

## Transcript

Hello and welcome to a podcast by Glasgow Disability Alliance.

[Shouts!] Glasgow Disability Alliance!

Glasgow Disability Alliance or GDA is run by and for disabled people. With over 5,000 members across the city, of all ages and backgrounds, with all types of impairments and long term conditions. GDA unites disabled people through accessible learning and peer support, building the confidence and connections we need, to take the lead, participate and contribute to our lives and communities to help build a fairer, more equal Scotland.

This episode, we have been celebrating lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender history month. Believe it or not, folks, some people are LGBT and disabled. Oh, yes they are. And we'll be hearing from some of them very soon. But first, here's a wee bit of our own LGBT history.

So this was an opportunity to bring people together to form a community within a community, almost and to look at what you've got in common and to have that support there and connections there. And to then to be able to branch out into the wider LGBT spaces and look at issues around access and LGBT gatherings and where people with different impairments and conditions could have their voices heard.

\*MUSIC\*

At GDA we are really proud to have become part of Glasgow's LGBT history by supporting the contributions of a small group of GDA members, who were determined to create a safe accessible space for LGBT disabled people and to support each other.

In Glasgow, a lot of LGBT spaces are really inaccessible. So, we can't sort of meet each other there and gather there and that makes finding other people like ourselves really difficult.

We were tired of being an afterthought, of poor access and no visibility at LGBT events – and tired of feeling invisible to the disabled person's movement. So we asked GDA to support us – we got linked in with Free Pride, which is another grassroots movement in Glasgow – and we ran a workshop – just to see what the demand would be, if people were interested. It was absolutely packed...and people were definitely interested! And they had a lot to say about what it's like being disabled and LGBT... it did take a while to get organised and to get funding – for disabled people transport and social care can be huge barrier, so GDA always provide taxi's and personal assistance so people can take part. But it's a lot of work persuading funders why that's necessary – but eventually we got there, and the group was born.

\*MUSIC\*

So, why do we need a LGBT disabled people's group – you might ask. You might think there's a fair sized LGBT scene in Glasgow and there's lots going on for disabled people – there's not really but we'll come back to that.

Anyway, let's find out.

I think this goes back to LGBT and disabled – combining those to it's a minefield to people.

It's desexing people who are disabled. That you don't have a sexual identity, that you don't have an identity that is sexed. Once you're disabled, you're just a blob of flesh. Like being a disabled person with a slot for donations, you're a charity case.

I'm not just a disabled person. I'm an LGBT person am lots of other things so it's tiresome and frustrating and I feel a lot of pressure trying to fight and, as I've said a hundred times, justify myself to every aspect of my life. So I'm able to participate in things like work, college and even socialising with my peers – there is a lot of challenges around everyday kind of things.

It's very similar to my experience of being visually impaired and being registered blind and people genuinely asking me how do you know that you are gay if you are blind – as if it's all about looks. Is it people's narrowmindedness? Or also a lack of education about disability as well? Because you have a disability or a condition, sexuality doesn't work like that. You love who you love.

So it's been a really good, really needed social space where we can be ourselves and be our whole selves, without having to hold back part of ourselves, because if you're in an LGBT space, you often have to hold back your disabled self. If you're in a disabled space, you often have to hold back your queer self. But there, you don't have to hold back.

So having a space where you can have your own identities and meet peers and build positive relationships with peers to challenge and tackle these kind of statements and challenge people's attitudes, and making sure that policies and things are challenged, and everything is not just the status quo because it's detrimental to the disabled LGBT community the way it is. So if we keep challenging and keep pushing policy-makers, law-makers and decision-makers at every level and making sure that LGBT disabled people are included and having their voices heard.

Joining the LGBT group has helped me mentally focus on things and helped me realise a lot of things about myself as an LGBT disabled person, but also that made me feel like I'm never alone. There are people who have experienced similar things who are going through similar things, and I feel like after having a shitty week, month, there are people similar to me.

When you're queer and disabled, it's like double mindblown. You're gay and disabled – how does that work? So you don't know how gay sex works, and you don't know how disabled sex works, and combining that, it's like—is it even a thing?

Some people say, 'Should we have sex? Should people like you, me, us have sex in the first place, because we're disabled beings?' We're desexualised. Why are you interested in sex? You're autistic, like me. You should be in the basement, not getting married or having a family. You should be in some basement in the dark with a blanket and the lights off and a computer and not interacting with people.

I never knew disabled people had sex. It's kinda like the balance, right – you're very promiscuous if you're gay, but you're non-sexual if you're disabled. So where do we stand if we're gay and disabled?

When you're disabled, people feel like they can ask you all sorts of questions. 'What's wrong with you?'

Would they ask an able bodied person the same questions?

No I don't think they would ask a non disabled person the same question. I mean, things like "how do you even have sex?"

The biggest turning point for me feeling included and accepted as an LGBT disabled person was when GDA ran the LGBT group. That was the biggest, and from there, I gained confidence to challenge the barriers that are in the LGBT wider community. I've got my wee heartfelt moment. I see a lot of tokenistic babble.

For me, it was the LGBT identity was the first one that my family had to get their heads around, and that was ok after a while. The most difficult is people understanding disability. If you're my partner, you're automatically seen to be my carer or some heroic person coming into my life and putting up with me.

Or that narrative that you're just a taker and not a giver.

[BOTH LAUGH]

\*Music\*

Someone said that the way to spite enemies is to live well, and I live by that. People that kind of hate you because you're queer or disabled, or whatever, if you live well, that's spiting them, because you're living despite their discrimination or feelings or what have you.

Normal to me, is a really stupid word. No-one's normal, in my opinion. Everyone's got something that's amazing and special about me. I spent so long of my life, especially in school, trying to be 'normal' and it didn't work out for me. Because no-one is normal, as I said. I love who I am. I have my bad mental health days, but I know deep down that I am where I am and the person I am because of how I have lived my life.

'I don't think you're trans enough. I don't think you're disabled enough by my standards. Standards which I've seen on the telly.' So it's, like, 'You don't look that disabled.'

One of the things that tends to dishearten me is that I can go out to drinks with my friends, and that's fine, but going on after drinks, they might want to go to a club, and there's not a single queer club in Glasgow that I can go to. Not a single one has wheelchair access, which means come 11, 12 at night, I'm off home to my jammies, while my friends get to enjoy themselves on a night out, because there isn't that accessibility.

Two of the Prides this year I didn't go to, simply because I couldn't find out enough information about access, and I wasn't prepared to turn up hoping that there was going to be access when there might not be.

The big issue is, LGBT spaces need to be willing to learn from disabled person's perspective and listen and implement change so we can fully participate like in the LGBT community or any community, so it's about starting that dialogue.

So, for LGBT history month, we worked with Our Story Scotland and gave an account of our LGBT history. I'm really proud. It's really important that disabled LGBT person's stories are heard because in the future it will shape things to come. It's a proud moment. If somethings' happened to me in my life, I'm sure more people went through the same thing.

\*Music\*

So reflecting back, it's three years since the group was founded – what do our founding members feel they've achieved and what are their hopes for the future?

So, yeah, as Kim said, the opportunity to come together to share our experiences, with people who— who understand it because they're living it as well, has been really valuable, and it's allowed us to look at, 'What are the issues we want to tackle?' and 'What are the messages that we want to get out there to the wider LGBT community that often isolates us quite a lot?'

I think the highlight for me is just seeing that it really is filling a need for people.

And that's also— that we got a lot of support from each other. Um, cos at GDA, everything is done with a lot of peer support, but I think that you feel even more of that at the LGBT group, uh, there's a lot of trust amongst the

members. Um, I know that some of the things— people have disclosed things that they maybe wouldn't have felt comfortable, amongst other people, which shows the level of trust we have with each other, that we know that we won't discuss it with anyone else. So, just, that privilege that, you know, that other people trust you that much, is really, really amazing.

Most important thing to me about the group is, uh, the sense of belonging. That is— It's overwhelming at points, uh, because you just—everybody just gets you, and you don't have to justify yourself.

Yeah, exactly, just what Susan said there, and to have that sense of belonging where you don't need to hold back in certain areas and can be fully yourself and fully a human being in all respects. You don't need to hold back your identity, no matter what it is, because that belonging and inclusiveness and support will be there regardless.

My hope is that one day we won't need groups like this. But shorter term, I think that— I'll go with what you guys said, and that people can find a sense of belonging, that... Yeah, I want to find the people that need... groups like us and bring them to us.

I think that could be something as well, actually, that other people or other groups could look to this as a blueprint for how to set up a space like that. Um, yeah, so that would be—that would be good to be able to have that impact.

\*Music\*

So if you are interested in making your venue or your event accessible to disabled people or LGBT disabled people – please gee us a shout.

Thanks, Charlotte. And if you are interested in joining our LGBT disabled people's group, you can contact us on [info@gdaonline.co.uk](mailto:info@gdaonline.co.uk) or give us a call on 0141 556 7103. You can also contact us on facebook, twitter and through Contact Scotland BSL, if you are a BSL user. So, stay tuned to hear more from our LGBT disabled people's group. They will be recording their own histories for the Our Story Scotland archive and hopefully sharing them with us here as well. A huge thank you to the founding members of our LGBT disabled people's group who you have been hearing from today. Charlotte, Kim, Susan and the awesome Gemma, Neil, Emily and Ross for speaking to us on this episode.

Susan McKinstry is a writer and campaigner and you can read one of her pieces on the Huffington Post website [huffingtonpost.co.uk](http://huffingtonpost.co.uk)

Ross Wilcock is a filmmaker for BBC the Social and you can hear more from him on their website.

That's it from us today. Thanks for listening and stay tuned for future podcasts from Glasgow Disability Alliance.

\*Shouts\* Glasgow Disability Alliance.