

## Mark Southern

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**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, I'm Mark, I'm 45. I live in Bolton. I'm a gay man. Single at the moment, because no-one'll have me! [laughs] Obviously, I tend to wear the ribbon, the HIV ribbon. It's something that's important to me as well as volunteering for the LGBT Foundation, and George House Trust.

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**INTERVIEWER:** Could you tell me a little bit about your volunteering with those organisations?

**PARTICIPANT:** Yes. I started volunteering with the LGBT [Foundation] three years ago, when I volunteered at Pride, which was the first Pride I'd ever been to, because to be honest I'd only really come out to my family and everyone when I was about 40 anyway, so I hadn't really done much. Obviously I'd been to the Village a few times with friends on nights out, but... so I wanted to get more involved with the... I suppose, the life and the community, and I thought volunteering at Pride was a good way to come and enjoy Pride and put something back. So I've done the last three Prides. And last year I did World AIDS Day, collecting round Manchester and on the actual 1 December, collecting them and then doing the candlelit walk, and helping out individuals. And I'm doing that again this year, although this year it's not quite as much to do, they do only the 1st, 2nd and 3rd. And yeah, obviously with the George House Trust, it was- I've not really done much [volunteering] with them, because like I say, most of it's through the LGBT [Foundation] anyway. But that's to do with World AIDS Day and things like that.

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**INTERVIEWER:** OK. Why do you like volunteering? What do you get out of it? What's the reasons for you to do it?

**PARTICIPANT:** Well obviously, it helps, because I'm not working at the moment so it helps with my CV. But also, it gets me out and it's good to [be] just helping. And obviously it's broadened my horizons and broadened my education. Because I knew quite bit about things, but obviously not lots. I mean, I've learnt new things. It's just obviously meeting, not just being put within the organisations but obviously at Pride, they're even collecting on the streets, you know, just public, because I'm a very person person. I like talking to people.

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**INTERVIEWER:** What do you think it's done for you?

**PARTICIPANT:** It's probably made me happy because I'm getting out and doing things. And obviously the fact that I'm helping people. But it's also, like I say, it's improved my knowledge of things. You know, and especially with things like HIV and AIDS, you know, being able to... help people and educate people, you know,

like... because I mean, [there were] things I didn't know and when collecting for World AIDS Day it's like, are you aware of this? Are you aware of that? So, you know, just the whole, now I'm obviously out and everyone knows and just getting into the community, and the scene. But helping as well. And obviously, yeah, I enjoy it. It can get a bit hairy sometimes, but...

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**INTERVIEWER:** You mentioned that you came out a little late, around a few years ago. Could you describe your childhood and your early adulthood, before obviously this life that you have now, that kind of thing?

**PARTICIPANT:** Yes, well I mean, I went to a Catholic school, where the headmaster was a priest. So obviously, things like sex just weren't talked about. And I mean, homosexuality was a big no-go. And then obviously, because at my age, when I was in my third year of secondary school, HIV hit the headlines, which was obviously at the time "the gay disease". So yeah, I mean, I knew I was gay and I was... happy in the sense that I knew I was gay, but obviously it was difficult because, you know, people of my generation were finding it difficult to accept homosexuality as well, because of [what] their parents and grandparents were telling them, and then obviously you had HIV/AIDS. And it just went from that, so... it got to the point where, as you got older, it wasn't particularly an issue.

And I think when I was about 25, I was working in a hotel, and because I was over 25 I could drive the staff minibus to take staff home. I got talking to one of the managers, who was gay but older, and I mentioned to him that I was gay. And he told me not to tell anyone, mainly because of course I was driving younger staff home, some of whom may have been 16 or 17[-year old] glass collectors, or 18/19. So I suppose even, I wouldn't say that was discrimination, but there was still a fear then, you know, that you don't tell anyone about your homosexuality unless you have to. Which thinking about it now, was a big mistake, because I think that put me back a long way. Because it's... I obviously feel like I couldn't [?] be honest anywhere. I think in the long run that did have a detrimental effect on my health. I did start suffering from depression. It was partly to do with some of the jobs I was doing, but I think just... that as well. I couldn't be who I wanted to be, and to a certain extent, if I wanted to meet up with anyone, it was in risky situations.

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**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah. Could you describe your school to me? What did it feel like going to your school? What were the other pupils like, the students? What were the teachers like? What was the building like? How did you feel there, were you happy there?

**PARTICIPANT:** Yes, I was very happy the first two years of secondary school, because we were on split sites. So obviously there was just two years, first and second year there. Yeah, on the whole I think I did enjoy school. I mean, I was bullied a little bit but I think that was for the normal reasons – small, overweight, glasses, things like that. I suppose that was another reason why you could never come out as gay, I mean, it would have been, never mind what the staff would have

done, I suspect the pupils would have been, it could have been very awkward. Yeah, I mean I think on the whole I enjoyed it. Probably the early parts, first, second and third year. It was- I said my first two years were on the split site, what used to be an old school. So that was quite nice because it was more compact, you know, and obviously when you went to [higher years] it was obviously a far bigger school, and probably a little bit more daunting. And the deputy head who was running the first site was an ordinary man, but of course when you went to the main building, the head teacher was a priest, so that was a bit... you know, especially in my situation. And obviously, I think the thing is, like I say, there was no- your sex education was literally more to do with, these are the changes you'll be seeing, and it briefly touched on, you know, well, this is how babies are made, and that was it. So of course there was no contraception, because being a Catholic school you can't talk about contraception in any way. The only contraception was... no. But the other thing of course is, you were told you couldn't have sex before marriage. So of course as a gay lad, knowing I was gay, at times I felt very very lonely and isolated, because obviously it was something I couldn't talk to anyone about as such, or if it was, it was really hush-hush.

I don't know, there may very well have been a couple of teachers who maybe I could have spoken to, but I don't think you would have taken the risk, you know, because I think obviously, things are a lot lot different now, for the better.

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**INTERVIEWER:** When were you first aware that you had feelings for guys, for boys?

**PARTICIPANT:** Fairly early. I think I, err...

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**INTERVIEWER:** Can you describe your first memory of...?

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, I think when I was probably eight or nine, it was just the, you know, people were talking about girls, although again, in those days I don't think we were quite as advanced as people are now. But I just didn't feel interested- I knew I was different, but at that age, probably not quite sure why. And then obviously when I went to secondary school, I think I realised yes, I fancy boys.

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**PARTICIPANT:** I've always known I was, if you like, different. But I think probably for me, at 11 or 12, I knew that I was gay. Which... Yeah, I mean, on the whole that was OK, I felt OK in myself, but obviously then other people's attitudes were not very good, obviously being taught by the Church that homosexuality was completely wrong. So yeah, that was difficult. And then of course then when HIV hit the headlines, it was very very difficult. Obviously the school had to react to that. So two teachers came round to each form in your form lessons, and no disrespect to teachers- because my mum and dad were both teachers as well, so I couldn't get away with anything. But I knew the two teachers and they were very nice- and they came round, and obviously they still couldn't talk about contraception. So all they

were saying is, you know, we've only ever had one partner. Well, you know what kids are like, "we're not bloomin' surprised". And it's a shame, because they were both really really nice people. But that's all they were saying - we've only ever had one partner. And it was more about, you know, not, well OK, if you're going to do anything, use precautions, because of course they couldn't say it. And of course, for a long long time I didn't. It was a... you know, and it's, so I mean even- not just learning about sex, but learning about contraception and sexually transmitted diseases, you found out about them in the playground. You weren't taught about them, which was a... you know, I suppose, yeah, when HIV made the headlines, it was frightening. You know, because it was a case of, I'm gay, [but] I can't tell anyone, so I can't really go and get help from anyone, and, what do I do? So yeah, that was frightening. And thank god these things have improved, a great deal.

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**INTERVIEWER:** I was wondering, you don't have to talk about if you don't want to, but I was wondering if you could describe to me that first time that you had sex, with your friend, and how you felt about it, and how did go about it? How did you find a place where you could do it? But you don't have to-

**PARTICIPANT:** No no, it's fine, I'm just trying to think, it's just so long ago. Err... I think we talking about girls and whatever, and it was just a case of I think, as kids, lads do, you know, we were playing with ourselves and possibly masturbating, and I think I said something and it just... it ended up that we started playing with each other and masturbating with each other. I think there might have been some oral there, and then it just moved on from there, to obviously, full... sex.

And this went on for... years. I ended up sharing a house with him for a while, and he was in a heterosexual relationship, and occasionally we still... bits and bats. But I mean, we would... ironically, we had a little code [on the phone], so it'd like like, oh yeah, I'll come over for some computer games and stuff. And that was... so yeah, I felt... well obviously it felt good. And... I suppose for the time whilst we were together and happening, it didn't feel wrong. But sometimes afterwards it was like, oh, [sucks teeth] was that really right? That's obviously because of what was, you know, the teachers, whatever. And I suppose the other thing was, I knew I was gay, but he said, we'll just do this until we get girlfriends. So I suppose in one sense was I doing it under false pretences, whatever. But I mean, I've spoken to him years later and he said he never regretted any of it. So it was just a bit of fun, but... yeah, I mean it... for the first time, and then we moved on to, and... yeah, we... you know, went on for a long time. And we're still mates. I don't see him very often now unfortunately.

But yeah, we used to go out every, when we were old enough to drink, slightly before we were old enough to drink as well! You know, we used to go out every Friday and Saturday night. Sometimes I'd stay at his, and then obviously he moved into houses and... so yeah. It was... I suppose the other thing was, with my school and my upbringing as well, we're talking about how sex before marriage is wrong, and then I mean, homosexuality was completely wrong. So I suppose it got to the point is, you might as well be [missed] [00:17:11] as a lad. So I mean I... I would say, I don't think I particularly took too many risks, in the sense that I had a lot of unprotected sex when I was younger. But I was having that unprotected sex with younger people.

So, the chances of there being any major problems were probably slim. And I think probably when I got to my mid-20s then I was more conscious of using protection, but then again obviously I didn't have sex that often.

I mean, I've never had a relationship, mainly because it's... obviously if you're having a relationship, someone's got to be right. But in my case they would have had to be completely right and utterly right, because in my case, I'd be going home and say, hello mum and dad, by the way I'm gay, and this is my boyfriend. So that was difficult. And I suppose in that sense, sometimes there might have been a bit more pressure to have unprotected sex, because it was risky anonymous sex.

But certainly since I've come out and been volunteering with the LGBT [Foundation] and George House Trust, but mainly with the LGBT [Foundation]- but no, I never go anywhere without some of the safer sex packs in my wallet, so the lube and the condoms. And yeah, I don't care how good looking they are... no. It just doesn't happen. So I suppose that, again, it's... I'm not, obviously, unique, but I'm in a position where if I'm talking to people I can say, yeah when I was younger maybe I did take a few risks, but it's not worth it.

But I do think now unfortunately we're going down... we're slightly going back in time, because I think some of the adverts you see now for condoms are beginning to focus on them being contraception to stop pregnancy, and that's... they're focusing on that more again now, which worries me, because I've been doing World AIDS Day. The infection rate in heterosexuals, and younger heterosexuals, is going up, because people aren't using barrier protection. And it's worrying. And I think, obviously I think schools have a lot to answer for, but, you know, it's... what's better, teaching a child or teaching a young person, that alright, you shouldn't be having sex, but if you are, protect yourself. Rather than sitting there and saying, well no you shouldn't be doing it, shouldn't be doing it, shouldn't be doing it, because it's like, well, I might as well do it, and they're like, well, you know, I'm not supposed to be having sex, I'm not supposed to be using a condom anyway cos actually so... sod it, just do it. Which I think is worrying. Very worrying.

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**INTERVIEWER:** Could you take me back to the time again when you first were aware of or heard of this thing called HIV, called AIDS? How did you hear about it? How did you feel? Was it something your family talked about? Is it something you talked about at school? How did you first become aware of it?

**PARTICIPANT:** Those famous dreaded adverts with the tombstones. Err... no, I didn't really talk about it at home so much because it was a... again, I mean, I had two older brothers, but again, sex wasn't really talked about in the home, and certainly homosexuality wasn't. No, obviously we saw that [the tombstones] and it was like, ooh well, and then it was... a part of it was at school as well, obviously, talking in the playground. It became obvious that it was described as a gay disease. So obviously that was worrying, because it was like, oh, right. But then again, it was a case of oh right, it's not going to affect me because I don't know anyone. And I suppose at like 13, 14, whatever age you was, you weren't thinking down the line, about what's going to happen in ten years. So it was a bit worrying because it was

the "gay disease" and it was like, how's that going to affect me down the line, possibly... But again, there was, and I think even with the, from what I can remember from the adverts, you know, there wasn't any... just you know, "this is the disease, blah blah blah" - it didn't really tell you how to protect yourself. It didn't tell you, "if you're using condoms..." And, whatever... It was like, and I suppose to a certain extent, before those headlines I would never have considered using a condom, you know, during sex. Because it was like, condoms were to stop pregnancy.

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**PARTICIPANT:** Condoms are not just to stop pregnancy. But I say, I don't think it really told you that on the adverts. And of course, certainly, you didn't find out at school. I think possibly I found out more from my friends who went to non-Catholic schools, because obviously they were slightly more openly talking about it. They probably still didn't mention homosexuality, because I'm not sure, was it clause 28, whether that was still in force at the time, I'm not sure when that came in. But obviously at Church of England schools they would talk about condoms, and sexually transmitted diseases. So... Obviously it's a big worry finding out off the boy next door, the details about it, because he's learnt that from his school, when I couldn't learn it from mine. But it... I mean, it certainly... probably [what] was more of a problem than the actual disease was the fact that that made me go, oh well, I can definitely not tell anyway I'm gay. Because I mean... I know there was a bit anti-homosexual backlash. Obviously they were not just seen as queers or whatever, and people who thingy, but these were suddenly these people who were carrying this dreaded, fatal disease. So yeah, that was, it was... I would hope now that if something like that happened now, that it would be handled much better, you know, by the press, by the government, by the health authorities and by schools. But you never know.

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**INTERVIEWER:** How did people talk about... you mentioned the boy next door kind of thing. How - because obviously initially there was quite a lot of uncertainty about what it was. How did people talk about it? And you mentioned that it was a gay thing. Do you remember any-?

**PARTICIPANT:** I remember one- and to be honest I found it quite funny, quite humorous, although the head teacher didn't like it, didn't find it so funny. Some of the boys printed up a, what now you'd consider quite a naïve picture, and basically it was a stick picture of one person bent over and another person behind them, and I think it just said, AIDS, Don't Bend for a Friend.

Now, you know... I thought that was actually, I found it quite amusing. And looking back on it, I think that probably was a better message than the tombstone, you know. But obviously that was possibly because, I mean that was... that was obviously to do with the fact that obviously it was the "gay disease" because it was- although it didn't actually show, you know, the gender of the people, it was obvious that it was supposed to be two lads, because obviously, Don't Bend for a Friend. That said, I found it quite amusing.

But... And I think that was it, it was... [sigh] maybe especially being from the Catholic... it probably wasn't talked about much because it was almost, well, that sort of thing won't affect Catholics, because, you know, Catholics aren't homosexuals, they don't do that thing. So... yeah, I mean I can remember, I do remember thinking in the playground, people said, oh yeah, you know, that AIDS, that's a puff's disease, and that's like, yeah.

So it was... and then of course, the problem is then if there's been kids, if somebody, you know, if somebody was being called gay or a puff, and it was more than just the fact that they were calling, they thought, you know, the rumour was, then that obviously was dangerous. I mean, probably by the time I left school, I'd had some sort of sexual contact with a few of my friends or school friends. Now of course the one thing is, of course, I knew they would never say anything, because obviously the thing... So. But I mean, there was one lad, who there was a rumour that he'd been with this lad, and when this lad woke up he was giving him a blowjob. And it got quite rough for him. But then again, kids being kids, after a few days it blew over.

But you know, it was a difficult time, you know, 'cos... well, I suppose, coming to terms with my sexuality, although I was happy and I knew what I was, but then it was questioning, well, can I really go down this line? Obviously not just the risk of infection/AIDS, but the fact is, am I going to be accepted, when I moved on? I mean I think I did... a joke I have with one of my gay mates is, I did try the dark side once, I did go with a girl. And, no. That just... totally reinforced to me that I was gay. So I suppose it was a case of, well it's something I've got to live with. And just do what I can and take any precautions I need to.

So, I think, when I was about 18/19, I got beaten up because somebody thought I was gay. They didn't know, but they thought I was. So he decided to beat me up. And a few years later, somebody broke my jaw. Because they thought I was gay, or they were pretty sure I was gay. And I think at that point, I just sort of got to a point where, well, fine, it's your fault. It's your problem, not mine, I'm not going to change. If you've got a problem with it, then, fine. You're the idiot, you're the one who's going to look silly. Although maybe then they wouldn't have, but now obviously it's- thank goodness, I think if someone beat someone up because they're gay, then people do say, hang about, you're wrong, you're silly, and then they sound like idiots.

But you know, I think it took a long time to get the association between homosexuality and AIDS out of people's heads. I think we're getting there, but not quite. But obviously that why I wear the ribbon, and I think it's important. I know at one point my mum was a bit concerned I was wearing it, because she was saying, how are people going to react? In Manchester they're alright, but in Bolton how are they going to react? Are they going to look at that and think, you know, you're HIV positive? Are they going to think, he must be gay? Or the other thing is, if he's wearing that, I know he's gay so he must be HIV positive. Which I'm not. I do get tested regularly. And it was a case of, well, that's their problem, not mine. You know, if they want to talk to me, I'll talk to them about it. So... And I think it's very important to, you know, make people aware of it. Especially in the heterosexual community now. It's not just- again, that was the other thing, when I was young, it was that if you got AIDS, you were a bad person, because you were gay, or you

know, you were a drug user. So... and now it's, OK, you know, if you're like, normal, heterosexual people can get HIV now. But we're getting there.

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**INTERVIEWER:** You mentioned the association, you talked a little bit about the association between HIV and gay and them becoming quite closely linked. And then that making it in a way, more difficult to be open about your sexuality. Could you say a bit more about that, in terms of, you know, after school, your life, your twenties and thirties?

**PARTICIPANT:** Yeah. Well obviously even in my 20s and 30s, there was still the association between HIV and being gay, or being a drug user. But it was still... And I think there was still... They still didn't have the younger generation who possibly were slightly more tolerant of homosexuality, you know, they weren't coming through. I mean, my nephew was born when I was 16. He knew I was gay a long time before anybody else, because he asked somebody in the pub who was gay, anyway, and the guy sort of outed me, but he didn't have any choice, because someone standing next to him knew I was gay anyway. And he attitude was, alright, fine, I don't care. But I mean even... that happened I think when he was about 20. So I'd have been 36. So when in when I was in my 20s and even into my 30s, there was still that link between homosexuality and AIDS. And almost, it was like, if a straight woman gets it, or a straight man gets it, they must have slept with someone who slept with another bloke, or whatever. So there was an association that somewhere along the line, there must have been a gay man involved. Or possibly... because I mean, even when I was young you didn't really talk about bisexual people. They existed, obviously, and I suppose there was a lot of discrimination against them.

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**PARTICIPANT:** But yeah, I suppose it was... I don't know, when I probably got to about 35, it was a case of well, I'd possibly resigned myself to the fact that I might not be able to ever come out... I might not have a relationship, so... but I'm still happy with my sexuality, we'll just see how it goes.

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**INTERVIEWER:** So could you describe more that process, more recent process, where you've been more public about your sexuality? And what prompted that, and how did it go?

**PARTICIPANT:** There was a few issues in my life. I was suffering from depression. That was as much to do with the job I was doing, because I was working in a casino, and I was doing daft hours, including 8 hour turnarounds. And of course, you never get a weekend off unless you're on holiday. So I wasn't seeing people. So my weekend was a Tuesday, Wednesday. So I was still going out, but then I was coming home, going on chatrooms and stuff. And things came to a head and I kind of knew something... my mum and dad came round, and they saw something, that it was... I can't remember what it was now. And while in the past I might have said, oh no no no, and it was like, "well yeah OK, I'm gay". And it just sort of blurted out, [and

they were like], oh, right. And ironically for the first half an hour, I had to convince my mum and dad it wasn't their fault! My mum said, oh we should have known, I should have known, I'm your mother I should have known. I said, no, I've hidden it for like, 40 years if you like, but you know, I've hidden it. And then of course the... "well, are you practicing?" And it was like... and the sort of thing, which I think helped, because in my family we're very silly, [good] sense of humour - I said, well no actually I've got quite good at it now! Which I suspect with some people they might have gone, oh [cringing noise]. But that sort of broke the ice. And it was just a case of, now... you know, my brothers are not over-keen. Because again, one of the reasons why it probably took me so long to come out was because one of my brothers was very, very homophobic. Who funnily enough happened to be the father of the nephew who knew. And when he asked my nephew, did he know, he said no. Which, I don't particularly blame him. Now obviously he's a little bit more mellowed now, mainly because his wife, who works I think in social services, told him, you can't say that anymore. So it was... yeah. A lot of people in the pub, or friends knew, or suspected, or... but yeah. It was a little bit of a release. I mean, I know the... where I was working knew I was gay. So, it was a bit of a release.

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**INTERVIEWER:** What's your relationship like now with your family?

**PARTICIPANT:** Well it's very good with my mum dad, and it's not bad with my brothers. Again, I think one of my bothers still can't quite get his head round it. They were, because my brothers are 6 and 8 years older than me, so obviously they were, they would have left school when HIV hit the headlines, so... But they're alright. I mean, obviously my nieces and nephews are fine with me. My nephew's got a wicked sense of humour sometimes, like he walked in the pub once and said- oh, hi Uncle Puff! [laughs] He's 28 now. I said, you're not too big for a clout! He went, yeah. So yeah, I mean it's, obviously that generation is... I think there's still some, obviously, problems with discrimination, because that generation, my generation is their fathers. So there's still some, you know... one of my nieces has a child of her own now, so hopefully by the time he gets to that sort of age, we might have a situation where there's no... well I don't think we'll ever get rid of homophobia, I don't think you'll ever get rid of any sort of discrimination. But I think we're getting there. And I think we're getting there, that people are beginning to realise that HIV is a disease that affects everyone. And... it's just, we just need Catholics to let them, you know, to teach children about contraception and protection. Don't think that'll happen, but...

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**INTERVIEWER:** That leads to me my next question, which is, how did you first hear about safer sex or the idea of safer sex, or condoms? Were you aware of any of the campaigns and initiatives that were starting out, or...?

**PARTICIPANT:** No. No, again, it was... again obviously the... again, I knew about condoms from, you know, school playgrounds and whatever. So you knew they were there, and I think it was a case of... I think it might be because I bought some once and read the instructions, if you like. But it was obviously, you know, prevents

pregnancy, and then obviously it said prevents STIs, including HIV. But then of course, you carried on reading, and it said, not suitable for anal sex. It was like, what? What am I supposed to do? So then obviously you had the situation where you had the Durex Extra Safe. Well, it was bad enough going into a chemist to ask for condoms. But going in to ask for extra safe condoms, it was like... they must know why I want them.

So yeah... I'm not sure I really knew much about the Village, at the time. I certainly never came in. I didn't come into the Village for the first time until I was about 35. And that was a friend of mine who is gay, he tended to come in on his birthday with his brother and sister-in-law and friends. So he said, come down, once. Well, I was like a kid in a candy bar. I just couldn't believe that, you know, something like this existed in the middle of Manchester. Especially male pole dancers.

So yeah, it was... but I wasn't aware of any campaigns at all. As I said, I don't think there was much on television about it. I don't remember seeing anything on the telly about, protect yourself, use this, do that, do that. It was just the tombstone, and you know, AIDS is here, it's a killer, don't do it. And again, the only time condoms were advertised were to stop pregnancies. So... so certainly, going back to... I've learnt a lot since I was volunteering, coming into the Village. And obviously what's going on now. But obviously what's happened in the past. And you know, not realising how much possibly has been done. But one thing I've realised is that it was, you know, the LGBT community who turned around and said, well hang about, let's do something about this disease. And they were the ones who have pushed the education and the protection and the safer sex message.

I was talking to one guy, he said, well, some people might say, so they should have been, it was their fault – not that he was – because some people considered that it was *their* fault or whatever. And I said, well yeah, but the thing is, this is a problem, because what happened when it came out is that gay men didn't use condoms, because, what was the point? Because we were told that condoms were to stop pregnancy. And to possibly stop some STIs. And now it's... you know, I don't know how many [of] the free safe sex packs they give out... I don't think you can walk into a bar on Canal Street without them being there.

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**INTERVIEWER:** So, you've talked a little bit about Manchester. What's your impression of how things have changed in Bolton? Is there much visibility around campaigns? Do you see safer sex packs in bars? Do you...

**PARTICIPANT:** No. Well I mean, there's only one gay bar in Bolton now. We used to have three. There's only one now, and I've not been in it for a long time, because I didn't really like it. But it was the pub itself, and to a certain extent the clientele. But there is more of a... you know, homosexuality and gay is a little bit more prominent in Bolton now. We've had two Prides, sort of. You know, the first one was just a series of events in various places in the town centre.

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**PARTICIPANT:** There is a little bit more tolerance and visibility, but still not a lot. But obviously the LGBT [Foundation] here [have] done a lot to promote things. And I know Bolton Library are very good. Because they have things on in... when it was 50 years since the decriminalisation, they were flying... above Bolton Town Hall, they were flying the rainbow flag. And they do have a thing about it. And when it's World AIDS Day, usually the week before, they have a display and information. So you know, things like that are good. Certainly, last year, or this year as it would have been, for Pride, I was quite happy to walk through Bolton town centre, wearing my LGBT t-shirt [...] to catch the bus to come in. Now, I suspect ten years ago, I'm not sure I would have been. But now I'm, you know, I'm still a little bit wary, but I'm a lot more comfortable, and I think, because obviously there's been a lot of things where, you know, the council have said, you know, we will not tolerate hate crime, and... you know, emphasising the point that homophobic discrimination is the same as racial discrimination or sexual discrimination. So, yeah, we're getting there. It's a lot better than it was.

[00:47:55]

**INTERVIEWER:** So what was the first time that you encountered a safer sex campaign targeted at gay men? Was that at the LGBT Foundation? Had you come across stuff, information that was specifically aimed at people like you before that?

**PARTICIPANT:** No, that was just pure and simply when I came... well, when I first started coming to the Village, I saw bits and bats. But it was only really once I started coming to the LGBT [Foundation]... actually the first time I got any idea was, I came to a group called Icebreakers, which although it's not run by the LGBT [Foundation], it was upstairs on the third floor. So that was the first time I really got into, you know, seeing all these different leaflets and safe sex packs and information, and... the other thing is, where you could get information. And not realising how much information there was about all sorts of things. It's not just a case of, well, you're gay, [here's this information], it's: you're gay and you are into this, you know, or if you're into this, or you've got this. So it was really once I started coming here.

And one of the things, I couldn't believe how frank some of them were. You know, they don't mince their words. Which is obviously good. You know, there's no point mincing around, and saying... you know, it's like, if this is what you're doing, this is what precautions you need to take. When I first started coming here, there certainly wasn't anything like that in Bolton, and again I'm not quite sure Bolton's that far yet. Because obviously... again, even with safe sex packs, they're in the pubs and bars and clubs in the Village, but I don't think they're in any of the pubs outside of the Village, I'm not sure they are. So obviously in Bolton you're got a situation where there's only one gay pub, so... But then again, I don't know whether, I mean, I'll be honest, I don't know whether the LGBT [Foundation] do send them some stuff. Maybe I'll have to pop in and check!

[00:50:31]

**INTERVIEWER:** OK, so we've got a few minutes left and I was just going to ask you about your sense of the situation now, and then going into the future, obviously there's some things left on the horizon. How would you describe your experience of

awareness and involvement in safer sex campaigns and the kind of ways that's changed, and what's coming?

**PARTICIPANT:** Well I think obviously one advantage is that because homosexuality and bisexuality is being accepted more, then it makes it easier to talk about safe sex within those communities, and even the heterosexual community. Obviously there is a lot more awareness of HIV and other STIs, and... you know, people do know about condoms and things. Again, the weird thing is, like I said before, TV adverts are still going to be emphasising that condoms are for stopping pregnancies. Which, you know, is worrying, because that might be leading to the increase in infections in the heterosexual community. But then again, you might have a generation of gay or bisexual men who are starting to hear that message again, [and are like,] we don't need to use condoms because they stop pregnancies, or we only need to use condoms for the lubrication of it. So I do fear that we're going back to almost pre-AIDS days where gay lads aren't going to use condoms.

Again, I think there needs to be more education in schools. And obviously, especially, possibly Catholic schools where they need to talk about them. And obviously with PrEP coming forward, that's obviously a wonderful thing. Again, it's... got to handle that very well because I've had one or two, not being aggressive, but saying, well, you're giving [them] a pill so they can go to sleep around. Again, that's something that's got to be well-managed. But the other thing is, I said, I wouldn't have sex without a condom, I don't have anal sex without a condom on. And I think the majority of people, gay men, accept that. You know, and they'll say, well alright, fair enough. I certainly wouldn't be persuaded or bullied into having sex without a condom with someone I didn't know or didn't know their history. I think a lot of people do. I think a lot of people are like that, they won't get bullied. They won't. And it's obviously, if they come to the Village, then that's [missed] [00:54:07] reinforced. And like I said, there's no reason for it. If you're in the Village, you can pick up a safe sex pack, you can pick up one, two, three, as many as you want. So I'm hopeful of going down the line that obviously, the message for safe sex is getting through, and obviously the rate of infection for HIV is hopefully going to lower. I still think there's a bit of work to do, and we need to get this PrEP and PEP that comes through, as a community, we need to make sure that is marketed right to other people. It's not just, oh this is a pill you can take and you can sleep around and do whatever you want. It's a case of, alright, I'll take that, but I'll still think about safe sex, you know. So again that's... although it's a wonderful thing, that doesn't mean if you take that you can go out and sleep around and do whatever you want with whoever you want and not take any precautions at all.

[00:55:22]

**INTERVIEWER:** You mentioned PEP as well. Have you had any experiences or do you think you might consider using PrEP and PEP ever? If you're not comfortable talking about it-

**PARTICIPANT:** No no, I don't think, at the moment I wouldn't because I'm not comfortable- and, as I say, I wouldn't consider having anal sex without a condom on. And at the moment certainly I'm in a position where, because I've live in Bolton and stuff, and I don't particularly come to Manchester a lot, where I'm not in a position

where I'm having a lot of sex. If it got a point where maybe I was, or the chance was I might have been, then I might. That would be something I might consider. Again, depends on obviously, my life story. Although I do think that obviously I'd like to think that I'd be confident enough and sensible enough to not possibly need it because I always use condoms. But it's something I might... but obviously the PEP, obviously if I was ever worried that, you know, [I was in a] situation where I ever had any situation without a condom or the condom broke, then obviously yes I might consider going and getting the PEP. Although apparently it's not a nice course to take.

[00:56:58]

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah, it's very strong.

**PARTICIPANT:** But there again, that might be... ironically, if someone has to do that, that might make them think about using a condom or... maybe. Because obviously you've got alcohol involved as well sometimes in the Village, so. But yeah, it's... I think it's nice that people are beginning to realise and recognise in the LGBT community that things can be done and should be done.

**[00:57:31] End of transcript.**