



SAY IT LOUD CLUB OUR IMPACT 2019-20



AT SAY IT LOUD CLUB, OUR VISION IS FOR A WORLD WHERE LGBTQ+ PEOPLE CAN EXPRESS THEIR SEXUALITY AND GENDER IDENTITY SAFELY AND WITH PRIDE.

UNTIL THIS IS POSSIBLE, WE BELIEVE THE UK SHOULD BE A PLACE OF SAFETY FOR LGBTQ+ REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS, PROVIDING AN ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH EVERYONE CAN FLOURISH AS THEIR TRUE SELF.

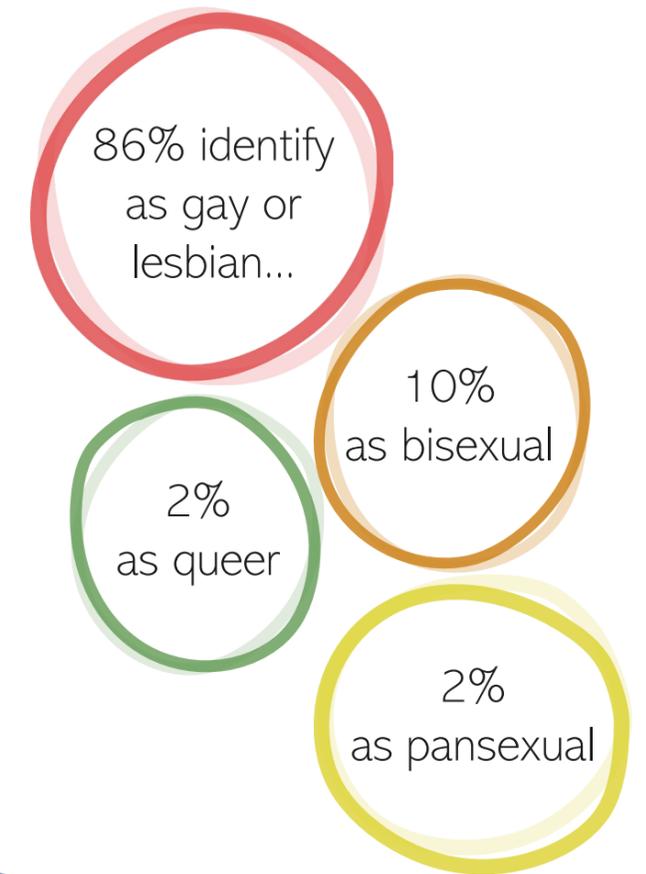
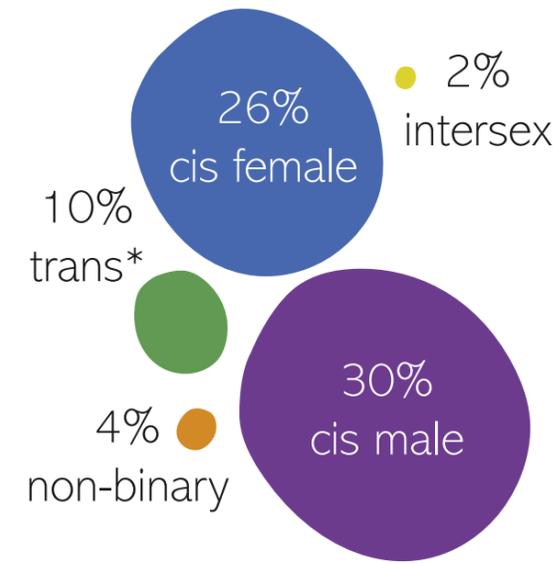


**ALOYSIUS SSALI**

FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF SAY IT LOUD CLUB

# WHO WE ARE

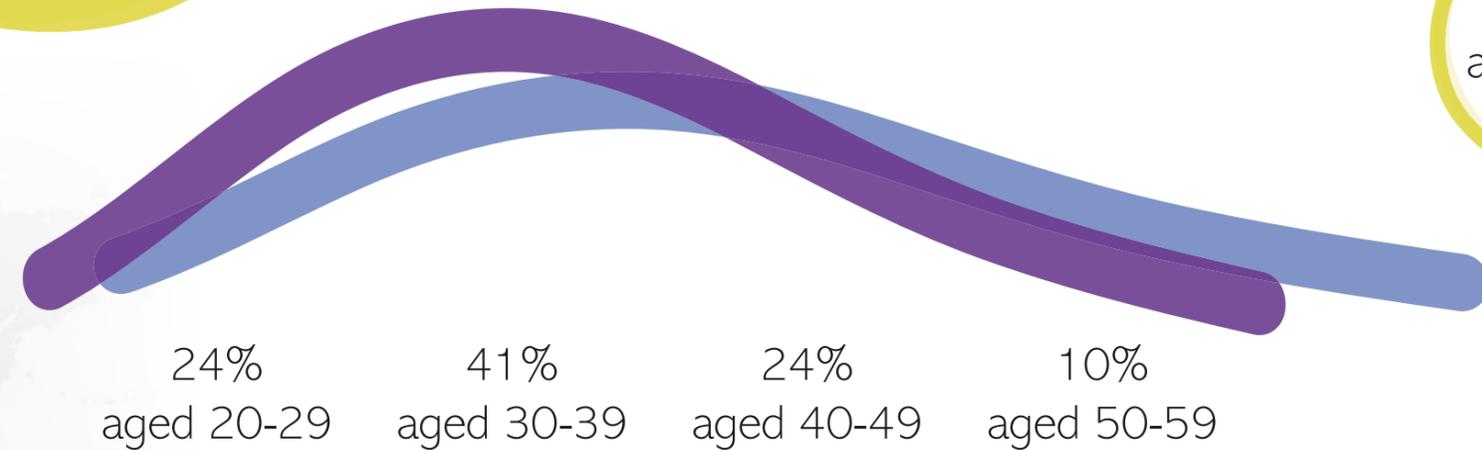
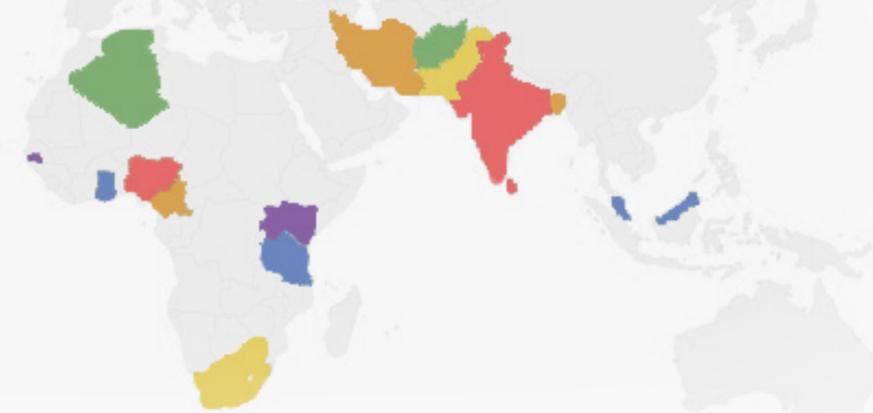
Say it Loud Club is the community of LGBTQ+ refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. We engage with our members through one-on-one mentoring, workshops, social events, peer support, and referral to partner organisations for legal, financial, health and housing support.



250+ MEMBERS

18+ COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

4 CONTINENTS



SAY IT LOUD CLUB HAS HELPED WITH COMING OUT OPENLY ABOUT MY SEXUALITY, CONFIDENCE, AND IMPROVEMENT IN MY HEALTH BOTH MENTALLY AND PHYSICALLY.



# THE NEED FOR SUPPORT

As of April 2019, it was illegal to be gay in 70 countries, and in 12 of these being in a same-sex relationship was punishable by death.

It's becoming harder for LGBTQ+ people to successfully claim asylum in the UK. In 2018, 1502 asylum claims on the basis of sexuality were made in the UK (5% of all claims) and 35% were granted. This is lower than the 44% of total claims which were granted, continuing the trend from 2015-2017 where the rejection rate for LGBTQ+ asylum claims rose significantly more rapidly than that for other asylum claims.

Multiple reports have indicated that asylum claim decisions are being based on stereotypical and discriminatory beliefs. Claims have been rejected because asylum seekers do not have a gay "demeanor" or "effeminate manner". Officials have also asked questions that suggest asylum seekers cannot be both religious and LGBTQ+.

Metro (2019) [Countries around the world where the penalty for being gay is death](#)  
Home Office (2019) [Summary of latest statistics](#)  
Independent (2018) [Number of LGBTQ+ asylum seekers refused by Home Office soars by 52%](#)  
Pink News (2019) [Shadow minister accuses Home Office of 'persecuting' LGBT asylum seekers](#)  
Pink News (2019) ['How can you be lesbian and Christian?' Home Office using religion against LGBT asylum seekers, says report](#)  
Forced Migration Review (2013) [Mental health challenges of LGBT forced migrants](#)  
Each Other (2019) [Do Asylum Seekers Have Free Access To Healthcare In The UK?](#)  
Immigration News (2019) [LGBTQ Asylum Seekers at High Risk of Homelessness](#)  
World Economic Forum (2018) [Forgotten twice: the untold story of LGBT refugees](#)  
Breaking Barriers, [The Refugee Employment Crisis](#)  
Campaign to End Loneliness (2015) [Loneliness is the "biggest challenge" facing refugees and migrants in London](#)

## HEALTH

Many LGBTQ+ refugees have experienced emotional, verbal, physical and sexual violence, and develop complex mental health problems as a result of a lifetime of trauma. Asylum seekers are also at higher risk of specific physical health conditions, yet face many barriers when trying to access help for both mental and physical illnesses.

## HOUSING

LGBTQ+ refugees are at even higher risk of homelessness than the wider refugee population, with only 18 beds available for the 2000 LGBTQ+ refugees arriving each year. LGBTQ+ refugees experience abuse and sexual harassment/assault in provided accommodation due to their identity.

## INTEGRATION AND ISOLATION

The unemployment rate for refugees is over 4x higher than the national average. Research has indicated that over half of refugees think loneliness has been the "biggest challenge" living in the UK. Seeking employment and joining local activities and communities to combat loneliness can be harder for LGBTQ+ refugees due to fear of discrimination because of their identity.

# THIS YEAR...

23

members each month received one-to-one mentoring

2

members each month have been granted asylum

# WE HAVE RUN:

11

free socials, attended by an average of 37 LGBTQ+ refugees

10

free workshops, attended by an average of 51 LGBTQ+ refugees

4

online socials a week during COVID-19 lockdown, attended by 31 LGBTQ+ refugees weekly

# WORKSHOPS:

Cancer Awareness with Doctors of the World

Sexual Health with Black Beetle Health

Building Confidence with Lena Kaur, Public Speaking and Impact Coach

LGBTQ+ Rights in the UK: Past and present

Using Social Media with the Say It Loud Club Comms Team

Legal Aid with SI Legal Services

Community Integration with HostNation and Breaking Barriers

Homelessness and Sexuality with Irish Causeway Housing Association

The Impact of Concealing Your Identity with Aloysius Ssali

Pride and Me: A members' discussion

We have co-hosted 'speed-friending' events with TimePeace, where our members have met, socialised, and skill-swapped with others living in London.



We collaborated with Shado for LGBTQ+ History Month, curating a week of exhibitions and events celebrating the diversity of London's LGBTQ+ community.

# NAZIR

My name is Nazir, I am 21, and I come from Dhaka in Bangladesh. I came to the UK in September 2018.

Living at home, it was like a prison. I was bullied all the time. I couldn't share my feelings with anyone. I felt I was living two different lives. I couldn't walk through the street holding my partner's hand. I couldn't even touch him in public because of the fear of getting us both killed. When I tried to share my feelings with my family members I was beaten.

After I came to the UK my family found out that I was gay and disowned me. If they find me, or if I try to go home, they will kill me. I am taking medication and receiving therapy due to depression caused by these death threats and the uncertainty of my future. I still experience nightmares about what could happen to me, but I wake up and am thankful for having found real safety in the UK.

I have sought asylum, which was very difficult for me because I didn't even know what asylum meant. The whole process was complicated. Without emotional, legal, social, and financial support from Say It Loud Club and other LGBTQ+ organisations I can't even imagine where I would be.

I want to share my story to inspire people. I want to help people to come out and provide support for other LGBTQ+ people.

I am very grateful that God made me gay. I used to tell myself that God was unkind to me, but now I know that he loves me and that's why he gave me this unique orientation. Here in the UK, I realise that being gay is not a curse, it's a gift.



# EMBRACING IDENTITY

LGBTQ+ refugees have often concealed their identities for most of their life, having been told that same-sex attraction and gender non-conformity is wrong, and threatened with violence or abandonment if they reveal who they truly are. A combination of fear and internalised stigma mean that some of our members live for years in the UK without revealing their identities and thus not receiving the specialist help and support that they need.

All of our members receive 1:1 mentoring and informal counselling, helping them to accept and embrace their true selves. We place a strong emphasis on peer support, so new members have role models within the LGBTQ+ refugee community who offer hope and encouragement. Over the last year, we have also hosted discussion-based workshops on themes such as 'coming out', 'the impact of concealing your identity', and 'expressing yourself'.

100%

say they are more comfortable with their sexuality or gender identity since joining Say It Loud Club.

98%

say they are more open about their sexuality or gender identity since joining Say It Loud Club.



SAY IT LOUD CLUB HELPED ME TO UNDERSTAND MY SEXUALITY BETTER AND EMBRACE IT. IT WAS THIS THAT ENABLED ME TO SUCCESSFULLY APPLY FOR, AND BE GRANTED, ASYLUM IN THE UK.

# SEEKING SAFETY

Having fled harrassment, violence, imprisonment, and threats of death in their home countries, our members all seek the security of refugee status in the UK. However, without adequate advice or support, many LGBTQ+ asylum seekers are initially fearful of contacting Home Office. Some aren't aware that applying for asylum on grounds of sexuality is even a possibility. Say It Loud Club refers members to solicitors with expertise in this field, and provide emotional support as they embark on the long, complex journey to being granted refugee status.

Because of their immigration status, LGBTQ+ refugees are vulnerable to falling into dangerous living situations, including street homelessness, exploitation and destitution. We work with housing associations, shelters, food banks, and other aid organisations so that our members can live safely in the UK, in emergencies and in the long-term.

91%

say they feel safer since joining Say It Loud Club.

2

members have been granted asylum each month, on average.

91%

say that Say It Loud Club has helped them on their journey towards being granted asylum.



I WAS STREET HOMELESS FOR OVER FIVE YEARS UNTIL I WENT TO SAY IT LOUD CLUB. THEY HELPED ME TO SECURE ACCOMMODATION AND I FOUND THE COURAGE TO APPLY FOR ASYLUM.



# DIANA

My name is Diana. I live in a government-provided accommodation for asylum seekers in Southall but I'm originally from Kenya.

I fled from my country, where homosexuality is illegal and unacceptable everywhere. My family was very religious and completely opposed my sexuality. They attempted to perform exorcism and traditional healing to fix me. After going through "corrective rape", pregnancy and forced marriage, I decided to flee.

By the time I got to England, I had very low self esteem and confidence because of the trauma that I had gone through. I had come this far and I wasn't going to give up.

Say It Loud Club has helped me gain trust in the community again and I can now embrace my sexuality without fear. In one of our mentor and support sessions, Aloysius encouraged me to speak to a solicitor regarding my situation. I used to find it hard to open up about my past experiences but Say It Loud Club helped me gain courage to confront my issues. I met my solicitor during a social meeting at the Say It Loud Club and she has helped prepare my application at the Home Office and given me information that I might need to explain my claim.

I'll forever be grateful to Aloysius and the entire Say It Loud Club community.



# PROMOTING WELLBEING

The majority of our members arrive in the UK suffering from mental illness, most commonly depression, anxiety, and PTSD. These illnesses are exacerbated by isolation and the stress associated with their living situations and immigration status. Our informal counselling and peer support offer a space for members to voice and process their difficulties. For those who are struggling the most, we can refer to other organisations with specialist knowledge related to our members' experiences.

Our members encounter barriers when trying to get physical healthcare due to fear of being reported to the Home Office, difficulties navigating the NHS, or not having the right paperwork to register with a GP. Together with Doctors of the World, we ensure that all of our members can access both preventative and urgent physical healthcare.

86%

say their physical health has improved since joining Say It Loud Club.



89%

say their mental health has improved since joining Say It Loud Club.

“ SAY IT LOUD CLUB COMFORTED ME WHEN I GOT COVID-19 AND I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO. I WAS PANICKING BUT SAY IT LOUD CLUB PROVIDED ME WITH THE INFORMATION THAT I NEEDED.

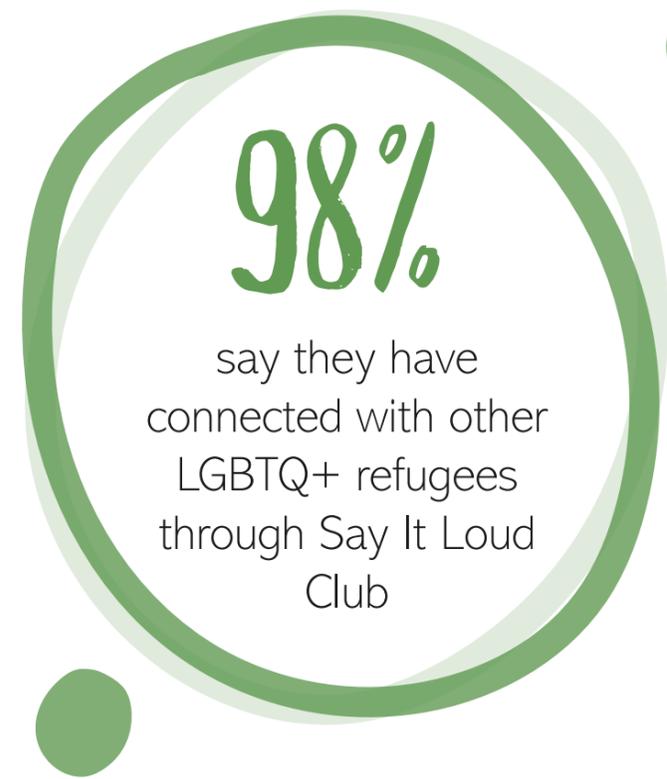
WHEN I FIRST JOINED SAY IT LOUD CLUB, I HAD MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES FROM MY PAST. I WAS ABLE TO RECEIVE COUNSELLING AND SO GAINED CONFIDENCE. THE CLUB IS A FAMILY – WE CAN MEET, TALK ABOUT OUR ISSUES, AND HAVE FUN.

”

# BUILDING NETWORKS

Loneliness and social isolation have a huge impact on the wellbeing of our members. Arriving in an unfamiliar country and having to communicate in an unfamiliar language can be scary for anybody, but is particularly difficult when fearing discrimination due to being a refugee or a member of the LGBTQ+ community.

Our monthly social events are a safe, understanding space for members to connect, share experiences, and discuss issues specific to LGBTQ+ refugees. It is through these socials that members can regain their confidence and build new social networks. Many of our members say that Say It Loud Club has become their new family!



“ SAY IT LOUD CLUB HAS GIVEN ME SO MUCH CONFIDENCE VIA SOCIAL EVENTS, MEETING OTHER MEMBERS, AND BEING ABLE TO SOCIALISE. THIS HAS HELPED ME TO UNDERSTAND THAT I'M NOT AN OUTCAST BUT SOMEONE WITH POTENTIAL.

BEFORE I JOINED SAY IT LOUD CLUB, I WAS VERY LONELY AND IT WAS SO HARD TO ENGAGE IN COMMUNITIES. NOW I AM HAPPIER AND HAVE FRIENDS.

”

# NAZNIN

My name is Naznin, I am a Muslim woman originally from Bangladesh.

Being a woman in my country brings its own challenges, but even the little freedom I had left was taken away and my respect and identity denied because of being a lesbian. Growing up was very tough but I had managed to conceal my sexual identity, gained good grades at University, and even started my own business.

When my sexuality was discovered, my life turned upside down and it became extremely hard to find a safe place to leave. I never thought I could ever leave my country but after realising that my life was in trouble, I fled and came to the UK in March 2014. Everything in the UK was very new to me and it took me years before I opened up to anyone about my troubles. I was lonely and struggled to make friends.

Being a member of Say It Loud Club gave me a good platform to work on my confidence and self-esteem. After a few months, I had become a group volunteer and before long, I was helping other women who had suffered homophobia and telling them the importance of living openly and seeking help. For the first time, I felt that I too was a Londoner and that there was a place for me here.

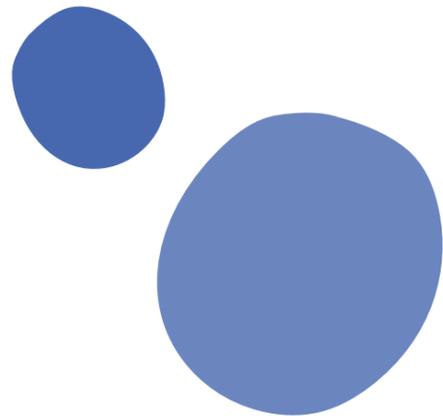
I am incredibly grateful that the UK granted me protection in May 2020, and I am now free. Thank you Say It Loud Club!



# ENCOURAGING INTEGRATION

After the initial period of adjusting to a new country, our members want to lay down the foundations to build a full and purposeful life in the UK. We help our members to find voluntary work whilst they are seeking asylum, and jobs once they have refugee status, by linking them with employment and skill-building mentoring schemes. We also provide many voluntary positions within Say It Loud Club itself, from roles in peer mentoring and translation, to office admin and social media. We are building partnerships with universities and soon hope to provide access to university education for our members who are still in the process of seeking asylum.

We also recognise the importance of refugees feeling at home in their new communities. We co-host events with local organisations so our members can connect with new people outside of Say It Loud Club. For those who are particularly isolated, we work with befriending organisations to slowly grow their social network and confidence until they are able to attend larger events.



89%

say they feel more integrated into everyday life in the UK since joining Say It Loud Club.



SAY IT LOUD CLUB BECAME MY NEW FAMILY WHEN I CAME TO THE UK AND I DIDNT KNOW ANYONE IN THE COUNTRY. WITH THEIR SUPPORT, I WAS GRANTED ASYLUM AND THEY HELPED ME TO INTEGRATE INTO UK SOCIETY.



# ADVOCATING NATIONALLY

We want to promote the rights and wellbeing of all LGBTQ+ refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. We attend a diverse range of events across the country, and work with local and national media outlets, to reach the general public with our messages. As well as Aloysius, our Founder and Director, speaking about his own experiences as an LGBTQ+ refugee, we support our members to share their stories and opinions by running public speaking, writing, self-expression, and social media workshops.

This year, Aloysius and Say It Loud Club members have appeared in the Huffington Post, Glamour Magazine, Artefact, and Shado Magazine, and spoken at events including Cannes Film Festival, UK Black Pride, The Guilty Feminist Podcast, The Secret Policeman's Podcast, and Gurls Talk.

96%

say that Say It Loud Club has helped them to share their experiences with others

50%

of our Board of Trustees are LGBTQ+ refugees.

“ SAY IT LOUD CLUB RESTORES CONFIDENCE AND LOW SELF ESTEEM. SINCE I JOINED I HAVE MORE CONFIDENCE IN SPEAKING ABOUT WHO I AM AND MY LIVED EXPERIENCE.



# ELVIS

My name is Elvis, I am a 62-year-old Nigerian man. I first came to the UK in August 2011, fleeing for my life. Before I came to England, I was living a decent life in Nigeria. I was married but also had a concealed relationship with my same-sex partner. In April 2011, however, our relationship was discovered. My partner got arrested and this was the last time I ever saw him alive.

Fearing for my life, I escaped to the UK with a visitor's visa but when I arrived here, I was suffering from severe trauma. I often felt very paranoid, thinking that those who were persecuting me because of my sexual orientation were everywhere. As my life and general wellbeing deteriorated, I found myself street homeless and spent five years living and sleeping rough around King's Cross station without any hope of recovery. There was a time when I lived for a day and didn't care about the next day.

I reached out to Say It Loud Club and after attending to an appointment, I felt a little shine of hope. I began to take an active engagement in social and educational programmes, through which I regained my confidence and self-esteem, but most important for me was the sense of feeling like I was a human again. For the first time I realised that I didn't have to conceal my sexuality anymore. It was with this confidence and support that I applied for asylum in the UK on grounds of my sexuality.

Fortunately, the Home Office heard my case and granted me asylum in February 2020. I am now able to live my life the way I want without having to worry about those who persecuted me because of my sexual orientation. I want to encourage other people out there who are struggling to come out and seek help. It's a joy to live openly.



This report outlines Say It Loud Club's activities and impact between April 2019 and March 2020.

Statistics derive from a survey of Say It Loud Club members carried out in May 2020, with 51 respondents.



## CONTACT US

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