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# Role models & people in the community

## Publicly known LGBT role models

Visible LGBT role models can have a transformative impact on creating a truly inclusive workplace and society. Below we have provided examples of role models including historic role models who have created and inspired the world through to activists who have dedicated their lives to promoting diversity and inclusion and using their identities as a platform for change. Please click on the links for more information.

### Alice Walker

Alice is a 73 year old critically acclaimed Black author credited for the book "The Coloured Purple" which challenges society's view of women. As a Black Bisexual woman Alice has used her voice to campaign on the challenges and issues that women like her face. For more information on Alice and her work click [here](#).

### Alex Drummond

Alex Drummond is a renowned Trans activist and author who has dedicated a number of years deconstructing gender and tackling gender stereotypes. Alex sits on Stonewall's Trans Advisory Group and has been influential in shaping Stonewall's campaigning on Trans rights. For more information on Alex click [here](#).

### Ruth Baldacchino

Ruth is an LGBT, transgender and intersex activist from Malta and is the programme officer for the first intersex human rights fund. Ruth has a non-binary gender identity and has contributed to education policy on Trans, Gender Variant and Intersex Students in Schools. For more information on Ruth click [here](#).

### Michaelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci

Both artists are known for their artistic skill and have gone down in history for creating some of the most awe inspiring pieces of art and buildings. Both men are believed to have been bisexual based on historical knowledge, but what is less commonly known is that both men suffered from epilepsy. This highlights a common feeling amongst disabled LGBT people is feeling of invisibility both within and out of the LGBT community. For more information on disabled LGBT people click [here](#).

### Jonny Benjamin

Jonny is a British mental health campaigner who in January 2014 launched a social media campaign called Find 'Mike' to search for a stranger who talked him out of taking his own life in 2008. Jonny has struggled with mental health problem since the age of 10 and was eventually diagnosed with schizophrenia and bipolar disorder in his 20s. In 2008 he was hospitalised due to his condition and after running away intended to take his life by jumping off a bridge. Jonny was saved by a good samaritan, Neil Laybourn. Jonny has been open up about his struggle with his sexuality as a gay man and his mental health illnesses. To find out more click [here](#).

### Jovanie Morrison

Jovanie Morrison as a young LGBT person has provided his story on being homeless. 1 in 4 homeless young people are LGBT. Jovanie realised he was gay by age 12 and was rejected by his family; following a violent outburst by his relatives. Jovanie in collaboration with the Albert Kennedy Trust provides his story [here](#).

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### Dr and Imam Ludovic-Mohamed Zahed

Imam Zahed is a gay man and the founder of Europe's first inclusive mosque in France. He

### **Charlie Condou**

Charlie has appeared in numerous TV shows and has recently featured in Coronation Street as Marcus. Charlie is also a prominent LGBT activist and advocate of same-sex parenting. He is a father of two children with his husband Cameron. For more information on Charlie click [here](#)

### **Our local LGBT Heroes**

Here in Tower Hamlets we are lucky to have staff and community leaders who act as role models to the LGBT people both in the workplace and the wider community. These individuals strive to make the borough an inclusive environment, where somebody's sexual orientation and gender identity is respected and celebrated, whilst showcasing the multiple identities (being disabled, older, BAME and having a faith as well as being LGBT). The council celebrated the achievements of these individuals in Autumn 2015. Below you will find a summary of some of the local LGBT heroes and straight allies and the work that they continue to do for our community.



### **Deng Yang Sang - Young Mayor, Tower Hamlets Council**

Deng Yan San is the current young mayor of Tower Hamlets and an amazing young woman, who has most recently volunteered to go and help build a school in August, in the Rajasthan region of India.

Before that she was Head Girl of George Green's School, has written a 30 minute play for the National Theatre on Gender Equality, as well as being an active member of the East London Chinese Community Centre.

She has also recently graduated from the NCS programme - where she was volunteering in an intergenerational project in sundial Centre and help create a campaign for cardboard citizens, the homeless charity.

### **Councillor Peter Golds - Tower Hamlets Council**

Cllr Peter Golds has lived and worked as an openly Gay Tower Hamlets Councillor in the face of great adversity and some quite unpleasant bigotry. This is a great role model to other gay people.

He has endured anti-gay and homophobic heckling in the council chamber which many Gay people would have been scared of and rather than running for cover in the face of it all he has been brave and stood up to it. He has been solid in standing up for Gay venues within the town when their future has been threatened by licensing or other changes.

He was prepared to stand up and be counted over the issue of the White Swan and it was him who alerted us and the Gay community to the risks that the proposed licensing arrangements for entertainments at the venue represented. We were not even aware that they affected us. He's an excellent role model and a very brave councillor.

### **Jennifer Fear - CEO, Step Forward**

Jennifer Fear is the CEO of Step Forward - a charity that has been supporting young people in Tower Hamlets since 1988. Jennifer's contribution for over 15 years to the charity has been inspirational. She was integral to the start up of a personal development group for young LGBT people to enable them to have a safe space to explore the issues they experience growing up as young LGBT people.

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Jennifer is an inspiring leader yet remains grounded and approachable to all young people who see her as a role model and someone to aspire to be like. She promotes diversity in all that she does and challenges those around her to ensure that LGBT young people get the support

Jennifer in her capacity as a lesbian woman is also active on numerous forums and panels ensuring that the voice of the LGBT community is always taken into account. Jennifer probably never set out to become a role model but by just being "herself" she has certainly become one!

#### **Hardev Malhi - Inclusion Officer, Barts Health NHS Trust**

In his capacity as Inclusion Officer, Hardev has contributed immensely to the setting up and progress of the LGBT subgroup of the Trust's Staff Diversity Network.

Apart from providing the basic minimum equality diversity training, Hardev has proactively attended seminars and training sessions outside the organisation in order to develop a Transgender training programme.

Hardev supports the Trust's engagement activity with the LGBT community group that meets at Positive East, Stepney Green. Without his considerable knowledge of the community, we would not have been able to achieve this, especially as we seek to make sure 'everyone counts' in our efforts to reduce health inequality in the area.

Finally, Hardev supports the Stonewall Healthcare Equality Index benchmarking exercise for the Trust by engagement through the LGBT sub group of the diversity network.

#### **PC Lee Hawkins - LGBT CSU Police Officer, Limehouse Police Station**

Lee Hawkins is the current Hate Crime and LGBT CSU Police officer in the borough. In my opinion, he has gone beyond his required duties and responsibilities as a serving Police officer to address Hate Crime within the borough.

He has been extremely proactive as a partnership lead and in developing both existing relationships and building new relationships with a variety of agencies within the borough, both statutory and in the voluntary sector.

He is extremely proactive in addressing Hate Crime by identifying and mapping intelligence on Hate Crime incidents across the borough which has been instrumental to addressing risk and reducing repeat victimisation. He has a very committed approach to ensuring that victims of Hate Crime receive the best possible outcomes whether this be via the criminal justice system or ensuring they receive the required support they require from advocacy and therapeutic services.

Agencies state that they feel confident in reporting incidents to him and are confident that their service users will be treated with sensitivity and understanding. Agencies have commented that because of their experience of working with him, they have increased confidence in the boroughs Policing which is significant progress!!

I feel that he has been exemplary as both an LGBT Hate Crime practitioner and as an example of a proactive and insightful Police officer who has an excellent understanding of the local issues with a strong willingness to address Hate Crime.

In addition to this, he is extremely kind, thoughtful and willing to go the extra mile for anyone.

#### **Kofi Agyemang - Tower Hamlets LGBT campaigner**

For decades, Kofi Agyemang has worked tirelessly, using his own time and personal resources to confront and challenge homophobia in BME communities. The more public area of his work and efforts has culminated in an online resource by way of the SAY MY NAME website <http://www.saymynametheseries.com/>

This invaluable educational recourse serves to explain why homophobia is such a negative and destructive scourge on our society and highlights the particular effect homophobia has on members of the BME community. Abhorrence of Black gayness is openly manifested in most black art forms such as music, comedy, film and theatre where gay people are attacked and ridiculed.