

Hugh Polehampton

[00:00:00]

INTERVIEWER: So, do you want to tell us a little bit about why you came you to Manchester, and why you then got involved in the council and how that led to getting involved with the AIDS policy?

PARTICIPANT: Yes. I started as assistant town clerk policy, at the city council in early 1986. My responsibilities were managing the equal opportunities unit, which had two gay men's officers and two lesbians' officers, and the race unit, and urban policy unit. And one of the early things I was asked to do when I came to Manchester was to develop a policy on AIDS. I should say at the time, I came out gay at my interview in late 1985, here, ha! Which was a dramatic thing for myself, so as a newly-come-out gay man, I was interested to make a contribution to lesbian and gay issues, as they were then. But as I say, an early request was to develop an AIDS policy, which was very exciting, so I worked from the chief executive's department, it was called the town clerk's department in those days, with the director of environmental health, the medical officer for environmental health, who was like a health authority employee advising the council about medical issues. So the three of us sat down and we went through a very careful investigation of what policy angles the council ought to adopt in relation to AIDS.

The reason for this request was because in late 1985, before I started with the council, the council had detained a man with HIV in hospital using some legislation, and there was a huge row particularly led by Manchester AIDS Line from the gay community about this act. And the leader of the council committed the council to develop a proper policy so that that kind of thing didn't happen again. So it had high political backing that we should develop this policy. And so this was done, and we were very proud of the work we did because we went into great detail in all aspects of the subjects; medical aspects, social aspects, social services, education policy aspects, and of course the council was much bigger then than it is now. It had something like 30,000 employees, including all schools and some colleges, so it was a much bigger organisation than it is now. But also, that was '86 and I suppose the first bit of community activism I got involved in was World AIDS Day, which was in April 1987. One of the gay men's officers and myself organised an event with Radio Manchester at The Hacienda. The idea was to interview people about HIV and safer sex, and then have a studio discussion later on in the evening, broadcast on the radio. So that was quite an exciting little piece of hands-on community action. Because I guess my responsibilities were very strategic within the council.

[00:04:03]

INTERVIEWER: When you were drafting the AIDS policy, did you find yourself going to the community, asking them things? Because obviously you were very connected with the community, hosting World AIDS Day, events and stuff, or was it purely kind of...? [tails off]

PARTICIPANT: Initially we sat down and thought things through. Once we produced the policy, we were the first English local authority to have a policy on AIDS, and I

discovered that Liverpool City Council had just adopted our policy. And it seemed to me that was a mistake, because they hadn't gone through the thinking and the consultation that we had. I can't remember the detail of consultation that we did, but the council had a gay men's sub-committee, a lesbian sub-committee and a race sub-committee as part of the equal opportunities set-up, so I guess we would have used those sub-committees. I can't remember the details of the consultation we did, but we spent an enormous number of hours looking at different scenarios and considering things from different points of view and I guess Liverpool didn't do that, so if issues arose, they wouldn't have done the thinking to deepen their understanding of the policy implications. However, [laughing] it was very flattering!

[00:05:39]

INTERVIEWER: So then after you had created the AIDS policy, where did your career go with campaigning and also with being in the council and being so active?

PARTICIPANT: The council committee itself decided to put some officer time to implement the policy, so an HIV unit was set up in the environmental health department, jointly managed by myself and the two other officers, and that was staffed by secondments from other departments, so a secondment from the environmental health department, from the education department, and from social services. Then the government announced funding was available for local authorities for the year 1989-1990 and we applied for funding and I took the lead in writing a bid for that. We had an AIDS working party, which was people from different departments, chaired by a councillor and involving the key voluntary sector groups, like Manchester AIDS Line, which became George House Trust, Body Positive North West, and the Gay Centre and other groups. So we consulted with that group, and I was a senior officer reporting to that group.

And then of course there was the Section 28 stuff that started in late 1987 when Clause whatever-it-was-called-then was proposed in the committee, and the big campaign was developed by the council to counter those proposals, and I was involved with the equal opportunities unit officers in work around that. And a group was formed to protest vigorously against the section, which led to the North West Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Equality being created as a voluntary sector group, and I was invited to join that by a friend who worked in the council, and that led to me becoming more active in the community as a volunteer to match the strategic work I was doing in the council. And subsequently, I became treasurer of that group, the North West Campaign. And we had amazing meetings.

I remember people perhaps don't think I'm exaggerating to say there were 100 people sitting in one of the big committee rooms on the first floor of the town hall, but there were, sitting around in that huge great hall, discussing the protest march that happened on February 20th 1988. It was stunning. People were so angry about it, and motivated. And subsequently, after that march, as a north west campaign, we set up a working group to develop a sex education policy for school governors to make the point that the Section 28 did not stop work to support LGBT people- well I guess we weren't so aware of trans people, lesbian and gay issues were the focus of people's efforts. I guess we hadn't really added 'B' to 'LG' at that stage, although that was beginning. I guess transgender issues had not really come to be the focus that

they now are, and rightly so. So that was from the North West Campaigns perspective in '88.

Then with this funding promise, we did a significant bid to the Department of Health which included having three public education officers; one for men who have sex with men, which was quite contentious, both from the gay community and from [laughing] the public! Because they were very homophobic days, but also there were many gay people who said having a public education officer for men who have sex with men is pointing the finger at gay men and blaming them for HIV / AIDS, because of course, the press and the media were totally hostile to gay men and blaming gay men for the epidemic, so it's a very unpleasant time in the media, extremely unpleasant. The new Manchester Evening News had a horrible writer who I won't name who had a homophobic article practically every week. So there were some people in the gay community a bit horrified that we'd specifically named a public education officer 'men who have sex with men'. However, I thought it was absolutely right that we did that and the AIDS working party supported that view, because we needed to do specific work with the gay community.

The other one was public education officer [for] young people, and then public education officer [for] drug users, because of the whole issue around injecting drug use. We also had some workers to support the Manchester AIDS Forum, which was an inter-agency forum for Manchester bringing the health authorities together with the council and with a wide range of voluntary groups across the city, so it was quite a big group. And I chaired that for two years from 1989 to 1981 [Transcriber's note: I think he means '1991' not '1981'], and it had various working groups, including a public education strategy group—and I was very active on that group—to develop a strategic public education strategy for the whole of Manchester with a multi-agency which would include the whole range of different groups that needs to be targeted with specific support and education work.

[Break] [00:12:52]

[00:13:31]

INTERVIEWER: What was the reception to the book that you made for school governors?

PARTICIPANT: The North West Campaigns sex education booklet, which I can show you later, was well-received. We were arguing that the act did not stop positive work, did not mean that school governors could not have education about gay issues and the issue was of promotion. Section 28 said local authorities shall not *promote* homosexuality, shall not promote it as a pretended family relationship. But if there was factual work, we argued, that is right and proper that that be done. So it was popular, it went down well and a lot of local authorities did buy it themselves, the forward-thinking ones.

[00:14:35]

INTERVIEWER: So when you worked with the AIDS Forum, what kinds of things did you do? Was that quite a community-based...? [tails off]

PARTICIPANT: Well, as I say, it was a joint forum with the statutory agencies and the voluntary sector, so there were three health authorities in Manchester then. So we had officers from the three health authorities, but it was a very useful vehicle to try and get co-ordination and similar thinking both from within the community and within the statutory bodies. A key responsibility they had was the needle exchange scheme, which was a very good scheme for injecting drug users to get clean materials and goods, and that did have a sex education aspect too. And there was a working group of the forum that managed that needle exchange scheme, which I think we were a leading authority on.

[00:15:46]

INTERVIEWER 2: You mentioned press coverage and the general atmosphere, but I was wondering on a personal level how it felt to be campaigning at that time, to be involved in these issues and whether you could say a little bit about the wider attitudes that were prevalent at the time in terms of attitudes towards sex, but also attitudes towards gay sex and attitudes towards this thing called AIDS. So, do you personally remember first hearing about AIDS, about HIV and do you remember how you felt about it and what it meant to you at the time? Obviously, it was called something different to begin with.

PARTICIPANT: I suppose '84. 'Cos I was married with two children, yet '84 was the year I came out to myself as a gay man, and then I became aware, and I started going to gay clubs in 1984 and I became aware of HIV —well, I think it was called AIDS then, we called it HIV later on— we became more aware of the scientific facts. Scared, I suppose. By '87, '86, '88, I had a lot of anger about the public hostility which was within my own family, I mean, my father was dead by then, but my mother was extremely homophobic. I was closeted as far as my family were concerned. And the drip, drip, drip in the media the whole time, it was more than a drip, great bucketfuls of shit, ha! If you don't mind me saying so from the tabloids. It's easy to forget, actually. I was looking through my files this morning and reading stuff. I'd forgotten how virulent it was. 71%, I read this morning, of people disapproved of gay relationships. And yet here we are now in 2017 with gay marriage, I mean it's incredible what's happened, the change.

Yeah, and people were very angry. The march in February '88, I think, was a dramatic turning point for very many lesbian and gay people who went on that march, and that transformed their lives. Some people had never been on a march before, and they were prepared to state their sexuality in public, because they were so angry about it; the sense of injustice and cruelty from the rest of society.

[00:19:17]

INTERVIEWER 2: In terms of your work around sex education there's an obvious link, but how do you think Section 28 affected the atmosphere engendered around not being able to talk about same-sex intimacies or promote them, how do you think that affected work around HIV and sex work, or do you think they were linked, or did it have an effect?

PARTICIPANT: Well, it was a double whammy because the government were trying to stop you from talking in schools to young people about gay issues. And therefore, you couldn't talk about safer sex issues, so for people who might be lesbian or gay, it was a double whammy. Actually, the legislation doesn't seem to, —well it hasn't led to any court cases— but I mean the worst impact of the legislation was the self-censorship thing. Lawyers across the country were advising schools with, "You don't want to touch that," and so on and so forth. It didn't actually have to go to court, and I don't think there was a court case, but it was the fear that was engendered amongst teachers and school managers that, you know, "God, we're going to be in the headlines if we try and tackle gay issues sensibly." But certainly, with the education department, the HIV unit, we had a part-time secondment from the education department, and it was hard work for him, because it was difficult to get safer sex issues given the importance which they should. Well, he did excellent work, and there was a schools group 'AIDS-' I can't remember its name, but there was a schools group that he worked with, he did some excellent work with schools in training and education of teachers, training them about HIV. But yes, we made the argument, one of the responsibilities of the HIV unit was to do training of staff in the authority; firstly about infection control, to teach people that HIV was not a virus that could be transferred by sneezing or sitting on toilet seats and things, there was huge confusion about that, and prejudice, but also saying there are things we can do to promote safer sex, and particularly through schools, to the public education officer [for] young people, his job was to work with youth groups and the education department in relation to schools, with the part-time secondment from the education department.

[00:22:24]

INTERVIEWER 2: And you've mentioned quite a little bit [of] your work with Mesmac. Could you just tell us what Mesmac is or was, for somebody who's never heard of it? What did it do? What kind of work? Where did it intervene and why was it needed?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah. So, we developed the AIDS policy in '86. There was very little work being done with gay men, who were the most affected at that time by HIV, but the health education authority nationally had set up the Mesmac project — Men who have Sex with Men Action in the Community — and they'd chosen four pilot sites to work with.

We applied to be a pilot site and were turned down, so we said we would set up our own project. 'Men who have sex with men' is because a lot of research had shown that a lot of men having sex with men were not identifying as gay or even bisexual, they regarded themselves as heterosexuals, or maybe they didn't even have a label, so we thought by labelling it 'gay' or 'bisexual', that would put people off, a lot of so-called straight men from engaging with us, and we wanted to get safer sex messages through to everybody who might be having sex with men, men who were having sex with men. Certainly we felt, well, I felt that we needed to do some specific targeted work with different communities, and it was quite wrong and unjust not to be specifically recognising that gay men were a group that had to be worked with.

And then we wanted to set up an action group, a community group, so that meant we could set up a public meeting, and it was quite difficult to even get the poster

developed, accepted within the council! But it was, and he had a meeting in the town hall, and started the project. But the objectives were to get safer sex messages out in the most acceptable way to gay men, given their big variation and diversity, using the scene, gay pubs and clubs, using them and trying to work with the managers of gay pubs and clubs to help get messages out via poster display, free condom use and so on, free condoms availability, and subsequently, that led to the service of providing bowls of condoms in pubs and clubs for people.

So we had initially just one full-time officer, and then that didn't work because of ill-health, so we created three part-time officers, one of whom was Paul Martin, who was very much a creative influence, and there were two other officers, one to work in cottaging places - there was a big building in the centre of town, the Dunlop building, which is now student flats, but that was empty and derelict, and a lot of sex was going on there - as an example, so our objective was to put leaflets and condoms around so that people could see those and pick out messages.

[00:26:16]

INTERVIEWER: What kinds of responses did you get from people doing this work?

PARTICIPANT: Well, we got good responses from the pubs and clubs, so we had a number of safer sex parties. One at Rocky's, which was the big hi-NRG club on Whitworth Street —now gone and replaced by a modern office block, that was a basement club— very popular, and we had a really good safer sex night there; one at The Rembrandt, which was promoting food sex. We developed a leaflet —well, it was Paul who wrote it— called 'Fucking Alternatives', saying that you don't have to have penetrative sex to have sex, there's all sorts of ways of having sex, and we were trying to encourage people to talk openly about sex, rather than not being able to use the words etc., so this leaflet was promoting all sorts of sometimes silly, sometimes serious ideas about avoiding penetrative sex, and the risks that that could have, but also to promote condom use. So we used that in the sex parties. We had one at The New Inn in Stockport, with balloons and condoms and fun, and at La Cage, which was another well, popular club in— what's it now? It's underneath near New York, New York.. AXM, isn't it? It was underneath AXM.

[Recording paused] [00:28:04]

[00:28:05]

INTERVIEWER 2: So, you were saying about the safer sex parties.

PARTICIPANT: Yes, I mean, how to get over the message of condom use, that was one of our major challenges, how to make condom use attractive, so I suppose fruity flavours and all sorts of alternative ways, but it was difficult because people were resistant to condoms because of making sex less enjoyable, it's a hassle, it's awkward talking about condoms to somebody you don't necessarily know very well, and it's a huge issue I guess! [Laughing] But there's a bit more a history behind condom use than perhaps there was. That was a target of the stuff we were doing in pubs and clubs, to try and make condom use more attractive, certainly, and it was a

challenge. Were we successful? Well, I'm not sure! I suppose we need to look at the statistics.

[00:29:27]

INTERVIEWER: So, what were these parties like? What was the atmosphere when you had these parties. Did a lot of people come to them? Was there a lot of interest?

PARTICIPANT: Yes, so we dished out invites in the pubs and clubs beforehand and had posters advertising them, and I think we were pleased with the turnout at them, and we had a party atmosphere and we had members of the group available to talk to people about any issues they wanted to talk about; we had goody bags of leaflets and condoms and trying to make the items and leaflets very attractive; lots of balloons, and the idea was to make the whole thing fun. An emphasis on fun rather than [lowering voice to sound solemn] 'serious', 'frightening' [laughs]. We wanted [them] to get the message, "You can have fun, we're not trying to stop people having fun, but let's do it safely, and this is how you do it," so we were trying to get over that we are a resource to help and advise you to do things that you want to do, but in a safe way. I mean, that wasn't the only thing we did, there was also a strategic aim of Mesmac to try and get the health authorities and the council to take the issues of men who have sex with men seriously, and there were issues with policing as far as cottaging was concerned and so on.

[00:31:14]

INTERVIEWER 2: Could you say a little bit more about that? In the sense of how the police were responding to the issue, because I know there was the head of Greater Manchester Police [who] earlier had— hence he made that declaration—

PARTICIPANT: Mr Anderton?!

[00:31:32]

INTERVIEWER: Right.

PARTICIPANT: About gay men 'swirling in a cesspit of their own making' or something? Yeah, that was horrendous, absolutely horrendous.

Well, I didn't get involved particularly with the work with the police, and I can't remember too much about the work we did with the police, but that outburst from Anderton, the head of Greater Manchester Police, that was '86. And I don't recall too much work with them in '88, '89, '90.

[00:32:20]

INTERVIEWER 2: As well as the goody bags promoting condom use, and the strategic aim, were there any other strategies to promote safer sex? Any other kinds of outreach work, anything we haven't covered in terms of what Mesmac were doing on the ground?

PARTICIPANT: Yes, the third worker, he was the outreach worker, so that was cottaging, outreach and pubs and clubs. The work on cottaging and outreach wasn't as successful as the work in the pubs and clubs, I guess. So that's why, perhaps, I've spoken more about that. But the outreach was intended to cover students wherever they may be, and I can't remember the work we did there, I don't think it was so successful as the other work. But the policy work was about getting free condoms. I suppose it led in the future to the Jarman Clinic being set up at Withington Hospital, having a specific gay men's clinic, although that was much later on, and that was more through Mesmac had changed in '93, '94, to become Healthy Gay Manchester, because it was felt that we were focussing too much on HIV / AIDS and not on other health issues for gay men, so it was broadened by 1994. But my involvement in these issues was really 1986 to 1994.

[00:34:25]

INTERVIEWER 2: And during that period of time, how was the epidemic changing? People have talked before of different stages of the epidemic and the ways in which, say, the early 90s were a pretty hard time because there was AZT, but combination treatment didn't come in until 1996, so how would you describe those years in terms of, obviously you were active, you were campaigning, but [I] imagine that people around you were also ill, people who were living with HIV and didn't have access to treatment.

PARTICIPANT: So, another aspect of work I was involved in was the HIV and Civil Liberties conference in 1990, where we worked with the national organisation Terrence Higgins Trust front-liners to develop a national conference in Manchester about the civil liberties aspects of HIV. That led to a declaration being written up after, The Declaration of Rights of People with AIDS, if I can remember the title properly. But that was very much looking at the broad human rights issues of HIV. Sorry, [laughing] what was your question?

[00:35:56]

INTERVIEWER: It was more in terms of personally, how did you cope? Obviously you were throwing yourself into your activism, your work with the AIDS unit at the council, but I was just wondering on a personal level, emotionally how you coped with that period. Was it a difficult period? Just in terms of friends, colleagues or people you knew living with HIV and not having access to treatment at that time.

PARTICIPANT: Yeah. I suppose I hadn't come out 'til '84, so I hadn't been active and developed loads of friends in the pre-HIV era, so in terms of my friendships, most of the people affected by HIV and AIDS were the people I was working with, rather than personal friends, but I was aware of horrific situations of the people I was working with who had lost countless friends in the 80s. And, well, it was very scary. I suppose I was made angry by it, because I felt that I'd read *And the Band Played On*. I made the mistake of reading that book about the history of the origin of AIDS in America and reading that on holiday, it was no holiday at all, it was so horrific, what had happened, so I suppose that anger motivated me to do more, do the things I was doing within the community. But yes, it was strange, because I'd never been involved before in working groups talking about the details of sexual activity. I guess

my family background, sex was a bit of a 'you don't talk about it' sort of thing, so it was very liberating for me, I suppose, but it was certainly different to my previous existence!

[00:38:49]

INTERVIEWER 2: You mentioned that you'd come out in '84. What personal impact did activism and campaigning have on you? Did it make you more confident? Looking back, did you change as a person? What did you gain from it, do you think?

PARTICIPANT: Well, I had a bit of a split personality. I was married and I had two children. When I worked in Manchester, I lived up here during the week, and the deal, if you like, with my wife, was that I would keep my gay activities to Manchester. So I was a bit of a split personality. But certainly it changed me and opened me up to a whole new world. And I suppose my work were my emotions for a very— well, not all my work, *this* aspect of my work and campaigning, my emotions were very deeply involved in the work.

[Break] [00:40:10]

[00:40:30]

Well, I think what happens, is I went silent! [Laughing] Because I ended up in the 90s having a lot of therapy, 'cos I was a bit closed down and I think there was so much suffering going on around me, particularly when I was— and then I suppose I felt I was better suited to work on public education campaigning rather than on treatment issues. Some people would be working with Body Positive, working with people directly affected, people with AIDS, people with HIV, people who were ill. I felt more comfortable, I had more skills in relation to the education work rather than the treatment and caring work. So to that extent, I was not exposed to daily tragedies like so many people were in social services and the health authorities, maybe. But I suppose I felt, "I'm all right, other people aren't." So I tended to deny my own problems if you like, and try to focus on other people's.

But what was inspiring was the creativity of the people I was working with, and the feeling that we could make a difference. And basically, the city council was very supportive to what we were doing with establishing the HIV unit. It was good to know the council was very much behind that. I mean, there were issues around the 1992 general election, and the need to protect the council a bit from being identified with some of the work that Mesmac was doing, so the workers had to become completely voluntary. That caused problems for us.

[00:43:27]

INTERVIEWER 2: Why the '92 election? Because the Conservatives got back in?

PARTICIPANT: Yes, but there was a lot of media pressure, I can't remember exactly.

[00:43:43]

INTERVIEWER 2: On the 'loony left' kind of thing?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, and this made it more difficult for the council to be openly supporting some of the radical work we were doing. Some of the safer sex parties, and so on. Well, it was World AIDS Day, it probably was 1992, possibly '91, where we had a big exhibition in the town hall on HIV / AIDS on World AIDS Day, and there was a big conflict around what it was possible to show in this exhibition around safer sex issues for gay men. And in fact, the policy was brought in that there couldn't be any erect penises, ha ha! And it's a straight male culture issue, I think, which was getting in the way of connecting with the people who need to know the message. The fact is, men have penises, and when sexually aroused, they are erect, and if we are trying to save people from diseases, we need to be explicit and not be so— but then there was the issue of, "Oh, children may see this!" So it is politically complicated when you've got tabloid media hungry for scandal, that stops a lot of creative work too, and I guess a lot of effective work was hidden under the mattress or under the duvet cover because of political sensitivity.

[00:45:43]

INTERVIEWER 2: Hm, that's really interesting.

PARTICIPANT: Oh, I wonder now, with Queer as Folk having the very explicit scenes of sex, when was it? Last century! [laughing]

[00:45:56]

INTERVIEWER 2: In the mid-nineties?

PARTICIPANT: Yes, mid-nineties, I'm not sure that would be shown now, 'cos I mean there's great sensitivity about underage sex and Channel Four got away with showing that, and it was quite shocking in a good way, "Wow, it's great to see this on the telly." But fashions change, don't they? By which I mean different issues lead to different sensitivities being to the fore.

[00:46:33]

INTERVIEWER 2: Is there any other part of your work that we haven't covered that you would like to talk about? Any other campaigns you were involved with, any other aspects?

PARTICIPANT: Well I suppose I was lucky enough to be involved at a strategic level and a hands-on level, and I think we could have been more effective in the hands-on work maybe, but it's easy to be wise after the event. And there were some structural reasons that made some of that work difficult. But I think it was a very creative period and a lot of people did some creative work in terms of public education. I haven't said much about the HIV unit's broad work, perhaps I ought to say more about that.

The unit was trying to be comprehensive in looking at treatments, so we had social services involvement, and the strategy of the unit was to have policies in relation to treatment, counselling, support, public education, and needle exchange and training of staff. We were looking at the whole gamut of the council services and trying to put in place trained people who understood the reality of HIV / AIDS who were doing their utmost to support those who needed it. That was our overall objective.

There were about twelve people in the unit, but that all sort of evaporated in the early 90s when the funding dried up, because we were getting '92-'93 something like £700,000 a year government grant for our HIV strategy. The council was also contributing its own money, so we were making a significant contribution. And we were supporting the Manchester AIDS Forum, which was bringing all the agencies together.

[00:49:16]

INTERVIEWER 2: And so, part of that work was training anyone working for the authority, sensitising them to issues around HIV, and also more strategic work in terms of certain policies and...[tails off]

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, it was about infection control, "You are safe if you do this, and this is the nature of the virus, don't worry about sharing a cup with someone." We were trying to reduce the stigma that people with HIV and AIDS might get in the workplace, which was intense in those days with lots of rubbish that people believed, so it was calming the fears if you like and trying to reduce stigmatised attitudes to people with HIV and AIDS. And also you're asking the question, "What can you do?" in your department and in your job to support this policy.

[00:50:24]

INTERVIEWER 2: So moving on a little bit, how do you see developments such as treatment as prevention such as PEP and now PrEP, I don't know how familiar you are with them, how do you see their impact in terms of how safer sex is changing?

PARTICIPANT: I think I've lost contact with what's going on, I mean, I'm aware of those issues, obviously, but I've not really studied them. I suppose for my own involvement, I left the council in '93 and went freelance. It was 'cos the council, [was in] another financial crisis, they were trying to get rid of people, they were offering voluntary redundancy, and I took it at the age of 50. And I did work with the health education authority on HIV issues, and then I worked for the National AIDS Trust in Wales developing an all-Wales AIDS network and that included helping to establish a men-who-have-sex-with-men initiative in Wales.

But once the drug regimes came in, people didn't really want to know, really, and the money for work on HIV / AIDS seem to dry up, so I worked more with drug issues and worked for the Drug Prevention Advisory Service in Manchester, as part of the Home Office, as part of a strategic job for the north west region. And then I got involved in wider work in the evaluation of social health projects on a freelance basis. So my career drifted away because of the success of treatment and the funding for public education and support and counselling and so on disappeared, so the skills I

had on HIV and AIDS were not really wanted [laughing]. And I suppose I became more involved in Vada, which is an LGBT community drama group, which I was working with for a long time.

[00:53:05]

INTERVIEWER 2: So, just as a reflection, we've covered a lot of ground in this interview, if you had to sum up your reflections about the kind of work you were doing, both within the HIV unit and the council and with Mesmac, what kind of impact do you think that had? How would you sum them up to someone, if you had to describe that kind of intervention that you were part of?

PARTICIPANT: I was lucky to work for an organisation that was aware of the issues around HIV / AIDS and wanted its organisation to tackle them responsibly and positively and progressively. That was fantastic, and that enabled me to contribute to what I think was an extremely good policy framework for a council, and then the resources were available to actually implement stuff, so I feel privileged to have had that opportunity to manage that on looking at the strategic level. And hearing about so many people who work for different organisations without that kind of commitment, it was, as I say, a privilege to be part of that set-up.

In terms of the work in the community, it was great to have had the freedom to do so many creative things. I mean, it would have been nice to have been more effective, and obviously, there were times when we had great problems in making progress, for one reason or another, and it would have been good if those problems hadn't been there, but nonetheless, in spite of that, we did do a lot of creative work as a team, 'cos I think working at the HIV / AIDS unit was a very good team, and I think within Mesmac, we had certain issues, but there was basically a strong team sense. And I think it is teamwork that's so important. I suppose the success of the HIV unit was that there were a dozen people, but each of those people had their own network, and it was like a spider's web, so the education worker for the education department had his own networks within education and schools, and he fed that into the HIV unit. The same with the social services rep in the unit, and the trainers, and the public education officers.

I think the most effective way to tackle such an issue is to have a group of people, each with their own networks and replicating them is to try and generally change the whole system to do the right thing. And okay, we could have done better, but we had a jolly good go at coping with what was in front of us. So it is being part of teamwork that is very fulfilling.

[00:56:53]

INTERVIEWER: Is there anything else you want to add, anything we haven't covered that you just want to say before we close?

PARTICIPANT: I was involved at a national level as well. There was a local authority association officer working group on AIDS, which had representatives of local authorities sitting on it, and we produced a number of advisory leaflets about drug use, about confidentiality, and so on, and I think that as another aspect of my

involvement. I suppose I like a bit of strategic and a like a bit of hands-on! I have been very lucky to be able to have worked at both those levels.

[00:57:45] End of transcript.