

LGBT+ Role Models

Rachel Salmon – Derbyshire Fire & Rescue Service

It's fairly common for people from the LGBT+ community to say that they knew about their sexual orientation or gender identity from a young age. For me, there were signs during my childhood that I was different to my peers, none more so than aged 7, when my best friend and I wrote down a list of who we fancied and I was confused why mine were all girls and hers were all boys. Growing up, being gay was seen as being derogatory and the word 'gay' was thrown around a lot. When someone fell over they were 'gay', extra homework was 'gay' and the section of panelling in the school corridor that did not match the rest, became known as the 'gay box'. If you stepped in it, or found yourself standing in it, you 'became gay'. The less than subtle idea of it all was that gay was a bad thing to be.



So I made the decision at the age of 8, not to tell anyone about how I felt. Over time, this, combined with aspects of my home life, made me mentally unwell. In my early twenties, I contemplated taking my own life. This coincided with the end of my degree, being stuck in a job that I hated and trying to come to terms with my Dad being diagnosed with mesothelioma, which has a 6 month life expectancy. The thing that saved me was talking. A friend came round and dragged me out of the house. Over a Nandos (this is probably the classiest coming out story you'll ever hear) I told him that I was gay. Simply telling him, being accepted and him not being horrified, changed things for me. Coming to accept myself wasn't an overnight thing, in fact I think it's one of those processes that you constantly work on, but I think I started on that process that day. I no longer felt wrong purely because of who I was attracted to.

After coming to terms with it myself, when I was 23 I made the decision to tell my family. Immediately, I was ignored by one person in my family and they would leave any room that I walked into. Thankfully, my Dad was a different story. It's easy to say that someone who is older will not understand, but my Dad was 84 when I told him and, after taking some time to explain, he treated me exactly the same as he had before. In fact his response was, 'the same rules still apply'. This confused me as the 'no boys in your room' seemed somewhat redundant. 'No', he replied 'I mean I don't care who you date as long as you're happy and they're not a Nottingham Forest fan'. I'm pleased to say I've managed to stick to that one.

Then, in November 2015 my Dad passed away. After time spent grieving, I started to think about what I wanted from life. I decided that I had a responsibility to be the visible adult that I wish I had when I was growing up. And so I educated myself and became vocal about LGBT+ rights. At DFRS I've been 'out' from the start and the reactions I've received have been positive. Across the Service we are sharing and furthering knowledge and understanding through conferences, training sessions and a thriving LGBT+ & Allies Network, and making a real difference for those who need it.

One of the benefits of being out in the workplace is that I can prove that there are gay people who are exactly the same as everyone else – being gay doesn't have an impact on me doing my job any more than being brunette does.

I will continue to be passionate about what I do. The world is not equal if you are LGB or T. It's illegal to be in a same sex relationship in 72 countries, 1 in 5 LGBT+ employees have experienced bullying from colleagues and over a quarter of LGB people are not open to colleagues about their sexual orientation, which rises to 42% for trans people. There needs to be a culture of acceptance that is created so that anyone can be themselves at work. DFRS are making real and vital steps to help LGBT+ employees and service users in this respect, and I am so proud to be a part of that journey.

Nyle DiMarco – Actor

Nyle DiMarco is an actor who is Deaf and identifies as sexually fluid, and rose to fame by winning *America's Next Top Model*. DiMarco has been working tirelessly to highlight intersectionality and has given various talks describing his experience as a Deaf, LGBT+



man in a world where people with multiple identities can be forgotten. He says: "Often when I am invited to LGBT+ events, they are unable to provide interpreters. It is a conflicting feeling when I realise that I am a part of the LGBT+ community, but still get incriminated against at events. How am I – or the millions of people with hearing loss – going to be actively involved in my own community, as well as ending the stigma, if we do not have direct access to information in our own language?"

Hence my involvement: I want to remind my own community to be the best of the best in being inclusive of others. That way we will move faster towards equality".

Andy Sudbury – Derbyshire Police

"I joined Derbyshire Constabulary in December 2003, firstly completing Training School and then getting my first posting to Peartree. The initial ten weeks were hard work: I was young and naïve, wasn't used to police work and I didn't get on well with my shift.

It was apparent around this time that my work was beginning to be affected due to the complex feelings I was having about my personal life. I decided that I couldn't keep up with the lie I was living, professionally and personally. After telling my girlfriend, family and friends, and fielding numerous questions at work asking if I was alright, I summoned up the courage to tell a room full of people 'I am gay'. From that moment on, I was given a number of opportunities: I was moved to Cotton Lane Station as I felt that there was an underlying homophobia in some members of staff that meant that I couldn't be myself and I was put in touch with staff from the LGBT Network, who I had previously contacted through one of the confidential helpline phones. There



was no formal network for LGBT staff, but it was better than nothing. I was able to talk with another gay person and my life at work started to get better.

Work dramatically improved for me after this, and at Cotton Lane I was never treated any differently. I met my best female friend who is also gay and on some occasions there were more gay officers on shift than straight. I really felt at home and could be myself. Since then, I have spent the rest of my time at Cotton Lane, doing a five year stint on the Safer Neighbourhood Team, and going back on a Reactive Shift. I have never had any problems with being an out gay man at work, and I have found that I have been able to have better relationships with my work colleagues and the public if I am open about who I am. I also joined the Derbyshire Gay Police Association in 2006, becoming Coordinator in 2010, and have helped plan and taken part in Pride events within Derbyshire.

I am not going to say that being out has been the easiest of paths, as people still have negative views towards LGBT people, but I am in a position where I am able to challenge people's views and educate. Coming out gets easier each time you do it, or it has done for me. Some people make an issue out of it and I don't keep that kind of person in my life, but for me, it was the best decision I have ever made. My biggest piece of advice would always be: be yourself – be happy”.

Captain Rowland – The Army

“I'm 29 and have served as a Royal Artillery Officer in the British Army for eight years. I currently serve as a Recruiting Officer in London. I have always been open about being gay and being from a mixed ethnic background and my partner has been made very welcome by my colleagues; I think I receive more respect for being open about who I am”.



Ruth Holden – Derbyshire Fire & Rescue Service

“I chose to become a Bi Rep, as part of the LGBT+ & Allies Network, because I wanted to support my colleagues and improve awareness across the organisation of the challenges faced by individuals who identify as bi. I know first-hand what it feels like to be on the ‘outside’, to not fit in to social norms and feel unable to talk freely about your life, not finishing sentences, trying to gauge what someone's reaction will be. I know what a difference it makes to have a voice, to be taken seriously, to be seen and heard for all that you are and not just a label. This is especially important in a workplace where you want to be valued for your skills, experience and knowledge without bias or prejudice.



When I first joined DFRS I wasn't really out to anyone, not because I was deliberately hiding anything but because it is not the only thing that defines me. Having had some let's say 'uncomfortable' experiences, in both personal and work situations previously, I wasn't sure

how and when to have that conversation. As many people reading this will know, one of the hardest things about being LGBT+ is having to come out constantly, hundreds of times, every time you meet someone new, join a new team or start a new job. I was encouraged by the openness of others I worked with and my involvement in the LGBT+ & Allies Network made me realise that I wouldn't be treated any differently if I came out and everyone can be themselves at DFRS. I feel lucky to be working for an organisation that champions and celebrates diversity.

So, for me, this role is really important. Whether a person wants to talk openly about how they define/identify themselves or not, I want to ensure there is someone available for confidential support, an informal chat, and a safe place to go to voice concerns and share ideas that will help continuously improve the way DFRS supports all employees.

An inclusive culture is something we should all strive for. I see how committed DFRS is to diversity and inclusion for all, while maintaining an awareness that there is always room for improvement. I wear my rainbow lanyard with pride and I hope by being a visible bi role model I can help others and continue to change attitudes towards bi people”.

Katie Cornhill - Firefighter

Katie has worked for a firefighter for Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service for 20 years, after serving for six years in the Royal Marines. Despite being born male she knew she identified as a female at the age of five, but this could sometimes be stifled by those around her, who did not approve of her dressing in female clothes. Reflecting on this time, Katie says: “When I was growing up there weren't any gender-variant or transgender role models to help me understand and accept myself. I've never sought to be a role model but I think its important to acknowledge that to some I am. As a proud woman, a proud lesbian, a proud mum and a proud firefighter, it is wonderful to be able to help people realise they are not alone, to inspire them to be themselves, and to realise that they can contribute positively in organisations and to society as competently as anyone else does, irrespective of their self, sexual or gender identity”.



Amandla Stenberg

Stenberg has recently been honoured by a Human Rights Campaign for the work that she has done for LGBT+ equality. The actor came out as queer in 2016 and said that they use they/them pronouns, before coming out as gay in 2018. They have been unflinchingly honest about their experience as a gay person of colour, as well as their learning experience of understanding their own sexual and gender identity as a young person, as they are still only 20 years old.



Benjamin Rychwalski-Lindley - Derbyshire Police

"I joined West Yorkshire Police in 1996 before I transferred to Northamptonshire Police in 2002, joining the dog section with my malinois general duties dog Luke and his specialist drugs/weapons/cash recovery dog Rolly. During this period of time I identified as a gay female but always felt that there was something different about me. I often felt awkward in social situations. Then, in my early 30s, I watched a documentary on television about trans people and it was like the curtains had been pulled back on a very sunny window! After this, I made enquiries with my GP and was referred to a private gender specialist. I was referred for gender-specific therapy and then began my hormone treatment whilst embarking on my journey along the clinical pathway.

I felt particularly anxious about speaking to my family, friends and work colleagues, mainly as I was worried about what they would think of me. I remember going to speak with my dad about what was happening and he was very upset: I guess for him he was losing his daughter and gaining a son. He questioned what he had done 'wrong'.

I would describe my experience as being born in completely the wrong 'suitcase'. My inward did not match my outward and I was trapped in the wrong body. Once I realised that I could do something about it, there was no turning back.

I found that it was easier to tell his friends, most of whom were part of the LGB family. I chose a date to share with work colleagues and found that people just wanted to support me and not say the 'wrong thing'. I am happy to talk about things given the right environment. I appreciate that not everyone has met someone who is trans and there will therefore be questions. My work family really went along the transition journey with me and I found this to be a very positive experience. I now work for Derbyshire Police and work hard to be visible and raise awareness of trans issues. I do this as I want to provide help and guidance to staff, be a point of contact for officers and support staff and raise awareness, which in turn will help when those colleagues deal with members of the public who may identify as trans or have related issues.

It is so important for people to feel confident in themselves in the workplace – work is after all an extension of self – we are able to feel happier and give more when we are truly aligned with our own self and sense of purpose. We are all individuals and we represent communities of individuals".

