

Coming Out

LGBT Stories
from Wales



**ARIENNIR GAN Y LOTERI
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“I found it very difficult accepting I was gay because my parents had been together a long time so the only role models I had were straight. It took me close to five years to accept I was gay, and when I actually did accept it and tell everyone, they were all great. I have had very little negativity regarding my sexuality. In fact the more open I am with people, I find I am treated no differently to anyone else and my sexuality is never an issue. I would not change my sexuality at all.”

Kim, 38

“I spent years not knowing what my feelings were due to poor education in school. When I finally came to terms with who I was, I was still utterly fearful that I would be treated differently by friends, family and colleagues and so it took me a long time to tell anyone. Things are changing for the better, but we still do not live in a gay-friendly society, even in the UK.”

Mohammed, 34

“My mum realised and asked me one evening, and I was just honest. After then, it was just so much easier.”

Jackson, 25

Introduction

This guide presents a collection of 'coming out' stories from LGBT people from across Wales. It covers a diverse range of people's experiences of telling their families, friends, colleagues and communities that they are lesbian, gay, bi or trans.

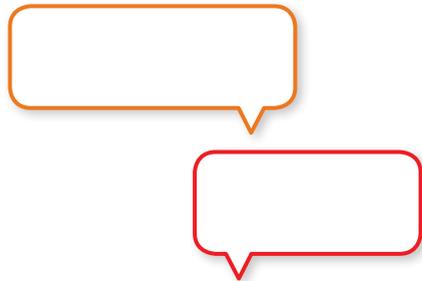
Many of the stories are proof that we still have a long way to go before everyone is accepted without exception, but the voices in this guide also reflect the joy and strength people find in being able to be open about who they are.

Coming out isn't a simple, one-time event, and it's up to each of us if, when and how we want to tell people about our sexual orientation or gender identity. However, at Stonewall we also know the power of LGBT role models – and that our role models are not celebrities or people high on pedestals but work colleagues, family, friends and community members. People who step up every day as role models simply by being themselves.

We hope that in reading this guide you might see your own experiences reflected in some of the stories, and perhaps find the inspiration to tell your own.

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Family

Lesbian, gay, bi and trans (LGBT) people of all ages report varied reactions from their families upon coming out. For some, coming out can lead to family rejection, while others are pleased (and often surprised) to find they receive love, reassurance and support.

SOME DESCRIBE HOSTILE REACTIONS FROM THEIR FAMILIES, LEADING TO A BREAKDOWN IN RELATIONSHIPS.

"I came out to my mother. It was awful, she said *'that's your business but don't ever bring a same-sex partner home with you'*. My brother was a staunch homophobe and after that never spoke to me. I never told him and my mother denied telling him, but they were very close. My brother always made very derogatory anti-LGB comments."

Shelly, 49

"When I first started coming out, the response from my friends was generally positive and accepting. I can't think of one person who reacted negatively, although a few people were surprised. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of my family. My parents rejected the idea that I could be bi, simply stating *'you're not'*. I am still trying to persuade my parents to accept my sexuality, over ten years since I first came out to them."

Gwen, 35

AN INITIAL NEGATIVE REACTION CAN LEAD TO ACCEPTANCE LATER ON, AS FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS CHANGE AND GROW.

"Mum took it well. My dad not so well, and if it hadn't been for my mum's efforts I think I would have been thrown out of the house. Things are fine now 24 years later and my brother has come out too and got married before me!"

Rob, 42

"When I first came out, my mother made me go to the doctors! I went to the doctors and told them I liked girls and they said there is nothing wrong with that. I told them that I had to get some sort of medication as my mum would kick me out the house. They offered

to put me on a waiting list to see a psychosexual therapist but they said there is no medication available as it's completely normal to like the same sex! Hurrah I was normal after all! Funny thinking about that now as they wouldn't change me for the world."

Mair, 35

"Some members of my immediate family did not take it well and it took some months for them to come to terms with it. While my family's reaction was hard to go through, I am glad I came out as my life has improved significantly since then and my family are much more comfortable with it."

Ashok, 27

"I wrote it in a letter. My dad was very quiet but my mother kept saying how it would affect her and that she would need some time before she was comfortable to talk about it, and she advised me to keep it quiet from other family members. The first time I felt she truly accepted who I am was after a bad break-up where I was a mess, she really stepped up and was there for me, now she is comfortable and really gets along with my new girlfriend. She has told her work colleagues and other family members – I couldn't be happier! As when you have your parents on your side who love and protect you, who cares what the rest of the world thinks!"

Lowri, 25

FOR SOME LGBT PEOPLE WHO ARE FEARFUL OF COMING OUT TO FAMILY, THE RESPONSE THEY GET CAN BE A PLEASANT SURPRISE.

"Gradually came out to different people over time. Telling parents and children was the hardest. Really pleased that my 90-year-old granddad was really positive and supportive."

Gwyn, 41

"I was lucky when I came out that both my parents were really understanding. It took a while for the family to get their heads round it but it's never affected family life. As my dad said: *'22 years of being in the Navy I kinda guessed, you're my love and I love you no matter what'*. That for me was amazing."

Adam, 29

"I couldn't tell my parents until I'd gotten to the point of a six-month relationship with a 'friend'. They knew, I knew they knew. But I wanted them to tell me and vice versa. Eventually they questioned me until I broke! They cried and hugged me and said they thought I had been doing drugs, and that was the reason for my shifty attitude! Ha!"

Elly, 29

Young people

Despite the great strides forward that have been made for LGBT equality in recent years, many young people still fear coming out. The stories told here will be familiar to many LGBT people: of the search for support and role models, fear, acceptance and navigating the tricky process of growing up just like any other young person.

"I am a pansexual trans male. I never had help to figure out who I am and I still don't have help or know who I really am, but I think more kids today are finding who they are and a lot of them will need help to figure it out and how to tell the people they love. Because only a few of my friends inside and outside of College know, and that is only because they are also trans/gay/non-binary/etc."

Sam, 17

"I first came out to a close friend of mine in primary school that I may be gay. Although I didn't really know that was what I was at the time, I just knew that I was different, and although she did not react badly, I could tell that she thought it wasn't something I was supposed to feel. From then on I completely denied it and tried to pretend I was straight. I didn't come out to my parents until the age of 21, and once I had I wished I had done it sooner as the way they reacted was the best response you could ask for."

Daksha, 22

"I grew up in care and lived with many foster parents. Coming out was difficult as I felt like I was the only one in my school or community to have feelings for someone the same sex as me. I was so ashamed about the feelings I had I tried to commit suicide. Eventually I turned 16, ran away and ended up living in a hostel. It was there, when I had no one else to answer to, that I came out. There wasn't much support for me when I came out. A lot of bad things happened when I was younger; because I was so young and had no family to support me. I was too young to go out to gay bars at the time, so I was excluded from being able to socialise. An LGBT youth group would have been beneficial for helping me to meet other young people in a safe environment, but this was not available at the time."

Tomos, 27

"I met my first boyfriend and after a few months together I had to tell one of my closest friends; he gave me a massive hug and together we told all my friends. I have never been hugged so much by so many people in one day ever since. They were fantastic and I owe that close friend so much for his help and support on that day. Eventually the entire school knew and for the rest of my time in compulsory education I never had a problem. Of course I had the occasional 'gay boy' or similar comment shouted at me by younger kids, to which I replied 'yes and?' which normally shut them up. . . There were two family members that were so supportive and still are to this day, my cousin who came out at the same time as me, but was 40, and then surprisingly, my 70-year-old grandmother. They were also a great support to my parents and I'm so grateful for everything that they did for me. I wouldn't change a thing because it has all made me who I am today. My cousin once told me that *'those that mind, don't matter and those that matter, don't mind.'*"

Matt, 23

MANY COMING OUT STORIES REFLECT THE KEY ROLE SUPPORTIVE FRIENDS CAN PLAY.

"I told my best friend in school, a straight lad, and the first four friends I told were straight lads I played football with. The experience was a very warm and loving one, and I'm fortunate that I was welcomed when I came out."

Jac, 28

"Coming out is not easy at the best of times; coming out in the Welsh Valleys is definitely even harder than the average experience as far as I can tell. I have a friend who has taken 10 years to go through his transition from female to male. The process has taken far too long, and this is because the NHS in Wales are not as responsive or well-funded to support people who need to transition. It has been a journey he has very nearly not finished on numerous occasions, threatening to take his life because he was not being helped and supported in the way he medically needed. I do not want to have to watch another friend go through this."

Liza, 30

"From an early age I knew I was different, but I didn't know how. It was when I went to secondary school that I realised 'different' meant gay. I bottled everything up until I became suicidal in my 20s. I decided I couldn't go on any longer. It was come out or end it all. In a panic, I reached out to the right friend and thankfully I'm still here to write this."

Dai, 41

"I knew from a young age...I remember drooling over Charlene from Neighbours and hating Scott Robinson! I must have been seven or eight then. I remember thinking '*I wish Katie (year above me in junior school) was my girlfriend*'. Being from the Valleys, it soon became apparent to me that those types of thoughts were '*wrong*', '*sick*', '*unnatural*'... so I repressed them...massively repressed. I had years of awkward intimate encounters with men but I knew it wasn't right, it wasn't me. This went on for about four years. Then I befriended Andy...wonderfully camp, glitter-wearing, Kylie-adoring Andy. He was heartbroken after his first ever boyfriend dumped him and I helped him pick up the pieces. I went with him to *Atlantica*, in his words '*this cool and happening gay bar in Cardiff*'. This was the start of my adventure. Suffice to say, we went, we enjoyed it...and a whole new world opened up to me."

Leanne, 34

Education

Stonewall Cymru's research has shown that LGBT pupils face high rates of bullying, a lack of understanding from teachers and rarely see themselves reflected in their education. As a result, coming out at school can be an isolating experience.

MANY SCHOOLS ARE STILL FAILING TO PROVIDE AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT WHERE LGBT PUPILS ARE SUPPORTED TO BE THEMSELVES.

"As someone who grew up genderqueer in Wales through a Catholic education system I think it's vital that mental health provision and education are prioritised. When I was at my most confused I decided to come out to one of my teachers and within 24 hours the entire staff and most of the student body knew what I had told him. I was persistently bullied for the remaining two years by the staff and my peers. I feel that if more education and support was available I could have been saved the following years of heartache and mental health intervention that it has taken me to restore my sense of self."

Jo, 35

"I came out as bisexual to a friend who was not in the same school as me and was slightly older, as I held the view that people my age (14) would be too immature to understand, or would treat me badly. It was another six months before I told any friends at my school, and a few months after that I told my mother and grandmother. My school had no LGBT provision – we had one Stonewall poster in our 6th form area, and when someone enquired about advice on sexuality, and if there were any differences in contraception that gay people should use, our teacher said: *'I'm not allowed to talk about that, the school isn't allowed to'* – this was in 2009 to a year 10 class! I was never a victim of anything beyond verbal attacks, such as name-calling or ridicule/teasing. I never once felt judged at university for my sexuality, everyone on my course accepted it, and I wrote many articles about wearing make-up for university newspapers. I now run a support group for young LGBTQ people, and I hear time and time again that schools are just NOT doing a good enough job. Sex and health education has a serious lack of important information, never even touching on sexuality, HIV, consent/rape or homophobia and transphobia/gender identity. The worst part of being openly gay in school was feeling I couldn't speak to any staff member, and that

there was no acknowledgement of a huge part of my identity in a place I spent nearly 40 hours a week in, learning and growing up.”

Lewis, 21

“It was good, my parents, friends and school were very supportive. In particular, my school offered me the chance to include LGBT history on the curriculum, put leaflets about LGBT issues in the nurse’s office and supported me when I was bullied (verbal harassment, throwing rocks etc.)”

Awen, 25

MANY LGBT PUPILS EXPERIENCE HOMOPHOBIC, BIPHOBIC AND TRANSPHOBIC BULLYING.

“Coming out was an incredibly traumatic experience for me. I was not very accepting of it, and constantly hoped that someday I would change. This wish was intensified due to the fact that I was regularly bullied by other pupils, and so felt very inferior to heterosexuals. This led me to develop social anxiety disorder and depression, which became a very intense and difficult battle. However, after five years of treatment, I can confidently say that I am proud of being a homosexual, and I believe that I deserve the same equal rights as every other person.”

Ryan, 21

“I told my friends, who then told their friends, who then told the whole school...I was bullied a lot but had a good core group of friends as support. Nothing was done when I informed teachers, and more often than not they were instigators of explicit and non-explicit homophobia. My headmaster told my parents that I had told friends I was gay, which was such a betrayal.”

Abir, 29

“I knew that I was gay at the age of 14, but I didn’t have the confidence to tell anyone at that time. I was scared what people might think, and at the time I was being bullied, so I thought it would only make it worse. At 15, I told one of my best friends that I was gay and nothing changed between us at all, which was great! Then throughout Year 11, I started to tell more and more of my good friends, until I finally told my mum at the end of the year. She completely accepted me, although my dad was a lot harder to tell and unfortunately he still feels uncomfortable with it. I’m now 17 and in college, and I couldn’t be happier in my life! I’m also trying to get involved in LGBT support for my area, to help other youth who are going through what I did.”

James, 17

FOR MANY LGBT YOUNG PEOPLE, IT IS AT UNIVERSITY THAT THEY FIND A PLACE WHERE THEY FEEL COMFORTABLE BEING THEMSELVES.

“I basically just pretended that I was already out because I was embarrassed that it had taken me so long... Being at uni made it easier because no-one had ever known me as ‘not gay’. In the end I just sent my gran a text saying *‘is it okay if Louise, my girlfriend, comes over too?’* and she didn’t even comment on it...still don’t know why I didn’t do it ten years ago!”

Mel, 24

“I came out to a few friends when I was 14 but only truly came out when I went to university and joined the LGBT+ society. I’m now the LGBT officer for my university and feel far more comfortable there being myself.”

Elliw, 23

At work

The workplace is often the last place LGBT people feel confident being themselves, and many are not out to colleagues. A supportive employer, role models and allies however can all make a huge difference to LGBT employees.

FOR SOME, COMING OUT AT WORK IN THE PAST HAD NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES.

“I came out in the 1970s while working in a senior youth work role at a London-based charity. I was sacked for being gay.”

David, 66

“It was a very difficult time, I was outed which resulted in bullying at work (civil service), hate crime against me and my property and damage to family relationships that are still not healed a decade later.”

Priti, 32

SUPPORT FROM EMPLOYERS AND COLLEAGUES CAN HELP LGBT EMPLOYEES FEEL CONFIDENT TO BE THEMSELVES, BOTH WITHIN AND OUTSIDE OF THE WORKPLACE.

“At the time I was working in a childcare setting in England which was male dominated, this had an effect on my relationship with certain members of my team, but I was lucky enough to be supported by a good manager who supported me positively in this environment – I was successful over time too to gain promotion that altered the balance of my relationship with team members and over years I was accepted as a good manager and not on my sexuality as when I first came out. All family members were accepting of me coming out, however two older members of the family sent my parents flowers, I think because they were feeling sorry for my parents that I was not straight!”

Simon, 40

“I have always been ‘out’ at all my jobs since leaving university (three charities). I have never experienced any prejudice from employers, indeed one employer asked if they could

promote my civil partnership in our staff magazine to encourage other staff members to feel comfortable coming out if they wanted to.”

Kuldeep, 47

“Fell in love with a colleague and risked jobs, careers, friendships, family relationships. Some teething issues with parents but all working very well now. Friends great, employer great. Ex-husbands (now) great!”

Alys, 50

“The reason I felt I could come out was due to a change in employment and the openness of the people within the organisation and the realisation that it was ok. My colleagues have become great friends and have encouraged me to come out to friends and family, which I am now doing slowly and I feel like me now instead of hiding who I am. I owe a lot to the current organisation I work for.”

Angharad, 36

HAVING ROLE MODELS AND SEEING SOMEONE LIKE YOU IN THE WORKPLACE, WHO IS OPEN ABOUT WHO THEY ARE, CAN OFTEN GIVE LGBT PEOPLE THE CONFIDENCE THEY NEED TO COME OUT AT WORK.

“I came out at work in my mid 30s when I had a gay manager. My manager was out at work which was important as it enabled me to be more confident generally about my sexuality.”

Elizabeth, 48

“I am a GP, I came out to friends in 2000 when I was a GP trainee and my trainer discovered this. He advised me to be open with my future GP colleagues (now my partners). I came out to them and I have not looked back. I am ‘out’ at work, with my colleagues and patients and my community. It is important not to ‘hide my light under a bushel’ and to be an example to other LGBT people and young people.”

Llinos, 42

Bi experiences

Many bi people's stories show how common misunderstandings and prejudices, including from other LGBT people, can make it particularly challenging for them to be open about who they are.

“‘Coming out’ is never really a rite of passage I feel I’ve had to do. I’ve never really felt the need to sit down with my parents and they may or may not really know, but then I don’t think they would really be surprised. Mostly I just let it come up naturally and get surprise at times that I’m not straight or not gay (bisexuality still seems more of a surprise to many). I suppose the fact that my sexuality and gender identity are very connected and would require complex understanding for many people stops me having a full conversation with them. With a fluid and non-binary gender, sexuality becomes a complex situation as often the words available don’t tell the whole story – it’s easier to just say bi than the full explanation.”

Alex, 40

BI INVISIBILITY, DRIVEN BY THE ASSUMPTION THAT EVERYONE IS EITHER SIMPLY ‘GAY’ OR ‘STRAIGHT’, CREATES PARTICULAR CHALLENGES AROUND COMING OUT FOR BI PEOPLE.

“I didn’t realise I was bisexual, even though I’d always stood up against homophobic bullying when I was in school. No one had ever told me there was another option and you didn’t have to be straight or gay. As I liked men I thought that meant I was straight. Even my gay friends had never told me that bisexuality existed. Then, when I was at university, I got involved in environmental campaigning and realised that some of the people I met were calling themselves bisexual. They said you could be attracted to men and women and could like both in different ways, it didn’t make you any less bisexual. I wished someone had told me that bisexuality existed and that you can love men and women and it could be in slightly different ways. I told my flatmates who were all fine and most of them turned out to be bisexual or lesbian by the end of the year, so that was fine. My parents just said they wanted me to be happy. I’m lucky I come from a very open-minded family and was always active for gay rights, so most of my friends supported me. Some didn’t understand how I could

be bisexual, even though they were supporters of gay rights, but I just wish someone had ever talked about bisexuality.”

Fflur, 33

“I always knew I was attracted to girls as well as boys, probably from the age of seven or eight, but I felt that this was wrong, so I hid it. It was only when I went away to university and met with the then LGB Officer that I learnt about bisexuality. Suddenly my world made sense, I wasn’t a freak or a pervert: apparently I wasn’t the only person in the world who was attracted to more than just a person’s gender. I came out to my friends as several of them were gay, lesbian and bisexual and I was totally accepted. Family was harder and, to be honest, I don’t think my mother ever accepted it. So I just chose not to talk about it to them, even though they know I actively campaign and tell my story in public. I will no longer hide who I am – I am proud...”

Kirsten, 42

“It took me a long time to come out to myself. After that, it became a personal issue that grew stronger and stronger in its need for recognition and expression. Then for many years I considered myself to be lesbian – but struggled with that identity. Then when I found myself in a relationship with a bisexual woman (in my 60s!) I finally admitted to myself that I am bisexual – which was harder than coming out as gay...!”

Sue, 65

MANY BI PEOPLE ENCOUNTER BIPHOBIA AND NEGATIVE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT BISEXUALITY UPON COMING OUT.

“I came out to my mum age 15 as bisexual. My mother and sister are very supportive. At university I joined the LGBT society as a bi representative committee member and this made it easier to be out and visible. I went on to run the university LGBT society. This gave me the opportunity to be out to the rest of my family. Being out as a bi person is extremely hard even if you wish to be out. There is a great deal of embarrassment, fear of hostility from gay and straight people and fear of not being taken seriously. Unless you are in a same-sex or polyamorous relationship people don’t believe you and if you are in a same-sex relationship they just think you were gay really most of the time. If you are bi in an opposite sex relationship people think you should call yourself straight as if none of your past self or experiences or current feelings matter. When I moved back to Wales I was afraid of all these things so I started my own LGBT social group which has now been running for almost two years. It is wonderful. I’m 23 now and life is better because I run that group but I still feel I have to downplay my partner’s gender to be taken seriously. Being bi in an opposite sex relationship makes your sexuality invisible to the human

eye, so although I'm fully out now, I'm sure many who know me don't know, either cos it's never come up or they have conveniently forgotten, especially in my religious rural village."

Rachel, 24

"I would always get asked the question, *'how do you know you're bi if you've never slept with another woman?'* This frustrated me immensely until I realised that I could respond with, *'how do you know you're straight if you've never slept with someone of the opposite sex?'* This shut the person up immediately, made them think, and most replied with, *'I just do.'*"

Nadiya, 22

Faith

Being lesbian, gay, bi or trans and having a religious faith are often presented as being necessarily in conflict with each other. The stories told by many, however, paint a more complex picture. One which can contain tension and often struggle, but that can also be a story of finding faith, hope and love.

FEAR OF ENCOUNTERING PREJUDICE OR HOSTILITY CAN LEAD MANY LGBT PEOPLE TO AVOID COMING OUT TO RELIGIOUS FAMILY MEMBERS OR COMMUNITIES.

“I was scared stiff. Seriously considered and threatened suicide, even wrote a leaving note and was ready to go. I was brought up attending chapel and led to believe that homosexuality was a grave sin, punishable only by the flames of hell. I was scared stiff of my own feelings and completely immersed myself in scripture. As I got older, it became more difficult – I met more people and got a broader outlook on life. It took me until I was 30 to experiment in secret with a very understanding and patient girl I met, and I haven’t looked back. I’ve had a few relationships since and I now believe I have found the right lady that I want to spend the rest of my life with. But coming out was very grim and my parents still believe it is not right and an abomination to God!”

Rhiannon, 39

“I came out quite late because I come from a Catholic Italian family and assumed this would lead to problems. It did. My mother, sister and aunt rejected me. Surprisingly, some of the people who I assumed would reject me didn’t and stood by me – namely my elderly grandmother, another aunt, and my family in Italy who are practicing Catholics. I only came out once I’d moved 250 miles away from home to go to university and was engaged to a man (I’m lesbian). He stood by me and was my best friend ever.”

Claudia, 40

SOME ARE DISAPPOINTED WITH THE LACK OF SUPPORT THEY RECEIVED FROM RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS UPON COMING OUT. OTHERS HOWEVER HAVE POSITIVE EXPERIENCES OF SUPPORT AND ACCEPTANCE FROM RELIGIOUS FAMILY MEMBERS AND THEIR FAITH COMMUNITY.

"I came out to my pastor in church and his response was *'when I was young, being gay meant being happy'*, which was not particularly helpful when I was feeling vulnerable. My pastor's response was to tell me to keep it quiet. I did and told my parents when I was 19. My parents took a few days to come around to me being gay. But due to my church background I became quiet about it and had to keep my sexuality secret. I then sought 'healing' for being gay to become heterosexual. I followed this route of healing for about five years but, as you probably guessed, it never worked. I finally became honest with myself about my sexuality at age 28 after years of struggling with the church. I finally had the courage to leave the church when I was 29. It was the best decision I ever made."

Michael, 44

"I came out to a small group of friends from my church who also supported me and encouraged me to come out to my parents and sibling when I was 19. It wasn't until this moment that I actually felt comfortable with my sexuality."

Danny, 22

"I've been a life-long Christian and church attendee at The Salvation Army and I came out to my ministers (this was my biggest fear, thinking that I would be thrown out) instead I found that my coming out was dealt with sensitively and with care, love and support. The fact that I am gay has had no bearing on my standing at church and I have always been encouraged to bring my partner along if they want to come, and he does. The ones who took a long time to come to terms with me being gay were the family, who couldn't understand why or how I could be gay considering that I had been brought up as a Christian. To some extent, this has damaged relationships with much of my family, but I am closer to my mother now than ever, and still close with my grandparents, though my relationship with my sister is very strained as her husband is homophobic."

Patrice, 36

"Lots of alcohol, found a gay pub in the city when at uni, then phoned Mum when drunk. It was a bit of a shock as she is an Anglican Church warden, but she has always been great, as have all my family, thank goodness!"

Tammy, 38

"Coming out to others was a gradual process – I did so first when I was 17 to a female friend and she was accepting. Came out to my parents at 19, and thereafter was completely open. A lifelong Catholic Christian, I have now left the mainstream Church for an LGBT-friendly alternative. One of the benefits of doing this was that at last, I was able to acknowledge absolutely the value of my sexuality to my spirituality, which means so much to me."

Niall, 41

Rural life

A third of Wales's population lives in a rural area, many of whom will be lesbian, gay, bi or trans. However, isolation from services, few LGBT social and support opportunities and a lack of diverse role models can make it difficult to come out as LGBT in rural areas.

"Rural Wales was a difficult place to come out so I moved to a city. I still face homophobia in Wales."

Nia, 44

"I came out in Ceredigion. A difficult experience. I think it would have been easier if I lived in a city. Fewer people, and fewer people who know you."

Eluned, 35

"Living in a small town, it was not very easy coming out, but I had the support of my family so it was not as bad for me as some of my friends."

Rose, 50

"Came out at 20 in college, then went back into the closet until 36 due to moving back to rural Wales, and I got married due to wanting kids and because I couldn't face coming out to my parents and small community. My husband always knew I was gay right from the start."

Bethan, 48

"I grew up in quite a rural town, where there didn't appear to be many gay people – when one of my mum's friends came out, my mum's reaction was that she was no longer allowed in the house. This placed me in a difficult position. I pretended to have boyfriends to please my mother, but my mum caught me out lying. When I finally came out, my mum's reaction was 'what would everyone think of her as a mother?', rather than my happiness and wellbeing. She gave me an ultimatum: I either stopped being gay and stayed at home, or carried on and had 12 hours to get out. . . . Twenty years on, I think I survived quite well considering. I feel society forces you to be one thing or another, forces labels onto you. But finally, at 36, I can be me, not who society thinks I should be. I feel confident to be defined by who I am, not by my sexuality!"

Kate, 36

Changing attitudes

Seismic shifts in legislation and social attitudes are never without their impact on individual day-to-day lives. Stories from older LGBT people, who have lived through (and often driven) those changes, reflect on the process of coming out, then and now.

“Walked up and down outside a gay bar. The fear of being seen going in to one of *‘those places’*. Looked around, the street was quiet. Took the plunge, went in, and never looked back!”

Sidney, 62

MANY OLDER LGBT PEOPLE CAME OUT DURING A TIME OF DIFFERENT LAWS AND SOCIAL ATTITUDES, WITH DISCRIMINATION AND A LACK OF VISIBILITY AFFECTING THEIR EXPERIENCE. SOME DESCRIBE FEELING THAT THEY HAD ‘MISSED OUT’ ON THE OPPORTUNITIES A MORE ACCEPTING SOCIETY COULD HAVE PROVIDED.

“Coming out is difficult anyway, but in the mid-80s, the general public weren’t so open, and were much less informed about LGBT issues. So it feels like things are easier these days, and it feels like I personally lost out for a while and focused on ‘conforming to societal expectations’ of being my parents’ only son.”

Carwyn, 51

“Even though it was illegal at the time, I knew that I was gay and I was fairly open about my orientation.”

Eddie, 65

“In those days, coming out was a frightful thing. Coming from Wales in those days, it was dangerous.”

Rheinnallt, 50

“We’re talking 27 years ago, so society was different. I lived in a small town so there was a complete lack of role models to gain any form of self-acceptance and identification. Going away to university was critical. I started uni at 17 and felt able to tell my family after my

first term. It wasn't easy at the time, but with the benefit of hindsight I'm glad I did it."
Malcolm, 45

DESPITE NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES IN THE PAST, SOME LGBT PEOPLE EXPRESS HOPE AT HOW THE SITUATION IS CHANGING FOR THE BETTER.

"I think it's much easier for young people today to come out as lesbian, gay or bisexual."
Ifor, 45

"When I came out (about 30 years ago), coming out in Wales was very difficult. I think things are better these days."
Gwynfor, 50

"Being born in 1950 and brought up in a typical Welsh-speaking valley town, I had no true idea about my sexuality. All I knew was that I liked to look at women and men. But I held out and did not get married until I was 26, and that was because of pressure from my family and friends saying *'it's about time you did'*. On the day I got married, I felt strangely uncomfortable and clearly remember looking back over my shoulder in the full church and thinking to myself *'I don't want to do this'*... But I did just to 'conform'. I struggled in my head to work out why I liked to look at men as well as women, and because there was no internet at that time, I had no real way to sort it out. As the years went on, my feelings towards men grew stronger and stronger, and with the internet I discovered gay bars existed so visited them as the opportunity arose. A mutual divorce followed. To summarise, I now have a daughter and two grandsons, my son is gay and has lived with his partner in Cardiff for five years. My ex-brother-in-law left his wife and son many years ago and he too has come out and has happily lived with his male partner for nine years. Another confused Welsh valley person who life came good for in the end. As for myself, I have had three same sex relationships since my divorce, and I have lots of gay friends... Life came good for me in the end."
Gerald, 64

Further information

If you or someone you know would like further information or support on coming out, please contact Stonewall Cymru's Information Service on **08000 50 20 20** or cymru@stonewall.cymru

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“I take every opportunity I have to come out to do so, to break barriers, to challenge stereotypes, to develop an understanding and to be visible for those who are afraid and those who are willing to understand but don’t currently. Coming out for me is a consistent fight for visibility. Although all in all, it has in my personal world been a very positive experience.”

Efa, 29