

Created by



Setting up a GAY/STRAIGHT or GENDER & SEXUALITY ALLIANCE in your school.



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PREFACE

In 2018, we set out to create an informative handbook that will help secondary school students create safe spaces and support systems that will assist in combatting the high levels of depression, self-harm and suicide reported in the 2016 LGBTIreland study. As members of an LGBT* college society, we believe social groups and supports such as this are very important in protecting the wellbeing of LGBT+ youth in Ireland.

This project has been an eye-opening journey for us as a committee which would not have been made possible without the financial support and guidance Cork Institute of Technology, Cork Pride Festival, Bank of Ireland and Cork City Council.

We also want to thank UP Cork LGBT Youth Group, Gay Project, LINC, LGBT Ireland, BeLonG To LGBT Youth Services, Cork LGBT+ Interagency Group, Union of Students Ireland, CITSU, Deerpark CBS, Coláiste Daibhead, Dr Margaret O'Keefe and Stephanie Fogarty that assisted in the research, creation and editing process of this handbook.

We hope this handbook gives you the tools you need to create change, and to promote inclusion.

PART 1

ABOUT GAY/STRAIGHT OR GENDER & SEXUALITY ALLIANCES



WHAT IS A GSA?

A GSA is a safe place for students to talk and learn about LGBT+ issues and topics but to also find support from or give support to their peers. They are after-school clubs for secondary school students that are open and inclusive to everyone – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning students, as well as Straight Allies and students with LGBT+ families. GSA's are usually run by students under the supervision of a GSA Supervisor that which is school staff member (e.g. Principal, Councillor or Teacher). This role can be assigned by your school Principal.

GSA's are a great way for your school to show acceptance and support for your LGBT+ students and can also act as a means to combat homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in your school.



WHAT DO GSAs DO?

GSA's typically meet weekly, fortnightly or monthly depending on the availability of your GSA Supervisor. The activities or types of meetings your GSA holds can vary depending on your members interest or goals.

According to gsanetwork.org, there are three common types of GSA's which are as follows;

Social GSAs are set up to help students socialise with fellow LGBT+ students and Allies, so they can make friends.

Support GSAs are set up as a safe place for LGBT+ students to seek support and information from their peers.

And Activist GSAs are set up, so students can work together to improve the environment of their schools for LGBT+ students by finding ways to combat bullying, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia.

Each of these types of GSAs are important for helping LGBT+ students feel safer and more accepted in their schools. Most GSAs begin as social or support GSAs and later begin to do more activist or awareness raising work once their members feel more accepted in their schools.

This is important as it creates a lasting environment of acceptance for future LGBT+ students that might enter your school.

PART 2

WHY IS THERE A NEED FOR GSAs?



WHAT IS A GSA?

In order to show you why GSAs are vital in supporting LGBT+ students in your school we drew upon the LGBTIreland Report 2016, a 2014 study by the University of British Columbia and the Dept. of Children & Youth Affairs GBTI Youth Strategy 2017.

Here are the facts:

LGBTIreland Report

The report found that compared to the My World National Youth Mental Health Study 1, LGBT+ young people in this study had reported:

- 2 times the level of self-harm
- 3 times the level of attempted suicide
- 4 times the level of severe/extremely severe stress, anxiety and depression.
- 12 years: most common age people discovered their LGBT+ identity
- 16 years: most common age people told the very first person they are LGBT+
- 1 in 4: people who had come out had not told their mother or father they are LGBT+.

What helped people to come out? Knowing that they would be supported and accepted by family, friends and others; greater visibility of LGBT+ people; and more accepting attitudes helped most people to come out.

- Only 20% of LGBT+ students felt they belonged completely in their school

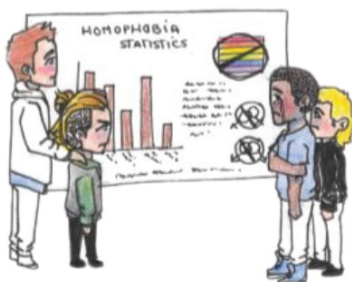
- Only 20% of LGBT+ students felt they belonged completely in their school.
- Only 44% of LGBT+ students said they received positive affirmation of their identity.
- 67% witnessed bullying of other LGBT+ students in their school.
- 50% of LGBT+ students personally experienced anti-LGBT+ bullying.
- 1 in 4 missed or skipped school to avoid negative treatment due to being LGBT+.
- 1 in 4 considered leaving school early and approximately 1 in 20 quit school.
- Students who experienced anti-LGBT+ bullying in school had higher levels of depression, anxiety, stress and alcohol use.
- Students who experienced anti-LGBT+ bullying in school were more likely to self-harm, to seriously consider ending their life and to attempt suicide.



(LGBTIreland Report, 2016).

A 2014 study from the University of British Columbia found that students in schools with GSA's in Canada were less likely to be discriminated against and statistics of suicidal thoughts and attempts were lower in both the gay and straight student population. The study of almost

22,000 students found that the longer a school provided a GSA, then odds of suicidal thoughts and attempts in LGB students and heterosexual boys were halved. This was due to a more open and supportive school environment (Sæwyc, et al., 2014).



National LGBTI+ Youth Strategy

Launched in 2017 by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, the National LGBT+ Youth Strategy, led by a team of LGBT+ youth themselves found that young people in Ireland want to see more supports for other LGBT+ young people. These are some of the goals these young people want the Irish Government to meet;

- Provision of support such as Gay Straight Alliances, LGBT+ Week, counselling, safe spaces and student staff networks.
- Diversity training for all professionals working with LGBT+ youth.
- More safe spaces – inclusive and exclusive spaces within the wider community and in accessible locations.
- More services and spaces in rural areas.
- More welcoming and inclusive communities.
- Raising awareness of negative stereotypes and creating more supportive environments.
- Greater cooperation within LGBT+ groups and between all youth and community-based groups.
- These studies show why providing a GSA in your school will be beneficial to your students regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

(Dáil Eireann, Department of Children & youth Affairs, 2018)

GSA provides students with a space to be themselves and explore their identity that is fun. They can be social groups for young people to make some friends and build a sense of belonging. In a GSA young people have an opportunity to meet trained and knowledgeable staff and/or guests from varied organisations. Here they can be education on different LGBT+ related issues and gives them a voice to inspire positive change in the school environment.



PART 3

SETTING UP YOUR GSA



KNOW WHY YOU WANT TO SET UP A GSA

The first step to starting your GSA is to ask yourself why you want to set up a GSA in your school. Identify the key reasons why having a GSA in your school is important. Are you able to commit the time and effort needed to successfully run your schools GSA? Will you have the support needed to maintain your GSA? Does your school have any specific requirements when setting up after school clubs? Once you have answered these questions it's then time to take the next step.

MAKE A PLAN

Next you need to write down your plan of action. What day and time do you intend to hold your GSA meetings that are accessible to other students in your school that might be interested in joining? How long will your meetings last? What kind of meetings do you intend to have? When you've gotten your plan on paper you should be then prepared to make the next move.

INFORM YOUR SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

You now need to arrange a meeting with your school principal or other relevant school authority figure to discuss your GSA plans. If your school has any documentation or forms, you need to fill out be sure to keep copies for future reference. It is also good to keep note of other information about when and who you gave the documentation to. This record is important to have should you need to refer back to anything in the future. If your principal agrees to help you in

setting up your GSA, you should discuss and ask for help in finding a staff member that can supervise your group. (you can find information about the supervisor role further into this manual). Your principal will also be able to help you find a venue for your GSA meetings. Each school might have different protocols that need to be followed so be open to suggestions that your principal might have. It will be important to work together and have the support of your principal going forward.

ADVERTISE YOUR AGM

Once you've secured support from your school and have found a staff member willing to supervise your meetings you can now agree a date and time for your AGM (Annual General Meeting).

An AGM is the first meeting where you form your GSA committee that will help run your GSA.

But first, you need to advertise your AGM to your fellow students know about it. You can do this in many ways such as making posters, flyers, making announcements to other classes, having your school promote it on their social media platforms or whatever other way you think is best to get the

message out. Consider how your school is usually most successful in getting information to its students.

What's most important is to ensure you're getting the correct information out there.

Be clear in your advertising and make sure people know what a GSA is, why it's important, what an AGM is, the time, date and location. And make sure you give yourself enough time to get the information out so anyone that's interested has time to arrange to be there. Once you've completed these steps now it's time to sit back and wait.



PART 4

STUDENT ROLES



RUNNING AN AGM

Before your AGM there are a few things you need to think about:

1. Seating – Classroom setting or a circle.
2. Food & Drinks – How can you pay for it?
3. Copies of Committee Roles for other students.
4. Open & welcoming atmosphere – Music is always good.
5. Be friendly & greet people – Don't forget to smile.

To start, introduce yourself and let everyone know what pronouns you'd like to be referred to as. From this point, when people introduce themselves ask them to also share their pronouns.

A pronoun is the term we use to identify our gender for example He/Him, She/Her, They/Them etc... Pronouns are important to ask as it is not polite to assume anyone's gender identity. It is perfectly fine to get someone's pronoun wrong. We're all human and are all learning. If you do

happen to get it wrong, acknowledge it, apologise, and continue what you were saying. Deliberately stating our preferred pronouns is a way to model positive, inclusive behaviour and expression while educating and raising awareness.



Once you have found your committee members we recommend that you look into some team building training. This will be very beneficial for your committee and is something your GSA Supervisor might be able to help you with or alternatively you can email lgbtcit@gmail.com and we'll try to facilitate a workshop. We recommend contacting some of the organisations listed at the end of this handbook that may be able to provide you with training which is by an accredited professional with garda vetting and child protection training.



Next, explain what a GSA is, why you think they're important, why you think your school needs one and what you hope to do with your GSA. Let people know what day and time your GSA will meet. After this you need to go through each of the committee roles and explain what the responsibilities of the roles are should someone want to apply for one. When you have this finished you're now ready to start the committee election process.

First you need to start with electing a Chairperson. Those interested in the position need to raise their hands if they're interested in the role. They then need to tell everybody why they're interested and why they should be elected into the role of Chairperson. If only one person shows interest, students can vote by raising their hands. Should there be more than one person interested in the role you now need to have a silent vote. This means, students vote by writing the name of the candidate they choose on a piece of paper. Gather the votes and you can then ask your GSA Supervisor to count them. The candidate with the most votes wins the position. Congratulations you now have your GSA Chairperson.

At this point your newly elected Chairperson will now take over the AGM. They must now go through the remaining committee roles in the same manner until you fill the available positions. Try to fill as many of the positions as possible as the more committee members you have, the lighter the workload going forward. It also gives your GSA members a chance to have a voice in the GSA and this will increase their participation and attendance in your GSA meetings. Should there not be enough students to fill the roles listed below do not worry. Ultimately what's most important for your GSA is to have a Chairperson and a Treasurer to keep the GSA running efficiently.

Should someone express interest in a committee role at a later stage it's possible to call for an EGM (Extraordinary General Meeting) where you must again have your members/students vote for any candidates looking to fill the remaining committee roles. Make sure you follow the election process professionally and fairly, so everyone has an equal chance to be elected. Should you have any further questions it's always good to ask your GSA Supervisor or principal.

COMMITTEE ROLES

CHAIRPERSON

The Chairperson has a strategic role to play in representing the vision and purpose of your GSA. The Chairperson ensures that your committee functions properly, that there is full participation at meetings, all relevant matters are discussed and that effective decisions are made and carried out.



The Chairperson oversees the following:

- To plan and run meetings in an orderly, efficient manner.
- To bring fairness and objectivity to meetings and decision-making.
- To facilitate change and address conflict within the board.
- To review governance performance and skills.
- To advocate for and represent the organisation at external meetings and events.
- To be aware of current issues that might affect the GSA and its members.

SECRETARY

The role of the secretary is to support the Chairperson in ensuring the smooth functioning of your GSA Committee.

The Secretary's tasks include:

- To ensure arrangements for meetings are met (booking the room, arranging for equipment and refreshments, organising facilities for those with special needs, etc).
- To prepare agendas in consultation with the Chairperson.
- To circulate agendas and any supporting papers in good time.
- To receive agenda items from other committee members.
- To minute meetings and circulate the draft minutes to all

committee members.

- To ensure that the chair signs the minutes once they have been approved.
- To check that committee members and staff have carried out action(s) agreed.
- To ensure up-to-date records are kept of committee membership.

TREASURER

The overall role of a treasurer is to maintain an overview of the GSA's financial affairs, ensuring its viability and ensuring that proper financial records and procedures are maintained. The Treasurers task include;

- To oversee and present budgets, accounts and financial statements.
- To liaise with other relevant committee members about financial matters.
- To ensure that appropriate accounting procedures and controls are in place.



PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICER

The Public Relations Officer will be responsible for the promotion of your GSA, meetings and other events. The

PRO will also oversee the upkeep of your GSA's social media or other online platforms that you may consider using. These can include; email accounts, website,

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or other online platforms. Your GSA Supervisor should have full access to any online accounts and should be provided with usernames and passwords.

They must also consider additional events outside of the regular meetings of the GSA that might be of interest to your GSA's members.



RULES/CONSTITUTION

For any GSA it's important to have a set of rules or a constitution that all committee and members should follow. These will act as guidelines to ensure everyone behaves in a safe manner. There are different ways in which you can create your GSA's rules, below are some suggestions;

- Hold a meeting and ask your members what rules are important for them. All rules must be agreed upon by the members present and must be signed like a contract so that members officially agree to abide by these rules. Your Secretary will then type up these rules and share copies at the next meeting.

Examples of rules that you might consider are:
Have respect for others, their personal space and their belongings.


1. Be open and welcoming.
2. No phones during meetings.
3. Respect everyone's confidentiality.
4. No fighting or name calling.
5. Help tidy up before the meeting ends.

Alternatively, your GSA Supervisor or school principal might be able to provide you with rules already in place for all groups/clubs in your school.

- However, you might want to create a GSA Constitution that outlines the rules and regulations of your GSA and the responsibilities of your Committee Members and general members. We highly recommend this format as it gives a clear outline of what is expected from your GSA. Should you have any questions or need guidance on how to create your GSA Constitution we at CIT LGBT* Society are happy to help. Just send us an email on lgbtcit@gmail.com and we can forward you a draft or answer any questions.

SAFETY & CONFIDENTIALITY

It's highly important to ensure that your members are made feel safe in your GSA. That means making sure that you host safe events that are agreed upon with your GSA supervisor. And more importantly, you need to make sure that your members confidentiality is protected. A good rule of thumb is to follow this rule: What happens in our GSA, stays in our GSA's. This will make your members feel welcome, able to openly be themselves and allows you to do the same without judgement and with complete trust. This is what will make your GSA a safe space for those that need it.

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PART 5

GSA SUPERVISOR



A GSA Supervisor is a member of staff from the school. This person needs to be someone that the GSA members will feel comfortable to be around and will allow them to be themselves. The GSA Supervisor will oversee that the GSA is being run in a safe and responsible manner to protect its members from any possible harm. They will be the go-to person should a matter arise that your committee are not able to handle. And the GSA Supervisor will also be the person that your committee need to seek approval from for the events or activities you plan.

It's important to understand that some teachers might not feel properly trained in relation to working with LGBT+ people. However, many of the LGBT+ organisations listed in the contact details in the back of this handbook can offer advice on where to find training that can help.

CHILD PROTECTION & TUSLA

In accordance with the Children First safety regulations, the GSA Supervisor will typically be a teacher, guidance councillor or other members of school staff that have been Garda vetted for the protection of your GSA members. Once you've found a GSA Supervisor that you can trust, you're now ready to take the next steps in setting up your GSA.

PART 6

WHAT TO DO IN YOUR GSA



Your GSA committee oversees deciding what to do in your GSA. However, it is important to consider what it is your members want to do. So, it's a good idea in your AGM and during GSA meetings to get feedback from your members and gathering ideas of what everyone wants to do. But keep in mind that your GSA Supervisor will need to sign off on your GSA activity or event plans before you do them. Below are some basic activity ideas.

Activity ideas:

- Games Night.
- Art & Crafts.
- TLC (Tea, Laugh & Chats).
- Pizza Night.
- Quiz Night.



Event ideas:

- Take part in BeLonG To Stand Up Week.
- Invite guest speakers.
- Hold a fundraising event.
- Run a LGBT* campaign.

There are many fun things you can do that are safe and enjoyable for your GSA members.

PART 7

FUTURE OF YOUR GSA



COMMITTEE ELECTION PROCESS

As a GSA committee it's important that you hold an AGM each year to elect a new committee. This will ensure that your committee officers are elected fairly and that your GSA continues to grow. Should a committee member not be able to continue in their position at any point, you should hold another election for that position to be filled. We would advise to hold your AGM before the end of the school year, so you have a committee to take over when you return. This will ensure the future of your GSA is in safe hands that will continue your work. Remember to follow the guidelines in Part 4 of this handbook.

Funding

If your GSA wants to do activities or events that will you will need money for there are different ways to get funding. Be sure to ask your school if they have any budget allocation for after school groups. If this is not available, you can consider fundraising or sponsorships.

FUNDRAISING

There are many ways to raise funds for your activities or events. You can hold a bake sale, go bag packing or do a sponsored run. Whatever method of fundraising you choose to use, remember to keep record of the money you take in. This means making sure every cent is accounted for and that there is more than one committee member present when your treasurer is adding up the funds. This is in the best interest of your committee and ensures good governance.



SPONSORSHIP

Another way to raise funds is to seek sponsorship from local businesses, shops or organisations. In return you can offer to help promote their business by using their logo on your posters. It's important to let them know how much funding you need and what they will get in return.

You can ask your GSA Supervisor or school Principal for a sponsorship letter outlining the details. Remember that when you receive sponsorship for a business you need to follow through with the terms and conditions you have set out. If you say you will add their logo to your posters, then you need to stay true to this commitment. This will be beneficial if you need to ask for sponsorship the next time.

Before you ask for sponsorship, you need to have your GSA Supervisor sign off on who you will be approaching. The businesses that you ask need to be relevant and you can not promote anything that is alcohol or tobacco related.

For future reference it's important to hold onto any documentation that you sign in relation to fundraising or sponsorship.



PART 8

IRISH LGBT+ RESOURCES & SUPPORTS



LGBTIRELAND

Tlf. 01 685 9280

Email: info@lgbt.ie

Website: www.lgbt.ie

For support or information please contact 1890 929 539
or provide an online instant chat as well.

GAY PROJECT, CORK

Tlf. 021 4300430

Email: info@gayprojectcork.ie

Website: www.gayproject.ie

LINC, CORK

Tlf. 021 4808600

Email: info@linc.ie

Website: www.linc.ie

OUTHOUSE, DUBLIN

Tif. 01 873 4932
Email: info@outhouse.ie
Website: www.outhouse.ie

TEACH SOLAIS LGBT+ RESOURCE CENTRE, GALWAY

Tif. 089 252 3307
Email: resourcecentre@amachlgbt.com
Facebook: facebook.com/TeachSolaisLGBT/

BELONGTO YOUTH SERVICE, DUBLIN

Tif. 01 670 6223
Email: info@belongto.org
Website: www.belongto.org

**TRANSGENDER EQUALITY NETWORK
IRELAND (TENI), DUBLIN**

Tif. 01 873 3575
Email: info@teni.ie
Website: www.teni.ie

UP CORK LGBT+ YOUTH PROJECT

Email: nadia.moussed@ywicork.com

PRIDE COMMITTEE INFORMATION IN IRELAND

- **Cork Pride Festival**
www.corkpride.com
info@corkpride.com
- **Limerick Pride Festival**
www.limerickpride.ie
info@limerickpride.ie
- **Dublin Pride Festival**
www.dublinpride.ie
info@dublinpride.ie
- **Belfast Pride Festival**
www.belfastpride.com
info@belfastpride.com
- **Waterford Pride Festival**
waterfordgaypride@gmail.com
- **Galway Pride Festival**
www.galwaypridefestival.com

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This hand book was created by CIT LGBT* Society and aims to support secondary school students and staff in the process of setting up a Gay/Straight Alliance or Gender & Sexuality Alliance in their school.

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LINC

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