



# The Rainbow Project Rotherham

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**healthwatch**  
Rotherham

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## Introduction

During October 2025, Healthwatch Rotherham Research and Campaigns Officer, Danielle, attended two sessions at The Rainbow Project Rotherham (TRPR) to gather feedback from service users via surveys. The sessions included the Knitt Whitt Group, a social crafting group aimed at fostering community and wellbeing, and the Food Night, a community meal event providing a more informal setting for discussion and engagement.

The aim of this research was to understand the experiences, needs, and challenges faced by attendees, with a particular focus on LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning) inclusion, mental health, and access to health and social care services.

From the outset, Danielle observed that both groups were genuinely inclusive and welcoming to everyone. There was no sense of discrimination, and the overall atmosphere was warm, positive, and inviting. The groups are based in Wath, have ample parking outside the building, and have an accessibility ramp to enter the Hall.



## What The Rainbow Project Rotherham Offers

- **Group Support & Social Activities:** They run regular social-group meetups. For example a Tuesday-night gathering with a free meal and a chance to chat, that helps bring together members of the LGBTQIA+ community. [The](#)

### [Rainbow Project](#)

- **One-to-One Support:** Free support tailored to individuals' needs — this can be online (nationwide) or in-person (for those in South Yorkshire). [The Rainbow Project+1](#)
- **Advocacy & Advice:** They provide advocacy services and offer advice or information for people needing support around issues such as discrimination, gender identity, mental health, or navigating life as LGBTQIA+. [Consortium+1](#)
- **Trans Support:** There's a dedicated "Trans Support Project" (meetings alternate on Wednesdays) to provide peer support and a safe space for people exploring or struggling with gender identity. [The Rainbow Project](#)
- **Wellbeing & Mindfulness Support:** Through programmes like "Thrive Thursday" they offer mental-health/well-being sessions (for example, mindfulness events) to help support emotional wellness. [The Rainbow Project+1](#)
- **Creative / Hobby Groups:** They host activities like "Knitt Whitt" (knitting / crocheting evenings) — which can provide a relaxed social environment and a supportive community. [The Rainbow Project](#)
- **Hate-Crime Reporting & Support:** They act as a hate-crime reporting centre — meaning if someone from the LGBTQ+ community experiences a hate crime, the project can report it to the police on their behalf. [The Rainbow Project+1](#)
- **Support for a Wide Range of People:** Their services are available to people of all sexual orientations and gender identities (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, non-binary, etc.), as well as individuals over 50, people with disabilities,



people from ethnic minorities or immigrant backgrounds – in short, an inclusive service for diverse communities. [Consortium+1](#)

## Who It's For / What Issues They Can Help With

According to their own listing they offer support for:

- LGBTQIA+ individuals across all identities (gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, non-binary, intersex, Hetrosexual/Straight etc.) [Consortium+1](#)
- People seeking mental-health support, peer support, social connection, advocacy, or help with discrimination or hate crime issues. [Consortium+1](#)
- Those who may feel isolated, need support navigating their gender identity, or just want a welcoming community space.

## Methodology

The survey included questions on demographics, service access, wellbeing, experiences of discrimination, and perceptions of TRPR (The Rainbow Project Rotherham) services. Responses were both quantitative and qualitative, allowing for a comprehensive view of participants' experiences. Surveys were distributed to participants at each session, and informal observations were recorded regarding group dynamics and engagement. Participants were assured anonymity and encouraged to provide honest feedback.

## Knitt Whitt Group Findings

The Knitt Whitt Group consisted primarily of adults aged between 18 and 54, largely female and mostly heterosexual. None of the participants identified as transgender or non-binary. Four participants were currently accessing health, wellbeing, or social care

**4 out of 5 people  
answered yes**

**Are you currently accessing  
any health, wellbeing,  
or social  
care services?**

services, including GP appointments, grief counselling, orthopedic support, and weight management.

Participants generally felt comfortable discussing their sexuality and gender identity in daily life, with most participants reporting that they had not encountered negative experiences or misunderstanding due to their identity.

Engagement with The Rainbow Project had a positive impact on participants' wellbeing. People attending reported improvements in mental health, creativity, confidence, social skills, and social inclusion. Most of the women felt comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings within the group and described the environment as safe and welcoming. Which was apparent on the day as they were all forthcoming in their conversations regarding the Health and Social care sector and issues that they have experienced. Attendees highlighted that The Rainbow Project Rotherham provided a space to meet like-minded people and feel included in the wider community.

Key challenges identified during the Knitt Whitt group, regarding issues relating to the LGBTQ+ community included a lack of awareness and understanding, lack of social groups dedicated to focusing on the LGBTQ community. Participants suggested that local services could improve support through education and awareness.

## Food Night Findings

The Food Night group demonstrated a broader diversity in both age and identity, with participants ranging from under 18 to over 65, and a mix of female, male, transgender, and non-binary individuals. Sexual orientation was more varied than in the Knitt Whitt group, including heterosexual, gay, bisexual, pansexual, and other identities. Four



participants identified as transgender, non-binary, or gender non-conforming.

The group was extremely welcoming and introduced themselves, the environment was inviting. I was shown where the facilities were located, and was asked if I would like a hot drink all provided by the Rainbow Project Rotherham. The room was decorated in different artwork from their craft classes that they have, and lots of information regarding services in Rotherham.



On the evening of the 'Food Night' group, Chiz from Mesmac was in attendance with a table set up, providing sexual health advice, offering STI screenings and blood tests to the Group. Mesmac are in frequent attendance to the Rainbow Project, helping educate the wider public on Sexual health and wellbeing.





Nine participants reported accessing health, wellbeing, or social care services, including GP surgeries, gender identity clinics, mental health services, and social care support. Most participants felt comfortable discussing their identity, although some reported neutral or slightly uncomfortable experiences. Experiences of discrimination were more common than what we had heard in the Knitt Whitt group, with examples including misgendering, verbal abuse, and avoidance by others. Four participants indicated that they had avoided healthcare due to fear of discrimination.

**One of the questions that were asked were, have you experienced any of the following when seeking Healthcare?**

**Q7. Have you experienced any of the following when seeking healthcare?**

Response Option	Count	Percentage
Lack of understanding or awareness of LGBTQ+ needs	6	50%
Misgendering or incorrect use of pronouns	3	25%
Hesitation or discomfort discussing your identity with staff	6	50%
Positive and affirming support from professionals	2	16.67%
None of the above	8	66.67%

The insights that we gathered for this question was based off 12 responses, out of the 12 responses **half of the participants** answered yes to **‘Lack of understanding or awareness of LGBTQ+ needs & Hesitation or discomfort discussing your identity with staff’** these issues may seem minor to some but, if you are hesitant to discuss your identity with your medical professional this could result in symptoms being overlooked, diagnosis missed and a negative impact on your mental health.

Food Night attendees identified recurring barriers such as long waiting times for gender clinics, refusal of transgender referrals, and difficulties accessing appropriate mental health support. One of the main things that were discussed on the night was the access to hormones. Despite these challenges, engagement with the Rainbow Project Rotherham was reported as highly beneficial. Participants described improvements in mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing, increased confidence, and enhanced social interaction.

One-to-one support was regarded as very helpful, and all participants felt safe and accepted within the TRP community. Recommendations for improving services focused on increased visibility, funding, awareness campaigns, and more social opportunities for the LGBTQ+ community.

**61%**

**Felt that their sexuality or gender identity has had a negative impact on their mental health.**



# Testimonials: Rainbow Project Rotherham



What aspects of your wellbeing (mental, emotional, physical) do you feel have improved since attending TRP?

"Mental Health has improved because I'm talking to more people and it has stopped me shutting myself away. My mobility has also improved because I am getting out more."	"My mental and emotional health because they have spoken to me about everything"
"Confidence in gender identity, social interaction, development of hobbies"	" the group is really friendly and welcoming with open arms"
"Feeling more settled and happy"	"All the above"



Do you feel safe and accepted within the TRP community?

**100%** of the responses answered yes to feeling safe and accepted at the Rainbow Project Rotherham



What suggestions would you have to make group sessions more accessible/inclusive?

Out of the **11 members** who provided written feedback to this question, half stated that no changes were needed. The remaining respondents highlighted areas for improvement, mainly relating to increased funding and greater advertisement of the charity's services.

Since collecting this feedback, The Rainbow Project Rotherham has already taken proactive steps to address these points. They have begun **publishing weekly schedules** on social media to clearly promote their activities and ensure the public is aware of the support and groups available.

"Recommended app through members of TRP so they can keep updated regarding sessions"	"More funding"
"Have more advertisement about it"	"More visible & public spaces"
"More advertising on sessions with in the LGBTQ community & more funding"	"The group is cosy, and accessible so no need to improve"



If you have accessed the "Trans Support Project", how well did you feel your specific needs around gender identity were understood and supported?

We received a number of comments regarding the Trans Support Group, that the Rainbow Project Rotherham offers. Also, **100%** of users answered yes when asked if they felt like their voice was heard when attending the Rainbow Project Rotherhams Advocacy services.

"On a couple of the transgender groups i've attended the people seem very comfortable and willing to talk about their experiences"	"Only been once, but was very helpful"
"Felt very comfortable"	"Very well"
'Good'	'Yes'



What are currently the biggest challenges affecting the LGBTQ+ Community?

"Acceptance"	"Disrespected when out in the community"
"Finding autism LGBTQ+ support groups"	"We don't have enough social groups and outings"
"Abuse, exclusion, discrimination, lack of acceptance"	"Lack of understanding"
"Not enough advertisement around the group"	"Lack of community"
"Still getting homophobia"	"Not enough services"

## Summary of Key Challenges Affecting the LGBTQ+ Community

Feedback from participants highlights a range of ongoing challenges experienced within the LGBTQ+ community. A central theme is the continued struggle for **acceptance**, with several individuals reporting experiences of **abuse, exclusion, discrimination, and homophobia**. Many also felt **disrespected when out in the community**, indicating that stigma in public spaces remains a significant issue.

Another prominent challenge relates to **understanding and awareness** both in general societal attitudes and in relation to specific needs, such as those from autistic LGBTQ+ individuals seeking appropriate support groups. Respondents also expressed concern about a **lack of community connection**, noting that there are **not enough social groups, outings, or services** available to help people feel supported and included.

Communication and visibility were also identified as barriers. Participants mentioned **insufficient advertisement of available groups and services**, which limits awareness and engagement opportunities.

Overall, the responses demonstrate a need for increased acceptance, better community infrastructure, improved visibility of available support, and more accessible, inclusive services tailored to the diverse needs within the LGBTQ+ community.



### What actions could local health and social care organisations take to better support LGBTQ+ people?

"Keep them safe and deal with the issue"	"Fund more services like the rainbow project"
"More awareness, consequences for discrimination that actually happen"	"Learn more about it so they understand and make LGBTQ+ people more comfortable"
"Listen to them. And take their issues seriously"	"Work alongside other LGBTQ services"
"More funding for LGBTQ"	"More services"
"More groups for people to access"	"More Promoting"

Participants highlighted several key areas where local health and social care organisations could improve support for LGBTQ+ individuals. A major priority identified was ensuring **safety and responsive action** when issues of discrimination or harm arise. Respondents emphasised the importance of organisations taking concerns seriously, addressing problems promptly, and ensuring real consequences for discriminatory behaviour.

## Summary

The Rainbow Project Rotherham (TRPR) is a vital community organisation offering inclusive, accessible, and compassionate support to LGBTQIA+ people across Rotherham and the wider South Yorkshire area. Their services range from social groups and wellbeing activities to one-to-one support, advocacy, gender-identity support, hate-crime reporting, and creative or mindfulness-based sessions. The project provides a safe and welcoming space for people of all identities, ages, and backgrounds, including those who may feel isolated, marginalised, or unsure where to seek help.

Through visits to their Knitt Whitt crafting group and their weekly Food Night, it was clear that TRPR excels in creating warm, inclusive environments where people feel comfortable, respected, and able to speak openly. Both groups demonstrated strong community engagement, with attendees describing improved confidence, greater social connection, and enhanced mental and emotional wellbeing as direct outcomes of their involvement.

Many participants highlighted that The Rainbow Project helps them feel part of a community, offering a rare safe space where they can meet like-minded people, express themselves freely, and access compassionate support.

Across both groups, people reported positive personal changes such as reduced loneliness, improved creativity, increased emotional resilience, and greater comfort discussing their identity. One-to-one support was particularly praised for being responsive and tailored to need, while the presence of partner organisations, such as Mesmac delivering sexual-health services during Food Night further demonstrates the project's commitment to holistic wellbeing.

The project also plays an important role in supporting people who have faced discrimination or barriers in healthcare. Some participants reported experiences such as misgendering or a lack of awareness of LGBTQ+ needs in healthcare settings. The Rainbow Project provides these individuals with advocacy,

reassurance, and peer support, helping them navigate difficult systems and develop confidence to seek the care they deserve.

In both practical and emotional ways, The Rainbow Project Rotherham is having a demonstrably positive impact on the people they serve. It offers a lifeline to those struggling with identity, isolation, or access to services, and it strengthens the overall wellbeing, safety, and inclusion of LGBTQIA+ individuals in Rotherham. Through community connection, personalised support, and a truly welcoming culture, TRPR continues to play a central role in improving lives and empowering people across the borough.

## Glossary

- **LGBTQ+:** stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer or Questioning, with the “+” representing other sexual orientations and gender identities that are not specifically listed in the acronym.
- **TRPR:** The Rainbow Project Rotherham
- **Trans/transgender:** is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth. This can include transgender men, transgender women, and non-binary or gender-diverse people who identify outside the traditional male–female categories.
- **Non-binary:** is a term used for people whose gender identity does not fit within the traditional categories of male or female. Non-binary people may identify as both, neither, or somewhere in between, and their gender can be fluid or fixed.
- **Gender fluid:** describes a person whose gender identity or expression changes over time. A gender-fluid person may feel more masculine on some days, more feminine on others, both, neither, or anywhere in between. Their experience of gender is flexible rather than fixed.
- **Pronouns:** are the words we use to refer to someone in place of their name, such as he/him, she/her, or they/them.



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