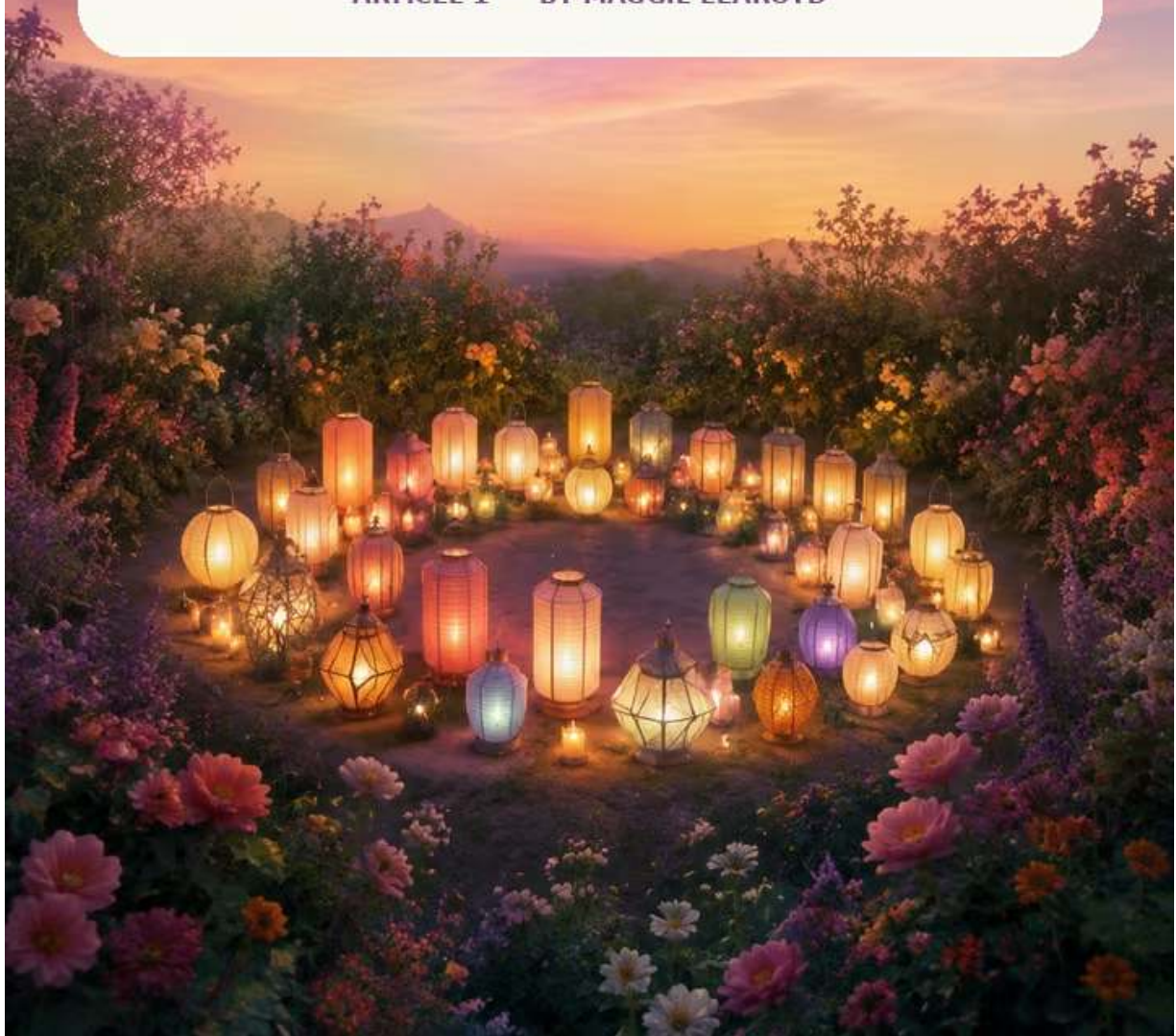


LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY & BELONGING

WHY COMMUNITY MATTERS

Finding belonging as an LGBTQ+ person

ARTICLE 1 • BY MAGGIE LEAROYD



Why Community Matters

Finding belonging as an LGBTQ+ person

Humans are social beings. From the moment we are born, we develop through our relationships with others. Feeling accepted, valued and connected helps us build confidence, strengthens our mental wellbeing and gives us a sense of purpose. This feeling of belonging is one of our most fundamental psychological needs.

For many LGBTQ+ people, however, finding that sense of belonging is not always straightforward. Some grow up surrounded by accepting families, schools and communities, while others experience misunderstanding, bullying, discrimination or rejection. These experiences can leave people feeling isolated, uncertain about where they fit in or reluctant to be their authentic selves.

Community can make an enormous difference. A supportive community offers far more than friendship—it provides understanding, acceptance, encouragement and the reassurance that you are not alone. Whether it is a local LGBTQ+ group, an online community, an inclusive workplace, a sports club or simply a circle of trusted friends, belonging to a supportive community can improve confidence, reduce loneliness and strengthen resilience.

Importantly, there is no single LGBTQ+ community. LGBTQ+ people are incredibly diverse, with different backgrounds, cultures, faiths, ages, abilities and life experiences. Community is not about fitting into one particular group—it is about finding people and places where you feel safe, respected and accepted for who you are.

This article explores why community matters, how belonging supports mental wellbeing and practical ways to build meaningful connections throughout life.

What Does Community Mean?

Community is often thought of as a physical place, but it is much broader than that.

A community is any group of people who share:

- Mutual respect.

Shared interests or experiences.

A sense of belonging.

Support during difficult times.

Opportunities for connection.

Encouragement and acceptance.

Community can exist in many different forms, including:

- Friendship groups.

Families of choice.

Local LGBTQ+ organisations.

Sports clubs.

Book clubs.

Faith communities.

Online support groups.

Workplace networks.

University societies.

Volunteering groups.

There is no right or wrong way to find community. What matters is feeling accepted and valued.

Why Belonging Matters

Belonging is one of the most important contributors to emotional wellbeing.

When people feel they belong, they are more likely to experience:

- Greater self-confidence.

Higher self-esteem.

Better mental health.

Increased resilience.

Lower levels of loneliness.

Improved physical health.

Greater optimism.

Stronger relationships.

Belonging reminds us that we matter and that we are valued for who we are rather than who others expect us to be.

Understanding Loneliness

Loneliness is not simply about being alone.

Someone can be surrounded by people and still feel deeply lonely if they feel unable to be themselves.

Loneliness may occur when people:

- Hide their identity.

Feel misunderstood.

Lack supportive relationships.

Experience rejection.

Fear discrimination.

Feel disconnected from others.

Persistent loneliness can affect both physical and mental health, making supportive communities even more important.

The Impact of Minority Stress

Many LGBTQ+ people experience what psychologists refer to as minority stress.

Minority stress is the additional pressure that can arise from living in a society where prejudice, discrimination or misunderstanding still exist.

Examples include:

- Worrying about being accepted.

Hiding aspects of your identity.

Experiencing prejudice.

Feeling excluded.

Facing discrimination.

Hearing negative stereotypes.

These experiences can increase stress and reduce confidence over time.

Supportive communities help reduce these effects by providing acceptance, understanding and encouragement.

The Power of Shared Experiences

One of the most reassuring aspects of community is discovering that other people have experienced similar thoughts, feelings or challenges.

Shared experiences can help people realise:

- They are not alone.

Their feelings are valid.

Others have successfully navigated similar situations.

Support is available.

Hope is possible.

Feeling understood can significantly reduce feelings of isolation and self-doubt.

Families of Choice

Not everyone receives acceptance from their biological family.

For some LGBTQ+ people, supportive friendships become a family of choice.

Families of choice may include:

- Close friends.

Partners.

Mentors.

Colleagues.

Community members.

These relationships are often built on mutual respect, trust and unconditional acceptance.

Families of choice can be just as meaningful and supportive as biological families.

Finding Your Community

Finding supportive people takes time.

Possible places to connect include:

- Local LGBTQ+ organisations.

Community centres.

Inclusive sports clubs.

Creative groups.

Volunteering opportunities.

University societies.

Inclusive faith communities.

Support groups.

Online communities.

Not every group will feel like the right fit, and that is perfectly normal.

Building meaningful relationships often takes patience.

Online Communities

The internet has made it easier for many LGBTQ+ people to find support, particularly those living in rural areas or places with fewer local resources.

Online communities can provide:

- Friendship.

Information.

Peer support.

Educational resources.

Shared experiences.

Opportunities to connect across the world.

However, it is also important to maintain healthy boundaries online and seek balanced, respectful communities that promote wellbeing.

Community Builds Confidence

Confidence rarely develops in isolation.

Supportive communities encourage people to:

- Express themselves authentically.

Try new experiences.

Build friendships.

Learn from others.

Celebrate achievements.

Receive encouragement during setbacks.

Feeling accepted by others often strengthens the confidence to accept ourselves.

You Belong Exactly As You Are

One of the greatest barriers to belonging is believing that we must change ourselves to fit in.

Healthy communities do not require people to hide who they are.

Instead, they celebrate diversity and individuality.

You deserve spaces where:

- Your identity is respected.

Your voice is heard.

Your experiences are valued.

Your wellbeing matters.

You feel emotionally safe.

You are accepted without needing to pretend to be someone else.

Belonging begins with recognising that you already have value.

Building Community Takes Time

Like any meaningful relationship, communities grow gradually.

It is perfectly normal to feel nervous when joining a new group.

You might begin by:

- Attending one event.

Introducing yourself to one new person.

Joining an online discussion.

Volunteering.

Participating in shared activities.

Small steps often lead to lasting connections.

Key Takeaways

Belonging is a fundamental human need that supports confidence, resilience and mental wellbeing.

Community is about feeling accepted, respected and valued for who you are.

Loneliness can occur even when surrounded by people if you feel unable to be yourself.

Supportive communities help reduce the effects of minority stress and isolation.

Families of choice can provide meaningful love, acceptance and encouragement.

Both online and in-person communities can offer valuable opportunities for connection.

Building community takes time, but every small step towards connection matters.

Final Thoughts

Finding a supportive community can be one of the most powerful steps towards living authentically and confidently. While experiences of rejection or misunderstanding may have led some LGBTQ+ people to question where they belong, those experiences do not define their future. There are people, groups and communities who will value, respect and celebrate them for exactly who they are.

Belonging is not about changing yourself to fit into someone else's expectations—it is about finding spaces where you no longer feel the need to hide. Whether that community consists of lifelong friends, a local support group, an inclusive workplace or a family of choice, meaningful connections have the power to improve confidence, strengthen resilience and enhance overall wellbeing.

Remember that building community is a journey rather than a destination. Every conversation, every shared experience and every genuine connection contributes to a stronger sense of belonging. As you continue to seek out relationships that are built on kindness, respect and acceptance, you create the foundation for a life in which you are free to grow, thrive and be unapologetically yourself.