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# *Role Models*

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BEING YOURSELF:  
LGBT Lives in Scotland

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# Introduction

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We talk a lot about Role Models at Stonewall Scotland. We know that it is a bit easier to feel like you're different, when you know others feel like they might be too. And we also know the fear and isolation that comes with feeling like you're on your own.

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At Stonewall Scotland, we have the privilege of working with employers, universities, colleges and schools across the country, and they all have one thing in common: they want to make sure LGBT people feel safe, feel included, and can reach their full potential. But unfortunately that isn't the case in every organisation, and too many young people are starting their careers believing that their success is reliant on them hiding who they really are.

Success means something different to each and every one of us, but we believe that it should never have to come at the price of being able to be yourself. In Scotland, we're very good at self-effacing modesty, and many people struggle to see themselves as a 'role model'. But the truth is, most of our role models are not celebrities, or sitting high on pedestals, but colleagues, friends, parents or siblings. They are not perfect, but we wouldn't want them to be, because we're not perfect either.

Being a role model is a choice other people make for you. It is when they see something in you that resonates, something aspirational, or perhaps very normal. Something that says to them, *this* is possible, whatever *this* might be. In this guide you will read some powerful and inspirational stories from people across Scotland. Some of them might strike a chord with you, others might just be interesting stories. Everyone's role models are different. These are some of ours.



Colin Macfarlane  
Director,  
Stonewall Scotland

“I believe that Scotland is *changing* for the *better*... There are lots of people who are really *passionate* about equality, so I think with all that drive and *determination*, *motivation* and joint will, life will continue to get *better* for LGBT people.”

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“Life is different for *everybody* and we are all very *different*. There is no right way or wrong way to know you're *LGBT*, and no *right or wrong* age to know.”

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“My dear grandson is so *lovely*. I love being with him and I love the fact that my *daughters* can call me *Dad* and they also call me *Grandma* with him. And that he calls me *grandma* too. That's the kind of *world* I *want* to live in.”



## *Alanna & Horse*

*Alanna Jane Higginson, Journalist and  
Horse McDonald, Singer and Songwriter*

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**A**lanna – I liked girls at school... I liked one particular girl, and was caught kissing her in the school toilets. I was so badly beaten up that I have got a dent in my skull. I missed a lot of school and if it wasn't for one teacher, I wouldn't be here at all. He used to stand with me at break times and lunch times, make sure I got home from school safely. That went on for over three years at school and outside of school, my parents found it difficult to deal with and we had to move house.

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Back in those days, there wasn't the internet, so as soon as I shut my front door, I felt very safe, because my family was very loving and supportive, even though they didn't want me being gay.

So I didn't come out and I went on to marry my best friend, who was a man. Obviously, it wasn't going to work, he knew that I was interested in women. I had a massive breakdown in my late twenties. I was hospitalised for eight months and then realised that I couldn't live a lie anymore. After I had gone back to work I found out my best friend was dying and I gave up work to look after her. She said life is too short, you have to be authentic to yourself and from that minute, my life changed. I went out with my first girlfriend, I told friends, family, everyone. My husband and I separated and that was tough, really, really tough – but we're still the best of friends.

The hardest thing in all of this is that we have got two boys, they knew but they didn't want their friends to know, because they feared they would get bullied as well. It was very, very difficult living on the Isle of Wight, there were not many visible gays and lesbians.

**Horse** – I always say that I never came out, because I have never been ‘in’ to come out. I didn’t really want to be a girl, I actually physically wanted to be a boy. Although I never actually came out, I was very obvious, but no-one else seemed to support me or accompany me on my journey, certainly in my early teens. A lot of the challenges I faced were within myself: not accepting myself, not fitting in with other people and basically being different to anyone else. Young boys in particular didn’t like me, and there were various times when I was chased and attacked in the streets, pretty much outside the school gates. It was a pretty awful experience being different and not fitting in.

*“The music has touched people and been an influence. I think if you touch just one person then it is powerful.”*

There was one incident when the Police started shouting at me as well, joining in with the bullying and I felt very much that I had no help and I was a bit lost. I had to get out. I never spoke once with my family about it, I thought I was going to bring them great shame. So the whole weight and pressure was to get away, and that is when I moved to Glasgow.

I still think I am working on making peace with what happened, as I am growing up, growing older. Within my singing, I get great joy. I write about my experiences and how I feel, and it is like osmosis, I have managed to pour my insides out, which has been very, very good for me, giving voice, quite literally to my feelings and my unhappiness and conversely, actually, helping other people in doing so.

People get in touch with me privately and ask for my support. Two women got in touch with me, their mum was a huge fan and she was a lesbian and they asked me to sing at her funeral. The music has touched people and been an influence. I think if you touch just one person then it is powerful.

**Alanna** – I always wanted to write, but my mum and dad told me I had to get a proper job. I have always written and that has been an outlet for me. I started GAIA magazine because I saw there was a real gap in the market, especially for women aged over 45. Every single magazine you look at is airbrushed. GAIA has got a good readership where the writers, and the people on the front covers are all aged over 45, but they are all inspiring women. Whether you are black, whether you are Muslim, whether you are lesbian, whether you are gay, we all face different issues, it is no good just sweeping it under the carpet. We hopefully address issues in a subtle way, so people are interested and might go and find out a little bit more about it. If what I write about affects just one person, then I will continue to do it.

I got into journalism and I had liked Horse's music for many years. It was a great source of inspiration and comfort to me. I interviewed Horse at a festival in Kent and we became friends.

I had a text from Horse one day, to say, do you feel the same as me and I said yes, and then it was a matter of two weeks later, I had moved up. It was freeing moving to Scotland, I found Scottish people very welcoming. I found being ‘out’ in Scotland, while not easy, has allowed me to be myself since I’ve been here.

*“Whether you are black, whether you are Muslim, whether you are lesbian, whether you are gay, we all face different issues...”*

**Horse** – As I grew up, I think I aspired to escape and the fantasy of escape, in South Lanarkshire (or maybe just anywhere), was to be a pop star or a footballer. I worked very hard, travelling up and down to London to try and get a record deal. When things were difficult growing up, music is what I turned to for my comfort and solace.

The press didn't see anyone else like me, who was actually out or doing what I did. They were looking for controversy, looking to be very negative. But we didn't play the game. I was still growing as a person and very unsure of myself and because I didn't know who I was myself how could I say to somebody, refer to me as this, dress me like this?

On one tour, the publicity posters and flyers had the heading 'Horse, What is it? A Man or a Woman?' I think that marketing was horrific and I think that, at that point in our journey it was the death knell: it was all about getting some controversy and the record company drove that as well as the press. I would say that my success has come in other ways: it's all about the music still and writing songs.

It is only very recently that I looked upon myself as an actual singer because I always thought that I wasn't very good! Part of that is a 'not good enough thread' that might be a Scottish thing. But in some respects that little piece of grit in my shell has made me strive to be the best I can be.

*“...what gives me hope is to see how far we have come, as the LGBT community.”*

But I still suffer from the effects of what happened to me growing up. When we are out walking or whatever, I am wary of someone being behind me. In a street, I am very careful of our safety. I don't think we should ever be complacent. It just feels like I have been left with a little bit of a stigma and a fear of being attacked for being who I am, and it is such a great surprise when people talk in warm and glowing terms about gay friends.

**Alanna** – I am a mum to two grown up boys now and one of the things that I didn't expect was the fear of having to come out again. We were introduced to our son's girlfriend and some friends, he was so excited, and he was going over to the table and said 'here are my mums'. He is 27, and they were really silly and horrible, and he was visibly upset. One of our youngest son's girlfriends, wasn't allowed to stay at the house because there were two lesbians. Her mum didn't mind me driving her home at two o'clock in the morning though, so she didn't have to walk. That is a bit of a shock because it is not just the kids, it is the parents. So that is something that we didn't expect.

But what gives me hope is to see how far we have come, as the LGBT community. What gives me hope is to see the future generation that is coming through but also the changing minds of our peers. We are not all the same, every person is different, but if we can all rub along together and there not be any of this animosity and hatred, that is what I hope for.

**Horse** – There has been such a change for LGBT people in my lifetime. When we went to parliament for the last vote on equal marriage everyone was celebrating, but actually, I buckled at the knees and burst into tears. Everybody was saying 'this is a good thing' but for me, having this happen in my lifetime – the enormity of my government saying you are actually all right and you are one of us, was just incredibly moving.

We went back to Lanark, the town I grew up in, to get married. We got married in a place that my dad had a lot to do with, it felt a little like he and my mum were there. Alanna's Dad walked her down the aisle, which meant a lot to both of us. Being there, it felt like a statement to say we are happy and this is a good thing. It was reclaiming a little bit of me, of us, being ourselves. The day I married Alanna was the happiest day of my life... so far!



# Nathan

*Nathan Gale, Trainee Solicitor*

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**I** came out as trans when I was twenty, and I lived, pretty happily actually, as male until a few years ago when I started feeling that I had more permission to be whoever I wanted to be. Words like 'he' or 'she' just didn't really feel right anymore, and just didn't really describe me, or my identity, or my journey. 'They' feels like it takes in the whole of my experience. I think it's a great pronoun, I even play the oboe in a band called the 'They They Theys'!

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Understanding and expressing my identity has been like a series of evolutions, through learning more about different identities.

I identified as a lesbian to begin with, because I was brought up as a girl and fancied a girl, so I thought that's what I must be. I also felt it gave me permission to behave and dress more in line with my gender identity, without having to explain it. I started to identify more and more as male, but looking back, I think it was really that I strongly didn't identify as female, and so male felt like the only other option.

My Mum's found it difficult over the years, I think because until recently she felt like I still wasn't really myself. I felt like I had to give the trans narrative that everybody expects, so I'd say stuff like, 'I didn't really enjoy it when we went shopping' and 'I didn't really enjoy nail polish', which actually, I did. That was very hurtful to her because those were things that we enjoyed together. She felt like she didn't know me if that wasn't true. So I think I make a lot more sense to her now, which is nice.



I think it's miraculous that I've ended up where I am now! I had quite severe mental health problems and was unemployed for a while. Through difficult times it's been a series of instances of making the decision to keep trying, to keep living. A lot of the time that's been because of people in my life, other times it's been because I'm still able to find joy in things like music, and sometimes it has just been stubbornness, or 'let's just see what tomorrow feels like'.

*“Some colleagues make a really big effort to get my pronouns right, which is great. But I think society as a whole is just a bit confuddled by me!”*

I'd always wanted to do law, but because I was dyslexic staff at school suggested I wouldn't manage, so I discounted it. I guess I'd got to that point where I didn't feel I had anything to lose, so I thought I'd just give it a whirl. I absolutely loved it and here I am now. My partner's support was a massive part of that. I know I wouldn't be doing what I am if it wasn't for him.

I couldn't not be out as queer at work, I can't imagine not talking about Rob, he's too important a part of my life. But it's also important for me to be open about being non-binary, because I know that there are so many people that aren't in a position to be out at work, and that won't change unless others are. Some colleagues make a really big effort to get my pronouns right, which is great. But I think society as a whole is just a bit confuddled by me! I get mis-gendered constantly – the non-binary thing is just not on people's radar. It does get a bit tiring sometimes, but more the fact that I feel invisible and feel that there's no space for me. That's difficult.

It's always been really important to me to change the world in some small way, for things to be different because I've stuck around. My mum fought to absolute exhaustion for me and my brother, who is also disabled, to get what we needed. No matter how difficult it made her life, she was just always there to advocate for our rights. What was important to her was that disability rights were furthered, not that she was recognised as doing that. I think that's what motivated me to keep trying so hard, because I always knew I wanted to change things. But I'm not exceptional, I've just had opportunities that I've been able to take advantage of, and some incredible people that have been there for me.

*“There have been times in my life when just the fact that I managed to get dressed that day was a massive achievement.”*

I am privileged by being white and middle class, and although having a career in law is difficult for me, it is possible. Succeeding and feeling successful always has to be in relation to your circumstances. There have been times in my life when just the fact that I managed to get dressed that day was a massive achievement. And I never lose sight of the fact that that was true then and there's every possibility that it'll be true for me at some point in the future. I've been able to find support and find the will to carry on, wherever it was available to me. Sometimes at work I have to read about horrendous crimes. And that can be really bleak, but then I just see people do really lovely little things for each other, and I think as long as we've got that, then we've got something.

A portrait of Anthea Koon, a young man with short dark hair, glasses, and a black leather jacket, smiling. The background is a blurred city street. A gold vertical bar is on the left side of the image.

# Anthea

*Anthea Koon, Naval Ships Modern Apprentice*

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**I** was born and brought up in Glasgow. Both my parents are Chinese and they immigrated to Scotland 30 odd years ago, but my dad left pretty quick and my mum works in a Chinese take-away. She's self-employed – if she doesn't work she can't make money. So I was given to her best friend and her husband. It started as a babysitting job and, 19 years later I'm still there. Family is who you make it, not blood ties – that is a big thing I learnt from how I grew up.

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It's great that I grew up in a huge family, I've got two mums and a dad – in many ways I've had a pretty normal upbringing but at the same time, I haven't... A good way of summarising it is I'm adopted minus the paperwork.

I was brought up to form my own opinions on things. We discussed issues, and my parents made me question what was right and wrong. But being gay, and the vast spectrum that is sexuality, was never mentioned in my household, neither in a positive or negative way. So I was left on my own to make my own opinions on it much like the rest of the things in my life.

*“Family is who you make it, not blood ties...”*

Conveniently, I could also poke and prod at my parents and ask questions – see what their opinions were, and where I stood. So when I came out to them it went really well, because they turned around and told me they'd known for years. And I asked them why they had never said anything, because I didn't know! And they just said that I needed to figure that out myself. Fair enough.

Most of my adventures of working through sexuality was from school. Everyone tends to say they were bullied at school, but I was one of those people who was quite pally with everyone, so when I came out, it was actually fine. Unfortunately for some of my friends though, it did get fired their way. I was very aware of it happening, and the fact that the teachers did nothing about it really put me off coming out.

*“You do need a bit of a thick skin when it comes to working in the shipyard – everyone has a very strange sense of humour.”*

My biggest concern growing up was actually what I was going to study at University. It is quite frequent in the Chinese culture to think ‘your child must succeed, they must go to University, and they must have the best job’. It is very much in the culture. But my Scottish dad encouraged me with hands on stuff and working with tools because that’s what he did. I love finding out how things work and I realised that what I wanted to do was work with my hands, with tools. I wanted to work on the shop floor doing things, and you don’t need to go to university to do that!

I am a pipe fitter to trade and I’m in the last year of my apprenticeship. You do need a bit of a thick skin when it comes to working in the shipyard – everyone has a very strange sense of humour. My colleagues are mostly okay with me being gay – I tend to do the same as I did with my parents, draw out the opinions before I say anything. But there are a few things that still need to change, like the use of the word ‘gay’ and ‘faggot’. There are words in the context of race that you would never think to use now, and it should be the same, but Rome wasn’t built in a day.

My Chinese mum was very scared for me when I came out. She wasn’t homophobic, she was scared, and she told me not to tell anyone at work. In her mind coming out meant you would get hurt, and your life would be restricted. In reality things have changed a lot, but I’ve also had things fired at me from all angles, be it gender, sexuality, how I dress, what my interests are, my race. You name it, I’ve had it. It’s unfortunate that people have to learn to deal with that. No one should ever have to learn to deal with something like that.

*“I also explained to him what non-binary means, because he was confused about whether someone was a boy or a girl.”*

I love my nephew to bits and he looks up to me. He was taught that girls wear pink, wear dresses, like dolls... Then he walks into my room. My room is painted blue, I have random posters on my wall, I wear jeans all the time and my job involves building ships. He thinks that’s the coolest job ever, that I build ships. I also explained to him what non-binary means, because he was confused about whether someone was a boy or a girl. He’s only eight, and he really listened, and really tries to get it right! Even now he talks about people as ‘he, she or they’. That’s amazing! To me that’s what being a role model is about. It’s showing people what is available in life, what you can do despite what other people tell you.



# Douggie

*Douggie Ward, Commander in the Royal Navy*

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**M**y grandfather served in the Royal Navy in World War 2, as part of the Fleet Air Arm on the aircraft carriers, and one of my very good friends' brother was also in the Navy. I used to hear the tales of all the things that he was up to and I thought, I could do that. Additionally I have always wanted to put something back into the community or into society in general and the more I read about the Royal Navy, the more I liked it. It is about people at the end of the day. So that is why I did it. I joined up as a Logistics Officer and I am also now a Barrister in the Royal Navy – a Commander (which is the same rank as James Bond).

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In all honesty I was a bit of a nerdy child. I enjoyed school, I enjoyed education, and I went to a really good school and made some really good friends. My aspiration was just to be happy, to be honest and to have a nice comfortable life with a nice family. I think I had always wanted to have children – especially having grown up in a relatively large family.

In 2003 I got married to my then wife. I didn't get married to my wife knowing that I was a gay man, I really and honestly did not. It was only as time went on that I realised that deep inside something wasn't right. I didn't realise until I was in my mid-thirties, so by that stage I had what most people would look at and think was the perfect life, and it was. I was married, I had two children, I had a lovely house in Rosyth and a good job and a black Labrador called Archie.

But deep down as time went on, I realised that I wasn't happy and something was wrong. I reached out to the Royal Navy's LGBT organisation, I had an inclination it was to do with my sexual orientation, and then I did realise, actually, I am gay. But for a bit, I didn't really do anything about it.

One day, the woman who I shared an office with was listening to the radio and they were discussing the private life of a politician. There was a lot of discussion about whether he was gay. My colleague said 'people don't really care who you are, as long as you are happy in yourself and honest with everybody else'. I drove home with those words ringing in my ears. I knew I was not being honest with myself and I was not being honest with other people.

I had a decision as to whether or not to stick a hand grenade under my world as it then was, or to not say anything to anyone, and not actually be able to be who I knew, at that stage, that I was. My whole job as a lawyer is about not misleading people, and so I thought, well I have to be honest. I also wanted to be honest for my ex-wife's sake, because I wanted her to have the opportunity of finding happiness and moving on. You only get one shot of life and you have got to follow your heart, ultimately. That evening I came out to my wife.

It was very emotional, but it felt like the world had lifted off my shoulders, and the reaction that I got was pretty amazingly positive as well, from colleagues, friends, family, wife and even my wife's parents. My daughters don't see it as an issue either now. When I married my husband my youngest daughter soon realised that there would be a lot more grandparents, uncles and aunties, which also meant more presents for Christmas! I don't think my elder daughter necessarily struggled with my sexuality, but I think she struggled a wee bit with the fact that I was no longer living with her mum. But we are still a family, we are just a different family, in fact we are now a larger family and we work together to make sure everything is alright for the kids.

*“It was very emotional, but it felt like the world had lifted off my shoulders, and the reaction that I got was pretty amazingly positive as well...”*

At work, even people who I thought would be negative, or dismissive, or positively against what I had done, were actually incredibly positive. In the last 15 years, the Royal Navy has changed incredibly. You live cheek by jowl in the Royal Navy, and the only way you can ever live in such confined quarters is by accepting differences no matter what, because you soon realise everyone is different. We have a very strong team spirit and ethos, and the most important thing is that you are an effective part of the team and by being yourself you can be more effective. I also think that it is important to show broader society that we are their Royal Navy: we represent society in all aspects. To do so, we need to be just as diverse as society in general, but personally, it is just so much easier being out at work because I don't have to hide, or lie, or make up stories.

Life is different for everybody and we are all very different. There is no right way or wrong way to know you're LGBT, and no right or wrong age to know. If I had known at 14, I wouldn't have had my two wonderful girls and I would never change them for the world. Life works in mysterious ways, but we have to follow our own path.



# Kirsty

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*Kirsty Colquhoun, Youth Worker, Activist and Student*

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**W**hen I first went to secondary school I had this epiphany, a realisation that life didn't have to be a man and woman, married with kids and a white picket fence. That was a complete revelation to me because I was always assumed that was what was expected. Realising that wasn't the only possible avenue, I was like, oh my goodness, this is really exciting!

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I grew up in a tiny village near Bathgate which only has about 2,500 inhabitants. Bathgate has about 30,000 people, so that is a metropolis for someone who has come from such a small rural community. I was selective in being open about my sexuality, so not everyone knew. I had enough going on being a bit of an alternative, chubby, goth kid, without adding something else to that melting pot.

Margaret Cho was the first openly bisexual woman that I had heard of, so for me that was quite revolutionary! Bisexual women didn't exist as role models when I was younger, or at least they were always assumed to be lesbians or assumed to be straight. I remember reading an interview in a magazine and she was talking about being bisexual and that was the first time I heard the word used in a really positive way. I remember thinking, that fits with me, that's how I feel, there is someone else out there.

I came out to my group of friends first, I think I was about 14, and they were all really supportive. But I grew up in a Roman Catholic family and went to a Roman Catholic high school and that environment was more difficult. My group of friends wanted a safe space to just hang out at lunchtimes, so I knocked on my headteacher's door and asked if we could use a classroom for just hanging out and feeling safe.

He took the names of all the students that I was saying, but as soon as he realised that they were all the seemingly 'gay' kids, he was really against it and I was still told quite succinctly that that wasn't going to be accepted. There was the view that there were no gay kids in the school, so I suppose that would have been seen as a bit public.

*“Bisexual women didn't exist as role models when I was younger, or at least they were always assumed to be lesbians or assumed to be straight.”*

I moved to Edinburgh to do my undergrad degree in psychology, and moving to a big city was quite a change. Obviously Edinburgh is only 25 minutes from Bathgate but that 25 minutes was worlds apart really, the hustle and bustle of living in the city and having something on your doorstep every night, that was unheard of! I loved being in a town where there are a lot of gay bars and gay clubs, openly gay people – that was really exciting for young 18 year old me. Moving to Edinburgh was quite a pivotal moment in shaping who I was.

I think that the term gay has been used as an abbreviation for the whole LGBT umbrella. Bisexuality has got its own issues and although biphobia has a lot of similarities with homophobia, there are also quite a lot of individual issues. I've had a lot of people say it's a phase, or question whether if you have not had the same amount of girlfriends as boyfriends, then are you really bisexual? And people suggest that I like to say I'm bi to be a bit alternative and individual and out there, which is really challenging. I have had quite a lot of experience with people questioning my understanding of my own sexual orientation.

Generally though, people are quite accepting but I think that having self-confidence in my own voice and my own abilities has been quite helpful. It is a big part of who I am and it is linked to all the things I am interested in, both personally and professionally. With one of my colleagues from Youth Services, I recently organised our first ever West Lothian LGBT friendly pride. I had a lot of people from the wider community reach out to me and say we have needed something like this for twenty plus years. But our community has definitely changed in recent years. I have seen same sex couples walking down the street in Bathgate, holding hands. That is something that wouldn't have happened when I was at high school, I wouldn't have imagined that happening.

*“But our community has definitely changed in recent years. I have seen same-sex couples walking down the street in Bathgate, holding hands.”*

Being bisexual is just one of many facets of who I am, but it is one that is important to me and I think it has been quite substantial in shaping the woman that I have become. Because of that, I like to be open and I think it is really important to be a positive role model for the young people that I work with. Working with young people, having a positive impact on them, and helping them to achieve their potential – that has always been a huge passion of mine. I think young people now are so much more turned on to social issues and political issues and environmental issues than they were when I was a teenager. It fills me with hope that coming generations are so much more accepting of all people.



Scott

*Scott Rennie, Church of Scotland Minister*

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**A**ll my life, I have believed in God. Not in a dogmatic way, but I have always had a spiritual sense of the divine in the world and in my life. I have always felt that I was meant to serve God in the ministry. That hasn't been easy because I have had many intellectual and emotional struggles along the way. I found coming out to myself the most difficult thing. Once I had made that step, it changed my life.

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Even from being a youngster, five or six, I knew that I fancied boys in the main. I learned from conversations with my family that this was not a good thing, that this was not the norm, that this wouldn't be appreciated.

I saw kids who were gay and they had a hell of a time at the hands of bullies, the school didn't protect them. All through my childhood I really got the message from home, from school and of course from church, that this was not on, this was not a possibility.

I felt that going into the ministry was what I was meant to do, and therefore that was a priority. At the same time, I didn't want to be gay. That was the other hard part, the other part of the equation. Although it seems very calculated to say that I just fit everything else around that, I didn't want to be gay because it just didn't go, and I had grown up hating that part of myself. That is why it took me years to come to terms with it, I think.

I married a woman whom I loved and who remains a great friend, a tremendous person, but we were both unhappy and the marriage broke down.



In a sense, the breakdown of that marriage gave me an opportunity to finally be honest with myself about who I was, and to decide if I was going to rebuild my life. I had to be honest and I had to come out.

I think a big factor in all of our lives is fear, and the worst thing about fear is that it has a grip on us that is often out of proportion with reality. My family, my ex-wife, my daughter, my friends were amazingly supportive. I was terrified about telling them because we had all grown up in church together, but they were all supportive, which really took me by surprise. Looking back, I kind of feel bad about that, because I think I should have maybe thought more of them, but fear is a terrible thing in your life, in anybody's life.

*“I saw kids who were gay and they had a hell of a time at the hands of bullies, the school didn't protect them.”*

When I look at the ministry of Jesus and his radical inclusion of people, his encouragement to the religious hierarchy of the day to include people who often find themselves on the margins because of prejudice, I think Jesus was always about bringing people in from the margins. I believe we are God's creation, so I am who I am, and I have never understood how God could be anti-gay, given that so many of us are LGBT. We are born that way and that is the way we are. I think the church's great mistake at times, has been not being able to embrace that and to ask, really ask, what does it mean to be faithful to your Christian faith and be gay, rather than to set the two up in opposition.

My case was heard by the General Assembly and I became the first out gay minister in the Church of Scotland. It was met, from some parts of the church, with sheer hostility, sometimes vitriol, but often just a low level kind of prejudice and niggling.

On the other hand, other parts of the church have been hugely affirming and so it has been a real mixed reaction.

At my induction, we had to have private security, but I also had the most moving letters from people like me, in faith communities, who were having the same struggles and issues. I found that hugely moving and inspiring. In the six years now I have been at Queen's Cross, the church has grown tremendously because it has attracted people who want to belong to a progressive, forward looking church.

*“I try and think of ways I can help move the world on to be a friendlier place for LGBT people, through my interests, through my work.”*

In my experience, what changes things, what changes peoples' minds, are their interactions with other people, not arguments or theories or debates. I think that presence of LGBT people being themselves, in communities of faith, has forced those communities, whatever tradition they belong to, to rethink their approach to sexuality and faith.

When people meet me most people tend to know a bit of my story. They kind of know that I am a gay man and I am minister and it is unusual. So I do think a lot about how I am and what that conveys to the world. I try and think of ways I can help move the world on to be a friendlier place for LGBT people, through my interests, through my work. I find it is a tremendous privilege for me to be able to make some difference. One way or another, I have been given that opportunity through the way history has worked out, so why wouldn't I grasp it?



## Carole

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*Carole Anderson, NHS Head of Strategy and Performance*

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**I** went to school in Lanarkshire and then the Borders and I was very mindful that I felt a bit different from my peers. I think the complicating factor for me is that I grew up in a Christian family and it was difficult working out how being myself felt somehow incompatible with that. There was a whole sense of it just not feeling safe to be different in the Borders. I felt there was a real need to get away from a small parochial town and go somewhere with a bit more diversity before I could start to explore who I was supposed to be.

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Despite that, throughout my five years at university in Glasgow, I didn't really feel that I was able to establish who I really was. I had good friends but I always felt only able to partly express myself.

I was engaging with evangelical Christians who had a very traditional biblical view around the fact that homosexuality was considered incompatible with living a godly life. That was so important to my value system and it sort of forced me to bury any sense of difference even further. But during this time, I fell hopelessly and unrequitedly in love with a number of women and never did anything about it, and also tried very hard to deny what was going on to myself. It did feel quite lonely.

It was really only in my final year that things came to a head. I had started going to a church that was pretty progressive and my parish minister was very supportive and gave me lots of information to read. The church musician was also in a relationship with another woman and I spent some time talking to her. I came to that realisation that actually, God made me the way that I am and the way that I could best honour that was to be myself and to live to my fullest potential.

I realised I could really only do that by being open about myself, and was therefore able to exploit all my talents. I think having the support of friends gave me the confidence to start to explore that further and admit it to myself.

It was really important to tell my parents early on and that was probably one of the most scary things I have ever done. I had built it up; I had planned the conversation in my head, took the bus from Glasgow to Galashiels and prepared myself to have this discussion. Every time I stopped to gather my thoughts, my mum filled it with conversation! Eventually I managed to just blurt out what I wanted to say and stopped and looked at them. They were initially quite quiet and they were obviously thinking quite hard but they handled it very well.

*“It was really important to tell my parents early on and that was probably one of the most scary things I have ever done.”*

I think finding my feet as a new lesbian in a big city was probably the biggest challenge, knowing where to start. I had my social network but trying to find a way of finding out where lesbian and gay people go, it seemed like a whole strange new world. Later, as a physio student, I found a few challenges with being out and not being able to trust working with tutors who would have the power to make me pass or fail my placement – I didn't want to give them any ammunition for that to influence them. It probably took a few years and eventually I was out to everybody. But I soon realised, every time you change job or work location, you never stop coming out. It gets tiring but you get to be very good at using non-gender specific pronouns and being a bit evasive until the point when you feel that you can trust the people that you work with.

I suppose it has only been in the place I am working now that I am less concerned about people's response. My sexual orientation is part of me but it is not the only defining aspect of my life. If someone has a difficulty with that, then my view is that it is their problem, not mine. My healthcare organisation takes LGBT equality seriously, so I know I have the backing of my colleagues at senior levels. Being lesbian and involved in equality work has given me huge opportunities to engage with people outwith my organisation, outwith my sector even. I have become chair of Scotland's largest LGBT network and while that is absolutely not my comfort zone, I really have grown in confidence and I don't think I would have that opportunity if I hadn't been LGBT. I am also a young person's befriender and, for me, letting a young person know that being themselves is important – that whoever you are, you can be really happy and fulfilled and do well at whatever you want to do. I suppose having found my confidence, found my voice as who I am, it gives me the edge.

*“...I really have grown in confidence and I don't think I would have that opportunity if I hadn't been LGBT.”*

I believe that Scotland is changing for the better for LGBT people, and that gives me hope. There are lots of people who are really passionate about equality, so I think with all that drive and determination, motivation and joint will, life will continue to get better for LGBT people as we build on the legislative change. For me, I would just like to continue to be able to use my time and talents to enjoy my work. And personally, my goal is to enjoy a long and very happy marriage with my wife, Elaine.

A portrait of Chris Creegan, a middle-aged man with short, white hair, smiling warmly. He is wearing a grey suit jacket, a white dress shirt, and a purple patterned tie. The background is a blurred stone wall with a red door visible on the left side.

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*Chris*

*Chris Creegan, Chief Executive of the Scottish Commission for Learning Disability*

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**I** was born out of wedlock to Scottish parents in the early '60s and given up for adoption as a baby. A story typical of its time. But although in adoption the term 'forever family' is used to describe the new family, for some adopted people the 'forever family' remains the one that never was. And so it was for me. I knew little of my birth heritage growing up. There was no life story book, just the odd reminder that I was Scottish and Catholic. The gay bit came later. I had a romantic notion that one day I'd move to Scotland, and after a nervous breakdown in 2002, I did.

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I left behind the emotional noise of my life in London and moved to Edinburgh. I'd not spent that much time here before, but whenever I got off the train at Waverley in the summer of 2003 it felt like I was coming home, but without going back. This is a place I call home more than any other in my life.

My adoptive mother was clinically depressed for most of my childhood and an alcoholic. You grow up very quickly in that kind of environment. It wasn't materially disadvantaged; we were reasonably comfortable, but it could be tough emotionally. Perhaps unsurprisingly I became a bit of an outsider. I didn't make friends easily. But it gave me an inner resilience, and gradually, I kind of won through. I went to the local boys' grammar school where sport was social currency and joining the cross country running team and working hard at it paid off.

Running became, I think, part of my survival strategy and it still is, though these days fortunately it's more about thriving than surviving. By the time I was in the 6th form, friendships came more easily. I had travelled a long way from outsider to in-crowd.

*“What mattered was that I’d told somebody and they hadn’t walked away.”*

Growing up in the '60s and '70s in a village, we didn't know much about sex let alone sexuality. I guess it became clear to me that I liked boys when I was about 14. We were all starting to have girlfriends but I had a huge crush on a boy who arrived at our school from the Midlands. And by the summer of '79, when I left secondary school, I was questioning my sexuality enough to need to articulate something to somebody. The friend who I came out to one night after a drink at the pub just listened; I don't even remember saying I'm gay. Looking back it was the end of a journey which had started when I'd arrived at the school. What mattered was that I'd told somebody and they hadn't walked away.

My emerging sexuality informed a political awakening and I became involved in campaigning for lesbian and gay rights, first as a student and then, when I started work, in my union. In the early '80s I was lucky to be part of a group of people that put sexuality on the trade union agenda. They were heady days. It was very much a fringe issue but it was a formative time during which the seeds were sown for many of the gains we've seen since. I met some inspirational people back then, like Kieran Rose of the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network in Ireland and Mike Jackson, one of the co-founders of Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners. They are reluctant heroes, both still flying the pink flag. What really shines through from their hard work and others' is the extraordinary power of personal stories and connections.

Although I was at the forefront of what happened in my own union, I found the idea of pride rather 'in-your-face', a bit screechy. I often spoke at union conferences and I occasionally I'd say I'm 'out and proud' because I thought I should. Other people would do that and it would kind of trip off their tongue, whereas I felt a bit diffident about it. I still prefer to leave a lot of myself at home. But I do think it is important to be able to be yourself. Not being able to be open about who you are really takes its toll. I remember one particular incident back in the '90s, when there was a horrible level of banter around sexuality and HIV at an important meeting. My partner was dying of AIDS at the time so it was pretty toxic. I froze. I felt completely distracted by this inability for a fundamental part of me to be allowed to just be.

*“I do think it is important to be able to be yourself. Not being able to be open about who you are really takes its toll.”*

For somebody like me, attitudes have changed to the extent that life's fine really. The Irish novelist, Colm Toibin, captured it perfectly when he said 'Today I forgot I was gay, I was too busy doing something else'. But I always have to juxtapose that thought with, how different is it for the shy 11 year old starting secondary school now? For many it will still be a battle. We've come so far but there's still a long way to go. With everything that's going on in the world, it's sometimes hard to see a way through, but then stories of courage, endeavour and generosity make you believe change is possible. But it doesn't happen by accident.



# Maxwell

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*Maxwell Reay, Mental Health Chaplain*

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**I** have always had a sense of doing a job because I think it's the right thing to do. For many years I worked in the voluntary sector in organisations that supported people with HIV and within the LGBT world. I think from my own experience of growing up knowing that I felt different, and trying to access support, it was very clear to me that there were people who got ill because of the way they were treated, and I wanted to help.

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As a young child I always felt very unhappy about what I had to wear, that was the real indication for me that I was different. And I suppose, having been born female, you don't necessarily question that until you start to wonder why you are being made to do the things you have been made to do.

In a way, I was a happy kid, and I suppose I was quite resilient so I got on with it, but it felt that I was not the same as everyone else, that I was not right. I can remember being really clear that I didn't want to be somebody's wife and I didn't want to give birth. And at the time that made me think, well I must be a lesbian, because that appeared to be the only option. Transgender role models did not exist in the 1980s.

It wasn't that I was dreadfully unhappy, but it took a long time for me to put the pieces together. That was because there were no pieces to put together. There was nothing that told me it was at all possible to be born female and transition to male. Looking back, it feels that it was all part of a journey, it was all part of a process of self-discovery and transformation.

At times, I've felt like coming out as a gay trans man was a bit like breaking new ground, and I think this still happens to people. I was often expected to be the one that did the educating and the one that helped others understand what I was going through and experiencing.

I felt that I had to answer all the weird and wonderful questions that people came up with, because how else were they going to find out? At times it bothered me when I felt that people were just being inappropriately nosy. I think you can feel cornered into sharing and oversharing personal details because you want it to be okay, and you want people to understand. You just want folk to know that you are ordinary, and acceptable; that you are still the same person inside.

I was brought up in the Church of Scotland. Nobody ever came right out and said, you cannot be gay and involved in this church, but for some reason I knew what people would say if the subject was ever raised.

In my early 20s, I remember staying in a gay run B&B in Bournemouth and they had a poster up that advertised the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC). This church openly welcomed lesbians and gay men. I stayed at the B&B a few times and every time I looked at this poster I wondered if a church could really welcome lesbians and gay men. Eventually, I wrote the phone number down and thought, I am going to phone them up. The pastor, Reverend Frank Scott, came and spoke to a gay social group I was involved with in Bath, and together we created a new Metropolitan Community Church that still exists today, twenty-seven years on.

That kind of absolute acceptance, and hearing that from people who knew what they were talking about and could back that up theologically, was probably the biggest gift that I could ever have been given. That opened up a whole world of possibilities in terms of my own faith journey and how I felt about my own connection to God and my calling to ministry. I was delighted to be accepted to train for professional ministry within MCC. I have been clergy in MCC since 1993.

I think there's a big difference, certainly in Christian church communities, between those who will tolerate you and those who will celebrate and affirm you. MCC, has always been celebratory and affirming of LGBTQI folks and other churches are now catching up, which is a very good thing.

My work and ministry involved moving with my partner to London. This gave me the opportunity to develop work within the trans community which explored the many connections between one's spirituality and trans identity. When my partner became ill we decided to move out of London to somewhere less busy. Returning to Scotland, my home country, felt correct. Edinburgh was our first choice of cities. MCC already existed in Edinburgh so it felt like we were coming 'home' to a city (and country) that would welcome us. It was important for both of us to come to a city where an inclusive and affirming church community existed.

The focus of my ministry and calling was to be out and active in the LGBT community. This developed over the years and I became very actively involved in the process of supporting MCC Edinburgh to become integrated into Augustine United Church, a mainstream city centre church. I think that this journey with a community is really significant in terms of people's self-confidence and their individual and collective ability to see that there's a bigger community that is accepting and affirming. This is true transformation. There is something very liberating about feeling part of that wider community.

I now work as a Chaplain in Health Care, mostly with people who are connected to mental health services. The folk I work with have often experienced something challenging or life-changing, and it completely pulls the rug out from under them. I provide spiritual care, and sometimes that has a religious focus and other times it doesn't. It has much more to do with the broad umbrella of spirituality. I often support people who want to think about the bigger picture of life, of identity, of meaning and purpose. People have questions like 'what's important and what's life giving? Who is in my life and who is important to me?'. Life changes all the time but everyday I see the capacity for people to change and develop, to be themselves and to experience liberation and freedom. That keeps me doing what I do.



# Oceana

*Oceana Maund, Trans Activist and Volunteer*

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**D**escribing my identity in a meaningful way is almost impossible. The language around trans identities is evolving all the time and today's description may be misunderstood tomorrow. My sense of my own gender identity remains constant and although I express myself as female, and prefer to be described as 'she', I feel uncomfortable with such binary definitions of what it means to be a man or woman. I'm often frustrated when I have to choose between these descriptions when they aren't accurate or helpful. So I won't. I'm trans.

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There was no one more disappointed than I was when it became apparent I was a boy. As far as I was concerned I was a girl; I'd always been a girl, I just didn't look like one.

From the moment I became aware of the difference between boys and girls I knew I wasn't the same as everyone else. I was also painfully aware that the way I was feeling was not something I could share with anyone.

Puberty hit me like a wall and school was really tough – the pressure to conform, to act 'like a boy', was all-consuming. After being excluded from school on multiple occasions for disruptive behaviour, I was expelled with no idea of what to do or where to go with my life. Back then, I had no language to express my feelings, or anyone to look to for support, and unable to come to terms with these feelings, I turned to alcohol in an attempt to stop feeling anything at all.

I didn't tell my wife anything before we got married. I hid clothes in the most ridiculous places... I had loosened the back of a set of huge speakers so I could open them and put things inside. My life was all about secrets and I would do anything to get time to myself in the house so I could be the person I wanted to be.



Eventually we came to a tipping point – I either had to explain myself or leave and so I confessed to cross dressing, although I always knew it was more than that. This proved incredibly difficult for her to understand, and whilst we remained together and had a child, it was something she would never fully support.

Eventually she outed me to her sister, phoning me on my way home from work one day to tell me. I pulled my car to the hard shoulder of the motorway and sat there for hours trying to decide whether I could even go home or not. In the end her sister proved to be the first person in my life who I could talk to about myself without guilt and this gave me the strength I needed to begin the long journey I'm still on.

We moved to France and had what, from the outside, looked very much like a perfect life. But helped by the explosion of information provided by the internet and the advent of social media, I was finally able to interact with others who felt the same way and begin to understand my gender. But having this understanding, and not feeling able to do anything about it, made me ever more unhappy and I was drinking heavily. Eventually we separated, and I returned to the UK leaving my daughter in France with her Mum.

I came out publicly as trans soon after, and honestly, things got worse before they got better. I was physically attacked, and I became very isolated, very scared, and retreated to a very dark place. My drinking became a constant, it was the first and last thing I did each day and I cared about little else.

*“The better and stronger I felt, the more committed I became to doing everything that I possibly can to make sure that other people do not have to face the same barriers.”*

It wasn't until I was about to attempt suicide for the second time that I finally accepted that I needed help, and I have never looked back. The thought of my daughter kept me strong. I had been heartbroken at losing her, and within a year I became much more stable, much more together and my daughter came to live with me. I am a single parent now, which can be tough, but I am happy.

I've been in recovery for eight years now and apart from transition, one of the biggest factors in that recovery was access to specialist addiction services. They were lifesavers, but it soon became clear that there was no advice or guidance on how they should interact with trans people, making the whole process much more difficult for us all. The better and stronger I felt, the more committed I became to doing everything that I possibly can to make sure that other people do not have to face the same barriers.

So now I work hard to raise awareness and understanding of the challenges facing the trans community. I provide support to local authorities, the NHS, and staff and students at schools and colleges across Ayrshire. Particularly close to my heart are projects working with alcohol and drug agencies, designed to change the way they deliver services, making them safer and more inclusive environments for LGBT people to get help without having to avoid talking about issues relating to their sexual or gender identity.

I no longer measure success financially. I have had the house in the South of France, but it was a life filled with conflict and no purpose. It took me a long time to actually make the decision to be what I am and it is the best decision I have ever made. I have never been happier and I get all the satisfaction I need from doing what I do, because I think it is the right thing to do. Now is a really exciting time for the trans community, people are finally listening to us and we have a real opportunity to change things – we have got to take it.



# Douglas

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*Douglas Borland, Lecturer in Biology and Chemistry*

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**I** have been really interested in science ever since I was very young. Having this curiosity, and wanting to find out relatively concrete things has always been something that has been quite high on my priority list, as well as trying to do something for the betterment of other people. That has been a big part of my work, but it also extends into the LGBT politics that I have been involved in; trying to make sure that there is an equal place for everyone.

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Coming out is a process that never stops. It is one of those things that you just have to judge and just learn to deal with having to judge.

Being able to actually utter the words for the first time, it does stick in your throat. It's not an easy thing to do. There are stages as to how severe the repercussions can become. I started getting a little bit of confidence and then I was bullied as a result of one particular person finding out. I sort of receded and I lost quite a few friends over the course of that.

I remember telling my mum, who lives 5000 miles away, when I had my first boyfriend. I remember sitting on my bed and I was facing the wall. I went very quiet, and I told her I had to say something. But I just couldn't say it. Eventually, I said, 'I am seeing someone – his name is...'. There was just silence and then she burst out crying. I couldn't get anything out of her, and then she finally came round and she said 'You would have made such an excellent father'. I set the record straight on that issue, she is now very open to the idea. I think she became too open – she started asking lots of questions!

University is a great place to be yourself. I remember when I went to university I was finally going to get to where I wanted to be. I made a point that during Fresher's week I was going to meet all these wonderful people and if anyone was to directly ask me the question, 'Are you gay?', my response wouldn't be a lie. That was a turning point for me.

*“... I am actually in a heavily privileged position and it is important to recognise that I can help others, or help give them a voice or a platform...”*

Harvey Milk is a real inspiration to me. He was a politician who inspired a real change in attitudes towards gay people in San Francisco and he actually died as a result of trying to be who he was. He inspired a wave of mass protest in a very peaceful and very measured manner. Seeing the film about his life kick started my activism in politics. As a gay man, I might have some serious equality issues going on, but I am actually in a heavily privileged position and it is important to recognise that I can help others, or help give them a voice or a platform, particularly women in science. Being able to help my students find their voice is something that gives me a huge amount of hope.

When I first started working, there was always that fear – what if they find out? What if my boss is just secretly homophobic and in two months' time I won't have a job? It is something you do for your own professional integrity but I think personal integrity is definitely more important and being able to make sure that you are being true to yourself. It is really important for my mental wellbeing and it is important that people understand that you are being you.

As an academic professional and having a conversation with students, I think they don't have to know everything, but I try to be honest. I have been asked by students 'Are you gay?', and I say, 'Yes. What of it? It's no big deal; it doesn't affect how well I can teach you chemistry or biology, so back on question five'. I won't tolerate students using discriminatory language in my class and I actively challenge LGBT discriminatory behaviour, but also chauvinism, misogyny, sexism, small little micro aggressions... being able to just turn around and challenge that behaviour is really important. They seem to be fine with it and having that sort of openness in work is actually a really good thing – it means that when I have students who may be facing certain issues, I would like to think that they can feel comfortable in speaking to me.

*“I won't tolerate students using discriminatory language in my class and I actively challenge LGBT discriminatory behaviour...”*

When equal marriage passed in parliament I was volunteering in the Stonewall Scotland office. We cheered, we had a collective sigh of relief and a good few tears, and we had some champagne as well. Being able to see almost full legislative equality arrive in Scotland was brilliant, absolutely brilliant – it gives me shivers actually. Being able to see that sort of transition from when I was younger, when it was never discussed in schools, to now having this full legislative equality, it shows a recognition that LGBT people in Scotland have gained a lot of their rights very, very quickly. It is something that is equally heartening, and also in some senses a bit of a concern, because it does lead to people going, well we have got everything now, the problem is solved. We've come a long way, but the problem certainly is not solved.



# Harry

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*Harry Dozier, NHS Communications Officer*

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**C**oming out can be a big deal. But, for me, once I realised I was gay, telling people wasn't the issue. What was a struggle was the long hard journey towards figuring out how to love myself, not in spite of, but because I'm gay.

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Faith was, and is, really important to me. I grew up in a very conservative Christian home and I knew that I was always attracted to men. But, since premarital sex was a no-no, I assumed that the one woman I wanted to have sex with would be the woman I'd marry. 'Excellent', I thought. 'Free pass on temptation!' It never crossed my young mind that I could be romantically attracted to a man. So at age 19 when I was walking down the street and passed a guy who I instantly wished I could wrap my arms around and kiss it suddenly clicked – this wasn't just about sex.

It was about intimacy (kissing to me can be really intimate). Once that happened, I realised, 'I'm gay. I guess I had better tell everyone'.

The first person I told was my mother. Unfortunately she reacted badly. I had suspected she would but it still set me back. Wasn't my mother supposed to love me no matter what? So, I thought maybe I should try a bit harder not to be gay first. I started attending a queer faith group at university which wasn't helpful because we didn't know what we were doing; I also think all of us secretly hoped we'd meet someone we fancied! But, surprisingly, one of the things that did help was the community at the church that I attended. I was still at the point of trying not to be gay, and the people there were the kindest, most inviting people you have ever met. If nothing else, it showed me that, you know what, God is love.

As I continued to struggle a close friend who is Jewish told me, 'we believe that there are hundreds of different sins that we live with on a daily basis. Gay is just one of them. Some people are liars. Some people eat bacon. We'll chalk 'gay' up to eating bacon'. At the time it was helpful to know that being gay isn't world changing. However, it still niggled at me that being gay was somehow wrong.

Then everything changed. Once I left university I decided to join a 'gay group' – the Connecticut Gay Men's Chorus. For the first time I met happy gay men that said, actually, you can have a community and have other gay men care about you as a person, not as a sex object. These were gay men living their happy, normal, family oriented lives. They were my first gay role models and they probably saved my life.

*“It has always been the support of community and role models that helped me get to this place of acceptance.”*

Through time I realised there is nothing wrong with being gay. 'Gay' is not an ailment that you just learn to survive with. I actually have a chronic joint condition – that is something that I prosper in spite of. The love I have to give is not a hindrance except for that some places in society tell us so. But, inherently, it does not exclude me from polite society or having a family. It is a good thing.

It has always been the support of community and role models that helped me get to this place of acceptance. I remember one of the older guys in the chorus telling me about when he first came out. He had nowhere to go so moved to the streets of New York and had to sell himself to get by. He went through that, figured out what he actually wanted to do with his life, and fought to give himself other options. That experience was part of his life but it is not him. He learned from it.

As a kid, my parents often told their stories of living through the civil rights movement in America. For me it seemed passé until I experienced firsthand the racial prejudices that still exist. For LGBTI people I want there to be a point when prejudice isn't an issue – when we can be any faith, colour, size and shape. But, just as I still feel the shockwaves of racism in America, I know that for LGBTI people total acceptance is still generations away.

I moved to Scotland as a conscious decision to get away and figure out who I wanted to be. The biggest challenges have been the cultural differences. I'm told that I am too keen. I'm too intense. Too sensitive. Too... American. But, like being gay, I've learned to be proud of my differences – the things that set me apart.

At work, not everyone understood what I was trying to achieve by promoting LGBT equality. This misunderstanding was really difficult for me because, since living in Scotland, 'gay' had never been something I had to hide. I'd moved here because of Scotland's general forward thinking on inclusion. So, this opposition made me feel like that idea was being rejected.

Then I remembered my role models and the communities that helped me. I thought, 'What can I do to make sure others don't feel this way?'. So with the support of my organisation's inclusion manager I helped start the LGBTI+ and disability networks at work. It helped remind me that being a role model is about helping build and support that community.

Because of my role models I realised it's all about what you learn from the things that happen in your life, good or bad. What your sexuality is isn't the definition of who you are and your worth. And there is a lot that younger LGBTI people can learn from older generations. We've had victories but we still have fights to fight. However, on the way there, we should continue to celebrate being gay, continue to love, and be visible, and support each other in a real community.



Jo

*Jo Clifford, Playwright*

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**W**hen I was seven I was sent away to a boys' boarding school. It was a weird place, very strange and very traditionally male. We had to have a cold plunge every morning and then we would go out to the yard and we would do physical jerks. It was very much about learning to be tough and strong. Then secondary school was all about conformity and bullying.

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When I was about 15 I finally started to make sense of the feelings that had been bothering me since a very early age: I understood I actually would be much happier living as a girl. That horrified and frightened me because at that time there was nothing I could do with that realisation except hide it. It was far, far, far too dangerous to tell anyone.

It wasn't until I was 18 that I discovered that there were other people like me in the world – that there was even a word for how I felt. I had a long, long, long struggle against feeling ashamed, feeling frightened, feeling it was completely ridiculous. There was a lack of information and a lack of people I could really talk to who would understand and who I could really trust. I tried to be a man so hard for so many years because I didn't know, or couldn't believe, that transitioning would be right or possible for me to do.

I met my late partner Susie when I was 21 and it was love at first sight. She was the love of my life and I think I was the love of hers too. We had this incredible closeness together and almost at once I had to tell her. She said to me, I know there's something very feminine about you and that's one reason why I like you. That was incredibly important to me. But I didn't really tell anybody else for a long time because it's hard to imagine now how difficult things were in those days. How isolated I felt.

I had to write plays, there was nothing else I could do, nothing else. But I thought I was a very strange writer, and I wished I could be different. I wished I was writing conventionally but I wasn't, and it was only much later that I thought, oh okay, I am a trans writer. Since I've transitioned, I've discovered that I've also been able to perform, and that's a joy and a skill that had been blocked for 40 years. It was amazing, to discover I could do that again and I think that's a huge source of hope. It says that it's possible to recover from trauma – it's massively difficult but it is possible.

My wife Susie died of a brain tumour, we had been together 33 years and I remember when we had the diagnosis I was so devastated. One night I remember I was on my own, feeling so despairing and unhappy, and I heard a voice in my head. The voice said the female in you is wholly good and she will give you the strength to get through this suffering, and then she will give you the strength to find a new life after Susie's gone. I had never thought of it that way, being trans had always seemed to be a misfortune to me, but it turned out to be absolutely true.

*“...it's hard to imagine now how difficult things were in those days. How isolated I felt.”*

Performing *Jesus Queen of Heaven* for the first time in 2009 was a crucial moment in my life. I felt then, as I still feel, that most of the really entrenched and horrible opposition to LGBT rights comes from Christianity. As a Christian, I felt it was really important to resist that and say, actually if you look at the Gospel, Jesus would be completely with us. Jesus was always with the oppressed and the people that suffered from prejudice, always with us. So that was the message of the play, but it was also an act of devotion because Jesus is an astonishing and profound figure.

It was extraordinary to turn up for the first performance and see the street full of people that hated me. It was my childhood nightmare come true, because they did know who I was and they did hate me. There's such a difference between the people that hear about the play and think it is vile and immoral, and the people that have actually seen it, Christians and non-Christians, who say it is really moving, very beautiful, and very Christian.

*“...the voice said the female in you is wholly good and she will give you the strength to get through this suffering.”*

The Mail on Sunday wrote a nasty article about it recently, but what was interesting was that in 2009 when the play first came out, all the tabloids wrote vile articles and called me things like 'sex-swap playwright'. But this time, the Mail on Sunday was very respectful of my gender, and got my gender right even in this otherwise nasty article. It was such an astonishing, astonishing change.

There is a sense that actually things are moving forward, and I have actually survived. I look back on my life and I find that a huge source of hope because I could have very easily not have. There are all kinds of endings that would have been far more plausible for me. And all of them unhappy.

And yet I haven't ended unhappily, I am happy. I have found myself creatively and have a loving family. My dear grandson is so lovely. I love being with him and I love the fact that my daughters can call me Dad and they also call me Grandma with him. And that he calls me grandma too. That's the kind of world I want to live in.

*“Life changes all the time, but everyday I see the capacity for people to change and develop, to be themselves and to experience liberation and freedom.”*

*“It's always been really important to me to change the world in some small way, for things to be different because I've stuck around... But I'm not exceptional, I've just had opportunities that I've been able to take advantage of, and some incredible people that have been there for me.”*

*“I believe we are God's creation, so I am who I am, and I have never understood how God could be anti-gay, given that so many of us are LGBT.”*



## *A few observations about role models*

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- 1 People will have a range of role models, and everyone's role models will be different. People rarely want to emulate a single person – they want to pick and choose qualities they admire from a number of role models.
- 2 Visible role models help show the way for others. As an LGBT person, it's much easier to imagine that you can be successful in whatever you want to do, if you can see that others have achieved that already, and if there are visible LGBT role models. Many LGBT people still fear that they will face discrimination in the workplace and in day-to-day life, and so it makes a difference to know that others have overcome those barriers.
- 3 Effective role models demonstrate self-awareness and the confidence to be themselves. They think about who they are, the values they stand for and the way in which they want to impact on others. This is a continuing process which will look different when studying, in work, and in your personal life.
- 4 Role models matter. For organisations, having visible LGBT role models demonstrates that you take diversity seriously and that your staff feel able to be themselves. That sends an important message about your ethos and can attract new talent, and loyalty from both staff and your service users or customers.
- 5 Organisations need role models at all levels. People at the top can champion and set direction. Managers can create a welcoming and supportive workplace. Those at the beginning of their careers can role model the benefits of being out at work from day one.
- 6 Good role models encourage and develop others. They like contributing to high performance among their peers and never see it as a threat. They appreciate people being themselves and don't want to create clones – they get a kick from helping others to develop their own voice and talents.
- 7 If you're openly LGBT, you might well be a role model whether you like it or not. The only real choice is how good you want to be at it. Acknowledging your potential to influence those around you means you're better placed to make informed choices about using that influence constructively.
- 8 Good role models are courageous and take risks. They're willing to step out from the crowd rather than playing it safe. That doesn't have to be a grand gesture – sometimes it's more about being themselves.
- 9 Good role models don't want to be defined just by being LGBT. They think it's an important part of who they are – just like other dimensions of their identity such as gender, ethnicity, disability and culture.
- 10 No-one's perfect! Really good role models don't edit out the bumps and scars they've acquired along the way. It is easier to relate to someone who is fallible, is open about their mistakes, and learns from them. If you sit on a pedestal you may well fall off.

# *Stonewall Scotland Empowerment Programmes*

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## *Role Models*

Role Models influence others and create positive change no matter what their role in an organisation or community, and the most successful organisations and partnerships recognise the importance of having strong leaders at all levels. At Stonewall Scotland we know that role models are important to our sense of self and that lesbian, gay, bi and trans role models are crucial to creating inclusive workplaces and to advancing equality for all staff. Our one-day CPD-accredited programme provides individual personal and professional development, giving attendees the space to explore how to be an effective role model within their workplace and community.

## *Allies*

Allies are individuals who do not identify as lesbian, gay, bi or trans and believe that LGBT people should be able to be themselves and reach their potential. At Stonewall Scotland we know that allies have a critical role to play in creating inclusive environments and have been key to advancing fair treatment for their LGBT family, friends and colleagues. Our one-day CPD-accredited programme provides individuals personal and professional development and gives Allies the space to explore how they can be the most effective Ally possible.

## *Leadership*

At Stonewall, we know that being lesbian, gay, bi or trans is just another layer of our identity. We are each made up of different components and our experiences and background influence how we show up in the workplace, engage with our communities and more importantly, how we act as leaders.

The Stonewall Leadership Programme is a unique opportunity for LGBT professionals to explore what it means to be an authentic leader and to reflect on the relationship between their identity as an LGBT person and their performance as a leader. The programme is underpinned by the notion that people perform better when they can be themselves. Having visible role models, especially those who we don't ordinarily see, is crucial to changing attitudes. The programme focuses on the idea that the most effective leaders are able to be themselves in their approach and explores how sexual orientation and gender identity relate to this.

## *Role Models in Schools*

Role Models aren't just vital in our workplace and communities, they also provide inspiration to our young people as well. For LGBT young people, it can make a huge difference seeing someone who they identify with talking about their experiences and what those experiences have allowed them to do. Similarly, an LGBT role model can help break down barriers and stereotypes which non-LGBT young people may have and help them to realise how they can help their LGBT friends and family. This one-day programme equips attendees with the tools and confidence to share their stories with secondary school students and become a role model for both LGBT and non-LGBT students.

## *Train the Trainer*

Stonewall Scotland's flagship teacher training programme is a one-day course where teachers and education staff can learn about LGBT issues, including homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying. Throughout this interactive course, attendees develop strategies to tackle bullying, support pupils and address LGBT issues in the classroom as well as learning tools and techniques to train their colleagues. Separate sessions are run for primary and secondary school teachers, with each tailored to the specific needs of those sectors and focussing on learning from best practice and shared experiences.

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*With thanks to all interviewees*

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# *Role Models*

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BEING YOURSELF:  
LGBT Lives in Scotland

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*“Life is different for everybody  
and we are all very different.  
There is no right way or wrong  
way to know you're LGBT, and  
no right or wrong age to know.”*