

home
group



Role models guide

www.homegroup.org.uk/getinvolved

Introduction

We believe that, as one of the UK's largest social landlords and care and support providers, we have a big role to play in tackling prejudice and discrimination.

We want everyone to be themselves at Home Group. We value everything that makes us unique and we recognise that celebrating our differences can help make Home Group a special place to live and work.

Our Role Models project is all about celebrating our diversity and finding inspiration in other people's stories, lives and actions. This new guide focuses on the ways in which all our protected characteristics interact to shape our experiences.

We invited customers and colleagues from across Home Group to become role models for our project. They are people who believe in being open and authentic – they understand that by being yourself you can motivate others to do the same, and they are people who we feel inspire and encourage others.

“Role models are aware of their potential to influence others and by being open about their lives can help to create more inclusive workplaces.”

Our Role Models represent our employee networks including our LGBT+, BAME and disability networks and show that being open and sharing experiences is a very powerful way to break down barriers, improve relationships, challenge stereotypes and create positive change.

This project provides a clear and visible representation of how we value diversity at Home Group and celebrates everyone's differences to help us be the best we can be.

I hope you enjoy meeting our role models and you find inspiration in their stories and experiences.



Mark Henderson – **Chief Executive**

“Home Group is a place for everyone and between us we can support and inspire each other.”

**Mark Henderson,
Chief Executive**



ROLE MODEL

Becky Leonard-Dixon

Becky is Assistant Involvement Advisor with Home Group's involvement team.

"I was 25 years old, homeless, struggling with untreated Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, keeping my true sexuality firmly under wraps, and on the brink of suicide.

"My brother lived in a Home Group service and I was sneaking in at night for somewhere to stay. Home Group colleagues caught me but, instead of punishing my brother, they asked if I needed help. They housed me and supported my mental health; I started therapy and began putting my life back together.

"I threw myself into all the involvement opportunities available including reviewing complaints and major incidents, equality and diversity events, the national customer panel and visited over 50 supported services as a customer assessor.

"I left when I was well enough but didn't want to stop being involved. I signed up as a volunteer, then the apprenticeship came up and Home Group helped me apply, even paying for travel to the interview.

"It was an adjustment. I hadn't worked full-time for four years, still had to manage my mental health and, at times, became overwhelmed. If

I had worked for any other company I wouldn't have got through that first year.

"I was offered the chance to study for a Level 3 qualification and last year Home Group made my role permanent as an Assistant Involvement Advisor.

"I love my job. It's helped me to be proud in so many ways. I've learned to love who I am and came out as bi last year, which led to me reverse-mentoring one of our Executive Directors."



"I've had the pleasure and privilege of being able to promote all of this to customers too, and inspire them to move forward in their own lives.

"Home Group has an amazing way of recognising the value in my differences. I wouldn't be here now without these unbelievable opportunities."



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ROLE MODEL

Anthony Lavin

Anthony is a Home Group customer living in one of our learning disability services in Hull.

“When I was younger I lived with my mum, dad and brothers until I was about 13, when my parents split up. My mum is a lesbian and my dad is gay so you can say we are quite a colourful family!

“I lived with my mum right up until moving into my service four years ago. I wanted to move to supported living because I wanted to gain my independence.

“Last year we were targeted quite a bit by some local youths who would make fun of us and there was a lot of hate crime due to our disabilities. It really upset me that people can be so mean.

“It’s not nice to be picked on and we should all be treated equally - we have feelings, wishes and goals in life just like everyone else.”

“Since moving into my service, I’ve become involved in customer assessments, Easy Read communications groups and speaking about

my service at external conferences. I’ve even travelled to Newcastle to speak to the Home Group board. I’ve also recently won an award; it made me feel proud of myself.

“My celebrity role models are wrestlers; I love them as they are strong and very brave! My other role model is my mum; she has been picked on and bullied for her sexuality and her weight but she continues to stay a kind person, even when people aren’t always kind to her.

“Growing up people made fun of me because of my speech and wearing hearing aids. These comments can stick with a person for life but I think it’s made me the person I am today and taught me how people should be treated. We are all different but we are all human.”



“We are all different but we’re all human.”



ROLE MODEL

Blayk McStay

Blayk was a Home Group customer then hospitality apprentice at the Tyneside Foyer in Newcastle and is now a bank worker in our supported services.

"I'm 19 and I identify as a transfemme gay man and I'm comfortable with he or she pronouns as I see myself as a unique soul, rather than a gendered soul.

"I was in a rut in my second year at college; I wasn't enjoying it and felt lost. I had money worries and my benefits had stopped due to my age. I had no work experience and was hearing nothing back from endless amounts of job applications.

"I was encouraged to join the study programme at Tyneside Foyer and then to apply for an apprenticeship. I put my best 'smart casual' outfit on and kept my head held high; this was a new opportunity for me and I was beyond excited! After the interview I felt optimistic and I got a call back and began my induction.

"I've gained so much confidence and begun to believe in myself; I'm on the right path and that self-doubt has become self-appreciation due to all the support I've had."



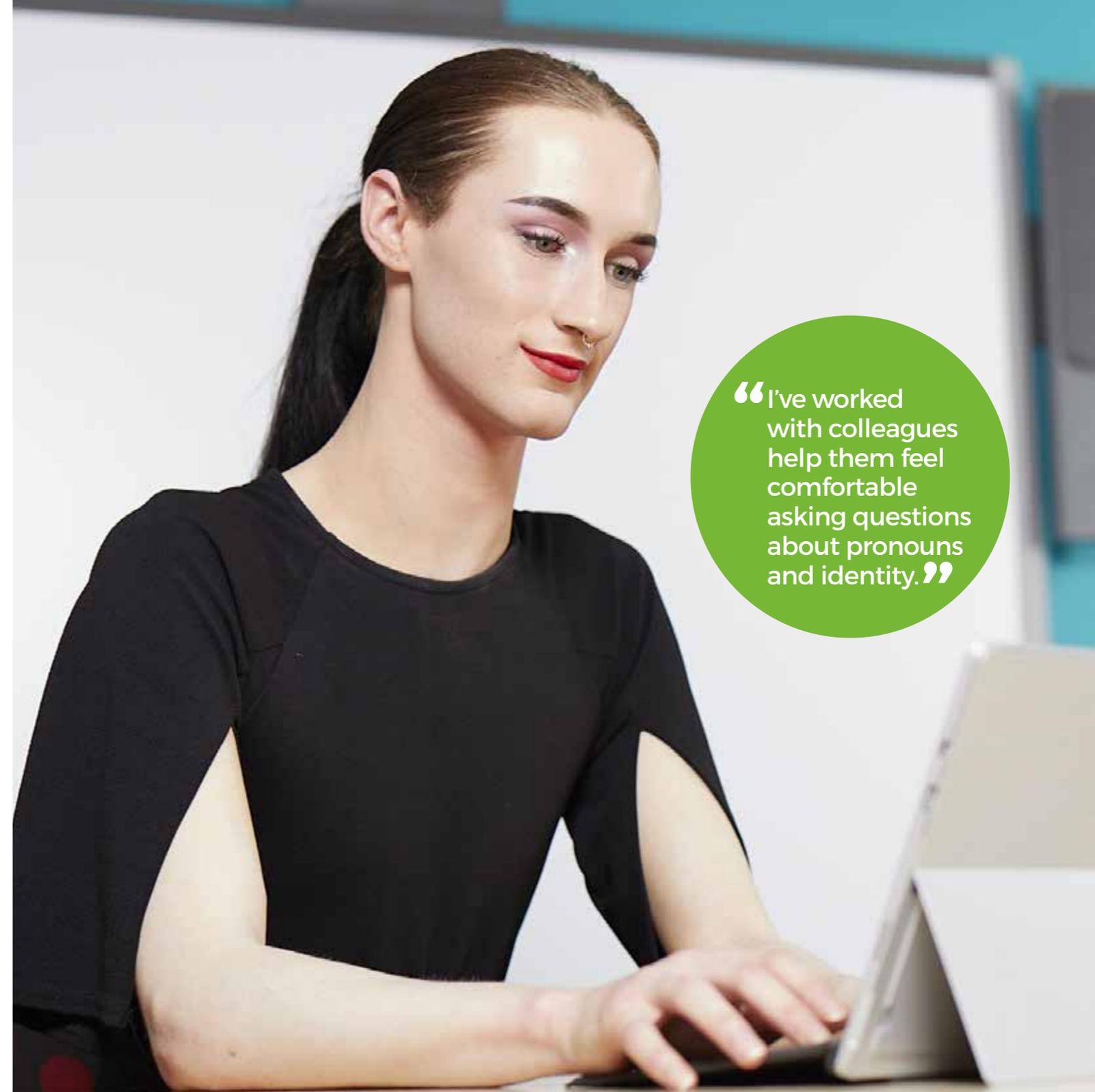
"It's a great company to work for; there's a brilliant inclusive culture and individuals are really celebrated for who they are.

"I've worked with colleagues to help them feel comfortable asking questions about pronouns and identity.

"I have had exciting experiences from job-shadowing with the involvement team to doing photoshoots for the marketing team; these experiences have kept me on my toes and supported me on my journey to adulthood.

"My eyes have been opened and I now realise that I am capable of so much. I have skills to offer to future employers and I can don't have to change being me."

"I've worked with colleagues help them feel comfortable asking questions about pronouns and identity."



ROLE MODEL

Helen Brindley

Helen is Director of Financial Reporting at Home Group.

"I'm a young woman in a leadership role, in an industry dominated by men which has led to many challenges. Being a younger woman I have often experienced awkward moments, unfair insinuations and judgement.

"I regularly meet people who assume my role is something different, based entirely on my age, gender and perhaps even how I choose to dress.

"I would encourage people to be aware of their unconscious bias and to really challenge it."

"I was born into a wonderful stable family home and my sister and I wanted for nothing; something I now realise was incredibly precious.

"The biggest adversity in my life was getting divorced. It had a huge impact on my mental and physical health and I couldn't help feeling a huge failure. It made me realise how I judged mine and other people's lives. I realised that there is always more to every story; you just have to ask and listen.

"I left my job at the same time as my marriage ended and I no longer had my own home so I moved back in with my parents at the age of 30.

"My role models are my mum and dad. Mum worked as a civil engineer and was the only woman for years in an office and industry full of men. She is bright, determined and generous to a fault. I thank my lucky stars every day that she is my mum.

"My dad stuck with a job he hated for over 20 years because the shift pattern worked for our family. He was there every day; picking us up from school, making us dinner and helping with homework; dad had a huge influence on how I was brought up.

"I am proud of the work I have done through counselling to become comfortable in my own skin. I have learnt that taking care of your own happiness is utterly priceless.

"What I like about Home Group is that people can be themselves; as the famous quote goes "Be yourself, everyone else is taken"."



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ROLE MODEL

Indra Mudie

Indra is an involved Home Group customer from Cumbria.

"I was diagnosed with Fibromyalgia and Hypermobility Syndrome (Ehler Danlos) two years ago. I had been experiencing pain and discomfort in my muscles and joints for no reason and was so tired that I could barely function most days.

"I was sent home from the doctors many times before I saw a doctor who listened to me, referred me to a neurologist and diagnosed me with Fibromyalgia; at last I had a name for why I was feeling like this.

"For the first six months of the diagnosis, I just got on with it. Then it got progressively worse. At the time, I had a full-time job as a dental nurse and volunteered at weekends as a medic at a local karting circuit. I was a positive person, proud of what I had achieved and where I was going with my life.

"However, when getting out of bed can wipe you out for the rest of the day, it doesn't take long to lose your positive attitude. There is no cure for it and no real treatment to ease the condition. I had to give all that up as I was unable to function most days.

"I also have to deal with comments such as "you don't look ill" or "you can't be disabled, you look fine". Some days I do, other days I walk with the aid of a stick and stop regularly to catch my breath.

"Luckily, I've had wonderful support from my partner and his family. He helped to show me that everything is still possible."

"I just have to do things differently. I've learnt how to pace my life to minimise the pain that everyday tasks can cause.

"I still volunteer as the medic when my health allows and now I'm a community first responder and a heart start instructor. I may not be as busy as I once was, but I'm still proud of what I am achieving with my life. "

"I've learnt how to pace my life to minimise the pain that everyday tasks can cause."



ROLE MODEL

Neal Roye

Neal works in Home Group's admin team in our Birmingham office.

"I'm a black, gay man, of mixed heritage (Jamaican, Irish, Native Arawak Indian), a spiritual Christian and amateur musician, singer and dancer.

"I was high-achieving at school but post-puberty experienced bullying, poor grades and lack of focus due to just being 'different'. After retaking my A-levels, I studied medicine at university and was a closeted, shy young man.

"I experienced a lot of ignorance and aggressive homophobia from my church, black communities and some of my friends and family.

"Instead of listening to the cacophony of bigoted opinions I worked on accepting myself and realised that God still loved me. I found the strength to come out to my family, friends and the world who were mainly very accepting.

"Remaining in the closet until age 24 was deeply damaging to my sense of self-worth and I experienced stints of major depression. I was looking for a new job and seeing Home Group placed 17th in the Stonewall Top 100 Index was a huge factor in me applying. I was warmly

welcomed and felt instantly at home; my differences weren't just accepted but valued.

"Since joining I wear my rainbow lanyard proudly and take an active part in our employee networks Pride at Home and Partners in Pride.

"My role models include Billy Porter from the show Pose; confidently expressing his identity and challenging the mindset of what a strong man looks and acts like. Others include Maya Angelou, Martin Luther King, Mahalia Jackson, Peter Tatchell, Sir Ian McKellen and Bette Midler; inspiring me by their talents and civil rights work."

"We should all be a bit more patient and understanding, through an interest in diversity, we can all learn and enrich each other's lives."

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ROLE MODEL

Sarah Clark

Sarah is Head of Service Delivery for Home Group in Yorkshire

"I'm a woman in leadership and an older, single mum with a diverse and unconventional family unit.

"I've never married and always wanted children so when I got to my early 40s I started exploring options around becoming a parent.

"I decided to adopt as a single person. It was a challenging process; they scrutinised every aspect of my life."

"I went down a route called early permanence, where I agreed to foster a new born baby with a view to adopting them, but only if later agreed by a judge.

"I'm quite a risk averse person so to take that risk was an unusual move for me. My manager and Home Group were fantastic in supporting me and were flexible with short notice leave so I could attend all the meetings relating to the adoption.

"I have always had a great social life but often felt judged as a single older woman. I was just back from holiday when I saw the email from my social worker about a baby that was due just four days later!

"Within a week I was off work for 14 months and when I got back my flexible working request was accepted to allow for my new home responsibilities. Work life balance has always been important to me and even more so now. In a few years' time I'll want to pursue my career further.

"My mum is my role model; she was always a feminist and challenged norms. She had a strong sense of social justice and really inspired me and helped me build confidence.

"I want people to read my story and not be afraid to reach and aspire. Don't let society make you choose between being a parent and being a leader; you can do both - well!"



"Don't let society make you choose between being a parent and being a leader; you can do both - well!"

ROLE MODEL

Robin Frame

Robin is a Facilities Host at Home Group's head office in Newcastle.

"I came out as trans when I was 27 after a long time feeling the label I'd given myself (at the time I identified as a lesbian) didn't fit, but I didn't know transitioning was a thing.

"As I rushed closer to 30 I felt the pressures put on women by society to settle down and start a family and I realised that 'mother' was another label I wasn't comfortable with.

"When I was 24 I was called to work at the Church of England Cathedral in Newcastle. The best way to describe being called would be that 'this has happened for a reason' feeling you sometimes get.

"I was lay-staff (anybody who works for a church and isn't ordained) working in the administration office when a new priest joined and talked openly and proudly about her son who was trans. The penny dropped. No wonder I was so uncomfortable as a woman – I wasn't one.

"My colleagues, both lay-staff and clergy, were amazingly accepting when I came out as a lesbian and were just as excellent when I came out as trans.

"I had no idea what to do next – there are waiting lists for specialist clinics on the NHS that are sometimes five years long, and in the meantime you are left with no support. I dyed my hair from pink to brown, because men don't have pink hair. I got rid of my dresses and makeup, because men don't wear either of those.

"I realised I had moved from the pressures of one gender stereotype to another. I now describe myself as gender non-conforming – I am a man, but I like a good dress and smoky eye."

"I am also much more comfortable with my sexuality too. I am pansexual, which means I am attracted to people not their gender.

"There are Christians who believe that cisgender heterosexuals are the only people worthy of love. What I need people to know is that most Christians believe that everyone is worthy of love."



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ROLE MODEL

Amber Hindle

Amber is a customer who lives in one of our mental health services in the midlands.

"I'm half Ethiopian, half British, 30 years old and have had a clinical diagnosis of schizophrenia since I was a teenager, spending almost eight years in and out of hospitals. Once I left hospital I become very paranoid, would relapse and end up in hospital again; it was a vicious cycle.

"Life changed when I was offered a respite bed at a Home Group service with additional support; moving into Aviary House saved my life.

"I heard about Home Group's involvement activities and thought I would give it a go. Over the last 12 months, I've been involved in all sorts; from going out and about on customer promise assessments, to equality and diversity workshops, regional viewpoint team, fire safety groups and most recently speaking at an external conference - it's been an inspiring year. I was wonderfully shocked and humbled to win a special recognition award from Home Group for all my hard work; I'm still a bit speechless about it!

"Being involved has helped me loads. I wasn't able to walk to the end of the street without

support this time last year; now I'm travelling independently all over the UK. I've been to London, Leeds and even Newcastle to talk to Home Group's board members; something that's really given me back my confidence.

"I've also managed to stay out of hospital for a whole year - something I'm really proud of.

"My parents are my role models; they have been together for 40 years, survived all sorts of personal struggles but have supported me and taken the time to research my condition and learn what they can do to help me."

"I'm looking forward to continuing my involvement with Home Group; I hope the caring, feisty and fun person I am continues to shine through."



"I wasn't able to walk to the end of the street without support this time last year; now I am travelling independently all over the UK."

ROLE MODEL

Sandra Brydon

Sandra is Home Group's Director for Scotland.

"My parents moved just outside of Edinburgh when I was two years old. I had a happy childhood but in a very conservative family where what others thought was very important and feelings weren't really talked about.

"I left school at 16 and spent 18 months in a bank filing cheques and sending out bank statements; hating the job!

"I applied for a role in a Human Resources department of a housing association knowing nothing about social housing and spent the next 40 years working in this sector.

"I am a lesbian but it took a lot of years (and therapy) to feel able and proud to say that. I didn't come out to anyone until I was 40 and struggled through my 30s knowing that I was gay but not sure how to deal with it.

"I had significant self-esteem issues which hindered my confidence and willingness to accept being different.

"Telling my family was traumatic for me but I was leading a double life and that felt so wrong. My parents took a bit of time to understand but the rejection that I had feared just wasn't a reality."

"I met my now wife almost 30 years ago - a friend of a friend and we have had many conversations about what if I'd been out - would we have got together way back then? We had our civil partnership in 2012 when I turned 50 and then 'upgraded' when the new legislation came in in 2015. Amazingly I am also a granny now - my wife's daughter (and her wife) had a wee boy (Frank) last year.

"I have fabulous friends and we share such a lot of history supporting each other through anything that life brings us. I feel very blessed to have these strong amazing women in my life. Believing in myself and allowing myself to be me is one of my greatest achievements."



"Believing in myself and allowing myself to be me is one of my greatest achievements."

ROLE MODEL

Sema Cosgun

Sema is a former Home Group customer at Tyneside Foyer and now an Income Assistant at our Newcastle office.

"I'm a 19 year old Turkish Muslim woman and I moved to the UK when I was 10. I spoke no English so I really struggled when I started school. I was bullied because of the way I looked, my beliefs and the way I spoke.

"I moved to secondary school with zero confidence and thought if I didn't speak to anyone I would be safe. That was the only way I knew how to protect myself but it didn't work - the bullies still targeted me because I had no friends.

"The first day I walked into school wearing my hijab in Year 9 people looked at me in a disgusted way and the verbal abuse turned to physical assaults; hitting me, throwing things at me and refusing to sit near me."

"It was horrible but I didn't do anything to stop them or tell my family; I was too scared.

"I moved to Newcastle in Year 10 but the racism continued and I didn't have any social life; I was

spending all my time with my family because they were the only ones not judging me.

"I started a study program at Home Group's Tyneside Foyer; I still can't believe what a totally different experience this was - the training team really helped and supported me. They encouraged me to start an apprenticeship which was the best move I've made in my life; I will never forget how Home Group has built my confidence up.

"I used to think I was a shy person but I'm not shy at all; I was just scared to show my true self; something I don't need to worry about now.

"Home Group does touch people's life in a positive way; it's not just a place to earn money; it's my second family."



"I used to think I was a shy person but I'm not shy at all; I was just scared to show my true self; something I don't need to worry about now."

50% of Home Group board members are **women**
60% of Home Group senior leaders are **women**



16% of our colleagues are aged 20-30

19% of our colleagues are aged 55+ years

Home Group's highest represented age group is **40-55**

1 in 20 Home Group colleagues have declared a disability.

Home Group is a disability confident employer



219 Home Group employees are from either a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) background

Home Group is ranked as **17th** in the Stonewall Top 100 employer index

We have our own colleague network; Pride at Home and allies network Partners in Pride with over **750** members



We're ranked **7th** best 'super large' organisation in the UK, **8th** best organisations for women to work and **4th** best place to work in the North East*



*2018 Great Place to Work

Home Group colleagues follow

12 different religions



Highest represented religion is **Christianity** followed by **Muslim**

This year we've worked with **3,800** customers in over **30** different kinds of involvement activities which has had a social value of **£2,539,700**

We also engaged with over **13,000** customers via surveys, in-depth interviews and focus groups



“To me, intersectionality means recognising that people are multi layered in terms of identity. In order to tackle inequality and discrimination, we must accept that many people are disadvantaged on multiple levels, and not just in terms of a single defining characteristic.”

Frances Cobden,
Home Group customer



**Are you looking for
a new opportunity?**

Would you like to work
for an organisation
that truly values
difference?

Then take a look at our careers website:
www.homegroup.org.uk/careers

If you have a story or experiences to
share and would like to get involved, or
if you would like to find out more about
our Life Swap and Role Models work,
please email:

Involvement@homegroup.org.uk
or call us on **0191 594 8142**