

Galop and Stonewall Housing Oral History Project

Interviewee: Deborah Gold, CEO of Galop

Interviewer: Susan Hansen

Place of Interview: North London

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Key

PG: = Interviewee, Deborah Gold

MH: = Interviewer, Susan Hansen

[time e.g. 5:22] = inaudible word at this time

[5:22 1A] = inaudible section at this time

Word 5:22 = best guess at word

SH: Could you tell me your date of birth and where you were born?

DG: I was born on the 9th of December in 1975, and I was born in Epping, which is in Essex.

<Part 2 starts>

S: OK, so you were born in Epping. Can you tell me a little bit more about your childhood and growing up in that area?

DG: Yeah. Er ... although I was born in Epping that was just the local hospital. I come from Loughton, which is in Essex but it's on the Central Line, there's a tube stop there, so it's quite ... kind of a suburb of London in some ways. It's interesting mix of rural, the edge of Epping Forest, but it's just like a small town basically. And I've got two sisters. I don't know what else to say about my childhood and growing up ...

So I kind of grew up, I always felt like I was quite a Londoner, even though actually strictly speaking I'm not from London, so it kind of feels good to be back in London again.

S: So you grew in London, so I guess was there a point in your life when you lived more centrally or ...

DG: I moved away when I went to university and that was the Reading, and I did an undergraduate degree and then a postgraduate MA in Reading and worked there for a while after I graduated, and then I moved to Brighton because my partner, Lisa, who I met when I was at university, had by that point got a job lecturing in Brighton, so I moved there and I worked there for a while. And then I ended up working in London and commuting from Brighton and then Lisa was also commuting from Brighton and we did that for a while and then we realised that it was madness and we were exhausted all the time <laughs> and it was destroying our lives and so we moved back into London.

That was quite strange actually because I ended up having lived quite far from my family for quite a while, living back again in a similar area, although I'm kind of in London more rather than Loughton, really quite close to where they were and by coincidence at the time that I came back, I'm the middle

sister and both my older and my younger sister were also back within visiting distance – but it's actually been very nice to ... and lots of friends who were around when I was at college are still living in the area and it's quite strange still having that group around, but I like it. It makes it feel more like I have some kind of community around me, which is nice.

S: Sounds like a homecoming.

DG: Yeah, definitely. And it felt like a positive thing, and I love London, so ... I mean I think it's an amazing city, so I can't imagine living anywhere else in a way.

S: So how does the Reading environment compare?

DG: I actually love both of them in different ways. Reading as a city... not the most inspiring place in the world. But I had a fantastic time there. Sorry (for the tape, I'm taking my shoes off!)

<Laughter>

Becoming distracted.

Yeah. I had a fantastic time there, I really, really enjoyed it. It was my ... it was university, so I made fantastic friends, I have very fond memories towards it. It's interesting, 'cause other friends that went to university there I think don't feel ... and stayed on longer than I did afterwards, feel more negatively about the place 'cause it's not much going on there, but I left at the right time. And I loved Brighton as well, and in some ways it had everything, it had the city-ness but the fact that you could walk places and everybody that lives in London has that frustration that you have loads of friends that live in London but it might take you an hour-and-a-half to get to see them, so yeah ... so I've loved everywhere I've lived in different ways, but I've really liked being back in London, definitely.

S: So when was it that you moved back down ... or up?

DG: Don't worry, I always do the south/north thing. When was it? Well the job that I had was actually ...because although I'm Chief Exec at Galop I don't know if you know that I did work at Stonewall Housing before I worked at Galop. <Laughs> And ... I had before I ... I'm trying to work backwards ... I've been at Galop for about two-and-a-half years, maybe nearly three years ... I was **4:07 1A** ... it must have been around ... let's think ... I've been here for five years, I lived there for one year ... about six or seven years ago. Sorry, I lose track of time but about six or seven years ago.

S: And what were you doing at Stonewall?

DG: When I first started there I started part-time because I was also working at Shelter, a lot of my working history has actually been, before being at Galop, around housing. And I ... went there as a housing advice worker in the housing advice team, part-time housing advice worker, and I have to say at that point I felt almost like my life had reached the pinnacle of where it could go, 'cause I'm really passionate, and housing and housing equality and stuff has always been something I'm really interested in, and at that point I had a job at Shelter and I had a job at Stonewall Housing and I was just like, from

the big housing campaigning side, Shelter was the place to be, and from the point of being interested in queer politics that I had been for a long time, Stonewall Housing was the place to be, so it was amazing to be working at both of those places. And I did the housing advice role for a couple of years and then, by utter coincidence, a job came up and I didn't even know it was happening, but it was a job that was a secondment that was full-time at Shelter, but it was a joint project with Stonewall Housing, and it just turned out that Jackie who had been the Chief Exec at Stonewall Housing at the time that I was there, had been negotiating this joint project, and it was about trying to put LGBT housing issues on the housing agenda, and I applied for that job and got it, so I did that for a year and a bit I think, and then about that time the Advice Services Manager left Stonewall Housing and I applied for that job and got it, so I became the Advice Services Manager at Stonewall Housing and I did that for a couple of years, and then ... Jackie left and there was a bit of a change around an Tor left at Galop around the same time, and the job at Galop came up and I applied for that and I got that, so I've actually, I have to say, was very lucky and was very supported by Jackie and by Stonewall Housing in my career progression, and it's very much the chances that I got there that gave me the opportunity to have the work that I have now in Galop. And I was on the Management Committee at Stonewall Housing for quite a while after I left. I've only just stopped being on that management committee a few months ago, so I'm no longer formally involved in the organisation but really I was for about six or seven years.

<Part 3>

S: So we've been talking about your transition from Stonewall to Galop. I guess this next topic is about the beginnings of your involvement with Galop and the time you became CEO and what the issues were and coming in and ...

DG: Do you mean issues externally or within the organisation?

S: It can be both. We can start with whichever you want.

DG: OK, I'll do both!

<Laughter>

Well I've worked with Galop for a number of years because Galop and Stonewall Housing worked so closely together, and when I was at Stonewall Housing as a caseworker my portfolio was actually hate crime casework, so I did a lot of joint work then with initially Richard, or Richie, who was at the time the main caseworker at Galop, and then after he left, Phil, who was the replacement casework manager at Galop; and Richie and I actually did a drop-in session together for a period of time which was at CLASH, which is the ... what does it stand for? Central London ... I don't know what it stands for but it's a sexual health outreach service in Westminster, and that was my drop-in that I did at Stonewall Housing for a long time on Wednesday evenings and for a period of time Richie went along to do a Galop thing, so I worked with him then, and I was responsible for ... not managing, but on a day-to-day, operationally running that joint relationship and we had lots of joint clients and things, so I was very familiar with those issues. And Tor was very involved in Stonewall Housing because she ... obviously she was Jackie's partner – she was just down the corridor but also she was on the Management Committee and close organisation ... so I was very familiar with

the kind of work that they did and the issues before I worked there, which really, really helped. And when I started, Tor was incredibly supportive and helpful, so it was a really nice transition into the organisation. It was a really lovely organisation to go into. It's quite different from Stonewall Housing actually, because it's quite a bit smaller, just physically the office is much smaller so it's all open plan, which is a very different way of working. I'd had, for the first time in my life, a period of about two years as a manager at Stonewall Housing where I had my own office, and then I'd gone back into being Chief Exec but sitting in the corner ... a very different way of working.

And I think that the team were ... I was going to say freaked out, that's not true, but the team were wary and aware ... they were very welcoming, but it's ... you know, that period of change when the only manager changes to somebody else, not really knowing what that would be like, and because I think Stonewall Housing just in its nature, because it's a larger organisation with a much more complex funding structure for example, is a bit ... at that time was a bit more of a formal organisation I think than Galop was, and I think people were a bit concerned about how formal I might be in my role. Whether I would try to bring in the structures that they saw happening at Stonewall Housing at Galop, and so there was a period of time of adjusting.

But as far as the issues, it was mayhem from as soon as I started basically. I think that we've always been ... I think we're a really effective organisation and certainly from knowing them before I was involved I was very respectful of what they were able to achieve from being such a small organisation, but funding is always a massive struggle, having enough staff is a massive struggle. I came in at a time when Phil had been heroically trying to keep things running but Tor had been on maternity leave for, I don't know, nine months or a year, and during that time they hadn't been able to afford to properly replace her while she was on maternity leave, so what had happened is that Phil, who was the Advice Services Manager, had been acting up, half acting up, so he was basically doing both roles. So there really hadn't been a proper Chief Exec there for about a year, and a lot of changes ... I think what had happened to the organisation is it had been through quite a lot of change, quite quickly, and grown quite quickly and my impression was that the systems weren't in place to support the growth that the organisation had gone through, so very basic things like the way in which it was able to record how it used its money didn't match the way it got ... so it didn't record separate funding streams, which made reporting back to funders incredibly difficult, because you literally would have to go back through invoices and things to work out what you'd spent your money on, rather than what you would expect. So there was a lot of initial work at that kind of thing. A lot of real worry ... I'm talking about internal things first of all I guess, as I started with that ...

It was a difficult time from a funding point of view because one of our major funders, who's really supported us for a long time actually, which is London Councils, which was previously the Association of London Government and even before that had a different name again, and I think that they funded Galop in one way or another for a long time, and they were going through a process of reviewing their own funding and changing from an application process where you would just come up with a project and say, 'Hey, here's an application. Will you fund my project?' to a commissioning process where they very much said, 'This is a service which we would like to be delivered,' and then people can apply for money to deliver this service. And that was a real time of uncertainty, because there was a risk that if we lost that money from

London Councils it could have been very tricky for us. And really not knowing ... And it was a time of change I think in the LGBT sector as well, because there are quite a few of these smaller charities that are really struggling to keep going and we'd all worked quite separately in the past, and I think there's been lost of other people ... I don't want to say that Galop and Stonewall Housing take credit for it, but certainly Bob and I benefited from the fact that we'd worked very closely together, both being senior managers together at Stonewall Housing, so that when I went to Galop we already had a very good working relationship and the two organisations had already worked closely together, and we knew from the start that this funding process was going on which represented an enormous risk, but also an enormous opportunity, and we were very keen to find a way to work with other LGBT organisations because we didn't want to get involved in what we'd seen happening in the past, which was that we were all in competition with each other for the same money; because ultimately I want Galop to survive but if PACE shuts that would be terrible. All of those organisations are important in the work that we're doing, so we were involved in trying to organise some meetings, initial meetings, with lots of different organisations to say, 'Let's all just be very open about who's applying for what, encouraging people to lay off where there was a project that really clearly fitted within the criteria of one organisation. Some of us might agree that we wouldn't go after that money, but then where there was money that was new money we would look at putting partnership bids in and things, and that actually eventually worked out really well and Galop actually did very well out of that process, and we've got more money, a lot more money, now than we were getting from London Councils originally, so that was really great.

So there was a lot of work about just keeping our head above water when I first got involved.

And externally ... I don't think there was anything significantly big happening at the time that I got involved, except that it was about trying to keep the issue on the agenda, which it always is for us. So the press are very interested when there's a high-profile murder or something, but obviously we see the day-to-day things and some of the things which maybe don't seem so exciting and dramatic, but actually in the way that they affect people in their ability to live their day-to-day lives, that small scale stuff, verbal abuse, that doesn't sound so bad, but when the person lives next-door to you and it's happening every day, it's massively debilitating and so we're seeing those kind of things all of the time, and those are the kind of things that's immediately hit upon I think, the real day-to-day nature of it.

And then there was some work with really re-establishing relationships with the police and things, and to establish that relationship in the right way so that we are a critical friend, if you want to have that kind of good working relationship with police officers but you also need to be able to challenge them and be seen as a kind of challenging organisation, and not an organisation that's in the pocket of the police; so to work closely with them whilst maintaining that independence and externally people to see that you're independent so that you're trusted. And so that's always a difficult balancing act as well.

S: So my next topic is related to the impact of Galop at a number of levels, so the first level I guess we could discuss is the impact of working at Galop on your personal life; the second is a little broader – looking at Galop's impact on

the LGBT community more broadly; and the third category is a little more vague – this is the impact of your work with Galop on others – these can be significant others or ...

DG: Any others!

S: Maybe agencies, whatever you want to do it to.

DG: OK. I mean on me personally ... on a basic level I feel really proud to work there and it's something that I feel passionately about and it's really amazing to have the opportunity to work in an organisation and also to be at a point personally where I can have the level of influence within an organisation that I have, and that's something that's really positive. I skirted over earlier stuff earlier, but I was really involved in politics a lot when I was a student and I was very involved in LGBT politics, student politics and ... I dunno, I was Women's Officer and Equal Opportunities Officer and LGBT Officer and <laughs> all kinds of things like this at university. And then I think that it's almost that balancing act in wanting to be an activist but also wanting to be effective, and over the years not wanting to ever sell out those kind of ideals that I had, but also finding a way to actually put them into practice, and I think that's how I initially got into housing, and that way of really making an impact on individual people's lives and it being something that I really saw as a kind of equalities issue, and this is very much the same thing. So it's had a massively positive impact on me in that way, although just on a day-to-day level it is incredibly stressful, and it is the hardest thing that I've ever done. The organisation is tiny and everybody there is incredibly committed and it does have a really nice family atmosphere, but ... but it can be very draining and there are lots of late evenings and long weekends and it's very hard to switch off from it. But yeah, I think it's something that's been really, really positive for me and I feel it's good to feel proud of what you're doing and like you're achieving something.

And what was the next level? The next level was the community, so the impact that Galop has on the community. I hope it has a very positive impact. I think that we're still a very relevant organisation and as you see things getting better from the point of view of legislation has improved, our rights just in law compared to even mid to early '90s when I was coming out and initially active, are off the scale; and yet, hate crime still exists and we often get asked by journalists and things whether or not hate crime is increasing, and we don't have the evidence to show that it is increasing, but I think it's almost more of a story is it might not be increasing but what we can say it also isn't going away, and you would think it would be going away, given the improvements that are existing with the other things, and yet it's pretty consistent and the effect that it has on people's lives is pretty consistent. And I think that Galop has been a really effective small organisation and we've always been based in London and that's allowed us to really focus our attention and I think have more of an impact. So in the time that I've worked at Galop we published a research report called *Filling in the Blanks* which is one of the things that I've been really proud of, and I was lucky that by coincidence I was actually <Laughs> Sorry ... I'm put off by the fact that it's ...

S: Shall we pause it?

DG: Yeah. <Pause>

I was talking about *Filling in the Blanks*. So I was very lucky because I was actually on the steering committee of *Filling in the Blanks* when I worked at Stonewall Housing as the Advice Services Manager, because Stonewall Housing was a partner in that project. So when I took on the project at Galop, I was pretty well inducted into it and Peter, who was the researcher on that project, was fantastic and I think that when you're in a project it's quite hard to see the wood for the trees, but when we finished it and were able to take a step back and think about the recommendations and things, there were some really clear messages and we felt like we had some new things to say, which was really nice, and that it wasn't just another project that said the same stuff: 'Hate crime's bad. People don't report it. People don't trust the police.' These things are all true and they're important, but we know them and we wanted to go a bit beyond that. And that's been really fantastic. We've already been able to have an impact on the way that the police are looking at how they're dealing with those issues, so that's been ... you can see that you do a bit of research, you put it out there, it does have an impact and obviously on a day-to-day basis we have an impact on the individuals that we work with, and that can be fantastic, and I think that's one of Galop's strengths, that although we do the policy work and all the development work and things, we still also do that one-to-one work with clients, and that gives us our ability to speak with authority I think on the subject, and that gives us our strength as an organisation, which is really, really nice. And in a way it's our weakness but also our strength that we're so small, I think.

So yeah, I think that from that point of view we've had a really positive impact, and I think over the years you can look at what we've done as an organisation and it's amazing to come into an organisation that's done some of the things that we've done, and that's why this project has been so brilliant for us for really thinking about that and connecting the people who are here now with some of the people who've fought this same fight over the years to get us to where we are, even though some of the things have changed ... I don't know, the police aren't using agent provocateurs anymore and the policy around cottaging and cruising and things is different, and yet still you get people that phone us ... and now it's about, 'Somebody's come down to a cruising ground and they're threatening people and they're frightened to go to the police. But we're still there and a trusted place that you can come to and talk about those things without anybody raising their eyes or feeling uncomfortable and that's really important I think. So I think that over the years it's had an enormous impact in affecting people's views and enabling people to get help when they've needed it, and that's still a role that we're playing now.

And then there was a third tier, wasn't there? Others ... OK.

I mean I think that it is difficult sometimes to separate a job like this from your personal life, because it is something that you believe in so much and it becomes such an all-encompassing thing for you, but it does affect my partner and my friends and my family, and I think that that's been really nice, because you see that you're doing something that other people believe in, and lots of my friends have done things like volunteered at events that we've had and Lisa, my partner, actually used to be on the Management Committee of Galop until she stood down when I got the job <chuckles>, so she still really believes strongly in that and she was involved in the *Filling in the Blanks* project and my family have donated money at various times, so that's been a really positive thing.

And then ... others apart from the LGBT community ... I just think in general it has an effect from a policy level on what goes on, and that as I said before, for a small organisation we've been able to have a really big influence and we're on we have access to some people that make decisions, and that's something that's been very helpful, so you can certainly see the influence that the organisation has had over the years because of that.

<Part 4 starts>

S: The next topic is about changes that you've witnessed in the LGBT community, both generally in terms of policing and in terms of Galop's work, I guess over the course of your CEO-ship and perhaps before.

DG: In my own life and things?

S: Yes

DG: OK. <Pause> I think that I've only been at Galop for about two-and-a-half years so in a way where I've witnessed changes it's easier to see those changes over a longer length of time, which isn't to say that Galop didn't affect them. But certainly the way that the police are, even to the extent that I remember the first Prides that I used to go to, and that would have been ... I'm trying to think when the first Pride was that I went to ... 1993 or 94 maybe, something like that, and I remember the police being there, policing those marches, and I remember that atmosphere between the crowd and the police and it certainly felt much more like a protest at that time, and the police didn't feel like a friendly force, it didn't feel like they were there to protect us. It felt like they were there to protect the other people from us. And there was certainly some antagonism sometimes, in addition to which at that time you would quite often have some quite vocal protestors at Prides and that could be threatening and you didn't necessarily feel entirely confident that the police were there to protect you from those people. And if I compare that now, more fifteen years later, and I'm quite involved in the policing of Pride because as well as being at Galop I'm co-chair of the LGBT Advisory Group, independent advisory group to the Met Police, and now they have a special person who's responsible on the day for community policing at Pride and who has my mobile and the mobile of the other people and will call us if there's an issue, and they have special Gold Groups and we all get the phone numbers of them, and they have police that march in the thingy and that have stalls, and it's very much in the discussions about policing Pride all of the language is about enabling Pride to happen and making people feel safe and the whole atmosphere that you see from the police is very different, so that's a long way for them to have travelled in that period of time, definitely. Although I do think that because lots of the people who are the policy people, the people making decisions – I do think they genuinely do want to end hate crime and they genuinely do want to engage with the LGBT community, however they have to understand that on the ground people's experiences of the police doesn't necessarily match their intentions, and I think sometimes I feel they're frustration at hearing us say the same thing again and again and again, and our frustration is you're *saying* it's supposed to be this way, but actually it's that way for a lot of people, and until it's this way for everybody then things aren't going to improve, people aren't going to report. So long way travelled, long way to go I guess is the message. But I've certainly seen in that small-scale way a change in the way that I feel people interact with the police, and thinking about Galop's work for example, another good example is you read

back on some of the stuff that they were doing in the 90s when police were specifically targeting people who were cruising to arrest them. And obviously it's helped by the fact that the law has changed now, which has helped, but again the police just recently published a really good piece of guidance about the policing of PSEs where they consulted with lots of people including Galop, where it was a long process, and it was all about how people who use PSEs are likely to be vulnerable, an actually the focus of the policing should be about protecting those people, rather than arresting those people. And that again is a really significant difference in about fifteen years from how that's happened. And I do think that, again I was thinking that I haven't been involved in these things but I guess ... I mean I was actually in London around the time that that Admiral Duncan bombing happened, and I don't know if I've invented this in my head but I think it happened around May 1st, or Mayday in the year that it happened, because my memory is that I was in London for the traditional TUC May 1st workers rights march, and that happened to be going on the day after this bombing had happened and it was incredibly shocking and I remember going down onto Old Compton Street with my friends who'd come out with me for the march, and people had put signs up along Old Compton Street that said, 'You can't kill us all.' And there were lots of people that were gathered together and having silent fists in the air protests and I remember that being really, really moving, but again the feeling being a bit like ... not that you were blaming the police for it, but certainly some antagonism and some feeling about not having been protected by the police, and the police not taking these kind of things seriously, so I think again ... and I know that was a turning point for the police, in that from that I think that was a bit of a wake-up call for them, and I know that at that time they realised that they needed to engage with the community and they had no way of doing it and no people they could talk to, and it was from that that Galop was involved in helping to set up the independent advisory group that we're still involved in, and that's gone a long way to improving relationships with the police. So there's been a real sea-change in the way that they respond, but then I don't know how much of that really has reached everybody, because obviously I'm involved in it so it becomes hard to separate yourself out from that and see how it is for the average person that actually has to report something for the police.

<Part 5 starts>

S: We've probably covered a bit these questions, I guess around your involvement with Stonewall Housing rather than just with Galop, and the rationale for LGBT housing provision.

DG: That's OK, I can talk about that for hours!

S: We just want the predominant issues for LGBT housing ...

DG: <Laughs>

S: And the changes you've observed.

DG: OK, fine. Well I mentioned earlier that actually I had a job for a year which was specifically about really trying to make people understand that rational, and I also wrote a policy thing that Stonewall Housing still use on that subject, so this is my subject! We absolutely saw, at Stonewall Housing, we see it at Galop as well, day in and day out, some of the horrendous experiences that

especially young LGBT people have around their housing, around their families throwing them out, around ... I mean I think that it affects ... I'm trying to stop myself from going into my conference lecture mode ... but it can affect them on a whole range of levels because firstly, they're homeless, and that's shit <chuckles>, whatever your sexuality or your agenda identity! But then you have to take that and add onto it all of the complications they have because maybe they're just coming out and that's a really difficult process, and if that isn't something that's really positive for somebody then I think that that can lead to all kinds of problems for them, they may not have the support of their family or a stage further their family may be the cause of their homelessness, and that can be sudden, which is difficult as well. I mean all kind of things happen to young people with their families, but I don't want to ever generalise but I think that often when a young person is thrown out by their family, there's been some kind of pretty long-running bad relationship leading up to that, but for some LGBT young people they may have felt like they had quite a good relationship with their family that can suddenly go really bad. And I think the shock of that can be really difficult for them, and maybe they've had a really crap time at school experiencing homophobia and transphobia and then they try to get help from the council, which is almost impossible, and getting a sympathetic hearing is almost impossible when you're treated like you're nothing ... and finding your way through that bureaucracy is almost impossible. And then if you end up in a homelessness hostel it's almost like being at school again, with big groups of young people who are also still homophobic and transphobic and staff who assume everybody is heterosexual and don't ask you and don't see that as a support need. So it can be a massive problem for young people.

But it can affect people all through their experiences in how they interact with housing. If it's your neighbours who are homophobic or transphobic then obviously that has a massive impact on you. I remember I had one client in Stonewall Housing that ... well I've got lots of clients that stuck with me for various reasons but ... this guy lived in a housing estate and he had an upstairs neighbour who was really, really threatening and homophobic to him and it was verbal mostly, but it's a really good example of how things can really escalate because he lived in... she was upstairs and they had I think like a square council housing estate with a courtyard in the middle, and they had balconies so you looked down through your balconies and she was standing on her balcony shouting stuff at him on his balcony and what happened is all of the neighbours could hear and then a group of people started ... because you know, there's an incident going on, standing in the courtyard watching it, so by the end of it everybody knew, and then it went from this one woman to he would walk past gangs of young people, groups of young people, and they'd make gun shapes at his face and there would be graffiti and it becomes this huge thing.

So yeah, and then there's older people and the experiences that they can have, and the incredibly isolating experiences that they can have if they're living in old people's homes ... (Old people's homes, that's a terrible phrase!) Accommodation for older people, sheltered accommodation, or care homes and things. And again we have had clients at Stonewall Housing who would contact us with the most incredible harassment from people that were living in the sheltered accommodation with them. And then I think one of the things that I found when I was doing training work with the housing associations and councils and things is that people just don't feel confident talking about it. They don't have the language or the skills to open up those conversations, so

it just gets ignored, and not picked up, and people don't get the kind of help and support that they need. So I think it can massively ... and housing is such a central thing to somebody's life and their sense of wellbeing and their ability to achieve anything else in their life. And when that isn't working nothing else in your life works either, so ... yeah, I think it massively impacts on it.

S: The second component of it is changes you've observed.

DG: OK. I do think that in the last few years people are talking about it and people are realising that it's an issue, and that I think is the same for hate crime and Galop, and I think that's partly an external thing which is to do with the fact that the language about equalities has started to change in the last few years, with the EHRC, the equality and human rights commission, and the fact that it has a kind of legal duty to protect ... that there is, sexual orientation and gender identity are actual protected strands within the law, and that's something that's new, and even that change has started to change the landscape I think, and the new equalities act that will hopefully be coming in now will take that further, and some of the other changes that there have been have meant that certainly in my working life I've witnessed the change and the fact that maybe doors are open now that weren't open before. I still don't think ... people have the skills or the language. The gaps are there but I think people are beginning to become aware that they're not doing it right, at the very least, and are more open to how they could do it right. That, I think, is the change that's happened in the time that I've been working in the field.

<Part 6 starts>

S: OK. So thinking about your university years again, I'm going to ask you a little bit more about that time, so what you were studying and your involvement in student politics and how that came to I guess inform the CEO work today.

DG: OK. I got involved in student politics actually at further education college, so I've always been ... I like reading, I'm interested in politics, I like arguing all those kind of things, and I didn't have a fantastic time at school, I was very pleased to leave when I left, and I think that my further education ... well, I went to kind of an FE tertiary college kind of thing where I did A levels and that was a really formative time for me, because it wasn't attached to my school, so it was a real new start, and really positive experience that I loved, and I <laughs> I was involved around the time that I was leaving school with a couple of mad friends who ran this thing called the South Loughton Animal Rights, which was basically a stall on Loughton High Road giving out anti-vivisection leaflets and things. But anyway I used to go along sometimes and sit behind their stall and things, and a guy came along who I'm still friends with and said that he went to the local college and he wondered if they knew anybody who would want to run as environment officer in the student union in the local college and they said, 'Ah, Debbie will do that!' And somehow I became involved in that, and it was only an FE college so it wasn't like a student union in a university, but I became very involved in that and I at that time campaigned with this guy and some other people that were involved in the student union to have what is called a sabbatical officer, which is where the university funds a stipend for somebody to take a year off between university ... and not be studying and basically being full time the president of the student union, and we managed to convince them to do that, and so I was the first ever sabbatical president at the college that I went to. So I had a year of full-time student politics, and it was while I was also at college, and it was

really through my involvement in student politics that was when I came out, so I was very lucky that I had a really positive coming out experience. I think I only really realised it quite late on when I was about seventeen, and I'd already started to go to NUS conferences (National Union of Students), they have like a big annual shindig conference thing, which I ended up going to seven years running, unbelievably! <Laughs> I really was a student hack. And I think maybe even the first one that I went to I realised or had been thinking that I might be gay, and they have side things and they had like an LGBT party thing, and I went along to that and said to somebody there, 'I think I might be gay ...' And I was really lucky 'cause they were all so lovely and there were all these slightly older than me university people that were involved in their LGBT societies and I was seventeen and I think looking back a few of them were a bit protective of me, and that was really, really nice, and some of them were involved in student unions that were quite local to my student union, in universities, so University of East London, University of Essex, and some of the people there were really fantastic, and over those couple of years I did a lot of student politics with them and felt really supported by them. And in fact one of them, by total coincidence, is now ... I was out of touch with him for years and years but is a Management Committee member of Stonewall Housing (I'm not going to say who it is, but just a weird lives colliding kind of thing). So when I went to university, because I'd been very involved in student union politics, I was really, really lucky because the people that were involved in NUS and things found the person that ran the NUS group at university and introduced me to him at some student event or other that was going on before ... So by the time I started on my first day at university, I already knew the person that ran the LGB group and actually was helping run the stall at Freshers Fair, which was my first day at university, for the LGB group, which it was then ... 'cause at the time trans weren't included in those kind of things. I think that's been one of the improvements that's happened in the community over the last few years. So that was really great and ... somehow I think he was quite burned out and I ended up, with another friend that I met at university, taking over that and by the end of the first term of my first year at university I was running the LGB group.

I became very heavily involved, and I think I had that level of confidence because I had had that history of student union involvement actually for three years since I was sixteen and I'd had a year out before I went to university, doing that full time, so ... and bizarrely my student union was the only one in the country that was actually very right-wing and the president, there were like three presidents before I'd been involved had been involved in the ... were members of the Conservative party, which was very unusual in student politics, so there was a bit of a left-wing revolution after I got involved, and I just had a really great time. I had a real romp through university and I had a lot of really, really good friends that I'm still really, really good friends with, and I was involved in the women's group and the LGB group and I went, I think for seven years I went to the NUS Women's Conference, the LGBT Conference and the National NUS Conference as well as local East Anglia things and ... that was a very supportive place for my politics to grow, but it did mean that I did all those mad left-wing things that you do when you're involved in student politics ... which I'm not ... I think have absolutely formed a part of who I am and the kind of work that I wanted to do. I studied Philosophy – you asked me what I studied, so I did a Philosophy degree and then I did an MA in ... it was called political theory and public ethics but it was basically political philosophy. So I've been really lucky. I was also involved, when I was at

Reading, during my MA, I was involved in the Women's Centre in Reading and so I volunteered at the Women's Centre and I was the chair of the Management Committee there for quite a long time, so that was another fantastic opportunity, and then the housing thing just happened as almost a coincidence. I was temping over one summer holidays and it just happened to be in a Housing Association. It was just a random temping job that happened to be in a housing association, and because it was a rubbish housing association even though I knew nothing about the subject they had me doing allocations with no training, and it was a sheltered accommodation so you would get these phone-calls from people and I was choosing who would go where, which is terrifying, but anyway it was a baptism of fire and I did this for maybe only the summer holidays, I think, and then I stopped temping and went back to university and then I just got this random phone-call from the temping agency and they had this part-time seven hours a week administration job in this organisation in Reading that worked with single homeless people who were looking for somebody that had done housing work before, and so they'd gone back through their books, I wasn't even an active temp anymore but they rang me 'cause they needed somebody that had some housing experience and I thought oh well, I'm a part-time student, a seven hour a week admin job, that would be quite nice ... So I went for the interview and I was an administrator there for a while, and I loved it there and eventually they gave me a job as a trainee housing advice worker, and I got all my legal training; they sent me on loads of training there. So I was doing homelessness applications and it was quite ahead of its time, because it was doing what's now called floating support, at a time that nobody really did that kind of stuff, which is around having casework ... they had some houses that they allocated to, but they also had a huge ... I had a caseload of about thirty people who lived in their own homes and I would visit them and do tenancy sustainment work with them basically, and had a whole range of people with different addictions and mental health problems and older people, and so I really learnt a lot in that job, and then I left that job because I moved to Brighton and I was commuting for a while from Brighton to Reading, which was insane <Laughs> and took about three hours each way, and eventually that couldn't go on for much longer and it was costing me so much that I ended up going for a job in Brighton that was only fifteen hours a week and yet still I was earning more money than I was by commuting to Reading, and that was a job as a youth support worker in a LGBT support group. So again that linked straight back into the kind of work that I'd been doing at university, and then after that I've done various housing things ... So I think that there's definitely been throughout my work career it links straight back from university, and it was definitely a very formative time for me. And I think I've certainly looked for work that I felt has been connected to those things that I was doing when I was at university, definitely.

S: Influencing.

DG: Yeah, absolutely. And I think that's always been really important to me, and to work for campaigning type organisations and ...

S: [9:34 IA]

<Laughter>

OK, so this job you had in Brighton, did that last terribly long?

DG: Yeah, I was there for quite a while, and again that was an amazing project. I've worked since at Galop and Stonewall Housing, I've visited lots of youth groups and things, and some of them are great and some of them are not so great, but I've never come across anything like this organisation in Brighton. At its height thirty, forty kids in one night. It was mayhem <laughs> and we took them on trips away, we would take them camping and doing all these kind of ... I would cook for them. We had a ... it was like a youth centre place and we ... it was really nice, there were computers and we did one-to-ones and we had organised activities, so we would have workshops that we would write and myself and a colleague went into schools and colleges and did anti homophobia workshops and things, and while I was there I wrote a toolkit for teachers with lesson plans for different ages, so that was really interesting, on homophobia and transphobia. And on a Tuesday evening I would be thinking, 'Right, I've got a tiny budget and I have to make enough food for forty people. What will I buy?' And that was really nice and we got them involved in helping with the cooking, and it was a really good project, and I think again it gave me a lot of skills in a whole range of different things.

I'm trying to think where I went to ... eventually I worked for a Citizens Advice Bureau as a training officer and I think again that ... Citizens Advice Bureaus are amazing organisations, you don't know the half of the stuff that they do, but I was really lucky because I already had that legal housing training and as the training officer I ended up having a really wider legal knowledge in all the different areas that CABs give advice in, so that has also helped, and I think certainly I wouldn't feel so confident now but at the time I was very able to give benefits advice and family law and all the different areas, and that's helped me I think in my work to have a wider feeling ...

I went from the CAB to Shelter, where I was an information officer and I was writing their legal advice stuff, and that was amazing and I loved it there. And then I went from there and then I was at Stonewall Housing and I did the various different things there. So it's definitely been a career progression from one thing to the next.

S: Yeah. And you've been able to keep using all of the little things ...

DG: Yeah, definitely. I think everything that I've done has fed into the next thing, which has been really, really nice. I think there's never really been a time that I haven't ... because I had a lot of part-time jobs so I was doing two things at once, so there hasn't been a time that I haven't been doing some kind of LGBT thing in one part of my work, so that's been really nice as well I think.

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