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Introduction

As the chair of Action for Children’s LGBT staff network, Celebrate I am passionate about helping to create an inclusive environment for all our staff, volunteers and the children, young people and families who access our services.

Action for Children works with over 300,000 children, young people, parents and carers through 650 services across the UK. We are committed to helping the most vulnerable and neglected children and young people break through injustice, deprivation and inequality, so they can achieve their full potential.

We strongly believe that all children and young people have equal worth, equal rights and should have the opportunity to experience the joy of life and the best possible outcomes.

The Celebrate network was established to ensure all our LGBT staff, volunteers and service users are able to bring their whole selves to work and are supported by managers to be creative and innovative in our desire to improve outcomes for children throughout the UK.

I truly believe that Role Models are integral to ensuring an inclusive organisation that promotes and values its diverse workforce. I am delighted to introduce the Celebrate Role Model guide and hope that you enjoy the journeys of Action for Children’s inspirational role models.

Claire Cahill
Children’s Services Manager
Chair of Celebrate
What are Role Models?

What is a Role Model?
Role models can be lesbian, gay, bi sexual, transgender or an LGBT ally and help Action for Children demonstrate its commitment to equality and diversity. Our role models help us to provide an inclusive environment for our staff, volunteers and service users.

Why are Role Models important?
Role models are visible within Action for Children and help to embed our equality and diversity commitments. They also share with colleagues their values of equality, diversity and inclusion and the importance of being able to be yourself in work.

Senior Role Models
Our role models are throughout Action for Children and this guide provides a snapshot of people who actively encourage an inclusive and diverse organisation. Our most senior role model, is our Chief Executive which confirms that equality and diversity is a priority for Action for Children.

What do role models do?
Role models are a source of learning for colleagues and share their experiences of equality and diversity. Role models do not shy away from challenging injustice and have sound values and principles that underpin their work within Action for Children. Our role models feel able to be themselves and support others to be themselves in order to be productive, creative and innovative in order to achieve Action for Children’s aim of improving outcomes for children across the UK.
Tony Hawkhead
Chief Executive.

Why did you decide to join Action for Children?
I decided to join Action for Children because I loved the sense I had of a charity with a huge commitment to children and young people, wherever we work, with a rich history going back 145 years. I was very impressed with the trustees and staff that I met before I started and I really liked the range and quality of work we all over the UK.

What do you enjoy about being Chief Executive of Action for Children?
I really enjoy having the opportunity to get out to see our projects and to meet the children, parents and carers that we support and to talk to the wonderful staff and volunteers who do such great work. I love talking to politicians, supporters and partners about our work, of which I am deeply proud.

Why is it important to ensure an inclusive working environment for all your staff at Action for Children?
I believe that all the best organisations are those that are inclusive and diverse. This ensures that different perspectives and experiences contribute to our services, planning and decision making and also ensures that we reflect the communities that we serve.

What benefits can role models bring?
Role models show all of us the possibilities for our careers and jobs. For me, they are a huge part of building people’s confidence and the belief that they can go further.

What advice would you give someone who was worried about coming out to their manager?
Don’t be afraid. Action for Children has a strong commitment to diversity and equal opportunity to which all managers have committed and which has my personal backing. What we want are great people, whatever their sexuality.

Favourite film:
Depending on mood, Die Hard, It’s a Wonderful Life, The Third Man, Get Carter (original), Four Weddings and a Funeral.

Favourite colour:
Blue.

Favourite quote:
From my grandfather - “You can’t fart against thunder”.

Tell us about your career to date and what you do at Action for Children.

I started my professional life as a Youth Worker after realising that working with young people made every working day one which was full of challenges, surprises and laughter. Three things that I now realise give any part of my life balance and sustainability. Since then I have worked in a variety of settings but mainly within the voluntary sector. I have worked for Action for Children for 15 years with the last two years in my current role as Children’s Services Manager. This encompasses Walsall, Wolverhampton, Birmingham and Worcestershire and is certainly full of challenge. However this is balanced by the ongoing drive and passion I have to ensure we provide the best possible service to children and young people across my cluster.

What do you most enjoy about your current role?

The variety and breadth of tasks within the role as well as the people I am lucky enough to have contact with and work alongside.

You are the chair of the Celebrate network, why are staff networks so important?

They provide both formal and informal opportunities and support for people to meet with other like-minded people. This is invaluable to any member of staff but particularly if you know you are in a minority and are unsure about being able to be yourself with your work colleagues and manager.

What advice would you give someone who was worried about coming out to their manager and colleagues?

I have always been well supported by my managers and colleagues and am very confident that your reception would be the same. However do take time to think it through and be sure that the timing is right for you. Do not feel pressured to share any information you don’t want to and do talk to your friends and family, friends at work and other members of the network if you think that would help. Being open about your sexuality at work should be a ‘non issue’ for any member of staff working for Action for Children.

Tell us something interesting about yourself that no one else would know

I am a qualified dance teacher and spent three months teaching Dance at a Summer Camp in New York when I was 18 years old. Tap dancing is my favourite type of dance and I have just found an adult tap class which I love going to and feeling like ‘Billy Elliot’.

What’s your favourite drink?

Summer - Pimms, Winter - Mulled Wine, Everyday – Cup of tea.

What’s your favourite film?

Ooooh difficult - Pretty Woman.

What’s your favourite type of food?

Italian (but with Mexican a close second).
What is your professional background and when did you start working at Action for Children?
I started working for Action for Children (NCH at that time) in 2001, just as I was completing my professional HR qualifications. I started on a three month contract and 14 years later I am still here. This was my first HR role and I have worked my way up through the HR Department from HR Assistant, to Officer, to Advisor, to Business Partner right through to my current Interim Senior HR Business Partner role. Previously I worked as a Veterinary Assistant, at Boots the Chemist on the Health Care counter, Office temping work and also in a Greeting Card shop.

Did anything draw you to Action for Children in particular?
When I joined Action for Children on a temporary contract I had not heard of NCH, as it was then, but I soon discovered that their values and principles were aligned to my own and I would now describe the organisation as being an employer of choice and would recommend working for Action for Children to anyone.

What do you most enjoy about your current role?
What I enjoy most about my current role is the opportunity to contribute to the front line by supporting Managers to carry out their people and organisational responsibilities by providing them with my advice and support so that they can focus on making a difference to the children, young people and families they support.

Why is it important to be an ally?
I feel very strongly, and want to share with others, and the next generation, the importance of encouraging individuals to be open about who they are at their core. I feel this is a key role for me to become an ally and a champion for Celebrate to help promote this within Action for Children.

What do you do in your spare time and how do you like to relax?
In my spare time I spend a lot of time with my friends and family but mainly with my husband and my two young children who keep me fit and healthy. I enjoy a variety of food and like to try new things but most of all I like to curl up with a good book on my kindle to relax with a nice mug of tea.

Favourite food
I love most foods but I would say that my favourite food is tapas as I can have a variety of dishes and share them with my friends and family.

Favourite artist
I love listening to Tracey Chapman and Nina Simone when I want to relax but I also love dancing around with my children to the latest pop song usually Jessie J or Little Mix.

Favourite type of holiday
I love going on beach holidays so I can play in the sea and build sandcastles with my two children.

Emma Boulton
Interim Senior HR Business Partner
When did you start working for Action for Children and what is your current role?
I started working for Action for Children in August 2010. Since that time I have been the Operational Director for Children’s Services in North East England and Cumbria. I also hold lead responsibility in UK North for Inclusion.

What brought you to Action for Children?
My whole career since leaving university in 1995 has involved working with children and young people starting as a secondary school teacher in an inner city school. I spent 15 years working operationally and strategically in the fields of youth justice, child poverty, homelessness and inclusion in the public sector. Increasingly I was more drawn toward the voluntary sector through my work on the board of another young people’s charity. I was aware of the great work Action for Children did nationally and locally and wanted to become part of a team whose values I admired and shared.

What do you enjoy about your current role?
The variety and the pace is exciting, but most of all it’s the sense that what we do makes a difference where it really counts in local communities and nationally. We have an opportunity for embedding coproduction with children and young people that very few other organisations have. I enjoy working with a motivated and passionate team of people and tackling some of the biggest issues facing families today head on. The personal development opportunities are very good too.

Why do you think it’s important to have a senior, gay role model at Action for Children?
People perform better when they can be themselves it’s a simple as that. I think seeing someone like me getting on with things uninhibited by a particular aspect of my identity is positive for those people around me who want to be open about themselves. It makes good business sense as proven by the top organisations in the UK that celebrate diversity and reap the benefits, but it is also something I feel I should do. It’s not always been easy for me, but it made a difference to know there were others and importantly more senior people who had been through the same experiences in the workplace and thrived.

Favourite film
The Big Sleep.

What’s your favourite type of food?
Italian.

What makes you laugh?
My dog.
Why did the post as Head of Inclusion at Action for Children interest you?
I am a social worker by profession and was aware of the work of Action for Children and its reputation. I am really interested in equality and engaging children and young people, so the inclusion post ticked all the boxes for me. I absolutely love my job, the people I work with and the impact inclusion has for my colleagues.

What are you most passionate about?
I think this stems from my work with children and a short career in politics. I am particularly interested in gender inequality and the perception of women within society. I worked for over ten years with young offenders and looked after children, so I am passionate about how agencies and organisations can work together to improve outcomes for children. I am also passionate about the Celebrate network and the work I do every day at Action for Children.

Favourite thing to do on your own?
I rarely have any time on my own, but if I do I enjoy roller-skating on the Taff Trail, which is a trail that starts in Cardiff Bay and finishes in Brecon. I very much doubt I could roller-skate the full distance! I also enjoy keeping up to date with the new and social media. It’s so easy these day to find keep in touch with friends and share news stories. I like to feel informed!

Favourite thing to do with others?
Eating. I love all types of food so an ideal evening would be dinner with my family and friends and maybe a few glasses of wine. I very much enjoy spending time with others much more than being on my own. It’s probably why I feel strongly about contributing to an inclusive organisation.

Why is it important to have role models in Action for Children?
Role models are important for all organisation, whether they are third sector, public sector or private sector. It is important that LGBT staff and volunteers are supported and encouraged to be role models who raise awareness of equality issues across the organisation. It is important that all staff feel that Action for Children is an inclusive organisation and role models can help to achieve this.

Fantasy holiday destination?
Maldives.

Most influential book ever read?
My favourite book is ‘We need to talk about Kevin’ by Lionel Shriver.

Most precious childhood memory?
Summer days playing with my friends in the street.
What is your current role at Action for Children?
I currently work as a Children’s Services Manager in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan, in South Wales, and cover all the Action for Children disability services for these areas. I joined Action for Children 8 years ago, starting my journey at Caerphilly Children’s Centre. My inspiration for joining Action for Children, came from my previous role within the NHS. Working alongside hardworking staff in residential services as a Psychology Practitioner, I was inspired by the commitment and dedication of the staff and service in meeting the needs of some very challenging children. Having worked in Caerphilly and Powys, I came back to Cardiff and now manage that very service which inspired me so many years ago and now manage four services which all continue to inspire me on a daily basis.

Why is Celebrate an important part of Action for Children?
Celebrate is important to all staff to be aware of and include issues that relate to everyone working for Action for Children, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender assignment or LGBT preferences. Working for Action for Children isn’t just about who you are. It is about what you bring, and what difference you can make to the lives of others. Celebrate recognises the differences in individuals and shows value to these differences through Celebration. A diverse workforce and celebration of this diversity, helps us to bring diversity to our work and to recognise the diversity of those that we support and enable.

Why is it important to have role models at Action for Children?
Having a role model is great – to see someone standing up for what they believe in, striving to do better and encouraging others to do the same can be inspiring. To be inspired helps us to strive for betterness in ourselves and for others. It is important for young people to have positive role models within all aspects of society, not just within TV programmes and media, but in the social care workers, teachers, nurses and others who make up the society in which they live and play. Likewise, as grown-ups we need role models too, people to look up to, inspire us and to continue to show us how much better we can be. These role models aren’t just in those who win awards, or CBE’s, or famous celebrities; they are within the families and young people we support, who face everyday challenges, and work hard to overcome these; the disabled children and young people who show that anything can be achieved with the right support and the right attitude.

Who was your role model when you were growing up?
I don’t really remember, but it was probably a teacher who invested in me and gave me time to shine and respect for who I was as an individual. In my later teenage years this was my parents who bought us in a time where it was a challenge to be different and adapted remarkably well. I hope one day to be as good a parent to my children as they have been to me.

Finally - Miranda always makes a good role model for those of us still trying to grow up!

Describe a perfect weekend.
The perfect weekend would be a walk in the snowy hills, making snowmen, sledging and with our 2 little dogs. Coming back to a log fire roaring and a warming chicken stew with a good film to end the evening, then a lazy Sunday at home.
What is your current role at Action for Children?
I am the Children’s Services Manager for the Sandwell Cluster and am responsible for leading a cluster of services which includes children’s centres, family support projects and early years and childcare services.

What do you most enjoy about your current role?
The best part about my job is the opportunity to be creative and develop new and exciting services to support the children and families we work with in Sandwell. Every day is different and presents a new challenge, and I enjoy working with a really proactive and hardworking staff team and witnessing first-hand the positive impact of the work they do.

Why is it important to have LGBT allies at Action for Children?
I feel strongly that every child and young person we work with should be supported to feel comfortable and confident about who they are in order to reach their potential. If this is our goal for the families we work with I feel it is important to reflect this value within our staff team and ensure all staff have the opportunity to feel included and valued for who they are and the work they do.

Tell us something about yourself that other people don’t know.
My original qualification is in biological science and before moving to this sector I worked as a science officer in the Philippines.

What are your hobbies and interest outside of work?
I like to travel and enjoy watching and playing all sports particularly football and triathlon, although I do more watching than playing as I approach my mid-thirties!

Who is your favourite popstar?
I enjoy all music and like the Killers and Foo Fighters, although my guilty pleasure is Take that and Blue, just don’t tell anybody.

What was your favourite TV programme when you were growing up?
Growing up, Saturday afternoons were always the TV highlight of the week and my particular favourites were the A-team and gladiators followed by Match of the Day if I was allowed to stay up late.

Who inspires you?
Although it’s an obvious answer, I am inspired daily by achievements of the families we work with in Sandwell and by the dedication and hard work my staff team and my colleagues in the West Midlands.

Personally my grandmother was a real inspiration to me growing up, and as a long suffering fan of Wolverhampton Wanderers I have to mention Steve Bull, the best striker never to play in the premier league.
What made you decide to work in the third sector?
My inspiration comes from working in capitalist, corporate organisations and seeing how decisions were only made for internal benefit. I wanted to be part of something outward facing, something that built up communities and strengthened the lives of people who were disadvantaged. It has been the best decision in my career so far.

What do you most enjoy about your current role?
Being part of something tangible and genuine that really helps others. Having the opportunity to spend time with the young people who use our services inspires me to keep all our incredibly hard working staff and volunteers well connected and informed. Working on creative projects and putting the voice of the children and young people at the heart of everything we do is truly rewarding.

What advice would you give someone who is not out at work?
Deciding when and how to come out is of course a personal choice. However, being yourself at work makes a big difference. Not only are there countless studies showing that it increases motivation and productivity, but it means you can avoid the weight of hiding something about yourself. There is a great support system at Action for Children within the LGBT staff network for people who want to be open about their sexuality but are finding it hard. We are proud to celebrate diversity in all forms, so don’t be afraid.

What makes you happy?
When my girlfriend and I have just booked a new holiday. Our home together, full of books and artefacts from around the world. My family’s acceptance. Seeing how my efforts in the network are bringing staff closer together and raising awareness of equality issues, and that my communications work contributes to our overall organisational aim to make growing up safer.

What is your favourite type of weather?
Autumn. Golden leaves, apples, soft sunlight. The last warm garden barbecues and tennis games.

Who inspires you?
So many people. Anybody who has taken anything negative or difficult in their lives, and used it to inspire confidence and strength in others. That’s beautiful and something I have tried to do.

Emma Lawrence
Internal Communications Officer

Why did you join Celebrate?
Because I wanted to use my passion for human rights to contribute to a network that builds staff connections and fights for equal opportunities. I am proud to take the lead on communications and help organise events for the network, because what we’re doing is very positive.
Gabrielle Desmarais
Supporter Development & Retention Fundraiser

What is your current role at Action for Children and what do you most enjoy about your job?
I work in Supporter Retention and Development, where I am in charge of putting together a monthly e-newsletter for our supporters. I also help gather up stories for our Thanks to You magazine, and for various fundraising appeals throughout the year. What I enjoy most about my job is the fact that I get to remind supporters of the reasons why they support our great charity. I get to tell stories on behalf of real people who received help from Action for Children. It’s also a creative role, which makes me very happy.

What makes Action for Children a great place?
Action for Children is such a fantastic charity. My colleagues are all very passionate, empathetic, and welcoming. We have great camaraderie, especially in Watford (our largest office), and I’ve struck up some great friendships. When you work the long hours that most fundraisers put in, you have no choice but to be friendly with your colleagues!

When do you consider yourself to have come out at work?
Since I’m bisexual, the concept of “coming out at work” is a bit more complicated than it is for my gay colleagues. Bisexual invisibility is a real issue. Since I’m relatively feminine in my personal style, and my partner is male, everyone assumes that I’m straight. However, if I were to widely advertise that I’m bisexual, it opens me up to comments and questions based on widely-circulated misconceptions of bisexuality. Comments about bisexual people vary from being called “indecisive”, to being told they’re “actually straight”, “just experimenting” or “going through a phase”. Disbelief is the most common reaction. I’ve told a few colleagues that I’m bisexual, but that was only when the topic of LGBT rights came up. It went quite well. I guess you could consider that “coming out” – it’s been very low-key so far. I like to wait until it’s relevant to the conversation, and for when I have the energy to broach the topic.

What advice would you give a colleague who is not out at work?
Do whatever makes you comfortable in your own skin. If you’re not bothered by the fact that your colleagues don’t know you’re LGBT, don’t feel pressured to make a big deal out of it. On the other hand, if it’s important to you that your colleagues know and support you, then make a point of sharing that information in your own way, in your own time. Whether you want to make a big announcement, or simply reveal it to one person at a time, the important thing is to take action according to what’s important to you. Whatever your choice, I encourage you join Celebrate. If you’ve decided to come out, having a support system, like our network, will make it less daunting. And if you’re not going to reveal that information, you can still help ensure that no one is being kept silent out of fear of discrimination.

Tell us something about yourself that nobody else knows.
I like to be silly. At work I try to be professional, but once I’m home, the bad jokes come out. Favourite place: Regent’s Park. Favourite sport: Archery. Favourite book: Bird by Bird – Anne Lamott.
What do you do in your current role?
As a corporate fundraiser, my role is focused around working with companies to provide mutually beneficial partnerships. These partnerships are all unique, which makes my role exciting and varied. Our corporate partners support Action for Children in a number of ways from fundraising to pro-bono support and from gifts-in-kind to volunteering. I work closely with partners to create a diverse and exciting programme from which we both benefit and to ensure that our targets are met and exceeded. Another aspect of my role is to develop new business - I seek out potential opportunities for partnerships with new companies and plan out how best to approach them and what the partnership would involve. The nature of corporate fundraising is very collaborative and I work very closely with my team, especially with creative elements such as new business proposals.

Did anything in particular draw you to Action for Children?
I knew about Action for Children through a joint partnership in a previous charity and I was fascinated by the scope and breadth of their work. Action for Children stood out to me as an organisation with a passionate and committed workforce and one who really lived their values of putting children at the heart of everything.

When I joined Action for Children, I was delighted to find out about Celebrate network. I feel very fortunate to be part of such a vibrant and engaged group and look forward to seeing the network continue to grow and flourish.

Why is it important to be yourself at Action for Children?
Action for Children’s workforce is as diverse as the range of services we provide. We work with children, young people and their families who come from many different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds and it is important that we celebrate this diversity.

Being proud of who you are is vital not only for personal wellbeing, but also to set a positive example to colleagues and everyone we come into contact with through our services. As an organisation that prides itself on helping vulnerable children and young people, being yourself and being confident in your own skin are ways to support the achievement of this goal.

Tell us something interesting about yourself that no one else would know?
I legally changed my name when I was aged 6 after reading a book about an angel called Celeste!

Who inspires you?
Margaret Atwood.

Favourite type of music?
Electronic.

Who is your role model?
My grandmother.
How did you become involved with Action for Children?
I am a service user of Action for Children’s Floating Support Service in Omagh which is a service that supports young people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. I am also a volunteer and help raise awareness of homelessness in the UK as well as helping with fundraising.

How has Action for Children helped you?
Action for children has helped me a lot by building my confidence and teaching me new skills, they have helped me build my bond with my family again so I can stay at home.

What is the best thing about Action for Children?
I like everything but if I was to pick the best thing I would have to choose the participation group with Clare, it’s so much fun and you get to do loads of activities.

I enjoy the Participation Group through the Floating Support Service. It acts as a youth committee where we talk to staff about things we like and don’t like about the service and come up with new ideas to improve it. For example we reviewed the Referral Form, project leaflet and lots of policies. We raise awareness about youth homelessness and have even been to Stormont and talked to Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly about Action for Children and the support we have received. I also have been involved in the Recruitment and Selection of Staff for the Floating Support Service and Northern Ireland Committee members.

I have met so many new people from similar backgrounds who are facing similar challenges in their lives. We are given so many opportunities, it’s so much fun and you get to do loads of activities. The group is brilliant, you feel accepted and no one is judging you.

Why it is important for young people to feel supported when they come out?
I feel that it is important because when you come out at a young age you’re most likely to get bullied and disowned by your friends and maybe even your family. To have that support lifts a lot of stress of the young person and it can also make them feel more happy and confident about themselves.

What are your hopes for 2015?
I hope to get a job where I can help the young people in the community and also start a course that can get me to university to become a youth worker.

Who inspires you?
My mother.

Favourite type of music?
Electronic and country music.

Favourite food?
Pizza.
What is your role at Action for Children?
I have been a Wales Committee member for the last couple of years.

What do you enjoy about your role at Action for Children?
It’s corny perhaps but I really enjoy being a small part of an organisation that makes a big difference to the lives of young people across the UK. My contribution is limited to providing advice and offering feedback where I can.

Why are role models important at Action for Children?
My role models have inspired me to take an action or follow a path that otherwise I might have disregarded. At Action For Children hopefully they can help to send a message that ours is an organisation where anybody can succeed, no matter who they are.

What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?
I belong to the cult of CrossFit, a group fitness activity that seems to be taking off everywhere. I also like to cook. But watching Breaking Bad and House of Cards seems to take up quite a bit of my spare time at the moment.

What advice would you give to an employee of Action for Children who is not out at work?
Coming out is something that LGBT people don’t do just once. It is something we do all our lives – meeting new people, starting a new job or moving home. If an employee of Action for Children wanted to come out at work, I hope they would feel able to do so. It’s a personal journey though. Different approaches will work for different people.

Starting by talking to a close colleague might work for some, a public notice in large type on the staff intranet might work just as well for others!

Who inspires you?
Aneurin Bevan.

Favourite quote?
‘Genius is one percent inspiration, ninety-nine percent perspiration’, which was said by Thomas Edison. I am not sure it is my favourite quote but it is a good one and one that springs to mind. This quote has spurred me on to keep trying at times when I didn’t feel like I was getting anywhere.

Favourite film?
I LOVE the Life of Brian. I could quite easily pass on all the other Monty Python films but this one makes me laugh no matter how many times I watch it.
Inclusion Champions

At Action for Children, we have a network of Inclusion Champions who raise the profile of equality, diversity and inclusion across the organisation. Inclusion Champions are Role Models who actively challenge inappropriate behaviour and practices, raise issues of discrimination and exclusion with appropriate managers and support colleagues to engage in positive conversations about the benefits of equality, diversity and inclusion.

If you would like to hear more information about becoming an Inclusion Champion, please contact Siobhan Corria.

Useful contacts:

- **Head of Inclusion**
  Siobhan.corria@actionforchildren.org.uk

- **Inclusion Officer**
  Mark.benson@actionforchildren.org.uk

- **Celebrate Chair**
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Action for Children supports and protects the young and vulnerable as they grow up. We make their lives better: now, tomorrow and every day.

All children shown have been helped by Action for Children.

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Produced by Action for Children 04/2015. 14/15 0391