober
places without prices, where it's only time that is spent.

We need wait lists to be smaller and bigger funds
counselling, assistants, interpreters,
to be around people who're like us.
Accessibility,
comfort,
safety—

Our needs are varied
but that's the beauty of diversity.

Lately, we've been looking forward again.
Because after all those months and that endlessly long year,
if nothing else, we've learned the importance of togetherness.
Where do we go from here?

Poem and artwork commissioned as part of
You, Me and Us: Wellbeing & the LGBTQ+ Community
With special thanks to Gray Crosbie and Madeleine Leisk.
<https://www.ylwbkillustrations.com/>
<https://plantpoweredpoet.bigcartel.com/>



MENTAL WELLBEING

All Trans Identities Are Valid!

Care For Yourself

Care For Each Other

ART SPACE

CLUBHOUSE

sober space
all welcome

Charity Shop

COFFEE POSSE

Q Cinema

Everyone Welcome
Making an accessible city for all

space
for
everyone

