

Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee

Engagement session with individuals who have experienced conversion therapy/practices

26 October 2021

Participant - D (he/him)

Committee Member - Pam Duncan-Glancy

D told how he experienced conversion practice while at university and as member of a Baptist church in Scotland. He felt tension between his sexuality and faith, so spoke to his bible study group leader, who suggested conversion therapy/practice (CT/P).

The bible study group leader told D that CT/P would help him overcome his desires and sexuality and enable him to live as a heterosexual.

The format of the CT/P involved meeting on a weekly basis, using talking alongside tools and techniques of “regular” therapy supported by biblical text. D attended as he was hopeful he could be “like everyone else”.

D was told that homosexuality was a depraved lifestyle and he was compared to being an alcoholic or drug addict. His behaviour was monitored and he was told to keep a journal of when he was attracted to a man. This impacted his self-esteem and led to constant self-awareness/doubt.

D recognised the CT/P was becoming coercive and controlling in very subtle ways. He approached his pastor about the bible study group leader. The pastor fully supported the therapy to “free” D of his extreme moral depravity. D said the message sent to him was “if you take your faith seriously you would reject a sinful life and continue with the therapy”.

D was attracted to a straight friend. He left the house he shared with the friend. He felt isolated and didn’t feel there was anyone he could talk to.

This occurred over a timeframe of approximately 3 to 6 months. D felt like he was on the right path. He eventually came out to others in the bible study group. D said the main impacts when he realised he “hadn’t changed”. He felt a loss of hope and couldn’t accept himself.

Over time, D went on to secure a Masters and sought support at Bradford. He waited for about another year before speaking to his GP. He has had suicidal thought at times but his GP and medications have helped.

D confirmed he would try to answer questions from the Committee member.

PD-G: Was the bible study group described as an 'actual' study group?

D: The group itself was fine. The CT/P was one-to-one with the group leader. The CT/P was not advertised or promoted and the bible study group literature did not make any reference to it.

PD-G: What was the sort of tools, techniques and biblical text used?

D: It took different forms. It included photocopied pages from books. I was given essays and articles to read on sexuality. Regular reference was made to church teachings and theology. I was told that keeping a journal was like CBT.

PD-G: What support did you have?

D: Not a lot. When I came out to friends they encouraged me to continue the CT/P. They had their views that I would go to hell.

PD-G: What have the impacts been?

D: It has impacted my mental health, self-esteem, self-acceptance. It's still a struggle. I feel shame and find it difficult to build friendships. I have had to step away from the church.