

## Situation in the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic is often told to be one of the most tolerant country towards the LGBT+ people, but this statement is not based on any serious data and it's a question if we don't use the term tolerance instead of indifference. The Czech law does not define the hate crime in case of different sexual orientation so there are no official statistics about the violence against LGBT+ people. Discrimination surveys as well as our experiences shows that Czech LGBT+ people are experiencing physical, verbal or psychical violence very often. The homophobic bullying and violence occurs among the young people more than in any other social group. EU Agency for human rights reported that 83% Czech LGBT people are bullied at school due the sexual orientation.

## Project goals

The studies from other countries shows that bullying at school, non-acceptance by the family and relatives and the violence are the main reasons why the LGBT young people are more likely to attempt suicide than other youth. There is no study in the Czech Republic that would deal with suicide attempts among LGBT youth, but our experiences support this sad reality - from the launch of the portal in 2015 there were 15 suicidal cases and more than 30 other serious issues. Young people are especially vulnerable while dealing with so called "inner coming-out", which means forming the minority identity. The self-acceptance is such a big issue and while combined with the rejection by the family or peers, the personality of a teenager can be harmed very deeply.

The overall goal of the project is **the prevention of homophobic violence and bullying as well as crisis intervention, suicide intervention, prevention of drug abuse and depression among young LGBT persons**. Those phenomena often occur among LGBT persons when they are rejected by their families or their closest environment. Web portal sbarvouven.cz is offering young people the safe space to talk to their peers who went through similar experience.

The secondary goal of the project is also the awareness raising among general public. Only 1% of the Czech general public accepts two men kissing on streets, only 5% accepts two women showing any kind of affection publicly. That shows deeply rooted prejudices that affect LGBT people well-being. As a result almost half of young LGBT go back to the closet in their first employment, LGBT people do not report cases of abuse, violence or bullying to the authorities etc. Our goal is **to open conversation about who LGBT people are and what they face**, so as a result we wouldn't have to solve 5 suicidal cases annually.

## The methodology

The portal works as an online chat / intimate discussion and safe space between a person who seeks to answer questions related to his/her sexual orientation or gender identity and mentor who has a similar life experience.

Mentors work as a volunteers and they are not professional psychologist or psychotherapist, their role is not to conduct a psychotherapy. Their role is to talk to our clients and to help them find their solution. They are **supervised by three highly professional therapists** who follow every discussion and serve as a point of advice for mentors. Every year the mentors are having 3 supervision meetings with psychological trainings, workshops focused on bullying and in 2018 they went through the certified training in online crisis intervention held by Linka bezpečí. Thanks to that the service is moving more to professional help in crisis while preserving the biggest value-added - the mentors from the LGBT community with their own experience and story.

The key point of the portal is the respect of privacy of the clients. The **registration is anonymous**, we don't need any personal info, clients are using the nicknames. The portal also has a **"quick leave" button** which the teenager can press when somebody (parents, teachers etc.) is getting closer to their monitor - when pressing the button, the webpage is quickly redirected to google.

### Reaching the main target group

To reach the youngsters we promote the portal and its service throughout a year and by combining different means of communication. When launching the portal we created a short video which was presented during the schools screening of the biggest human rights documentary film festival One world so it was seen in cinemas by approx. **55 000 students** from all over the Czech republic. The video was also shared online.

The online is the main communication channel - we focus on Facebook (used by 91% of young people under 25), Instagram (rapidly growing among youth) and Youtube (the second most popular social network in the Czech Republic). We are also using Google Ads (working with key words) and Google Display Network targeting websites consumed by young users. The individual campaigns (e.g. around the end of school year, Valentine's day, Christmas etc.) are always tailored particularly for this audience - using their language and communication habits. From 2018 we are collaborating with PR agency Havas, who are preparing the materials for us as a pro bono work. The average reach of the individual campaigns are around **60-100 000 users**. In 2018 one of the most famous youtubers Kovy come out as a gay. He mentioned our portal in his coming out video with **more than 630 000 views**.

The online campaign is supported by traditional means of communication. We advertise in printed magazines for youth (we have long term partnership with students magazine Redway which is distributed in schools and sometimes used by teachers as an alternative educational material) as well as in the media for teachers as they can be those who might propose contacting sbarvouven.cz to their students in need.

The PR of the project is also supported by TV presenter Ester Janečková, the patron of the portal, who is helping with contacting media and providing interviews - in 2018 we managed to have 24 media outputs about the portal (Ester Janečková is helping with promo pro bono as she is the patron).

For reaching the target group it's also important to cooperate with other services dealing with youth - Linka bezpečí (the biggest crisis intervention line in the Czech republic) is our partner, we share best practices, cooperate in trainings etc. We are collaborating also with Ara Art who provides counseling for Roma LGBT+ people and Trans\*parent who is organizing support groups for transgender youth.

### Results

Since its launch, **the portal helped over 2700 people**, the clients and mentors together exchanged more than 43 000 messages. Every months there is approx. 50 new clients registered. Since the launch we helped **15 people with suicidal tendencies** and dealt with more than 30 other serious issues like escape from home etc. Those who contact our service are predominantly young LGBT+ who suffer from homophobic bullying and violence. 84% of them were under the age of 25 years. The vast majority came from small towns and villages. The most common problems that people deal with was fear of coming out (14%) and fear of homophobic bullying (12,5%, which is quite high number).

Except the numbers the key results are the individual stories of the clients. Many of them are contacting us with hindsight to say thank you and to tell us how their life is going on. We are happy to hear that the service is really helping with self-acceptance which is crucial when you have the minority identity. The possibility of talking to somebody who went through similar situation help youth to understand that it's ok to be gay and if they are actually facing some difficulties they can believe that

it's going to be better. The self-acceptance is the key moment of the coming-out. Once a person is ok with himself the outside coming out will more likely have the happy end.

The project is helping the LGBT+ community in general because it is helping with its emancipation. All studies show that if the majority know personally some LGBT+ people they become more tolerant and respectful. For the truly respectful society we need the LGBT+ people to be out in all aspects of their lives.

Interesting result is also with experts who are cooperating the portal. Two of the supervisors are straight and did not have much insight into the LGBT+ community and the problems LGBT+ youth are dealing with. After the years of cooperation they become strong allies who are able to share their experience among professional public or in media. At the beginning they were also quite skeptical about the transgender and non-binary issues and now they are fully accepting the different gender identities are able to present their opinions with other psychologists.

### Organization and Finances

The project is run by Prague Pride association which was established in December 2010 by a group of professionals from various fields of expertise. The main mission of the organization is to **support, promote and enforce a tolerant civil society and equal opportunities** in the Czech Republic; and **to address and eliminate discriminatory behavior based on sexual orientation or gender identity**. The organization fulfills its mission through community building and through influencing the public opinion on issues concerning the LGBT+ community in the Czech Republic. The first and biggest activity of the association is annual summer festival. Since 2014 strategic planning, the organization engaged in yearlong activities: public awareness campaign on LGBT+ rights; forum on LGBT+ workplace equality; and online portal for LGBT+ youth in crisis - [sbarvouven.cz](http://sbarvouven.cz).

The portal is led by the Board consisting of: the manager of the project (Oldřich Kundera), the patron of the portal (Ester Janečková), the supervisors (Irena Smetáčková, Josef Smrž, Aleš Kabilka), PR specialist (Bohdana Rambousková) and the leaders of the Prague Pride association (Czeslaw Walek, Kateřina Saparová).

**Oldřich Kundera** – project manager of [www.sbarvouven.cz](http://www.sbarvouven.cz). From his previous jobs Olda has gained a lot of experience in people management and facility management. He is currently working as a Customer care manager for Innogy. In his free time, he helps to organize a Queer ball in Prague and Brno, he organizes camps for young LGBT during their coming out period, and he is a member of the Board of directors of the STUD, z.s. Olda is involved with [sbarvouven.cz](http://sbarvouven.cz) from its beginning, first as a mentor, and since fall 2016 as its manager.

In 2017 we started the cooperation with Vodafone who become the main partner covering 70% of the project's budget. In 2018 we started with campaigns focused on individual donors with optimistic results. For 2019/2020 we plan to achieve ⅓ of the budget to be covered by individuals.