

DL15: Coming out stories

Amanda, 15

I realised I was a lesbian at quite a young age – I think I was 12 or 13 when I realised but I didn't tell anyone or do anything about it until I was 14. Before then I'd gone out with boys and tried to fit in with the other girls but I wasn't really comfortable. I first told my best mate at the time that I fancied girls. She was shocked but promised not to tell anyone. She did though. She told all the other girls in our group that I had said I had fancied her. They told all the boys and then suddenly everyone knew. They said they didn't want to get changed with me during gym because I was looking at them. My teacher made me wait until they had all finished changing and then I changed even though it made me late for class.

I eventually found a local youth group. Not many girls go, but they are better mates than the mates at school and at least I get to hang out without getting the p**s taken out of me all the time. I'd like to meet other girls, and get a girlfriend but I don't know where to go to do that. My parents check what I use the internet for so I don't want to use the computer at home; I haven't told my parents yet. I don't think I could use the school computers. We never mention gay stuff in school, unless it's to have a go at someone so I don't really feel able to be myself. When everyone talks about which film star they fancy or whatever, I just go quiet and stay out of it. School is quite a lonely place to be, but I'll be through soon then I can go elsewhere.

Stephan, 18

At primary school I always played with girls and never played football with the boys. I was teased a lot for it by the boys at school but felt confident that there was nothing wrong about boys playing with girls and the teasing never got to me. Things changed at secondary school however, and my inability to interact with other boys through things like football was immediately picked up on. I heard the usual insults about me being gay or a faggot, not only because I didn't like football and sports, but because I was intelligent and because I came from a certain type of family (not working class). My intelligence and perceived background (it was an inner city secondary school and I had well spoken and intelligent parents with professional jobs) were viewed as signs that I was gay.

I had worked out that I was gay – and the fact I couldn't change it – by the time I was 13 but didn't dare to tell anyone. The bullying continued in all areas, both physical and verbal, and by everyone. By Year 9 it became particularly acute during PE classes leading me to dread taking part. I started forging permission from my parents to excuse me from PE and that escalated to me truanting off school and forging sick notes from my mum. A couple of times I got caught at home truanting by my dad, and when my mum and dad sat me down and asked why I had to tell them I was being bullied and how severe it was. I didn't want to mention that I was gay and people were calling me gay. My dad, who was chair of governors at my school, was furious that his son was suffering from such fear and paranoia and approached the school to demand that I be excused from PE on the grounds it was essentially making me

mentally ill. The school complied and I spent the last two years at school not attending PE which stopped me being exposed to the worst of the bullying.

We got internet access at home when I was 14 – I think my parents wanted to give me some access to the outside world as I didn't have any friends at all either inside or outside school. Through the internet I found out more information about being gay and gay lifestyles and made some friends online who supported me. They supported me through coming out to my sister and my mum and dad at 15 and they all were fine about it. Living in London was beneficial in that I knew that I could access a community if I wanted to, but on a few occasions I was made to feel very uncomfortable, particularly because I wasn't sexually active and had no desire to be at 15, so I didn't feel comfortable going to gay venues.

After school I attended a FE college, far away from my home so as to get away from the bullies. I felt entirely comfortable about my sexuality and made friends I could be open about it with.