



Spotlight #6 Episode 8

Podcast transcript

Spotlights is a series of online events and publications focusing on a particular group of victims and survivors, who are often hidden from services. This podcast episode forms part of our spotlight on LGBT+ people experiencing domestic abuse. In it, my colleague Collette talks with Berkeley Wild, the founder and director of The Diversity Trust – a community interest company that aims to influence social change to create a fairer and safer society. Berkeley is also a trustee of CVS South Gloucestershire and of LGBT Bristol, an organisation he founded 24 years ago, and a Stonewall Education role model. In this podcast, Berkeley talks about how The Diversity Trust collaborated with Bristol based Next Link domestic abuse service in a year long project to improve access to domestic abuse services in the West of England for LGBT communities, and touches upon how his own lived experience of domestic abuse has made the issue important to him.

C: Berkeley, welcome to our Spotlights podcast series. Thank you for agreeing to do this podcast with me. So, you are from an organisation called The Diversity Trust. Could you tell us a bit about what they do?

B: Okay, so we are a community interest company which is a type of social enterprise and our work is around equality, diversity and inclusion, those core themes, and the kind of work that we would be involved would be predominantly delivering training to frontline staff and to various organisations that would literally go from very small non-governmental organisations, charities, through to large multinational corporations. So we have a really wide-range of clients and most often the clients that are coming to us are seeking support around things like the Equality Act and the equality duty and making sure that they are compliant, but also mainly going a bit further in terms of thinking about how they can celebrate and embrace diversity better, particularly within the workforce, but also about delivering to customers and clients and service users. So that's the core of our work, and then the other flipside of that is in carrying out research which we will do – often community based research but also we have arrangements and partnerships with academics and universities around the region and most of our work, although we do deliver training UK-wide, most of our work is in the West of England, West Country area.

C: Okay, and so you partnered with an organisation called Next Link, who are based in Bristol I believe?

B: That's correct, yeah.

C: Yeah, and they're a domestic abuse organisation. You collaborated with them over the course of the year on a particular project, which you've come to talk about today, so can you say a bit about that project and how you got involved?

B: Okay, so what happened was we'd been working with Safer Bristol Partnership and Bristol City Council for a while, for a number of years, initially actually through

substance misuse and hate crime and other factors, and I had felt quite passionate about the subject of domestic violence and abuse as a survivor myself and I'd been working to develop some training with a co-trainer whose background was in DV. They were actually a commissioner locally and had retired and so they were really interested in sort of progressing some training, and we'd then been approached by Safer Bristol Partnership and by colleagues at Bristol City Council to form a partnership with Next Link, who are the main provider in the Bristol area. So they arranged a meeting for us and we then put in a tendering bid, an expression of interest to the Police and Crime Commissioners Office, so to Sue Mountstevens' office, and that process took a few months to go through but we were eventually successful in our application to secure some funding and the funding was for a year, for a 12-month period, and it was to design and deliver some bespoke training for frontline mainly domestic violence specialists, but it did become wider in terms of the audience that we reached, and the other part of the process was to look at some policy reviews, so how to help Next Link particularly in updating its policies. We also work with Survive locally as well, they are based in South Gloucestershire. And then as well as that to inform the policy development and to inform the training, we did a programme with some research. So, we ran some focus groups and we did two different types of focus groups. So, we ran focus groups with providers, so with the specialists, DV support workers, but also we did some research with actual LGBT communities and with survivors, particularly of domestic violence, and we ran a few focus groups and one of those was within Next Link itself and actually was mainly drawn from service users. So that was interesting and then we also tried to open them up as well to engage a little bit more with communities. That was actually really difficult, even though we were offering an incentive, it was really hard to get people to come forward take part, so we had smaller numbers. So, we had larger numbers in the providers' groups and larger numbers in the service users' groups, but very small numbers in the community groups.

C: Yeah, that's interesting because what we see a lot in the data is that the numbers of LGBT people coming to specialist domestic abuse services is very small compared to what we know the number is more likely to be of people experiencing domestic abuse. Something else that we tend to see, actually, is that it's more so bisexual women seem to be represented in domestic abuse service intake and in particular there's a lack of trans men and women coming to the attention of those specialist services, so it's an interesting question about where those people are going for support if anywhere at all.

B: I think so, and certainly I know from anecdote but also from some research that's been published, that LGBT communities generally tend to help seek informally so they will go to friends and family if that's an option. And for many trans clients that we've worked with and supported over the years, that's really reduced because obviously for many trans people that can mean isolation from family and it's really difficult then to get support because, if you're not seeking support from agencies because mainly people fear discrimination, that's the reality, we've got some really hard-based evidence around access to hate crime services for example, which is very clear about that. Then therefore if people are only able to seek help informally it means that it's really difficult for people to actually get the specialist support that they really do need and then people's lives are also very complex when you add in factors such as mental health concerns, for example, and addictions, it becomes incredibly difficult for people that are experiencing domestic violence as another intersection in their lives.

C: So, it kind of suggests then that it's not enough for domestic abuse services to say, "We are open to all. We're equal opportunities in terms of our accessibility. We welcome all different people in our service." That is just not going to be enough in terms of really reaching people when there are these additional barriers.

B: Yeah, absolutely, and in fact that analogy is one I use in my training all the time. Historically, people's understanding of equality particularly was exactly that, that we welcome everyone, we open our doors but the problem is, the barrier is that not everyone will come through your door and you will need to make adjustments and you will need to think differently in terms of reaching into communities and LGBT communities is one of those communities that perhaps historically has less trust really in services because of the historic treatment, because of criminalisation. Therefore, it's about thinking what can we do? DV is an interesting one particularly because in terms of the number of men that we spoke to, they said, "Well, domestic violence charities are for women. They're not for men." That was another barrier particularly for gay men and I think you're absolutely right, our experience, certainly if we looked at the monitoring would be that bisexual women were pretty well represented, lesbian women less so and gay and bisexual men less so and then trans was really quite difficult. Also, the relationships that trans people can experience in domestic violence are different. It can be amongst partners, but it can also be amongst other family members as well and recognising that as domestic violence and domestic abuse is another factor.

C: Yeah, absolutely. So, you've mentioned the focus groups that you carried out. Can you give us a bit of a flavour of some of the feedback that you got from those?

B: Yeah, so we ran different groups with different cohorts. So, we ran groups that were amongst... that we were able to draw up from specialist providers, from frontline workers particularly. We also ran groups with clients and service users particularly that came from Next Link and then we ran some open groups that were trying to recruit from communities, and they were the most difficult to reach into, and particularly men which it was an interesting... for me personally, it was an interesting learning experience that we were really able to quite well recruit women to the internal groups, for example. I think we had one group of eight female service users, because we ran specific gender groups as well. We did that consciously. We ran specific groups for women, for men and for trans women, trans men. So, we tried really consciously to address that, and it was consistent I think that the groups that we led with women in, they were able to find entry easier into charity support, into specialist domestic violence and abuse support than the groups with men. So not only was it more difficult to reach men and actually encourage men to take part, but it was also more difficult I think generally for men in terms of them recognising and understanding that DV was happening to them and what DV was. Also, people didn't even have a language to be able to explain that. I mean, I know from my own lived experience of domestic violence myself that I couldn't have articulated it, now I can 15 years on. You know, 15 years ago I wouldn't be able to say the words but now I can and that's through the work I've been involved with, this work, all those factors coming into play. I think for some men, particularly the ones we spoke to in focus groups, that was an additional barrier, assumptions that it wasn't for them and I think one of the key messages that we really tried to embed within the work with Next Link was that if I don't see myself reflected in your organisation, I don't think you're for me, and I think, I hope, that we've got that message across, that people do need to have a range of representation to be able to think, actually yeah, that is something I can go and access and get support from.

C: It's about the picture we paint of domestic abuse, isn't it? Whilst for the vast majority of people their experience will be a male perpetrator against a female victim in a heterosexual relationship, because we know statistically that's going to be the majority, that the issue is that if we don't also paint a picture of domestic abuse in different relationships, then we're not giving people a language or an opportunity to say, "Actually, I can see my relationship reflected there as well," and historically the media depictions, the way we talk about

domestic abuse, has been that very one-sided view of heterosexual domestic abuse.

B: Absolutely, I think fundamentally a term I use quite frequently is the concept of heteronormativity, that only heterosexuality is 'normal and natural' and therefore we don't think about same-sex relationships, for example. We don't think about trans identities. We don't think about the range of different identities that will be in the LGBTQ communities and I took part recently in a domestic homicide review and that was a same-sex male couple involved in that and that was really consistent, that although the victim was presenting to services and there was a clear flag around the possibility of DV being in that relationship, it really wasn't picked up by professionals, and that was a consistent, if you like... I'll use the word failing, because that's what the lessons learned, what they were trying to gather from domestic homicide review, and I think it's almost like we don't see DV in same-sex relationships. I think that's a very, very consistent problem that we have to try and overcome.

C: Yeah, so it's not just victims and survivors of domestic abuse themselves that aren't seeing their relationship depicted in the portrayal of domestic abuse but professionals might also not see it. They are also not picking up on those signs. So, you mention that some of what you did was around training, and training domestic abuse workers but other professionals as well. Could you say a bit more about that part of the project?

B: Yeah, so this was fundamental for us. It was a key component and we ended up delivering I think around ten or 12 days of training and what was really interesting, because we were obviously commissioned through Police and Crime Commissioner, and that was across Avon and Somerset, so we were really mindful that we tried to reach into different areas so we did training in Bath and Bristol and South Gloucestershire and down in Somerset and North Somerset, so we wanted to get a really broad geographical spread and I think we ended up in almost, certainly in the high hundred or so, I think it was almost 200 participants which was quite a significant amount of people being trained. But what was fascinating, although we were marketing the courses for specialist DV workers, that's who we were trying to target the training for, we ended up having people coming from the police and from other support agencies. So, it was quite a generalist audience, so we ended up having to write three courses in the end. So, we'd written an original course which was very much for specialist DV workers. We also then tried to write a course that was more general around domestic violence awareness, so a more general training course, and that we then delivered that to, for example, the LGBT liaison team within the police and we also did an LGBT communities course around raising awareness of domestic violence and abuse. So, we did it that way and then we also realised, because of people signing up to come on the training and looking at their job descriptions and where they were coming from, we ended up having to do a kind of basic awareness training around domestic violence for those people who were participating. So, it ended up being quite complex and quite a challenge, so we had to basically re-write the course at least twice to be able to fit the audience. And we did that on the run, literally we had a course that was coming up. We had to change it based on who was coming but it's great that people were really interested in coming along to that training and one of the things that was consistent that we kept trying to come... we kept coming up against was what are the differences? Well, actually, there aren't really that many differences and I think people almost, I wonder whether this comes out of a place with a bit of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia but people were almost, not intentionally but unintentionally almost wanting us to say, "Gay relationships are so different and gay domestic violence is so different and it's different because of X, Y and Z." So, I did try and write a paper on that and we used that as a handout to give to people to talk about things that may be differences, but actually fundamentally, without getting into the nitty gritty of what DV is now, fundamentally the differences aren't that great. The same

kind of things happen within LGBT relationships as happen in different and opposite sex relationships.

C: That's their heteronormative view again though, isn't it, that if it doesn't match my heterosexual experience, it must be very, very different and other and it reminds me of I said to you that when I was in frontline work setting up an LGBT focus group, because I was struck by how few... we only worked with women in that particular service at that particular time, but how few lesbian and bisexual and transwomen were coming into our service and I remember speaking to somebody who worked in the community safety partnership about awareness raising, LGBT awareness raising, and her saying to me, "Well, where do gay people go? I don't know where they go," and this idea that we might be publicising our service in libraries or public places or what have you, but there must be a special place that LGBT people go to that must be very different from heterosexual women and me just being really struck by the kind of naivety of that comment.

B: Indeed, in some cases, some parts of the country, for example, in parts of the world, there'll be an LGBT centre. There'll be a specialist support space but that doesn't necessarily mean that that's the right place for someone to go who's the victim of DV. It could be actually they need something very different to what an LGBT space can offer in terms of support and so we were I think in a sense... I've always said I'm working towards my extinction. That's what I do what I do. I don't want to have to be doing this work in 20, 30 years' time. Well, I'll be too old anyway, because I think we should be getting to a place where organisations are culturally competent and what I mean by that is that an LGBTQ person can come into a service and expect to receive the kind of service that everyone in mainstream society already probably does expect because they will be aware enough through processes like training and education, that they will be aware enough that there are going to be differences but those differences aren't great and actually, at the end of the day, it's about providing a space in which victims can come forward and survivors can come forward and feel safe to be able to talk about all those many factors, all those intersections around their identity. That possibly will be a factor in their DV experience. It may or may not be, but it possibly will be.

C: Yeah, so if organisations are thinking about how do we improve our response then, and I guess there's a couple of things that we've touched on, how do they reach out and then, once they have done that, how do they create a service which is going to speak to people's experience and people feel actually that's a service for me. What sorts of ideas did you come up with through the project about what needed to be different?

B: I think it's a little bit like the model of visibility of identity and it's something that I work with in training, where you have like a waterline and the things you can see are above the water and then all the other things are below the water. In a sense, organisations have to think about that as well for themselves, so you can see people having a stall at Pride that's very visible. You can see if they use perhaps a rainbow flag as an image or if they have in their communications they thought about it enough to have same-sex relationships reflected in those communications, whether that be on websites, social media or whatever it is, they've looked at policy and they've put in place monitoring that's been tested and evaluated and people understand why there's monitoring. Then all the things that are underneath, all the hidden things, tend to be about organisational culture, and that's the thing that takes a huge time to shift and that starts with training and education awareness, but it's a journey that I think as agencies they have to go on and it's a long journey. It's not short. It's not a quick fix. It's not like putting a rainbow flag out. It's much more different than that and so we, I think, need to be able to say to communities... because there are two things going on at the same time. One is

communities are over here, away from services and they don't think the services are for them. At the same time, agencies and services are a distance away thinking why aren't LGBTQ communities accessing our services? We need to somehow bring those two things together so that there can be a dialogue and so we think use things like case studies, for example, where LGBT people have had really positive experiences of accessing services and then we've reported on those as stories that then we can get those cases studies out into communities to see the stories of people's experiences have been positive. So, we've done that in a number of ways. We've done it with health and schools and education and hate crime discrimination and I think that's another way. Short videos, for example, is a really easy way of getting messages across to communities and one of the things that we learnt really early on was how easy it is to recruit LGBT communities through the use of social media because LGBT communities generally tend to be more social media savvy and using it more so if you want to get key messages out, use your Twitter account, use your Facebook account because that way you will engage a little bit more with the communities and also think about language, and that's a really important factor, so neutralising around gender, using words like partner, not making assumption around someone's gender identity, making use of pronouns, so perhaps if someone doesn't identify as binary, thinking about using they and them pronouns. So, there are lots and lots of different ways in which people can learn and there are so many resources out in the world now, so many resources online that people can access, some fantastic films that have been produced by organisations that are thinking about these kinds of issues that can be just easily accessed. It doesn't cost anything, so yeah, it's a culture change within an organisation and not just making assumptions that you've got your door open and everyone come through it.

C: Reciprocal training, that can work really well, can't it? So, if you've got a local LGBT organisation, you might offer to train them in domestic abuse dynamics and how to respond to disclosures and, likewise, they might then come in and train you on LGBT language ways of working?

B: That's exactly what we did, yeah. So, we ran one of the ten, 12 training courses we ran were specifically for LGBT community groups and it was led by Next Link, so we led most of the LGBT training for the specialist and non-specialist service providers and then Next Link with us obviously then led the training that was specifically targeted at the LGBT community and groups.

C: Yeah, because I think another kind of area that I became aware of when I ran this focus group was that when people were going to LGBT organisations they were holding onto that information and trying to support individuals as best as possible, sometimes trying to support both people in that relationship and not thinking about going out to a domestic abuse service for some specialist input or help or what have you, so we need to also better equip LGBT professionals to manage domestic abuse in a really safe way.

B: Absolutely, and when you look at the statistics, I think it's one in three, I think, same-sex relationships where there's a possibility of domestic violence from people's research that's been published. So, it's not that it's not happening. It is. It's a high prevalence but certainly obviously because of the very numbers, percentage of population, obviously the smaller population you're talking six, seven percent we think, although we don't know from census because they haven't asked the questions yet but they might do in 2021, but certainly we are talking about lower numbers, but I feel that one of the reasons I was so passionate about this project is that people are just managing it in isolation and that's not good. That needs to be changed.

C: You said to me earlier about your own experiences and that giving you real passion for this area of work. I just wondered what changes you've seen over the years and how we are responding better?

B: Yeah, I think a couple of things I would say on that. One is my experience with the police. We are talking historical. It was probably around 18 years ago, I think, when I first made contact with the police around the experience I was having of DV, and initially was on the telephone and I got laughed at and I think that was about the police officer at the time involved in that not recognising perhaps that DV happens in same-sex relationships particularly amongst two men. I think there was something around that and I think there's been a paradigm shift because I think, if I was to make that phone call today, my trust in... and have witnessed the police changing its culture, again change of organisational culture, I think they take it so, so seriously now that that would not be the case. I don't think I would get that response, anyone would get that response today. I think they'd have a much different response. I think they'd be much more victim led. But I also think there's been a sea change, or there's been a will and a want amongst services to make a difference and I think that's why it was great to work with Next Link and with Survive and other local charities to try and help them in their thinking organisationally about what do we need to do differently? How can we make it more accessible? How can we be more LGBT inclusive? So, I think they're slightly pushing at an open door whereas perhaps historically that wouldn't have been the case and actually I wouldn't have had anywhere to go because if I was being laughed at by the police, and as a gay man where do I go for support, there wouldn't have been a space for me. I do think that is beginning to change and I think that that's proved by the fact that local charities, particularly domestic violence agencies, have been able to stand up and say we are open to same-sex victims and that includes gay men, bisexual men.

C: Thank you so much for joining me on this podcast. It's really fascinating to talk to you. The full report of your project is available online, isn't it?

B: Yeah, you can go onto The Diversity Trust website and we've got all our research reports on there and certainly the improving access to domestic violence services report is there and it's also on Next Link's website as well, so it's all published.

C: Great, thank you.

B: Thank you.