**Podcast transcript**

**Series 2, Episode 1: Trans and non-binaryexperiences in the workplace**

**Stephanie** A very warm welcome to the first podcast in our second series of ‘Talking Inclusion with’ from Inclusive Employers.

I'm Stephanie Hirst, and I'm so pleased to be back again. A year ago, believe it or not, we launched our podcast by talking about how better to support LGBTQ plus colleagues. And today, we're going to delve a little deeper into that topic and talk specifically about the experiences of trans and non binary colleagues in the workplace. And of course, we'll explore what we all can do as colleagues, and employers to support each other better.

Now before I introduce our guests, in case you don't know us, we're Inclusive Employers. Our mission is to make every workplace an inclusive employer where every colleague values differences, and can contribute their skills and experiences fully to their organisation.

These podcasts are for anyone who has an interest in inclusion and diversity. In our podcast we share life stories and experiences, learn about best practice, and hear practical advice for employers from our guests, as well as Inclusive Employers own inclusion and diversity experts.

Now today, I'm joined by the fantastic Ali Hannon. Ali is a speaker, trainer, performer and activist. Ali's background is in performing and teaching improvised comedy, and they use company workshops to help people to build confidence. Hi Ali, thanks for joining us today.

**Ali** Thanks for having me, Stephanie.

**Stephanie** And we also have our very own Steven Taylor, Inclusion and Diversity consultant at Inclusive Employers. He's going to share his expert advice today. Hi, Steven.

**Steven** Hi Stephanie

**Stephanie** Welcome along to both of you to the to the podcast today.

So we're gonna talk about what life can be like in the workplace for our transgender and non binary colleagues. We'll talk about do's and dont’s, and give top tips for employers.

But we're going to start by sharing our own experiences, and Ally can can we start with you. I mean, what's your experience been like, as a non binary person at work? And tell us a bit about your experience of coming out as well?

**Ali** Thanks, Stephanie. Yeah, I mean, gosh, it's interesting to reflect back on it really, I wasn't always out as non binary at work, I came out when I was about 28. It had been something I've kind of been exploring for years, but I think as many of us do within the LGBTQ community, sort of find the different places that you feel safe and able to explore different aspects of yourself.

So when I came out, I don't think it was a surprise to anyone, quite frankly. But it was still relatively new, not just within the workplace, but also in society, in general to talking about non binary identity, it was a little bit of an unknown for people.

So the They/Them pronouns were a little bit troublesome to begin with, but what I found, as amazing role models in the public domain have come out and talked about their experiences, people in the workplace are becoming more comfortable using They/Them pronouns, talking about non binary identities. This is why representation matters.

So I wouldn't say my experience has been bad, but it's tracked the sort of wider social inclusion, and never driven by, I don't think anyway, not to my knowledge, maybe I'm a little bit ignorant to it, but never driven by, you know, sort of evil intent, but often driven by lack of understanding. Again, it's just improved over time. So yeah, that's a kind of broad answer to that question specifically.

Sometimes I get screamed at when I'm in the loos, and that's fine. Well, no, look, I mean, I don't think if anyone's gender non-conforming, and I think this is really important to bear in mind, not just the experience of non binary people, but mass presenting women or feminine presenting men, if you're gender non conforming, the loo is a bit of a hotspot for people's unconscious bias. So often, what I find is, I get the double scream, so I'm stood at the base and washing my hands and whoever walks in screams at me, turns around, looks at the door, and then screams again, because they don't know what's going on, because they thought that they walked into the wrong loo than they realise they walked into the right loo. And something untoward is going on. Again, I you know, I don't want to be screamed at in the loo, but I understand but it is like a it is the place where unconscious bias sort of seems to erupt. I don't know if it does.

**Steven** Yeah, definitely. It's one of the biggest topics that comes up in just in workplace inclusion around gender neutral toilets, and what can be best practice around that, so just just as real shame that you have to experience that Ali every time.

**Ali** I mean, don't get me wrong, it doesn't happen now in my workplace, because I'm now self employed. And the only person screaming at me is myself when I look in the mirror in the morning, but that's for other reasons.

**Stephanie** But it's interesting what you say about about the toilet, because you know, so much has been talked about, especially the bathroom bill in America, and that created the wrong kind of headlines. Which you know, what is it? America sneezes and we catch a cold, and we tend to worry about all of these things. And there's lots, you know, being talked about with women's spaces and all sorts of stuff. But as you were saying Ali, it's about education, isn't it about it's just.. knowledge is power. And the more we're educated about this kind of stuff, the more people and the general public becoming informed.

**Ali** People are terrified, and I totally understand that we are creatures of habit, right. Y’know, we spend our entire lives building these marvellous categories that help us shortcut, and make the world, the infinitely complex world around us more simple. And as soon as something defies one of those categories that we've become accustomed to, our brain sort of starts fizzing, and we feel uncomfortable, and sometimes when we feel uncomfortable, we do or say things that are reactionary. And if we reflect on them, perhaps we wouldn't be super proud of them. And we're all guilty of it, right?

So in a scenario where you see a person, and you read them as one gender, and then they do something that's not compliant with that gender, it might not be because we hate gender nonconforming people it might be because we're not used to that combination of behaviours. And it's just recognising that I think that, that that's the big, big growth opportunity.

**Stephanie** And it's taught behaviour, isn't it? We're all like, anything, we're all born as a blank, hard drive, and everything that we learned is taught behaviour. And this gets filled up through experiences that we have as children. I know, because I transitioned, oh, gosh, almost a decade ago now. And going into the bathroom that matches my identity, the ladies, you know, that was, it's kind of terrifying, because you just think, am I going to be accepted in here? What's going to happen, and we're gonna be thrown out all sorts of stuff. And luckily, for me, I never had any issues, but I know a lot of people who do have issues going into the bathroom that, you know, reflects their gender identity.

**Ali** I mean, this is the thing, and I think, you know, when we look at the wider discourse, I'm sure this is we probably don't want to get into the sort of more, you know, sort of difficult parts of of the discourse around trans and non binary identities, but you know, people worried about who's in the loos’, and I think, you know, my trans guy friends, beardy, broad shouldered, fellas, you don't want them in the ladies, you really don't I mean, I think people need to reflect on if they're worried, and I totally understand, think about what you're worried about, what is it that you're fearful of, and just reflect on that, because the reality is, if you have this sort of very essentialist, bio essentialist view on gender and sex, then what you're doing is opening up, I think, more discomfort than you think you realised. And then just by accepting people for who they who they are.

**Stephanie** Steven Taylor is with us, our inclusion and diversity consultant at Inclusive Employers, what's the feedback you get from people in the workplace about using, you know, the toilets that match their gender?

**Steven** It's a bit mixed, really, I think workplaces are really trying their best to be more inclusive now. And obviously, of course, the gold standard is that the gender neutral toilet, but a lot of the feedback that we get is often it's quite costly to do a lot of refurbishment and things like that. So they're trying the best to to accommodate those. And I suppose it's, as Ali said, it's the education piece around that, of actually accepting that, that person identifies as a particular gender, and it's okay for them to use the toilet that they want to use. And at the end of the day, all they're doing is they just want to go into the business and leave. That's what that's what people want to do. So it's, as we say, the gold standard as the gender neutral toilet, if it ever can be it can be supported and implemented. But we recognise that that can be a challenge for workplaces. And actually, what can we do to maybe just as Ali said, you build an education piece around that and, and prevent any, any potential discrimination from happening really.

**Stephanie** Ali. I know, you've mentioned that you're self employed now. But when you did work in the workspace, you know, were there any moments where where colleagues or managers did things, Not wrong, but right, they got you - Wow, you just get this. This is amazing.

**Ali** You know what, it's the small moments that get me. I remember, for the first time, I think I had some time off because I had a bug that before this, but type of bug it was just a normal bug, irregular bug sort of work for a couple of days. And my boss, my new boss at the time, was basically responding to a couple of emails that come into my inbox that were like, you know, can you do this thing, Ali, and it was the first time I'd seen someone use my pronouns, sort of without being directed towards me. So it was talking to someone, Ali will get in touch with you as soon as they're back in the office. And I was like, that's it, it's not like I'm not looking for anything bigger than that tiny little moment where somebody is behind your back, reinforcing your identity, reinforcing and reflecting back at you who you are, that that's those are the moments I live for, and I think just the general sort of ability to get things wrong, I do worry that so many of us are so scared of making a mistake and I get that as well. I empathise fully with a sort of, especially in the workplace.

Steven, I'm sure you've come across this all the time. People, particularly important bosses, want to be perfect all the time. And any perception that they're anything less than perfect is a horrifying concept, but the only thing that unifies us as a species is our inherent ability to get things really wrong sometimes, and being able to respond to that grow, learn, change, accept, admit all of those things. That's the superpower.

**Stephanie** It’s been able to grow been able to learn, as I mentioned earlier, you know, it's all about education. And the more information that we have, the more we can educate ourselves and learn about each other's differences, because that's what makes y’know, I've said this before on the podcast, that's what makes us beautiful, each, each one of us is completely different, and we should celebrate all of our differences shouldn’t we.

**Ali** Yeah. And also acknowledge that we can hold space with people who, who perhaps don't understand or don't agree, whatever agree means that, you know, we can hold space for everybody, as long as we treat each other with a basic level of respect and dignity and yeah, people's opinions change over time, then yes, great. If you hang out with a non binary person, you realise that we're not all creeps, trying to sneak into the loos.. you know, we're just normal people getting on with their lives. And that often takes the fear out of it just hang out with us realise that we're as wonderfully dull and mundane as the rest of the population.

**Stephanie** We all are, and I think what people try and people when, when people have said to me about my journey, or whatever, they go ‘I don't get it’, because what people are trying to do is they're trying to attach it to something, coz that is what we've been taught as children to learn, you know, if you didn't, I don't know, if you if you're a meat eater or not, but if you wouldn't eat Ham, if you didn't know that it came from somewhere, and whatever you would go, I'm not eating that. But because they've got something to attach it to, and they know where it comes from, they can understand it. Whereas having a mismatch with your gender, that's something that they if they're a cis-gendered person, they can't attach it to anything. So I kind of break it down as biology just gets a little bit drunk

**Ali** Completely.

**Stephanie** Essentially, it just, it's got a hangover, and it puts things in the wrong or not wrong, because wrongs a negative word at different places, then, you know, my brain formed opposite and my soul formed opposite to what I came out looking like and they didn't do brain transplants...

**Ali** One day this is, but then also, one day, you know, I think also, you know, going back to what we were saying earlier about categories and stuff, you know, we, I don't want to be too depressing, because I know this is an upbeat podcast to inspire and invigorate people, but very few people I know are gently and lovingly, compassionately encouraged to perform the gender that's been assigned to them.

Most people I know have been quite traumatised and coerced into performing gender correctly. I know so many cis people, and by cis, I mean people whose gender is the same now, as it was when they were signed it or it was observed at birth however you want to word that, who had to give up things they were passionate about, or do things differently simply because it didn't comply with their cultural or familial view of what that gender should look and feel like. And I think that's so sad.

**Stephanie** Yeah. Stephen, is it is your experience, as a line manager, what's your experience of non binary colleagues?

**Steven** So going back to one of my previous roles quite a few years ago, now, I was a line manager for another organisation, and an individual, I think that they were already non binary at this point, but it was quite new, I think it was that they were like, maybe a year into their journey. So obviously, they changed the name at this point. When we were getting their uniform, they obviously selected the uniform for them as a non binary individual, we give them that choice, because I think that thinking back all uniform is very gendered, male, female, so we allowed them that choice.

But it was interesting to see the dynamics of the team really, that if because I think it was probably the first experience for a lot of us, as myself as a line manager for everybody in the team have been introduced to somebody who identifies as non binary.

Just thinking back on that to that individual, they were so open and honest, and just so really forthcoming about their experience. And I mean, I'm super appreciative, I learned so much from that individual, I was able to ask them questions, how can we support you? What can we do as a, as a as a colleague, as an organisation to make your experience within the workplace a lot better. And they were, they were just very open and honest about it. And like, say that the uniform helped us and that the name that they chosen to not identify as using they then pronouns was a big one. And, again, that I think that was the biggest challenge for the team.

I always remember a scenario when we were in we were in a group and I was like, ah, where have they gone? And people thought it was plural, too. And they're like, who's they?

**Stephanie** Yeah.

**Steven** So it was like no, no, that individual - I obviously don't want to use their name - you could see that initial confusion and then you can empathise with this with other but it's best when it's new for a lot of people. But it was just it was just trying to become accustomed to us and They/Them pronouns.

And the individual, as I say was was very open and honest, and in terms of I'm very empathetic in terms of allowing those mistakes happen because they did get misgendered a lot and obviously as a line manager, I had to pick up on that, and have those conversations at the side but the individuals seeing that the support was there from the line manager as well, so they understood that then. Yeah, it was it was just interesting to see that dynamic between the team and their learning process through through that.

**Stephanie** The word you mentioned, then ‘misgendered’ is something which you know, someone who's cisgendered, they'll never know the impact of that of what, that can make you feel how that makes you feel. The you know, it can be like a kick in the stomach, can't it it can be a real that can just not just destroy your day. That's a little seed that grows inside your head and starts to just control you, doesn't it? Ali?

**Ali** We're so used to deferring responsibility for our gender to other people, I think this is what we have to recognise is that, you know, pronouns serve as a function not of reflecting who I am, it's reflecting who you think I am. So I understand this discomfort at the moment around the transition that we're experiencing now where people are taking ownership for that perception rightly so. Because nobody has the right to call me anything other than what I want to be called of. I want you to call me Ali, I expect you to call me Ali, I don't want you to go around calling me Roger or Barbara because I remind you of a Roger or Barbara that you once met. You respect me by respecting my name.

Pronouns are the same. For so long, they've been about my comfort and and don't get me wrong if you decide that your comfort is more important than mine and calling me she or he is more comfortable to you than reflecting me back. Reflecting back at me what I will ask you to call me which is ‘they’, that's your thing. I might not want to hang out with you very much.

**Stephanie** Now, one of the challenges we hear about at Inclusive Employers is that people don't fully understand gender as a construct. Especially say if they are cis-gender, and haven't had any personal experiences to reflect upon. So let's just take a little step back and think about what we can share to help others to understand more about trans and non binary, and Steven focusing on pronouns here and inclusive language, what should we be doing and why is this so important to the trans and non binary and wider LGBTQ plus community?

**Steven** I think so, just touching on the first point, Stephanie, the pronouns piece, it's one of the most common probably spoken about now. But like one of the probably most popular topics around LGBTQ plus that we're seeing, especially if I include some employers, and there's just little subtle things that you can do, as we previously mentioned, just in terms of putting pronouns on in your email signature, putting pronouns on your social media channels, introducing your pronouns when you introduce yourself, just as an additional to your job role. And we find these things just help to create that safe space, recognise that trans or non binary colleagues are valued and recognised within the organisation as well, and just being a part of the LGBTQ plus community myself, but showing that alliship for trans or non binary colleagues, whether you're a part of the community or not, just by putting those pronouns where you can, announcing them at the beginning of meetings, or the just having those open and honest conversations around pronouns as well.

Sometimes we might not understand pronouns or we might know someone who uses different pronouns or gender neutral pronouns, such as they and them, and just maybe just seem to be concerned. So to those individuals, asking about their experiences and hearing about their, experience can also help.

**Ali** You know, pronouns are a thing that we're taking ownership for, for the first time, probably in our society. So it is a change, it might feel strange to begin with, but my friend, so she moved over to the UK, she's lived all over the world, but she's Finnish. Born. And in Finnish, there is no gender pronoun, everyone is gender neutral. So she came over and she's learned English better than I can speak it. And she had to get used to using She/Him pronouns, and They/Them. And then she said, Now I have to go back, I have to unlearn everything I thought was true about English and go back to Finnish but there are kind of three laps on going off on one now stop Ali.

**Stephanie** No, it's good. Because this is, this is an educational This is interesting stuff, the more we learn, and the more we hear your experiences, and hear about your friends is its knowledge is power.

**Ali** Yeah, it's interesting, because I mean, there are, I think, and I'm going to be really reductionistic three types of language in Europe. So we've got gendered language, German, French, Italian, we've then got gender neutral languages, like English, where a table is a table in France, table is a lady table. A wall is a man wall, I don't know, either way. And then we've got gender free languages, like Finnish, where gender doesn't feature within the language itself. So you know, again, gender is a construct within language as much as it is around social or, you know, identity. It's about how we formulate and create narratives around the world. So in Finland, we don't know someone's gender until we get to know them. If I'm talking about someone in the third person, you have no idea what gender they are. Obviously, in France and Germany, we reveal someone's gender as soon as we start Speaking about them. And it's just an interesting difference in the way that we approach the world.

**Stephanie** And Steven, do you feel like employers within the workplace or employees worry about getting pronouns wrong, it's okay, there's got to be a change here, I'm respecting the person and working ways. I want to make their experience in the workplace as happy and you know, as easy as possible. But I'm scared about messing up. Because my taught behaviour from a child is when I see someone who, who looks like a she, or a he, my brain before my brain might might, the word might leave my mouth before I can control it. And that's the worry, isn't it? If that makes sense?

**Steven** Yeah. 100%. Yeah. And we are seeing that, like Ali said that the responsibility is going on the individual now, which is great to see. And the people are happily taken on that responsibility and wanting to do better, I think some of the conversations I've had, which is interesting is, as you say, what we associate with gender in terms of, we might see an ‘A’, and that's got a gender association to it.

So then when someone chooses to use They/Them pronouns, but they have a gender specific name, that that's where the the unconscious bias creeps in, and we slip up and, and it's just little things like that, that people are picking up on going and recognising I'm doing it, but I'm still struggling, and how can I challenge that? How can I have have these open and honest conversations. And the other thing, as Ali said, is, is just owning up to it and actually go and say, you know, I've just I've made the mistake, I'm sorry. Or if you're not even making a big thing of it, just recorrecting yourself. So if you happen to use the wrong pronoun, and say, Oh, she said, they said, and just move on. And just even that little correction for non binary individuals, or trans who using the other pronoun can like say, don't have to make a big issue out of it, you could then maybe just pull the individual aside afterwards and go, I'm so sorry, I misgendered you then in private, and then just change the pronouns there and then in place and just move on and don't make a big deal out of it there and then, so yeah, it's just like little things that you can do like that.

These conversations are being hard now from from EDI teams, but even just trickling down, out and to the frontline colleagues who will realise another how important it is and, and the difference that they can make to trans and non binary colleagues by just making that little bit of difference. And, as we've mentioned, even just by putting pronouns and email signatures, on social media channels, even just like say, all of those little things that you can just show your support as an ally to trans or non binary individuals, as well will make a big difference.

**Stephanie** It's interesting, what you say about pronouns on emails, or on your social media accounts and all sorts of that's, that's that's really going that's really changing the way society works, doesn't it? And educating us all?

**Steven** Yes, definitely. And again, having conversations with my cis-gender friends, and colleagues in the workplace, why do we have to do that? Why are we having to put pronouns on our email signatures. And these are the conversations that we've continued to have. And then once you’ve explained that, look, what effort it is to you to do that to just show your support as an ally, and not only does it support the trans and non binary community, but it just helps anyone being misgendered?

**Ali** Look Steven, I think the name thing always works for me, it's like, just leave your name off your email signature, let other people make one up for you just by what vibe you are giving off today. Forget about gender, let's leave everything a mystery. We don't even need to put job titles. Let's just see what you look like. How are you behaving today? Are you a manager, are you a director? It's not a real thing. It's just what vibes you get off? Yeah. So I think, you know, when people realise that we take ownership for much more of identity than we think we do, it's actually a straightforward thing. Just put in your pronouns. It's not hard.

**Stephanie** I know, Ali touched on it earlier and mentioned briefly about you know, what cis-gender is, because some people just don't, what is what is cis-gender, what is it?

**Steven** So cis-gender is somebody who identifies with the sex that they were assigned at birth. So someone like myself, I was born male, identify as male, so I would identify as a cis-gender male.

**Ali** What I think it's interesting at this point, as well, I think a lot of the discomfort around talking about gender and sex is that we often find that language gets overlapped or it all gets mixed up. So for me, when I when I worked with organisations where I talked about gender, I also talk about sex as a separate entity. And again, none of these are like absolute sex is not an absolute gender is not an absolute sex, okay, gives us an idea of we say sex assigned at birth. So broadly, without being too crude, what the doctor looks at and goes, Do you have an innie or an outtie, and then they kind of arbitrarily without much interrogation assign either male or female.

Now, for some people, that's not always the case, and we have to acknowledge our own sex members of the community as well.

Gender, on the other hand, is everything else that comes with that. It's like the it's like the is the service package that you get with the kit. So if you're assigned male at birth, with that comes the job of man, most often, and man is constructed of all sorts of things that can be the way you dress the way you behave, what's expected of you. And as I said earlier, you know, oftentimes that's quite a traumatic experience. for a child to be coerced and, and sometimes quite a traumatised into performing boy or or man and the same for girls as well. And so we often conflate the two. So sex is kind of observable, but also, I believe not hugely important aspect of me as a person.

Gender, on the other hand is is the bit that everybody sees. That's the bit that I used to express myself how I interact with the world. It's how people perceive me, it's one of the categories that we were talking about earlier. I'm non binary, I made a terrible woman. But I also would make an equally terrible man. I don't do either of those things very well. So for me non binary fits beautifully, because what it does is a absolves me of the responsibility of trying to perform those two things, as society would would want me to the greatest cop out of the morning I’d say.

**Stephanie** Do you know what? I've got lots of non binary friends and met lots of people are non binary, but the way Ali, you're describing it today is a completely new and it's like, wow, yeah, you've really just broken it all down, and exploded it like a schematic, this is just what it is. And I've never heard it explained like that before.

**Ali** We’re obsessed with with sex. We are, I mean, not that kind, this kind. We are, because I think we think that it's something more than it is, and it's not and again, I don't want to be too flippant, but we have an eye colour, we have all sorts of different aspects of us our hair colour, the texture of our hair. All of these things are part of our biology, but they do not define us. Where do we draw the line?

**Stephanie** Yeah, you've mentioned that word there ‘define’. Because there's so many things like I've got a trans history, but when I'm on television, and it says, you know, at the bottom of the screen, they call it a lower third when it tells you the title and the name of the person. And I remember being on TV once on a big show, and it said transgender broadcaster, no broadcaster…

**Ali** Just a Broadcaster.

**Stephanie** No, just Broadcaster.. I do not want to predefined by I'm proud of it. I've got a trans history. But you know, I'm not letting this thing define me. You're not putting me in a box. Sorry!!

**Ali** Sexism. We don't say lady surgeon, or woman CEO without squinting a bit these days, we think, oh, gosh, I don't need to say lady doctor. We can just say doctor, and the same in trans I don't need I'm not a non binary comedian. I'm not. I can't really call myself a comedian. I'm just a comedian, a failed comedian. You know, let's use better adjectives rather than trying to exactly define someone by that aspect to them anyway, that's..

**Stephanie** in the media, the media has. They've got a lot of responsibility for this, because they like to put people in boxes.

**Ali** Yes.

**Stephanie** And I think because as human beings, we watch and read a lot of media, and that's what informs and educates us, quite wrongly, sometimes, maybe a lot of the time. And that's what can inform and educate people when they come into the workplace. So they think, well, what the I've read this, I've seen this, I've seen this in television, that's the way you would, you know, call someone or identify someone as and that is wrong, isn't it? It's wrong, because that's what's the media is pushing?

**Ali** Absolutely. And and, you know, this is why I'm so proud of trans and non binary people in the public eye, I look at people who are out and right now out, because now is not a particularly good time to be out and visible. Particularly if you have passing privilege. If you could go by without being out, then I completely respect why people do that. Because, you know, we've got enough on our plates. But for people who are out, who are talking about it, I know that you make people's lives better, simply by existing, I look at the impact of someone like Jonathan Van Ness, who, you know, has absolutely transformed people's perception of what it means to be non binary. And rather, like I said, than earlier, this scary entity we've become human.

**Stephanie** Yeah. You mentioned to us there passing privilege. And can you explain what that is for some people that wouldn't know?

**Ali** Yeah, I mean, again, it's not a judgmental comment. It's just noticing and I have passing privilege when I want it. If I want to pass as a woman, if it's unsafe for me to be out as non binary, I can, I can do that. So I have passing privilege most of the time. And there are situations where I don't have passing privilege, like in the loo. When I get double screamed at, because people are reading me I have no control over that. But for some trans people, you might have them in your life and you'll never know. Because you know, the wonderful thing about trans people is they you know, universally different. They are not all the same and some will go by in their lives without you even knowing that trans history. Others might talk about it. Others might choose not to comply with the binary might sit somewhere in between. So there's so many different ways of going about Life passing privilege means that you just can not have to talk about it for a moment. And that's a nice thing to indulge in from time to time.

**Stephanie** I think sometimes people that's, that's quite important because you've been dealing with this. For me, I was I've been dealing with it since my first earliest memories have been in the classroom.

You know, when they used to tell all the boys to go to one side of the classroom and all the girls to go to the other, I just go and sit with the girls, because that was my natural state of comfortableness. Cool, and they go, No, you go over there. Because I didn't know any different. I didn't know the difference between girls and boys. Well, I thought I did. I thought I was a girl. And I was saying all of these things. I'm a girl and be told I'm not in all of these, these things.

Because the doctor, of course, when I came out, as you mentioned earlier, oh, there's an outtake. There you go. May I know? Incorrect? Incorrect. So you know, you're at odds with yourself your entire life. And then when you do find the courage to transition, or to come out in whichever, whatever you are on the LGBTQ plus spectrum, and the feeling of ‘Oh, I’ve done it’, right, okay, that is a huge hurdle. And then you have society to deal with, that's another hurdle. So and if you can just integrate into society and not talk about it again, that's a huge relief, because you've been dealing with this for your entire life, and just to not deal with it and not talk about it must be a huge relief for a lot of people.

**Ali** Well, I think, you know, the lesbian, gay bisexual community, you know, have a similar experience, I think they're experienced tracks a couple of decades before us, if that makes sense. I think for trans or non binary people, we're going through exactly the same thing that they created.

**Stephanie** Like they did in the 80’s

**Ali** Yeah, exactly, you know, the sort of got the conflation of being trans or non binary and, being in some way, sort of perverted, or, you know..

**Stephanie** Yeah.. Dealing with section two, section 28, and all sorts of all of that kind of history. You know, this was legalised in 1967, but iLook how long it took for the acceptance, which is, you know, it's not there completely, but it's now pretty much accepted.

**Ali** It takes time, when sometimes you wake up in the morning, you're like, can we just fast forward a bit, but we can't we keep, we keep talking about it. And hope that people, as we've, you know, as Steven’s alluded to, you know, engage with organisations that can help them understand better, so that change does happen.

**Stephanie** And that's, that's true, isn't it? That's why it's vitally important. Steven?

**Steven** Yeah. Just thinking back to your point, like say, it's just kind of being a part of the LGBTQ plus community, I almost can't speak on behalf of trans or non binary, but part of the community is, I get why people can get overwhelmed by it all, like say with the language and having trouble understanding when they can't connect, as you mentioned earlier, Stephanie, as well. And I think we as a community do empathise with that as well, I was trying to make sure that we try and bring them into these conversations and try and explain it the best we can. But you're very right.

And just in terms of like, it's how we make sense of the world, the all of these labels, it's just, and we're often trying to make sense of the world for other people, so they can understand us. But it's also important to recognise that actually, how we identify how one trans person identifies is not necessarily how another trans person identifies or how they use the terminology or the labels or non binary, for example, what it means to one person isn't, it's not going to be the same for somebody else. So again, it's just really important to have those conversations and hear as many lived experiences as you can from people who are willing to share again, it's important not to place the responsibility of the community to where we always educate either. So that's another important point.

But if people are willing to share and talk and, and have these open and honest conversations, and like say, hopefully push society forward, but also welcoming them in I like to think as well. So Yeah, I totally understand. It's just people trying to make sense of the world. but it's we need to recognise actually, that just because I've told you one thing, or Stephanie said another thing, or Ali said one thing doesn't necessarily mean that's the voice of the whole community either.

So it's great that people are listening to this podcast today and and educating themselves further. But actually, there's so much more that you could be doing as well and go and reach out to as many people as you can, reach out to you stuff networks, whether in the workplace, all of all of these different things that you can do to hopefully elevate those voices, but also educate yourself as well.

**Stephanie** A survey in 2021, by total jobs found that 65% of trans people hide their gender status, and history at work, which had increased from a previous survey in 2016, when around half of trans people didn't reveal their gender identity. So it is clear that as employers, we need to do more to support our trans and non binary colleagues.

Steven, can you share your advice on how employers can support non binary and transgender employees?

**Steven** Yeah, of course. I mean, I think this goes back to what we were saying before does that we feel like we're essentially moving forward as an LGBTQ plus community but here on, actually, that number is now increased from 52%, to 65%, is actually actually evidence and that those who identify as trans or non binary feel less safe in the workplace, so we do really need to keep talking about this. It's a hugely important topic and we need to keep moving forward. So the things that we recommend that you think about, such as your trans inclusive policies, do you have them? Can you implement them reach out to your LGBTQ plus networks? Get them involved in writing your policies? Do you have any trans and non binary colleagues within the workplace that you that you can reach out to? Or if you don't think about those who may potentially want to transition in the future, or who are going through that transition as an employee or as a colleague, what are you doing to support them or their colleagues supporting them with that process? Are they educated enough in terms of are they aware of what they need to do to show their support, so that they don't miss gender, the individual, and then make make that transition as easy as possible.

But also, again, just going back to the basics of things, such as little things that we can do on a day to day basis, such as your pronouns, think about the language that your using, as well, just in terms of are you using gendered language, especially just in communications, especially internal comms things such as that? And also think about your systems as well. So those who, again, as we mentioned, choose to transition in your workplace, are your systems up to date in terms of its agenda, or can you make it gender neutral? If somebody decides to change the name, How easy is that process? And what is the confidentiality around that as well, who needs to know how many people in the HR team needs to know about this, how many people in the organisation needs to know about this in terms of so you need to inform a line manager, again, just to make that, that transition as easy as possible and support as best as possible as well.

But these are all things that you can do as I think the one of the most important ones is just training and awareness as well. Pick out the awareness days in the in the calendar year, I mean, we've got LGBT history month in February, we've got Pride month in June, but we've got a Trans Day of Visibility, we've got so many awareness days throughout the year that you can utilise as a springboard, to have these open, honest conversations, to do webinars, to do training sessions, to elevate the voices of the trans and non binary communities. There's so much that can be doing from a workplace perspective, just to hopefully create that inclusive environment for your trans and non binary colleagues.

Stephanie Because you do feel like, when I came out in in the workplace, I was leaving my job, actually. So I’d made a choice, and I was in a fortunate position where I could walk away from my career for a time. I know, though I worried, you know, was I going to get my career back was the industry was the broadcast industry applauding me going, Wow, brave inspiration without giving you a job. Don't be silly. It felt like that a little bit if I'm honest, but I wasn't ready to come back. I wasn't, ready, I've not done enough work on myself, I needed to just stop being in the public eye for a short period of time and just step back.

And then it was someone who I think was, you know, was the word I wouldn't want I wouldn't want to say brave, but I want to say they wanted to break boundaries down and they gave me a job back on the radio again, that person saved my career. So I can't thank them enough because they were… Braves the wrong word. But I think you know, that's what probably they thought they were.. right, I'm gonna, this person is half decent, playing some records and talking about rubbish in between. So I'm gonna give them the opportunity to, you know, find their way back to where they were.

And it took me seven or eight years to get back to where I was, but it was with sheer determination, focus, and vision. Because when you bring yourself to work in the workplace, you just want to be your whole true self, don't you Ali, anywhere you want to go you want to be your whole true self, but especially in the workplace, where you spend the majority of your time.

**Ali** Absolutely. And we all have reasons why we need to perform our versions of ourselves in certain ways in order to survive. You know, we're creatures that develop coping strategies, some of those are really super effective for most of our lives.

But a lot of the time they stopped working and I want to acknowledge people's discomfort, right, because I think discomfort is a really important bit of communication. If you are listening to this and thinking, I just feel uncomfortable around gender nonconformity. I feel uncomfortable around trans or non binary issues or people because I don't understand, notice that discomfort. What is that discomfort coming from? Is this a, an absolute objective discomfort with the person that's in front of you? Or is there something in you? Is there an experience you've had that has meant that your commitment to gender is really strong?

That, you know, it is the first club we belong to right when we're kids, we're given you know, all we want is to assimilate and belong so we've given clubs and like you Stephanie, I grew up thinking I was in the boy club most of the time and I couldn't understand what people are trying to push me into the girl club, and you know, for me, recognising that discomfort is about acknowledging these these these connections that we formed over time, these parameters and rules that we've used to cope in a world that's really scary that you know, if we can play, I can perform girl well then I'll belong here. But if that's that, if that's at odds with who we are as people, it's exhausting and actually psychologically pretty damaging, so if you experience discomfort, just notice why - acknowledge that, whilst you feel like you might have ownership, for somebody else's identity, because your own understanding of what identity is, can you let go of that? Can you give that back over to someone, and finally, don't be afraid of asking questions and looking like you don't know what you're talking about, because this is new. And it's complex. And if you make a mistake, the world is not going to explode.

There is only one thing worse than being misgendered for me, which is when somebody does misgendered you and then collapses to the floor, screaming, you know, in horror at their terrible, horrible mistakes, chill. It's okay. We all make mistakes, move on. It's a process, take it easy. Notice discomfort, lean into it as much as you can. And just notice what it's bringing up for you.

**Stephanie** Some people like to run away from anything that's discomfort, don't think,

**Ali** Run away

**Stephanie** Yeah, they just go, oh, I don't know, I'm off. Whereas I'm like, No, I want to learn more. Why did that make me feel uncomfortable? But maybe I'm just I just think I'm a bit odd.

**Ali** No, but it's like your friend who decided to drag you back into what you're good at, you know, that's about, you know, leaning into a little bit of discomfort. You know, we don't know how it's going to end. I don't know how it's going to end when I introduce myself with They/Them pronouns. I feel like I'm imposing on people sometimes, because I'm like, Oh, my gosh, I might expecting you to get your head around this and you might not have done before. But ultimately, every time I lean into it, people surprise me with their ability to not take ownership for my identity, and accept me on face value.

**Stephanie** And how amazing are people… They are. I don't think people get enough credit for how amazing they actually are…

**Ali** Oh my gosh, I've met the most extraordinary people. I mean, honestly, like, particularly parents, I tell you now, I mean, I love a tear jerker, but the number of parents I've met through workplace inclusion activity who've come to me and said, I've got a non binary kid, I've got a kid that's gender non conforming, and I just love them. I love them so much. And I, you know, that for me is the healing process, right? Because having a parent that's on your side, it's, you know, it's the best and it's not difficult to take your kid as they are, I hope. I mean, I'm not a parent. I'm speaking out of turn, but I believe that, you know, standing up and walking alongside, alongside an LGBTQ plus kid is the most powerful thing you can do.

**Stephanie** Yeah, massively. And I think parents are becoming more educated these days. And you know, I'm a child of the 80s, so, my parents, there was no Google, there was no information, and the only first bit of information I ever got was watching. You know, I was off school, I think I was dozing on the sofa, and there was a lady called Caroline Cossey. She was a bond model, inspiration, and she transitioned in her teens in the 70’s, and she was outed by the News of the World in the 1980s, turned her career upside down, and she was on TV. And I was dosing on the sofa, I heard this lady talking, and she was just describing her childhood. And it was like she was describing mine. So I literally jumped off the sofa, grabbed it was taped number seven in our video library, when we used to have those videos that look like you'd got books, because the covers, look, it looked like you've got the entire works of Dickens was just a pirated copy of ET, that your dad told you not to tell anyone he’d got from down the pub. And I threw that in the video and recorded it. And that was my information.

That was my Google that was the only thing, the only tangible bit of information I ever had, that anyone had ever transitioned or I didn't even know that word then, you know, it used to be sex change, which is very outdated. Even transsexualism, because that sexualizes gender. language does change over time, doesn't it? And rightly so. But it's having that information. It seems we've gone full circle with this. It's just about education, isn't it?

**Ali** I love a good ROT, I was obsessed with I don't know if anybody remembers Ellen MacArthur and Ellen MacArthur is cis, and not part of the community, but it was the first time I'd seen someone a bit like me, who with short hair, doing cool stuff, like in a yacht going around the world, just being cool. And not worrying about being pretty and being girly, just being themselves. And I thought, this is the coolest person I've ever seen. And that's the thing when you're starved of role models, you sort of you do go for people who even just remotely resemble what you want from your life. And I wanted to fix yachts, and I've never yet not yet realised that fantasy, Steven.

One day, you know, and just seeing people in their element not worrying about the performance of gender and in that binary way, just being themselves really…. Yeah, that's that's the stuff and it's good to have role models. It's good that we're getting more role models. But yeah…

**Stephanie** Role models in the workplace is important as well, isn't it? Because within the workplace, there may be several people who don't fit a binary spectrum or whatever and seeing someone else in the workplace, you know, and I hate using the word have the courage because you shouldn't have to have the courage to come out, why do we have to have this thing was ‘Oh, you, you're so brave’. No, I'm just being me. But seeing other people in the workplace, and you know, seeing them take the journey can help others can't it… find their place in the world, Steven

**Steven** 100% - like I say that I suppose there's two parts to that. There’s the allies pieces, and that, but then there's also like, you say that that visibility and even be a part of the LGBTQ plus community itself, and that visibility piece for me was was so lacking as well. So as as bisexual individuals, so I can kind of, I know not trans or non binary, but I can totally relate to that visibility piece and not seeing it within the media or like, never really fit in into its categories, and I suppose, even I've had my own little experiences with the conformity of the gender norms, you know, not being 100%, masculine, but they're not being on the feminine side, either.

So it's like, I know, I identify as male, but I've never felt a part of the masculine side of school or college, for example. So yeah, even though I know I'm a cis-gender, male and identify as male, I've still had those that those challenges of that gender construct.

So it's just really interesting to reflect on that, and then especially with like, relating that to the workplace from just just being able to have those allies and that visibility point of view as well. So you have that LGBTQ plus network that you can reach out to, and maybe there isn't anybody who identifies as trans or non binary, but you've just got that support network and, and you're able to share your voice and share your lived experience. And that ally ship is huge, important, as you mentioned, Stephanie, getting you back into the workplace. And you had that you had that one person that said, No, right? Well, we're gonna get you back in, bring you back in. And this is how we're going to move forward with this.

So having those allies whether they're a part of the community or not, is hugely important and recognising that they do have a bit of power and privilege to bring the LGBTQ plus community in and allow them to, to share their experiences and their stories and, and like I say, just creating that inclusive environment for all really. It can be exhausting, as an LGBTQ plus person to have to go in and be like, as we've said, potentially not living our full truth or hiding it or trying to have that bit of privilege where we can pass just because we just want to get on with our day to day and just do our job and just get on with life. So as you mentioned, Stephanie, it comes back full circle. And just in terms of if you can be an ally to the community, amazing. But if you can raise the profile, or the voices of those within the community as well, I suppose that's even better really isn't. So…

**Ali** I have a slightly controversial theory, that a lot of homophobia actually doesn't really come from a fear of what gay people do privately. But a lot of it comes from a fear around gender performance. I think a lot of homophobic abuse. We're not abusing people in the act of being gay, whatever. A lot of the time we are, we're seeing homophobia happen to people because of their perceived performance of masculinity or femininity, women being too masculine, men being too feminine. And actually, there's so much more that unites us as a community than we're willing to admit.

When we see certain organisations drop the ‘T’, I think we find ourselves in an environment where we are denying a huge part of who we are, before I was out as non binary identified, kind of as a lesbian, but I was a terrible lesbian as well. The people never abused me because I was really holding hands with a girlfriend or, you know, I had a badge that said, I'm a lesbian on it was, ‘Oh, you're so manly’, or you know, you know something about my gender. It was never about my sexuality, and I think it's really important to acknowledge that the reason LGBT is a thing, is because we all experienced what it's like not to conform to heteronormative ideas about gender.

**Stephanie** Exactly. And I've always believed that we're stronger together.

**Ali** Oh, God, of course. I mean, come on.

**Steven** Definately

**Ali** Every battle we face has been as a unit, we can't stop start losing each other now. It's that rage.

**Stephanie** Amazing. It's been a true honour having you on the podcast today. Thank you so much, Ali. Thank you so much, Steven.

**Ali** Thank you.

**Steven** Thank you. It's been a pleasure. Thank you.

**Stephanie** Now for more information about supporting LGBTQ plus colleagues, you can visit our website it's Inclusive Employers.co.uk and for inclusive employees members. There's also a link to our LGBTQ plus resources in the podcast description.

And on the next podcast, you can join Inclusive Employers very own Steven Copsey, aka ‘The Prof’ is going to be talking about the menopause at work. We're going to be breaking down the taboos and exploring what's Inclusive Employers should be doing to support menopausal colleagues.

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