

LISTEN

UP!

SWITCHBOARD REPORT 2021

“

**WE ARE STILL HERE
LISTENING TODAY,
PROVIDING CALM
WORDS WHEN THEY
ARE NEEDED MOST
SINCE 1974**

”

WELCOME

Switchboard is the national LGBTQIA+ help and support line across the UK. Ever since we took our first call in 1974, we've been at the heart of these communities, and had over 4 million conversations with people who just needed someone to listen. Now, in our 48th year, we are available from 10am - 10pm, 365 days a year, through phone, instant messenger and email.

This impact report is the first of many to come. It will not only provide an insight into what we achieved in 2021, but also reflect on how the unexpected events of 2020 affected the communities we support, and the ways we run our service.

Due to the Covid pandemic, on 24th March 2020, we had to shut our London phone room, and run our support line service remotely for the first time in history. However, we are incredibly proud that, despite

the challenges presented to us, we remained available to support LGBTQIA+ communities in their time of need. This would not have been possible without our extraordinary team of volunteers and highly determined staff team. Everyone's commitment to the charity has been outstanding and allowed our service to keep running. So, we want to thank them for all the time they have given to help us through this difficult period.

Throughout 2020 and 2021, our listening volunteers handled 33,139 conversations. Through these conversations, we saw a noticeable increase in service users contacting us to talk about isolation and gender. Everyone who reaches out to Switchboard with concerns, hopes, and fears, helps to give us a greater understanding of what is happening to LGBTQIA+ people in the UK.

The conversation data that has informed this report is often nuanced and complex, informed directly from what the 'service user' shares with us. For example, conversion practices show up as a series of different behaviours that impact the caller, rarely described as the commonly used term conversion therapy. This is also true for several other topics, such as varying forms of abuse or insecure housing, so often linked to living in an unsafe environment. All the conversations we have with service users at Switchboard cover a many number of issues and this should be taken into consideration when reading this report and the conversation data.

Looking to the future and our upcoming 50th birthday, we are more determined than ever to be here for our communities. In October 2021, we launched a 3-year plan which outlines our commitment to ensure that; **“No contact goes unanswered, and is met with a quality service from volunteers that are reflective of the LGBTQIA+ communities.”**

Now, we invite you to join us on this journey as a volunteer, supporter, or service user. Help us listen and provide calm words when they are needed most.

Stephanie Fuller
General Manager

Tash Walker and Peter Zacaroli
Co-Chairs



WE LISTEN, NO MATTER WHAT



The Covid lockdowns didn't only challenge how we ran our service, but also our ability to recruit new volunteers - which usually included a rigorous 60-hour in-person training course. This meant that from March 2020 to December 2021, we struggled to recruit and train new people, and relied on our existing volunteers to push through the fatigue we all felt to support others in need.

Call data reveals that the listening volunteers who had 18,003 conversations in 2020, were largely the same volunteers who had 15,136 conversations in 2021. These years were incredibly difficult for many

people, and our listening volunteers were no different. So having those thousands of conversations, whilst navigating their own personal experience of living through the pandemic, shows how dedicated our volunteers are to helping others in these communities.

Towards the end of 2021, we introduced a new internal system for logging conversations. Moving forward, this data will give us strong year-on-year comparisons, which will reveal conversation changes over time, as well as capture data for our abandoned contacts.

Over the course of the pandemic, we saw visible spikes in contact which aligned with the national lockdowns. Our call data revealed that in March of 2021, conversations peaked to their highest point for the year.

It has also been possible to draw direct connections between significant events in the media and a rise in contact. For example, when the TV drama, It's a Sin first aired, this led to a rise in callers directly referencing this and HIV/ unresolved trauma. Similarly, when people with large social media followings comment negatively about the rights and experiences of trans and non-binary people, this often resulted in people reaching out to Switchboard for support.

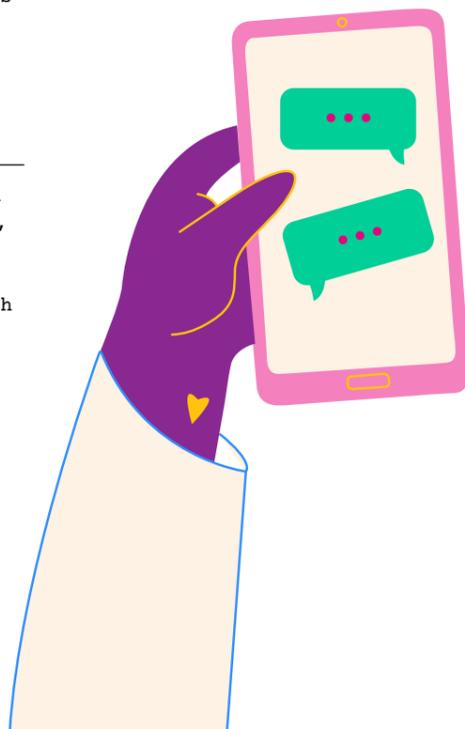
In February 2021, for the first time in our history, we had more conversations over instant messenger than phone. The reasons for this appear to be around three core themes.

1
Younger people were suffering disproportionately in the pandemic and prefer instant messenger to phone calls.

2
Many people found home wasn't a safe space, and saw instant messenger as a more discreet method of getting help, without the risk of being overheard.

3
Trans and non-binary people showed a preference for instant messenger, as it negates the risk of being misgendered, which is something that they may have experienced with other voice based services.

“
WHEN THE TV DRAMA, IT'S A SIN FIRST AIRED, THIS LED TO A RISE IN CALLERS DIRECTLY REFERENCING THIS AND HIV/ UNRESOLVED TRAUMA
”



“
IN FEBRUARY 2021, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN OUR HISTORY WE HAD MORE CONVERSATIONS OVER INSTANT MESSENGER THAN PHONE
”

2020
18,003
CONVERSATIONS



2021
15,136
CONVERSATIONS



INTERACTIONS BY MONTH IN 2021



NO MATTER WHO, HOW OR WHAT

This information is based only on what is freely given by those who contact us. Everything is informed by the individual conversations we have had with people in need, which means there will be instances where this information hasn't been disclosed.

We are now able to understand which channels service users prefer to reach out to us on, and it is clear that both age and subject matter play a significant part in this.

User age group: 24 and under

The graph opposite is based on contact from service users aged 16-24. This age group prefers to use instant messenger for the majority of their conversations, especially when they're in relation to sexuality and gender.

User age group: 25-39

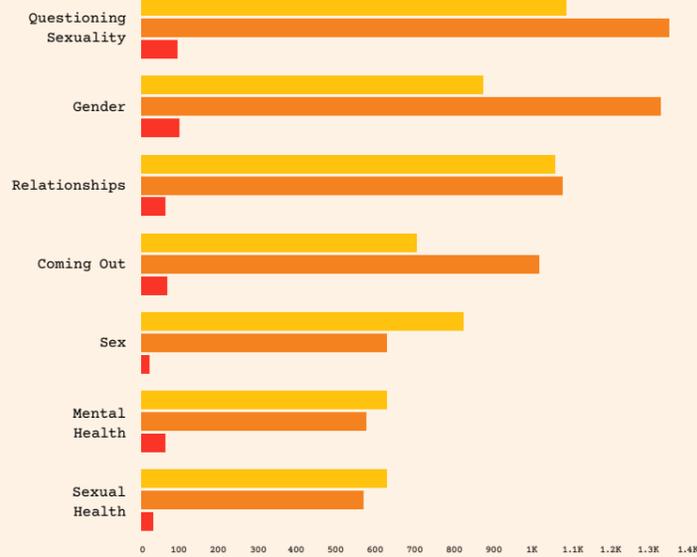
The preferred channels seem to change with age. This may be due to living independently. As we can see in the table below, service users aged 25-39 who reach out for support on the same subjects have a preference for voice based services - a trend which becomes more pronounced as we move through the age ranges.

However, this age range does revert back to messenger as a preference for conversations relating to gender. The reasons behind this are complex, but may be related to socioeconomic factors, such as not being in their own safe space, fearing being overheard, and having had previous experiences of being misgendered when using voice based services.

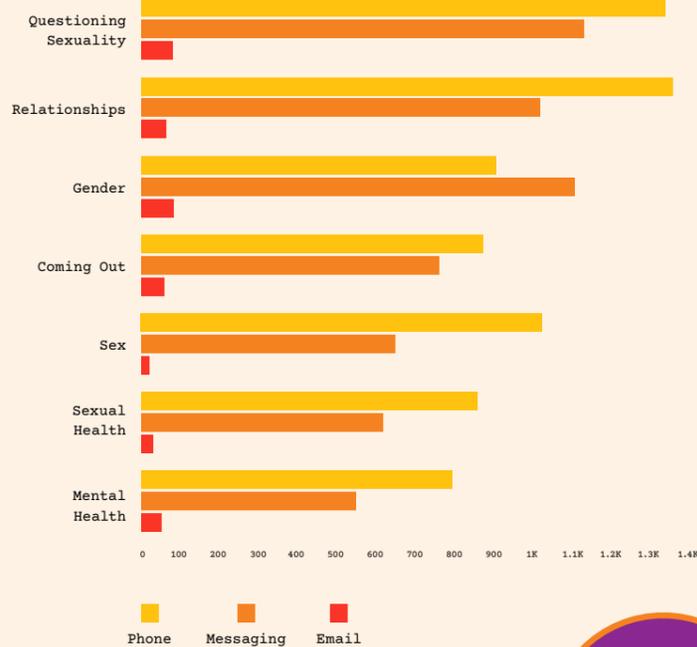
User age group: 40 and over

When looking at the preferences of service users aged 40 and over, we see a preference for voice based services along with an increased usage of email.

USER AGE GROUP 24 AND UNDER



USER AGE GROUP 25-39



*these numbers are based on occurrences in conversation reports as completed by volunteers, some conversations will have multiple themes.

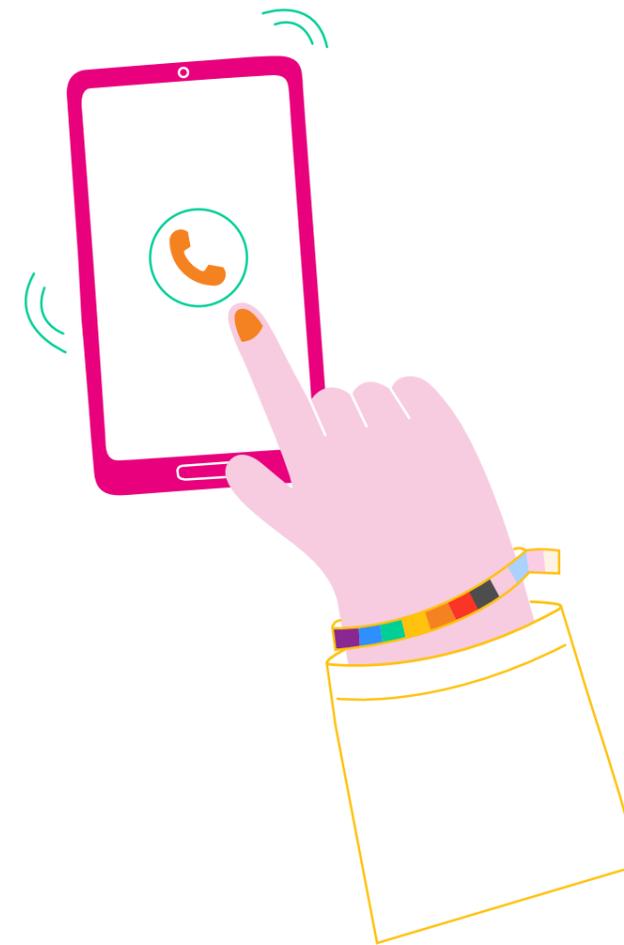
Everything in this report is informed by our service users, nothing is assumed.

SUBJECT THEMES*

2020

2021

RELATIONSHIPS	3.8K	QUESTIONING SEXUALITY	3.9K
FAMILY	3.1K	RELATIONSHIPS	3.6K
COMING OUT	2.6K	GENDER IDENTITY	3.1K
QUESTIONING SEXUALITY	2.5K	COMING OUT	2.7K
ISOLATION	2.2K	SEX	2.4K
SEX	2.1K	SEXUAL HEALTH	2.2K
GENDER IDENTITY	1.9K	MENTAL HEALTH	1.9K



TOP THEMES ACROSS 2020 AND 2021

RELATIONSHIPS
QUESTIONING SEXUALITY
COMING OUT
GENDER IDENTITY
SEX
ISOLATION
MENTAL HEALTH

*these numbers are based on the primary reason service users reached out, and some conversations has multiple prominent themes

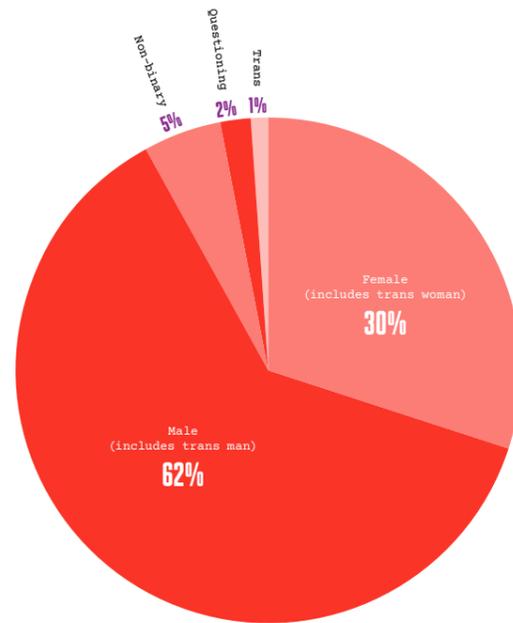
GENDER IDENTITY

In 2020, we saw the continued rise of service users who describe their gender as being different to that assigned at birth. This figure reveals that this subject arose in 27.1% of conversations, which equates to 4,862 conversations.

This trend continued upwards, with the figure rising to 32.7%* of callers in 2021. It would be difficult to pinpoint what exactly caused this tangible rise in numbers since 2019. However, topics such as the review of the Gender Recognition Act led to increased media hostility towards trans and non-binary people. And lockdowns meant some people had to return to settings where they were either not out, or were being wilfully misgendered.

From 2020-2021, we looked closely at how service users described their gender. Data revealed that 45% of those aged 24 and under said their gender was different to that assigned at birth. In 2020, this was 31.5%. So we have witnessed a 14.5% increase in 12 months.

SERVICE USER GENDER IN 2021



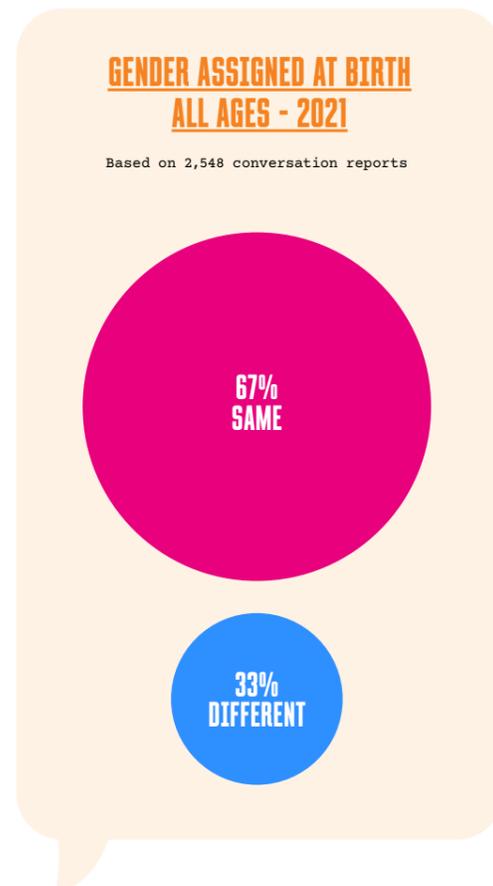
GENDER IDENTITY BY AGE

Age Range	Same Gender	Different Gender
24 and under	55%	45%
25-39	68%	32%
40-49	76.5%	23.5%
50-59	82.6%	17.4%
60-69	85.3%	14.7%
70+	94.2%	5.8%

*Gender variance represents itself through all age ranges with many people finding the gender expression that works for them as they age, this can also change over the years.

GENDER ASSIGNED AT BIRTH ALL AGES - 2021

Based on 2,548 conversation reports



FAITH

2020

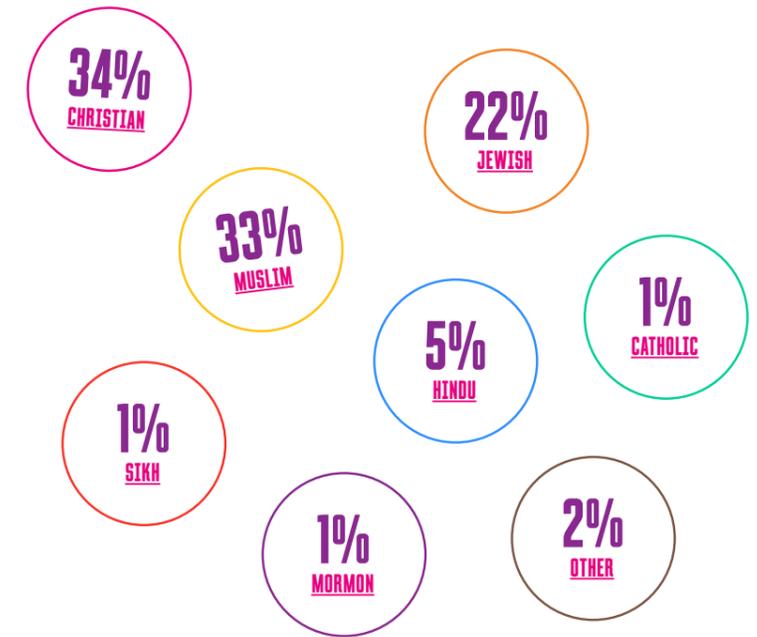
Conversation logs have also provided us with a better insight into the different religions of our service users. Out of the service users who expressed that they had a faith:

- 25.6% were Muslim
- 24.7% were Christian
- 14.3% were Jewish
- 9.5% were Sikh

2021

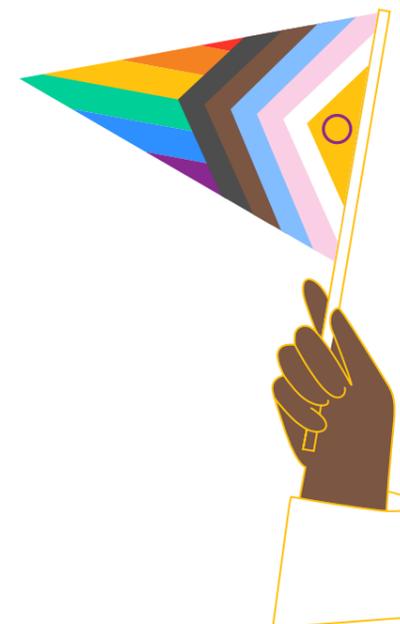
We can see that in 2021, 67% of service users who expressed a faith were either Christian or Muslim. However, this year showed a slightly higher percentage of Christian service users, while the number of Sikh service users appeared to be less.

FAITH IN 2021

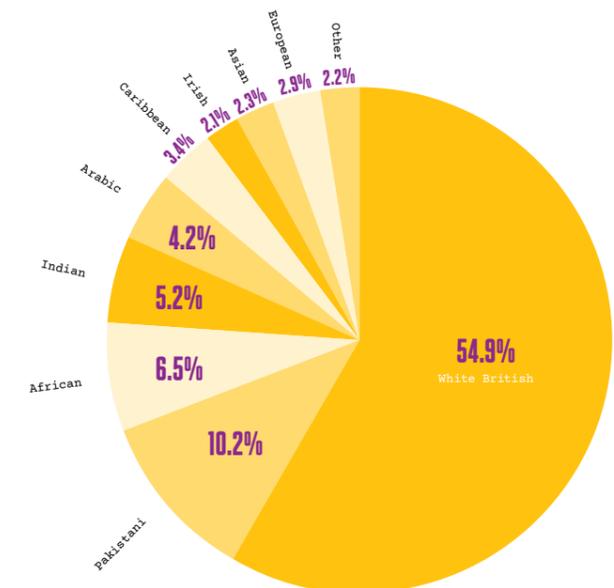


ETHNICITY

Between 2020 and 2021, we have also gained a clear and more detailed understanding of the ethnic diversity of our service users.



ETHNICITY IN 2021



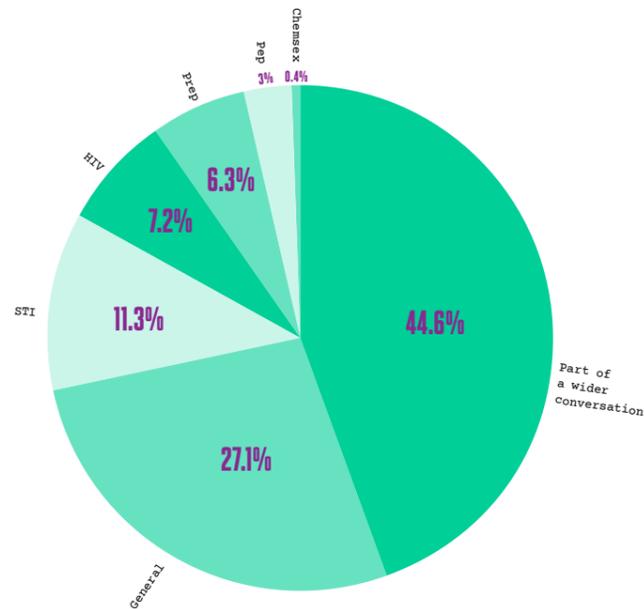
SEXUAL HEALTH

In 2021, we provided sexual health information on 6,939 occasions. This was 1,359 more times than in 2020, and accounted for 46% of the total number of conversations we had that year. Out of these 6,939 conversations, 496 were regarding HIV, which was 100 more than we saw in 2020.



This data is based only what service users have provided and not all conversation reports will include this information.

SEXUAL HEALTH IN 2021



SEXUAL ORIENTATION

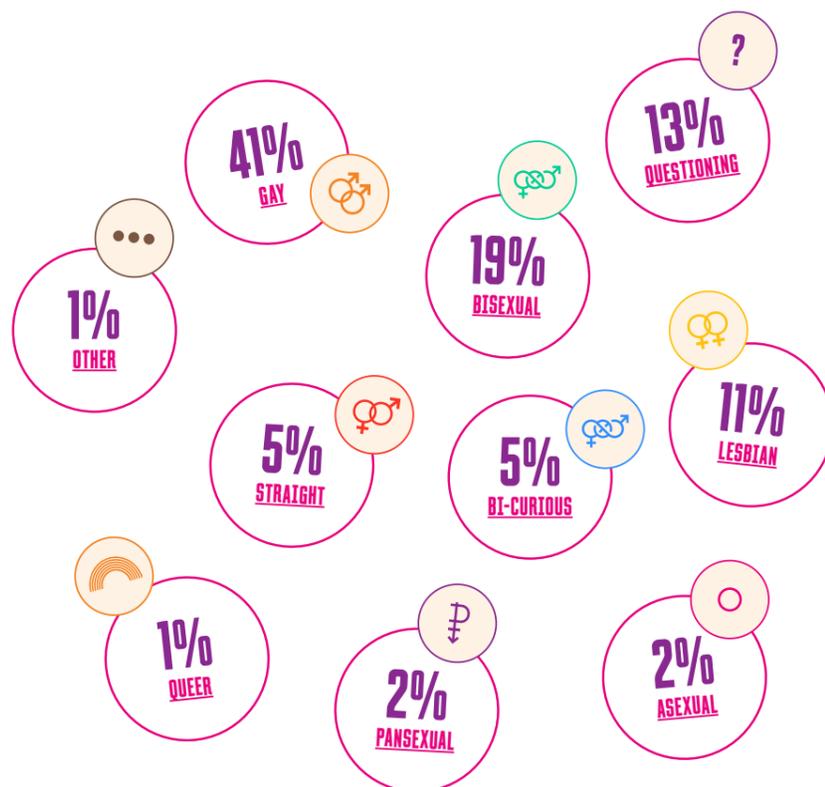
In 2021, we have seen a 3% increase in conversations with people that describe themselves as Bisexual. In conversation reports created by our listening volunteers, Bisexual appeared 1,327 times in 2021, which is 702 times more than in 2020.

From 2020 to 2021, there appears to be a reduction in the percentage of Lesbian service users. However, the number of people who have described themselves as Lesbian in conversation shows an overall increase of 250.

The increase in service users that identified as Gay is possibly due to female callers referring to themselves as Gay instead of Lesbian. This appeared 2,875 times in conversation reports in 2021, which is an increase of 1,493 since 2020.

As with all of our data in this report, this is never assumed, and is always informed by the service user. Which perhaps indicates a shift in language use. Similarly, the term Queer continues to emerge across both sexuality and gender.

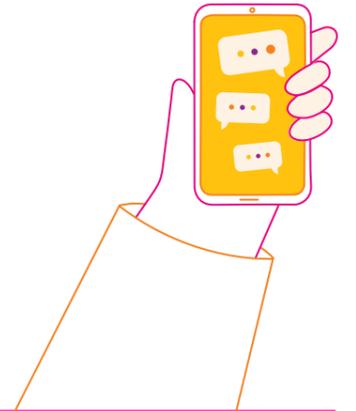
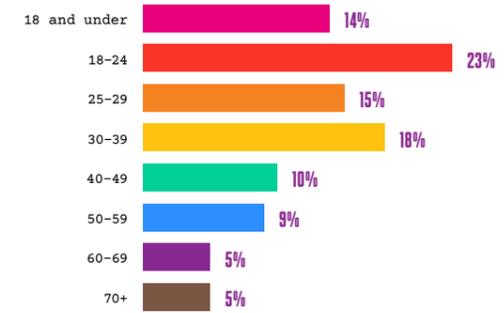
SEXUAL ORIENTATION IN 2021



AGE

Contact data has also revealed that our support is vital for people across all age groups. The diversity in service users age, and their preferred channels of contact, will help to inform how we develop our service moving forward.

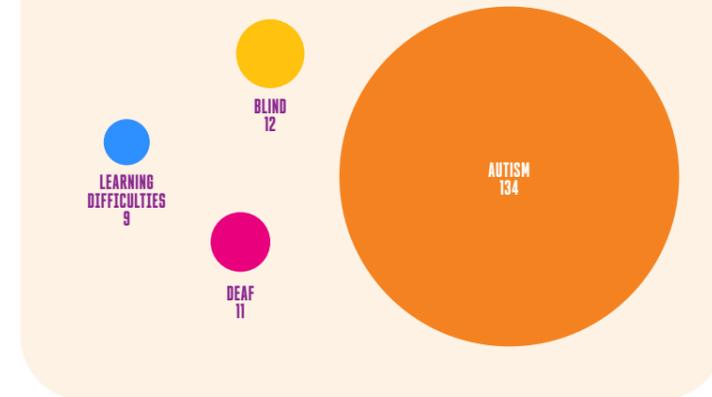
AGE IN 2021



DISABILITY

The data we have on conversations where disability was a prominent theme is limited. However, we can see that Autism is identifiably appearing in the context of wider conversation points. At this stage, we cannot say if this is an increase compared to previous years, but we aim to reflect on this in future reports.

DISABILITY

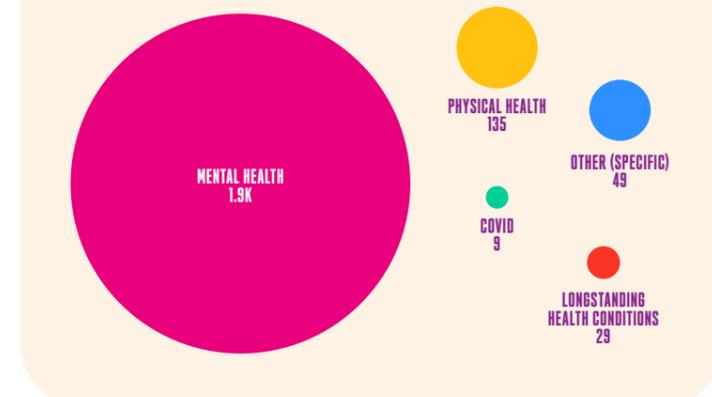


PHYSICAL, AND MENTAL WELLBEING

Mental health featured highly in 2021. In fact, service users expressed mental health was part of the reason they were reaching out in 1900 conversation reports.

Many service users who reached out to us had multiple mental and physical challenges too, which were often described as longstanding conditions.

PHYSICAL & MENTAL WELLBEING



OUR VOLUNTEERS GO ABOVE AND BEYOND



Since the 80's, the year 2020 asked more of our volunteers than any other. As the number of conversations we handled rose, so did the listening hours our volunteers were giving to our service. In total, the listening hours rose by 2,262 hours, which is the equivalent of 94 days worth of additional listening.

It should also be acknowledged that the volunteer hours listed are only those of listening volunteers. But there is also a vital team of support volunteers that give great amounts of time to help switchboard to deliver its services.

As expected, the number of hours fell in 2021, but still remained higher than 2019. We also fully acknowledge that if our listening volunteers had not been feeling the effects of the pandemic themselves, and if we as a charity had not had to deal with the limitations of onboarding new listening volunteers remotely in a pandemic, the number of calls would have continued to increase.

Here to listen, for as long as it takes

Through our data, we can clearly see that our service was high in demand in 2020. And much of the contact we had took place over longer periods of time. With 3000+ conversations lasting more than 30 minutes.

For many people within the LGBTQIA+ communities, when the government advised us to stay at home, home was not a safe space. For others, home became a place of isolation and loneliness, as access to their community was removed. This was very concerning and undoubtedly created a need for longer conversations.

LISTENING VOLUNTEER HOURS

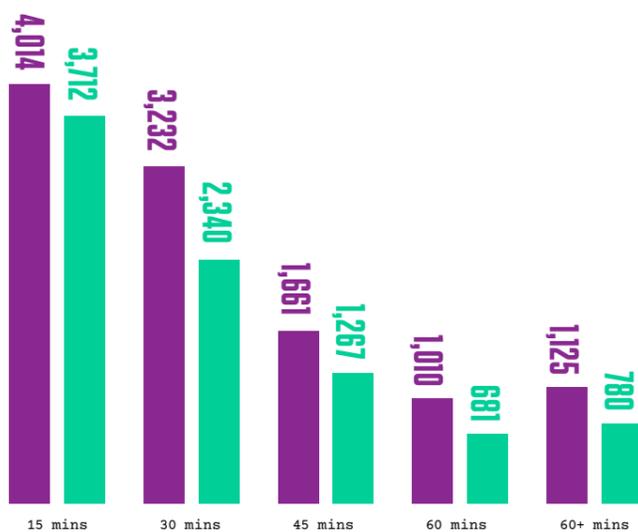
2019
7307

2020
9799

2021
7537

“ THERE IS ALSO A VITAL TEAM OF SUPPORT VOLUNTEERS THAT GIVE GREAT AMOUNTS OF TIME TO HELP SWITCHBOARD TO DELIVER ITS SERVICES ”

INTERACTIONS DURATION VOICE CALLS & INSTANT MESSENGER



(This information relates to voice calls and instant message chat only)

OUR VOLUNTEER COMMUNITY

Our volunteers are at the heart of what we do. Each and every one self identifies as a member of the LGBTQIA+ communities, and undertakes an intensive 60-hour training course to become qualified listening volunteers.

Switchboard also relies upon a committed group of support volunteers who assist with the day-to-day running of the organisation. These support volunteers bring specialist skill sets to areas of our work such as IT support, supporter care, media & brand, communications, and data collection.

In 2021, Switchboard utilised a software programme to help us better understand our volunteers, with an aim to achieving three clear goals:

1

To recognise the commitment of our volunteers - by understanding their length of service, holding an accurate record of the training they have received, being able to create mini impact reports based on their volunteering hours/conversations over a 12 month period, and acknowledging birthdays and volunteer anniversaries.

2

To understand more about their identity - including ethnicity, sexuality, gender expression, disability, and the intersections between these.

3

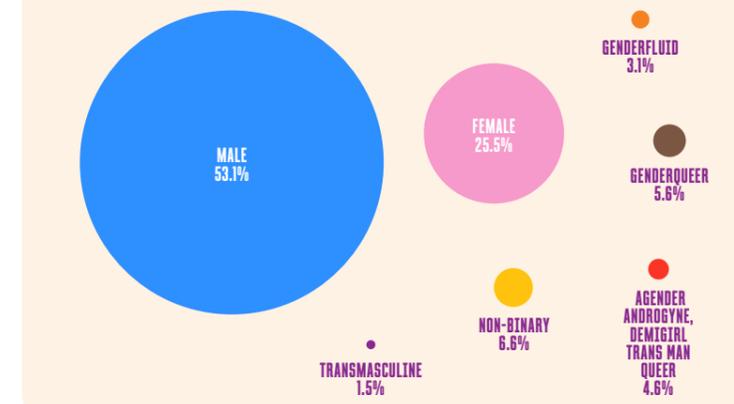
To Prioritise wellbeing and inclusion of our volunteers and staff

GENDER IDENTITY AND ETHNICITY OF VOLUNTEERS

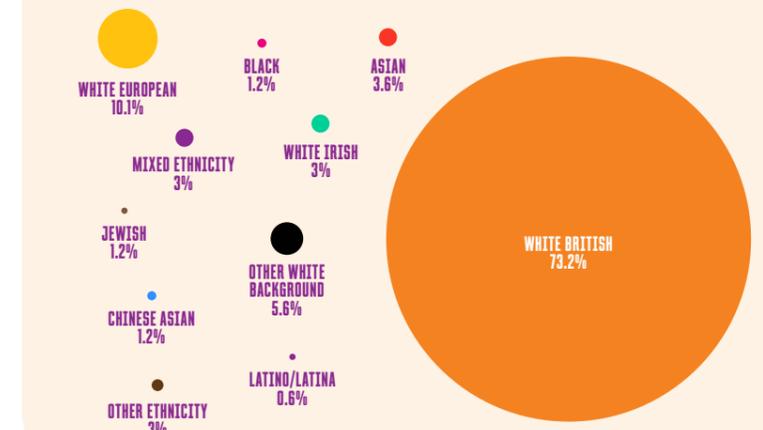
Switchboard ended 2021 with 214 volunteers, this includes Trustees, listening volunteers and support volunteers. We are now able to understand the diversity of our volunteers and this is particularly important in understanding where we might need to increase recruitment from under-represented groups. As of the end of 2021, our volunteer base can be understood by the gender and ethnicity charts below.

We believe that being able to volunteer remotely from across the UK will enable us to become a more diverse organisation. However, we do very much plan to keep the phone room at our core.

VOLUNTEER GENDER



VOLUNTEER ETHNICITY



THE NEED FOR OUR SERVICE

In late 2021, we moved to a new system that handles our calls, instant messages and emails. This is providing a deeper set of data than we've previously been able to access. It enables us to view how and when service users contacted Switchboard. And it also reveals the number of phone and instant messenger conversations that get abandoned.

We can also now see the days of the week in which service users are most likely to reach out to us through our phone and instant messenger services. This in turn will enable us to add additional volunteers to our listening service.

A NEED BEYOND THE UK

Although we are a UK-focused service, it is important to acknowledge that we do receive contact from service users who live outside of the UK, including countries in Europe, the USA, and areas of conflict such as Ukraine, Afghanistan, and Syria.

The chart on the right shows an outline of regions we have received contact from, based on information given by the service user.

When looking at how service users reach out to us across all three of our channels, we know that in 2021, 75% of our service users are based outside of London. 43% of emails from service users come from outside the UK. And 16% of our instant messenger conversations also come from outside of the UK. This is due to email and instant messaging being more globally accessible.

75% OF SWITCHBOARD USERS ARE BASED OUTSIDE OF LONDON

Location	% of users
London	25%
South East	13%
Other	10%
North West	9%
Scotland	8%
South West	7%
Yorkshire	6%
East Midlands	6%
North East	5%
West Midlands	5%
Wales	3%
East of England	3%
Northern England	2%

2022 AIMS

1

Deliver 8 new training intakes of listening and support volunteers - this will add approximately 80 to 90 new volunteers

3

Increase call rota coverage for peak call times, based on contact data including abandoned calls

5

Continue to promote Switchboard as a listening opportunity for diverse communities within the LGBTQIA+ communities

2

Move to an 0800 number to remove costs, which have acted as a barrier to service users accessing the support they need

4

Provide each volunteer with their own impact report

6

Develop a range of e-learning modules to ensure continuous learning

THIS ALL COSTS MONEY

None of our recent developments would have been possible without the support of our generous donors.

- Due to a generous legacy gift, we were able to give our HQ a much needed refurbishment, making it a welcoming and secure environment for our volunteers.
- We have received incredible support from our corporate partners, not just in donations, but also in pro-bono support and raising awareness of our service through their networks and brands.
- Our individual donors and supporters, including our Frogs (Friends of Gay Switchboard), have been so generous in their giving.

Right now, it costs around £17 for Switchboard to provide everything that is needed for a listening volunteer to be there for a service user.

For more information on how you or your organisation can support our work, contact:

development@switchboard.lgbt

CALL WAITING OVER A 3 MONTH PERIOD

ABANDONED
6,625

HANDLED
2,987

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

In 2021, Switchboard's Board of Trustees and General Manager worked with the membership to develop a three year plan, which we're calling The Switchboard Charity Plan 2022-2025. The final year of the plan coincides with our 50th birthday.

Our ultimate goal is that:

NO CONTACT GOES UNANSWERED, AND IS MET WITH A QUALITY SERVICE FROM VOLUNTEERS THAT ARE REFLECTIVE OF THE LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITIES

We have broken the plan down into 32 overarching strategic aims that will see us achieve our goal.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

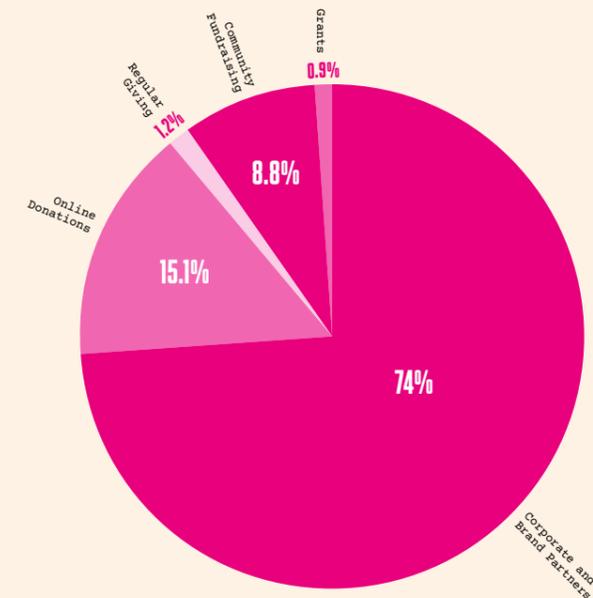
We are committed to sharing our data to help others. Since the pandemic hit, we have been part of the National Emergencies Trust LGBT Helpline Partnership. This has seen us provide data alongside other helplines to better understand the LGBTQIA+ communities' needs across the UK.

In London, we have also been an active member of the domestic abuse partnership, working alongside other LGBT organisations to understand the scale of domestic abuse within our communities, and provide support to those in need.

SWITCHBOARD FINANCIAL REVIEW FOR 2021/22

In 2021/2022, we enjoyed a successful year, with an income of £485K and expenditure of £345K.

We are now embarking on an ambitious period as an organisation, and this will see us reduce some of our existing reserves of £1.6M due to increased expenditure in service development, volunteer support, awareness and staffing.



SPECIAL THANKS

Looking back on the last two years, we are incredibly proud of how our community of volunteers and staff worked together to keep our service up and running. In total, our listening volunteers had 33,139 conversations with people who reached out for our support.

This is all the more incredible when facing the challenges of not being able to recruit new volunteers in the numbers we have needed, seeing an increase in demand for our support, and transitioning to a remote service.

From the conversation data we have gathered, it's clear that an increasingly diverse pool of service users are reaching out to us. And our goal is to make sure that we can continue to meet that need with an equally diverse set of listening volunteers.

As an organisation providing a national listening service, Switchboard occupies a unique space in the UK. Over the last 48 years, we've grown to understand and anticipate the needs of all LGBTQIA+ communities, and we intend to share our knowledge to help create a better world for LGBTQIA+ people in the UK and beyond.

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