

The logo for Home Group, featuring the words "home" and "group" stacked vertically in a teal, lowercase, sans-serif font, enclosed within a white circular background.

home
group



LGBT+ 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 believe 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 show that being open and sharing experiences is a very powerful way to break down barriers, improve relationships, challenge stereotypes and create positive change.

Our Role Models project provides 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.

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

Mark Henderson – **Chief Executive**

“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

- We're ranked **18th** on the **Stonewall top 100** workplace equality index
- Our LGBT+ employee network Pride at Home has over **100** active members
- We won Stonewall's 'sector champions' and 'staff network of the year' (North East 2019 awards)
- Our LGBT+ Allies network (Partners in Pride) has over **600** members
- Our LGBT+ reverse mentoring sees LGBT+ colleagues mentoring senior leaders
- We have signed up to the HouseProud pledge; empowering social housing providers to improve services for LGBT+ customers



HouseProud
Pledge Pioneer

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

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

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."

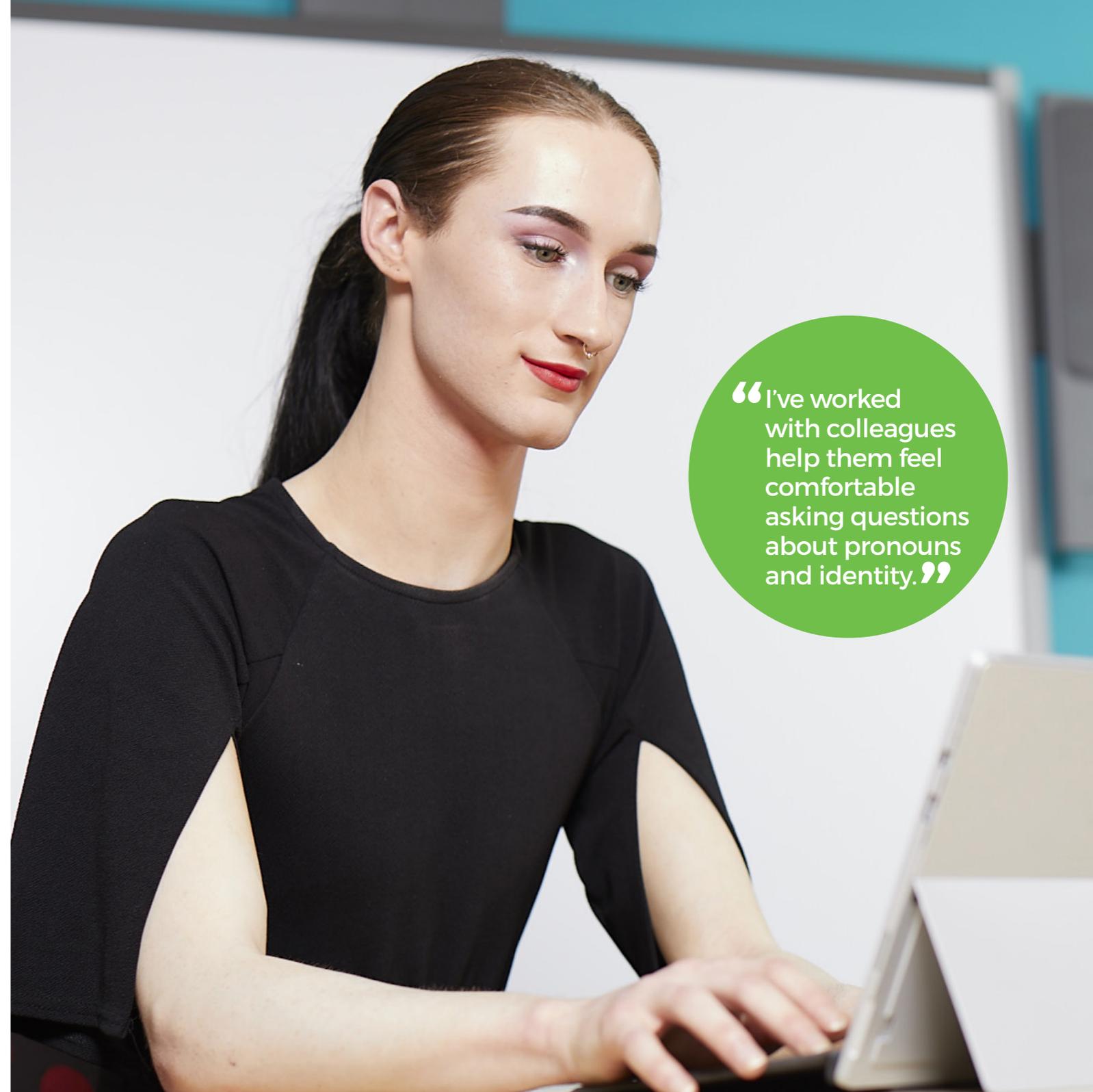


"It's a great company to work for; there's a brilliant inclusive culture and individuals are really celebrated for who they are.

"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

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

Josh Robinson

Josh is a Home Group Customer, studying business and economics.

“My name is Josh, I’m 22 and I’m a Home Group customer and am at college studying business and economics.

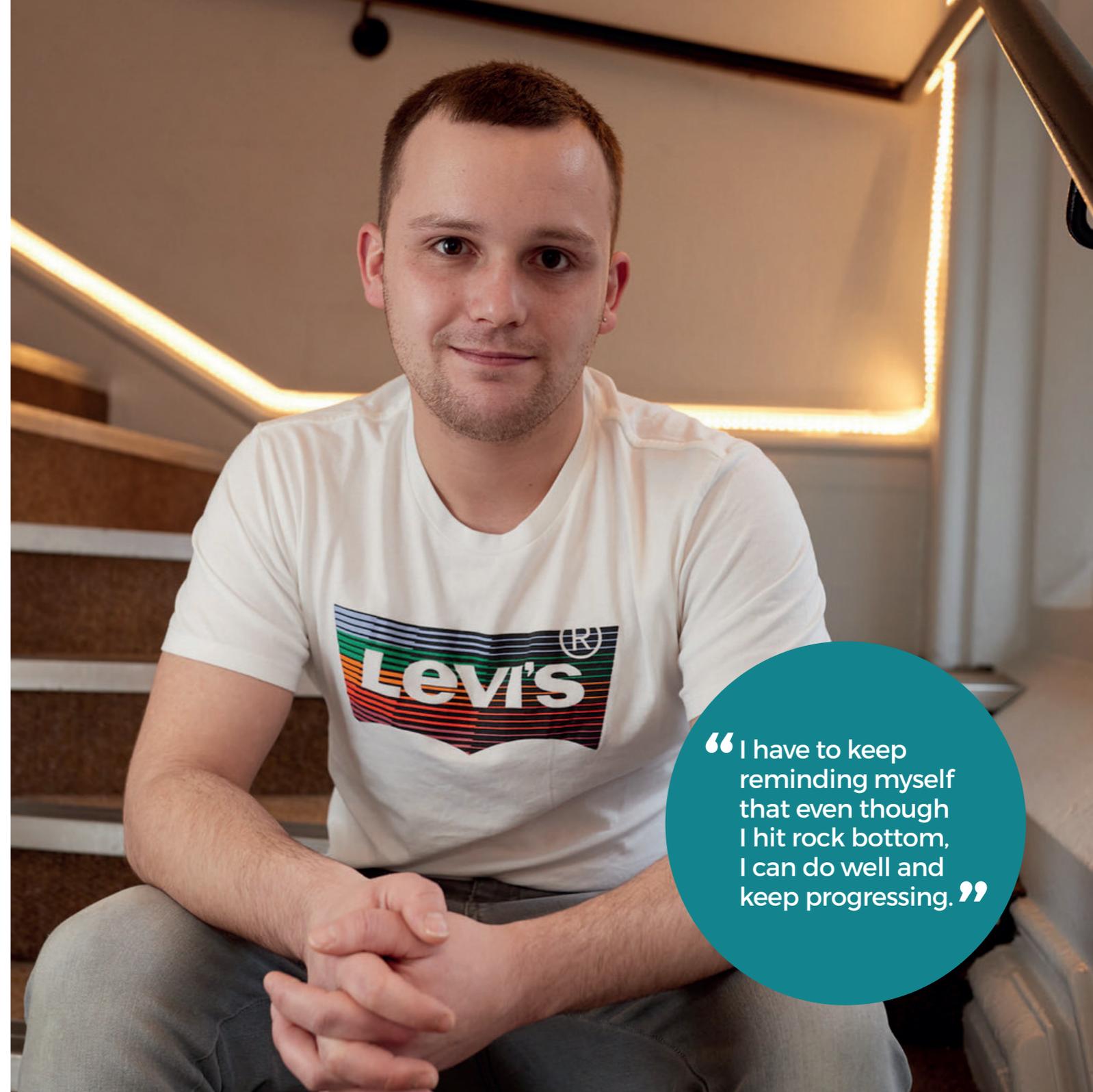
“I am a bisexual man and I feel quite able to be myself in my local area. I’ve been in relationships with gay men in the past who haven’t understood my bisexuality which has been challenging.

“I have ADHD and was put on medication at a very young age. I describe it as an emotional whirlwind and sometimes I can be quite chaotic and impulsive – I gave up my property in Yorkshire when I was 18 and moved to Newcastle without telling the relevant services so for I while I slipped through the cracks and was off my medication.

“I ended up in a relationship where I felt totally dependent on my partner and it wasn’t long before I started feeling controlled. When the relationship ended I went to live at Tyneside Foyer and started my apprenticeship with Home Group. It taught me lots of things including that customer service isn’t really for me!

“I struggled with my mental health after my apprenticeship and ended up back in hospital. I feel anxious that I’ll be rejected because I’m different but every time I go for something I get accepted so I have to keep reminding myself that even though I hit rock bottom, I can do well and keep progressing. I wish it was easier to ask for help and that frustration wasn’t so commonly mistaken for aggression, just because an issue is difficult to understand.

“What I would like people to take away from my story is trust your instinct, if you are good at something or enjoy it, just do it and keep going even if there are challenges along the way.”



“ I have to keep reminding myself that even though I hit rock bottom, I can do well and keep progressing. ”

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."



"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."

ROLE MODEL

Andi-Elizabeth Rutherford

Andi-Elizabeth is a customer from Cumbria.

"I'm 61 and a transgender woman, I only describe myself as transgender when I am talking about my transition, otherwise I am a woman.

"I knew I was a woman since I was young and told my doctor when I was 18, he said that there was no such things as being transgender, but I knew it was a thing and it was me!"

"In my teens I would secretly dress in women's clothes at home and started going out in the middle of the night dressed up and putting myself at risk. The woman in me just had to get out! I left home but my 4 am trips continued. In my forties outside work I was living as a woman almost full time but felt like I was living two lives.

"Friends at work encouraged me to come out and since then I've been able to drive change at work to support trans people. I'm very proud that I've put equality and diversity onto the company's agenda and worked with local colleges and the

NHS to raise awareness. I've been told I have inspired other trans people to come out and live their true lives.

"I got involved with Home Group after I changed my name and title and was having problems being mis-gendered at the customer service centre and receiving post in my old name. This was very upsetting for me so through the involvement team I helped Home Group make changes to their processes to make things easier for trans customers. I also got involved in Life Swaps and started sharing my story as part of training for colleagues and at external events and national conferences.

"My role models are Emmeline Pankhurst whose passion really inspired me and Frances O'Grady who is a Trade Union leader, I am so impressed by how far she come in a male dominated workplace."



"I've been told I have inspired other trans people to come out and live their true lives."

ROLE MODEL

Luke Chi-Hang Cheung

Luke is a customer from Hereford.

“My name is Luke Chi-Hang Cheung, I am 29 years old and lived at a supported service for mental health for 18 months. I have recently moved into my own property and am now getting floating support.

“I am a gay man, of mixed Chinese ethnicity and was diagnosed with depression when I was 14. I did well at school and went onto university and started working as a teacher when I was 22. I love teaching and taught A-level students until I was about 27.

“My family relationships broke down and I needed to move out. I used a local social prescribing service through my GP who referred me to Home Group.”

“I have always known I was gay, playing kiss chase in the playground I would wonder why I couldn't kiss the boys! I was 13 when I came out to my family and they were all accepting of me, which could have been very different given my Chinese heritage. I am very comfortable in my

sexuality now but I believe there was a link to my depression before I came out, due to the worry that I would be disowned. That worry left me when my family stuck by me but the periods of depression stayed.

“Thinking about my future I hope to be well enough to go back into teaching soon. My doctor, the support I've had and being involved at Home Group has all contributed to me getting back on that path.

“I love being involved, it's helped rebuilding my confidence and being able to move into my own home. I've been able to use my skills in a supportive and encouraging environment which has helped me see my value again.

“I'd like people to take away from my story that depression can affect anyone and to remember that you're never really alone there are people out there who will help you like Home Group has helped me.”



“I love being involved, it's helped rebuilding my confidence and being able to move into my own home.”

ROLE MODEL

Stevie Lorimer

Stevie is a former customer and volunteer with the involvement team.

"I live in Bishop Auckland and was getting floating support from Home Group when my support worker put me forward for involvement about six years ago. I was out of my comfort zone with travel and meetings but thrived and soon got involved in customer promise assessments and 'Life Swap' sharing my story about mental health difficulties, being a gay man and how involvement has helped my recovery.

"I've struggled with my sexuality all my life, I was bullied relentlessly at school, home and work. Initially I hid in a marriage with a woman and didn't act on my true feelings for years. I finally accepted that I was gay in the 1980's when AIDS was all over the media and there was a lot of fear around gay men. I was disowned by my family who I haven't heard from since.

"I've also struggled with my mental health due to the bullying and isolation, not trusting anyone to be a true friend to me and having no family to fall back on.

"Involvement has been so vital to becoming more mentally well, it's been a chance to be part of society again while being able to truly be myself and not be judged. It's so important for me to be seen as just Stevie, when I'm involved I am recognised for my abilities not my disabilities."

"I share my story at Life Swaps for colleague training, conference and external events. I've been able to use some of my past work experience to help customers with learning disabilities to get involved which has been a highlight for me over the last year. I struggle to feel pride, but I am proud of this.

"Just believe in yourself, and don't let others drag you down. It's hard to get back up so don't let anyone else tell you how to be or how to feel. We are all worthy of love."



“Just believe in yourself, and don't let others drag you down.”

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.”



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a new opportunity?**

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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
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our Life Swap and Role Models work,
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Involvement@homegroup.org.uk
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