

'This is Me'

Transitioning while working in
the ambulance service

Steph Meech

18 November 2022



National Ambulance LGBT+ Network



Celebrating the sexual orientations
and gender identities of all our
patients, staff and communities

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My Story



On 20 November, the worldwide trans community take time to reflect, and highlight the constant struggle they face to be accepted. To mark this year's International Trans Day of Remembrance, South East Coast Ambulance Service's **Steph Meech** shares her story.

So, this is me!

My name is Steph Meech and I am a trans woman. I have been working for the ambulance service for more than twenty years, first with Sussex Ambulance Service and then South East Coast Ambulance Service when we merged with Kent and Surrey.

I started as a Trainee Technician and gradually worked my way up to the clinical position of Specialist Paramedic in Urgent and Emergency Care. Now I work as an Operational Team Leader.

I sit on the National Ambulance LGBT+ Network

committee as the trans awareness lead and recently became a member of the College of Paramedics Diversity Steering Group.

This year, the Association of Ambulance Chief Executives (AACE) launched a campaign to highlight the abuse experienced by large numbers of ambulance staff as they do their job.



The idea was to showcase a few staff members who had experienced abuse when they were only trying to do their jobs. They would each explain



My Story



ASSOCIATION OF AMBULANCE CHIEF EXECUTIVES **NHS**

“
I'm one of the first trans paramedics in the UK and it feels great to be my true self, but I have had patients verbally abuse me and refuse my care.
”

Steph is a Paramedic and Operational Team Leader who has suffered transphobic abuse from the people she tries to help.

Visit www.aace.org.uk/vaa or scan the QR code to find out more and promote respect for ambulance staff.



You deserve the best care. They deserve to work without fear. #WorkWithoutFear

how this affected them and I told my story.

After the AACE campaign, I was interviewed by BBC South East about the abuse I received working as a trans paramedic.

Then, as Pride season was under way, I was asked by Meridian News to tell my story as a trans woman and a paramedic. The downside of any media campaign, however, is the risk of attracting negative attention from people who feel that they have the right to post abuse online.

I experienced a backlash and what I find hard to accept is that these people do not know me and have never met me, yet they felt compelled to abuse me online.

On the next page I have included some of the tweets I received. Imagine that you received these comments just for being yourself. This is really hurtful and can really impact on your confidence and self-esteem.



Online Abuse



'Women have a right to be treated by other females, not males in wigs.'



'If Steph is attempting to touch female patients against their will, Steph is a predator.'



'Imagine needing help and having this fella turn up. You'd think you were in the circus.'



'I don't want a man in fetish gear anywhere near me or my loved ones, especially not while we are in need of urgent medical care and therefore extra vulnerable.'



'In his male form, I'd have no problem letting him help me. In his fetish drag, I wouldn't let him near me.'



Transphobia



The International Trans Day of Remembrance is observed every year to draw attention to the violence endured by trans people and remember those murdered as a result of transphobia.

The figures are shocking and the predictions are that 2022 will again record higher numbers than the previous year.

Even though the statistics are distressing, as most of these murders occur outside the UK, we can become complacent. The fact that we live in the UK means that these alarming numbers have little bearing on our everyday lives.

However, the UK has become increasingly hostile to the trans community. A study by the European Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association reported that the rise in transphobia has damaged progress towards LGBT+ equality.



Impact of Transphobia



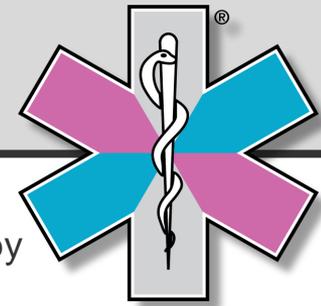
- ❖ 375 trans and gender-diverse people were murdered, 7% more than in the Trans Murder Monitoring (TMM) update 2020.
- ❖ 96% of those murdered globally were trans women or transfeminine people.
- ❖ 58% of murdered trans people whose occupation is known were sex workers.
- ❖ Murders of trans people in the US have doubled from last year; people of colour make up 89% of the 53 trans people murdered.
- ❖ 43% of the trans people murdered in Europe were migrants.
- ❖ 70% of all the murders registered were in Central and South America; 33% in Brazil.
- ❖ 36% of the murders took place on the street and 24% in their own residence.

- ❖ Cases from Greece, Malawi and Kazakhstan were reported for the first time.
- ❖ The average age of those murdered is 30; the youngest being 13 and the oldest 68.

Source: [Transrespect](#)



Impact of Transphobia



Stonewall

- ❖ Seven in ten trans people (70%) report being impacted by transphobia when accessing general health services.
- ❖ Nearly half of trans people (45%) said that their GP did not have a good understanding of their needs as a trans person, rising to over half of non-binary people (55%).
- ❖ 90% of trans people reported experiencing delays when seeking transition-related healthcare.
- ❖ Trans people of colour also experienced transphobia from trans-specific healthcare providers at more than double the rate of white respondents (13% compared to 6%).
- ❖ One in four trans people (26%) aren't open with anyone at work about being trans. This number increases to about two in five non-binary people (37%) who aren't out at work.
- ❖ Two in five trans people (41%) have experienced a hate crime or incident because of their gender identity.

Source: Transactual, Trans Lives Survey 2021

Transphobia and Hate Crime



When someone is hostile to another person because of their
DISABILITY, NATIONALITY, RACE, RELIGION,
SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR TRANSGENDER IDENTITY

and they show their hostility by



INTIMIDATION



HARASSMENT



DAMAGING PROPERTY



VIOLENCE

it is **HATE CRIME**

cps.gov.uk | [@cpsuk](https://twitter.com/cpsuk) | [#hatecrimematters](https://twitter.com/cpsuk)



Transphobic hostility – an act designed to hurt or degrade someone – is a crime under UK law and can result in people being fined, given community service or even imprisoned.

Usually suspected crimes are reported to the police as ‘hate incidents’ and where evidence is subsequently found, it will be redesignated as a

hate crime. You can help people to understand this and report incidents when they occur. This goes for patients and your colleagues.

Remember that ignoring such events, whilst not a crime in itself, is effectively giving permission for people’s abusive actions. We can all take a part in making working environments better.



Being a Trans Ally



A lot of transphobia is born out of ignorance rather than being malignant. However, the challenges we face as members of the trans community are getting worse.

Because of the amount of hate I received online after the AACE campaign and subsequent media work, my Trust filed complaints with Twitter, expressed support for me and condemned the abuse.

Now more than ever the trans community needs their allies: people who are not afraid to speak up and challenge inappropriate behaviour.

A trans ally is a non-trans person who is committed to being open-minded and respectful to people who may have a different gender identity or present their gender in a different way. Every non-trans person can be an ally to ensure trans people are treated with dignity and respect.



South East Coast Ambulance ✓ @SECAmbulance · Jun 7
It's been disappointing & upsetting to see some of the comments made by a small number of people following our post yesterday 😞

ALL of our staff have our full support to be themselves & we will not tolerate abuse in any form, including derogatory comments

[#Workwithoutfear](#)

South East Coast Ambulance ✓ @SECAmbulance · Jun 6
Steph is one of our paramedics who, because of being her true self, has experienced abuse from the very people she has gone to help.

We're very proud of Steph but she, and all ambulance staff across the country, deserve to #WorkWithoutFear

bit.ly/3lvzoAe



Being a Trans Ally



According to the Trade Union Congress (TUC), many people want to be a trans ally and support the trans community but feel they don't know enough to speak up. It has offered five tips:

1. Educate Yourself

There are many resources you can use to learn more and empower yourself to be an ally. Look at LGBT+ friendly media sites such as the LGBT Consortium, which represents many charities.

People might point out that you've used the wrong terminology or misunderstood something, but that shouldn't stop you from being an ally. Trans people will appreciate that you have the right intent. Use the opportunity to learn more.

2. Challenge Transphobia

Speak up for trans people, for trans equality and against transphobia. Your voice and your actions

have weight and can change hearts and minds. Be the first to challenge transphobia or correct misconceptions. Do speak up when there are trans people in the room and when there aren't.

3. Include Trans Colleagues

Many trans TUC members feel isolated at work with some explicitly stating that their colleagues excluded them. Make an effort to include trans colleagues in work and social conversations. It's good workplace practice anyway and a courtesy that should be extended to all.

4. Listen

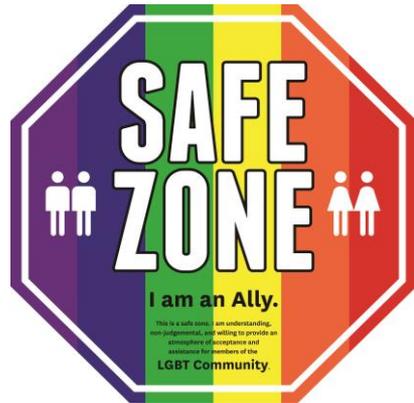
Actively listen to trans people and how they describe themselves then follow their lead. If you use the wrong name, pronoun or terminology, apologise, correct yourself and move on. No need to make a big deal about it; ensure to learn from your mistake.

Being a Trans Ally



5. Respect Boundaries

Remember, it is inappropriate to ask *anyone* about the appearance or status of their genitals, so boundaries are important. And avoid asking personal questions about an individual's transition. There is no right or wrong way and everyone is different. Understanding that and respecting privacy are key attributes of an ally.



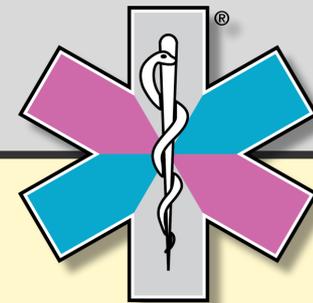
As well as giving the best care to patients, ever member of staff should be able to come to work without fear of persecution and bigotry. It's important that we make our environments safe spaces for all LGBT+ people. ■



Yours, Steph x



Your Professional Development



Make a Difference!

In July 2020 we released two professional development packages that focus on two major health inequalities for LGBT+ people. The first is the Ambulance Service Trans Toolkit, which aims to demystify the issues for trans patients and how we can provide better support for our trans colleagues. The second looks at how we can provide exceptional care to patients who are living with HIV.

Feedback from people that have completed the packages has been very positive and indicates the development helps people to provide a more confident and appropriate service to our patients.

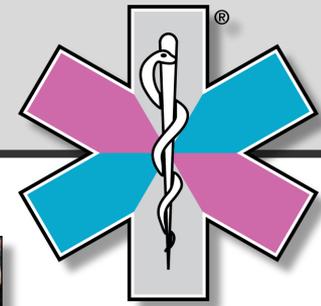
It's all about providing **#InformedCare**.

Access to these professional development packages is free, and can be found at:

ambulanceLGBT.org/resources/professional-development/



Forwards, Backwards or Upside Down?



Alistair Gunn, National Ambulance LGBT+ Network Chair, wonders whether progress is moving forwards, backwards or flipping upside down, but feels positive about the long term.



Back in 2015, when we set up the National Ambulance LGBT+ Network, I quickly realised our biggest task was getting information ready to support trans people. While the rights of LGB people had largely normalised, and attitudes were gradually catching up, the same couldn't be said for the trans world. I am really proud of the work we've done to support our patients and colleagues and hope I have become a true ally.

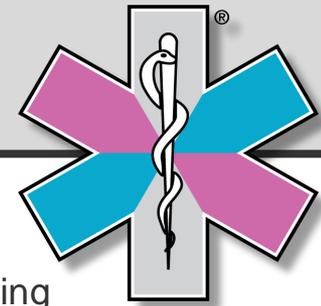
While we've been putting together trans z-cards and professional development packs to make lives better, I have noted how larger societal attitudes appear to have switched into reverse.

The first sign that something was wrong was reading the almost venomous musings of people such as J K Rowling, who suggested trans women are not 'real women'. While it might be okay to use your position of privilege to highlight an issue, I must question the point of this one.

Are we trying to discredit people, suggest that the whole trans issue should not exist or create hypothetical hierarchies in society? To me, it doesn't make sense. Perhaps I am being too simplistic when I hypothesise that not saying these things would have been far less divisive and hurtful.



Forwards, Backwards or Upside Down?



It seems Rowling's comments really have divided people. I read that Daniel Radcliffe, the face of Harry Potter, claimed Rowling had 'hurt' young Potter fans and was keen to let people know that 'not everyone felt that way'. A massive credit is due to Radcliffe and the other Harry Potter stars, who openly criticised Rowling's transphobic comments and distanced themselves from them.

It's interesting to me that many younger people seem to have a much more pragmatic view when it comes to diversity and inclusion. I've seen this among the national committee as we've welcomed younger people who have a clear affinity to concepts that the older members have taken more time to understand. It's positive as these younger views are our future. In the meantime, big challenges remain.

Apparently, NHS waiting lists for trans people are forcing people to leave England. There were

precious few treatment centres available, and rather than increasing capacity after the massive delays resulting from the pandemic, services have been cut. It's led one legal professional to tweet: 'Trans people who can qualify [for NHS treatment] can likely live better lives by leaving England and trans people who can't qualify (because they are too young) can likely live better lives by persuading their parents to leave England.' In Wales, however, the government's *LGBT+ Action Plan for Wales* sets an ambition to become the most progressive country in Europe.

Let us, and all those within the NHS ambulance services, hold our heads high and recognise that we want to make every patient's experience a positive one, especially as we enter peoples lives at their worst moments. And let's keep working towards making a truly inclusive working culture and celebrate every one of our colleagues. ■

Photo View



Alistair and Steph at the National Ambulance LGBT+ Network's task and finish event in 2020, complete with trans star of life.

