

**Walking in my shoes:
personal experiences
of inequality in Britain**

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Introduction

This document forms part of a series of companion reports published alongside the Final Report of the Equalities Review, *Fairness and Freedom*. Many of the responses to the Review Panel's Interim Report, which was published in March 2006 for consultation, commented that greater prominence should be given to people's lived experiences of prejudice and institutional discrimination. People wanted to see more evidence reflecting the importance of individuals and groups in their struggle to rid society of discrimination, prejudice and inequality.

The Final Report itself includes information about what life is like, from an equalities perspective, in different parts of Britain today. People of all ages and backgrounds were willing to describe to the Review their personal experiences of inequality in Britain, and all the testimonies received have helped to inform the Report and the Review Panel's recommendations. But the Panel also thought it would be valuable to enable some more of the people who contributed their experiences to the Review to tell their own stories. They are therefore set out here, alongside news reports and research findings from recent years.

The document is structured around six broad areas of life that most individuals experience:

- education and learning
- workplace and labour market
- health and social care
- home and family
- crime and justice
- wider society and community

This is not intended to be a rigid or restrictive categorisation. Some of the case histories described are relevant to more than one of these spheres. And the impacts of people's experiences – positive or negative – tend to be felt across other areas of their lives.

The Panel is grateful to all of the individuals who provided their stories, not all of which could be included in this document. The Panel would also like to thank the organisations (including members

of the Reference Group for the Equalities Review and the Discrimination Law Review) who worked in partnership with the Review Team to collect many of these personal histories. Some testimonies are quoted directly from case studies and research previously published by these and other organisations. General references to sources, including other published documents, are set out at the end.

Most testimonies appear here unedited, as they were told by the people who experienced or perceived them. A small number of the case histories are told by other people, who had learned about these experiences as case workers or in conducting research. In some cases the Review Team have selected particularly powerful extracts from longer narratives which we have not published in full; these extracts are included here, with some of the shorter testimonies received, to demonstrate the broad range of people's experiences.

Many contributors wished to remain anonymous, but others were content to reveal at least a little of their public identity as well as their life experiences. For some anonymous testimonies, sources are included to provide context for the experiences described.

The rest of the series of companion reports gives an idea of the broader work undertaken in the course of the Review. These comprise:

- *Constructing a Capabilities List*
- *Defining and Measuring Equality*
- *Engendered Penalties: transgender and transsexual people's experiences of inequality and discrimination*
- *Equalities in Great Britain, 1946-2006*
- *Equality, Diversity and Prejudice in Britain*
- *Persistent Employment Disadvantage 1974-2003*
- *Promoting Equality in the Early Years*
- *Sexual Orientation Research Review*

This research provides some extra context for people's personal experiences of inequality in Britain in recent generations.

Education and learning

As a very small child I don't remember being made to feel any different in this world, just a small child living its life protected and loved by its family. I was taught my alphabet, to read basics and write my name and other important words. I also could count quite well. So my first day of school held no fear for me, no matter how much my older brother tried to warn me to the contrary. He was not a bookish child at all; in fact he couldn't stand to look at books, let alone read one.

My first day of nursery came and went and I was way ahead of my peers within the room. I happily skipped holding my Mam's hand, back home to the trailers on the camp, on which we were camping unauthorised. We were on the local authority site, but had to move off because my Granny had had a stroke and needed somewhere permanent. She was moved onto our plot and my parents were given an ultimatum: either we moved off or she would have to. We moved to the only place available for us, the side of the road next door to a pub which my uncles used.

I became more and more confident at school as the weeks went by, my teacher always held my work up as an example and I got mentioned in assembly. I was given awards and merits constantly; all the while my brother made fun of me and got into fights. Shortly after moving up a year we got moved on and so had to change schools. It was here that I felt what my brother felt. It was here that I realised I was unintelligent, I was naughty, I was out of place. I was a dirty little Gypsy girl. I was substandard... I must have expressed something to my Mam; she felt something shift also because at around this time, as she did my hair, I began to get the speech. "Babby, you are a Gypsy, that's something to be proud of and don't let anyone tell you otherwise. Always remember no one is better than you and you are better than no one; we are all the same... But if ever someone thinks they are better than you... Then that's different."

It was during these speeches I made a decision. If I had to be in this place, with these people, I would prove them wrong and I would learn something. For some reason my brother and sister didn't quite get through this stage, maybe because my brother was with my dad on a morning so he didn't hear what my Mam had to say. I don't know for him, but for my younger sister, who regularly drank aftershave to make herself sick in the morning to get out of going to school, it was no good. The only culprit I can find is the school. They let her down. They constantly compared her

to me and she got sent to my class to learn how to behave and how to learn. I am three years her senior, not much now, but in primary school that's huge. I left school at 9 years old... No one came looking for three young children who just disappeared!

I tried again when I was 12 but I only managed three months in school. I felt how my sister must have felt, even though I chose to prove a point and excelled in most subjects. I was out of place and I didn't belong. So how did the sub-standard Gypsy with no formal education make it to become the deputy director of one charity and the chairperson of a second tier umbrella organisation? Quite simply, it was my mother's words ringing in my ears alongside the praise from my first few years at Wapping primary school. It is this that gave me the determination to learn and excel. It is this that any disadvantaged group needs: praise, self belief, determination and opportunity.

– Violet Tucker (Leeds Gypsy and Traveller Exchange)

This isn't as serious or as bad as being hit by the teachers and stuff, but in classes the teacher, because of my colour, will talk to everyone else but me because I'm the only Black person in my maths class. She tells us to put our hand up and what she did to me once was that I put my hand up and she looked all the way around the room and then looked at me and then walked to me, but she checked every opportunity to avoid listening to my question. It's happened quite a few times. I think it's because of the colour of my skin.

It feels like everyone at school is picking on me. They shove me in the corridor and call me "gay boy". It happens in almost every lesson, too. My so-called friends don't stand up for me, and the teachers don't do anything to help, even when half the class is calling me names. I was bullied in my last school for being gay – that's why I left. Here it's even worse. I don't know what to do.

– Jason (aged 15)

I am 35 and work in the public sector. I am also a gay man but am too concerned about unknown consequences to out myself at work, and I am ashamed to say that my partner of four years is invisible even for pensions purposes.

The Interim Report's findings about the educational chances of gay men at 16 rang true with my own experience. I was brought up in a rural area in the South West in a Christian family and there was no one I felt I could talk to about my sexuality until I was 25. I didn't know anyone else in the

same situation at school and in fact didn't really know what sexuality meant until I started looking at where I might go to university.

I was academically able (eight good 'O' Levels and three 'A' Levels), but I was very frightened about the prospect of living away from home and being 'found out' – even if this seems irrational now. This was cemented in my mind when I read the 'alternative' (Student Union) prospectus of a university which had a half-page 'comic' article about what they thought of gay men and how any that came to university would be exposed very quickly. As a result I formed lots of excuses about why I wasn't going to university. There was also no tradition of university in my family, which was relatively poor, so there was no discouragement from my stated aim of going into work at 18.

I was really surprised to learn from the Report that this is not uncommon and still happening, and I therefore welcome the Review's concern about this issue.

– Christopher (London)

Pupils at school make fun of me because I have Asperger's Syndrome, and call me horrible names. I feel ashamed of myself because I'm different. I'm stressed out and don't know how to cope.

– Jonathon (aged 11)

I'm getting bullied at school. People in the neighbourhood are calling my family "terrorists" and say, "Go back to your own country." I'm worried they'll start saying these things at school. Muslim boys are getting beaten up at school.

– Fatima (aged 9)

In 1992, I was a Head of Department at a college in Cornwall, working with a Principal who was also an old friend, and getting ready for the 'real life experience', the point at which trans people live in their correct gender role before completing their medical treatment. When I told my Principal, S, that I was in fact female, not male, he was surprised but supportive. Unfortunately, S reported to the Board of Governors, which decided against supporting me. I was then dismissed without references – a perfectly legal act at the time.

Luckily, a friend of a friend knew a solicitor who was interested in this area of human rights, and she knew a remarkable barrister. Between us, we came up with a novel legal argument. The law said that no trans woman could prove unfair dismissal unless she could produce the trans man who had

been treated more favourably by the employer – the so-called 'third party comparator' rule. We argued successfully that I was my own comparator: when my employer had believed me to be male, I was treated very favourably; when the employer discovered that I was female, I was treated quite differently. No one had thought of this approach before, and it gave us at least the possibility of trying to bring a legal case. The support of the members of the Parliamentary Forum on Transsexualism, established around this time, was invaluable, as was the support of Liberty, the National Council for Civil Liberties, and the trans support groups. But a crucial difference was made by the financial aid which my solicitor gained, and in particular by the support of the Equal Opportunities Commission, without whom there would have been no case.

The rest is legal history. My solicitor gained anonymity for me in the court proceedings, something which has been very precious for the other trans people who have taken legal action, and he persuaded the Industrial Tribunal to refer the case to the European Court of Justice, where Helena Kennedy won it – not just for me, but for everyone who believes in the equal treatment of people. We made new law, through a legal decision which affected not only every person in the European Union but was influential on the legal decisions of other countries and continents.

Things have moved on astonishingly fast since then, and now trans people have full civil status in their correct gender. It is wonderful to see young people entering a world where alienation and loss are not an automatic experience, and where gender is just one of many potentially interesting facts about individuals.

Will society ever achieve true equality? When we all stop thinking of ourselves in categories such as Black/White, male/female, gay/straight, and use our imaginative sympathies to understand each other as people – then we may.

– P (landmark transgender case, 1996)

When I was a child, my atheist parents taught me to respect other people's beliefs and actively encouraged me to find out about the various religions and make up my own mind. My husband, who was a committed Christian until his late teens, was a bit concerned about that as he did not want his children indoctrinated as he had been, but we agreed that our two daughters did have the right to make up their own minds.

When we were looking for schools for our elder daughter, we rejected the local Church of England primary school (we didn't want religious instruction), and deliberately selected a community school with quite a mixed intake that included a number of children of Asian origin and various other nationalities. When our daughter started at the school, it soon became clear that the school had a strong Christian ethos, probably at least as strong as the average Church of England school.

The assemblies always included hymns and prayers and my daughter often told me things her class teacher, who was clearly a committed Christian, said about Jesus. My daughter understood that we did not believe in God or Jesus, and she was aware that the Asian children who withdrew from assemblies believed in another God called Allah; although she did sometimes seem a bit confused about what to believe, we talked it through and, to begin with, she seemed to accept that different people believed different things, and that she should learn about what they believed and could make up her own mind when she was ready to.

Each class used to do an assembly for the whole school and their parents once a year and, in her first year, the children had been divided into groups by religion, and each group performed a little play and talked about what they believed. And there was my daughter in the Christian group talking about baby Jesus! I liked the general idea, as it seemed a good way of teaching children about different beliefs, but I wondered whether my daughter had chosen to be part of the Christian group. I asked her that evening, and she said that the teacher had put them into groups. She had apparently told the teacher that she wasn't Christian and didn't believe in God, and the teacher had told her that she would when she grew up (!) and given her no choice. After that I noticed that she was sometimes upset when she came out of school, but she wouldn't tell me what was wrong. But she did ask me one day whether she was a bad person – it transpired that the teacher had been telling the class what good people believed, and she had drawn the obvious conclusion. A few days later I found her crying because she was going to go to hell. I went in and talked to her teacher, who wasn't very understanding but said she would "be careful how she put things".

A few weeks later, my daughter told me, in tears again, that some of the children had told her that if she wasn't Christian she must be one of the 'Pakis' and had shouted, "Paki, Paki," at her in the playground. The person on playground duty had not intervened. This time I went to see the head, who (I was pleased to see) was very concerned about the implication that the children of Pakistani origin may be suffering racist abuse, but did not seem at all concerned about my daughter being bullied because of her non-religious beliefs.

Not long after that, my daughter announced that she was now a Christian when she was at school, although she didn't really believe it. That was the way that she would deal with the bullying, and she kept it up until she went to the secondary school, where she felt it was all right to come out as an atheist, not least because by then she was by no means the only one, and the school accepted and respected her beliefs. This pretence obviously 'worked' for her, and she was much happier at school, so although I didn't feel at all happy about her having to pretend something she didn't believe, I did not feel that I should push a child of that age to stand up for herself when it was making her so unhappy.

My younger daughter, who went to the same primary school, responded in a very different way. She had the same class teacher in the first year and, within a few months, became a firm believer,

regularly asking me to read bible stories to her, which I did. So she had a different problem: she used to beg me and her father to find Jesus so that we wouldn't burn in hell! That was almost as hard to deal with, but I was not prepared to lie to her. Eventually, when she was about 8 years old, she decided for herself that "believing in God is as silly as believing in Father Christmas" and was very happy to tell everyone, including her teachers, that this was what she thought. Somehow she managed to avoid, or cope with, the bullying my elder daughter suffered.

Until my children went to school, I had no idea that a community school could be so Christian but, talking to other people, I began to realise that my children's experience is not all that unusual. I knew that schools had to have 'collective worship' and that this was supposed to be Christian, but I had assumed that community schools, especially those with a mixed intake, would respect children's beliefs, whether religious or not. Are there any schools that teach about the full range of religious and non-religious beliefs, without thrusting one set of beliefs down children's throats? There should be!

I get teased and called lots of names at school about being a Christian.

– Jane (aged 13)

Adam Marson – a 21 year old wheelchair user with spina bifida, hydrocephalus and epilepsy – went to National Star College, a residential college in Cheltenham, for three years from the autumn of 2002 until July 2005. The college serves students with physical disabilities and associated learning difficulties.

He had hoped that going to the specialised college would mark a turning point in his life. "My social worker introduced me to the idea of going to National Star College. I went and looked at it and I really liked it. It was more freedom and there were plenty of things to do. For me it represented a chance to get real independence," he explains.

He says his hopes were further raised last year. After leaving college, he had a meeting with his social worker and was told that he would be provided with independent living accommodation. But, so far in the year since that meeting, he says he hasn't even been shown one place. He says he's fed up waiting.

"My life is on hold and it's a real pain. I hope I get my own place, but when I will get it I don't know," he says. "Living at home is all right, but I like to be around people my own age. My parents are getting on – they aren't young any more. My dad's 73 and my mum is 71 and I feel just like a lodger living at home. I feel I need to get a life of my own."

Adam is now concerned that his two years at college will have been a waste of time if he doesn't soon get a place of his own. He worries that he may soon forget the independent living skills he worked so hard to learn.

My school kept coming up with stupid arguments like, "Academic standards will fail if girls wear trousers", "No one else has ever complained" (not true), "If you want to wear trousers go to a different school".

I was pleased I won my sex discrimination case because it was the right result after a long struggle. It shows that you can do things if you put your mind to it, especially if you have the backing of the law and organisations such as the EOC.

I think that there should be regulations to say that it is illegal to prevent girls wearing trousers at school, or anywhere for that matter. It really is ridiculous that some schools are still insisting that girls wear skirts.

– Jo Hale (won the right to wear trousers in school, in 2000, aged 14)

A public school in the North of England refused a request by the parents of Muslim pupils to exempt their children from swimming classes during Ramadan. The request was made on the grounds that contact with water increased the risk of accidentally drinking water while they were fasting.

Of the 900 pupils at John Kelly Girls Technical College in North West London, 50 per cent are Muslims. On Mondays, the college finished at 4.10pm, whilst during the rest of the week they finished at 3.30pm. During Ramadan, Muslim pupils who were fasting requested permission to break their fast on Mondays at *Iftar* time, which is just before 4.00pm. However, they were refused permission on the grounds of the general school rule that pupils were required to stay in class until 4.10pm on Mondays, and not permitted to take food or drink into the class.

A 9 year old girl in a school in North West London was made to sit with other children during lunch although she was fasting. When the mother complained to the teacher concerned, the mother was told that the school does not have enough funding to employ another teacher to look after the girl in another room and the insurance will not cover the school if she is left in another room without supervision.

I was born in Mombasa, Kenya, to Gujarati-speaking Hindu Indian parents. In 1966 I went to India for further education; I passed pre-Medical Science examination (equivalent to 'A' Level) and completed two years of BSc Hons Geology from Punjab University, Chandigarh, India.

I arrived in Britain in December 1970 as a British Passport holder student, and wished to get a place in a medical school through UCCA. My qualifications were not recognised in Britain, although being recognised in California and other parts of USA. I joined Luton Polytechnic to do 'A' Levels – did not get a grant although other British East African Indian immigrant students (whose families had settled in Britain) were getting grants. Besides, I was charged higher rate of fees as a 'foreign student'. Hence began working Friday evening to Sunday night supporting myself. Even then I did not get a 'conditional offer' from UCCA. What I found most insulting was that I was made to sit the competency test in English, which I passed with distinction from the Joint Matriculation Board. My lecturers told me that social mobility was very much a matter of familial British educational connections and class. (Even after 36 years nothing much has changed, as the latest research reveals.)

I eventually gave up and began working in the catering industry. I saved enough money to sustain myself through a year's full-time course in Hotel, Catering and Institutional Management at North London Polytechnic, Holloway in 1973-74.

– Anant M Vyas

I am 40 and have just started a degree in French at Sussex University. I have a disability and a chronic illness, both of which mean that I get easily tired and that my balance is not good and so I need handrails on stairs. In January this year I was asked by the university what help I would need in order to be able to study there, and I asked if a lift were going to be installed in one of the buildings I would be using a lot and also if handrails could be installed over five stretches of concrete steps that were in and around buildings I would be using. I was told the lift would be in place and that handrails could be fitted. Later on I met with the Head of Estates to look at the areas where I needed handrails and was told there would be no problem, although the designs would need to be first presented to English Heritage as Sussex University is a listed building. The handrails were to be installed before Freshers' Week at the end of September but nearer the time

I was told it would probably be by the end of October. It is now the beginning of November and there are still no handrails. The lift, while installed, worked through Freshers' Week but then broke at midday on the first day of term and is still broken five weeks later.

So what impact has this had on me? Well, I have discovered ways around the stairs that have no handrails, although it means that I take longer routes to get from A to B which can be a chore when I'm tired. It also means that I never walk anywhere with my classmates as they take the quickest route and I go off in a different direction – it makes it harder to get to know people when I am never with them except in class. The lack of a lift means that I have extra stairs to climb, which is do-able as these stairs have a handrail but it's one more thing to make me tired. So, yes, the lack of these access measures have not prevented me from doing my degree but they make my experience different to my fellow students'. They also make me feel that my needs are not taken seriously – putting in handrails and fixing a lift are not difficult things to sort out. I should not have to feel that it's up to me to make a fuss to have these simple things done – why can't they just be taken care of? I end up feeling that, OK, I can cope without handrails and a lift so I'll just keep going even if it's a chore. However, my fellow non-disabled students don't have these extra stresses and I feel put out that as always it's me who has to cope.

Until recently I worked at a High School for boys where I was Head of Religious Education. I had been there for three and a half years after a break from teaching of several years, due to the effects of homophobia in the classroom in my previous school. Ironically, back then I had full support from the school and was encouraged to call the students' bluff and come out fully, with the promise that I would be backed by senior management, Heads of Year, governors etc. I felt too vulnerable to go along with this. End result: breakdown and signed off for stress leading to my departure from teaching.

Foolishly or otherwise, I decided to return to teaching in 2001 to take a post at the boys' school in April of that year. I entered some kind of timewarp and found myself in an institution that seems to think it is operating in the 1950s. Homophobia is rife among the students, largely unchecked by staff, and among the leadership team were some who have been openly homophobic in my hearing. To cut a very long and tortuous story short, I once again found myself on the receiving end of constant abuse. Not because I am at all obviously gay – I am not – but because I dared to defend gay people and challenge homophobia on a regular basis. In RE the topic comes up often. The students have clearly not experienced many teachers challenging homophobia and certainly very few male teachers.

I have left the school now, after having been signed off long-term for stress.

– Tony Green

As a primary school teacher, I have long been aware that I am discriminated against because of my beliefs. So many primaries, perhaps particularly here in the North West, are faith schools that my inability to provide a faith reference has meant that my opportunities for employment are severely restricted. On first moving to the area over 10 years ago I did apply to C of E, Methodist and RC schools even though they stated "practising ... preferred", as I thought that it might be a formality. However, it soon became apparent that this was not the case, and now I don't even bother to apply. At one interview, I was asked if I were a Christian and I replied that I tried to live my life according to values which Christians shared. I was told that this was not enough and that to work in their school, I needed to have Christ in my heart. Needless to say, I did not get the position. It went to someone who ran a Sunday school class in her 'spare' time.

Can you imagine the despair I feel at the knowledge that even more faith schools are being planned, so restricting my chance of employment and that of others like me even further, as time goes on?

When I was 14 my headmistress told me to forget about a teaching career. In the past women were not considered capable of running anything but an infant school. Although there has been an increase in women heads, the belief that women are not tough enough to deal with pupils over 11 still exists. The best thing about my job was to see children gain self-confidence that would enable them to deal with problems that they would encounter outside of school, especially those who were from a minority group. To see children progress in their learning is a wonderful experience.

– Betty Campbell (Wales' first Black woman head teacher, 1973)

I was born in 1958 in Nottingham and grew up in the East Midlands. My father wanted me to get a good education and he wanted it so badly he sent me to school – in fact a lot of schools! I didn't enjoy school, mostly because new teachers assumed you ought to know things and they got very angry when you didn't. It also became apparent that reading and writing were essential and as I could barely do either many days were spent staring out of the window.

Unlike the rest of my Traveller relatives, my father wanted me to go to secondary school. Here I enjoyed sport and art, two subjects which didn't require much spelling and reading skills. I only attended two secondary schools, which helped a lot. While I was at school I never mentioned I came from a Traveller family, as we knew I would have had my life made impossible. After resitting my exams, I eventually had enough qualifications to attend Art College.

After Art College, armed with a degree in Fine Art, my girlfriend suggested I train to be an art teacher – that was in 1981. Since then I have taught at St Aidan's Church of England School, Harrogate, the Art Elective Programme for the Ministry of Education, Singapore, and Landau Forte College, Derby.

In 2002, after 20 years, I decided I could no longer hide my true identity. I gave up my Head of Department position in mainstream teaching to become a support teacher in the Buckinghamshire Traveller Education Service. I worked there for two years before moving to take charge of the Primary Team within Doncaster Traveller Education Service.

I feel fortunate that my father gave me an opportunity, through education, to have a whole new world of opportunity opened up to me.

– Joseph M Wilson

I'd prefer it if they had better meetings and included us as persons rather than a stupid kid. I'd prefer it if they chatted to u like a normal human being rather than a divvy kid. Talk to you instead of talking down to you, with respect and stuff.

They bully me because of my colour. They call me racist names, hit me and make comments about my family. The hitting hurts, but the words hurt more. My dad has suggested that I punch the bullies. I think this will make things worse though, as the bullies are very popular. The whole school could end up hating me.

– Nat (aged 12)

Workplace and labour market

I am a 38 year old woman with two children aged 8 and 6. Apart from a four-month interim position that I got through a friend last year and a further stint of three months in a related area, I haven't done any paid work since 1999. This is because I have been travelling with my partner's work and I also decided to care for my children myself in the early years (part-time work was hard to come by seven years ago). My children also had quite a few health problems when they were younger and I felt that they needed me to be with them, particularly as there is no family support. However, now that they are doing well at school and are stable and happy, I am trying to forge a life for myself again. I have been searching for work since the beginning of last year and on average apply for three roles a day; however, no employer wishes to interview me, even when personal recommendations have been made – the reason given is that I am not currently in the market.

The facts are that I am more than qualified for the jobs I apply for (Masters graduate in my field, which is HR, and I am also professionally qualified under the Chartered Institute) and I typically have more than the amount of experience asked for, spanning international investment banking, overseas consulting, education and entertainment. To keep my skill set up to date I have been doing a voluntary role for two years as a school governor responsible for all HR matters; however, this is always discounted. I have certainly not allowed myself to vegetate during the child care years and in addition to everything else have also written two novels, several screen plays, wrote, recorded, got signed and released a CD album in South Africa – but even this demonstration of creativity and tenacity has got me nowhere. Because of my academic background and experience we always felt that my career would be something to fall back on if my partner should ever lose his job, but this hasn't proven to be the case.

The irony for me is that I come from a working class background and was the first person from our extended family (my sister has been the second and last) to go to university at the end of the 1980s. From an early age I wanted to learn and get on, and managed to do so under quite adverse financial circumstances. And I wanted to have a career, unlike the women before me; however, it seems that I am in exactly the same position as my ancestors at this point. Something I never anticipated.

I am not alone as most of my friends are university graduates and professionals and many of them have given up before they have even started to try and get work because they think that they won't be

considered. This is an enormous waste of talent and I feel we are being indirectly discriminated against by employers.

I am aware that I do not represent a particularly disadvantaged section of the community but we are certainly not rich either and, like many families in London, tend to live from week to week with nothing put aside for the future, but this is the sacrifice I made to bring up my children myself. However, I'd like to change that, become economically viable and start to save for my old age and for my children to go to university (should they want to go).

– housewife (south-east London)

I am a 65 year old man. I am a British citizen; I was born in Mumbai. I came to this country two years ago and got a job with a local grocery shop owned by a fellow countryman.

After two months working for him my working hours got longer from 30 to 73 hours; I did not receive any wages, only food from the shop. I was living in the store room of the shop. My wages were paid straight into my bank account which I had no access to – the bank have only seen me once in the 16 months and that was when I joined. My employer would not give me my passport or driving licence or any of my paperwork so I could not leave my job. My daughter, who is 15, was taken from the shop to work in another shop; I later found out she had been taken to India to marry my employer's cousin.

When we complained to our employer he locked us out of the shop; we had no food for four days.

We have been treated very badly by our employer. We had no one to turn to for help. There are many in the community in the same position as me.

I think adults are quite cheeky. When you've done the job good enough to be paid for they'll pay you less than the cost it is for it.

During 1991, when I was 56 years of age, I was unable to find work. After some time and, realising that job advertisements suitable to my background stipulated age ranges, I resigned myself to registering with private employment agencies (a total of 65 in number). It was only after a period of 11 months and some hundreds of applications that I finally acquired a short-term contract.

One agent had informed me that employers felt they could discriminate on the grounds of age as "it was not illegal to do so". After getting my foot in the door in three companies, I was finally offered a permanent job (I was then 61).

During my employment, I had immersed myself in IT, for which I was paid. However, my final employer saw fit not to send me on expensive training courses relevant to my job, while younger employees enjoyed that privilege. I subsequently acknowledged that ageism was fit and well in the workplace.

Following my redundancy in 1991, I learned that a cross-party Bill against ageism was being progressed in Parliament and I prepared a dossier made up of job advertisements, which was forwarded to one of the MPs involved. I am very pleased that the new Bill came into force.

Joining the Royal Air Force (RAF) was something I had wanted to do since I was about 12 years old. As I got older my interest in the RAF grew until I joined in January 1990.

I was only the third woman to become an RAF police dog handler. If anything went wrong for me I was told that it was because I was a woman, yet if I did well I was told that I'd only done well because they were being easy on me because I was a woman. I often felt that for a woman to succeed and do well she had to be better than the men! I did get quite a lot of sexist remarks and came across many men who believed that women should not be in the RAF or be dog handlers ... most of them made their feelings quite clear to me ... however, many of them did tell me at a later date that I had helped to change their opinions of women in the RAF.

When I first complained about the treatment I had received I never in a million years would have thought that I would end up at an employment tribunal fighting the MOD!! It was after things started to go wrong and I felt that the whole RAF was against me that I contacted the EOC and, after much discussion and tears, I decided that a tribunal was the only way I could fight my case. I was over the moon when I won! I felt that for the first time someone in a position of authority had believed me and that I wasn't the stupid woman the air force had made me feel like!

I would not have been able to take my case to a tribunal had it not been for the EOC giving me the support and assistance I needed. I wouldn't deter anyone from joining the RAF but I would advise them that it isn't always plain sailing. There are still men in the RAF who believe that it is no place for a woman. But luckily they are becoming fewer and fewer! I'd advise women recruits to enjoy themselves and take every opportunity given to them.

– Catherine Brumfitt (brought sex discrimination case against the Ministry of Defence, 2004)¹

¹ The Equal Opportunities Commission commented: "Whilst in the RAF Catherine made a formal complaint of sexual harassment after attending a training course. The sergeant running the course had used inappropriate language and crudely described sexual scenarios to illustrate many of his points, behaviour which she found offensive and humiliating. Following her complaint, she was treated differently in many ways including work assessments, which she felt affected her promotion prospects. The tribunal found that she had been victimised as a result of making a sexual harassment complaint. This sort of victimisation is unlawful under the Sex Discrimination Act."

After five years in the Royal Air Force, I joined the civil service in the early 1970s as I saw it as a safe bet away from the race discrimination in the private sector and other work environments. How wrong could I have been? After getting my first promotion within two years of joining, I was then stuck in the next grade for thirteen years and had to watch other people with less skills and lower academic qualifications promoted ahead of me. I had to appeal against non-promotion before I gained my next promotion. Management, which was all 'White', often cited "the lack of management experience" – although at the very same time I was being given 'exceptionally fitted' makings on my annual reports and being recommended for grade skipping. It was also ignored that I had managed staff in the past and project managed initiatives worth millions.

Ironically, after writing an open letter to the then Director General in the department, I was sent on secondment to another department, given temporary promotion to two higher grades; but by then I was so disillusioned with the civil service that I left in 1996.

My service included time in three major government departments in London, Sheffield and Manchester, and for most of this time I was the only Black (Afro-Caribbean) in a management position.

When I saw the advert for Executive Officer in the civil service in 1975, I truly thought the civil service had realised that having an age limit might be discriminatory. This advert had no age limit, but all the ones I had seen previously had an age limit of 28. So I wrote for an application form, only to find that there was still an age limit so I was not eligible to apply. I was 35 at the time.

I was one of a very few people who knew about the indirect discrimination provisions of the Sex Discrimination Act (SDA). I had previously been my local MP's secretary, who was a junior Minister to Barbara Castle, and as such had assisted in piloting many of the clauses of the SDA through Parliament. Even the newly formed Equal Opportunities Commission, when I first took up the case with them, wrote to me in February 1976 saying: "It would appear that there is no sex discrimination in this case as the age limit applies equally to both men and women." !!

At the tribunal the civil service was found to have unlawfully discriminated against me, as this rule affected more women than men, due to them taking time out to raise children. It was judged to be indirect discrimination and therefore unlawful. I did not ask for or receive compensation as this was taken as a test case. This process took two years, and it took another two years for the civil service and the unions to agree an upper age limit of 45.

– Belinda Price (first indirect sex discrimination case, 1977)

When being interviewed for a new post, an ordained woman was asked details about her sex life. She has children and she was also asked how she intended to care for her children if she was offered the post. Her husband, also ordained, has never been asked about his sex life or how he will care for his children.

While I was studying law at university, I worked as a temporary legal secretary in my holidays to support myself. It was – and still is – pretty rare for men to work as secretaries and often when I would start a new assignment, other secretaries, or their bosses, would say, "Oh, I've heard about you." On one occasion, I was told by a lawyer when I turned up for work that I wasn't needed any more. Unbeknownst to him, I had heard him saying to a colleague that he had been expecting a woman.

I took him to an employment tribunal alleging sex discrimination and won. Afterwards he wrote me a letter apologising but saying that in his experience it was useful to have a woman secretary around in case any of his clients started to cry, so that the secretary could hold the client's hand. I could hardly believe what I was reading.

I think this sort of attitude is still present in parts of the legal profession. People are becoming more sophisticated about how they discriminate but they still are, and I know for a fact that real difficulties remain for women who want to take time out to have children – and men who want to help raise them.

– Jolyon Maugham (won sex discrimination case, 1994)

It was a case of discrimination in recruitment. At the time I was planning my transition to living permanently as a woman, and thought a complete change of employment would be a good idea. So I applied for a post with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). I attended for interview in London (presenting myself as I then was) and was actually offered a rather better post than the one I had applied for. I wrote in confidence to the then Director of Public Prosecutions to say that I wished to accept the post but explaining that I would shortly be transitioning and wished to work for the CPS as a woman. I understood that she had long been a champion of equal opportunities and expected to receive a favourable response. Instead she wrote me a very brief letter, telling me that my circumstances were "inimical" to the principles for which the CPS stood, and withdrew the job offer. I sought legal advice from an employment law specialist and was advised that, as the law then stood, I had very little chance of redress.

The crucial case of P v. Cornwall County Council in the European Court of Justice in May 1995 (see pages 9–10) clarified the law and made it plain that the treatment I had received was indeed against UK law. Within 3 months of the P decision I therefore made an application to the employment tribunal alleging discrimination by the Director of Public Prosecutions and the CPS jointly. Though this was contested up to the Court of Appeal, with EOC backing I finally won. One of the terms of the settlement reached was that the CPS was obliged to change its codes of practice and submit a revised version to the EOC for approval. I've no doubt that other governmental organisations quickly amended theirs to avoid similar embarrassment.

– Susan Marshall (brought transgender sex discrimination case, 1999)

After weeks of being told by his workmates that he was a "typical thick Paddy", an Irish worker at a foundry finally complained. The company's managing director told him to ignore the comments, because they were "just jokes". Finally, when he was dismissed – because he kept asking the manager to do something – he took his case to a tribunal. The tribunal decided that the company had directly discriminated against the Irishman when they sacked him, "because he was an Irishman who would not take Irish jokes lying down" – in other words, he did not 'fit in'. The company was ordered to pay nearly £8,000 in damages.

A Citizens Advice Bureau in Hampshire told of a client who has learning difficulties and who walked out of his job as a kitchen porter for a catering company because he could not stand the constant bullying any more. In addition, staff on the previous shift always left a mess for him to clear up and he was not being paid for all the hours he worked. Although his situation was tantamount to constructive dismissal, Jobcentre Plus failed to take into account his circumstances and learning difficulties, and sanctioned him for leaving his job. They would only give him Jobseekers hardship payment, leaving him with £33.70 a week to live on. He has been unable to find another job because of employers' reaction to his learning difficulties. In addition, Jobcentre Plus kept sending him to interviews in distant cities that are difficult for him to reach by public transport (he cannot drive). The client has since become depressed and is now on anti-depressants.

In 1978 I joined Camden Housing as Cashier Clerk (as my previous application for Estate Manager's post failed to raise a response). Camden was 'positively discriminating' and proud of it at that time. Within a week a White colleague resigned his Estate Management job from the same district office. At a leaving do he said that he too had applied for the Cashier's post and had seen me at the interviews. During his interview he was offered Estate Manager's job without having applied for

it. He was pleasantly surprised but could not cope with the demands of the job. Knowing me then he felt that I was discriminated against.

In December 1979 I gained the Estate Manager's position. But to date (including a relatively brief period of unfair de-selection, May 1994 – July 1997) I have remained in the same post despite innumerable applications including innumerable restructurings of the Housing Dept.

Psychological damage sustained from numerous injustices and discriminations resulted in my hospitalisation in April 1999 due to progressive coronary heart disease, ischaemic heart disease with unstable angina. An hour after my operation, I received a call at Oxford Radcliffe Hospital from my line manager asking me when I was returning back to work.

– Anant M Vyas

As a former Muslim, now a humanist, I have often witnessed prejudice and discrimination against the non-religious and those of other religions. One instance I recall happened when I was about 18 years old. Apparently a Muslim (a friend of the family) had wanted to convert to Sikhism. There was a big outcry from the Muslim community and a number of people were asking for him to be beheaded. Some Muslims were prepared to kill him themselves. My father, amongst other slightly more liberal Muslims, persuaded him to not convert. I recall being very frightened at the time as it was explained to me that to reject Islam was one of the worst things one could do and that the penalty for that was death. This incident and others which contribute to an intimidating and hostile environment for me and others in my position have meant I have been unable to openly express my humanist convictions to my family and other Muslims.

In my previous job, about three years ago, I believe I was hindered from progressing partly because of being more open about my non-belief in Islam. My manager and his manager were both devout Muslims. My manager had converted to Islam about seven years previously. They had both, at separate times, indicated that they thought it was very bad for me to be drinking and "not being a good Muslim".

An opportunity for another job in the company had arisen and the senior manager refused to back me in getting the job, and in fact he very probably gave a negative opinion of me to the person recruiting. I do not have any evidence for this other than that the initial interview had gone extremely well and the person was very keen for me to join. However, after my senior manager had spoken to that person, I was told that I did not have the relevant experience that they were looking for.

I subsequently managed to get another job within the company, mainly because the manager of that unit knew that I had the right experience and he would not accept a verbal reference from my manager. This situation is more complicated and other factors were also involved, but it did make me wonder on a number of occasions whether I could have done better if I had been a devout Muslim and not a non-believer.

We received a call from a woman of Black Caribbean origin who had been dismissed. She was a mortgage broker liaison officer and a graduate who felt she was very good at her job. She had won internal competitions for her performance and hoped to make a career in the financial sector. She had been subjected to prolonged race discrimination at work. She did not complain at first as the worst offenders were the directors of the company. She was the only Black employee. One of her colleagues called her the black sheep of the company. Eventually she did complain when she could not take it any more. Nothing was done. Shortly afterwards, she was dismissed and denied an appeal.

We represented her at a two day hearing. Her house was attacked on the first day whilst she was giving evidence. Despite her employer bringing eight witnesses against her, the tribunal found unanimously that she was discriminated against and victimised. They found the types of jokes made in the office to be racist and sexist. They found the reasons put forward for her dismissal to be "spurious" and found she was dismissed for complaining about the race discrimination. After another full day in tribunal she was awarded over £22,000. She is now re-training and has found part time work.

– Newcastle Law Centre

I got involved with childcare when one of my sisters had no one to look after her children when she went to work (in Pakistan). I enjoyed looking after the children so took a course in Pakistan equivalent to NVQ3/4 in this country. I then worked with children at a refuge camp in Pakistan where many of the children had been abused by the army and had learning difficulties. I started work at a Sheffield nursery in 1992.

It was very strange when I first came to Britain, as parents found it difficult to accept a man from Pakistan working with their children. However, once the parents and children got to know me, it was fine. I enjoy my work because it is a challenge. The perception is that it is still a job only for women but I enjoy working with the children and their families.

– Tariq Mehmood (male childcare worker)

Alan, 53, has learning disabilities that made finding a job difficult. He has spent much of the past 20 years in a day centre. With help from centre staff he found a job in a fruit shop, but it was an unpaid position and left Alan with nothing to show for his efforts except some free fruit at the end of the day and no prospects for advancement.

When Mencap started working with the centre and discovered Alan's situation, it was apparent that it was far from ideal and also illegal. Alan had not been given any training for the job and had been incorrectly advised by the centre that he would be worse off if he did paid work.

"Because of his disability, Alan didn't challenge any of this," explains Anne Barney, Alan's Mencap trainer. "He likes to say yes and he didn't realise that it was a dead end job that wasn't going anywhere," she explains. "Mencap encourages people to aim higher. If you're going to work in a fruit and veg shop, that's fine, but learn the trade. Basically, Alan was working as free labour."

Anne worked with Alan to identify his existing skills and those areas in which he needed more practice, such as taking new bus routes. After a work placement, Alan was offered a part-time job at Asda working as trolley porter. He's paid at the national minimum wage and gets staff discounts and the company of work colleagues. "It's opened up a new world to him," Anne says, "and you can see the confidence he's gained."

Alan is excited about his new job and clearly proud of what he has achieved. "It's good work I do," says Alan. "I really enjoy it. I have fun. The people are nice. I do ten hours a week and I get paid for it, not like before. I like that! I like having more money of my own. I have friends there. I think my life is better now."

This will probably make very depressing reading for most people, but it is true to say that I have faced discrimination/harassment/bullying in almost every job I've had since leaving school. I'm 35 years old now and have low confidence and self-esteem and suffer from depression and anxiety. In my first ever paid employment situation, I was employed as a trainee branch administrator for a national metal stockholder. Within the first few weeks in post, there had been many 'gay' jokes banded about the office and when I was invited to join the staff on a night out at the local bowling alley, I was questioned over and over again about who I was bringing with me. Eventually, I asked a female friend to accompany me and pretend that she was my girlfriend in order to deflect the questions. A week after the night out, I was so unhappy with the situation that I confided in a warehouse manager that I was in fact gay. Over the subsequent days, the attitude in the office had turned against me and I was given the cold shoulder by my colleagues. One morning when I arrived at work I was asked by a colleague whether gay men also wore women's clothing. By the end of

that week, I was called into the manager's office and dismissed. I asked for a reason and he told me that I was a "square peg in a round hole".

Not long after, I secured employment in a national video retailer. I worked closely with a female colleague and confided in her the reason why I had been dismissed from my last job. The same thing happened again. Whenever I came into the building, colleagues would stop talking and make me feel like an outsider. Eventually, I approached the colleague who I had originally confided in and she told me that she had let slip the information to the manager of the store. The manager had then gone round to every member of staff and told them that she thought I was sick and gayness was a disease. I left a few weeks later.

By this time, I was very upset with what had happened to me in work. I took a poorly paid job in a nursing home as an auxiliary. I worked there for several months and had decided to keep my sexuality to myself. However, I had got quite close to one of the male workers there and over time I was unable to keep my sexuality from him. Again, I made another big mistake. Within days, the same kind of cold shoulder treatment had begun again. This time, however, I decided to make a complaint rather than just leave. I also needed the money as I was broke and my CV was beginning to look very patchy indeed. I had a meeting with the matron of the home and told her about what had been happening. She dismissed the allegations and said she would not investigate the matter. When I arrived at work the next day a huge poster had been put up in the staff locker room. It read, "AIDS is the GAY plague." I walked out of the job the same day.

After that episode, I didn't work for quite a long time. Eventually I managed to build up my confidence and start working behind a local bar. I kept my sexuality a very closely guarded secret. During this time I went to college and studied an NVQ and five years ago, I gained employment with a national disabled charity as an employment advisor. At first, I kept my sexuality a secret, but because of the good diversity and equality policies in the company I eventually confided in some of my colleagues as we had started to socialise. Things went quickly downhill from there. I suddenly became aware that I was not being considered for training opportunities, promotion and in the yearly appraisal I was not being marked as competent enough to get a salary increase. It all seemed so familiar. The minute people had found out about my sexuality, they were treating me differently. The discrimination was constant. My personality was constantly attacked by some colleagues and my life was made hell. In one monthly team meeting, my line manager told a homophobic joke which the whole team found highly amusing. I was devastated. I left work with ill health for a prolonged period and was able to enlist the help of my union to help fight the harassment that I was receiving from one particular colleague. After investigation, my line manager decided that she would not uphold the grievance and that there was not enough evidence. I decided at that point to look for another job.

Eventually, at the age of 35, I've got a job with Wigan Council and within weeks I have joined the worker's equality forum and also come out to my manager and key members of my current team. I've been assured that I will not face any discrimination or harassment within Wigan Council and I have to say that up to now everything has been fine. It seems at last I've found a good place to work. This trauma has certainly left its scars on my mental health and I have recently been diagnosed with depression. Again, my manager has been very supportive and offered me free counselling by the council. Just by writing this testimony, it really brings out how much discrimination and bullying I've faced in my past employment and for no other reason than my sexuality. I can also accept the part I've played in the traumas of the past. Maybe I'd have had an easier ride if I'd kept my sexuality a secret. But then I wouldn't be me.

– Michael Morris

Making it to the ranks of the paid officials of the trade union movement is no easy thing for anyone who want to follow that path. The truth is that it's tougher for Black people – at least that's what I have seen as someone who falls into that category.

When I started working in the trade union movement it was as a young building worker asked to collect the dues from other members on a Friday, when the last thing on their list of priorities was to give some of their hard-earned brass to just about the only Black person on the site. The particular abuse I received toughened me up for just about anything else I was to face in my trade union work.

After an enjoyable spell as one of the very few Black trade union education tutors in the country during the 1980s and early '90s, I became one of the first ever Black people to be appointed as the national education officer of a major trade union.

After moving on to various negotiating and representative jobs in the union I worked for – the largest in the civil service – I was appointed as the TUC race equality officer. That job reminded me (if I needed reminding) about the widespread nature of institutional racism in this country and abroad. Soon after starting this job I was given responsibility for the work that the TUC was doing to tackle institutional racism in the aftermath of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report.

In late 2003 I was appointed as the TUC regional secretary for the Midlands. This is a bit of a big deal as this makes me both the first Black regional secretary the TUC has ever had and also the highest-ranking Black official in the history of the TUC. I'm so pleased that during my second year in the job the TUC was also able to elect its first Black woman President, Gloria Mills.

So things are tough out there and racism is still an everyday reality for far too many people but there are some positives out there. Just maybe my role as a regional secretary and the sight of Gloria chairing our annual Congress might just persuade or, who knows, inspire other Black people to break down some of the barriers that are out there?

– Roger McKenzie (regional secretary of the Midlands TUC)

Health and social care

Selina, a social worker, visited a Muslim woman whose husband was in hospital with a broken leg. Selina was told that the woman was close to a nervous breakdown. Selina was instructed to start the procedure which would allow social services to take the children of this family into care. On visiting the family, Selina found little evidence to suggest that the woman was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. On reviewing the case notes, Selina found that the assessment was made on the basis that the woman prayed regularly and this was taken as a sign of extreme anxiety.

Every day without fail and regardless of my time of arrival I had to change my father as all his clothes were permanently soaked in urine.

– as described to Help the Aged 'Dignity on the Ward' campaign

'HL' is autistic and has learning disabilities. In 1997 he was discharged from a learning disability institution to live with Mr and Mrs E on a trial basis, attending a local day centre.

In July 1997, while on the bus to the centre, a number of factors triggered a disturbing episode and by the time HL arrived at the centre he was distressed and banging his head and shouting.

A self-inflicted head wound meant he was taken to the local A&E unit where he was assessed by a psychiatrist as being in need of in-patient treatment. He was transferred to the behavioural unit at the hospital where his consultant decided that his best interests required that he should be readmitted for in-patient treatment.

The consultant decided it was not necessary to detain HL under the provisions of the Mental Health Act 1983 because he appeared to be fully compliant and did not resist admission. Mr and Mrs E disagree.

"He had a bad day on the bus – he just needed to calm down at home," says Mrs E.

HL remained in the hospital's behavioural unit for three months as Mr and Mrs E unsuccessfully appealed through the legal system for his release. The Court of Appeal ordered his release but this was then challenged by the Government who appealed to the House of Lords.

"The culture of protectionism was unbelievable; it's difficult to believe anyone is treated that way in a civilised society," said Mr E.

Finally, in December 2004, the European Court of Human Rights ruled HL's human rights had been breached because there was no mechanism for him to leave or appeal against the decision to 'voluntarily' take him into hospital.

Her meal would be on the tray cold and hardly touched. More often than not her teeth would be on the locker at the other side of the bed, well away from the chair on which she was sitting. At no time was she encouraged to eat, the food was not cut into bite-size pieces, and no person seemed to be responsible to see that the patients received nourishment.

– as described to Help the Aged 'Dignity on the Ward' campaign

When I went for a check-up I could not understand. They would ask me to take off my clothes and put on a hospital gown; I would not understand. They would take x-ray but I didn't know why or what for. Once the x-ray was done, I would leave the room. I didn't understand why they took the x-ray.

– Hindu cancer patient (interviewed in Gujarati)

The caller's father has been in hospital for ten months and will be discharged soon. He has been advised that he can't get on a waiting list for a wheelchair until he has left hospital and the waiting list is currently at 18 months.

– call to SeniorLine

A Citizens Advice Bureau in the north of England advised a client who was undergoing gender reassignment. Part of the treatment causes irreversible infertility. The client was informed he could store semen before the treatment takes place, but that the NHS will not pay for this for transsexual patients. Other patients that have treatment that causes infertility have the costs of semen storage paid for by the NHS. The client does not have the means to pay for semen storage, and is being discriminated against on the basis of his transsexuality.

The caller's parents are both suffering from dementia. Her father is 90 and mother 89. Her mother spends most of her time in bed. The caller and her sister have requested a social services assessment but were at first told there was a shortage of staff and her parents' case was not a priority. The caller has severe heart problems and her sister has arthritis. They are paying for a carer to go in but both are aged over 60 and are finding caring a great strain. The caller has been trying to get her mother incontinence supplies, but every time she contacts them she is told that they are too busy to do anything.

– call to SeniorLine

I went to a doctor's on my own; my mum booked me an appointment, and I went and the doctor said, "I'm sorry, I can't see you without a parent," so I had to go all the way back home.

[She] was discharged from hospital without a proper assessment. When she got home, she found that she could not use the toilet as she needed rails to push herself up. She contacted the occupational therapist, who said she would have to wait at least two months and could use incontinence pads in the meantime. She is not incontinent. She is upset by the indignity and feels suicidal.

– call to SeniorLine

I am 29 years old and a post-operative male-to-female transsexual. I am a paramedic, a career I truly love, and I live with my female partner who was fortunate to have been born with a female body. I knew I was a girl from the age of 5 and at 16 I saw a NHS psychiatrist who insisted that I could be 'cured'. His treatment destroyed the next 10 years of my life and led to severe depression, suicidal thoughts, anxiety, self-harm and a near-complete withdrawal from society. I had to fight every step of the way with a less-than-supportive, prejudiced doctor and some harassment from neighbours.

My parents are proud and supportive of me and I have received lots of support from my colleagues too. I have now put my depression behind me and am living my life for the very first time as opposed to simply existing.

A nurse unceremoniously lifted the shift garment they had put on her and exposed her completely in front of my son and me. It seemed terrible to me for her to be treated in such an undignified and humiliating manner.

– as described to Help the Aged 'Dignity on the Ward' campaign

A report from Crawley's Community Health Council was critical about the lack of *halal* food provision in Crawley Hospital, claiming that mothers who had recently given birth were going home early as a result.

Mary Mayne, a spokesperson for the Community Health Council, said, "The ethnic minority patients generally have food brought in from home as there is very little choice for vegetarians and *halal* meat is not available." She also pointed out that lack of vegetarian and *halal* food in the canteen affected hospital staff. "An example of this," she said, "is that the only vegetarian food available on a recent night was chips and that had been fried in the same oil as chicken nuggets."

A 92 year old woman was in a residential home until she had an unsuccessful operation just over a year ago. She was then assessed by the hospital social worker as needing nursing home care. For a year social services paid £500 of the full weekly cost of the nursing home, with the woman's daughter paying the additional £25.

However, social services have now told the daughter that they will only pay £385, their usual rate, so the woman will have to move. She is partially sighted and deaf. The present home takes time to understand her, unlike the previous residential home where she was abused when she could not understand.

There has been no reassessment of the woman's needs and her daughter is concerned that another move would be detrimental to her mother's health.

– call to SeniorLine

I am afraid of being sent to an older people's home because I don't know how to speak and understand English. I would be seen as an idiot and soon become an idiot.

– Chinese elder

She was most upset because she kept on asking for a bedpan and no one arrived or, on many occasions, arrived too late and she wet herself. She was both embarrassed and hurt at the reaction she got to having wet the bed. She ended up with no dignity at all.

– as described to Help the Aged 'Dignity on the Ward' campaign

When my husband went into hospital two years ago with terminal cancer, he told the staff that he was not religious.

He was in considerable pain in spite of the morphine they were giving him and spent a lot of time dozing, so I was not surprised one day when I went in to spend some time with him, as I did every day, to find him asleep. When he opened his eyes and saw me he immediately sat up and, without even saying hello, told me that he had been harassed (his word) by two different chaplains, and would I please go and tell them that he didn't want them to come and pray over him: it was the last thing he needed right now. Actually, what he said was rather more than that. In our 30 years of marriage I had hardly ever seen him lose his temper and he almost never swore, but he did that day. I asked him what they had said to him, but he wouldn't tell me. He just turned away, saying that they had no right to come and "spout their piffle at him". I was really surprised at how angry he was as I had never heard him say anything negative about religion or the religious before; it was just that, in spite of his Methodist upbringing, he hadn't believed in God for years.

I said I'd talk to the nurses on the way out, but that wasn't good enough: I had to go and talk to them straight away. I calmed him down as best I could and went off to find the sister. I told her that my husband was upset and angry about the two chaplains and asked her to make sure that they did not go to see him again. She said she would, but when I said that I thought that the chaplains were only supposed to visit people who had 'ticked the Christian box' she agreed that there was a rule about that, but because there were so many really seriously ill patients on the ward they encouraged both chaplains to visit (although they weren't usually in on the same morning). "After all," she said, in a very patronising 'I know what is best for my patients' tone, "quite a few people who don't think of themselves as Christian find that they change their mind when they are so seriously ill, and it is only right that they should have a chance to pray with the chaplain." That made me angry and I asked her what the chaplains had said to my husband. She didn't know, but said they usually asked patients if they wanted to talk or perhaps to

pray. If they didn't, she thought they would both probably have left it at that, but the woman would sometimes stay and talk a bit longer if she felt it was right to. I told her that between them they had really upset my husband, and made her promise that she would tell them not to approach him again.

When I got back my husband was dozing again, but as soon as he realised I was there he asked what they had said. I told him that the chaplains would not bother him again. He visibly relaxed. "Thank you," he said, and closed his eyes.

Then, after a bit, he opened his eyes and said that it was "a shame there aren't sensible people around to talk to – apart from you – and I don't want to spend what time I have with you talking about dying." I told him he could talk to me about that, but he said he didn't want to upset me more than I was anyway. It would be good to have a chance to talk to someone else sometimes, but not someone who told him that "God would do what was best" for him. That was the same God, he assumed, that had decided it was best for him to die of cancer. That made me cry, but what made it worse was that this was the last time that he was ever really lucid – the last time we had a proper conversation.

It still upsets me that he was so angry that day and that we spent that time talking about two chaplains and a ward sister who had decided to ignore what the patient wanted because they – or their God – knew best.

Home and family

I really wish social services could find my Dad. I've never met him although my Mum tells me he used to take me to the nursery. I really want to know him because he is a part of my life. It's hard knowing that I have a father, but he's not there. I've got [lots of people in my life] so I feel fine; I have two families, but I still worry and wonder about my Dad. He's not there to call me his special girl, to give me advice, to talk to me and sometimes it's really hard. I am mixed race and I want to know more about my background. Half of my history, culture and race is missing.

Isabella Devani, a 28 year old woman from Canterbury, was delighted when she became pregnant. But becoming a mother has proven to be an exhausting struggle, not only to care for her baby, but also to fight for a domiciliary care package to meet their needs.

"I am a permanent wheelchair user, whose sight and manual dexterity are impaired. I also experience debilitating fatigue levels," she explains. "But my standard care package was not amended to include the increased time needed to help with my personal care after the birth of my baby, Laurence."

That meant that when Isabella returned from hospital with baby Laurence, only her existing care package was in place. "No time has been included for me to have help bathing baby or general help when my MS fatigue flares up in the afternoons, or for when baby is crawling on the floor." Among other things, this means that Laurence can't have a bath until Isabella's mother visits once a fortnight.

Isabella says social services aren't making her situation any easier, refusing to put money towards the increased cost of a wheelchair-adapted cot because, they contend, the cot is for her baby, not her. In the meantime, she uses a bedside crib, but worries that Laurence will soon be too big and she won't be able to pick him up.

"It can't be good for my baby not to get the attention he needs or to have a mother feeling tired and low a lot of the time," she says.

Isabella says she's afraid to push too hard for an acceptable solution to her problem. "I'm reluctant to take it any further because if social services think I can't cope they may get the children and families service involved. I can cope but I need some help – not because I'm a bad parent, but because my disability makes life harder. All this should have been sorted out before my baby was born."

Hannah was subject to a social service assessment regarding her parenting skills. As part of the assessment, social workers asked Hannah about her aspirations for her teenage daughter as opposed to her sons, as they were concerned that due to her Muslim culture she would discriminate between them. Hannah was told that her daughter was a bright student at school and was asked whether she would like her to go to university. Hannah replied by saying "*Insha-Allah*" (God willing). This statement was interpreted as meaning that she cares little for her daughter's future because she wants to leave it all up to God, rather than to encourage her herself.

The family concerned has been fostering a little boy; he is about 1 now. They had him from three weeks old; an attempt was made to settle him back with his natural parent but was unsuccessful and he was returned to them after a few weeks. He is now likely to be put up for adoption. The family has been told that they would not be suitable adoptive parents because the husband is 52 years old.

This is regardless of the fact a) that they are considered suitable as foster parents; b) that the child has been with them for most of his short life so far, clearly has an attachment to them and has already had enough disruptions; and c) that plenty of men father children naturally when they are over 50.

I was born in Broseley near Telford in 1962. I was registered as female by my parents and brought up in the village of Much-Wenlock experiencing childhood as any other young female child. At the age of 19 I married for the first time and had three children over a number of years. I later divorced and married for a second time, having one child by this marriage.

All in all I spent 35 years living the life expected of me by society in general and the strong religious convictions of my parents. I was to all onlookers a normal young woman, happily married with a growing family. On the surface this was true, underneath was a different story. Underneath lay a complex and difficult conundrum which led me to be depressed and unhappy though, as I said, to the everyday onlooker I had everything any young woman would want.

At the age of 35 I decided to try and listen to my 'inner voice' which screamed constantly the need to address my inner masculinity and a suppressed male identity. For two years I lived to the best of my ability as a man and during that time attracted hate crime towards my young family, partner and I, from within the local Telford community at large.

At the age of 37, I was diagnosed as having Atypical Transsexualism and started the long road to transition from female to male. This involved several operations and long-term use of masculinising hormones. The hate crime continued for a period of time until I was no longer 'visible' as being different. I then moved to another part of Telford and started a new life. My relationship had failed due to my masculinity threatening my partner's sexual orientation. I was now male and heterosexual; she was lesbian – this meant we could no longer be together as my partner had lost all her family in one foul sweep due to making her own stand over her sexual orientation in the first place. Her family had been Hindu.

When I first lived in my 'acquired' gender as a man, I was in a legal limbo. Although I looked, sounded and lived as a man and was able to change much of my documentation to reflect my status, I could not change my birth certificate. This meant I would forever be still legally female even though my passport and driving licence said male.

The big change for me came in 2004 when the Gender Recognition Act came into effect and, after 33 years of campaigning, men and women of transsexual origin were at last allowed to change their birth certificate.

Mine was changed on the 1st November 2005 and means I am now, for all purposes in law, Male. It further allowed me to marry my partner of four years; not same sex marriage but one man and one woman in the eyes of the UK law.

– Rico Adrian Paris

I was being bullied at school. When my dad found out, he was sympathetic, but that's because he didn't know why I was being bullied. When he found out I was gay, he freaked. Since then, every time he gets angry at me for something, he threatens to throw me out of the house. He never used to do that.

– Nick (aged 13)

My foster family call me "monkey nigger" and "slave boy" and always exclude me. My foster father hits me. I get bullied everywhere about my dreadlocks because I'm Rastafarian and boys at school have threatened to cut them off.

- Dennis (aged 15)

A Citizens Advice Bureau in Wales advised a Traveller family who live in a caravan on a local authority site. The site has an outhouse for shower, toilet and washing facilities. The family has a 14 year old disabled daughter, who cannot use the outhouse facilities because it has a very high step and the space is too confined. The local authority provided a ramp for her to get into the caravan, but she cannot access the bedrooms inside. The daughter has to sleep in the living area, and be washed on the floor of the caravan with flannels. The client has had a number of assessments with social services and five meetings which have taken months. A decision was finally made in consultation with the council's legal department, refusing eligibility for a Disabled Facilities Grant on the grounds that these grants can only be used to adapt existing property and their present caravan cannot be adapted. Social services are not prepared to use the grant to provide an adapted caravan, even though Welsh Assembly guidance for Housing Renewal Policy states that discretionary assistance can be made in addition to the grant, with no restrictions, and also allows for providing replacement accommodation "where the provision of replacement accommodation represents a better alternative compared to repairing, improving, or adapting the existing property".

The family have been told they can be offered a house. The family do not want to move to a house due to their ethnic and cultural background.

David lives with his wife.



One of his favourite pastimes used to be working in his garden.



When he did this, young people used to call him names and throw things at him.



Sometimes they fired stones at him through a gun. One time he nearly got hit in the eye.

David's wife was really upset.



They both knew they hadn't done anything to deserve being treated like this.

They called the police, and got the local councillor involved. They just said this happened all the time, and it would be really hard to get the young people to stop doing it.



The council did say that David could have his grass cut for free.

They seemed to have missed the point that David was being stopped from doing something he enjoyed.



He wanted to spend time in his garden just like anybody else would but couldn't because young people were harassing him.

When I first contemplated gender transition, my greatest fear was overt discrimination on a face to face basis, whether it be in public, at work, among friends or, worst of all, within my own family. Happily my fears went unrealised, possibly because I am lucky to pass so well that people take me as female.

What I had failed to anticipate was the weight of institutionalised discrimination, in dealing for example with my National Insurance affairs in a way that labels me (quite openly) as a sensitive case to all its staff, or in obtaining even something as mundane as car insurance, when I am obliged to explain that I am legally male.

The Gender Recognition Act is of course meant to have done away with many of these everyday problems of transfolk. However, because I remain happily married to my wife, who has stood by me through the traumas of gender reassignment, I cannot get the gender recognition that would protect me from the daily attrition of such events unless I seek annulment that would render over 26 years of marriage null and void. Neither of us has the stomach to betray the vows we made to each other, in what must be the ultimate compromise to ask of any spouse.

When the Gender Recognition Act was going through Parliament, I argued strenuously against the clauses on marriage, expressing my concern that gender recognition would create a two-tier trans population. I predicted that people would automatically assume that they could treat people with gender recognition in their acquired gender, leaving the rest to be dealt with as members of their birth sex. I predicted that the rights of those left behind would not only stagnate but be degraded.

I feel female, look female, and am accepted as female by those around me, and physiologically I imagine I am nearer female than male in many ways. I've even had vocal surgery so that I can finally sound female, and encounter disbelief when I claim to be legally male. And yet legally male I must remain, because I cannot dishonour my marriage.

And what will the Equality Act and associated developments do for me? Will they say, because I haven't got a Gender Recognition Certificate, I will be left at the whim of service providers to decide what is reasonable in allowing me onto a female hospital ward, into a female prison, or to join the Women's Institute – living in fear of disclosure of my past, so that ignorant prejudice can protest about my presence as a 'man', leaving the service provider with the easy way out of excluding me? The continuing issues around insurance are a case in point – the EOC have argued to abandon this and cite the successful US experience to support the removal of this clearly discriminatory measure.

But will the UK follow this line, or will I be left yet again to convince the incredulous call centre operative that, yes, I am legally male, in a perennial process that I find painful, undignifying and undermining?

I thought gender reassignment would finally leave me in peace, after years of inner turmoil; and it's true, I am at peace with myself at last, but only to find myself in a feeling of constant embattlement from the state that first of all denies me legal recognition of my acquired gender, and then unthinkingly erodes the social recognition of my acquired gender for which I do not need legal recognition. I'm not sure how much longer I can stand it.

– Sarah Wood (East Sussex)

In Yorkshire, a Citizens Advice Bureau advised a gay client who was subjected to numerous difficulties and emotional trauma when arranging the burial of his partner because the coroner's office and undertakers believed that his partner was HIV-positive. The client's partner had long-term heart disease and died of a heart attack at home. The GP who attended was not allowed to see the patient by the police, and the body was retained at the mortuary for four days. During this time the client was not allowed to see his partner's body. No post mortem was conducted. Only after repeated questioning was the client informed that the undertaker and coroner's office believed his partner was HIV-positive. He didn't believe this but, because of the supposed diagnosis, special embalming arrangements had to be made which cost him £400. Since his partner's death, the client has tried to identify the origins of the HIV diagnosis. The GP says there is no such diagnosis, and the coroner's office reports they don't know who told them and that they have since shredded their records. The client has been refused access to his partner's medical records. The client feels he and his partner have been badly treated, and that this has significantly increased his distress at this time of bereavement.

I have a problem with my step-dad ... He comes up to me, like I'll go into my bedroom and I'll back off and I'll shut the door, and he goes, "Don't shut the door," and I'm like, "Oh God, he's going to hit me or something" ... Many times before he's hit me round the head, and like [I'll say], "You've got no right to hit me, you have no right to have a go at me," and then he says, he keeps telling me, "I have every right to" ... and he goes, "I'm an adult, I can do whatever I want," and I go, "So can I," and he goes, "No, you're only a kid. Sorry, you can't do nothing; you're only a kid. You have no right to do anything."

There's not enough people know about their rights. Their parents are just dead strict and pick on them all the time. They think that if young people tell someone no one will believe them.

Paul Casey, 28, from Kent, has spinal muscular atrophy and has been in a wheelchair since the age of 13. He is forced to live apart from his partner and two children after being denied a Disabilities Facilities Grant (DFG).

"When I met Gillian in 2001, I was living with my parents in Biggin Hill," says Paul. "Their house had been specially adapted for my needs for years, including a hoist to get me into and out of bed and a wet room so I can take a shower.

"Gillian and I decided we wanted to live together and spent all our savings on a two-bedroom bungalow near Croydon rail station in January 2004," he explains. "It was perfect for my needs."

After exchanging contracts on the property, Paul applied for a DFG. After a 10-month wait, he received an assessment visit from an occupational therapist, who agreed that Paul was eligible for a grant.

But, as both Paul and Gillian were in full-time employment, a means test deemed them ineligible for a DFG. They had already spent 10 months living apart and the prospect of never being able to live in their new home together was almost too much to bear.

"All my life I've striven to achieve," says Paul. "I naively thought that working hard for a living and dealing with my disability, rather than wallowing in self pity, would get me somewhere. I may as well have just stayed at home, living on benefit. At least then I would have got the full grant. I am being penalised for choosing to work.

"In the current situation, I am unable to live here with Gillian and her children as I can't use the bathroom. This means I have to travel back every night to my parents' home in Biggin Hill. They are both pensioners now and I can't expect them to lift me in and out of bed indefinitely."

"We want to know why," Gillian asks, "when we originally applied for the DFG, no one told us that the chances of getting the grant were virtually nil as we were both working. It would have saved us months of heartache."

"We are a family," says Paul, "and we want to live together properly as any other family would. It's so frustrating. You work hard, get a good education, pay taxes but what is it all worth if you can't enjoy the basic qualities of life?"

I've always heard remarks like Untouchable and *choora* and these sorts of names. As a little kid I never took note. I thought when people said he is Untouchable I must be a superior person, you can't touch me. I honestly didn't realise what it actually meant. So I never took these things to heart until I was about 14. I went into doing music and meeting people from different

communities and different people. We started playing at weddings and occasions. It was sometimes at weddings – people give you money and that – when they actually come up and put money on stage I heard some snide comments like, "Don't give them money, they are *choore*, they are *chamar*, don't bother giving them money, they are beggars". It was only then that I started noticing people still carry these sorts of things on.

The main thing for me, when it really hit me hard, was when I was 17 years old. I met what was then my girlfriend but she's my wife now. Now obviously, I am what is known as an Untouchable, a Valmiki, bottom of the casteing range. And my girlfriend was a *jat*. I thought no problem, we love each other, and it shouldn't be a problem at all. We'll talk to the family; we'll be civilised. We're talking 23-24 years; this sort of thing was very unheard of, just meeting and love marriages.

We approached her family; there is only one brother and five sisters all together. When we approached the family, the brother was furious and he took hold of my girlfriend and locked her in the house and didn't let her go anywhere. Any time she had to go anywhere, she had to be chaperoned. My father tried meeting up with their family but they said, "Don't come to our house, you're Untouchable; we don't even want you near our doorstep, we don't want any of your family there." We said, "Look, come to ours." They said, "No way, we will never come to an Untouchable's house."

We tried to compromise and meet on neutral ground and we tried to talk to them. Talking was totally out of the question and I, at that point, stood my ground and said, "Look, what is wrong with me? I don't understand. I'm a hard-working person, I haven't got a criminal record." If you really look at what my status was compared to their status, they were living in a council house they didn't even own and I was of the calibre of living on Kenilworth Road compared to them. Where they were only earning £10,000, I was earning £60,000. I said, "Don't show status, I am taking your daughter for what she is; why are you trying to show me that I am at the bottom and you're at the top? If you start weighing these things up, we're not; it's the other way round but I treat you equally." They replied, "No, no, it's never going to be on."

We went against their family and got married and she was disowned. She was disowned by the whole family, her sisters, mum and dad, the brother, everybody. The brother said, "Anybody meet her I'm going to disown you, whether it be any of the sisters." It carried on for about four or five years. Slowly over the time, six or seven years, the sisters started meeting her and slowly slowly she did start meeting all the sisters. After about twelve years the mother was really scared, really scared to meet my wife because of her son was not going to allow it. And we used to go out to meet at private places where he would not know that we met her.

The real crunch came 22-23 years on, which was six months ago. My wife's mother was diagnosed with terminal cancer and she was given three months to live. This was at the beginning of this

year. When she was given three months to live we thought OK, doesn't matter what our differences are, doesn't matter what our casteing is, he is a human being. As a human being we are asking you, she has got terminal cancer, she is too ill to go out of the house, the last few months all we say is: can we see her before she dies. And... even up to that point he said no. Even at that point he said, "No, you are not allowed to see her; if she gets out of the house, and she meets someone else, you can meet her at her *mama's* [wife's maternal uncle] house but you can't meet her at our house." She [mother-in-law] made about two attempts to go to my wife's *mama's* house where we met her and those were the last two times we met her in the three months. She passed away about two months ago. When it came to the funeral, when the body came back to the house, everybody was allowed at the house; he told his sisters that he did not want her [my wife] anywhere near the body. He said, "She is not allowed to pay her respects; tell her to go away." Over that time, I was really really furious. I told my wife that we are going to the house, we're going to see her. We won't go into the house; we'll wait outside. Even right up to the time that she was cremated, he did not want us anywhere near. He still felt as he did 24 years ago. He said, "Untouchable is still an Untouchable. You are Untouchable yesterday, today, you'll always be Untouchable, and nothing is going to change you in my eyes. No matter how big you become, how well-off you might become, once a *choora*, always a *choora*."

She passed away and we thought, "That's it. We don't want anything from him any more. We don't need to know him any more."

And it has taken this long, but it has only been in the last few years that I've realised that even after times like this, nothing has changed, we are still discriminated against. It doesn't matter what we become, it doesn't matter how big we become, once an Untouchable, always an Untouchable. So I'm really glad this [CasteWatchUK] has been set up today as a stepping stone for many other events to try to wipe out this discrimination. I know we can't really wipe this out, but to educate people, our new generation, and our future generations to come, to think very sensibly and not only think about today but tomorrow. 23 years ago, I did not think about what would still happen 23 years later.

– Pali (41, businessman)

Crime and justice

When something happens to you, like you get beaten up, and you go and tell the police, they won't believe you because you're 12.

The dramatic increase in the number of women in prison has put a severe strain on the Prison Service. The horrifying number of suicides indicates the level of desperation amongst women prisoners and it is well-known that imprisonment is very damaging not only to the woman herself, but also to her children and family.

Most women in prison have been convicted of non-violent offences such as shoplifting or fraud, and there is a pressing need to look again at why we are imprisoning women who do not pose a serious threat to others.

– Vera Baird QC MP (Chair of the Fawcett Society's Commission on Women and the Criminal Justice System)

Omar was stopped by the police in London for a minor road traffic offence. Arrangements were made for the car to be collected by a relative, Abdullah, and his friends. On their journey back after collecting the car, Abdullah and his three friends were stopped by armed police officers. The officers used abusive and vulgar language, pointed their guns at Abdullah and his friends, and threatened to blow their heads off if they looked. Abdullah and his friends were taken to the police station, strip-searched, detained in custody for 36 hours and eventually released without charge. No interviews took place in relation to them.

The following day, Abdullah took his 10 year old son to the shops to buy some toys. On his way back the car was surrounded by armed police officers and, again, guns were pointed at both Abdullah and his son. There was more abusive and vulgar language. Furthermore, the police officers made threats to Abdullah that they would blow his son's head off. Subsequently, it was confirmed that there was an error made by the police in failing to remove the vehicle registration number from their database.

The police are terrible with people with a learning disability. I told them [about being bullied in the community] and they didn't believe me, because I have learning disabilities ... They don't listen or take us seriously.

– man (aged 28, Kidderminster)

I am in a male prison, but have recently been granted my full gender recognition certificate, and am now seen as female. As this is a new thing for the prison service no one knows what to do as there are no guidelines or anything for them to follow.

I decided to become a police officer when I was about 15 years of age and still at school. The subject of careers was raised and this is the first thing that came to my mind, as I had a desire to do something useful for other people. When I became a Chief Constable people were largely supportive, some showed curiosity and wanted to take a closer look, and a few were surprised and showed some resentment. This latter group were largely retired male police officers.

I have had a few bad experiences, and these have mainly been difficult relationships. I think some people believe there is one best way of doing something or behaving. They don't appreciate that a different approach can be equally as effective. There aren't many women in senior positions as many women still lack belief in their own abilities and this, coupled with an uncaring culture, means they don't put themselves forward for promotion.

– Pauline Clare (UK's first woman police Chief Constable, 1993)

You can see one Black boy and one White boy walking down the street and they're both planning to do something bad, but the police won't stop them until they see two Black boys walking down the street; then they'll stop them.

I felt no one in the prison felt what I was going through. The only people who might were the prisoners. White officers shout racist language. You go home and have to live with this; it's very difficult.

Carol, 53, has both physical and sensory impairments – fibromyalgia, cervical spine stenosis, osteoporosis – and mental health difficulties due to the years of stress she has experienced. She has not got the support she needs and feels incredibly isolated and has attempted suicide in the past.

She says she was raped about six weeks ago by a man who had fixed her car in the past. The man was arrested and the Crown Prosecution Service has told her he is to be bailed sometime in September. She is not sure when and doesn't know what he will do when he is released. She says she doesn't have the energy to press charges because she is so tired from her medical conditions and the stress created by the lack of support and insensitive, and often cruel, approach from social services.

I am 51 and am a police sergeant in a north of England force. My employers and work colleagues were very supportive when I told them that I was going to be a policewoman instead of policeman. I was so pleased that I could continue to do the job which I enjoy and which I had been doing for 26 years.

Muslim inmates at a prison in Kent have complained that they have been fed *haram* food, but the prison authorities have denied the allegations.

"We were served with sausages for breakfast despite numerous complaints to the authorities. On Christmas Day, we were served mousse as a sweet dish, which contained gelatine. On Boxing Day, everyone was given turkey, which was not *halal*, and again I brought that to the notice of the duty SO but to no avail. I had to go without lunch," wrote Mr Khan to one of the governors.

In reply to one such complaint, the prison authorities have stated that when sausages are served, "the vegetarian diet is made available to Muslims". Mr Din, another inmate, also confirmed to *The Muslim News* the problems around the provision of Muslim diet in prisons. He also said that Muslims had been fed with pork.

A few years ago I was gay-bashed on the station concourse of Brighton Station. My friend and I had spent a usual day in Brighton, going to the beach, visiting some of the gay bars and pubs along the way. We were originally going to catch the last train back to London, but ran out of steam earlier. We decided to just go to the station, go to the bar there and wait for the next train. In the bar were a family of Travellers. We spoke to them whilst we waited, and got on well. When we all left, I walked in front of the group to see when the next train was leaving.

Suddenly there was shouting from behind. One of the women in the group was shouting at my friend; things like "come on you ****ing lesbian, let's have ya". I went back and told my friend to ignore them as there were about seven of them. As we walked away from them, the angry woman came round in front of me and punched me several times in the face. I put my hand to my mouth and two teeth dropped into my palm. That was the last thing I remember.

Apparently, my friend defended me and they all ran away. My friend ended up getting arrested and I was put on a train (by the police) back to Victoria, bloody and on my own. A complete stranger gave me ten pounds to get a cab back to Bloomsbury. My friend had all our money and train tickets.

Two days later, British Transport Police called me and told me to go and make a statement at Euston Station. When I got there, toothless and covered in bruises (I was also kicked in the head, but I still do not remember), I was asked when and where I was arrested and basically treated like a criminal. I had been told to go to the wrong station. It was King's Cross. The WPC there was really sympathetic and apologised for the confusion. I had forensic photos of my face. The police said that the Travellers had probably left the Brighton area by now and didn't hold out much hope of finding the perpetrator.

This is the first time I have written about this since it happened. I was sent a compensation form to fill in, but never did. I had three years to send it in, but could not bring myself to write it down or even think of the event. A shame really, as my dental treatment cost a small fortune.

Wider society and communities

Paying taxes I'm treated as an English person; getting services I'm treated as an Asian.

Where my dad lives he's got a shop next door and I used to go into his shop, and because I'm ever so good at maths I used to count out how much change I had and everything, and he used to try and rip me off and because I was a child, he like never used to take it into consideration. I used to say, "I want my change"... if it was my dad he'd give him the money he wanted.

I'm the only Asian person in my class and used to get picked on for my colour, but I dealt with it. I feel now though that it's made me racist against White people. I hate myself for it. I just wish people from different races would leave each other alone.

– Shireen (aged 15)

I get really annoyed that lots of people at my school are racist towards Asians. I'm not Asian, but have friends who are. My family doesn't like Asian people.

– Mandy (aged 14)

Alice has a wide circle of friends, and likes to go out and about as she pleases.

You might be thinking: "good for her". But there is one thing that stops her from being as involved in community life as she would want to be.

She does not drive and, like many of us, she has to depend on public transport.

Sometimes when she is walking to the bus stop, or waiting for the bus, she is surrounded by groups of young people. They call her names, and make nasty comments to her. They circle round her, and this makes her feel as if she is trapped.

Sometimes she gets angry and fights back. This makes people think **she** is dangerous, and she ends up being blamed for causing trouble.

The police tell her to report every incident. But it is easier for her just to miss events that she has to get a bus to.

– as described to the Disability Rights Commission

An ordained woman was approached by a man who said, "Women priests are witches and should be burnt at the stake."

Heba Al-Naseri, a second year medical student at the Queen Mary and Westfield College (QMW) in east London, was eager to play in a football tournament. On the day, however, not all turned out to be as planned.

"Just before the referee blew the whistle to start the game," she recalls, "our captain, Charlotte Dawkins, informed me that the referee had said that I was not allowed to play, as my *hijab* was not part of the kit. But, as there were men around, I was not prepared to compromise the principles of my religion, and therefore had to stand down from the game."

Heba has regularly played for the team without any problems, but on that day she had to watch the game from the sidelines. "I had to suppress my anger," she said, "but I continued to support the team."

Heba tried "to reason" with the referee, but he was adamant that the "rules could not be changed". The British Football Association (BFA) said that it was up to referees to decide on the interpretation of the rules and that they may want "a team to wear the same kit". The spokesman for the BFA told *The Muslim News* that there was no "provision for religious sensitivities" in the rules and referees "have a final say".

A junior football team that was fined and 'kicked out' of a cup competition for refusing to play during Ramadan lost its appeal. Abraham Moss Warriors Under-12s, from Manchester, had its ban from the Bury & Radcliffe Juniors League upheld following an appeal. They had asked for kick-offs

to be switched from mornings to afternoons so that the Muslim players could drink after their games. The League took disciplinary action, which the Lancashire FA upheld.

Team manager, June Kelly, told *The Muslim News*, "Everyone keeps saying they are trying to encourage more ethnic minorities to take part in football; it's just a joke."

My partner, D, and I have lived together since 1991, in a Paddington Churches Housing Association property in Camden, where I had worked with older and disabled people before taking health-related early retirement. In 2002, I was 54 and D 61, when our lives were disrupted by anti-social behaviour perpetrated by neighbours with addiction and mental health problems.

When we followed steps (as laid out in HA policy) to resolve the situation, continual harassment of us began. This was general and sexist/homophobic, and our being middle-aged was reflected in the ageist, contemptuous way these neighbours felt they could victimise us ("You ****ing old witches are going to get a kicking") with impunity. We were routinely and obscenely verbally abused and threatened. (We live on the first floor, the neighbour on the ground sharing an entrance, so were in effect under siege.) Had our flat been occupied by younger – and/or male/heterosexual – people, perceived as less vulnerable, I believe these neighbours would have behaved differently.

The daily situation deteriorated and harassment escalated unbearably, but was worsened by the landlord's failure to take action. Support (clearly inadequate) was provided to the tenant harassing us; when D requested equivalent help from the Older Tenants' Support Team, this was denied due to insufficient resources. All but one of a dozen Housing Officers seen were younger men, treated us disdainfully and showed complete lack of empathy despite our highlighting that for pensioners harassment is hard to cope with, that our GP had prescribed both of us anti-depressants, that we perceived the situation as dangerous and were ill because of sleep deprivation and stress.

No respect or acknowledgement of us as a same-sex couple was evinced, nor was the breach of our right to family life recognised – unable to continue living together there, we alternated staying away for respite, and could not have D's daughter, young granddaughter or our elderly parents to visit. (Another issue related to middle age is that one's parents may be in need of care; in 2003 I looked after my dying mother and the distress involved was compounded by D being alone to endure the ordeal at home. This was repeated when D's mother died in 2005.)

We felt that unrealistic expectations were unfairly placed on us, despite exhaustion and lack of stamina, to monitor the situation. No consideration was taken of the impact upon us of incidents we were witnessing and enduring; for instance, we constantly had to call the police out to domestic violence, fights involving knife-wielding crack dealers, intimidation by large, drunken out-of-control men. (While no one should have to deal with this, I feel I could have coped better when

younger!) After a year, at our wits' end, we felt compelled to involve our own solicitor, in order to insist the HA act in accordance with its responsibilities. The tenant was finally moved only at the end of 2005.

When one neighbour was arrested for harassment in 2004 and assistance was provided by Camden LGBT Forum advocates and ASB unit, Victim Support and police, our relief at being taken seriously after official indifference was huge. The Housing Ombudsman has found that PCHA did not follow procedures correctly. Disappointingly, the factors of our age and health were not dealt with, and our request for an investigation of discrimination against us and institutionalised homophobia within the organisation was not followed up.

Luckily, we have supportive family and friends, and a strong relationship. My fear is that others without such resources would suffer more in this situation. I had flashbacks, panic attacks and nightmares on returning to the flat and continue to feel unsafe in the neighbourhood. I gained understanding of how prolonged unfair treatment causes feelings of depression and hopelessness which disempower older people, undermining physical and mental health and confidence. On the basis of this experience it seems to me there is a need for an understanding of the way in which multiple factors involved in discriminatory practice (age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability, for example) interact as a whole. My hope is that sharing such stories may contribute to protecting others from such experience, and for a time when commitment to equality in service provision ensures community safety and quality of life for everyone.

The former Mayor of Coventry, Ram Lakha, a Labour Councillor who is a Dalit, faced intense discrimination from 'upper castes' when he stood for election in a largely Indian ward.

"During campaigning I was often told that I would not get people's vote as I was a chamar. So I filed my nomination in a non-Asian constituency and was able to win. The Indian community in Coventry always felicitates every new Mayor; however, till today they have not done this for me."

In 1966, whilst millions were celebrating England winning the World Cup, my family and I were moving into our first house. Two weeks later a brick was thrown through the window of my father's car; I quickly learned that some people would do things like this to us because of who we were, not because of anything we had done. I'm pleased to say that this did not deter my father and mother from sending me to school. I learned a lot at school about the non-Gypsy way of life and the systems we all have to work within.

After leaving school and working with my dad, then starting my own company, I quickly realised that when I combined what I had learned at school with what I had learned from my father and community I was able to achieve considerable success. The skills I was taught – including flexibility, pride in your work, taking risks and how to positively interact with a wide range of people – were called upon many times in my numerous areas of work, both paid and voluntary.

Despite being a community volunteer, a national campaigner for improvements in healthcare and the recipient of a number of awards for volunteering, there are still occasions where I will be discriminated against because I am a Gypsy. However, whilst this can be very disappointing and in some cases extremely hurtful, it does not deter me from carrying on working to educate the wider community about Gypsies and Travellers.

Like many ethnic Travelling people I am very proud of my heritage and the contribution Travelling people have made and continue to make to this country in all areas from entertainment, science, agriculture and the armed forces.

– Richard O'Neill (social entrepreneur, writer, broadcaster; founder and former volunteer director of National Men's Health Week)

As a British-born Muslim I am lucky to practise my religious belief in peace and without harassment and never had any problems at work. My fear is that this could change. Islamophobia is on the rise at an unprecedented level and as a 'moderate' recently said to me one day (a White Englishman): "I am frustrated and beginning to detest anything to do with Islam and Muslims." My response was I too was frustrated, multiplied by ten, when I saw suicide bombing, etc. around the world and in the UK.

The word 'Muslim' will become the new racist terminology which will overtake others such as 'Paki', 'nigger', etc. My daughter came home one day aged 5 and said, "The children won't play with me because they said that I was Muslim." Muslims are the new whipping boys in this so-called secular society where a hostile atmosphere will be created, pushing Muslims into a retreat and into real 'ghettos'.

The Muslims in Britain now have to justify their existence and have gone on the offensive. Exhibitions and mosque open days are a common feature across the UK to portray Islam in a positive light. Maybe this should have happened in the 1970s. But there is always something in the press and media to vilify and demonise Muslims: Dutch cartoons, highly publicised terrorist raids by the police, Pope's comments, the veil issue, the list goes on. Are Muslims falling for the bait? How long can Muslims continue to swim against the tide of prejudice that is coming our way?

The future does not bode well and amongst certain Muslim circles talk is about return to original homelands. In the former Yugoslavia a few years ago, neighbours were slaughtered not because they had vastly different cultures but because they had different Christian and Muslim names. Let us hope and pray that there is never a repeat of the pogrom and genocide that occurred a stone's throw away, on our island.

What could be a light at the end of the tunnel is that the Muslim community is not a homogenous community; you currently have many different nationalities, ethnic origins and races who embrace the religion of Islam. And as the fastest growing religion in the world and the UK there are many indigenous English people who are now following this religion. Sizeable numbers of the new and emerging communities also share the same religion. With this in mind, hopefully bridges could be built with those from the other Abrahamic faiths and other major faiths to jointly lead on tackling this new menace in our society.

– Ibrahim Kala (born 1969, Bolton, Lancashire)

When we lived in West London, my son was involved in all kinds of after-school and youth activities. But when my husband changed his job we moved to a rural part of South West England, and bought a house in a village. We all loved it, but when my son tried to join the local scout group (he had been a very enthusiastic scout in London) he was told that he would have to make a promise to God. The London group knew that he wasn't religious and had allowed him to join without making promises, but this group insisted that he must make the promise, whether he believed it or not. It didn't matter which God, but he had to make a promise to God. At 12 years old, he refused to do this.

I felt quite proud of him; after all, it would have been very easy to pretend he was religious. But when we looked around, we realised that the scouts and the Church youth club were the only youth groups in the area, so this meant that he couldn't take part in any youth activities. It also became clear that he was missing the kinds of things he did before we moved, and the scouts in particular, especially as most of his friends in the village were scouts. He was often bored and lonely, and became quite sulky, so I asked him whether he wanted to make the promise and join the scouts, but he said no.

Eventually we decided that staying in the village wasn't fair to our son, and we moved to a somewhat larger town. Our son still can't join the scouts (all the local groups seem to have the same rules), but there were other things he could join.

I can understand it if a Church youth club restricts its membership to children and young people who go to Church, but I was really angry to find that the scouts did not consider my son to be fit

to be a member, just because he is not religious. That is discrimination pure and simple, and it's unacceptable, especially when the scouts present themselves as welcoming everybody and have changed their rules so that other religions can join. But they still exclude children and young people who are not religious, and are not prepared to be hypocrites. They are also creating 'black holes' where there are no youth activities at all available to many young people. Is it surprising then that so many young people hang about in shopping centres, parks, etc.? Some of them have absolutely nowhere else to go and meet up with their friends.

– Sally Rogers

Because we just hang out on our street, there's a lot of old people that shout at us.

I always feel left out because I have cerebral palsy. I can't do things like other children. They tease me at school and call me "weird" and "slow". No one wants to be my friend. It's not fair that I can't have the same freedom.

– Claire (aged 10)

Sarifa Patel, 47, from London, has physical and sensory impairments, fibromyalgia and osteoarthritis. She also suffers from sciatic arthropathy, a painful form of joint disease, and often needs a stick to support her when she walks.

She has four children, two of whom have disabilities.² Her daughter Maya is visually impaired and epileptic, while her son Khan has reduced mobility because of leg ulcers which refuse to heal. He has also been diagnosed with brittle bone disease and severe asthma.

"When his leg ulcers were at their worst, he could barely walk, yet when I asked the head teacher if he could be taught in a ground floor classroom, I was told I was 'asking too much'," Sarifa explains. "Their refusal to co-operate had a huge psychological effect on Khan. He refused to go to school or to see the doctor."

When Sarifa took Khan for his medical assessment, the boy was interviewed privately by doctors, as they thought he might be being abused by his mother. Sarifa was distraught. He was eventually registered as disabled, although the local authority did nothing to follow up or provide care for him – then or now, she says.

² Names have been changed to protect the children's identity.

Sarifa does not conform to a stereotype of Asian women and she believes this is probably why she has experienced discrimination in her life. "I don't fit into a box," she says. "I believe in the social model of disability that involves positive thinking and uses alternative therapies like reflexology and head massage to empower the individual. It has certainly worked for my son. I was able to wean him off many of the drugs he was taking for brittle bone disease and control his pain considerably. He's now a very active young man who is managing his disability well."

Sarifa felt that she needed emotional support and a few years ago sought counselling. Openly discussing problems in this way with a neutral party is frowned upon by the Muslim community. They believe that their people, particularly women, should be strong enough to deal with their problems themselves, she explains. Similarly, most disabilities are not recognised by Muslims as they can't "see or touch them", she says.

"Counselling carries a stigma where I come from. People think you must have mental health problems. Now whenever I visit the doctor with a problem he thinks it's all in my head," says Sarifa.

"Life is a challenge for a disabled person in my community," she continues. "Whether it be the school, social services or the medical profession, none of them seems to take us seriously and listen to what we have to say. If I speak up I am labelled a trouble-maker, but all we want is our dignity and some respect.

"I've received a lot of support from Action for Sick Children, Asthma UK and the Asian Women's Network. They've helped me to value myself as a person. They have also given me the encouragement and strength to realise that with all the challenges I've faced, I've achieved the most important thing of all: I've kept my family together."

References and extra information

The Equalities Review would like to thank all the individuals whose testimonies are included here or otherwise helped to inform the Review.

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- Age Concern
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- British Humanist Association (BHA)
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- Childline
- Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE)
- Citizens Advice
- Dalit Solidarity Network UK
- Disability Rights Commission (DRC)
- Education for All
- End Violence Against Women Campaign
- Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC)
- Equalities National Commission
- Equality & Diversity Forum (EDF)
- Evangelical Alliance
- FaithWise Ltd
- Faithworks
- Fawcett Society

- Help the Aged
- The Law Centres Federation
- OUTEverywhere
- Polari
- Policy Research Institute on Ageing and Ethnicity (PRIAE)
- Press for Change
- Refugee Women's Resource Project
- Stonewall
- The Age and Employment Network (TAEN)
- Women And The Church (WATCH)
- West Midlands Regional Assembly
- Women and Equality Unit, Department of Communities and Local Government

Some of the case histories featured are drawn from publications provided by some of these organisations, which include further accounts of personal experiences of inequality:

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