

The Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee

End Conversion Therapy/Practices Virtual Engagement Session in private with the Committee and Individuals with lived experiences

26 October 2021

Participant – K

Committee Member - Pam Gosal

Kate was born in Scotland and moved to Wales as a child, although always returned for summer holidays.

Early influences in her life were her parents and grandparents.

When she was seven or eight years old, she realised she fancied boys and girls, though mostly girls. She had crushes on girls at school, and her brother would tell her mum how she was acting around girls. She once asked her mother what she would do if her brother said he was gay, she said she'd throw him out.

At the age of 17, despite doing well academically, she was very depressed. She met an evangelical and read the Bible. She then wrote to Gideons and said she believed in God but liked women. The response was that God will help you and you don't need to stay like that.

While at university, she had the chance to be 'out', but got "sucked into" the Christian union. She met another lesbian and they hung out together but got told by Christian leadership that it was a sin to be gay. There was talk of "restoring them to wholeness". They didn't talk about demons, it was about 'wholeness'.

She started going to a modern church and then to conferences that are known among the Christian community. She went to 'sexual healing' conferences and from what she heard there, became terrified that she was going to go to hell.

In her twenties, everyone was getting married. Her best friend was Andrew (name changed), she didn't fancy him, but she married him. The marriage was encouraged by the pastoral team. They said it was meant to be and that they had a vision they'd have many children.

She said the honeymoon was awful, that she hated sex. They had three children by the time she was 34. In the early years of the marriage, she was

exhausted and busy and could put her sexuality on the back burner. As the children got older she found herself with more time to think about things.

At the age of 39 she was asked to go for church leadership, to be a licensed lay minister. She was advised not to mention that she is bisexual. She found a talent for public speaking and delivering sermons; people would come specially to listen to them.

However, one of the women in the congregation started flirting with her, and they ended up kissing. They both told their husbands immediately, but the woman also told a hard-line member of the clergy. Eventually Kate was accused of unwanted sexual advances against a woman and she was very publicly removed from her post. There had also been a letter circulating around the congregation that Kate was an abuser of women.

Kate had a complete breakdown and lost four stone in weight.

Her husband had been totally supportive of her and they talked about divorce, although the marriage continued for a few more years. They went for a 20th anniversary holiday and Kate experienced a panic attack in a busy and religious public space. She left her husband after this trip.

Kate came out to her parents after the trip and they've barely spoken to her since. Her elder son doesn't talk to her anymore.

Kate has PTSD and has nightmares about priests coming around and reading out statements. She finds certain hymns triggering.

During all of this, Kate achieved a PhD and is a university lecturer. She has since met a woman online and is due to get married next year. She has also joined a church that it is inclusive of her sexuality.

However, Kate feels robbed of her childhood because of the attitude of the church. She feels it has messed up her husband and caused her children trauma. She blames herself to a certain extent but also blames the pressure from her parents and the church.

She says that no-one talked about LGBT issues when she was at school, "it wasn't cool like it is today." She feels like she has missed out on a big part of her life, "and I don't want it to happen to other kids".

Kate said that in lots of ways, she does not regret marrying her husband, including because of the children. But, she would have made different choices if she didn't have the pressure about her sexuality.

Kate was very clear that you cannot change your sexual identity. She suggested that churches could look at readings of queer theology, but these have been blocked out. In addition, LGBT people are often left out of LGBT discussions in the church, when they should be involved.