

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

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Participant – JM

Committee Member – Fulton MacGregor

Can you tell us about your experiences of conversion practices?

JM - My 'conversion therapy' was held within my family. I am second but youngest of 5 siblings. I guess I was quite feminine when I was relatively young. I remember at an early age my father turned around and told me he didn't want daughter, he wanted a son. I was sent to a Methodist church on Sunday morning, on Sunday afternoon to a different church, and Free church on Sunday evening to try to get this freakiness out of me. I was kept indoors not allowed to choose friend until I was about 17. My younger brothers and siblings had freedom to choose friends. I was not allowed to do that. I received a lot of verbal abuse from the family. Also physical abuse, with the stick he (my dad), cut out of hedge on a regular basis. My brothers were violent towards me and, were allowed to be. I had a career planned and I wasn't allowed to follow that career and was to follow my brother in a career, that would "make a man out of me".

My life was quite controlled till my early 20's I guess. My dad told me I was sick and not allowed to chose friends. Though my siblings were. It affected my self-esteem. When my father died 18 months ago I wasn't in the will. My sisters and brothers benefitted. Even though I was trying to be realistic, I asked them to chip in to the pot and give me a share of their inheritance. In response I was told that I sickened my dad.

At school age, I was taken out of school and not allowed to sit exams. The headteacher told my dad I had good prospects. But I was taken out and 'given' to my brothers. Take from that what you will. My sexuality was always challenged from the way I spoke, my accent. Couldn't have friends, couldn't choose friends. I was brought up in a very small community where our family had lived for hundreds of years. Lots of close relatives. The negative personality that I was supposed to have was soon spread far and wide and it never changed. It never changed and there was nothing I could do about it. The Vicars and Ministers all had tea with my parents. They all knew why I was the one that had to go to the various churches. None of my other siblings went. I was told you are better off in the church so that I could be taken away from society. I grew up with a constant shame. It had such an impact on life right up until as soon as 10 years ago. Living in a small community late one Friday night. At 10.45 I heard a bang on the door. There stood a woman and 4 young men all wielding knives, by now I have two children, and they had come to do my children a favour, because I was a queer. They had come to kill my children. They had every

intention of getting into the house. I was alone with my 2 young teenage children. I called police 25 times, dialling 999. Those people did £10,000 damage to my home. The police did not come turn up until 3 in the morning. Two arrested, two went to prison. 6 weeks before they were due to come out the police visited and told me it would be a good idea if I moved. I knew these two young lads. I knew their grandmother. I met her in the supermarket, the day after it happened. I thought she might apologise. The grandmother looked me up and down and said 'what do you expect'. At that point I wrote my victim statement.

I think a lot of conversion therapy happens in families, in the home. I learned a great lesson on how to bring my own kids up. I have two brilliantly rounded kids. There is covert action, you maybe don't send them to the psychiatrist, but you can send them to the church and if one denomination doesn't do it another will. If youngsters don't have a voice, or somewhere to turn to. There is nothing at present. All about education and acceptance. If that is not available in a family unit then what support is available for them. It is a form of abuse. Because it isn't outlawed. What comes under the umbrella of conversion, doesn't have to be a clinical setting, it starts in many ways and across many religions.

FM: Thank you for sharing, that was very powerful. I agree this needs to end. The difficulty we will have is what it is we are looking to end. Even what you have said today is different to what we have heard earlier but with the same issues.

How might we go about ending CT in the home?

JM - It is like a building block. Once legislation goes through with 'conversion therapy' I see no reason why there can't be wording within that for. Give a true definition of what 'conversion therapy' is. Most people think its clinical process. For most people it is a psychological process that can be carried out by anyone, it is a form of torture. We would not allow a child to be beaten in a home. That would be a safeguarding issue. How can a society allow psychological damage, injury, torment on a minor in their own home. How can that be acceptable in the 21st Century. We wouldn't allow that damage through any other form of bullying. Why do we allow it on a gender or sexuality issue.

FM: Where might that impact on other legislation. Child protection legislation. Child hearing Act. I think it might not be acted as it's a grey area. In CT legislation. It would impact other 'conversion therapy' could be a grounds to report to the children's' reporter. More professional, young person become aware that this is wrong or a form of abuse. Hat impact is abuse.

JM - We have safeguarding for kids in the family home. This legislation could be part of a building block. You get spin offs. There is an education aspect for society. Allowing people to be where they want to be. A lot of parents want to mould their children into what they want to be. For example, parents who want their children to be doctor. Allow children to have their own sexual agenda.

I would like to see something there protecting youngsters. If a child/youngsters that I am receiving this type of abuse because of my sexuality, the parents would get a knock on the door to say its illegal. If a teacher hears a child say they are getting

beaten then they will get a knock on the door. If a child is getting abuse in a home because of their sexuality. Those people are at risk. It's not a nice thing to happen when you are already confused because of your society, you have no where to turn to, if you told a teacher there is nowhere for them to go. There is nothing there to support young person. Something to protect people who don't fit in. There is a perception in society that it's only in extreme cases. But, it is happening at home too. Any legislation must reach into the home too.

It has been hell. And at least I learned. They say you learn from the failures of your parents and I have not passed onto my kids. I ensure my kids are accepting of everyone. I have known people who have committed suicide. I lived in a very small community. I grew up knowing people who were gay. I have 5 friends who before the age of 20 who committed suicide due to their sexuality because they had no where to turn to. Along the way I see early 20s youngster who turn to drugs cocaine on a regular basis because it is their sexuality. They can't choose the lifestyle because of families. It's not right. 'Conversion therapy' can come from many areas. For example, a psychotherapist I know of who advertises that he can do 'conversion therapy'. I see parents take their children along. Nice normal people who I know will be screwed up for the majority of their life. You learn to live with it. It has damaged you. You do get coping mechanisms, but you shouldn't have to.

FM – very powerful. What you have told us going forward will help us. We want to get it right.

JM – I want to speak to protect the next generation.