

LGBTQ+

TQ +

PARENTS AND CARERS

A DIGITAL ZINE OF STORIES OF
ADVERSITY, LOVE, HOPE AND JOY.

INTRODUCTION

Research into the solutions for perinatal loneliness found that LGBTQ+ parents and carers experienced discrimination and exclusion which resulted in feelings of loneliness. Hoping to help others to overcome this, we created this digital zine to share stories of LGBTQ+ parenting adversity, hope, love and joy.



We want to raise awareness of the challenges facing LGBTQ+ parents and carers whilst also changing the narrative away from negativity and towards messages of resilience and hope for the future, and for the next generation of children, parents and carers.

We invited parents and carers to submit zine pages or open text to share their stories during the Economic and Social Research Council Festival of Science in autumn 2024.

A zine is an amateur, self-made publication where people can share stories that matter and explore their feelings, thoughts and identity.

This digital zine was designed and compiled by Lea Cooper with support from Melanie Riley (Manchester Metropolitan University) and Ruth Naughton-Doe (University of York). Two online workshops were facilitated by Lea with support from Mel. The events and digital zine was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council Festival of Social Science and Administrative Fairness Lab, University of York.

People of all ages contributed to this zine. Some stories are positive, and some share more difficult experiences. Some experiences children may relate to, others are only relevant to adults. We advise reading the zine yourself and choosing appropriate ways to share pages with children or young people. You can decide for yourself what feels most appropriate to share with them.



If you have any questions or comments, please get in touch with ruth.naughton-doe@york.ac.uk.

BY KIT HEYAM
2024

Pa + Ren (6ft)
age 34



P R
Space Potato
age 13 months
2.5ft



- 100 people who've asked. "Is your baby a boy or a girl?"
- 14 months to conceive (after my period came back)
- 11 lb of chunky baby - +6oz!
- 10 days without pooing after birth (arguably worse than the birth bit)
- 9 hours in labour
- 8 months for my period to return after stopping testosterone
- 5 hours waiting for the labour ward staff to work out how to admit me with my 'male' NHS number
- 4 months to persuade the GP to let me go back on testosterone afterwards
- 3 people who've openly assumed we adopted (+ how many privately?!)
- 2 miles I cycled to my friend's house so they could help me self-med
- 1 time the GP hung up on me after I cried and begged for my hormones back
- + 1 baby space potato who is our whole world.

I carried our son and have struggled with straight mothers invalidating my wife's motherhood. Straight people but mostly women almost see her as 'dad' and don't acknowledge her experience as being comparable to them becoming mothers. It's been difficult to navigate friendships with these people and has caused increased isolation from friends. We have leaned heavily on our queer community.

Lauren

When my kids dad and I sat our kids down to tell them we were separating because I was gay, our eight year old piped up immediately "the word is LESBIAN actually."

Eilidh

An illustrated tribute to my pregnancy wardrobe

By Shay



As a masc-leaning non-binary person, finding gender-affirming clothes to wear while pregnant was a challenge, but I was pleased with the small pregnancy wardrobe I painstakingly curated. Turns out the baggy shirts and t-shirts I normally wear (aka 'dysphoria shirts') are also excellent pregnancy wear, and one particular stripy 'maternity' top that was 100% cotton was my MVP - sensory heaven!





Who is his
REAL mum?



What about his dad? Boys need a dad. How did you get pregnant?

It's Adam and Eve not Eve and Eve.



He's going to grow up
So Confused!



Explaining to you,
my boy-my world,
that even though
we cannot give
you a biological
sibling...

we give you
all of our
love
ALWAYS xx



IF YOU'RE NOT MY SON,
DON'T CALL ME

MUM



I AM A PERSON, NOT JUST
A PARENT

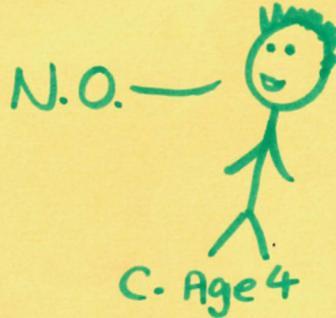
I HAVE A NAME; USE IT
[they / them]



PARENTING



I think it's
time for
your
B.E.D.



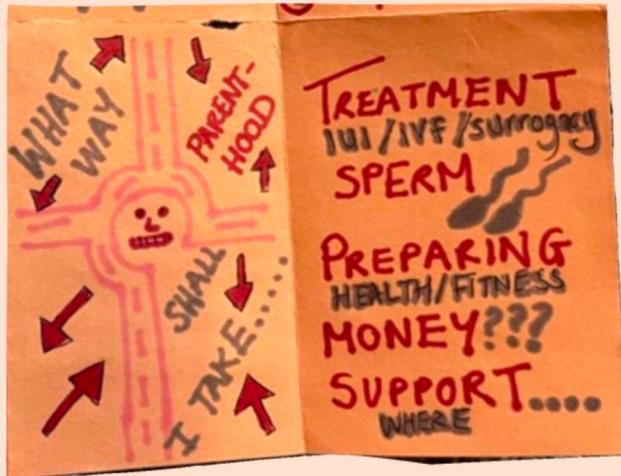
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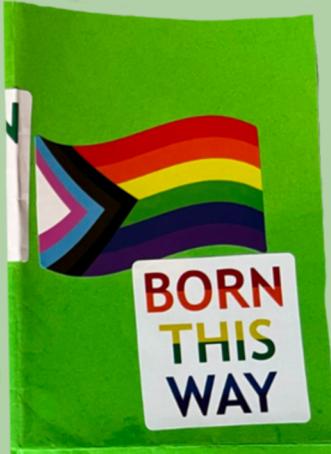
Our son has
grasped 'they'
pronouns at 5.

LOVE
IS
LOVE

So what's
your
excuse??

we must be better...



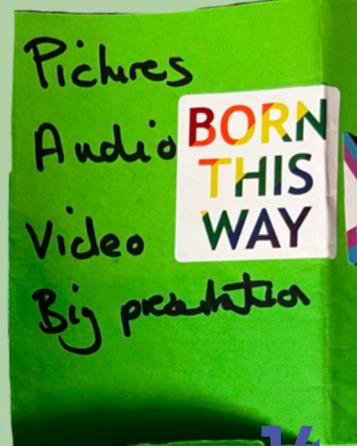
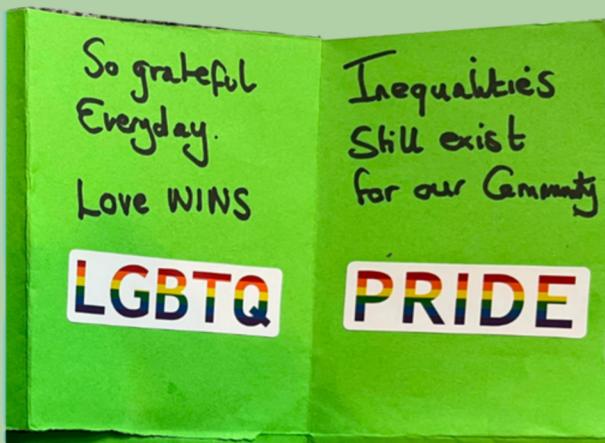


Long journey
to Parenthood
but I got
there!

LOVE
WINS

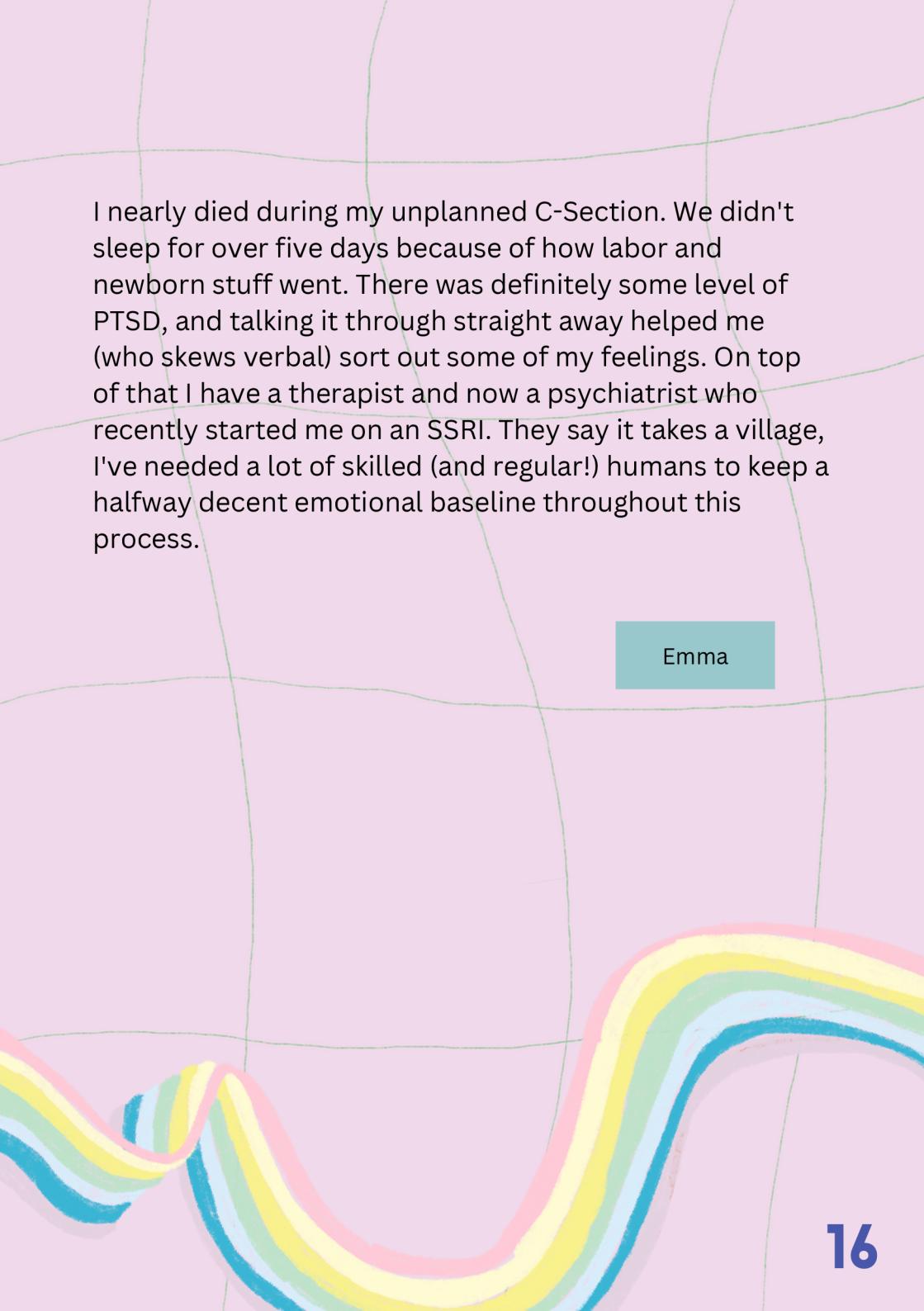
Keep Believing
Connect with
others who
understand.

LOVE
IS
LOVE



My wife and I had our first child in June. He is a sweet joy, and we're lucky to live somewhere with a lot of queer parents and decent paid leave. Even under these fairly idyllic circumstances, becoming parents was challenging and at times lonely.

We've intentionally tried not to allow our conversations to turn into solely logistics/baby stuff... That would have been very easy to slip into. We try to reconnect with other by playing games. Cards, backgammon, and the New York Times Spelling Bee game are favorites. I go to a weekly in-person parents' group and have found a lot of resources that way, including childcare. I had a postpartum doula and really appreciated that 'generalist' support for the first few months. The week we came home from the hospital, she invited us to sit down with her and describe the birth experience at length... At least an hour. I'm so happy we had the space to really process that together, what we went through was so, so much when we recounted everything in a row, we'd just been taking things as they come and pushing through in survival mode.



I nearly died during my unplanned C-Section. We didn't sleep for over five days because of how labor and newborn stuff went. There was definitely some level of PTSD, and talking it through straight away helped me (who skews verbal) sort out some of my feelings. On top of that I have a therapist and now a psychiatrist who recently started me on an SSRI. They say it takes a village, I've needed a lot of skilled (and regular!) humans to keep a halfway decent emotional baseline throughout this process.

Emma



What's it
like being
in a LGBTQ+
family, kids?



It is different
You will
meet
some
people
who
disagree

Yeah



But you
will meet
some people who do.
If people say it's not
okay, don't divorce—
just be who you are—
in love and strong as you
can.

aklutz

Even-if-
you (parents) don't
yet understand

WHEN
YOU
OPENED
UP...
DID
YOU
PARENTS
ACCEPT
YOU?

if you've been
denied yourself
how can you
accept me?

i'll hold
forgiveness
still

for you

AKLUTZ!

tell me — what did you realize about yourself
that you shut away for years? i'll accept you.

Their classmates call me xxx's mummy. They're the kid with two mums. Weird enough. But not right. How many degrees of (ab)normal can be managed in the cis het parenting mindset?



How does a kid manage learning queerness at home when school is so straight?



I try let them see their are other ways of being. Talk about the contrast. Find community, solidarity. Let them see there are other weirdos like us.



Oh, you know how it is with
boys

I look like this,
yet you
continue to tell
me the
gendered shit
you're putting
on your kids

Who is doing
the
indoctrinating
here?



Helloa



PRIDE

going to I like
queer
picnics. I was
a She but
know I am
a they.

Dreams come true

IT IS JUST
NORMAL
TO ME





Being an LGBT+ parent is completely wonderful and wonderfully hard at the same time.

The hardest thing from my perspective is heteronormative society and the microaggressions and systemic discrimination we are all so familiar with. I think since becoming a parent this has taken on a new form from my perspective. I am a non bio mum and there is not much that is designed to support us let alone the lack of consistent support tailored for women more generally (cis and of course even less so for Trans women). There are not many 'blueprints' out there for our roles and I find people try to make their own sense of us by either trying to compare our roles to a stereotypical dad or treat us as if we are a carbon copy of a stereotypical birth mum. I have had no problems bonding with my daughter and she shows healthy attachment to both of us.

But when she started nursery the inevitable question 'where's my dad' started to come. We have always been open with her about how she came to be and have no issue with answering her questions about her donor dad but it does hurt us to anticipate any hurt she may feel from perceiving herself and being perceived as 'different'. There are some wonderful books out there and she responds so well to seeing other families represented that she can see herself in. "That's like me! That's you Mama and you Mummy". She lights up.



We feel very lucky in so many ways - having been able to have a family, to have supportive friends and family around us and a healthy spirited child. But I also nearly always worry about how she will experience the world.

When going through the IVF process it was hard to navigate a system not built for us - we are white, middle class cis women, so are coming to this with a lot of privilege which I absolutely acknowledge and recognise the multitude of additional barriers in place which others have to navigate - I was sent forms meant for a male partner initially which felt confusing, degrading and caused a lot of anxiety. Partly the constant reaffirming that systems and society see our family as 'other' but also because I had to sign consent for a whole load of invasive tests I knew I didn't need as I wouldn't be contributing genetically. This brought up a lot of complicated emotions that I felt very isolated in dealing with.

Another consultant assumed I wanted and could donate my eggs and tried to rush me to sign consents for this. I later found out she was in charge of the egg donation scheme and had an incentive. In services generally, I have felt invisible and been asked who the actual Mum is. It is all a real reminder that my partner and I often have very different experiences.



It's complex and challenging but at the end of the day we have a wonderful wee family and an amazing wee daughter who has transformed our world. I would say the Rainbow Families information session provided by a local LGBTQ+ organisation was an absolute gem when we were thinking about starting a family. I'll never forget the doctor who presented and answered questions as she was so affirming and the space felt so safe. I am very grateful for her. And now I feel we need to do more to make sure our daughter sees families like hers and meets other children with same sex and gender diverse parents. More than ever with the toxic rhetoric coming from the USA and right here in Scotland, we and she need all the joy and affirming spaces we can find.

Anonymous

HOW IT STARTED

All I thought about was
becoming a mother
The holy grail, the goal,
the dream
I planned my little boy at
the tender age of 19



I was so happy to be his
Mummy, even when his
Dad and I split up the
following Christmas

*Our son was my world and I
was navigating young
parenthood*



I never really
had any space to
think about my
gender or
sexuality

JUST
MARRIED

The next year I met
the love of my life

The following year
we got married and
had a baby girl

It was wonderful to be a
family of 4 but then I
started to struggle...



f A m I L y

I developed severe postnatal depression and post-partum psychosis...

Eventually, during my recovery, I realised how much 'traditional' and stereotypical gender roles had harmed my mental health

Congratulations!



I began working for the team that had cared for me as a peer support worker and continued to pick apart my feelings on gender and my role in society as a wife and mother...

During Covid I started to realise I was transgender and hid it from everyone for fear of losing the amazing family I had made. I wrote a long note on my phone...

‘... in this world where it’s fine to be whatever we are in the moment why am I so confused, why am I hurting so much and why do I feel like I was to fade away and avoid it all. I’m a married mother, I can’t be feeling this way, the consequences are too great’



This was just after we had another baby girl **28**

In 2023, I met other queer, gender non conforming and trans people for the first time in my life

I realised I could not hide anymore



I felt like I had been sitting on a box for 27 years and now I had opened it I could never go back...

But the same box also felt like a treasure trove!





I came out and started socially transitioning. I changed my name, told my family and started to plan medical transition



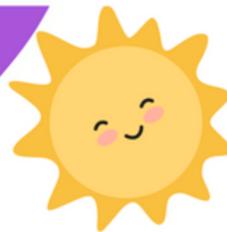
DYLAN

I described that I felt like I was seeing life in colour for the first time



We went to more queer spaces and I explained things in simple terms to our three children





**I AM FINALLY
DOING IT!**



Our children are now
9, 6 and 3.

They are amazing
and call me 'Roo-
Roo' which I love as
it acknowledges that
I carried them



My husband has been wonderful and
so supportive throughout everything.

We will renew our vows one day.

I am so proud to be a
queer, trans,
pansexual parent,
raising an amazing
family.

**You are not
alone**



As a parent I found it difficult to work out who I was once I gave birth. I loved the identity of being a mum but at the same time I felt lonely and so vulnerable in who I was. My birth wasn't particularly traumatic but I felt like it ripped my emotional self apart.

Going to baby groups or speaking to strangers about my baby was difficult as I was often asked about the father. I was never confident enough to challenge this and just used words like 'my partner' instead of wife. I wasn't ashamed of our family and didn't want to feel ashamed but ended up feeling this way anyway.

Gradually I began to be more confident in my identity as a queer parent and would correct people but this took time. I am always the only same-sex parent at groups we go to (unless others are doing the same as I once did)! I always do an internal happy dance when I meet another queer parent or family- it feels so comforting to see our family reflected in the world and makes me feel more confident in myself too.

I carried our daughter via IVF using anonymous donor sperm. We were very lucky to become pregnant on the first round and I was truly so happy to make our family of three.





However, I found the fertility procedures incredibly invasive and traumatic. My pregnancy was spent struggling with what I'd been through (alongside constant 'morning' sickness) and I felt I was grieving how I imagined pregnancy (and a better experience during IVF) would be. These complicated feelings and the 2 extreme states of being so happy yet incredibly unhappy, plus the guilt I felt at the IVF working quickly (compared to friends we knew or stories online) continued with me for some time into new motherhood.

I have drawn two flowers to depict all these feelings. I chose flowers as they go through a journey of growth and start as a mere idea, just like our family.

The first is in black and white and the second is more colourful, representing my acceptance and confidence as a mum and as a queer parent too. I also feel I have some of my own colour back as I feel more secure in my identity and myself as a parent, I have learnt a lot about myself and have come a long way since those difficult early days which makes me feel really proud of myself, and our family.

Ellie

for the broth:

1 flavoured stock cube
500ml water
4 garlic cloves
2in ginger
2tbsp tahini
4tbsp Soy Sauce
onion peel



Toppings:

Tea stained egg
Carrot
Seaweed
Onion
tomato
ginger
chicken

Ramen



CREATIVE PROMPTS

Fill your page with everything that comes to mind when you hear the word 'Joy'.

Draw a map showing how you got from where you woke up, to where you are now.

Turn this page into a postcard for a past self.

WLTM: write a personals ad for something you want in your life

Draw two stick people, what are they saying to each other?

It's 2074. Imagine a museum display about being an LGBTQ+ parent or carer in 2024, what would it include?

When I belonged... I saw... I heard... I was with... I felt...

Write a diary entry - about today, or about a day which felt important to you as a parent or carer.

What's on your playlist?

Write down a recipe that you like to cook.

What's one thing you want to share about being a parent or carer?

Design a pin badge you'd wear everyday.

Imagine this page is a bag, and you are packing everything you needed when you first started parenting or caring. What are you including?

Share an important moment from your journey as a parent or carer.

Put your pen in your non-dominant hand and draw a self-portrait.

Who has been important to you on your journey as a parent or carer?

What are you thankful for?

If you could change one thing about your experience as a parent or carer, what would you change?

LGBTQ+ ORGANISATIONS OFFERING PARENT, CARER AND FAMILY SUPPORT

These organisations are based in the UK and all offer information/support/services for LGBTQIA+ communities. Some work specifically with people who are thinking about becoming parents or who are parents. Many have Quick Exit buttons on their webpages. They are listed in alphabetical order. You can find others on this list:
www.consortium.lgbt/member-directory/

Bourne This Way LGBTQ+ Parent Support Group

bournethiswaylgbtparents.co.uk

Bournethisway LGBTQ+ Parent support group is based in Eastbourne, East Sussex. We aim to provide a non-judgmental, friendly, inclusive space open to ALL LGBTQ+ parents and their children, as well as prospective parents. The group aims to bring people together within the community, to offer support, share advice and undertake well-being activities.

LGBT Mummies

lgbtmummies.com

A national organisation that campaigns and advocates for equality for LGBTQ+ people who are looking to start a family. There is a supportive community for every milestone; your first adoption meeting, your egg retrieval, first scan, final fostering approval meeting, or your birth story.

Sheffield Queer Parents

qtpshef@gmail.com

@sheffieldqueerparents (insta)

Sheffield Queer Parents is an informal group run by queer parents, for queer parents, carers, and their kids, in and around Sheffield, UK. Anyone who understands themselves to be queer or LGBT+, and cares for children or young people is welcome to join, including prospective parents/carers. We organise meet-ups regularly throughout the year which we advertise through our Instagram account and Whatsapp group (contact us to join).

The Queer Parenting Partnership

The Queer Parenting Partnership is a Community Interest Company and delivers a complete antenatal and postnatal education programme, provide individual support and social support spaces. Our values are of equality, fairness, power, love, community, laughter and fun. We aim to build a community for queer families to learn and grow together and to celebrate our presence in the world.

Proud2bParents

proud2bparents.co.uk

info@proud2bparents.co.uk

Proud 2 b Parents is an organisation for LGBT+ parents/carers to be, LGBT+ parents/ carers and their children. We deliver services for the community across Greater Manchester, but deliver our training, advocacy and consultancy work across the whole of the UK.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this zine:

Emma; Eilidh; Dylan; Kit; Shay; Ellie;
and all those who have chosen to be anonymous!

Thank you to our partner organisations who helped develop the idea for the zines, ran in person workshops, and shared the flyer with their communities: Proud2beParents, Bourne This Way, and The Queer Parenting Partnership.



If you have any questions or comments, please get in touch with ruth.naughton-doe@york.ac.uk.

Zine Design: Lea Cooper, www.zinejam.com



Economic
and Social
Research Council

