

A Visible Force for Change



Making feminism trans inclusive

Speakers

Alexa Moore: Transgender NI

Joanna McParland: Cara friend NI

Summary prepared by: Eva Martin

Alexa is a trans women and human rights defender based in Belfast. Alexa founded the Gender Jam in Newry in 2016, and has worked tirelessly since then to improve access to support services to Trans people across NI. Alexa is also a founder of Transgender NI – advocating for the rights of Transgender people across NI.

Alexa joined the WPG (Women's policy Group) in 2020 and works specifically on health advisory and gender-based violence recovery plan. She is directly involved in work regarding Individual advocacy, Health care policy, and raising awareness efforts.

Jo is the education and training manager at Cara Friend – longest LGBTQ+ charity in NI - people from 12 – 25. During the Covid pandemic, Jo created an online safe space for people to engage with the team of Cara Friend. Jo also established a family support group during the Covid pandemic – providing families of LGBTQ children with a safe environment to seek professional support and education.

As education and training manager, Jo has developed Cara Friends new LGBTQ+ inclusive school's charter. The charter requires schools to engage meaningfully with their LGBTQ+ students, and develop a more inclusive, respectful education environment. Jo is responsible for training a team of all out anti bullying workshop volunteers.

What does a Trans inclusive Feminist organisation look like? (At a structural level)

Alexa: 'It is constantly changing and evolving. It is constantly working on itself. What I would like to see is an organisation that centers the voices of trans women, that does not devalue us as women. An organisation that centers Trans issues and trans women, as they are women's issues. A trans inclusive feminist organisation is also one that doesn't treat nonbinary people as a 'subset' group or a subsection of women. It's important when we're talking about issues that affect minority genders or affecting women - cis and trans - that we are using the correct terminology to describe the groups and the people that we're talking about. To ensure we aren't just lumping a bunch of people into the same group. A trans inclusive feminist organisation is one that knows what they're talking about. It's one that has trans women throughout every level of the organisation, where trans women feel safe engaging at every level of the organisation as a service user, as a volunteer, as a staff member, as a board member. Where their voices are heard at those levels. It's important not just to have a Trans inclusive feminist organisation – but to have a truly inclusive, intersectional feminist organisation as well.'

Jo: 'It's one that sees women as a diverse group, including trans women, trans women are part of that group. It's an organisation that's aware of the perception, and tackles it, that trans women are 'less than'. It's an organisation that empowers women and dissolves the barriers that have been designed to hold women back. That pushes women to positions of authority and power.'

What does trans inclusive feminism look like in everyday life?

Jo: 'It's about inclusivity. It is about making sure that all women have their voice – that they are seen. That they are seen as women. That they are accepted at all levels of society. At the core, it's about respect – about people seeing trans women for who they are.'

Alexa: 'Inclusivity is important. Being inclusive and being an ally to trans communities generally is proactive work. It requires proactive work to support trans women and to challenge transphobia wherever you see it. I think often, we keep our allyship for whenever a trans person is in the room, or a person of colour, or a disabled person, real allyship looks like challenging transphobia (or any form of prejudice/discrimination) wherever you see it. It's about recognising you won't be able to identify every transgender person you meet, we are everywhere. Really, trans people are not just confined to LGBTQ community centers and gay clubs – we're everywhere. In the workplace, in your friend group. You just might not know it yet. It's about recognising wherever you are, being inclusive and challenging transphobia, as well as platforming the issues and needs of Trans people. Whatever it is you do – make sure you are working to include trans people or leave it so that they feel able to get involved. That's what every day trans inclusivity looks like.'

- Being inclusive in everyday life
- Challenging transphobia consistently – not just for show in front of the trans community.
- Respect

The academic and cyclist Kim Humphrey has described feminism in the UK as 'viciously divided by Transphobia.' Do you think NI is in the same state?

Alexa: No. I don't think so - I don't think we're perfect, there's still a lot of work to be done. It's a constant thing to be worked on. There are still divides, there is still transphobia. even if there are organisation's or folks working in policy who are working to be inclusive, there will always be pockets of transphobia. So we must always be working proactively to address that. Issues around the inclusion of trans people, abortion activism, access to period products, etc., tend to highlight the divisions within feminism, and the need for further education and learning on such topics. we need to learn how can we work together – how can we support each other's needs? Often these issues are very intricately shared and linked, for example the issue of bodily autonomy, the issue of reproductive and sexual justice, and healthcare are all inherently women's issues, they're LGBTQ issues, they're issues for disabled people, for racialised people. They are issues that generally unite us, but in some areas of the UK, they are being used to artificially divide us.

I think that it's worth recognising where these divides came from – the reality is they came from a form of the gender recognition act of 1994 that was then suggested by the UK government in 2016. It has been an issue that has been dragged out over 5 years – in which time the bill has been used to demonize, target, and marginalise trans people in the public eye. We see so often very incorrect and misleading information of what the gender recognition reform act means. This barrage of misinformation and demeaning talk can create the illusion that there are strong

divides within the feminist community, but in reality, it is a minority. Unfortunately, these people often have large platforms to voice their views – they're in the mainstream media, even in the liberal media. The issue of division over transgender inclusion has been over emphasised because of transphobia funders, actors and the platforms they have to create such division. In reality, those who are transphobic are anti-feminist actors.

Jo: I do feel there is a difference between NI and the UK. Whether its in regard to do with opinions in school or about how transgender people are treated in general. Even Looking at our census, there is a question on sexual orientation, but no question on gender identity. When you look at the UK as a whole, England, Wales and Scotland were all able to move forward on social issues over the years but due to NI going through The Troubles, we were held back in a lot of ways. I do think to some degree that does have an impact on peoples understanding of trans issues over here and seeing trans people for who they are and including them in all aspects of society, for example the census.

There are certain aspects like culture and religion, that set Northern Ireland apart and behind from the rest of the UK. I do think the lack of understanding on transgender issues plays a huge part in Northern Irish feminism (and society). Until there is more of an awareness, this ignorance will continue to play a part.

How do we starve the trans exclusionary pseudo-feminism narrative of oxygen?

Jo: I think it is through education. If you educate people – you give them knowledge, then they have an understanding. If they have an understanding, they are more likely to be inclusive and respectful. In order to overcome transphobia, you have to educate these people – give them a balanced approach and perspective, that way when extremist transphobic comments are made, that is exactly how they will be viewed. Focusing on education – our young people and society in general.

It's also about not giving those who have extremist views a platform – so that they cannot promote misinformation, fear, and negativity. Always show a balanced approach to any issue and that is how extremism will be combatted.

Alex: education is so important. It involves revealing the pseudo feminism narratives for what they are – transphobia, misogyny. It is reducing women to their genitals essentially. A lot of anti-trans narratives are based in lies. For example, the use of toilets which align with a transgender persons gender – this happens currently anyway, yet the misinformation spread surrounding the reform of the gender recognition act has depicted a different narrative. When talking about forcing trans people out of bathrooms, or from the discussion on trans issues, you're talking about forcing transgender people out of public life. That is extremism. It's notable that not all of these people are 'radical feminists', they're actually liberals.

- Centering intersectionality
- Making sure we can recognise extremism when we see it

- Insisting that we cannot negotiate on human rights – nonnegotiable.
- Promoting education, which shall in turn promote understanding and more respect.