

No easy path

The realities of LGBTQ+ young people estranged from their families  
**Full Report** April 2026

**Boys Out Here** <sup>TM</sup>

# Contents

01 Introduction

02 Context

03 Methodology

04 Findings

05 Recommendations

# 01 Introduction

This report presents the findings of “Beyond Estrangement”, a research project which was codelivered with estranged young people. With funding from the George Michael Fund via the Talent Fund, the research aimed to explore the role that sexuality and gender identity play in young people’s experiences of estrangement from their families.

An estranged young person is an individual under the age of 25 who has permanently or indefinitely lost contact with their parents or primary caregivers, most often following prolonged experiences of abuse, neglect, family conflict, or coercive control. Estranged young people live independently without meaningful financial, emotional or social support from their family network. This absence of support leaves them particularly vulnerable to homelessness, exploitation, and trauma,

yet - unlike young people who have been formally taken into care - they often fall outside the scope of statutory or institutional support systems.

Buttle estimates that there are at least 200,000 estranged young people in the UK, though this is likely to be a conservative estimate. As our previous report, *Surviving Estrangement*, demonstrated, these young people face a multitude of practical and emotional challenges which impact every facet of their lives. Despite this, there are very few organisations in the UK providing targeted support to estranged young people, and even less understanding of how different identities shape lived experiences of estrangement and support.

In response to this gap, with funding from the George Michael Fund via the Talent Fund, we undertook this

research to explore the role that sexuality and gender identity play in experiences of estrangement, as evidence suggests that LGBTQ+ young people are at heightened risk of becoming estranged from their families.

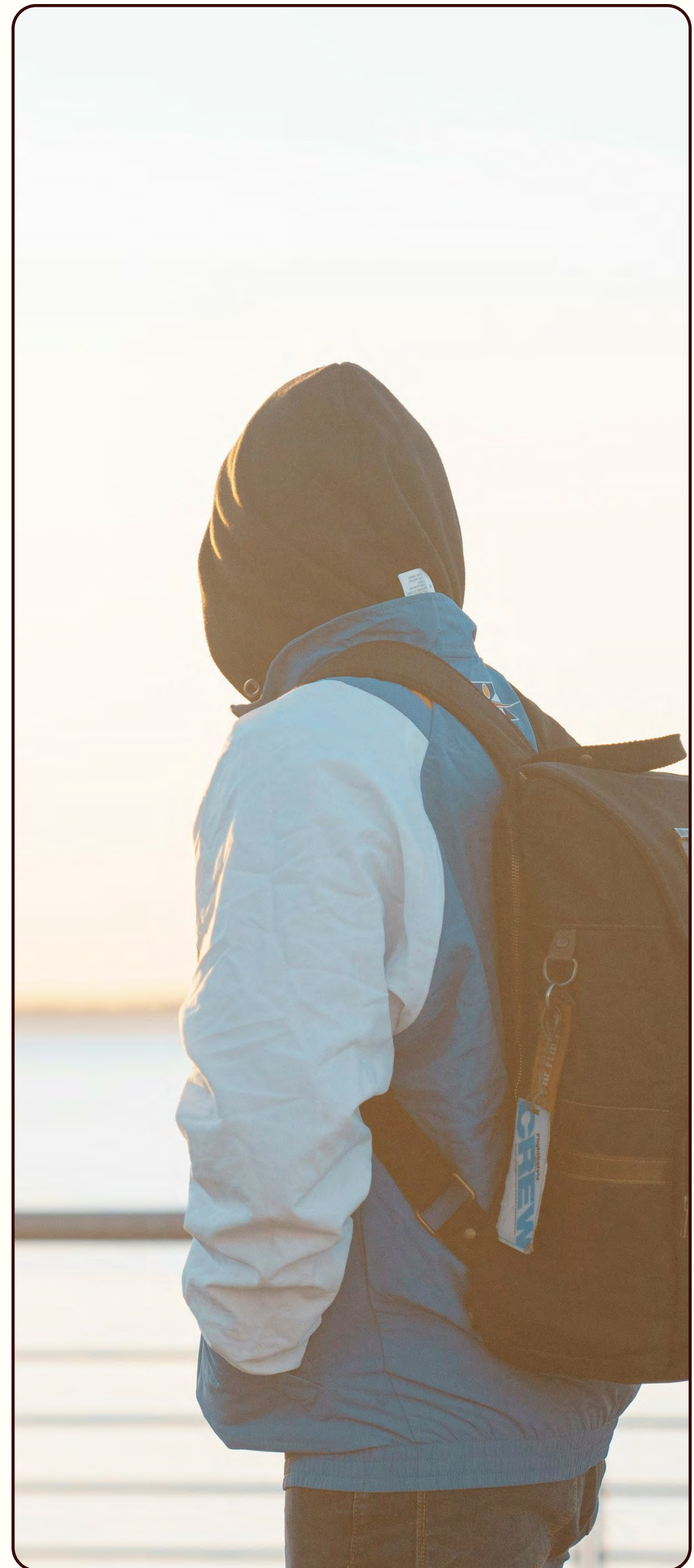
Buttle is hugely indebted to the six young peer researchers who codelivered this project with us. They drew on their own lived experiences to undoubtedly make this a much stronger, richer and impactful piece of research than we could otherwise have delivered.

<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Buttle UK (2023), [Surviving Estrangement](#)

<sup>2</sup> ‘We’ in this report refers to Buttle and the members of the young people steering group



# 02 Context

Estranged young people are not a single, homogeneous group, and evidence suggests that LGBTQ+ young people face distinct and heightened risks of family rejection, stigma, and alienation.

As early as 2015, Stand Alone and Unite Foundation identified family rejection related to being LGBTQ+ or transgender as a common driver of estrangement<sup>3</sup>. More recent research from Just Like Us found that nearly a third of LGBTQ+ young people are not confident that their parents or guardians would have a positive response to them coming out<sup>4</sup>. The same research shows that LGBTQ+ young people are twice as likely to report not being close to their families, and that this lack of closeness often continues into adulthood, with nearly half estranged from at least one family member. For trans and nonbinary young adults, these disparities are even more pronounced.

Many estranged young people experience forms of homelessness, which includes sofa surfing, staying temporarily with friends

24%

of young people experiencing homelessness identify as LGBTQ+.

or extended relatives, or sleeping rough. Research by akt shows that LGBTQ+ young people are disproportionately affected by youth homelessness. Even excluding 'hidden' homelessness<sup>5</sup> - those not known to services and therefore not visible in the statistics - 24% of young people

experiencing homelessness identify as LGBTQ+. The primary reasons they cite include family issues (29%), being kicked out (20%), and not feeling safe at home (22%). Many also reported feeling dismissed, devalued, or misgendered while seeking help.

Taken together, this evidence points to a clear need for research that centres LGBTQ+ experiences of estrangement, including recognising how sexuality and gender identity intersect with stigma, safety, and access to support. This research therefore adopts an explicitly intersectional approach, foregrounding the voices of LGBTQ+ estranged young people in order to deepen understanding of their specific experiences and to inform more inclusive policy and practice responses.

---

<sup>3</sup> Stand Alone and Unite Foundation (2015), [New Starts – The Challenges of Higher Education without the support of a family network](#)

<sup>4</sup> Just Like Us (2023), [Positive Futures](#)

<sup>5</sup> akt (2024), [In conversation with akt](#)

# 03 Methodology

## 3.1 Coproduced research approach

This research was coproduced with a steering group of six young people, aged 19-22, with lived experiences of estrangement. Five of them also identify as LGBTQ+. The group were recruited from our network of young people who have received one of our [Chances for Children grants](#). From the start, the project was designed to ensure that estranged young people were not only participants, but research partners who drew on their lived experiences to shape the questions, language and methods.

Embedding coproduction strengthened both the quality and ethics of the research. The steering group met regularly throughout the research process to:

- Refine the research questions
- Support the development, design and testing of our research tools
- Receive comprehensive training in research ethics and methods
- Advise on how to make the language and process inclusive to estranged young people from a wide range of backgrounds, gender identities and sexual orientations
- Sense check our interpretations of the findings and recommendations

Members of the steering group also led the one to one interviews and focus groups. Their involvement was crucial for creating safer, more trusting spaces for participants to share difficult experiences of estrangement, identity and support, which was key to gathering rich, honest data.

## 3.2 Research Questions

The project explored the following five research questions:

- What factors contribute to the estrangement of LGBTQ+ youth, and how do religion, race and ethnicity shape these experiences?
- How do LGBTQ+ youth navigate life after estrangement, and what coping strategies do they use to manage stigma, stereotyping and emotional challenges?
- What challenges do estranged LGBTQ+ youth face in accessing education, accommodation, and social integration, and how do these barriers impact their longterm wellbeing?
- How effective are existing support systems, including LGBTQ+ and estrangement charities, in meeting the needs of estranged LGBTQ+ youth?
- How does navigating support systems affect LGBTQ+ youth, and what policy or systemic changes could improve their experiences?



## 3.3 Data collection

The study used a mixed-methods design combining a survey, interviews, and focus groups.

We began with an online survey asking questions on the causes of estrangement, the emotional and practical challenges, and experiences of accessing support. We received 50 responses from young people aged between 16-23, with a high proportion in higher or further education<sup>6</sup>. Participants reflected a wide diversity of LGBTQ+ identities:

This diversity of gender identities and sexual orientations highlights that LGBTQ+ estranged young people are not a homogeneous group. The high proportion of trans and non-binary respondents in particular suggests that these groups may face heightened risks of estrangement, reinforcing the need for support services to respond to a wide range of identities and experiences rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach.

Survey participants were recruited through Buttle's network of grantees and through partner organisations supporting estranged LGBTQ+ young people.

The survey was followed by ten online interviews with LGBTQ+ estranged young people to dig deeper into the drivers behind and their experiences of estrangement, including navigating life afterwards and how they felt about the support they did (or didn't) receive.

We then ran two focus groups, aiming to bridge the gap between the problems and the solutions by exploring ideas for improving policy and practice for LGBTQ+ estranged young people and asking what needs to change. One was in-person in Cardiff, hosted by Llamau<sup>7</sup> (with four participants from their local network), and one was online in partnership with akt<sup>8</sup> (with six participants recruited from their UK-wide network).

### Gender identity:

- 46% women
- 28% men
- 22% non-binary
- 6% other
- 6% genderfluid
- 2% agender
- 42% identified as transgender (a gender different from that assigned at birth)

### Sexual orientation:

- 34% bisexual
- 20% lesbian
- 18% queer
- 16% gay
- 12% other
- 10% asexual
- 6% pansexual

---

<sup>6</sup> This was partly due to the application process for FE and HE being a key way in which young people identified as estranged, and partly due to the survey being included in the Unite Foundation newsletter, which is for estranged students and graduates.

<sup>7</sup> [Llamau](#) is a charity based in Wales that supports young people, women, and children at risk of homelessness. It provides safe accommodation, support, and training to help build confidence and open paths to brighter futures. It also operates Tŷ Pride, Wales' first dedicated 24-hour accommodation and support project for homeless LGBTQ+ young people.

<sup>8</sup> [akt](#) is the national LGBTQ+ youth homelessness charity, supporting queer young people aged 16-25 who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. It helps them find safety, security, and pathways to independence and fulfilment.

## 3.4 Data analysis

Quantitative survey data was analysed for descriptive patterns to identify demographic trends, reasons for estrangement, challenges faced, and perceived accessibility and usefulness of support.

Due to the relatively small sample size, we have not reported on percentages to avoid making sweeping generalisations. However, we will be transparent about respondent numbers and proportions as a snapshot to help contextualise and reinforce the themes identified.

Thematic analysis was used for interview and focus group data, with the themes organised under the five research questions. The steering group validated the emerging themes to ensure authenticity, and that they aligned with their own interpretations from the research. They also drew on their own experiences of estrangement to aid understanding of some of the nuances of the experiences that young people shared through the survey.

## 3.5 Ethics and safeguarding

The research followed our organisational safeguarding and data protection policies, with risk assessments approved by senior leadership. Participants provided informed consent and were reminded of their right to withdraw at any stage. Focus group participants agreed to maintain confidentiality. A designated safeguarding officer was on call throughout all research activities, and staff from Llamau and akt supported wellbeing during and after sessions. The young researchers received comprehensive training in ethics, including how to manage difficult scenarios. A member of staff was always present to support during data collection, as well as to check in with the young researcher before and after each session.

# Findings

# 04 Findings

The findings of this research largely align with those presented in [Surviving Estrangement](#), yet they highlight that LGBTQ+ young people encounter additional, complex challenges stemming from professionals' insufficient understanding of their unique experiences and ability to provide appropriate support. This section therefore discusses many barriers that all estranged young people face, as well as drilling down into how each of these are exacerbated by inadequate support and responses to young people's LGBTQ+ identities. It is organised under four headings which align with our research questions:

- Drivers and enablers of estrangement
- Life after estrangement
- Accessing support
- Experiences of support

## 4.1 Drivers and enablers of estrangement

Estrangement among LGBTQ+ young people is rarely caused by a single incident. It emerges as a complex and diverse experience, shaped by multiple, compounding factors.

Emotional or physical harm was the most common and primary driver of estrangement, reported by the majority of survey respondents. Young people spoke about making the decision to leave home for their own personal safety, after years of abuse and coercion from family members. Sexuality and gender identity often played a central or intersecting role that intensified patterns of control, abuse, or rejection within the family. For many LGBTQ+ young people, attempts by family members to suppress their identity were bound up with wider patterns of emotional harm, coercion and fear.

“I was definitely under pressure from my parents to hide both my sexuality and gender identity. And part of the way I was being threatened was linked to that. So the whole idea that there would be bad consequences if I told people or even if I talked to LGBTQ people. I wasn't allowed to do that.”

Interviewee

For these young people, estrangement was often an act of self-protection after prolonged exposure to harmful environments. For others, however, estrangement was not a choice, but something that was forced upon them as

a direct consequence of disclosing their sexuality or gender identity to their family members. These young people described being rejected, pushed out, or cut off by their families after coming out, often abruptly and with little warning.

“I came out as transgender and it did not go well. Everything was fine and then I came out as transgender and demisexual and it felt like a coin was flipped because it changed everything.”

Interviewee

These experiences were often closely tied to families' cultural or religious beliefs, where traditional values shaped expectations around gender, sexuality and life choices. Survey respondents pointed to religious beliefs within their family or community, cultural expectations connected to racial or ethnic background, and negative messages about LGBTQ+ identities circulating within both religious teachings and community attitudes as influencing their estrangement. For some, these belief systems were used to justify control, punishment, or rejection, creating an environment in which being open about their identity felt unsafe or impossible. These findings align with wider research which has shown that LGBTQ+ individuals from a religious or culturally conservative background are twice as likely to feel suicidal as the result of a negative coming out experience to their parents compared to their LGBTQ+ peers<sup>9</sup>.

Participants also spoke about factors which enabled them to leave their families. The transition to university offered distance, independence and access to both accommodation and financial support, enabling young people to leave harmful family environments.

University also provided affirming communities and social networks, including LGBTQ+ groups and supportive friendships.

“I don't think I would have been able to become estranged if I hadn't left for university. The distance between me and my parents and relatives, because I managed to move to a different city, was really important. University was my way out I guess you could say.”

Interviewee

These experiences show how the structural enablers that university can provide, including education, housing, financial support and supportive communities, are critical in giving young people the space and resources to establish that initial safety and autonomy.

LGBTQ+ young people described a range of other environmental and personal factors that enabled them to make the extremely difficult decision to leave their families. New social environments, such as LGBTQ+

friendly clubs and community organisations offered a freedom and affirmation that contrasted sharply with home life. Some discovered LGBTQ+ inclusive churches and religious communities, which was especially meaningful if previously religion had been a source of tension or exclusion. Milestones such as becoming eligible for financial support, securing a job, entering nurturing relationships, falling in love, and caring for pets were all described as moments that built self-confidence and determined the decision to separate from harmful family environments.

---

<sup>9</sup> Naz and Matt Foundation (2020), The Impact of Coming Out to Religious Parents.

## 4.2 Life after estrangement

Estrangement is a pivotal life event that carries long-lasting effects. In many cases, it can signify freedom from abusive and harmful family environments, as well as bring relief, self-discovery and confidence in identity. However, it also introduces many new practical and emotional challenges that continue well into adulthood.

In the survey, LGBTQ+ young people identified ongoing challenges across mental health and wellbeing, financial independence, safe and stable housing, education or training, healthcare access, emotional support and community, and experiences of discrimination or stigma. On a scale of 1 (not a challenge) to 10 (a major challenge), all areas scored above the midpoint on average, highlighting the significant and overlapping barriers faced by LGBTQ+ estranged young people.

Mental health was consistently identified as a significant challenge by participants, both for estranged young people in general, and for LGBTQ+ young people specifically.

The impact of childhood trauma and years of abuse created significant mental health challenges for young people. On top of this, young people had to deal with the strain of estrangement and the practical and emotional challenges this brings. These factors combined meant that mental health emerged as a major concern, and one of the biggest challenges facing estranged young people in general. Many described the hidden nature of their challenges, appearing fine on the outside but struggling on the inside.

“Because I’m a very young adult, who is also very independent and ‘put-together’, a lot of people think I receive financial support from my parents and still live with them. It can be difficult for people to understand the extremity of my situation and the fact that I’m doing all of this on my own.”

Survey respondent

While this finding is consistent with our previous research, young people involved in this study highlighted the additional mental health challenges faced by LGBTQ+ estranged young people. Trans young people in particular highlighted the impact of gender dysphoria on their wellbeing, and coming to terms with their LGBTQ+ identity could be a challenge for young people, especially if they had been explicitly rejected or abused by their family because of this. This often led to internalised feelings of guilt and shame, which in turn led to some continuing to hide who they really were for fear of rejection, particularly among close friends where the stakes were high.

“It took me until a couple of months ago to come out to the rest of my friends even though I knew they were LGBTQ. Just because the fact that my own family were not accepting, it made me so nervous.”

Interviewee

Despite these long-term impacts on their mental health, many participants reported that their wellbeing had improved following their estrangement from their families, as they were no longer in abusive, harmful or coercive family environments. For LGBTQ+ young people, this was further improved by their ability to be who they were born to be, explore their identity and be accepted by others.

“I was finally able for the first time in my life to, like, truly present in the way that I wanted to. And, like, I got my first proper girlfriend, and then I kind of started experimenting with my queerness in terms of how I dress and things like that.”

Interviewee

Another key challenge LGBTQ+ young people faced following their estrangement was financial and housing insecurity. Many young people this age rely on their parents for support while at college, university and taking their first steps into work. Estranged LGBTQ+ young people do not have this safety net and as a result are particularly vulnerable at key transition points. Lack of supported accommodation, self-contained flats and accessible housing for young people often means they are stuck in temporary or precarious living arrangements following their estrangement, which in turn creates issues in accessing support from their local authority (as it keeps changing) and other organisations. Similar risks arise when moving between different stages of education, or when looking for

work. Young people also spoke about housing as not feeling very safe or inclusive because it did not account for their LGBTQ+ identity, or the fact they were disabled.

Some described entering further abusive or unsafe living situations in order to avoid homelessness following their estrangement, or after graduation.

“When I first became estranged, I was staying with my boyfriend at the time. He was quite abusive, but I stayed with him so I had somewhere to stay. And then for a bit I was homeless.”

Interviewee

“Undergoing internships and work placements over the summer has been very difficult due to unstable housing. This lack of experience has made it more challenging trying to secure graduate employment.”

Survey respondent



Education was another area of LGBTQ+ young people's lives that was impacted by estrangement. Participants described the impact of estrangement on their mental health, housing and financial security placing a strain on their ability to attend and succeed in education. Those who successfully progressed onto university described intense pressure to plan ahead in order to reduce the risk of experiencing homelessness or acute poverty when they graduated.

was their relationships with friends and support networks. Some described losing their support networks when they left their families. Others explained that their friends' lack of understanding about their experiences and - in particular - the permanency of their estrangement, created a sense of isolation and loneliness. Social relationships can be strained when friends cannot relate to the lack of family support, and family holidays such as Christmas or Easter can feel particularly isolating.

new support networks amongst the LGBTQ+ community at university or in their local area through LGBTQ+ specific services, clubs and support groups. Simply knowing that others have faced similar challenges can be profoundly validating.

"I had to be 100 steps in front of other people who weren't estranged because I had nothing to fall back on. And I think that was the worst part. Being estranged in the final year of university is not for the faint-hearted. I was working overtime and it was just awful."

Interviewee

"I think it was lonely for me psychologically because no one could quite understand how I was feeling and my particular situation, or like the depth of it."

Interviewee

"For people that haven't got a family to rely on or know, finding their identity is difficult. Discovering you are "different" to everyone else can also have these feelings of isolation. It's important for these people to know there are other people in the situation - the more personally relevant the better (estranged LGBTQ specifically)."

Survey respondent

The final key area in which estrangement impacted LGBTQ+ young people's lives

However, some participants reported receiving good support from friends and their families during and after their estrangement, including letting them live with them temporarily or storing their belongings. Many also described finding

## 4.3 Accessing support

LGBTQ+ estranged young people described a range of barriers to accessing support following their estrangement. Many of these were similar to those reported by young people in our Surviving Estrangement report, but LGBTQ+ young people face an additional set of barriers resulting from a lack of specialist support and understanding of issues relating to sexuality and gender identity.

The main barrier LGBTQ+ estranged young people identified in accessing appropriate support was a lack of understanding of “estrangement”, amongst young people themselves as well as professionals and services.

Many LGBTQ+ young people reported that they did not learn the term “estrangement” until they were actively seeking practical support (such as applying for student finance or university accommodation), despite having already lived through the experience, sometimes for many years. This echoes the findings of our Surviving Estrangement report.

“The term estrangement only came up to me when I was applying for university. Because I worked out, on college forms or university forms, there isn’t really a box for my situation. It was through working with a charity, they helped me identify that’s the term that would apply.”

Interviewee

Similarly, the lack of understanding about estrangement and its impacts amongst professionals creates barriers to support for young people. LGBTQ+ young people gave examples of professionals assuming that their separation from their family was temporary, that they had chosen to leave their family and could return if they wanted to, or that their lack of family support was their own fault. Even when young people received good support, they described a subconscious stigma or expectation amongst professionals or even their peers

that one day they will rejoin family and go back to how things were.

“What I think organisations and governments and services do not understand is that when, pardon my French, the s\*\*\* hits the fan, I have nowhere else to go. I can’t pack a bag and go and live with my family. Can’t pack up and go and move in with someone. It is all on me and they don’t get it.”

Interviewee



This was further compounded by professionals' lack of understanding of LGBTQ+ issues and the unique needs of this group. This was particularly the case for trans young people, who described experiences of being misgendered and medical professionals in particular as being dismissive of gender dysphoria. Interviewees described experiences of GPs telling them that their dysphoria was just a phase or that it was the result of childhood trauma. Many described the challenges in accessing gender-affirming clinics due to the lack of availability and long waiting lists. They often connected this to the current harmful political and social rhetoric around trans people.

LGBTQ+ young people also pointed to the emotional toll of having to continually explain their estrangement to different professionals and the need to “prove” their estrangement as barriers to support. The challenge in evidencing estrangement for student finance was similarly highlighted by research conducted by Stand Alone and Edge Hill University in 2020<sup>10</sup>. These experiences contributed to the mental load and stress of estrangement for young people in our research, leaving them with little headspace to search for or refer themselves for support. This can leave LGBTQ+ estranged young people stuck in a limbo of poor mental health, with limited capacity to search for or access support.

An overarching theme from the research is that navigating systems of statutory support is challenging for young people who do not have the guidance of their families. None of the government support systems scored particularly well for accessibility in the survey. In particular, housing support was identified as both a critical need and yet the hardest to access by survey respondents. Findings across all the research activities highlighted challenges for young people in knowing who to go to for help, how systems and services work, what support they are entitled to and how to access this. Young people shared how having a professional to advocate on their behalf and help navigate complex systems was very valuable.

Benefits and other financial support can be a lifeline for LGBTQ+ estranged young people, but they often face considerable barriers accessing them. Many spoke about the challenges of accessing benefits, again due to work coaches not believing their situation. Some participants specifically spoke about PIP being difficult to access due to long waits, lots of paperwork and having to relive the trauma of what led to their estrangement to qualify.

“...especially the government, they should not be directing problems in society towards transgender people, we are humans just like everybody else and the problems in society aren't our fault.”

Survey respondent

“Had very unhelpful conversations from professionals who are obviously still struggling with the stigma of estrangement and cannot advise. Many expect some kind of justification for the estrangement before they can accept and support this decision.”

Survey respondent

Mental health services were particularly difficult for LGBTQ+ estranged young people to access, especially for those with severe mental health challenges or who had experienced significant trauma. Young people described long waiting lists or only being able to access short interventions which did more harm than good. Survey respondents ranked mental health as their most pressing challenge, but only just over half had received support for this.

“I'm disabled and unfit for work, so trying to get UC to give me that unfit for work label was a long and arduous process.”

Survey respondent

Many of the young people involved in this research were students who were unable to claim benefits due to being in full-time education. This appears to be based on the assumption that students have family support and are living at home. As a result, LGBTQ+ estranged students described having to use almost their entire maintenance loan to pay their rent, which meant working long hours on top of their studies to afford day-to-day living costs. This was particularly challenging for those who were studying intensive courses such as medicine. Consequently, this financial restriction may restrict LGBTQ+ estranged young people's aspirations or goals, either because they decide they cannot afford to stay in fulltime education, or because it pushes them into part-time or less intensive courses.

Education providers and statutory services often lack a consistent, whole-organisation approach to supporting LGBTQ+ estranged young people. For example, young people involved in the research had very mixed experiences of accessing support from their universities and colleges. Some received hardly any help, while others had very committed and supportive student

welfare teams who not only provided practical and emotional support after their estrangement, but in some cases helped them plan and take steps towards leaving their abusive family home. A few received strong support from some individuals or teams (for example, personal tutors), but experienced challenges and blocks when trying to access support from others (such as student accommodation leads). Those with multiple and intersecting protected characteristics were less likely to report receiving good support from their education provider.

“I guess what I’m trying to say is that even if universities sort of say they’re supportive, they’re not always necessarily. For example, with stuff that’s more intersectional in that if you, like, have disabilities and you’re estranged then it becomes more of an issue.”

Interviewee

These experiences show that access to support is a postcode lottery for estranged young people, and even more so for those who identify as LGBTQ+, as specialist services and community organisations have lost funding and support has become more limited. A young person's opportunity to access good support is dependent on the availability and quality of local support and services. Even then, a young person will likely need to be signposted by an education provider or support worker in order to know a service exists. Many never learn about the support available to them or what they are entitled to, so struggle on alone for many years.

---

<sup>10</sup> Bland, B. and Blake, L. (2020) [The difficulty in evidencing family estrangement to attain statutory finance in UK higher education.](#)

## 4.4 Experiences of receiving support

LGBTQ+ estranged young people had mixed experiences of support following their estrangement. This included statutory support, LGBTQ+ specific support, informal support from friends and the wider community, mental health support, support from education providers and financial support.

LGBTQ+ estranged young people often find formal or statutory support to be dismissive, judgemental and difficult to access. This was linked to the stigma around estrangement discussed above, which young people were more likely to experience in statutory services. In addition, young people found that services often only viewed them as having one issue or identity - for example, as homeless, LGBTQ+, workless or disabled. Consequently, they did not provide holistic support that met their full needs. Some also spoke about a lack of cultural awareness or sensitivity amongst professionals working at these services, and assumptions being made about their identity.

“I’d love to see there be more support that’s more culturally aware but also kind of understands that your cultural background can be something lovely even if you’ve dealt with certain difficult experiences because sometimes it’s viewed in a negative way when I actually love where I’m from.”

Interviewee

Poor experiences of statutory support can lead to estranged young people subsequently not seeking support when they need it. A few gave examples of this – they felt rejected, treated poorly or stigmatised by services, so then assumed there was no point trying to access support for years afterwards. This was especially the case for healthcare, housing and benefits.

“Because of that experience with CAMHS, I shut down any other help. I wouldn’t do any counselling. I wouldn’t do any services and stuff like that for years.”

Interviewee

Generally, participants reported that voluntary and charity organisations often provided better quality support and less judgement than statutory services. They highlighted welcoming and person-centred approaches as key to this.

“I accessed a local mental health charity 2 years after my experience, it was very welcoming and supportive. I found it much better than services such as CAMHS, where I felt like a case, not a person.”

Interviewee



In particular, LGBTQ+ estranged young people valued professionals and organisations with a deep understanding of the issues affecting them and who could help them grapple with the intersection of challenges they faced as, for example, a LGBTQ+, estranged, disabled young person. Charities such as akt, Galop, Mermaids and local LGBTQ+ centres were all given as examples of services which provide person-centred, trauma-informed and intersectional support.

Despite this, young people reported a mixed experience of receiving support from LGBTQ+ organisations. In the survey, LGBTQ+ organisations were one of the least accessed types of support amongst young people. However, those who did access this help found it quite useful. Similarly, some interviewees found LGBTQ+ organisations very useful, especially when exploring their gender identity and sexual orientation. However, others found that the support available was limited, while some explained that they did not feel the need to access LGBTQ+-specific support, as it was not a core part of their identity. This may explain why survey respondents also did not seek out this support.

“I never went to any sort of organisation about, you know, LGBT plus like that. It was just kind of something I dealt with on my own. I didn’t see it as a big deal.”

Interviewee

Informal support from friends and community was often more important and helpful to LGBTQ+ estranged young people than formal services. This was flagged in both the survey and qualitative research activities. Many talked about the importance of support networks of other young people with similar experiences, to help them find a sense of belonging and acceptance. In turn, this greatly improved their wellbeing. The LGBTQ+ community was often also talked about as supportive of young people’s estranged status, as they do not make assumptions about individuals’ relationship with their birth families.

“So if I’m going into a group of straight people or Indian people, I feel like me being estranged, it’s going to be a big deal. But if I’m in a group of queer people, I think they’re much more accepting and they understand that families come in all different shapes and sizes and sometimes families are awful.”

Interviewee

Some interviewees had good support from friends and their families during and after estrangement. They often provided practical help, for example, with moving house or offering somewhere temporary to live. However, young people often described feeling guilty or out of place when receiving this help from peers and their families. This support was also limited in tackling long-term challenges, especially in terms of financial hardship, housing insecurity and severe mental health issues.



“...if I was staying at a friend’s family’s house, they would be so nice to me, but I would still feel like they wouldn’t quite understand how much I was struggling... [and] I just felt awful the whole time.”

Interviewee

the interviews of needing someone “in your corner”, who they could talk to about everyday things and provide emotional support when things were difficult. This could be a teacher, lecturer, support worker or an older friend. However, it was often down to luck whether a young person found someone to provide this support.

Where LGBTQ+ young people had received financial support, this made a huge difference to their lives. For example, one interviewee who received support from their work coach to access enhanced benefits due to their disability described no longer needing to access food banks

“I think it just makes a big difference... to have someone who sort of sees you as a whole person, who sees how you’re struggling but also sees what you’re capable of and believes in you... that’s been, like, really crucial and life-changing for me.”

Interviewee

on a weekly basis. For students, bursaries and scholarships can be a lifeline. However, these are often not universal - students

have to apply for schemes such as the Unite Foundation’s accommodation bursary and they are very competitive. Bursaries from individual universities and student finance also help but young people described how these were often not enough to live on.

Religious support was ranked as least helpful by survey respondents, which possibly reflects the tensions between faith communities and LGBTQ+ identities, and how that can shape experiences of estrangement.

Mentors and trusted adults were important for LGBTQ+ estranged young people, who often have little in the way of support networks. There was a strong theme in

## Steering group reflections on the findings

Members of the Young Person Steering Group shared their reflections on the report’s findings and highlighted areas they felt deserved further attention. They emphasised the importance of recognising physical as well as mental health impacts of estrangement, noting the link between experiences of trauma, strain and risky behaviours.

The group also reflected on the idea of rebuilding relationships with family members later in life. For some this may be the right thing, and should they choose to reconnect, there should be support available that does not automatically risk the financial assistance they are entitled to.

However, the group also raised the issue of assumptions around family reconciliation, where there can be the expectation, either directly or indirectly, that estrangement is temporary and that the young person will one day return to their family. For some, the emotional impact or damage may be too great to safely return.

The group highlighted the importance of shifting the perspective to view estrangement through the eyes of the young person, acknowledging the emotional harm they have experienced and the challenges they face, rather than framing it as a temporary situation to be “fixed”.

# Recommendations

# 05 Recommendations

The findings of this research show that the key drivers of challenges faced by LGBTQ+ estranged young people are similar to those faced by all young people who are estranged from their families; namely, the lack of recognition and understanding from professionals and services, and the lack of entitlement to additional support. To address this, Buttle repeats its recommendations from our Surviving Estrangement report for:

- 1. The Government to adopt a single, statutory definition of estrangement which legally recognises this cohort of young people as a group in need of local and national support across social care, education, health, welfare and housing.**

We recommend the government adopt this definition of estrangement, which draws on the insights from our steering group, the young people who took part in this research and our experience of providing grants to estranged young people:

The government should adopt this and place a legal duty on statutory services across social care, education, health, welfare and housing to have processes in place to recognise and support estranged young people.

“An estranged young person is an individual under the age of 25 who has permanently or indefinitely lost contact with their parents or primary caregivers, most often following prolonged experiences of abuse, family conflict, coercive control and/or family rejection because of belonging to the LGBT community. Estranged young people live independently without meaningful financial, emotional or social support from their family network. This absence of support leaves them particularly vulnerable to homelessness, exploitation, and trauma, yet - unlike young people who have been formally taken into care - they often fall outside the scope of statutory or institutional support systems.”

## 2. The Government to establish an entitlement to statutory support for estranged young people across social care, education, health, welfare and housing.

Following the adoption of a single, statutory definition of estrangement, the government needs to establish an entitlement to statutory support for estranged young people and clear responsibilities for delivering this support across education, health, welfare and housing.

This should be backed up by policy which grants similar entitlements to support to estranged young people as care leavers. This will recognise the shared vulnerabilities and challenges of both groups, and acknowledge that the loss of parental support, regardless of the mechanism, creates a profound need for state intervention to ensure stability and opportunity. Young people themselves called for parity in the rights and entitlements to statutory and wider support between estranged and care experienced young people.

This entitlement should include:

- Financial support, such as the “setting up home” allowance for care leavers
- Access to a social worker who can guide them through the systems and services they need to navigate to access support
- Access to appropriate housing and related support
- Ringfenced jobs, scholarships, grants and schemes to support progression into education and employment, such as the civil service scheme for care leavers.
- Intensive mental health support and trauma-informed care to overcome the impacts of the events leading up to and the challenges resulting from their estrangement
- Transition support before, during and after key times of changes for young people, such as when they first become estranged, towards the end of school, college and university, when starting work or moving jobs.
- The entitlement to Pupil Premium at school, in the same way as looked after and previously looked after children.
- Flexibility on benefits and welfare support, for example, entitlement to the 25+ age bracket of Universal Credit, being able to claim benefits while in education or training, support with costs of job searching and starting work.
- Signposting to LGBTQ+ specific support and advice from specialist organisations and professionals.

In addition to our previous recommendations, Buttle recommends the following actions to improve support for estranged young people. These recommendations embed the need for targeted support for LGBTQ+ young people, recognising their heightened risk of becoming estranged and the additional barriers they face in accessing appropriate support:

### 3. For a clear, straightforward way of proving that a young person is estranged to be developed and adopted by professionals.

Estranged young people need an assessment process, similar to the [MACA-YC18](#) assessment for young carers, to demonstrate that they are estranged from their families. This process should be straightforward and carried out by a suitable professional, such as a social worker, teacher, youth worker or other support worker who knows the young person's home life. The assessment should ask sensitive questions about young people's protected characteristics - including their gender

identity and sexuality - and the additional, tailored support they may require to overcome the complex challenges that they are experiencing.

If a young person is assessed as being estranged from their family, they should then be entitled to the statutory support outlined in the previous recommendation. LGBTQ+ young people should also be signposted to specialist support from an LGBTQ+ group or organisation. The outcome of

the assessment should also enable young people to prove their estrangement to different services and organisations, without the need to repeat their story over and over.

This assessment could be developed by an organisation such as Buttle or the Unite Foundation, who both have significant experience of working with estranged young people.

### 4. For professionals working with young people to receive training on estrangement, to reduce the stigma and judgement they experience when accessing support.

All professionals working in statutory services that routinely support young people at key transition points or in crisis situations should be required to undertake training in what estrangement is, how it impacts young people, and the identification of estranged young people - so the onus is not on them to self-identify. It should also highlight the fact that LGBTQ+ young people are at heightened risk of estrangement and

the impact that family rejection is likely to have in all areas of their lives. This training should be rolled out across the education, welfare, health and housing sectors and be embedded in professional qualifications for public sector roles, especially social workers, teachers and health professionals.

This training should be co-developed with estranged young people and cover the

specific topics and issues that young people feel professionals need to understand in order to provide empathetic and non-judgemental support. This should include LGBTQ+ specific issues such as gender dysphoria and its impacts, the specific risks facing LGBTQ+ young people, and the importance of specialist, tailored support.

## 5. For funders, trusts and foundations to put appropriate funding and support in place for specialist organisations who are best placed to support LGBTQ+ estranged young people.

Our research shows that young people value support from LGBTQ+ specialist organisations who have the knowledge and skills to guide them through the complex challenges they face.

To build the thriving network of specialist voluntary sector organisations that LGBTQ+ estranged young people need, grant makers need to be more intentional in their support for LGBTQ+ young people, regardless of the issue(s) they are aiming to tackle.

To support this, we recommend that an organisation or umbrella body such as the [LGBT+ Consortium](#) develop an audit tool, similar to the [Racial Justice Audit](#) developed by the Funders for Race Equity Alliance, which enables funders to assess how much of their funding goes towards LGBTQ+ organisations and groups.

As a grant-making charity, Buttle will play a key role in encouraging other trusts and foundations to complete the audit tool and take action to ensure that their funding is proportionately attributed to specialist organisations which make a meaningful difference to LGBTQ+ young people's lives.

# Actions for Buttle

As a grant-making charity with funding and resources, Buttle is also taking away a set of actions from the findings of this research, which we will progress in collaboration with young people and partners across the sector. These actions are:

1. To plan and launch a national awareness raising campaign to boost understanding of and support for estranged young people, and persuade the government to enact the policy asks set out above.

The campaign will:

- Emphasise that estrangement is not a spontaneous, light-hearted decision made by young people; rather, it is a necessary means of self-protection after years of abuse, coercion and control from family members, and is a difficult situation to step into which carries its own significant challenges and risks of harm for young people.
- Emphasise the unique experiences and vulnerabilities of LGBTQ+ young people and those with one or more protected characteristics to estrangement.
- Target health, education, housing, welfare and charity organisations, as well as the general public.
- Highlight links and overlaps between estranged young people and homeless young people, and how homelessness organisations and charities can support the identification of estranged young people.
- Promote greater awareness amongst the general public to enable more young people in unsafe home situations to take steps towards estrangement, if they realise they are not alone and support is available.

## 2. To develop a “quality mark” for organisations offering support to estranged young people.

This will draw on Buttle’s previous Quality Mark for Care Leavers in further and higher education - which has been taken forward by the National Network for the Education

of Care Leavers (NNECL) - and the Stand Alone Pledge, which aimed to improve support for estranged students in further and higher education. The quality mark will

be co-created with estranged young people and set out the standards expected of support, which might include:

- Good practice in outreach and supporting the self-identification of estranged young people
- What a trauma-informed, intersectional and person-centered approach to support for estranged young people looks like
- Training for staff across departments on identifying estranged young people, understanding the needs of those with intersecting identities and protected characteristics, and providing appropriate support and signposting
- Effective ways for estranged young people to disclose their situation, without having to explain their story over and over (for example, an estranged young person ID card or passport)
- The provision of effective transition support to enable estranged young people to safely progress to their next step in education, training or employment

### 3. To lead the establishment of an inclusive advocacy service for estranged young people that can provide advice on accessing support, legal matters and challenging decisions that affect them.

This service should offer:

- A website and phonenumber that estranged young people can use to guide them through what to do when they are first estranged, including how to get housing, what their rights and entitlements are and so on.
- An option to contact organisations, for example, their college, GP or mental health charities, on young people's behalf to tell them that they are estranged and need some additional support.
- Trained peer mentors for estranged young people who can provide support and signposting at challenging times, based on their own lived experiences.

#### 4. To develop a directory or “one stop shop” website for estranged young people, which maps out the support available to them in their local area.

This could include:

- Information on hostels that take young people and on how to contact their local authority housing team, highlighting those which are tailored to the needs of LGBTQ+ young people
- Information on any local charities supporting estranged young people.
- Information on intersectional and LGBTQ+ specific support
- Information on local support services and charities offering help with a range of different issues, such as mental health, housing and benefits.
- Videos and tips on “how to be an adult” – link to existing resources like Youtube Channels ‘How to adult’, ‘Dad, how do I...’, ‘Mum, how do I...’ which teach young people without parent figures how to do practical tasks and live independently.

#### 5. Building on our multi-year grant pilots, to consider how our grant programmes can further support estranged young people at key transition points and over a longer term, to avoid them falling into periods of homelessness and extreme poverty.

6. To be intersectional in our understanding and support of estranged young people, recognising the various drivers of estrangement and the unique barriers to accessing support LGBTQ+ estranged young people may have faced.

Specifically, we will:

- Increase our visibility among specialist LGBTQ+ organisations by carrying out targeted outreach activities, so they are aware of the support we offer.
- Be proudly inclusive, lending our voice to help challenge the harmful political rhetoric faced by trans people, which creates additional barriers to support for an already highly vulnerable group.
- Be vocal and strong in our support of LGBTQ+ young people and take action to ensure our grants and work more widely are inclusive of the LGBTQ+ community.

7. To use our influence in the trusts and foundations sector to encourage other grant-making organisations to act on these recommendations, either in partnership with us or within their own organisations.

CC1.06 Workspace  
Kennington Park  
1-3 Brixton Road  
London  
SW9 6DE

020 7828 3211  
[www.buttleuk.org](http://www.buttleuk.org)

@buttleuk:  
[f](#) [in](#) [@](#) [X](#)

Registered Charity No - 313007  
Scotland - SCO37997

**Buttleuk** <sup>TM</sup>