I'm Shane, I'm a peer mentor at the 4U project and I'm genderfluid and pansexual. Sometimes I feel male, sometimes I feel female and sometimes I can feel anything in between. I'm attracted to people, regardless of their gender.   
  
It's not easy coming out to a roomful of your peers. Even now, in my retail job I refrain from telling some anecdotes because I don't know how my colleagues will respond to the phrase "my ex girlfriend". I can't bring myself to say "friend" instead because that's what my Dad always says to avoid acknowledging my sexuality. So while I'm arguing this out in my head the moment passes and I'm kicking myself because I've missed an opportunity to just be me. We used to have another Shane at work who was cis male so of course we were differentiated as "male/female Shane" or "Shane and Shane-ette" or as my boss called us "Mr and Mrs Shane" (which neither of us were fond of). I didn't want to say anything, even though I was uncomfortable, because I felt that in answering all the why's and how's I'd be dubbed a snowflake or a problem and alienated from the other staff. So I remained "female Shane" til the day "male Shane" left.  
  
I never really had to come out as such in school. I opened that closet door just a crack and, just as I began to feel positive about it, some of the girls at school tore it open and dragged me out. I remember standing in front of my year 10 class just after I'd heard the rumours. I was presenting something or other but I couldn't focus because I just looked at all these girls' faces: some who I hung out with until they started distancing themselves from me after they found out; some I barely knew at all and wouldn't have wanted them to find out yet; and some who would shout in the changing room, accusing me of looking at them in their bra. "DYKE" was my label. I felt like it was branded across my forehead so when I stood up to do my presentation it was all anyone could focus on; especially me.  
  
What they didn't know was that I wasn't even a lesbian. It was more complex than that. I was questioning my gender even then but I didn't feel I could tell anyone that in an all girls private school.  
  
I didn't know how to explore my gender, and my sexuality seemed like nothing but a curse. I felt uncomfortable, in my friend group, in my uniform (skirts unless for religious reasons) and I felt uncomfortable in my mind.  
  
That, on top of poor mental and physical health, family problems and GCSEs was too much for me without support. And for other young people that list goes on.  
  
The 4U project gave me the space and support to explore my gender identity and find a more fitting label for my sexuality. The relaxed attitude about not knowing your sexuality is so important because getting pushed into gay or straight is so damaging and limiting. I had to work hard in college and at home to take back that label that had been placed on me and replace it with the truth. With encouragement and some practical help from staff and other young people at 4U I came out properly - on my own terms.   
  
4U encourages pride and doesn't demand definitions. We use each other's preferred names and pronouns without questioning when they change. Such a supportive environment should not be restricted to a youth group. The young people at 4U should be able to be themselves every day, not just 3 hours on a Tuesday.  
  
They go to school or college every day, so why not start there. Just by knowing the definitions we talked about in the beginning, using people's preferred names and pronouns and challenging HBT bullying staff can create an environment where students feel safe and can be themselves.   
  
Coming out in front of a roomful of people will never be easy, but with support from friends, family, teachers and the whole school system, it can seem less daunting.  
  
I'm Shane, I'm gender fluid and pansexual.