



Phillippa's Journey:

Phillippa Scrafton is the Stonewall Programmes Officer supporting the council with LGBT inclusion and is a Northumberland County Council role model.

When Philippa Scrafton sat her boss down and told him she was having gender reassignment treatment she watched “the colour drain from his face”.

Born male but never feeling right in that gender, she suppressed those feelings for 35 years. But more than a decade ago, when children were on the cards, it became unbearable. It was, she says, a choice between suicide or becoming the person she knew she was.

Phillippa was at that time Darlington Borough Council's Recycling and Waste Minimisation Officer and spent her days managing a team of refuse collection and recycling service staff. She was also the warm, upbeat co-chair of the union's transgender caucus, and has blazed a trail for transgender equality.

Fifteen years ago, she chose life. The first stage of that journey was telling loved ones. That meant a painful divorce and mixed reactions from her family. Her mother and twin brother were kind and supportive, but her father said: “I hope you die before I do.” They haven't spoken since.

Then Philippa had to tell her colleagues, and circumstances led her to do it in a rather memorable way.

LGBT – A huge step forward

Having been a UNISON rep for over 15 years presenting as male, and having only told around a dozen people about her gender identity at that point, Philippa took to the stage at national delegate conference (NDC) and told over 3,000 trade unionists that she was trans.

Until then, UNISON's LGBT group didn't exist. The lesbian and gay self-organised group had agreed the previous year that it should be replaced by an LGBT group, but this needed a rule change at NDC.

Phillippa was speaking in favour of changing the rules to make that happen. Along with the hard work of other campaigners, transgender and bisexual members, she helped persuade the hall – and the LGBT group was born.

It was a huge step forward for transgender and bisexual rights in the union, but Phillippa's journey had barely begun. When it came to telling her employer, she was petrified that they would remove her from her front-facing role and “hide me in the basement”.

She wanted to know what her rights were and be reassured that they couldn't sack her or make her life so difficult that she'd leave, but information was sparse. Despite this, she saw the funny side. “I put it to them like this: ‘I'm the recycling officer – I'm just recycling myself!’”

As it turned out there was no threat. Her managers were not the problem.

Before people have irreversible gender reassignment treatment, they are required to spend a period of time in what's known as the ‘real-life experience’, living 24/7 as the gender they feel is right.

The morning of her first day in the office as a woman, Phillippa pulled up in the office car park, but couldn't move. She sat in her car for 45 minutes, not daring to get out. A kind colleague brought her a cup of tea.

Not all were so sympathetic. One colleague placed porn in her car. Another wrote a letter to the *Northern Echo*, calling her a ‘thing’ and saying she shouldn't be allowed to work for the council. The newspaper didn't print it, but the writer pinned it to the notice board in the canteen and stuck it to her colleagues' car windcreens.

The *Equality Act 2010 (England, Scotland and Wales)* protects against discrimination because of gender reassignment in employment and service delivery, and covers all sizes and types of employer and all types of worker. There is similar protection in Northern Ireland under the *Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations (NI) 1999*.

Phillippa's workplace handled the situation well: the bullies were disciplined and one dismissed.

In Phillippa's case her union UNISON offered her and other transgender members invaluable support in the difficult journey to become themselves

Members of staff or applicants for jobs with Northumberland County Council who need any support or advice about transitioning or gender identity can contact Rebecca Harding in Human Resources for confidential support, or contact Patrick Price our LGBT Equality Champion or our Joint Council/Trust LGBT staff group at equality.diversity@northumbria-healthcare.nhs.uk

Northumberland County Council is a Stonewall Diversity Champion and as an employer and provider of services we aim to be fully LGBT inclusive.

