

Author: Dr Sean Pert

Contact details: sean.pert@manchester.ac.uk

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Influencing practitioners of the future: Students' experiences of volunteering with trans and non-binary voice and communication clients

Waiting lists for Gender Identity Clinics are extremely long for trans and non-binary people. Some clients wait over two years (Davis, 2019). Speech and language therapy is the fifth most important clinical service after diagnosis, hormone prescribing and monitoring, referrals for surgery, and hair removal (LGBT Foundation, 2018).

Local NHS voice services may be reluctant to accept referrals for trans and non-binary people due to perceptions that the clinical work is highly specialised. This often leads to trans and non-binary people seeking advice from unreliable sources, such as YouTube. Private therapy is often inaccessible due to financial restraints, with almost one in five LGBT people reporting discrimination due to their sexual orientation or gender identity when looking for a job (Stonewall, 2018).

In 2016 the University of Manchester in partnership with the LGBT Foundation, set up biannual weekend intensive voice and communication groups for trans and non-binary people. Aiming to provide a much-needed free service, the groups provided mutual benefit with opportunities for student speech and language therapists to work with a client group pre-qualification under supervision. Over 120 clients have attended to date (average 11.9 clients and 12.1 volunteers per group). Clients reported satisfaction with group therapy (98%) and student volunteers (100%), based on 69 responses.

A survey of 97 student volunteers following eight successful groups elicited responses from 71 students (74%). This found that although 40 had met trans people previously (56%), only 3 had worked with a trans person on clinical placement (4%).

Volunteers reported a better understanding of the client group (97%), voice assessment techniques (87%), and voice therapy skills (97%).

Almost all of the volunteers (99%) reported the experience would make them more likely to want to work with trans people in the future, and all volunteers would recommend volunteering to their peers.

References

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