

LGBT+ role models



**We celebrate those who have
made a difference to the lives of
lesbian, gay, bi and trans + people
in Leicestershire**

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We celebrate those who have made a difference to the lives of lesbian, gay, bi and trans + people in Leicestershire



Leicestershire County Council, Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service and Leicestershire Police are proud to work together through our LGBT+ staff networks for all of our LGBT+ staff and residents. This year, we were supported by colleagues from East Midlands Ambulance Service, Leicester City Council, Charnwood Borough Council and Leicestershire Partnership Trust in our search for LGBT+ role models. The fire, police and ambulance services also have a joint staff network – the 999 LGBT+ Network which we're very proud of.

We're committed to celebrating diversity and combatting discrimination across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, and through our involvement in the LGBT+ Role Models initiative

we've seen and heard first-hand about some of the fantastic work that's happening in the area.

We're delighted to see such a wide range of role models – who share a local connection – featured in this publication, and we hope that you'll enjoy reading their stories.

Role models are massively important to LGBT+ people – a role model is someone to look up to, who celebrates diversity, champions equality and has a voice on behalf of those who need the most support. Whether you identify as LGBT+, or are an ally, be inspired by these stories and think about how you can be a role model too.

ACC Julia Debenham
Leicestershire Police

Callum Faint
Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service

Gordon McFarlane
Assistant Director and Equalities Lead,
Leicestershire County Council



Remembering Kelvin Irons

Kelvin was one of our 2013 role models, who has since sadly passed away.

Born and bred in Leicester, Kelvin spent 32 years at the Department for Work and Pensions, and his career saw him take on roles as diverse as office management to prison adviser.

Kelvin was a great role model and in his own words, 'A good advocate for being yourself and for

feeling comfortable and confident with who you are.'

Through his work as Social Justice Manager for Leicestershire and Northamptonshire, Kelvin supported people and helped turn lives around. Staff at Leicestershire County Council remember him fondly from his time working

with them on the Supporting Leicestershire Families project. He was nominated to be a role model by a colleague on this project, for his enthusiasm in helping vulnerable families.

Kelvin will be remembered and missed by those who knew him.

Stephanie Morgan, QPM

**Retired former
Deputy Chief Constable,
Leicestershire Police**



During her time at Leicestershire Police, Stephanie Morgan was the most senior 'out' gay police officer. She still plays an active role in making the county a better place to live for everyone through her voluntary roles supporting the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Community Foundation and an advisory role on the University of Leicester's Diversity, Inclusion and Community Engagement Panel.

She also received the QPM (Queen's Police Medal) in the 2015 New Years' Honours List and an Honorary Doctorate from De Montfort University for the work undertaken with LGBT+ communities.

Here, in her own words, she describes why she is seen as a role model...

"I joined the Hampshire Constabulary in 1983. I've had a varied career which began with the Fraud Squad, dealing with complex 'white collar' crime.

"In 2010, I was appointed as Assistant Chief Constable of Leicestershire Constabulary taking up the operations portfolio. I was regional commander for the Olympics, and oversaw the torch relay.

"In my line of work, I had to judge success as an absence of crime and disorder and of people, including all LGBT+ people, being and feeling safe in the communities I policed.

"My partner and I have suffered prejudice in the 29 years we've been together. My partner was in the services at a time when same sex relationships were illegal. We lived in fear of being found out - several of our close friends were arrested and their homes searched.

"My father was homophobic

and I felt unable to share much of my life with my family. In 2007 I told my father the truth when my mother was seriously ill with a terminal illness. My father found this difficult to accept but him knowing the truth meant that my partner was able to be a part of my family, and help out in the nursing of my mother.

"I want young people growing up today to have positive role models and be able to share who they are with their friends and family. I'm very optimistic for the future as I know how far the LGBT community has come, since those days when we feared being arrested.

"Being both the national policing lead for LGBT issues and the most senior 'out' police officer put me in the spotlight as an LGBT role model.

"I'm proud of the fact that I reached the position in my career where I made a difference by

influencing the national agenda and hopefully make things easier for LGBT officers and staff to progress.

"I am also proud to have led a national initiative - the 'It gets better' video where officers from all over the country were filmed giving personal stories in order to discourage LGBT youth from committing suicide and encourage them to report bullying and hate.

"I accept that there is further to go but take heart in the fact that there is an enthused LGBT community here that is doing all it can to ensure that 'coming out' is made as easy as possible."

"I want young people ... to have positive role models and be able to share who they are with their friends and family..."

Dr Elly Barnes MBE

CEO and Founder of Educate & Celebrate

Originally from Leicestershire, Elly topped the Independent on Sunday's Rainbow List in 2011 for her commitment to LGBT+ in Education. In 2012 she was 'highly commended' in the TES 'Teacher of the Year' awards. She has continued year upon year to be nominated for numerous awards and in 2018 achieved a place on The PRIDE Power list and also won the DIVA Magazine Activist of the Year.

Since 2005 Elly has devoted her career to changing the face of the education system by making nurseries, primaries, secondaries, colleges, universities LGBT+ Friendly by developing accessible resources, providing training and a robust programme which guarantees positive change and facilitates young people, families and teachers alike to be themselves without any fear of discrimination.

In 2010, Elly began delivering Continuing Professional Development Days from her school, developing Educate & Celebrate and the Award Programme for all schools to access. In 2015, she spearheaded the Educate & Celebrate programme as part of the pilot Anti-HBT bullying project with the Department for Education for which she received an MBE for her contribution to Equality and Diversity in Education. This was followed by an Honorary Doctorate from The University of Aberdeen.

In 2018, she was CEO of Educate & Celebrate, heading a wonderful team of experienced teachers and youth workers who have all made their own schools LGBT+ Friendly – giving them the experience to deliver the successful programmes throughout the UK, the Channel Islands, Europe and beyond. The team continue to develop resources responding to the needs of young people, teachers and families.

Throughout the development, Elly has formed a close partnership with Goldsmiths University of London and, together with Dr Anna Carlile, wrote a book of all the research from the Educate & Celebrate Programme released in March 2018 called *How to Transform Your School into an LGBT+ Friendly Place: A Practical Guide* for nursery, primary and secondary teachers.

Elly's approach has been recognised by Ofsted as best practice for taking a whole-school

approach to tackling homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying and ingrained attitudes in our schools describing it as 'visionary and innovative'.

Elly is a regular writer, speaker, author and campaigner for social justice in education. She says: "Increasing visibility around Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity changes and saves lives. We believe every conversation is important to move forward with breaking down the barriers to LGBT+ Inclusion. Together, we can create cohesive school communities with people and social justice at its core, enabling us all to be ourselves without any fear of discrimination."

"Together, we can create cohesive school communities with people and social justice at its core..."





Soroya MacDonald

Youth Development Worker, Leicestershire County Council

With over two decades dedicated to youth work, Soroya has spent her career supporting young people to achieve their potential.

She has been recognised for going the extra mile for LGBT+ young people in Leicestershire and providing a space for them to be themselves.

Soroya says: “I have been a youth worker for over 20 years. I have worked with young people with many different issues and in many different settings.

“I train school staff in local schools and colleges to be LGBT+ champions and to be aware of some of the issues that young people face. The LGBT+ champions wear a rainbow lanyard so that young people can identify them.

“I’ve also encouraged schools to add LGBT+ awareness into the curriculum – making sure that LGBT+ history is included in social studies, or that all types of families are included – not just the nuclear family.

“I try to think about the support that young people need. I am always cheerful and respect young people’s views and opinions.

“I suppose it helps that I’ve faced my own challenges along the way. I think back to when I told my kids that I was in a relationship with a woman, and how I tried to make them understand.

“I also lived in a small community so some people who I had known nearly all of my life stopped talking to me.

“But I am very proud of my kids and how they reacted and supported me and I’ve come through the bad times. I believe it is going to get better. I’m happy that society has changed and is still changing and that’s making it easier for people to live the life they choose.”

“I hope I can play a small part in showing people that it’s good to be yourself.”

Kartik Bhalla

Digital Marketing Assistant, Leicestershire Partnership Trust

Kartik started working in his digital marketing role when he left school at 16. “I decided to take up an apprenticeship in digital marketing in the healthcare environment because it was an area that I was really keen on learning more about.

My role at work involves engaging staff through marketing and communications campaigns to promote health & wellbeing initiatives. We have around 5,500 staff based across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.

I’m really proud to have successfully secured a permanent post at Leicestershire Partnership Trust, following on from the completion of my Level 4 Diploma in Digital Marketing. This will enable me to carry on developing and embedding diversity and inclusion in all we do, whilst recognising and valuing staff engagement regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.”

Kartik also takes on the voluntary role of Lead Advocate (Chair) of the Trust’s LGBTQ+ staff network and support group.

“The aim of the group is to provide a safe and confidential space for LGBTQ+ staff, in which potential issues can be discussed openly: providing a gateway of advocacy and assistance to staff,

signposting them to internal processes or external services, ensuring that equality perspective is considered by the Trust, strengthening relationships with external partnerships, and getting involved with local diversity and inclusion events.

For example, for the first time, staff represented the Trust by marching in the Pride parade this year. T-shirts and a parade banner were designed and commissioned in the hope of showing support and commitment to our LGBTQ+ workforce, and to recognise and celebrate the vibrant LGBTQ+ community of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.”

“Despite these challenges, I think the future is bright and colourful for the residents of Leicestershire! The contribution and value of LGBTQ+ people is becoming more recognised every day....”

Kartik is a passionate advocate for intersectional equality and diversity, both personally and professionally.

“Growing up as a gay Asian, I’ve faced some cultural barriers and I found it particularly hard to navigate those. There’s still a huge challenge in defying stereotypes, traditions, taboo culture, as well as lack of representation in media.”





Charlotte Stacey

Business resilience professional and LGBT+ champion for Oxfordshire County Council and Fire & Rescue Service

Leicestershire-born Charlotte has worked in local government since 2007, carving out a career from historic buildings through event management, to the UK's highest-ranking openly transgender emergency planning officer, and on into information management.

Charlotte's resilience work involves making sure those organisations such as Oxfordshire County Council and their partner agencies are ready to deal with emergencies and incidents, whilst managing their data securely.

"I work in a traditionally male-dominated environment, yet have overcome stereotypes and preconceptions to build understanding from firefighters to Chief Officers.

I have been able to help colleagues think about how they approach and make adjustments with our service users, and to be mindful of their situations, for example making our emergency rest centres LGBT+ safe places, and managing equalities during incidents."

Charlotte has also been able to champion change behind the scenes, writing and amending policies to make them trans inclusive, and bringing in trans guidance for managers.

"I'm proud to have led a number of 'firsts' for Oxfordshire: celebrating Trans Day of Visibility with flags flying at HQ; marking International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Transphobia with a display of young LGBT+ people's artwork at County Hall; and attending Oxford Pride with Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service, with our LGBT+ colleagues, our female firefighters, our families and Allies."

Charlotte's main focus is to broaden trans inclusion and promote intersectionality. "I'm still conscious that the T or + does not do justice to the spectrum of gender identities, including non-binary.

We still have a great challenge to embrace people's unique identities and characteristics."

She is also keen to tackle hate crime – and make sure that people are not complacent. "I have been attacked twice since moving to Oxford, and was very well supported by Thames Valley Police. So from a personal perspective, I actively promote StopHate.org to encourage staff and public to register hate incidents; and we took the Stonewall #NoBystanders pledge to Oxford Pride to demonstrate our commitment."

Charlotte is optimistic for the future of Leicestershire's LGBT+ people. "I'm really proud to have been chosen as a role-model for my home county. Each year I come back for Pride with our Leicestershire colleagues and am reminded of how diverse the county is.

"I put my open-mindedness and appreciation of others down to my childhood exposure to the diverse communities and groups where I grew up, and to my parents and my education: as a Leicestershire child 'being different is normal'."

Proud
to value
diversity

Leicester Wildecats

Established in 1996, Leicester Wildecats was the third LGBT+ football team to be set up in the UK.



The weekly kickabout is still a very important part of the club and it's open to everyone who signs diversity to value Proud up to the club's ethos and ideals, regardless of their age, ability or sexual orientation. The club currently has around 80 members from Leicester, Leicestershire, Rutland and neighbouring counties.

Wildecats was a founder member of the Gay Football Supporters' Network National League and took part in the very first game in 2002. The team's biggest achievement so far is the 2008 victory in the Gay Football World Championship.

Gareth Miller, founder of the club, says: "Wildecats provides a unique platform for members of the LGBT+ community to play football in a friendly, safe, non-judgemental environment, and players of all orientations, ages and abilities are welcome to join. "The club has played a significant part in improving the lives of a large number of LGBT+ people and LGBT+friendly people in the area over the last 25 years.

As well as promoting beneficial physical activity, the club provides a strong, vibrant social scene for its members.

The team has also made links with Leicester City Football Club with a view to fighting homophobia in football. "There is a great togetherness and bonding within the club, regardless of people's backgrounds.

"The team allows LGBT+ people to make friends outside of the normal channels available and some very strong friendships, and indeed, relationships have been forged through our club and amongst other LGBT+ teams we compete against.

"The club is proud to have a good balance between the weekly kickabout and the more serious

11-a-side league games, allowing people to show their abilities at different levels. We are also proud of our long and distinguished history. "Most of the legal barriers facing LGBT+ people have now been removed, but there is still some social prejudice to overcome.

"It can be very difficult for young LGBT+ people to discuss their feelings with friends, family and colleagues, especially if they are involved in football, which has a reputation for homophobia. "Meeting LGBT+ people in a football environment can challenge their preconceptions and allow them to

see that there is more than one type of LGBT+ person, and not just the stereotypes portrayed in the media."

"There is more than one type of LGBT+ person, and not just the stereotypes portrayed in the media."

www.wildecats.co.uk





George Dunning

Neighbourhood Policing Response Officer Leicestershire Police

George joined Leicestershire Police as a special constable in 2017 and became a police officer in 2019. He has been the organisation's LGBT+ co-trans lead since 2020 and is proud to be able to provide lived experience advice to colleagues and members of the community.

"I have always known since I was a child that I was male but growing up I thought you could only transition from male to female. At 18 I realised that women could also transition.

Until this point, I was out as a gay woman and was in a relationship where I was accepted as that. At the age of 22, however, I no longer felt comfortable being a gay woman and realised I was a trans-man. This resulted in my relationship ending, and I was then able to openly identify as trans.

My career with Leicestershire Police has predominantly been on response, a role I thoroughly enjoy and one in which I am able to promote the work of the LGBT+ Network and am comfortable being open with colleagues, and encourage conversation and debate around Trans awareness and issues.

When I joined the force, I shared my personal story as part of the You Are Not Alone campaign, despite some initial internal reservations, and I'm now regularly contacted by colleagues asking for support directly from them reading my story.

Being able to use my own personal experiences, I work closely with the organisation to drive change in outdated policies and legislation, and I was an integral part in developing the new trans and non-binary search policy working with force leads to ensure accuracy.

I feel proud to be a co-trans lead for the organisation, and to be part of a thriving and energetic network that aims to make life better not only for my colleagues but for our community as well"

"I am honoured to be recognised as a LGBT+ role model. I am privileged to be the voice of the wider trans community both internally and externally and I am proud to be openly out in a society that is ever changing and evolving. The LGBT+ community continue to face many challenges but I am proud to be playing my part in allowing us all to be who we are."

Sue West

Fostering and Adoption Service, Leicestershire County Council

I qualified as a social worker in 1988 and have worked in Local Authority childcare settings since that time.

I have primarily worked in the fields of fostering and adoption and I am really proud of the work that we have done to recruit LGBT+ carers and I can assure anyone applying that they will have fair, open and honest assessments with staff who don't make "assumptions" about people based on their sexuality or gender identity.

I have been open in terms of my sexuality as a team manager and a social worker and have had great support along the way – being a visible lesbian role model is something that is important to me. As an extension to my work in childcare, myself and my partner Ruth applied and were successful in becoming supported lodgings providers for Leicestershire. This is a great scheme which places young people aged 16 to 21 with families or individual carers. We have had two young men with us for over a year. It is a privilege to give them stability and support in this crucial stage as they move into independence.

In doing this and having these young people become part of our lives, we have become more aware of how issues around sexuality and gender identity impact on young people generally, both in positive and in negative ways. I hope Ruth and I role model a healthy and equal relationship for them where diversity in all its forms is actively celebrated – we have our ups and downs as everyone does but we also bring humour and love and a real belief in them as individuals – as one of our young people wrote to us "family is bigger than just blood" which was just the greatest accolade we could ever have.

We have also had an LGBT+ asylum seeker living with us for over a year, who has now been granted leave to remain, which is fantastic. She fled her home country due to the threat of a death sentence for being a lesbian. This has really brought it home to us that the fight for equality is ongoing across the world and to be able to be out and proud is something we can never take for granted

I am also now on the management board of the LGBT+ centre in Leicester... all of this has happened since I came out as a lesbian 10 years ago, but I think for me it is about being actively involved in the diverse communities that make up the LGBT+ family and trying to make a difference.

Finally, Ruth and I married in 2018 at the Guildhall – it was a lovely day filled with laughter.

“For me it is about being actively involved in the diverse communities that make up the LGBT+ family and trying to make a difference.”





Proud
to value
diversity

Angie Lymer-Cox

Service Manager – Children in Care Service, Leicestershire County Council

Angie leads our Children in Care service – and in her words, “Our future is our young people. They are so much less judgmental than past generations.”

“There was a time when young people asked me if I was married, I’d say no. (Angie and her wife Anne were one of the first couples to have a civil partnership back in 2006, and were formally married in 2015). “Then one girl I was supporting, quite rightly asked me if I wasn’t married, then why was I wearing a ring? She was just curious, had lots of questions for me, but to her it was just... ‘Whatever!’...”

Angie left school at 16 with very few qualifications, and described herself as ‘rebellious’ during her school years. “After school, I did a Youth Training Scheme (YTS) working with children and young people with special needs. I loved every minute and every child and family I worked with. It was the start of my passion to work with young people who had faced challenges in their young lives.”

Angie says that as a child and young adult she faced a number of challenges, which helped build strength and resilience as an adult.

Recalling her early feelings about her sexual orientation, she says, “At 17 I realised that the feelings I had been having over previous years were because of my sexuality. I was gay!

A revelation in itself as I never realised there was an alternative to a ‘normal’ way of life. After my YTS I became a youth worker and discovered other people from my community with similar challenges fitting into ‘normal’ society.”

“Initially working in this field was a challenge being gay in that many families and children didn’t understand that gay people aren’t a risk to their children. I have taken some abuse and each time see that as an opportunity to educate.

“Most of my family were really supportive of me. Some found it a challenge and would avoid any discussion. This was hard and caused a rift which never really healed. But I knew I had to move myself on in life and not hide away”.

After gaining further qualifications at college, Angie attended university to study social work...and has never looked back.

Angie now manages teams working with children in care, care leavers and unaccompanied asylum seeking children – which she loves. She is driven by the resilience and drive of young people and their achievements.

I want to be able to talk about my family, wife, puppy (my baby!) and holidays the same way my straight colleagues do without fear of discrimination or abuse.”

Tracy Ward

Assistant Director, Adults and Communities, Leicestershire County Council

Tracy grew up in Leicester and, despite a spell at university in London, she was drawn back to her roots. She has worked in adult social care in Leicestershire since the early 1990s.

Tracy has been a recognisable role model for the county council, has regularly participated in events, articles and is an active member of the council's LGBT+ staff network.

Tracy was nominated as a role model for being a good manager – for establishing working practices which value diversity and promote fairness and respect.

She says: "I believe everyone in Leicestershire has the right to access services which treat people with respect and dignity.

"I have worked hard to promote equal access for Leicestershire residents.

"I have faced homophobia in previous roles, and when I first started at the county council, I was uneasy with being open about my sexual orientation.

"I'm now proud of the fact that people around me have felt supported to be out at work, and that I've played a part in valuing people's differences.

"As a senior manager within adult social care, I'm also proud that the organisations I have worked with deliver services which allow the people of Leicestershire to maintain a sense of identity."

Thinking about the future, Tracy is keen to work with partners to deliver good services, and reduce hate crime and bullying.

She added: "I want to make Leicestershire a good place to live if you are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

"I hope that people will read this publication and see people like them – who are able to come out

at work, to family, to friends and do not feel stigmatised or fearful of what may happen to them just because of their sexual orientation."

"I hope that people will read this publication and see people like them..."





Lisa Vine

LGBT+ Advocate, Consultant and Trainer

Lisa's passion for equality and social change was ignited in her student days at Loughborough University and has been at the heart of a career that has seen her working in Parliament and for local, regional and national charities.

She now runs own business supporting those striving for LGBT+ inclusion, pressing for people to treat each other with kindness, compassion and empathy.

Lisa's work supports LGBT+ communities in Leicestershire and beyond.

That ranges from providing 1-1 support and advice services or supporting organisations with their LGBT+ inclusivity more broadly through LGBT+ inclusion training, guest lecturing or by completing LGBT+ inclusivity assessments; to give only a few examples

Lisa, who lives with her partner Laura in Loughborough, said: "Often as an advocate when you can't resolve challenges or barriers, it can be frustrating to say the least, but the people I work with and their families tell me that having an empathetic, genuine, and listening ear makes all the difference and in many cases is lifesaving."

Lisa added: "But I now recognise that it was consistently feeling 'lesser than' everyone else, as a result of being bullied and feeling different, that has had the biggest impact on me and still does to this day.

"This has impacted my friendships, romantic relationships, family relationships and even my professional development and progression.

"Now I know and understand this, I have been able to move forward not only to be the person I know myself to be, but with a sense of confidence and an enormous sense of pride."

She is most proud of her time supporting trans and non-binary young people in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland when she led a flagship BBC Children in Need project called the Young Transgender Centre of Excellence.

Lisa said: "I have been referred to as a 'one woman powerhouse' and the young people called me the 'fairy trans mother' and these are things I will carry with me for the rest of my life."

Lisa helped change the lives of young people by supporting them to disclose their identity to their loved ones and providing advocacy for those who weren't supported, to give only a few examples.

She hopes for a bright future for Leicestershire's LGBT+ residents but says rising hate crimes and hate incidents across the UK and attitudes on social media are holding that off and are having a negative impact on the wellbeing of LGBT+ communities.

She added: "It is for this reason, that I do what I do. To support LGBT+ people and their allies and to work with those striving for LGBT+ inclusion, to make the world a better place for LGBT+ people.

"There are some brilliant organisations working across Leicestershire to support LGBT+ people and push for LGBT+ inclusivity and equality."

"One of the biggest challenges I have faced was bullying in my childhood and teenage years, and I know it was because I was different."

David Rose

Mental Health First Aid Instructor

David has been a chartered health, safety and wellbeing professional for over 20 years having worked in the pharmaceutical, chemical, healthcare and higher education sectors. David has headed up projects involving prevention and managing workplace stress and mental wellbeing, providing mini-LGBTQ+ videos to staff resource sites, while celebrating National Bisexual Day, International Day Against Homophobia Transphobia and Biphobia and the Leicestershire Pride festival.

He moved to Leicester in January 2016. David has used his use his Mental Health First Aid England (MHFA England) Instructor qualification to train organisation workers in the Mental Health First Aid qualification

David knew he was bisexual from a young age but didn't talk to anyone about this for several years until the age of 16. "When I finally confided in someone they scorned me and said it wasn't possible.

"Sadly this meant I didn't bring the subject up again until I was 23, and again, I was met with disbelief and astonishment".

"Until I was in my mid-twenties, I dated women, but then I was in a relationship with a man for 14 years.

"We experienced homophobia when holding hands in the street and this led to us not showing physical affection in public."

David said he experiences many misconceptions around being bisexual - not being monogamous, 'going through a phase', being

greedy and carrying sexually transmitted diseases. "I

He said: "It took my family and friends some time to actually understand my sexuality and for a long period of time I felt a bit 'lost'."

In recent years David has felt empowered to come out as being bisexual for the first time in over 30 years of work.

As a role model David supports people in feeling comfortable with themselves and hopes to reduce prejudice, empower people and educate others about their sexuality. In doing so, hopefully people can be themselves and can prosper.

MHFA England have now introduced LGBTQ+ statistics to their modules for the first time.

Training materials draw trainees focus towards the increase of mental ill health experienced within this group.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion research continues to highlight a disproportionate level of poor mental ill health in the LGBTQ+ and Black Asian Minority Ethnic

(BAME) communities compared with the general population.

David added: "It's really important to me that young people growing up and older people who are struggling with their identity and coming out have access to the right information, support networks and people who have a shared experience.

"I feel we have moved on as a society in the UK, but we still have a long way to go. Onwards and upwards".





Makinder Chahal

Senior Health Promotion Worker Trade Sexual Health

Born and raised in Castle Donington, from a South Asian Indian background, Makinder has worked for Trade Sexual Health since 2014.

I came out to friends when I was 16, and my parents the following year. My parents struggled to understand this part of me, and worried about how people inside and outside of the family would treat me if they were to know.

At Keele University I engaged with the LGBT+ society, meeting people who understood me and helped me grow as a person, as well as allowing me to help create positive change within the LGBT+ community at the university. The Society won the National Union of Students (NUS) LGBT+ Society of the Year in 2012, while I was co-president.

From university, I entered into the voluntary and community sector in Derbyshire before moving to Leicester & Leicestershire to work for Trade Sexual Health.

My first role was South Asian LGBT Support Worker, providing one-to-one and group support for those struggling with their sexuality or to access support around their mental or sexual health.

After various other roles, I am now as Senior Health Promotion Worker, managing the volunteer programme within the charity, and I support colleagues to help LGBT+ communities across Leicestershire access holistic information, advice, guidance and services around sexual health and HIV.

There still isn't much visibility of South Asian LGBT+ people within the voluntary sector, and I'm proud to challenge the status quo confidently to ensure that LGBT+ communities are not seen as a homogenous group and that that diversity of the community is represented and celebrated.

I am most proud of Dosti Leicester, a social and support group for South Asian & Middle Eastern LGBT+ communities, which I started in 2014, and I continue to facilitate monthly.

I've been lucky in a way as I've always been around people who accept me for who I am, both in my personal and professional life. Identifying as a Sikh, I do feel that LGBT+ people of faith are still not provided with enough support around their sexuality or gender identity, especially from faith community leaders willing to stand out above the crowd in support of LGBT+ communities."

“Although I have struggled with trying to reconcile my faith with my sexuality, I’ve been fortunate enough to reach out to other Sikhs like me for peer support, making me feel less alone and isolated.”

Jo Harland
Partnership Inspector

Jo has been a police officer since 2003, and passed her Sergeant's exam in 2016 and her Inspector's exam in 2020 – achievements in her life that she is immensely proud of.

“I started my career in Nottinghamshire, and transferred to Leicestershire in 2008, working in Child Protection. I became a Sergeant in 2016 and most recently became an Inspector working as the partnership manager with Leicester City Council. One of the key areas of responsibility is the Hate Crime portfolio which provides me with an opportunity to influence how we respond to reports and support our communities in tackling discrimination.

All roles have been challenging yet rewarding.”

Although I am no longer the LGBT+ Network lead I still support the network.

“The police network is a supportive, proactive group of people and I'm proud to be involved. The LGBT+ network is there when people need us, and we make sure we're visible – at events like Leicester PRIDE and other local community events.

It was a real honour to pass the baton on to James Yeoman who has done an amazing job in keeping the network going and raising its profile. We want to help to make sure that the people we serve know that equality and diversity is important to Leicestershire Police and hopefully feel confident to report hate crime, or think about working for us, so that we can continue to build a workforce that is representative of the local community”.

Growing up as a gay woman, Jo faced challenges. “I think, like many LGBT+ people, facing my family when I first came out when I was 18 years old is the hardest challenge I have faced. I came from a small mining village and a large family. Due to my mother's age she found it very difficult to accept and chose to hide my sexual orientation from the rest of my siblings for a long time – she thought they'd disown me if they found out.

Although my siblings all had worries and concerns, they have all been very supportive and have embraced the fact that I am a gay woman.

“As a leader within the organisation it is important that I am publicly championing LGBT+ equality – I have had posts attacked on social media because of this, and the support of my siblings has been really important to me.”

Jo looks forward to a bright future LGBT+ people in Leicestershire.





James Yeoman

Police Constable, Roads Policing Unit and co-chair of LGBT+ Network Leicestershire Police

James joined Leicestershire Police in 2009 and has been a police officer since 2013. He has been the organisation's LGBT+ network co-chair since 2019, a title he's proud to hold.

"I moved to the Midlands in 2009 for university, having grown up in a small town in North Northumberland. Coming from a small place that lacked diversity, my new life in Leicester was one that completely embraced culture, race, and an ability for me to be my true self. 'Coming out' as gay felt like a huge weight had been lifted from my shoulders, and I felt lucky that my family and friends accepted me for who I wanted to be. I had many close friends who were not as lucky.

Since joining Leicestershire Police I have remained in frontline, uniformed roles, which I've loved. I've worked across the entire county, in a variety of departments and this has given me a breadth of knowledge and understanding of policing, and the diverse communities we serve.

As a police officer I have unfortunately witnessed first-hand those who've been victim of homophobic hate crimes, some of which involved significant injury. This really hits home when I know this still happens people in a community I represent, and this was the reason I really wanted to help our LGBT+ colleagues and communities more.

When I got the opportunity to take on a new role and challenge as the LGBT+ network co-chair, I couldn't say no.

Since 2019 I have worked tirelessly within the LGBT+ network to raise its profile both internally within Leicestershire Police, and externally within our communities. We provide a voice for all LGBT+ colleagues and assist in making organisational changes. Since I've been co-chair, we've introduced a new network of allies, developed a quarterly newsletter, provided assistance with investigations and helped improve training for new officers. Most recently I have pioneered our new trans and non-binary searching policy, for officers and detainees within Leicestershire Police.

The LGBT+ network takes part in key events such as LGBT+ history month and Leicester Pride, events that I feel incredibly passionate about.

Right now, our network - LGBT+ staff and advocates from across Leicestershire Police - is the largest it's ever been. We provide key support to a range of LGBT+ colleagues, as well as members with LGBT+ children, family or friends; we're here for them all.

I genuinely feel that the work we have done over recent years has raised our awareness two-fold, both internally and externally. I feel privileged to be one of our two LGBT+ network co-chairs for Leicestershire Police, and to be part of a bigger team that really does aim to make life for LGBT+ officers and staff better in policing."

"I feel honoured to be recognised as a LGBT+ role model. I'm passionate about the work I do, and feel it is a privilege to act as a voice for other LGBT+ officers and staff within Leicestershire Police."

Andrew Moonesinghe

Pharmacy services manager at Leicestershire Partnership Trust (LPT)

Andrew Moonesinghe has worked in the NHS for more than 20 years working to improve healthcare in general and specifically to help LGBTQ+ communities access it.

Andrew was instrumental in the launch of the NHS Rainbow Badge campaign – a way for staff to demonstrate their commitment to LGBTQ+ patients, carers, and colleagues.

So far, some 3,500 rainbow badges have been sent out across LPT with teams signing pledges to say that they understand the barriers many LGBTQ+ people face when accessing healthcare and are committed to being an ally and a listening ear.

Andrew said: “So many staff have shared their stories/journey as part of the campaign, and how the initiative has made a difference to them personally and professionally.

“Having the majority of our colleagues sign up to the campaign shows the dedication and commitment of our healthcare staff to improving healthcare for LGBTQ+ residents across the county.

“It was such a proud moment to see the NHS respond in this way.

“I am passionate about improving the quality of healthcare we deliver to our patients.

“I get to work with an awesome team whose remit is to look at services we provide across Leicestershire and help teams transform them.”

Andrew said his own personal experiences had driven him to try to help other members of the LGBTQ+ community.

He said: “Growing up in a Catholic family and being Asian, I feared the fallout from my family and community.

“A large proportion of fear came from my own insecurities about being gay.

“Despite a bumpy start, my family and friends showed such love and support at a time I needed them most.”

“Over the years, I have shared my experiences which has helped me grow and I try and use my experiences to help others through creating a space where LPT staff can feel supported and listened to – a space where they can build confidence.”





Anjeli Patel

Manager, Future organisation, Deloitte

Anjeli is an Indian transgender female who was born in Leicester and later moved to London. She works for Deloitte as a manager, future organisation.

“Anjeli previously worked for EY and while there, she created positive change both inside and outside of the workplace.

“I was a speaker at EY’s student induction, talking about my experiences as a British Asian trans woman at EY and the importance of employee networks.

I have been involved in organising various networking events with some of EY’s key clients and supporters of the LGBT+ community. I am also a member of the South Asian network, took part in a firm wide and external video for International Women’s Day, and have spoken at

internal events across the country about D&I at EY, reaching over 2000 people.”

Outside of the workplace, Anjeli spoke at Imperial College for LGBT+ history month about being Asian and trans, and was interviewed by the BBC Asian Network.

“I have been interviewed by the BBC around my transition and inclusivity at work and have been profiled by both DIVA online and Attitude on her experiences as an Asian trans woman. Additionally, I contributed to one Stonewall’s workplace resources, Engaging All Staff in Trans Inclusion, which was

sent to more than 700 Stonewall ‘Diversity Champion’ organisations as well as being available publicly through Stonewall’s website.”

Anjeli is a regular speaker at Stonewall Workplace Conferences - she is immensely proud to get “... feedback from individuals who are inspired and enthused to do more in their organisation after speaking with me.”

In addition to awards, such as the workplace award for the category “Gamechanger”, she has featured in the top ten of both the EMpower Future Leaders’ List and in the OUTstanding Future Leaders’ List (both in the Financial Times).

“I’m really proud to have been nominated as a role model for Leicestershire. Leicester will always feel like home to me. It is positive to see so much is changing in the UK so rapidly for LGBT+ individuals for the better.”

Ryan Auld

Youth and Community worker

Care leaver Ryan, 22, started a degree in Youth Work and Community Development at De Montfort University in 2020 after setting up and running an LGBT+ group called 'Out in Care' for young people, looked after by Leicestershire County Council.

Since then Ryan has been working to support young people across Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland in a role as assistant youth and community worker at The Centre, Leicester's LGBT centre.

Ryan said "I've worked hard to support the local young LGBT+ community.

"I've put so much effort into bettering myself and overcoming barriers in order to be at the place I am now so I can support those around me.

"I'm proud of the resilience of the LGBT+ community in Leicester.

"After not being able to connect with people for two long years because of Covid-19 we came back with a strong spirit that is there for everyone to see, Leicester pride made sure of that!

"I'm also proud of the young people who access the Youth

services I am a part of, week in week out.

"They lift each other up while making my job the easiest and most fulfilling I could ask for."

After coming out as trans at 14, Ryan entered the care system at 15.

Ryan said: "Explaining myself to every new social worker or support service was tiring.

"I was lucky to end up with some really great social workers who supported me along with my transition, were respectful as well as aiding my access to healthcare and support services.

"Coming out as gay at 20 was liberating.

"Understanding that the way I present and who I choose to love is nobody's business but my own.

"Ultimately knowing my sexuality did not make me any less of a man

was a difficult feeling to overcome.

"I use my experience to support others to come to the same realisation of self-acceptance - I think that's beautiful.

"I really hope we continue to see a rise in acceptance and love for everyone

"I hope everyone regardless of sexuality, gender identity or race - and every little intersectionality between - can live a happy and healthy life."




Proud
to value
diversity

Thanks to the following organisations for their support
in finding Leicestershire's LGBT+ role models



Leicester
City Council

East Midlands Ambulance Service 
NHS Trust



Charnwood


Leicestershire Partnership
NHS Trust



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If your organisation would like to be involved in the future, please email LGBT@leics.gov.uk