

# Allyship in Informatics

by Jonathan MacBride (he/him) IGS Administrative Assistant

Today (Monday the 27th March 2023) the School of Informatics emphasised their allyship of trans and non-binary people at the University of Edinburgh. It's not often as a cis gay man that I see inclusion at a high level. Today I felt that little bit more valued, motivated, inspired, more proud to work in Informatics. Allyship is usually seen where individuals want to make a difference in ways they can achieve. Today the School of Informatics quarterly School General Meeting featured the Director of People & Culture Chris Heunen presenting the School Values, announcing a new family fund grant and then giving time for a former Staff Pride Network Trans & Non-Binary Rep to share insights about being a good ally to LGBT+ people. Dr Gina Gwenffrewi shared some of her personal story, comparing her life as an undergrad at Cardiff University 20 years ago, unable to be her true self, unable to achieve her full potential, to now at the University of Edinburgh where she has achieved her PhD, currently teaching Introduction to Trans Studies to UoE undergrads. It's quite a turnaround which she puts down to being able to live and study as Gina, focussing only on what she's here for. Gina highlighted that if we can all show respect and care to trans and non-binary colleagues and students that they will be more successful in their research and work, happier, healthier, more creative, instinctive.

How do we do that? Baby steps are a start. A Rainbow Lanyard shows others that you are a safe person to approach. Hang one from your pocket or on your office wall if you don't tend to wear it round your neck. Ask someone which pronouns they use and respect their answer. Add your own pronouns to your e-signature. Many people aren't familiar with gendered names of

cultures around the world so not only does it highlight your understanding of inclusion, it helps others know who they're replying to. After all, here in Edinburgh a 'Chris' could use he/him, she/her or they/them.

A non-binary Informatics PhD student explains how the world around them impacts their day-to-day life:

"In most scenarios, I am the first non-binary person my colleagues will have encountered. Maybe English is not their first language, and they have never learned that it is grammatically acceptable and correct to use "They/Them" for a single person. Maybe English is their first language and they have just never had to think in this way before. There is nothing wrong with learning, and making mistakes. However, there is a huge mental load on being everyone's first learning experience, that could be reduced by faculty members and staff simply by showing support in their actions and using the right etiquette.

It takes a significant amount of energy (and quite honestly courage) to persevere through conversations where someone is knowingly and consistently using the wrong pronouns for me. All anyone needs to do is ask if they forget, and correct themselves and others when they make a mistake."

▪ Persie Rolley-Parnell, RAS PhD


What do I hope was achieved today? Perhaps a few people hearing a trans woman speak in person for the first time, personalising a message which they have only heard in the media. Maybe a message they haven't heard before, particular to their role in the School, relating it to how they teach, how they interact. A fellow trans and/or non-binary staff member or student could have been sitting there feeling hope, that things in life will get better. Or simply that one person tells another that a trans woman spoke at their School General Meeting. Visibility makes a difference. Personalisation of an


issue.

The Informatics Forum reception has a small stock of the latest design of UoE Rainbow Lanyards, featuring a more inclusive Progress Pride flag. Anyone with a staff card can also get them free from Card Services at the Main Library. They are available to everyone from the Visitor Shop who sell them with a card holder for £2.

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## Staff Pride Network Members' Newsletter February 2023



**Staff Pride Network**  THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

Staff Pride Network Members' Newsletter February 2023

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**World AIDS Day 2022: Why We're Wearing Red and**

# Fundraising for Waverley Care

The University of Edinburgh Staff Pride Network have had a long-standing relationship with Waverley Care, Scotland's HIV and Hepatitis C charity. Cathy and Katie (members of the SPN committee) attended an event for supporters in October to learn more about the work of the charity to support those living with HIV in Scotland. We heard from a great speaker who had benefited from the support that Waverley Care offers, and had since gone on to work for the charity so that he could share what he has learned and gained from his experience with others in need.

Waverley Care inspired us to support their Wear Red for World AIDS Day initiative, to create awareness of how the work of Waverley Care has provided support for decades, and continues to support, people living with HIV and AIDS.

**World AIDS Day is marked every year on the 1st of December, and aims to bring people together to unite in the fight against HIV, raise awareness and challenge the stigma that surrounds living with the condition.**

We would like to invite all staff and students at the University of Edinburgh to join us in marking World AIDS Day this year! Please take part by wearing red on World AIDS Day (Thursday 1 December), and by donating at least £1 to our fundraiser for Waverley Care.

Donate now via our dedicated [JustGiving](#) page.

**If every member of staff at the University of Edinburgh were able to donate just £1 each, that**

could generate over £15,000 in donations for Waverley Care, a great charity doing incredible work in our city.

We are also delighted to be collaborating with Edinburgh College of Art in hosting an event on the Thursday 1 December at 6pm in West Court (Edinburgh College of Art): **The Farewell Symphony, a talk by Sam Moore**, is a musing on the AIDS crisis, disappearance, and queer histories. We hope you can join us for the event in your red regalia.

Register to attend The Farewell Symphony via EventBrite.

The event is free to attend, but if you have the means, we suggest that each attendee make a donation of £2 to our fundraiser for Waverley Care.

Donate now via our JustGiving page.

Learn more about Waverley Care.

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## Update on Availability of Pride Lanyards

Due to a huge demand over the past few weeks for the new Pride Progress lanyard, we are already very low on supply. Another order has been placed and we hope to have more stock available from mid-October. Our merchandise request form is closed for

the time being.

If you have submitted a request for a lanyard via the Microsoft form, you can expect to receive an email in the coming days with an indication of when we expect to be able to fulfill your request. Apologies for the delay and thanks for bearing with us – we're delighted to see so much interest in supporting the Pride Progress message!

In the meantime, you can try contacting the User Services desk at your nearest campus library, as these teams may have a limited stock of lanyards available.

We will also have a small number of lanyards available at this week's upcoming evening social on Friday 7 October. Join us to hang out and you just might get your hands on a highly sought-after Pride Progress lanyard!

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## **Celebrate Drag Queen Story Time with Edinburgh International Book Festival**

A staff member was asking Jonathan yesterday about the controversy with 'Drag Queen Story Time' and telling him about their family's positive experience, taking his daughter to Celebrate Pride With Mama G! at the Edinburgh International Book Festival. Jonathan asked him if he would put it in an

email for us to share with members and he has, below!

*I just wanted to let you know that I thoroughly enjoyed a recent trip to the Edinburgh Book Festival with my daughter Tilly and some of her wee friends. On Saturday 27th Aug we went to 'Celebrate Pride with Mama G!' which was a 2 hour event on the main stage at the book festival with music and stories all centred around LGBTQ+. Tilly really enjoyed the hour or so we were there. Mama G was great with the kids (Tilly was very enamoured with her outfit) and gave a nice, interactive, history of Stonewall that Tilly enjoyed singing along with, "Love is love is love is love"! . The two stories we were able to listen to were great and it was nice to hear stories (read by Juno Dawson and Jodie Lancet-Grant) that were more inclusive than Tilly is usually exposed to, mainly as that is what is generally available in mainstream kids' books.*

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# Join us at Edinburgh Pride 2022

## **SPN at Pride Edinburgh**

We invite members, allies and students to join us for the Pride Edinburgh March on Saturday 25 June!

The SPN marching troupe will be meeting at 11:30 on the day at Levels Café on Holyrood Road. Speeches start at 12:30 and the march moves off at 13:00.

If you can't make it to Levels beforehand but still want to join in, just look for our marching banner – it will be 3 metres wide and looks like the image above!

## **For a quiet space after marching:**

Members are invited to meet at the Informatics Forum from 14:00 – 17:00. Join us for refreshments and a marching troupe debrief! Please note that this private space is being facilitated for University of Edinburgh staff and students only. Entry will be via Robbie on the march, through the side entrance and building sign-in. Call/TXT/iMessage/WhatsApp (07905517428) or even teams message Robert (Robbie) Court to access later in the afternoon.

**Note: We will keep this post up to date throughout the day and I'll try and share our location during the march.**

## **Live updates:**

Live location: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/d8d45uCRVSKGdAi67>

14:00 we're meeting by the rino head / gift shop by informatics





12:40 were by the traffic lights





10:20 myself and the banner are now in levels cafe having breakfast so feel free if you want to be fashionably early.





8:44 Prepping for meeting at levels cafe. The refreshments are all ready at the informatics forum at the end of the Parade route. The banner has poles this year so wind permitting

should be above the crowd. [fingers crossed].

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## **Iona Community: Student Week this September with Mx Ashwin Africanus Thyssen**

10 – 16 September: Students' Week (*title tbc*) A week for students to experience life in the community, to share laughter and stories, to explore the island and to reflect on current concerns.

This week is jointly led by Iona Community staff with staff and students from Glasgow and Edinburgh Universities and the Student Christian Movement. We are delighted that we'll be joined by Mx Ashwin Africanus Thyssen from Stellenbosch University for this week.

<https://iona.org.uk/visit-and-stay/iona-abbey-centre/iona-abbey-programme-bookings/?fbclid=IwAR2DhbgZdvhzn5GnSr1G8EA3XQfYKLBhqAXd5v12EIw07sCGzQWozghMZDU>

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## **The Pride material “Grace**

# Like Glitter” launch

Excerpt:

*You can't get rid of glitter. It doesn't matter whether you sprinkle it like fairy dust or send it in a card; whether you glitter-bomb as a protest or decorate your face with it at a festival. It doesn't matter how the glitter got there in the first place – you can't get rid of glitter. (..)*

*As LGBTQ+ folk, we believe that God's grace is always there in and around and woven through our lived experiences. We exist, whether folk like it or not, and so we are sprinkled liberally with God's grace. We have noticed that resources for and by LGBTQ+ folk in a faith context often focus on suffering and sorrow. And don't get us wrong, we know there is plenty of suffering to go around, and we have experienced more than our fair share of it.*

*And yet, we also want to do justice to God's grace, and to the joy and euphoria that living our authentic lives as LGBTQ+ people brings. And so, whilst some of these resources contain raw glimpses of our pain, the overall tone that we are going for is one of hope, of joy, of love and, yes, of grace like glitter. We hope that these resources will help you to spread grace like glitter too, wherever and whoever you are. May it be so.*

[https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid0Ar8Cw8Fi2RpHtaZoftwB4SHbjAnwLGy8kxyFHtfjTnzphjAuav8SnMPoxC3b2L4cl&id=100005037420123&m\\_entstream\\_source=timeline](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid0Ar8Cw8Fi2RpHtaZoftwB4SHbjAnwLGy8kxyFHtfjTnzphjAuav8SnMPoxC3b2L4cl&id=100005037420123&m_entstream_source=timeline)

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# **Breathing Space: a week on Iona for LGBTQ+ folks and allies**

*spending time together, exploring their own identities and the Iona Community's work for social justice.*

*There's plenty of time to discover community over meals, to laugh and relax outdoors, to engage in creative activities, to explore this beautiful island with its white sandy beaches and profusion of wildlife, to read or write in the library – or simply be quiet in the peace of the church or the landscape*

**It would be really helpful to know if there are staff and students who'd like something like that next year – then we can plan to do it for sure. Please feel free to send the info around!**

<https://m.facebook.com/IonaCommunity/photos/a.10150226571841211/10159464633256211/?type=3&source=54>

Warmly,

Urzula

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For this and other information on the Chaplaincy, please visit our website at <https://www.ed.ac.uk/chaplaincy>.

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**A message for you from Urzula**



# **Glienecke (she/her), Associate Chaplain and SPN volunteer**

Dear Members,

Today we have an exciting and emotive message for you from Urzula Glienecke (she/her), Associate Chaplain and SPN volunteer:

*I'm delighted to share some great news from the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. Today it voted in favour of 'same sex' marriage. Many voices were saying: 'At last!' It has been too long and with much struggle heartbreak on the way, but it has happened now. It means that those ministers of the CoS whose hearts have been longing to conduct LGBTQ+ weddings now may do so – including me! And I would be more than delighted to!*

*This means a lot to me as I grew up under a system that was highly oppressive against LGBTQ people. My country Latvia was occupied by the Soviet Union, where being gay was not talked about and treated as a medical disorder. A lot of people couldn't be who they were, couldn't live the life they deserved. When the resistance movement I was part of (the Underground Church, the Barricades, the Baltic Chain) was successful in the end and the Baltic States became free and independent, many things changed for the better, but not enough. There is still a lot of discrimination and injustice, despite the fact that the countries have become part of the EU. Because of that I am involved in fighting for gender justice, equality, inclusion and diversity – together with the Latvian Open Church Network and the Women Theologians'*



*Association.*

*One of the best things that have happened recently as a result of this work is this:*

*Patvērums Baptist Church (The Refuge) is a small congregation in Latvia that is passionate about LGBTQ+ inclusion and empowering women for the glory of God. The church was founded in August 2021 and offers an alternative view for Latvian Christianity.*

*Our church was born out of a pressing need in the community. My wife and I were hearing more and more about our friends being isolated from their churches because of their sexuality and views. Our friends were being denied the opportunity to serve in the church in any capacity because of their same-sex relationship, and they knew that if they continued to attend church, they would keep getting angry emails from their brothers and sisters, and people would not even hide the fact that they were praying for their family to end in divorce.*

*My wife Kaiva was a member of a Baptist church, and while she still attended the church's youth events, there were many occasions when the organisers for their youth services could not find a preacher, a man who would preach. So my wife decided to come forward and preach, only to be told afterwards by a brother that "he couldn't hear a word because she is a woman".*

*Personally, I, a seminary graduate and worship leader, was told that I would no longer be invited to preach because I had dared to say publicly that I would vote for a party that*

*supports LGBTQ+ rights in the upcoming general election. That was the moment I realised that I would be even more ostracised in the church if I had not been “lucky” – as a bisexual man I had fallen in love and married a woman. I experienced just a little of what my LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters in the church faced on a daily basis.*

*And so we got together and slowly started dreaming of an inclusive and affirming Baptist church here in Latvia. We contacted people in the much more experienced St Saviour’s Anglican Church in Riga for advice and felt that this is the direction God wants to take us. I also met with the Bishop of the Union of Baptist Churches in Latvia and he made it clear that there will be no relationship between our church and the Union.*

*At the moment we meet weekly for our services and most of us are still healing from the traumas we experienced in previous churches. We are working to create an environment where same-sex couples can be part of the church and serve without hindrance, and where their families are celebrated. And everyone has the opportunity to preach and lead – regardless of their gender.*

*We see that an inclusive, affirming and egalitarian Baptist church is a great need in Latvia. Currently, the Union of Baptist Churches in Latvia is campaigning for an amendment to the Latvian Constitution that defines a family as “one man, one woman and children”. The former bishop and the pastor of the largest Baptist church in Latvia have just been published in a political advertisement newspaper promoting a party that is also campaigning for this change in the constitution.*

*We plan to make our church more open to newcomers and to publish articles on our website about the Bible verses that are so often used against people from the LGBTQ+ community and women in leadership positions. We are only a small group of people, but I believe that God has called us to show His love for all people in a loud, meaningful and healing way.*

*(Jānis Uplejs)*

*There are many Christian churches which are inclusive and welcoming here in Edinburgh: Augustine United & Your Tribe: <https://www.lgbthealth.org.uk/lgbt-community-groups-scotland/trans-community-groups>, St Andrew's St George's West, Broughton St Mary's, Greyfriars Kirk and of course the Chaplaincy here at the University of Edinburgh, for all religions and none. Everybody is welcome, everybody is loved. You are wonderful just the way you are!*

*Urzula (she/her)*

*Associate Chaplain*