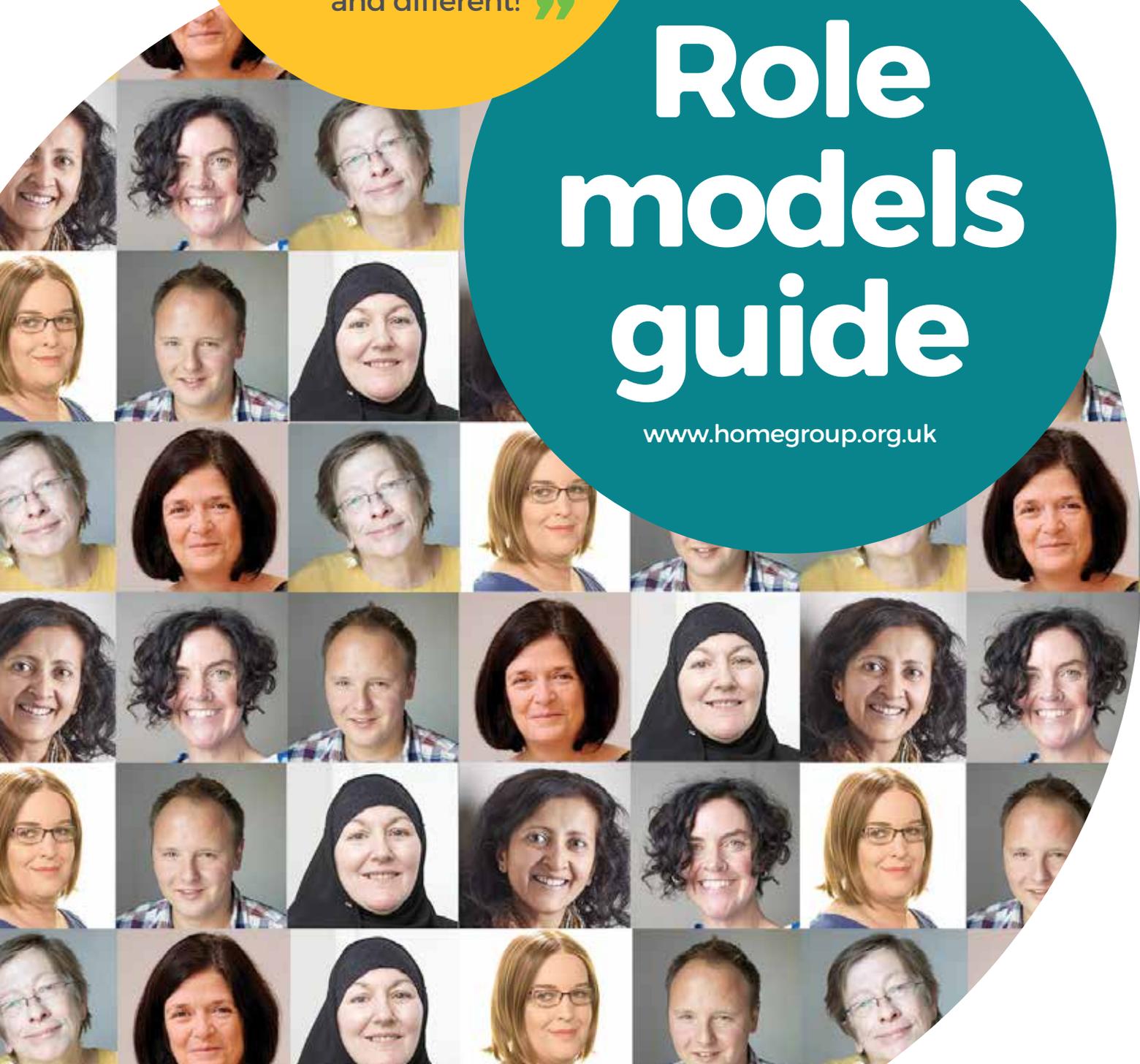




“ Never apologise for being yourself and know that the things that you are, and the experiences you have, are what make you fantastic and different! ”

Role models guide

www.homegroup.org.uk



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.

Drawing inspiration from the work of our Human Library and Stonewall's Authentic Role Models Programme, our Role Models project is all about celebrating our differences and finding inspiration in other people's stories, lives and actions.

Role models are aware of their potential to influence others and by being open about their lives can help to create more inclusive workplaces. They demonstrate that difference is both possible and valuable to the workplace and services we provide.

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

Increasing the visibility of diversity groups has a lasting impact on how people view and treat others. Our role models show that being open and sharing experiences is a very powerful way to break down barriers, improve relationships, challenge stereotypes and create positive change.



We hope our Role Models project will provide a clear and visible representation of how we value diversity at Home Group and celebrate everyone's differences to help us be the best we can be.

It supports our national equality and diversity strategy and policy, and equality and diversity initiatives such as Pride@Home – our lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender network for colleagues. Our Role Models project is closely linked to our Human Library of diverse colleagues and customers and their involvement in our equality and diversity work.

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

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

Mark Henderson – **Chief Executive**

“I hope that this role model guide will show readers that the myths and fairy tales about others, who might be ‘different’ in some way, are just that.”

Ruth Jackson

“There were so many really diverse people and it never occurred to me that they were any different to me. They were just people, like different flowers in a park.”

Frances Cobden



ROLE MODEL

Frances Cobden

Frances is a Home Group customer, member of the Home Group Human Library and the South Viewpoint Team. She shares her story and experiences at life swap events and co-delivers involvement training and events.

I was born in London to a Roman Catholic father and Baptist mother. We were a pretty open family and discussed a lot of stuff. Religion was quite important but it didn't define our family. I always believed in God and we used to go to scripture classes. As I got older though I had theological problems with Christianity so I started exploring other beliefs.

When I was in my late 20s, I went on holiday to Egypt. I was living quite an interesting life at that point and knew lots of diverse people. Then I had a religious experience that made me decide to become a Muslim. It didn't bother my family and I didn't really think it would be a huge issue.



I was still living in London at the time which is rich in diversity. I met people from all over the world and older people who had lived interesting and sometimes difficult lives. I knew a lot of openly gay people then too. There were so many really diverse people and it never occurred to me that they were any different to me. They were just people, like different flowers in a park.

Things changed when I moved to Essex and the world seemed to just turn upside down after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre. It all happened overnight and I became public enemy number one. I remember exactly when 9/11 happened; I was at work and sitting in the office with other people when my manager came in, glared straight at me and said: "How can they justify that?"

I went home and I saw what had happened on TV and I thought oh my God. I still didn't make the connection that it had anything to do with Muslims or Muslim people. After that though my workplace was a very hostile place to be and colleagues basically demonised Muslims. Nobody asked me how I felt about it.

There were a couple of Muslim people where I worked but they weren't visible Muslim women like me. They were from a different community and made a point of distancing themselves from me completely. I was just left to fend for myself.

It's been really, really hard being a visible Muslim woman. Colleagues would stand in our open plan office talking about Muslim terrorists, making jokes about my religion and discussing how

dangerous it is to live next to Muslims. I'm sitting in the office but somehow I'm invisible. I've been refused jobs because I pray at work and also because (so I've been told) I "would have to work with men". I was screamed at by a staff member to get out of a lift in a secure area when I was wearing my photo identification badge (they weren't). All of it is just based on assumptions and stereotypes.

I've been spat on in the street and accused of being a terrorist. People would come up to me and make racist remarks. The abuse made me very withdrawn and my mental health suffered a lot. I became depressed, anxious and frightened to leave the house.

I'm an intelligent person. I've been to university. I've got more than one degree, including a First Class honours degree in Philosophy. Yet some people assumed I couldn't speak English or read and write; and people questioned me in the street about how I can be Muslim and white. I became very oppressed by who I am and I became really quite ill.

It never made me question my faith though, and that's a really strange thing. When I became Muslim I knew in my heart it was what I wanted to be. I'm a principled, ethical and moral person, so I never questioned my faith. The only thing I do question now is why I didn't challenge the abuse that I was getting.

I'm happy to say that I'm in quite a good place now. I live in a really nice area and have lovely neighbours. My involvement at Home Group, particularly my involvement with the Human Library and Role Models project has really inspired and encouraged me. I've come out of myself again and my mental health has improved dramatically. In many ways, I'm becoming the person I used to be when I was in my twenties. I'm meeting people who are a bit like me; people who are open and willing to learn and share ideas and experiences. I'm turning my experiences into something positive.

“I would like people to be proud of and open about who they are, and to be honest enough to challenge stereotypes when faced with them.”

MORE THAN HALF

of Islamophobic attacks are committed against women



who are typically targeted because they're wearing clothing associated with Islam

Source: Townsend M 28.06.14 'Women targeted in rising tide of attacks on Muslims' The Observer

Tell Mama hotline experienced a

20% INCREASE



in reports of islamophobic incidents between May 2013 and February 2014

Source: Townsend M 28.06.14 'Women targeted in rising tide of attacks on Muslims' The Observer

ROLE MODEL

Ruth Jackson

Ruth is a Home Group customer. She is a member of our Human Library and Home Group Board. Ruth shares her story and experience of being a Modern Orthodox Jewish woman at our Life Swap events and at local schools.



I'm a Modern Orthodox Jewish woman. I was educated in Harrogate and I now live in a little town called Millom in Cumbria. I previously worked in various London advertising agencies. This was a cut-throat environment. The pressure in the job was huge; there were times when I would throw up because of it. But there were also great rewards; I acquired some great skills, met some amazing people and earned a great deal of money. Eventually, though, the demands of the business made me a very selfish person. I became impatient and had a strong sense of entitlement. Flying Concorde can do that to a person!

If I hadn't gone into advertising I would have liked to have been an actor (though I've been called a drama queen anyway). I could have become a social worker like my mother (who against all the odds achieved her ambition). I didn't follow in her footsteps. Perhaps I should have done, as life in the 'fast lane' left me very unsatisfied.

During her working life my sister and I were included in discussions about Mum's job, and from the very start we were encouraged to be curious about, and celebrate the differences in, other people. But we could spot her training being applied to our upbringing a mile off! A frequent complaint was "C'mon Mum, we're being social worked to death here!"

Judaism has taught me to learn from my experiences and now I actively seek out

opportunities to make the world a better place. My religion has taught me to put the brakes on. I hope I am a nicer person now.

I observe the Sabbath and the other Jewish holidays; I try to live my life by the teaching. I'm surprised sometimes by the ignorance about the Jewish religion and culture. In Life Swap events, people often ask me if it's true that all Jews are rich (my answer is I'm not...I'm a social housing tenant!). People also have some odd ideas about Israel and the massive influence of the Jewish people. In the main, these are things that are not true. People also often think that the Jews are the ones who wear the big black hats and have ringlets. Not true either, we come in all types of packaging, just like everybody else.

I'm crazy about all sorts of 'traditional' Jewish food, but also eat a lot of Middle Eastern food (Israeli, Arabic etc.). However I would warn anyone not to try 'Afghan Aubergines'! I spent a year living in Israel and can speak Hebrew. Whilst I lived in Jerusalem, an intensely religious city, it felt very strange doing normal things like popping out for milk!

Most Jewish people are normal working people who want their children to have a good education and to behave well around others. We live our lives informed by our faith and are community minded;

charity and volunteering are very important to us. Much of Jewish observance takes place in the home as the Law takes care of almost everything we do.

I try to live my life as morally as possible, but my secret sin is gossip! I've really worked on this and have been helped greatly by a book by a rabbi called the Chofetz Chaim titled 'Lashon Hara' ('The Evil Tongue'). If I feel like I'm slipping I'll give it another read.

My mother and role model Kath, has strong views also on the value of a good education. She is kinder than I am; perceptive, intelligent and very generous. When I'm stuck I think 'What would Mum do? It's generally the right thing!

I hope that this role model guide will show readers that the myths and fairy tales about others, who might be 'different' in some way, are just that; but also that it is always a good idea to be a little curious, look for the truth, and celebrate the person for who they are, not what people THINK they are.

The advice I would give to my younger self now would be "Be true to yourself and don't live your life through the needs and aims of other people".

“I often hear people saying uninformed things about Israel and the exaggerated influence of Jewish people – I'm living proof that this is not the case!”

21%

JEWISH PEOPLE

surveyed in the UK experienced anti-Semitic harassment in the previous 12 months

28% JEWISH PEOPLE

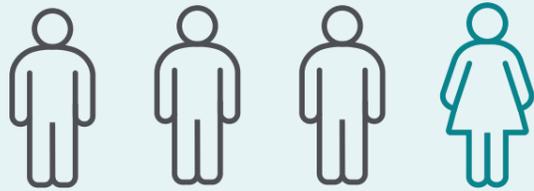
worry about becoming victim of verbal insults and harassment



Source: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights

Overall, women make up only

25%
OF CHIEF EXECUTIVES AND SENIOR OFFICIALS IN THE UK



Source: Fawcett 2014 The time to act is now

The average female executive earns

£423,000

less over her lifetime than a male on an identical career path

Source: CMI 2012

Women working full time in the UK in 2012 earned

14.9%
less than men



Source: Fawcett Society 2013

One third of managers

prefer to recruit men in their 20s and 30s rather than women of the same age for fear of colleagues taking maternity leave

Research by Slater and Gordon (2014)

ROLE MODEL

Rachael Byrne

Rachael is the Executive Director of New Models of Care at Home Group and is responsible for delivering the strategic development of all health and care services for the organisation.

My background has completely shaped who I am, I can remember taking a decision when I got married that I wouldn't change my name. From a feminist point of view I don't see why women should have to give up their names, but it was more than that it was about being proud of my Irish heritage and proud of what my father and his brother demonstrated to me about family life and work.

Education for me wasn't straightforward, I failed the eleven plus and attended Bebington Secondary School where I worked extremely hard. Looking back I suppose I was driven to prove to myself and my family that I wasn't a failure. I went to university to study English and Drama. My dream was to become a journalist - like Kate Adie, sitting on top of a tank and reporting from war zones. I was told drama would give me the confidence needed for this role, I soon realised it was going to take more than confidence and I realised it wasn't for me.

I left university and started working at a drop in service for homeless families and I loved it! I then became a night worker at a ninety bed hostel for women. I really enjoyed this job but I knew it wasn't right the way the service was run. I saw new opportunities and took a job in Manchester opening a new women's service.

I worked for a number of different organisations after that, including a housing project for people with HIV and AIDS and a number of specialist projects for young people. I loved the time I spent

“Role modelling is about sharing learnt experience, I hope to do that by supporting women with young families who are struggling to strike a balance between having a family and a career.”



at crime reduction charity Nacro. This was my first leadership role for which I had no real preparation, but I thrived on taking responsibility for developing services.

I moved to English Churches Housing Group (ECHG) where I established and ran a rough sleepers initiative, and developed an innovative housing drug rehabilitation scheme. I worked there for 11 years and progressed to the Executive Team.

I can see now how driven I was but I don't always think I realised that at the time. I had a range of advice and support from people I consider to be my mentors, I cherish the influence they have had.

I was 37 years old when I had children. They were a miracle of science and perseverance; I always tell my twin daughters they were nine years in the making!

IVF is very much a journey. My husband stayed at home with our children until they were three years old before he went back to work. My husband provided childcare during the week and worked weekends, when I took over.

During this time I had two line managers who really understood my situation. In fact, I was promoted and had significant achievements during this period. My employer's flexibility and support enabled this to happen. This is something I will always remember and try to do for others.

It was sadly the case that it was often the women in my extended family who were the ones that told me that I shouldn't try to have both children and a career. I think there are inherent views about women and work. Women are still viewed as the primary care givers and there's an expectation for us to choose between having families or careers and I think this is especially true for women in senior roles.

But I think it's really powerful for my daughters to see their mum in an Executive role and there are lots of positive role models out there I want them to see and follow.

In my experience, men in senior roles rarely admit their vulnerabilities and women tend to be much quicker to acknowledge theirs. I feel women have to be more circumspect about our weaknesses and this can feel uncomfortable. The good news is I think that's changing, and it is definitely supported in a value driven organisation such as Home Group.

I give all my energy to this role because it's what I believe in, but I won't be finished in my career until I'm a Chief Executive!



ROLE MODEL

Bhavna Patel

Bhavna is an Operations Manager at Home Group. She leads a team of colleagues who deliver a housing management service to customers across the business.

My dad came to England in the late 1960s from India with just £3 in his pocket and a dream of a better life for his family. My mother and older sister followed and eventually I came along in 1968.

I grew up in a small terraced house in Coventry. My dad worked in telecommunications and my mum was our homemaker. Back then it was more traditional in Indian communities for women to take on this role and even now some girls are restricted by their families, especially in relation to higher education.

We didn't have much money and I guess you could say we were quite deprived. I went to the local inner city secondary school and my parents scrimped and saved and made sacrifices to enable me to make the most of school clubs and educational trips. I started to think about going to university, even though many friends and members of my family didn't view it as an option for them.

The BBC came to my school and worked with us to record a script for a radio play. They thought I had a good recording voice and offered me a contract at the age of 16 years. It was such an exciting time and it really opened my eyes.

I stayed on at sixth form to do A Levels before studying politics at the University of Essex. I loved student life and was inspired by Professor Ivor Crewe, a leading academic and superb lecturer.

I would say that a big turning point in my life was being accepted by the Windsor Fellowship Scheme, both positive and inspiring this scheme offered inner city kids who showed academic

potential vocational placements during the summer holidays.

During the summer holidays I worked for a financial services company in London which gave me my first insight into the world of work, I then took up a role in advertising for The Guardian newspaper.

My experience of and belief in positive action led me to work for the Commission for Racial Equality in both policy and project management and this is where I gained significant management experience. I led teams which worked with businesses in relation to equality and carried out formal investigations where discrimination had been found. This was in the late 1990s and I feel racial prejudice is more subtle and less overt now.

Outside of work, I held the role of Assessor for the then Public Appointments Commission where I was involved in the selection of non-executive directors on public bodies such as NHS Trusts. It was fantastic to meet high profile and inspirational people who had already achieved an incredible amount in their lives.

As a child, I remember experiencing racism, something that I unfortunately won't forget for the rest of my days. I had been in a school play and on the way home a teenage boy stopped me and said: "I don't like Pakis." I was young and didn't know how to react but I remember feeling scared and unable to challenge him. If that happened to me now I would definitely speak out.

“I hope I inspire all women but particularly women from black and minority ethnic backgrounds to join Home Group. I want women to know that you can combine family life with a successful career.”

Having two children of my own, as a parent naturally I have always felt the need to protect them from racial abuse, and I openly speak to them about it and what to do if it happens.

People have said to me "Go back to where you come from", or "Where do you really come from?" They assume by the colour of my skin that I'm not British, yet I was born here, Britain is my home and I'm proud to be British. Too often people confuse race and immigration, but they are two very different things.

I think it's really important that people from different groups and backgrounds have the opportunity to mix and celebrate what they have in common as this helps to break down prejudices and misconceptions. My first role at Home Group involved working with colleagues and customers to build cohesive mixed communities and we won awards for our success.

My experience of Home Group has been really positive. As an organisation I think it is very inclusive, open and transparent. Colleagues give a lot and are committed to serving customers and clients. I get a real sense of fulfilment when I can make a positive difference to someone's life and this makes it all worthwhile.

1 in 5 black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women in the UK are unemployed compared with 1 in 14 white women



Source: APPG on race and community 2012

WOMEN
from **BLACK**
and **MINORITY**
ETHNIC groups
remain
under-represented
in the media



Source: Bates L 2013 'Everyday Sexism' Simon and Schuster UK

62%

of UK transgender population have felt discriminated against or harassed because of being perceived as transgender



Source: European Agency for Fundamental Rights LGBT Survey 2012

2013-14 figures

SHOW A 54% INCREASE



in transgender hate crime in the UK

Source: The Home Office

In England **48% of transgender people** under 26 years said they had attempted suicide

EVERY 32 HOURS

A TRANSGENDER WOMAN is reported murdered

Source: www.transviolencetracker.org

ROLE MODEL

Sarahjane Coffey

Sarahjane is a former Home Group customer. She was instrumental in developing and delivering involvement training for colleagues and has been active with regard to the Human Library and other project groups. Raising awareness and understanding around transgender issues, Sarahjane won an award for Outstanding Contribution to Involvement, and has inspired many other customers to get involved and shape, change and influence Home Group.

Like many transgender people I knew really early on that that I wasn't like other people but I wasn't really sure how or why. It took me a number of years to figure it out. By the time I realised who I needed to be, I was a coach driver married with a daughter and two sons from my ex-wife's previous marriage.

For years I tried to ignore how I was feeling. I suppressed it for the sake of my family and career, but it eventually became too much and I knew something had to change. I left my family and my job, I was divorced and my home was repossessed.

I tried studying beauty therapy at a college in the Midlands but financial pressures meant that I had to leave college and find work. I moved back to the North West and took another job driving buses, but passengers complained about having a transgender driver so I lost my job.

I was verbally abused when I left my flat and harassed by my neighbours when I stayed home. I felt powerless and I wasn't very motivated, I was tired of people sniggering at me and I'd had enough of being abused by strangers in public just because I needed a pint of milk. I had no family or friends to help me and I was truly alone.

No one should be made to feel bad because of who they are, but this does happen every day to lots of people.

This continued for about two years before my Support Worker directed me towards the Involvement Team, and this changed everything for me. I used my ideas and experiences to help shape and deliver training and workshops all over the country. I regained the confidence and self-worth I had lost.

Eventually I met my partner, and after six months on holiday in Australia I decided to move to build a life here.

I've experienced many challenges during my transition. The obvious one is learning to overcome intolerance and prejudice, as well as to see how things can work for me rather than others. Unfortunately, I think the NHS can deter transgender people, and if you can't afford private healthcare or medical procedures overseas, it is the only way you can transition.

I feel I owe it to my daughter to succeed. My idea of success is to be accepted as a woman and to find love but, above all, to have something to offer my daughter if one day she looks me up. I want her to be proud of me.

My aspiration was to build a life as the woman I always was inside. I hoped to find a role that allowed me to express myself, and assist others less able to stand up for themselves. I never saw this as an easy process, but it was a better option for me than living a lie and being unhappy as a man. Transitioning isn't a choice people make, but too many feel that they have no choice but to either go back to being unhappy, or worse, ending it all.

I have survived, but more than that, I have almost achieved what I set out to do. I feel fully accepted here in Australia; as a woman, not a transgender woman. I've found love and I'm positive that I will get work once I achieve the qualifications I'm studying. I have trusted my instincts and things are looking great! I would urge any transgender person to seriously consider why they are



“My aspiration was to build a life as the woman I always was inside. I hoped to find a role that allowed me to express myself and assist others less able to stand up for themselves.”

transitioning. My advice to others is to plan ahead, be honest with yourself and then stick to your guns. Whatever happens, never listen to negative people; we are all capable of great things as long as we believe in ourselves.

Your home should be the one place you feel safe and can relax. I think Home Group does a wonderful job promoting equality and diversity and I hope by being part of this project, I can contribute to that.

ROLE MODEL

Ronika Cunningham

Ronika is Involvement Manager at Home Group. The Involvement Team helps Home Group provide new and innovative ways to maximise customer involvement.

I've never hidden who I am. It's never crossed my mind not to tell people that I'm a lesbian. When I've spoken to friends who've had a hard time coming out, they say that I'm just good at ignoring the negative stuff, but I really don't think there was any! I came out in the mid-1980s when it was quite cool to be gay. The only time I experienced homophobia was travelling in Jamaica and Egypt.

I studied Arabic at university and spent my third year living in Egypt. It was a fantastic experience, but it was so homophobic. When my girlfriend came out to stay with me, we got a lot of abuse. The more Arabic I learnt the more I could understand what

was being said to us and about us, it was extremely unpleasant and often frightening. So, for the first time in my life, I had to retreat into the closet and I felt very oppressed. I always imagined I would travel the world to find the country I wanted to live in and settle down and have kids. Living in a country where it's illegal to be gay and homophobia is ingrained, I realised that place is England. I left Egypt and later moved to Hebden Bridge which has a large lesbian community. I still live there with my two boys. My partner and I have split up now, but she's still involved with the kids; she's still their other mum and they have a fantastic relationship with their two gay dads.

My mum is my role model, she raised five children on her own and in the 1970s that was a rare thing, known as a 'broken home'. Our home wasn't broken, it was a warm, loving, accepting environment where fairness and equality ruled. My mum was fantastic when I came out, she

“Never be oppressed by who you are. Find your tribe; find people like you and be proud!”

would have worried if my sexuality made me unhappy but she knows I love being gay! She's just brilliant about it and she will not tolerate homophobia not from anybody. My whole family have been great about it, including my grandma. I'm very, very lucky! I have the most gorgeous, amazing children who are so wise and wonderful and funny and loving, and I live in this amazing little town surrounded by other families like ours. I feel my kids are my biggest achievement; my life's work and the best thing about my life. For a lesbian that isn't simple either. It doesn't happen by accident. It involved quite a lot of planning and a lot of negotiation! If I raise two happy men who respect women then I will feel like I have done my job well.

When I was younger, I thought I would train to be a teacher, but in my twenties after graduating in psychology I became very political. The only industry that was trying to recruit psychology students at the time was the Ministry of Defence. The thought of nuclear war terrified me, so I moved to Greenham Common peace camp for two years and became a full time political activist.

I have worked for various local authorities and housing charities and I joined Home Group just over six years ago. I love my job as Involvement Manager, get to work with customers and witness their ideas and views being put into actions and improvements for Home Group. I have a lot of autonomy and every day is different. I'm really proud to lead the Involvement Team and of the innovative work they do like the Human Library and Involvement Works (involvement training for colleagues). I'm proud of our four apprentices and their achievements I've never had to hide my sexuality and I hope our Role Models project sends a clear message that Home Group is a place where you can be yourself - whoever you are. I set up Pride@Home our colleague Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Network last year and hear really positive and interesting stories from gay colleagues across the business.

OVER A QUARTER

of LESBIAN, GAY and BISEXUAL people are not at all open to colleagues about their sexual orientation

99% of young gay people report hearing the casual use of 'you're so gay' in school



3 IN 10

LESBIAN, GAY and BISEXUAL people think they would be treated worse than a heterosexual if they wanted to enrol their child into school



800,000

people of working age have witnessed physical homophobic bullying at work



ROLE MODEL

David Molyneux-Johnson

David is a Performance Leader at Home Group's Customer Service Centre. He is responsible for ensuring that the experience for customers is excellent, whenever they contact the organisation.

As a gay man, being able to get married feels like my relationship has been publicly validated. We have finally achieved equal status and that's a wonderful feeling.

Our wedding was the best day of my life. It was the culmination of all the events in my life leading up to our big day.

I didn't come out to my mam and dad until I was in my early 30s. They didn't ask me and I didn't tell them. Their reaction turned out to be completely different to what I had expected. When I did finally tell them my mum was more upset that I hadn't felt able to confide in them. She said she knew before I did. My parents have been, and continue to be, immensely supportive.

I guess the catalyst for coming out was my partner passing away. My whole life just collapsed at this point. I felt like I'd lost everything. We were living in Spain and he was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer. Events like this make you see life in a different light. Martin passed away just two months after being diagnosed and his death made me re-evaluate what was important in my life. I had been working in banking but I decided I wanted to change career and work for a not for profit organisation that gave something back.

I met Michael after my friend and his sister Suzanne made the common assumption that as we were both gay we'd obviously hit it off. We went on a blind date on Newcastle's Quayside. He thought I was arrogant, I thought he was quiet. After a shaky first 30 minutes we hit it off and we have never looked back.

Neither of us can remember who proposed to whom. It has been something we have always talked about as we both wanted to stand up and say "This is my husband. We love each other and we want to spend the rest of our lives together."

Planning our wedding was stressful but at the same time very rewarding. My dad was a little confused about civil partnerships. He didn't understand the format of the ceremony and what it meant legally. It was a good thing to bring him up to speed. I think, by being involved in this, if people can walk away with more of an understanding, then that's great.

Our wedding was quite traditional. We were married in a medieval banqueting hall which at the time was the closest we could get to a church. We had two best men and two best ladies, one

of whom flew from India to be there. I wore a kilt and Michael wore a morning suit. Our scarlet ties coordinated with each other (and the table settings!). Our mothers both wore hats and colleagues at Home Group made our wedding cake. It was a real celebration of our union. On the day we got married my colleagues at the Customer Service Centre put a picture on the screens saying 'Congratulations' and I thought that was fantastic!

I feel everything I experienced has helped shape me in a way and I'm a better person now than I was before. I've been able to rebuild my career and make a new life, and I thank Home Group for that (and of course Michael!).

So I think my message to others is to be yourself; be brave and be open about who you are. You'll have better relationships and, well, your life will be better in every way.

I was asked to think of my role model. Without a doubt this is Harvey Milk. I heard of him when I visited San Francisco. He was the first openly gay elected official in the USA and he proved that the LGBT community have an important voice and are as much a part of society as anyone else. Tragically he was murdered because of his beliefs but his legacy lives on in society still to this day.

I hope that this project will show that Home Group is diverse. Diversity brings great gifts, enables us to learn more about one another, as well as challenging stereotypes, prejudice and ignorance. I hope it inspires people to be themselves and celebrate the unique gifts they have to offer.

“If someone said ten years ago I would get married and be open about my sexuality I would have laughed in their face! But here I am a happily married gay man and it's fantastic!”

The first same sex marriage in England and Wales took place on



HALF
of LGBT people in the
European Union
avoid public places
because of harassment

Source: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2013



Home group statistics

12 DIFFERENT RELIGIONS

Highest represented religion (other than Christian) is Muslim at 1.3%

50% board members

&

58.8% senior leaders

ARE WOMEN

3.8%

of workforce is LESBIAN, GAY or BISEXUAL however 20.6% declined to specify



8.3%

of workforce have declared a disability

11.5%

of colleagues are NON WHITE BRITISH/IRISH

15.8%

of our work force is aged 20 - 30

19%

of our work force is 55 years plus

Highest represented age is

40-55

Conclusion

I am delighted with the outcomes from our Role Models project - it highlights the importance of the diversity agenda and also how our customers and colleagues are true role models. This helps everyone to understand our approach, and the fact that Home Group is a truly inclusive organisation.



We've been working hard to develop a diverse workforce; identifying our colleague profiles and encouraging colleagues to update their personal data, so that we can improve, attract and support a diverse workforce. We benchmark well against most of the statistical areas specifically around gender and improvements in recruiting people from black and ethnic minority groups. However we constantly seek to improve and are focussing on improving recruitment of people with disabilities, black and ethnic minority groups, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and younger colleagues.

Susan Fulton
Director of People

“ I think it's really important that people from different groups and backgrounds have the opportunity to mix and celebrate what they have in common as this helps to break down prejudices and misconceptions. ”

Bhavna Patel

“ I think it's really powerful for my daughters to see their mum in an Executive role and there are lots of positive role models out there I want them to see and follow. ”

Rachael Byrne



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