BY THE QUEER COMMUNITY,
FOR THE QUEER COMMUNITY



# Embrace:
## LIVING YOUR BEST Queer LIFE

A magazine to uplift, affirm, support and offer wellbeing advice to the queer community.

AUGUST 2026 - ISSUE 7



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# A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR....

What a year it's been so far, I personally can't believe it's August, in some ways it feels like the year has flown, in others it's been the longest year of my life... but I'm just back from holiday so feeling a little relaxed, and ready for anything... (maybe)

As ever, we have some wonderful articles to share with you this month, from some incredible humans, I can't wait for you to read them.

Please do connect with me and let me know what you think, I'd absolutely love to hear from you, or if you'd like to write an article yourself, get in touch,

Love Lianne (She/They)

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*let's get started*



BY EMMA OLDERSHAW

# The Child Holds The Key: How Unlocking the Pain of the Past Can Empower us in the Present

**I don't think I will ever grow tired of seeing the progress my clients make when they embrace inner child healing work. For me, this is one of the most powerful forms of therapy, one where I often see huge release take place after a single session.**

Inner child healing is not just for those of us who had what would clearly be defined as traumatic childhoods. You don't have to have been beaten, locked in your room, or kicked around the school playground. This is a myth. Our nervous systems can be shot to pieces by repeated exposure to seemingly minor or trivial events, and of course if you grew up surrounded by trauma you would think it was normal anyway, so you may not realise you had suffered any.

We know that during childhood, we are seeking to make sense of the world around us, and we look to our peers and adults to help us. It doesn't take much for us to feel confused or anxious when a parent, teacher or guardian behaves in a way we instinctively know is wrong but may not be able to articulate why.

This can lead to problems such as panic attacks, anxiety, stress, depression, self-harm, low self-esteem, people pleasing, dysfunctional relationships and trauma bonding/co-dependency, addictive behaviours and compulsions such as drug or alcohol misuse, disordered eating, compulsive spending or gambling, addiction to porn, risk-taking and much more. The list really is endless.

Growing up gay in the 80s, my childhood was never going to be easy, even without my dysfunctional family. I read something recently that really hit hard. It said that the LGBT+ community often work very hard because they feel they have to prove their value in a way that straight people don't. I had to sit with this for a while because I knew immediately that it explained my perfectionism, self-criticism when I feel I haven't done enough or done it right, and the huge amount of responsibilities I take on (working in several jobs and home educating my daughter, yet still agreeing to take on more projects).

Inner child healing for me was not just about closing off trauma related to my parents or my school bullies, it was also a journey of setting down shame, guilt and all those other emotions that come up when we are made to feel that being different is somehow "dirty" or wrong. I'm still not fully there, but since I began my own inner child therapy there have definitely been some pretty big shifts.

You might be wondering what inner child healing involves, and the answer is it depends on the therapist and the way they work. For me, I like to use a combination of methods, including:-

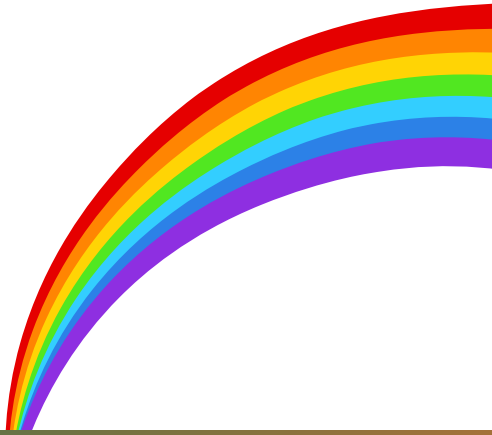
·Timeline regression in hypnosis to revisit points of pain or conflict from the past and close off the associated trauma.

·Transactional Analysis therapy which looks at the ego states of Parent, Adult and Child that we all experience – I use this to help clients reparent their inner child and to break free from the critical parent voice they carry in their mind.

·Internal Family Systems (IFS) or "Parts Therapy" – where we identify and work with the client's protector parts to enable us to access the exiled (painful) parts and begin a healing process.

As a gay woman in 2026, I see the need for this type of therapy increasing as the hostility towards our community is sadly ramped up once more.

We can't change who we are, or who we love, but by looking after our mental wellbeing we can change the way we react to the anti-gay, anti-trans rhetoric being spewed out by the media, and we can limit the ways in which it affects us. That's got to be worth celebrating.






## Emma Oldershaw (She/Her)

I'm Emma, a therapist specialising in inner child work and Gender, Sex and Relationship Diversity. I use hypnotherapy to deal with childhood trauma and I have also written several books about how to set yourself free from limiting beliefs that may stem from your childhood.

Website and social media links
Website: www.openskieshypnotherapy.co.uk
Facebook: @OpenSkiesHypnotherapy
Instagram: Oldershaw.emma
YouTube Channel: @OpenSkiesHypnotherapy



BY SLADE RIVERFIELD

# Making Space for You: Wellbeing on the Journey to Parenthood

**When you're preparing for a baby, most of your thinking goes to the baby; where they'll sleep, how they'll be fed, what we'll need to buy, who'll be in the room for the birth, how we'll get through those first few weeks running on no sleep.**

But there's another question that can be just as important: Where is the space for you?

For queer people that question carries a little more weight.

Becoming a parent can mean wading through antiquated systems that were never built with your family in mind. Explaining your relationships, your body, your gender, how your family came to exist to all and sundry. Sometimes you're mid-conversation deciding whether correcting someone is even worth what it'll cost you right now. Your own wellbeing quietly slides down the list, and building a family starts to feel like something you're not really part of.

Advocate for yourself where you can. But you're not obligated to correct every person, every form, every system. Some days you just don't have it in you, and that's OK. Not every interaction has to become a teaching moment. Your identity is yours; you decide what gets shared, with whom, and when.

One of the most useful things you can carry into pregnancy and parenthood is permission to have boundaries. And that permission matters even more once other intersections are in the mix; ethnicity, immigration status, disability etc, because the weight compounds.

Finding LGBTQIA+ inclusive services and professionals makes a real difference, when it's possible. It isn't always. On the days it isn't, it still helps to hold onto the fact that you're entitled to respectful treatment.

People talk about needing a "village" to raise a child. For queer families that village can matter even more than usual. Other LGBTQIA+ parents, queer friends without kids, chosen family, community groups, online spaces, or professionals who actually understand what your family's experience looks like.

Sometimes the relief isn't in what someone says. It's in not having to explain. Not having to justify why a comment stung, or why a particular moment felt affirming, or translate your own family into terms someone else finds easier. Your support network doesn't have to look like you to be the right one..

And we don't have to wait until we're completely depleted before we ask for it. Support isn't something you earn by reaching crisis point first. Asking can feel especially hard when you're the one who's used to doing the advocating. Queer families are often built with intention, and that comes with its own quiet weight: the sense that well, you asked for this. As if wanting your family this much means you forfeited the right to find any of it hard.

Parenthood changes people, often in ways nobody warns you about. Pregnancy in particular can shift your relationship with your body, sometimes your sense of your own gender too.

There's no one correct way to go through queer parenthood you're not required to stay exactly who you were before, and nobody's asking you to become a stranger to yourself either.

Your family might not resemble the families you grew up around and it doesn't need to. As perinatal educators who work with LGBTQIA+ families, this is the thing we keep coming back to: wellbeing shouldn't be an afterthought tacked onto the end of a pregnancy checklist. It belongs in the whole journey. From the first moment you consider becoming a parent, right through pregnancy, birth, and life with your baby after.

Living your best queer life was never about having a perfect one. It's about having enough freedom, support and space to build something that actually feels like yours.

## Slade Riverfield (They/Them)




I'm the co-founder of The Queer Parenting Partnership, with more than 20 years' experience working in childcare and supporting families.
In 2018, I took the leap into doula work from nannying. My motivation came from supporting a loved one through severe postnatal depression, an experience that fundamentally changed the direction of my career. Before I had even finished my first day of doula training, I knew exactly where I wanted my work to take me: supporting queer families.
Co-founding The Queer Parenting Partnership was the natural next step. I had seen first-hand how queer parents are so often excluded, let down, or treated as an afterthought.
So rather than waiting for someone else to create the change I wanted to see, I decided to create it myself.
Today, my work is centred on making perinatal education and support more inclusive and reflective of the diverse families who use it.

**How you can support The Queer Parenting Partnership:**

**Easy Fundraising: https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/the-queer-parenting-partnership/**




BY KIRSTIE ATHERTON

# Guess What? Everyone is going to die

**So, you know how some things in life are absolutely guaranteed? No, me either.**

There is one thing that's happening for certain though ..... I know you know. I know you've always known. I also know you probably spend almost all of your time not thinking about it, so brace, here it comes...

**Everyone is going to die**

Most of us can accept this. None of us like it, but acceptance is different, right? What many of us find harder to accept is that the 'everyone' we're talking about actually in fact also includes us. That's me. And (there's no gentle way to break it to you) it's also you, I'm afraid.

There are cures for many things. But death is not one of them. There are treatments for lots of ailments. But treatments (fantastic and appreciated as they might be) prolong life, they do not stop death. And so, we self-medicate with a prescription of doing-our-best-to-look-after-ourselves, looking both ways when we cross the road and mainly Just. Not. Thinking. About It.

I get it. And I appreciate not everyone's like me (so completely fascinated by death that it's my life's work) but the amount of avoidance of talking about death frightens me more than the prospect of death itself ever could. Here's why.....

When surveyed, most people having to organise someone's funeral (65%) say their most important consideration when doing so had been making sure that they were following the wishes of the person who had died. That's reassuring, isn't it? Turns out most people will honour your choices, even when you're not looking. Even when there's absolutely no chance of you ever finding out if they didn't. Nice.

But ..... (you know what's coming, don't you?) if we don't talk about our wishes – or hear the wishes of others – how can we even begin to honour them? In that very same survey, only 1% of people could say that they knew what all those wishes were.

It doesn't have to be a big deal. It doesn't have to even be a conversation, if that feels too much. Most of us (however strong a death-denier we might be) at least have an idea of a song we might like to be played at our funeral. If you write that down, tell someone you've written it down and where the safe place you've left it is, then that's writing your funeral wishes.

Most of us have a notion about which icks us out least - being buried or being cremated. Write that down on the same piece of paper. And on it goes. As detailed or as brief as you like.

From "I don't care what happens, just do not let my cousin Jamie make it all about them!" to 5,000 words detailing readings you'd like, your preferred dress code for mourners and what canapes you want serving. Guess which one's most reflective of mine? Yep.

We're all just bumbling about, trying to make the best of life, aren't we? If my experience is anything to go by (and I can't be the only one, surely?) accepting death's inevitability, knowing that I've done all I can to support those who care about me after my breath has stopped, makes every single sweet moment that's mine feel all the better for it.

Seriously, the liberation is really quite the thrill. I leave no one in doubt of how much I love them. I leave nothing unsaid when things are tricky. And I make the most of the 'nowness' so much so that I have a reminder to do so literally tattooed on my arm. Is every day easy? Exciting? A day of wild achievement? No. Some days are old episodes of Murder She Wrote and crying under a blanket. But they're all precious. And they're all the only thing that any of us ever have.





## Kirstie Atherton (She/They)

Kirstie works as a funeral celebrant and consultant. She's also Founder and Director of the Revolution at Dead Positive CIC, a not-for-profit company which specialises in sparking conversations about all things end of life. Before this, Kirstie worked as a counsellor and spent many years as a jobbing writer. Kirstie's dad, Ozzie, died when he was younger than she is now and she was 17. The work she does is her joyful tribute to him. When not working, Kirstie is asleep or researching her PhD in Dignity within Direct Cremation, which she somehow seemed to think she'd have time to do when she proposed her idea to her professors. Kirstie likes yoga, books and being cosy.



BY HAZEL O'KEEFE

# The Queer Art of Belonging

**If someone had told me a few years ago that I'd be writing about breathing, I'd probably have replied, "I'm already doing that, thanks." After all, I've just about managed to stay alive for decades without giving it much thought."**

IIt turns out there was a little more to it than that.

When we talk about wellbeing, we often think about eating well, exercising more, sleeping enough or practising mindfulness. While all of those things have their place, I've come to believe that one of the greatest influences on our wellbeing is something much simpler.

Belonging.

As LGBTQIA+ people, many of us spend parts of our lives searching for somewhere we can truly relax. Somewhere we don't have to explain ourselves, hide parts of who we are, or wonder whether we'll be accepted.

Finding that safe space can be life changing.

For decades, many of the places where queer people have connected have centred around alcohol. Those spaces have played an important role in our history and continue to be a source of joy, celebration and community for many people. This isn't about saying they're wrong.

But they don't work for everyone.

Alcohol can make us feel more relaxed, more confident and as though we belong. For a few hours, it can quieten self-doubt and make conversations feel easier. It can even make us believe we're absolutely smashing the dance floor, when the photographic evidence later suggests otherwise.

The thing is, for many of us, that feeling is temporary. We borrow confidence from tomorrow, and tomorrow has a habit of asking for it back with interest. Suddenly we're replaying conversations, wondering if we really invited a complete stranger to on holiday, and hoping nobody filmed our enthusiastic "I'm headlining Pride" dance routine. When the alcohol wears off, the anxiety, loneliness or sense of not quite fitting in can creep back in—sometimes even more strongly than before.

Some people are sober. Some are in recovery. Some have health conditions that mean they can't drink. Others simply don't enjoy loud bars or late nights. Many neurodivergent people find those environments overwhelming rather than welcoming.

That doesn't mean they need community any less - it often means they need it more.

Realising that true belonging doesn't come from what's in our glass. Alcohol can make us feel part of something bigger. We laugh louder, hug tighter, buy another round, and suddenly it feels as though we've found a family we'd been searching for.

Sometimes we have.

Sometimes we've simply borrowed that feeling for the night.

Real belonging comes from feeling safe enough to be ourselves. It's the difference between feeling accepted for a night and feeling genuinely connected. That kind of belonging stays with us long after the evening has ended.

Alongside building community, I've also been training in breathwork. Before I started learning about it, I thought breathing was simply something our bodies did automatically. It turns out there's a difference between breathing to survive and breathing in a way that helps us truly live.

Breathwork isn't about forcing positivity or pretending everything is okay. Nor is it about sitting cross-legged on a mountain chanting while surviving on kale and good intentions. It's about creating a moment to pause, notice ourselves, and reconnect with our bodies.

So many of us carry stress in our shoulders, hold tension in our jaws or breathe so shallowly that we don't even realise we're constantly preparing for danger. We become so used to surviving that we forget what feeling safe actually feels like.

Sometimes, taking one slow, conscious breath is the first moment of safety we've felt all day.

I've seen how intentional breathing can help people move from feeling overwhelmed to feeling grounded. It doesn't solve every problem, but it can create enough space to respond rather than simply react. For many LGBTQIA+ people who have spent years masking parts of themselves, living with anxiety or constantly adapting to fit in, that space can be incredibly powerful.

The more I've explored breathwork, the more I've realised that breathwork and belonging have something in common.

Neither changes who you are.

They simply help you come home to yourself.

Real wellbeing isn't just about reducing stress or managing anxiety. It's about creating lives where we feel seen, valued and connected. It's about laughing until your cheeks hurt. Sitting around a campfire. Walking in nature. Sharing stories. Dancing because it feels joyful rather than because you've convinced yourself, after three drinks, that you're the next Beyoncé.

And sometimes it's simply sitting together in silence, taking a few conscious breaths and remembering that we don't have to carry everything alone.

I've learnt that healing often happens in ordinary moments.

A conversation where you don't have to explain your identity.

A hug from someone who understands.

A walk in a forest.

A breath that reminds you you're here, you're safe... and that you don't actually have to solve your entire life before Tuesday.

These moments remind us that wellbeing isn't something we achieve alone. It grows through connection—with ourselves, with our bodies and with each other.

As someone passionate about creating inclusive LGBTQIA+ spaces, I dream of communities where everyone feels they belong. Whether that's at a breathwork circle, an alcohol-free festival, a wellbeing retreat, a coffee morning, a walking group or simply sharing a conversation with someone who becomes a friend.

Because sometimes the greatest act of self-care isn't buying another wellbeing journal, downloading another meditation app or ordering the latest wellness gadget that promises to transform your life in seven easy payments.

Sometimes it's taking a deep breath.

Sometimes it's finding yourself and people.

And perhaps that's what wellbeing really is.

Coming home to yourself, taking a deep breath, and finding the people who make you realise you never had to pretend in the first place.




## Hazel O'Keefe (She/They)

Hazel O'Keefe is an award-winning Community & Youth Worker, Breathwork Facilitator and founder of Re:Source and The Women in Comedy Festival. With a background spanning community development, wellbeing and more than two decades of creating inclusive events and spaces, her work has been recognised with awards including Manchester's Women in Culture & Art Award and the Northern Soul Comedy Business of the Year Award and Northern Power Women, agent of change.

Today, Hazel's work focuses on creating spaces where people can slow down, reconnect and experience a genuine sense of belonging.




BY LOGAN BLACKBURN-ISSITT

# History Should Give Them Roots, Not Weights

**Sometimes I worry about what being the children of queer parents gives my children.**

My children have marched at Pride.

We've walked together through the streets of our town, surrounded by flags, noise, colour and people celebrating who they are. Naturally, they asked why. We explained that some people don't think others should be gay or transgender. That people have been hurt because of who they are. Pride is our way of coming together to celebrate our differences and show that even if people want to be mean to us, we will not let them make us hide.

It's a simplified version of queer history.

They're children. They don't need the unabridged edition just yet. But I do want them to know it. It's part of their story.

I grew up under Section 28. I went to school while legislation existed specifically prohibiting the promotion of homosexuality by local authorities. I later marched in London calling for its repeal.

My children are growing up in a very different world. Their dad is transgender. They know this. Most of them understand what it means to varying degrees, but they don't really understand how unusual it is.

I'm just Dad.

I like that.

I also don't want their normality to erase the history that made our family possible. I want them to understand why Pride exists. I want them to know that Pride is a celebration, but it is also a protest. I want them to understand that people had to fight for rights they now experience as completely ordinary.

I want them to know that trans healthcare matters because it allowed their dad to medically transition and live as himself.

I want them to know that living truthfully is their right as a human being.

But there are things I don't want them to know. Or perhaps more accurately, things I don't want them to carry.

I carry fear.
There is a little part of my brain that knows one day a couple of blokes could decide to kick the shit out of me because I'm trans. I know that I could walk into a public toilet and meet someone who takes umbrage at my presence and decides he needs to teach me a lesson

It's not something I spend every day thinking about. I have six children, a business, laundry and the eternal question of what we're having for dinner. My brain has plenty of other things to be getting on with.

But the weight is there.

And I don't want to hand it to my children. History should give them roots, not weights. I want them to know that queer people have been persecuted without teaching them to expect persecution.

I want them to understand discrimination without teaching them to be afraid. I want them to be proud of their family without feeling that they have to defend it.

Perhaps my biggest fear isn't even what somebody might do to me. It's what somebody might do to them because of me.

I don't want a friend, a classmate, the news, or some random person on the internet to take the fact that their dad is transgender and use it to make them feel small.

I never want to be the cause of my children's pain. I can't guarantee that won't happen. That's a difficult thing to accept as a parent.

IBut I can decide what I give them to face it with. And this is where I think queer history gives us something far more valuable than fear.

Community.

When queer people were excluded, they found each other. When they were told to be quiet, they stood together and made noise. When people tried to push them out, they created places where they could belong.

They marched.

They protested.

They cared for each other.

They kept living.

That is the history I want my children to inherit.

Because oppression isn't the only story.

What people did in response matters too. When my children first asked what Pride was, their introduction to this history wasn't really a lesson about fear. It was a practical demonstration of community. Here are all these people.

Some are gay. Some are lesbian. Some are bi. Some are trans. Some are queer. Some aren't any of those things and have simply turned up because they believe everyone deserves to live freely.

And we're walking together.

That's how you fight back against exclusion. You find each other. I want my children to understand that lesson beyond our own community too.

If somebody is excluded because of their race, disability, religion, sexuality, gender, stature, or because they're simply different from everyone else in the room, that's not okay. Respect and kindness cost nothing. They should be standard.

And if you notice someone standing outside the circle, make the circle bigger.

I don't want my children to grow up believing it's their responsibility to fight every injustice they encounter. That's another weight, and it's not theirs to carry. But I do want them to know they never have to stand alone.

And if they see someone else standing alone, I hope they'll go and stand beside them. Perhaps that's one of the greatest things queer history can teach them.

Change didn't happen because individual queer people simply became better at tolerating being treated badly. People found each other. Community made people stronger. Community made people visible.

And sometimes simply continuing to live visibly, joyfully and truthfully became its own form of protest. Living is a protest. There's something wonderful about the fact that my children probably don't think about any of this when I'm making their tea or nagging them to put their shoes on.

They just see Dad.

But perhaps there's a lesson happening there too. Every day they see someone who chose to live as himself. Someone who loves their mum. Someone who loves them.

Someone who believes that love is something to celebrate and that living truthfully is worth doing. Maybe that's enough for now.

The harder parts of our history will still be there when they're old enough to understand them.

I'll tell them. I'll tell them about the laws. The fear. The people who were hurt. The people who fought back. I'll tell them that their dad once marched through London demanding change and, years later, marched through our own town with them beside him.

But I hope when they hear those stories, fear isn't what stays with them.

I hope they remember the people who stood together. I hope they know they have roots. I hope they know they have people. And I hope they never feel they have to carry the weight.




## Logan Blackburn-Issitt (He/Him)

UK-based trans dad of six, sharing insights on fatherhood, the highs, lows, and all the wonderfully weird moments in between. Blogger and community advocate, navigating life with my wife and incredible kids.



BY EVAN CURWEN

# Why Awareness Alone Doesn't Always Create Change

**Awareness is often the first step in healing. Whether through counselling, mindfulness, journaling or self-reflection, many people begin to recognise patterns they may never have noticed before. They start to understand why certain situations trigger strong emotions, why they struggle to set boundaries, or why they find themselves repeating the same relationship dynamics.**

This awareness can be incredibly powerful. It helps us move from reacting automatically to observing ourselves with greater understanding. For many people, simply recognising a pattern can bring a sense of relief. Things that once felt confusing begin to make sense. However, awareness alone does not always create lasting change.

Many people can clearly identify their patterns. They know they are people pleasing. They understand that they avoid conflict. They recognise that their inner critic is harsh and demanding. Yet despite this insight, they often find themselves continuing to respond in the same ways. This can feel frustrating. If we understand the problem, why does it keep happening?

Part of the answer is that many of our behaviours were learned long before we became consciously aware of them. They developed as ways of coping, staying safe, gaining approval, or protecting ourselves from emotional pain. Over time, these responses can become deeply ingrained and largely automatic.

For example, someone who learned as a child that keeping others happy reduced tension or conflict may continue to prioritise other people's needs long into adulthood. Even when they understand the origins of their people pleasing, saying "no" may still trigger anxiety, guilt, or fear of rejection.

This is because change often requires more than insight. It involves creating new experiences that gradually teach the mind and body that a different way of responding is possible.

This might include practising healthier boundaries, learning to tolerate uncomfortable emotions, developing self-compassion, challenging long-held beliefs, or exploring the deeper emotional needs that sit beneath our behaviours.

Change is rarely about forcing ourselves to stop doing something. More often, it involves understanding what purpose the behaviour has been serving and finding healthier ways to meet those needs.

Awareness shines a light on the path, but walking the path usually requires action, support, and patience. Healing is not simply about understanding ourselves. It is about gently putting that understanding into practice, one small step at a time.

While awareness of these patterns can be incredibly powerful, it is often not enough on its own to create lasting change. When anxiety and nervous system responses have been shaped over many years, they tend to shift more gently, through repetition, practice, and support. This is where having consistent guidance can be helpful to support the process of noticing patterns in real time, understanding what is happening in the nervous system, and gradually building new ways of responding that feel safer and more sustainable.



## Evan Curwen (They/She)

Hi, I'm Evan, a counsellor and coach and the person behind the healing pathway.
I help people do the deep stuff - developing self awareness, inner child healing, nervous system regulation etc.
My work blends counselling, coaching, mindfulness, and breathwork, because healing isn't one-size-fits-all, and neither am I.

Neurodivergent-friendly. LGBTQIA+ inclusive.



BY EMILY DUFFY

# What is "Queer Enough"?

**In this article I am using queer to encompass any sexuality or gender identity within the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.**

"Am I queer enough?" It is a thought I'm sure many of us have had, especially in the social media purity culture where we are tested and criticised for who we are and how we express ourselves.

There are many reasons why we might not be fully expressive from preference, and who we are intrinsically, to safety reasons. And so when we put a pressure on ourselves to be a certain way in our queerness it can leave us feeling negatively about ourselves.

**So, how might we challenge that narrative and be kinder to ourselves:**

- When we're born we don't have all of the stigma and societal expectations innate in our minds. These ways of thinking come from somewhere whether it's parents, peers, siblings, wider family, media, etc.
  - It can be useful to ask the question "where did I learn this narrative?" as a good challenge when we're not feeling queer enough or we're being overly critical of ourselves.
  - Alternatively we can ask ourselves "whose voice does this remind me of?" to explore where this thought is coming from in our lives.
  - These questions can give us a frame of reference as to if they're voices we even want to listen to and gain an understanding of where the judgement on ourselves is coming from
- We could also challenge it by asking "queer enough according to who?" Who are we trying to be queer enough for, and why?

- We often compare ourselves to ideals or people which we feel are out of our reach, "they're much more queer than I am" (whether true or not!). What would it be like to let go of arbitrary scales and allow yourself to be true to yourself however that looks - and whether that is outwardly expressed or internally known due to safety reasons.

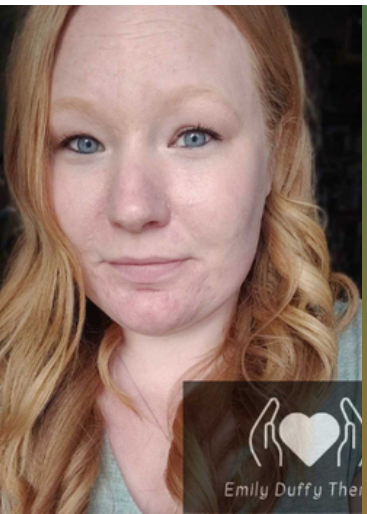
- When looking at not feeling "queer enough" and comparing ourselves to people who run Pride events and are completely out with their identity, it can feel like we're not doing enough to call ourselves a part of the community - aside from the many variables that play into why we might not be as out there with our identity - this doesn't mean you're not "queer enough". However, visibility isn't a guide for the validity of your queerness.

- The biggest thing. Being compassionate with yourself and remembering you are enough as you are! You don't have to prove yourself to anyone but yourself. So cultivating safety and a space to be yourself is important.

Essentially, when you have the thought of "am I queer enough?" It is focusing on what others are thinking of you and how you might be being perceived. Instead, take the comparison out of it and re-focus it purely on you to make it "I am queer".

You don't need a qualifier. If you say you are queer then you are absolutely queer. And your word is enough. So, let go of the "domineering fictional checklist" of queerness and let yourself be you and live your best queer life however that looks!






## Emily Duffy (She/Her)

Emily is a queer, ambiamorous, chronically ill, and integrative therapist working online in the UK. Most of Her work is around identity, the relationship with "self", and how this impacts the dynamics with those around you. If you'd like to know more about her you can do that here - www.emilyduffytherapy.co.uk




BY ANNA KNIGHT

# We Don't Hold on to Hope", we build it

**I can't be the only one who feels like the world is on fire at the moment. The last few years have felt like an endless funereal procession of calls to resist the creep of prejudiced viewpoints. I have dipped into exhaustion more than once myself, and my job is literally supporting people to make sustainable social change.**

And then... People who actively create the social change we are fighting for pass away - hope wobbles... Beloved icons of queer self expression pass away - hope wobbles... Political decisions that impact real lives are passed - hope wobbles... Sometimes, it seems like we're one more notification from Pink News away from giving up hope altogether.

If you resonate with this, please know that your feelings of grief, pain and rage are valid. As I shared in a previous edition of this magazine, I believe that everything starts with validating who we are and how we feel.

You are allowed to feel hopeless when hard news lands. What is important, however, is the 'and' that follows after. If we stay in hopelessness, society stagnates and worse - your personal pain increases. Neither of those situations serves anyone.

So here's my audacious "and" for you: you are allowed to feel intense and uncomfortable emotions about the current state of the world and you can choose to experience hope.

You see, no matter what we've been told before, hope is not an emotion. It's not a feeling that you have or don't have depending on the moment and your current circumstances. Hope is a psychological process, with a formula for building and maintaining it so that it can sustain you over time. In fact, research shows that a practice of active hope is one of the most important skills you can have in your 'resilience portfolio' - the essential skills for holding on in hard times.

**Hope = vision + pathway thinking + action**

What this means for you, lovely reader, is that rather than waiting around to have hope when it wobbles, you can choose to build it by working through the steps.

**Vision**: a belief in how you want the world to look that is rich in detail and emotional anchors.

I'm sure everyone has, at one time or another, summoned a vague notion of a world free from homophobia and transphobia. A magical version of the world where parents are accepting, rights are enshrined in law and everyone is safe. It's hard to keep hold of that vision when the world seems dark, but now is when we need it the most.

A few weeks ago at my local bookshop, the cashier looked at my purchases and joked that I was building myself a utopian world. She wasn't that far off the mark! My ideal future is unshakeable because I schedule in regular time to bring it to life. That process can be a tad dry - like the book of successful social change case studies I bought - so it's vital to balance that with more fun ways like engaging in fictional worlds where parents love us unconditionally, love wins and happy endings exist (which is why I also bought Heartstopper volume six!). This second part is sometimes branded as "escapism" or even "maladaptive daydreaming", but I disagree. Our ideal future needs depth, structure and plenty of heart to sustain it.

**Pathway thinking:** exploring the many routes we can take to achieve our vision.

Like many of us, I am guilty of coming up with a plan and then rigidly sticking to it... even when it's perfectly clear it's not working.

Even for radical things like activism, I fall into the trap of "this is how it's done", because surely the people who've gone before me know better than I do. I'm just one small person, not a legend of change making after all!

The problem with that mindset is that hope multiplies during the act of creative problem solving. When you're going down one route and it's not working, your mind looks for evidence of why the change will never happen (and usually finds some!) So if you feel like you're beating your head off a brick wall, now's the time to think big, and think ridiculous. The more outlandish the ideas you capture, the more creative your brain gets and the more likely you are to find your solution.

And if you're not the person leading the activism, look for the people bringing about change in creative ways and support them. From craftivism to subversive google maps pins to shareholder activism, there's plenty out there to be inspired by!

**Action:** small, tangible steps down one of the creative pathways that links to your vision.

You might have heard the phrase "the only thing you can control is yourself". It implies that everything else is out of your hands, leaving only concern and helplessness. It's both not completely wrong and total nonsense at the same time, because it misses one critical area: the things we can influence.

Steven Covey calls this the 'circle of influence'. It sits between our circles of control (ourself) and concern (the general flaming dumpster fire of modern society), calling us to do something which might influence the situation.

The outcome is not assured but in choosing action we regain our personal agency, and that makes all the difference. This works best when it follows some pathway thinking, as we're likely to do something that inspires or energises us rather than just signing the 52nd petition we've seen this week.

Hopefully you can see that by following this formula, we've brought feeling hope back into our circle of control again, boosting our capacity to continue and perhaps even creating tangible change. It becomes a win:win:win situation, and let's face it - we could all use some of those right now.

Hamby, S. (2025). The Resilience Portfolio Concept: New Insights into How Sufficient Strengths Can Overcome Even High Burdens of Trauma. Review of General Psychology, 29(3), 311-324.



## Anna Knight (She/They)

Anna Knight helps people make social change without burning out or losing hope. Their journey from NHS dropout to the pink-haired sassypants you see today was created through audaciously challenging how things "should be done" and finding supportive tools that work in the chaos of real life. When you learn to love yourself enough to do things audaciously, your impact skyrockets!



BY LIANNE TERRY

# Why I don't Like Cheesecake...

**People are always surprised that I don't like cheesecake, because generally I love all things sweet! But Cheesecake is the one sweet thing, that I won't even entertain.**

When I was about 5 years old, I was forced (I don't mean physically – I mean pressured by an adult) to eat cheesecake, as part of my school dinner, and school dinners in the 80s, weren't good! So, I strongly suspect it wasn't a great representation of cheesecake. (Having never eaten it since, I'm actually not 100% sure). Following the eating of the cheesecake, there was vomiting, by me.

And so, developing a trauma response, to cheesecake, to the point that I recently tried it, and felt like I was going to heave, so gave up after one spoonful.

And this is just a silly (but true) story about cheesecake, imagine the big stuff, the triggers we have from memories of really difficult life events. Imagine how difficult it can be to have a smell, taste, sound, touch or visual that reminds us of something really difficult, painful, or traumatic.

A trigger is a stimuli or situation that evokes strong emotional reactions, often linked to past experiences or emotional sensitivities. I'll talk more about tips for handling triggers later in the week.



## Lianne Terry (She/They)

Lianne Terry is a passionate and empowering Psychotherapist who guides her clients towards authentic happiness and self-discovery. As a proud member of the LGBTQIA+ community, Lianne specialises in helping queer individuals navigate relationships, family dynamics and heal deep-seated childhood wounds.



BY AMANDA TERRY

# Five Ways Sport can help your mental health

**Sport is often associated with physical fitness, but it can also have a powerful effect on mental health. Whether you play football, go swimming, run, cycle, or take part in a team sport, regular physical activity can improve the way you feel and help you cope with everyday challenges.**

**1. Sport Can Reduce Stress**
Exercise helps your body release chemicals called endorphins, which can improve your mood and help you feel more relaxed. Taking part in sport can also give you a break from life, work, or other worries. Focusing on a game, a workout, or improving a skill can take your mind away from stressful thoughts.

2. **It Can Improve Your Mood**
Sport can help reduce feelings of sadness, anxiety, and low mood. Physical activity increases blood flow and stimulates parts of the brain linked to positive emotions. Even a short period of exercise can leave you feeling more energetic and positive.

**3. Sport Can Build Confidence**
Improving at a sport can give you a strong sense of achievement. Reaching goals, learning new skills, or becoming fitter can increase your self-confidence and self-esteem. It can also teach you that progress takes time, which can help you become more patient and resilient.

**4. It Helps You Connect With Other People**
Team sports and group activities are a great way to meet people and build friendships. Having supportive teammates, coaches, or exercise partners can help reduce feelings of loneliness. Sport also teaches communication, teamwork, and how to support others.

**5. Sport Can Help You Sleep Better**
Regular physical activity can make it easier to fall asleep and improve the quality of your sleep. Good sleep is important for mental health because it helps your brain and body recover. When you are well rested, you may find it easier to concentrate, manage your emotions, and deal with stress.

Sport can support mental health in many different ways. It can reduce stress, improve your mood, increase confidence, help you make social connections, and improve your sleep. You do not have to be a professional athlete to experience these benefits. Finding a sport or physical activity that you enjoy and doing it regularly can be a simple and enjoyable way to look after both your body and your mind.



## Amanda Terry (She/Her)

Amanda is in her 50s, works in construction sales and lives with her wife and twin daughters. She is an avid Cricketer and enjoys watching and playing sport.

# Interview Kalie Jade

So, I took some time out this month to catch up with the power house, Kalie Jade, founder of LezBe Midful festival, to find out more about her, and about the festival itself.

**What inspired you to start LezBe Mindful?**

I had been running my own wellbeing-based business for a number of years and I really wanted to offer something specifically for the LBTQ community that provided life-changing opportunities. Ultimately, I had a dream to start a Lesbian Wellness Festival and the journey to this started to unfold with retreats. I had already been facilitating a non-profit community group called Spiritual Lesbians and Wellbeing, so this felt like a natural step forward.

**How have your events evolved?**

Initially I started organising luxury gay women's retreats at a lovely venue in Norfolk with a lake, a swimming pool and lovely grounds. There were two beautiful retreats here before the cost of living began to rise, so I stepped back from the retreats to create something more affordable to all. We stayed in Norfolk, but moved into glamping weekends which retained the luxury feel and onsite facilities, but became more attainable to all budgets.

During this time I felt a bit brave and once life settled down after covid, I decided to finally follow the original dream of creating a lesbian wellness festival abroad. For two years, LezBe Mindful in Málaga took place in Spain, a place that I used to call home, bringing lots of wonderful women together.









The event was designed to build confidence, encourage solo travel and blend wellness with party vibes. We created some magical memories, formed special bonds and friendships that have continued with various reunions.

At the end of last year my venue in Norfolk closed down suddenly, so I decided to hit pause and evaluate where I wanted to take these events going forward. I'm a big believer in following the signs, which all seemed to be pointing in a new direction. So interestingly this year, LezBe Mindful has evolved into one annual event, merging all of the best bits from both events into an exciting wellness festival.

**What's your biggest challenge?**

My biggest challenge would probably be brand awareness. Because what we do is a bit unique, it attracts a certain audience. I don't want to be the biggest event, I want to be the one with the most impact that inspires people to feel different about life. Sometimes people get what they need from the experience and you watch them flourish afterwards, so it's a powerful process to witness. They go on to find friends and partners, so in that sense my event has been a huge success and we await the next brave souls who want to join us for their transformation. Of course, some people return year after year and become part of the family.

**How do you make sure new attendees feel comfortable?**

This is actually a huge part of what I do, and what sets me apart from other LBTQ events. I know it takes a lot of courage to book a trip alone, I would struggle myself, so I like to make everything as easy as possible to reduce any worries or anxiety. I have always connected guests before they arrive in group chats or arranged car shares. I even organised taxi groups for around everyones their flight times so people did not have to travel alone to the venue.










I'm also known for my spreadsheets (private joke) which we all laugh about because they are so helpful for the travel arrangements.

**Why do you think it's important to create spaces like this?**

I think it's important because so many of us can feel isolated and lost. Life is a constant cycle of learning and unlearning from painful experiences. Within our community not everyone has the luxury of family, so friends can become a lifeline during troubled times. Creating a safe space for people to let go and try new things can be so rewarding, especially when you know the journey some attendees have been on to get here.

**What does Wellbeing mean to you?**

To me, wellbeing means having a way to take care of your mind, body and soul. I think it's important to have daily practices that help you stay grounded through the challenges we face. It doesn't have to be complicated, this could simply be a walk in nature, exercise or even reading a book, but ideally it would involve a morning or evening routine. I start my day with breathwork, sometimes I do a meditation or practise gratitude. I spend a lot of time walking, exercising and sitting by the sea to calm my mind and unwind after a busy day, especially when staring at a screen for long periods.

**Kalie** is a highly intuitive Sound Therapist, Reiki Master, Psychic Medium, Meditation teacher and Breathwork facilitator with a passion for facilitating inspirational wellness workshops and spaces. She has been on a journey of self-development from a very young age and loves passing on her teachings. Her workshops are designed to be motivating and uplifting with fun-filled creative, group bonding activities. Kalie offers a mixture of one-to-one psychic readings and holistic therapies alongside her wellbeing-based events, in the UK and abroad. She is a very active member of the lesbian community and strives to reduce loneliness and improve mental health, making gay women feel less isolated.





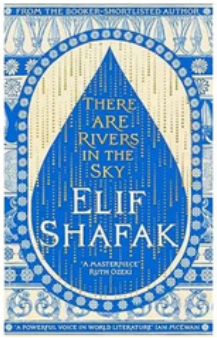

**Tickets:** https://bit.ly/lbm2026

**Website:** sapphicspirit.co.uk/lezbe-mindful

**Socials:**

https://www.facebook.com/lezbemindful
https://www.instagram.com/lezbemindful

## BOOK OF THE QUARTER




**There are Rivers in the Sky - by Elif Shakaf**
This is undoubtedly one of the best books I've ever read, and I've read a lot, it's beautifully written, weaving together lives across centuries with themes such as memory, displaceent and belonging.

It paints a rich history, with gorgeous storytelling. I found it thought provoking and lovely,

Really recommended for anyone who loves novels about memory, migration and belonging as well as emotionally rich books.

## MOVIE OF THE QUARTER

**The Devil Wears Prada 2**
I loved this sequel more than I expected to, as ever Meryl Streep was incredible in her role of Miranda, and it serves up the same sharp fashion, and larger than life characters that made the original movie a bit of a queer touchstone!

It's funny, and the plot twists do actually keep you guessing throughout! I really enjoyed it!




## SERIES OF THE QUARTER




**The Great British Sewing Bee**
You can tell that I don't watch much TV, (so if anyone would like to recommend anything) but I do love anything in this kind of format, and I'm watching it at the minute, so this month I've gone for Sewing Bee. Generally, it seems pretty inclusive programme, and I love Esme Young a little bit!

## POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS TO SAY TO YOURSELF

MY IDENTITY IS VALID, BEAUTIFUL AND WORTHY OF LOVE.

MY VOICE IS POWERFUL AND I CAN USE IT TO SPEAK UP FOR MYSELF AS WELL AS OTHERS

I AM PROUD OF WHO I AM AND THE JOURNEY I'M ON.

I WILL REJECT SOCIETAL EXPECTATIONS THAT DON'T ALIGN WITH MY AUTHENTIC SELF

I DESERVE HEALTHY, FULFILLING AND LOVING RELATIONSHIPS

I AM NOT ALONE, I AM PART OF A VIBRANT AND SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY.

## SMALL ACTS OF SELF CARE

PAUSE AND FOCUS ON SLOW, CALMING BREATHS FOR A MINUTE.

REACH OUT FOR SUPPORT WITH A SMALL TASK OR EMOTIONAL NEED.

TAKE 2-3 MINUTES TO STRETCH YOUR NECK, SHOULDERS OR BACK.

CLOSE YOUR EYES AND IMAGINE A PEACEFUL OR CALMING PLACE

WATCH A SHORT VIDEO OR LISTEN TO A PODCAST ABOUT A TOPIC YOU ENJOY.

PLAY A FAVOURITE SOMG THAT MAKES YOU FEEL GOOD.

## UK - HELPLINES AND SUPPORT

- lgbt.foundation
- switchboard.lgbt
- mindout.org.uk
- lgbtconsortium.org.uk
- stonewall.org.uk
- mind.org.uk
- gmhp.org.uk
- genderedintelligence.co.uk

## USA- HELPLINES AND SUPPORT

- thetaskforce.org
- mhanational.org
- lgbtcenters.org
- pridecounseling.com
- genderspectrum.org
- thetrevorproject.org
- lgbthotline.org
- glaad.org
- translifeline.org

Thank you so much for reading this first issue, please do invite your friends to subscribe and the next issue will be out in February.

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I would love to hear from you all about what you'd like to see in the magazine, any feedback on this issue or if you'd like to contribute an article, please do give me a shout!