



Transcript:

People with Mental Health Needs: Alison's story

Alison Gray: Social workers ...they can get the physical disability side but they can't get the mental health side. They ... or they can get the mental health side but not the physical disability, so when you've got both and you're gay as well, there's like ... it's almost ... it's too much for them to take in at any one time.

Narrator: A recent review of the mental health of those who are lesbian, gay and bisexual has drawn shocking conclusions.

Helen Jones: This study compared LGB people with their heterosexual counterparts and found significantly higher incidents of common mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, agoraphobia ... those kinds of mental health issues, as well as substance misuse, self harm, suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts.

Narrator: For Alison Gray, who lives near Brighton the problems which later contributed to her depression started when she was just a baby.

Alison Gray: I went into a care home at seventeen months old because my mother had a road accident. When ... my mother then left my father, she lost custody of myself and my brother. Then my father got married, when I was probably about ten and I went to live with my father and stepmother which was a horrendous experience.

Narrator: Alison thought she'd escaped her trouble childhood when at eighteen she married, but the marriage turned out to be violent and by 1994 she'd had enough.

Alison Gray: I met my first main love who I worked with and we got together and I just knew then that life was too short and I had to live the life I wanted to live and live it my way and then meant acknowledging that

I was a lesbian, always had been, but had suppressed it. My daughter had a very bad reaction. I was no longer allowed to see my grandchildren who I had basically brought up for seven years.

Helen Jones: Research shows that a lot of the mental health issues experienced by LGBT people are in response to the discrimination, prejudice and abuse that they encounter. The key difference for LGBT people that doesn't affect most of the minority groups is that a lot of people are rejected by their immediate family and friends for something that is very intrinsic to their identity.

Narrator: In 1998 Alison suffered a back injury on holiday which left her disabled and in constant pain. The pressure was too much and she had a mental breakdown.

Alison Gray: I just went into a complete meltdown. I've been surviving since I was seventeen months old. I am fifty four now, I no longer have the energy to actually do everything and survive myself.

Narrator: Alison was referred to the local mental health team with severe depression.

Alison Gray: My first social worker was fantastic. She understood me, she understood the fact that I was a lesbian, she was very pleased that I had a good network of friends all lesbians and also my CPN recognised that. So my friends were used to phone me up and say "Right we're taking you out today" when I wouldn't go out the house and just generally support me. And she was in favour of that.

Helen Jones: You can be very lucky and meet individual practitioners who are very aware and very caring, very concerned and there are ... you know lots of it on positive, really good practice, but unfortunately there are lots of examples of really poor practice as well. And in a sense it's more luck whether you get a good service or not than good planning and it shouldn't be down to luck. Services should be equally accessible, they should be equally good quality wherever you go and whoever it is you're going to see.

Alison Gray: The first carers I had didn't value ... they didn't value my sexuality at all. There were a number of them that were ... found it difficult when they had to help me in the shower. There's this myth that if you're a lesbian you want to sleep to every woman you meet, which is absolute nonsense.

Helen Jones: All the kind of usual prejudicial behaviour can be just as apparent amongst social care workers as anybody else. Institutionally social and mental health services don't take equalities as seriously as they could. They don't take actions that one might reassure clients that they are not going to be discriminated against or that if they are here's what redress they could find. For instances of discrimination, how they could make complaints about it, that kind of thing. But I think they don't take the first step in trying to make their services accessible for LGBT people.

Narrator: At a Mind Out Brighton they offer advocacy and counselling for LGBT people with mental health issues, like Alison.

Male Speaker: *"How you doing?"*

Alison Gray: *"Yeah, not too bad. I've got major problems with ..."*

Narrator: But Helen believes that this should compliment a more LGBT friendly statutory service for her training is the key.

Helen Jones: Training very much needs to go along with a commitment from the top down to improving services for LGBT people and I think without that even very enlightened, very good practitioners may not get the support they need in order to effect real change in services.

Alison Gray: If it wasn't for Mind I wouldn't be here today, and I know that.

" ... there's mould above there which is ..."

I've had some times when I have just been so low and if it wasn't for them and their intervention, I would have just crumbled.

[End of Recording]