

LGBTQI+

Creating inclusive workplaces where LGBTQI+ staff can thrive

In the health and social care sector, too many LGBTQI+ professionals still feel the need to hide their identities at work. Yet, when LGBTQI+ staff are free to be themselves, they are empowered to thrive personally and professionally.

At the heart of creating a truly inclusive environment is listening and learning. Through meaningful conversations with colleagues about their lived experiences, we can develop content and initiatives that resonate deeply. Many LGBTQI+ staff express immense pride in their identities but also share the reality of navigating challenges others may not even consider. For example, travel to certain countries can pose safety concerns due to laws and societal attitudes, reminding us that inclusion extends beyond the workplace.



Why inclusion matters

Workplaces significantly shape our well-being, and for many health and social care professionals, their roles are deeply tied to their sense of identity and purpose. An inclusive environment ensures that LGBTQI+ employees can thrive without the emotional toll of hiding who they are. It allows them to contribute fully to their teams and patients, enhancing both their personal fulfilment and professional growth.

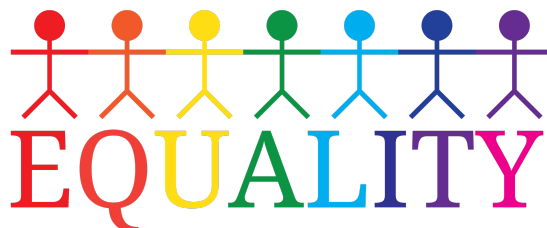
The saying “your workplace impacts your wellbeing more than your doctor” is particularly true for LGBTQI+ staff. For some, fear of judgment or unequal opportunities has created barriers to success. These challenges can impact mental health, job performance, and relationships.

Moving beyond diversity

Diversity is about representation, but inclusion is about action. Creating inclusive workplaces requires more than policies or checklists; it calls for intentional efforts to support and celebrate everyone.

When organisations foster environments where all staff feel valued, safe, and supported, they unlock the full potential of their teams.

Research highlights this need. A McKinsey study found that half of LGBTQI+ respondents chose not to pursue or accept a job due to concerns about inclusivity. Furthermore, more than a third of LGBTQI+ professionals in health and social care hide their identities at work, fearing discrimination. These challenges hinder not only personal well-being, but also professional relationships and the quality of care provided.



Combating discrimination and microaggressions

Unfortunately, biases—whether subtle or overt—remain a reality for many LGBTQI+ employees. One in five LGBTQI+ staff have experienced negative treatment from colleagues, and many transgender employees have reported facing physical violence or harassment. Alarming, some still feel uncomfortable reporting homophobic or transphobic bullying, underscoring the importance of building safer environments.

Microaggressions, though seemingly small, can have a significant cumulative impact. As Diana Ellsworth aptly states, “Every time we use inclusive language, we send a positive signal: this is a safe environment where LGBTQI+ employees are respected and valued.”

Health and social care leaders have a unique opportunity to model this behaviour, using inclusive language and fostering attitudes that create belonging and safety for all.

The benefits of inclusion

Inclusive workplaces are not only essential for staff but also improve patient care. Diverse perspectives foster creativity, innovation, and empathy—qualities that are vital for effective teamwork and compassionate service delivery. When employees feel supported and included, they are more likely to contribute openly and confidently, creating a more positive work culture for everyone.

For LGBTQI+ professionals, inclusion means being able to share their experiences and ideas without fear. It means being valued for their unique perspectives and contributions. When staff feel supported, they thrive, which in turn enhances the care they provide.

Central to fostering inclusion is listening to staff stories. Included in this newsletter are the voices of three colleagues who shared their experiences as LGBTQI+ professionals. These personal accounts illuminate the challenges and triumphs of being authentic at work and inspire broader conversations about inclusivity.



Building a better future

Health and social care organisations must prioritise inclusion. By adopting deliberate policies and practices that go beyond diversity, we can create safe, supportive, and empowering workplaces. LGBTQI+ employees deserve to bring their authentic selves to work every day, confident that they will be valued, respected, and celebrated.

Through this commitment, we not only uplift LGBTQI+ staff but also strengthen our teams and improve the quality of care for all. Together, we can build a future where everyone feels seen, supported, and empowered to thrive.



NHS Fife LGBTQI+ Network: Promoting inclusion across FHSCP

In 2024, the Year of the LGBTQI+ Worker, NHS Fife launched a staff network dedicated to promoting inclusivity for LGBTQI+ colleagues and allies. A pivotal step in its development has been opening the network to all staff within the Fife Health & Social Care Partnership (FHSCP), reflecting a commitment to fostering inclusion across the entire organisation.

This expansion creates a stronger, more unified support system, offering shared learning opportunities, best practice exchanges, and collective participation in events like Fife Pride. By including all FHSCP staff, the network ensures that inclusivity extends beyond NHS Fife, creating spaces where all colleagues can connect, feel valued, and thrive.

The network operates under a clear Terms of Reference, with quarterly hybrid meetings held across NHS Fife sites to encourage widespread participation. These meetings provide a platform for meaningful engagement and collaboration, ensuring that all voices are heard.

Looking ahead, the network plans to strengthen ties with similar groups across other NHS boards and partner agencies to enhance its impact further. By promoting inclusion across

FHSCP, the system progresses further to building a workplace culture where diversity is celebrated, and every staff member can bring their authentic self to work.



Please contact Matt.valenti@nhs.scot if you would like to learn more about the NHS Fife LGBTQI+ Network and ways you can get involved.



Bernadette Brown

She/Her, Married to a woman

Over the years, I've had a range of experiences sharing my LGBT status at work—some positive, some not so much. From the start, I've always viewed being LGBT as no different than any other personal trait. I don't need special treatment or exceptions made; I just ask to be treated as any other person, with respect and common decency.

Here's something to think about: if someone were to tell you they were married to someone of the opposite sex, would you respond with congratulations or some other kind of special acknowledgement? Probably not, right? So, when someone tells you they're LGBT or married to someone of the same sex, it shouldn't be treated as something extraordinary. It's just another part of who they are. Of course, I understand if someone's response comes from a place of allyship, but please, let's avoid framing it as if my marriage is somehow "different" or "special" just because it's same-sex. I don't need a pat on the back for simply being able to love who I love.

Working in care, especially, has often made me question what personal details are appropriate to share in a professional setting. This next part might be a little controversial, but it's something I've reflected on. I once shared my relationship status with a supported individual after she asked if I had a boyfriend. When I said I had a girlfriend instead, I was later discouraged from mentioning it again, as it might "put thoughts in someone's head"—someone who happened to be female. It was a bit unsettling, and it made me question a lot of things about how society views my identity.

But here's what I've come to understand: Being gay is not something to be ashamed of.

It's not the whole of who I am, but it's an important part, and I shouldn't feel the need to hide it.

Being gay is not wrong, and if others learn to accept it, that's okay too.

And finally, I'll leave you with this thought: Have you ever had to remind yourself that being straight is okay?





Lynda Reid-Fowler

A proud she/her pansexual woman, married to a woman, and owner 3 beautiful dogs that make up my happy family.

As someone who is very open about who I am, it isn't always easy, and I don't think that people can truly understand how homophobia feels unless they've experienced such discrimination before. I've faced homophobia a few times, but never did I expect it in the workplace and certainly not from someone that I had called a friend. Before I go further, let me be clear, this was an experience whilst working for another employer not here, not now.

It was at the time when another country had been passing laws around what was and wasn't acceptable in terms of same sex relationships. These laws were appalling in my opinion but only affected me in so far as that it meant I would not ever visit a country where those views were held. I certainly didn't expect the knock-on impact of this to reverberate into my personal life.

However, that expectation was misplaced when I saw my 'friend' (let's call her Katie) posting on Facebook in agreement with the laws being passed. Katie, originally from that country, seemed heavily invested in what was going on and expressing her views on it. I could see another friend, Rachel, who was also my colleague, posting comments leading to them arguing back and forth. Rachel was a true ally and someone who I respect greatly. She was a passionate advocate for all minority groups and as a black woman, she understood how it feels to face prejudice.

I was shocked as I read through the comments. Rachel had challenged Katie's belief in the laws, and this had led to a lengthy argument. With every further comment that Katie made, I felt more upset, more anger and more disbelief. Rachel wouldn't back down and challenged every ill-informed reason that Katie gave in support of the new laws.

I can only give a summary of her points and wonder what impact they will have on you as you read them. She had such views as:

- "These laws are to protect families and family values, they don't affect gays because they cannot naturally produce offspring and therefore, can never be classed as families."
- "Homosexuality is a deformation; they have extra chromosomes." She went on to explain that point in detail, not realising that she was describing Down's Syndrome.
- "Two men or two women kissing in public is disgusting and children shouldn't be exposed to that. It'll make them think that it's ok to do it and might make them gay!"
- "Marriage is a religious ceremony and is only for a man and a woman. Homosexuals shouldn't be allowed to get married, it's not right."
- "It's their own fault anyway for choosing to be gay!"

Those are just some of the points that she openly and publicly made. I spoke to Rachel and another colleague, Ellie, the next day. They were both furious at the opinions Katie held and offered me support in any way that they could. I don't know why it hit me then, but it did, I burst into tears and sobbed. Crying about the reality that some people do find me disgusting, that people hold such beliefs and more than anything else, it is just who I am, it's not a choice, it's not like picking a packet of biscuits in a supermarket! It's about how I feel and how I cannot change that, even if I wanted to.

Anyway, I decided to report the comments to my line manager who said that she knew exactly how I felt. She explained as an English person living in Scotland people sometimes joke about her heritage (I'll just leave that there). She asked what I wanted her to do so I suggested she take advice from HR and come back to me. Several days later, I was invited to meet with my manager and a HR representative. Ellie offered to come with me for support which I gratefully accepted. My manager and HR were both quite put out by me taking someone in support and kept telling me that I wasn't in trouble and did not need a witness. I explained numerous times that Ellie was there to support me, that was all. The solution that they offered was mediation between Katie and I, "so that you can talk about it and put your differences aside." I refused and said that I didn't want to put aside the way she feels about me and my community, it needs to be challenged and made clear that it is not acceptable.

At home, my partner was as angry as I was, and we certainly did not feel like it was being taken seriously. Rachel and Ellie were furious that the only option was mediation and wanted it dealt with as seriously as if it had been racism.

How would I be able to change Katie's mind when they felt that strongly. I couldn't see there being a positive outcome from mediation. I didn't want to sit in a room with someone and tell them how much their words had hurt me, how hard it can be at times and all because I can't help being who I am.

In the end, all that happened was Katie was told to be more careful about what she posted publicly then two weeks later, she gained a promotion. Six months later, she was promoted into my team and sat beside me. I must note that on occasions we had to hot desk and if Katie ever had to use a desk right after me, she'd sanitise it first. I did tell her not to worry because, well, it wasn't catching! Anyway, two months after that, I left and joined a better, more inclusive organisation.





Lily and Tracy

Being a mum to a trans daughter, to me is an incredible privilege. I never even considered in her early years that this would be the journey we, as a family would be on, yet here we are, rocking it!

It is now almost 10 years since my daughter came in, sat down and said 'mum, I think I should have been born a woman!.....my reply 'ok'

I am not proud of how I reacted. I felt panic and hate to say that I worried what people would think. I thought it was maybe a phase, but as the days went on it all started to make sense. I can't quite explain that part of it, but she had always been quite a complex child and struggled to socially interact with other children.

She's said that she started to feel weird about her gender as soon as she started primary school and couldn't relate to boys in her class so would try harder to be their friends. She felt society frowned upon boys being friends with girls and having no male friends. She enjoyed being around the girls and spending time with the female teachers.

Looking back I can recall her asking me why she wasn't allowed to wear the school pinafores and I had explained that those pinafores were for girls and the boys wore trousers. I never gave it a second thought. She would also occasionally put my dresses and high heels on, but again I never thought much of it, kids dress up all the time.

I remember the bullying starting early in primary school and being in and out talking to the teachers and trying to sort things. She tried to latch onto any friends she could, but they constantly let her down. This continued into high school and she explained how puberty hit her hard mentally, making it tougher with friendships and the bullying worsening. She still wasn't aware of any 'label' for how she felt and saw how queer kids were treated, so just tried to get on with life and through school.

She explains how the penny dropped when she and I were watching Big Brother. There was a contestant who was born male but identified as female and then came across a transition timeline on YouTube. This was when it all made sense to her and when she told me. She had gender dysphoria and felt more female than male.

One I started to process it I felt like a failure as a mum. How could I have not known that my child was going through this? Was I going to lose my son that I had known for 19 years? I had never heard of gender dysphoria before so wasn't sure what to expect.

Gender Dysphoria is a term used to describe a feeling of incongruence where biological sex does not match gender or how someone feels and identifies. This can lead to depression, anxiety, social isolation and severe mental health issues and in some cases, suicide.

So I started to research this and was amazed at how common this actually was. It upset me knowing my daughter had been living like this, keeping this all inside, but also feeling confused as a young child.

She was studying at University in Edinburgh at this point and I did everything I could to go over to see her, encouraging her to dress in female clothes when we were out together as it felt a good way to show her I was ok with it. Looking back I would have done it so differently. I probably put pressure on her, thinking I was being a good support, whereas now I would just be there in whatever way she wanted to navigate it.

For a few years she stopped socially transitioning for personal reasons and got on with her life as male, but I knew it would always 'be there' and during covid when she and her partner were living with us we had that same chat again. I said to her that she needed to do what was right for her and would have our support in all the choices she made.

Her partner of 2 years knew nothing of her dysphoria until that evening. She took the news like the incredible person she is. She has and continues to support my daughter through her transition and they are just as happy as they were before.

We have (as a family) all made mistakes along the way. Getting used to your child's name changing, getting pronouns right when previous names and pronouns want to slide off your tongue, but you get there because you love that person and you want them to know they are safe, loved and valued. I always refer to her as being 'she/her' even when she was born and being a little girl because that is how I see it. She was always a girl and to me I gave birth to a girl. I can't jump between her previous name and gender because it doesn't feel right to do so and in my opinion is disrespectful to her.

I changed my job over 5 years ago to become a Specialist Nurse in Sexual Health with a keen interest in LGBTQI+. This is all due to my daughter and my need to be more educated which will hopefully help educate others too.

Every year you will find me at Edinburgh and most recently Fife Pride with my daughter, her partner and my husband waving our Progress/ Trans flags, supporting the Trans community.

I am so proud of my daughter and the journey she is and has been on. She is living her authentic life and this is all I ever wanted for her. She has taught me so much and continues to do so.

