

LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY & BELONGING

GROWING TOGETHER

Creating a lifelong sense of belonging

ARTICLE 6 • BY MAGGIE LEAROYD



Growing Together

Creating a lifelong sense of belonging

Belonging is one of our most fundamental human needs. Throughout life, our relationships and communities influence how we see ourselves, how we cope with challenges and how confidently we move through the world. Feeling accepted and valued helps us develop resilience, maintain good mental wellbeing and build meaningful lives.

For many LGBTQ+ people, the journey towards belonging is not always straightforward. Some experience acceptance from an early age, while others spend years searching for people and places where they feel truly understood. Many discover that belonging is not about fitting into a particular mould—it is about finding communities where they can be themselves without fear of judgement or rejection.

Community is not something that remains static. As people move through different stages of life, their relationships, priorities and support networks naturally change. School, university, work, retirement, parenthood, relocation or changes in health can all influence the communities we belong to. Lifelong wellbeing often depends on our ability to maintain meaningful connections while remaining open to building new ones.

This final article explores how belonging evolves throughout life, why communities continue to matter at every age and how each of us can contribute to creating welcoming, compassionate environments where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

Belonging Is a Lifelong Journey

Our need for connection does not disappear as we grow older.

Throughout life we continue to benefit from:

- Friendship.

Acceptance.

Shared experiences.

Emotional support.

Encouragement.

Meaningful relationships.

Opportunities to contribute.

Feeling valued.

Belonging is not something we achieve once—it is something we continue to nurture throughout life.

Community Changes Over Time

Communities naturally evolve as our lives change.

Different stages of life may bring new opportunities to connect, including:

- Education.

Employment.

Parenthood.

Retirement.

Volunteering.

New hobbies.

Relocating to a different area.

Changes in health or circumstances.

It is normal for some relationships to change while new ones develop.

Remaining open to new connections helps maintain a strong sense of belonging.

The Value of Long-Term Relationships

Some relationships remain important for many years.

Long-term friendships often provide:

- Shared memories.

Trust.

Stability.

Honest support.

Acceptance.

Understanding.

These relationships remind us that we are known and valued for who we are.

Nurturing long-term friendships through regular communication and shared experiences helps strengthen emotional wellbeing.

Welcoming New Connections

While long-standing relationships are valuable, new friendships remain important throughout life.

Meeting new people can:

- Introduce fresh perspectives.

Expand support networks.

Encourage personal growth.

Reduce loneliness.

Create opportunities for learning.

Build confidence.

Every meaningful friendship begins with a single conversation.

Giving Back to the Community

Belonging is strengthened when we contribute to the wellbeing of others.

Ways to give back include:

- Volunteering.

Mentoring.

Sharing knowledge.

Supporting community events.

Welcoming newcomers.

Offering encouragement.

Advocating for inclusion.

Helping others often strengthens our own confidence and sense of purpose.

Mentoring and Role Models

Many people benefit from having positive role models throughout their lives.

Mentors may offer:

- Encouragement.

Guidance.

Practical advice.

Reassurance.

Inspiration.

Equally, many people become role models without realising it.

Living authentically and treating others with kindness can positively influence those around us.

Celebrating Diversity

Strong communities celebrate differences rather than expecting everyone to be the same.

Healthy communities recognise diversity in:

- Age.

Culture.

Ethnicity.

Faith.

Disability.

Neurodiversity.

Gender identity.

Sexual orientation.

Life experiences.

Diversity encourages learning, empathy and stronger relationships.

Maintaining Hope During Difficult Times

Every community experiences challenges.

People may encounter:

- Loss.

Illness.

Discrimination.

Relationship changes.

Career difficulties.

Financial pressures.

Supportive communities help people maintain hope by reminding them that they do not have to face these experiences alone.

Hope often grows through shared kindness and encouragement.

Thriving Together

Communities thrive when people:

- Support one another.

Respect differences.

Listen with empathy.

Encourage personal growth.

Celebrate achievements.

Share responsibilities.

Build trust.

When individuals flourish, communities become stronger.

Likewise, strong communities help individuals flourish.

Leaving a Positive Legacy

Every person has the opportunity to influence the people around them.

A positive legacy is often created through simple actions such as:

- Being kind.

Listening well.

Welcoming others.

Standing up against discrimination.

Offering encouragement.

Treating people fairly.

Small acts of compassion can have a lasting impact on individuals and communities alike.

Belonging Starts With Acceptance

One of the most important lessons about community is that genuine belonging begins with acceptance.

Healthy communities do not require people to hide their identity, minimise their experiences or change who they are to fit in.

Instead, they encourage people to:

- Be authentic.

Respect one another.

Celebrate individuality.

Support personal growth.

Value diversity.

Everyone deserves to feel that they belong exactly as they are.

Key Takeaways

Belonging is a lifelong need that supports confidence, resilience and wellbeing.

Communities naturally change as people move through different stages of life.

Long-term relationships provide stability, while new friendships encourage continued growth.

Giving back to the community strengthens both individuals and the wider community.

Mentors and positive role models inspire confidence and hope.

Diversity enriches communities and encourages understanding.

Small acts of kindness help create welcoming environments where everyone can thrive.

Final Thoughts

Creating a lifelong sense of belonging is not about finding one perfect community—it is about building and nurturing relationships that allow you to be seen, valued and accepted throughout every stage of life. Communities change as we grow, but our need for connection, kindness and understanding remains constant. Whether through lifelong friendships, new social groups, mentoring, volunteering or simply sharing everyday moments with others, meaningful relationships continue to shape our wellbeing and confidence.

For LGBTQ+ people, finding spaces where authenticity is welcomed rather than questioned can be life-changing. These communities provide more than companionship; they offer hope, resilience and the reassurance that no one has to face life's challenges alone. By embracing diversity, respecting individual experiences and supporting one another with compassion, communities become places where everyone has the opportunity to flourish.

Ultimately, belonging is something we both receive and create. Every welcoming smile, every respectful conversation and every act of kindness contributes to a culture where people feel safe enough to be themselves. As we continue to grow together, support one another and celebrate our shared humanity, we build stronger communities and leave a lasting legacy of inclusion, acceptance and hope for future generations.