

Galop and Stonewall Housing Oral History Project

Interviewee: Michael Dresser

Interviewer: Ben Smith

Place of Interview: Islington London

Date: 23 July 2009

Files: Galop Michael Dresser interviewed by Ben Smith, 1-9

Key

BS: = Interviewer, Ben Smith

MD: = Interviewee, Michael Dresser

[time e.g. 5:22] = inaudible word at this time

[5:22 1A] = inaudible section at this time

[Word 5:22] = best guess at word

BS: Michael, can you tell us where and when you were born?

MD: Well gosh! I was born in 1973 in Northampton, although I spent about five minutes there before <laughs> transferring to Oxford, so yes.

<End of Part 1>

BS: Can you tell me a bit about your background, so where did you come from and a bit about your childhood and where you grew up?

MD: OK, well until I was about 12 I grew up in Oxford. I was brought up by my grandmother, so I had a slightly unconventional childhood. And so I grew up with her in Oxford, and actually about the age of 14, I think, I went to boarding school and I went to a horrible boarding school for a year, then a year later went to a very good boarding school which was quite progressive and quite arts driven, which was what I was into. And how far through my life do you want me to go? Do you want me to go from then 'til now?

BS: What did you do at the end of school, was what your next step?

MD: OK, so immediately after school I went to university, I studied drama at Hull University, which was a BA course. And then immediately after university I moved to London, where I've pretty much lived ever since. I spent a year in Sydney with a previous partner who was Australian, and moved back to London half way through 2000, and I've been in London since then.

<End of Part 2>

BS: How did you get involved with Galop and when was that from?

MD: OK, well I applied for a job with Galop in 2003. I'd been made redundant from a previous job, that I hated, and so I was quite <chuckles> glad to be made redundant from it! We'd had nothing to do with anything that I wanted to do and I used that as an opportunity ... I come from a creative background and one of the things that I wanted to spend more time doing was writing, which I wasn't getting much opportunity to do with my previous job. So I made a very conscious decision to look for a part time job, and I'm not sure now whether I was looking for a job in the charitable sector or not, specifically. Either way, I

applied for the job at Galop of Office Manager, which was being advertised as a part time post, and yeah, and got it so. But actually yes, I can't remember now whether I was specifically looking. I mean I think I was quite interested in doing a job but within a field that I had at least some vague interest in, so obviously something in the LGBT sector meant more to me than a corporate banking job or something. So I guess there was that factor involved in why I decided to go for the job in Galop, but primarily I was looking for part time work and it fitted the bill.

BS: What did you know about Galop when you applied for the job?

MD: Absolutely nothing! I'd never even heard of them! <Laughs> So it certainly wasn't out of any sense of wanting to be part of a wonderful organisation that I admired and revered by any stretch of the imagination! As I said, I'd never heard of them in terms of the work that they did. And interestingly, having worked there for so long, I think it's still an issue actually with a lot of people who come to Galop, whether it's for work or for the services that Galop provides. I think the majority of people who come to Galop for the first time probably haven't heard of Galop until the moment that they either needed them or saw the job advert or whatever it was, so yeah.

BS: What was your initial impression when you went for the interview at the office?

MD: Well it was a slightly interesting situation because when they rang me to offer me the interview, the date that they offered me was right slap bang in the middle of a holiday that I was taking abroad. And so I rang back and asked if there was any way that they might be able to shift the date. And they said, 'Well probably not because we have to have a panel of several different people and they come from various other things and they've all got jobs, some of them are from the management committee, so it will depend on whether we can get them to rearrange the date, as to whether <laughs> we allow to have your interview on a different date.' And fortunately they were able to rearrange it! <Laughs> I've subsequently found out after I've been working at Galop that they'd pretty much considered me one of the only candidates actually worth interviewing! So <chuckles> they kind of bent over backwards to change the date, which I'm glad they did! Yeah, my impressions when I first came to the office ... it was, I suppose, cramped and dark and it's the same office that it is now, but it's been reconfigured several times since then. And yeah, it seemed quite cluttered, dark, crowded <laughs>, yeah. I suppose that was my impressions. Do you want my impressions of my interview and stuff like that?

OK, well the interview was actually, again, as I've discovered subsequently, a fairly standard Galop interview, and actually one which I think the process of is a really good way of doing interviews, well A) recruiting, and B) doing interviews. In that for the actual submission for the job application, rather than just asking you to write all sorts of reasons why you were suitable for the job, they actually provided a series of questions or statements and asked you to write a piece for each of the sections of how you were relevant, and obviously those sections were quite geared towards the specifics of the job that I would have to be doing. And similarly the interview, they gave me, and they still give all applicants for all jobs, a set of questions and you get ten minutes to read the questions in advance of the interview and make notes and you can take the notes in with you. And basically it means that rather than trying to impress

people with something that you don't know what they're looking for, and so you don't know whether what you're saying is right, what it means is that you're answering the questions that they want to hear answers to, and you're able to target your answers to what you know they want to hear. So you're able to talk about stuff that you've done that's relevant, that is going to be relevant for what they need to know. So I have to say, that it was one of the best interviews I've ever been through, well, recruitment and interview process. And well it was probably the most enjoyable <laughs> interviews I've done really, because a lot of the stress was taken out of it, because I knew that I could do the job anyway. On reading the questions it became even more apparent that I could do the job, which meant that I could just focus on talking about what my experience was in direct terms of what I needed to be doing in the job, and allowed them to ask me questions that I was then prepared for them to ask, because I knew where they were coming from, what they wanted to know, what the information was that they needed. So yeah, it was quite a positive interview, I really enjoyed it.

And it was the first time that I'd met, then, on the panel, where the then, Chief Executive Tor Docherty, and one of the Management Committee, I think at that point she was just a Management Committee member, although subsequently she became Chair, Susan Patterson. And I have to say, I don't remember who else was on the panel, but I'm sure they were very worthy! <Laughs> I think there was only one other person and usually we have to have someone from an outside agency on the panel for interviews, so I guess it was probably from one of our partner organisations, or something along those lines. But I don't remember who it was. But I definitely remember Tor, and I definitely Sue. And I remember enjoying talking to them and it all going very well, so yeah.

BS: What kind of skills and experience were they looking for?

MD: Well they were looking for an office manager and I think particularly not having had an office manager, it was a new post. They were looking specifically for somebody who could, I guess, really come in and, from an office management point of view, get the organisation shipshape. It had just fairly recently come out of a period of having no staff what so ever. The Chief Executive, I think, had been in post for less than a year, possibly only even six months, or something like that. And there was, I think, two case workers, certainly no more than two, possibly only one, at that point, but although there might have been two. So it was really very small, and a lot of what they were battling with was the fact that there were no office systems in place, there was no IT systems to speak of, there was no archiving system, there was a whole load of archive material that had been inherited that just was sitting around in boxes, filing cabinets full of stuff that could or couldn't be relevant, but nobody had really looked at it for years. Obviously at that point the Chief Executive was doing all the running of the office, which was taking up her time. So really part of my role was to come in and take over all that side of things, to get systems in place for making sure the office ran smoothly, stationary was ordered, all that kind of stuff. So yeah, I mean the job role, when I started, was very much about the management of the office and sorting out the legacy of paperwork and documentation that had been inherited, that nobody else had time to deal with, some of which was quite valuable, and some of which was important stuff like client files and all that sort of thing. So I basically, from an organisational point of view, I think Galop was in a bit of a mess, just nobody had been doing any of that sort of stuff for several years. So when I

started, that was the main target of my work, was to get all that ship shape and sort it out.

BS: That was in 2000?

MD: 2003.

<End of Part 3>

BS: So what do you think the key issues were for the LGBT community when you joined Galop?

MD: The LGBT community as a whole, or just in terms of what Galop's work is?

BS: I think first of all, as a whole.

MD: That's an interesting question, I have never <laughs> ... it never even occurred to me to think about it! I mean I suppose one of the reasons why I find it difficult to answer that question is because I've always been quite an active member of the LGBT community, and I've been out since I was 17, and I've always had, if not a strong political sense, then certainly a strong sense of knowing what's going on and what the issues are, which is slightly contradictory, means that because I've always been part of it, I'm not sure that I would be able to pinpoint specifically at that point in time what the specific issues were, other than just general LGBT rights. I mean it was obviously pre-civil partnership, and also pre-goods and services law. Actually, I suppose probably pre pretty much all the legislation that this current government, the Labour Government have managed to bring in, around LGBT rights and issues. So yeah, I think probably a lot of that hadn't really kicked in at that point, or some of it might have been in the pipeline, but it hadn't become reality. So I guess from that point of view, the landscape was probably quite different from how it is now, but I don't really remember thinking that there were any specific issues above and beyond just the general ones that are still, to some extent, issues, although they've become more safeguarded in legal terms since then.

I suppose in terms of the issues that Galop was dealing with, again, when I started, I really didn't know that much about either Galop's history or the actual nitty gritty of the work it was doing and I had been involved with an organisation that offered advice and advocacy before. So I guess when I started it, I was learning on the job as much as anything else about what the important or difficult issues were. And because I wasn't specifically involved with casework, and particularly when I started initially, my role was very much office management, I didn't get involved very much initially in strategic stuff or client based stuff. So I was probably actually quite unaware of the depth of the issues that Galop was dealing with, certainly in terms of client work. That's something that I've gained in much greater understanding of it, I think, as I've gone through and part of that's been because I'd say after the first year or two of being at Galop, my role changed somewhat and I became much more involved in strategic development of direction and how things were implemented. And therefore that brought me into greater contact with the client work and the issues that were faced by the organisation.

So when I started, it was odd actually thinking back, I wasn't really that involved in the issues that Galop faced. So it's kind of difficult for me to

<chuckles> to say what I thought they were, because my focus was much more on just getting the mess sorted out in office terms, which really didn't have an awful lot of direct impact on LGBT issues at all! It was much more about <laughs> stationary and shelving and documents, and stuff like that!

I mean I suppose what was quite interesting, one of the very early things that I did at Galop was to sort out what eventually became the library. We had an awful lot of material, some of which was produced by Galop, most of which was produced by other organisations, and that was anything from annual reports, to published books, to reports on certain issues. A lot of which dated back right to the beginnings of Galop and certainly a lot of its early work. So I got quite a sense of the history of Galop and where it had come from, particularly in the late eighties and very early nineties, because obviously I had to wade through all this material and decide what was worth keeping and what wasn't. So that actually gave me quite a strong sense of Galop's history and the issues that had been big issues in the eighties and nineties. But obviously there were some significant changes, particularly around policing and prosecution in the latter part of the nineties, which wasn't documented so well because at that point Galop was going through some turbulent times.

So yeah, I got a strong sense of the issues from the eighties, a less strong sense of the late nineties, and then obviously by the time that I arrived, that because of the changes in policy, and law, and policing, I think the LGBT was in a much better position by 2003 with regard to the law and the police. Which yeah, as I've mentioned, we subsequently then improved by the actual laws that were passed subsequently. So yeah, it's a bit of a wierd answer that one I'm afraid, 'cause I didn't really have that much of a sense of what Galop was at that point in time. And I think actually part of that might also have been because Galop itself didn't have a very strong path, because it had been rudderless to some extent for, I think, a good period of year or something. I mean it had a management committee, but that was about it, until Tor Docherty arrived. And as I said, she arrived not that long before I did.

So in a sense, part of what we were doing as an organisation was recreating ourselves and repositioning ourselves and identifying for ourselves what the issues were above and beyond casework. Yeah, so.

BS: Had it become rudderless because it, in a way, it'd achieved various things that it'd done in the 1980s?

MD: No, well from my understanding, I think there was a period in the late nineties where because of the very strong work that Galop had been doing in terms of trying to build better relationships with police and trying to change police in practice, it had inadvertently got itself to a point where it was regarded within the LGBT community as almost having got into bed with the police, and therefore being untrustworthy, or not representing the community as well as it should be. And as a result of that, I think what happened, the confidence, partly from the community, and also I think possibly for various other reasons, funding streams, combined to get it to a point where it didn't have strong funding and it didn't have strong support from the community. That was very late nineties, and I think it took from the late nineties to when Tor arrived, for it to reposition itself. I think there were points where it had a few staff working on client casework. But certainly in terms of an overall organisational direction, although it had a management committee, I think the focus was very much on just keeping the organising going in terms of doing casework, and

not really being terribly strategic in terms of how it was trying to influence policy or anything like that. It was just concentrating on surviving.

So I think that was why it was at the point it was at by the time I got there, or by the time Tor arrived. Through that, those were the reasons why it ended up where it was. So I don't think it was necessarily that it had ... well it had achieved an awful lot. And I suppose in some senses it was a little bit a victim of its own success, and just lost its way I think. Well yeah, I suppose to some extent it had certainly, by that point, the landscape had changed. By the late nineties the landscape had certainly changed in terms of things like the prosecution of gay men, which is the reason why Galop started in the first place. So I guess to some extent it had to reposition itself and find a new ... I mean obviously they were still continuing casework, there always has and they will be, I'm sure, as long as there's homophobia. But certainly in terms of the more strategic angle of how Galop was positioning itself, both in terms of the LGBT community and in terms of wider authorities like the police and like local government. I don't think it had quite found its new direction yet, and I think that process started in the early part of this decade and I think probably more specifically with the management committee's decision to appoint a chief executive which was the first time they'd had one. I think they made a very conscious decision to take the organisation in a strategic direction, and to appoint a member of staff who was responsible for driving that strategic direction forward and developing it, which was where Tor came in.

So that was where the organisation was when I arrived. So it was, I think, still in a bit of a state of flux to some extent, and defining its own role to some extent I think.

- BS:** Before we go onto the strategic involvement and the policy issues that you worked on as time went by, perhaps tell a little bit about how you turned the office round and how long that took, and what was it like?
- MD:** <Laughs> It was very dusty and very dirty! It took longer than I wanted it to! Well to be honest, a lot of it, on a lot of levels, was just a slog. I mean it wasn't massively interesting; it was just stuff that had to be done because nobody had done it for several years. And from an office management point of view, it was fairly standard office management setting up systems. I mean there were literally no systems in place at all. So it was setting up filing systems. At that point we were all working on separate computers; we didn't have any ... well in fact, only one of the computers had an internet connection. <Laughs> So it was fairly primitive to say the least. So I mean part of my role was to drag that side of things into the <chuckles> 21st century, which just took a while. I mean I'd say it probably took a good couple of years before we were in a position ... I mean I think it took at least a year before we even were in a position where we had the internet globally, in terms of all the computers being linked to the internet. And certainly we didn't have any capacity for sharing files for at least another year after that. I think 2005 was when we got our first shared computing system, although it wasn't a server, but it enabled people to share files. Which up until that point had actually been a big issue, because obviously if you're doing client work, I think the way it was working initially when I first started was that clients were assigned to ... well when I started I think there were two case workers and one of them left shortly thereafter, so we only had one caseworker actually. Which meant that all the casework files were on his computer, which made it difficult if anybody needed to access any of the information, he had to be around. It wasn't an ideal way of working at

all. And not having an internet connection, except for one computer obviously <laughs> made life a bit difficult.

So I mean that was one of my first tasks, was trying to get everybody online, which made a huge difference, just in terms of people being able to do research. I mean I remember when I first started, the only computer that had the internet connection was the Chief Executive's computer. And so if the caseworker wanted to look something up online or try and find a reference point online, he had to wait 'til she went to lunch or she had five minutes where she didn't need to be at her computer <chuckles>. So there was a lot of computer hoping going on for the first few months that I was there.

Yeah, what else was I involved with? Yeah, I guess setting up all the documentation. I mean it's wierd actually thinking back, because it's all stuff that is completely taken for granted now within the organisation. All the file templates, there weren't any standard file templates for staff to just be able to use the files. So consequently nothing matched, nothing looked ... there was no cohesiveness to any of the documentation that was ... I mean obviously there was a certain level of cohesiveness to client work in that they had some templates for client stuff. I should probably say that my work at no point then or since has really involved anything to do with the client side of things, so I can't really comment on how that was running. But certainly in terms of general office administration stuff, there was nothing there at all. So I was basically, I suppose to some extent, setting up an office from scratch almost. Well probably not even from scratch because there was stuff there that wasn't really working properly, so it wasn't really as easy as just coming in and having a blank slate. It was actually dealing with stuff that was there but not properly done and not, you know, almost harder in some ways than setting up from scratch because it was working out what was useful, what wasn't useful, why was it useful, how could it be adapted, how it could it ... everything being compiled together to work together properly. Setting up stuff like policies, there were few policies in terms of staff management, with things like grievance policies, all that kind of stuff. There was very little documentation on that level. So part of my work, not initially but slightly further down the line was developing and writing policies.

Yeah, so it was hard slog, although I don't remember it being boring are arduous particularly at the time. But I suppose looking back on it now, it was quite uninspiring work, just in terms of setting up fairly boring systems, but stuff that needed to be done. So it was quite a challenge 'cause like I said, there wasn't much of any great usefulness there already. So yeah, I would say it was a challenge, <laughs> is probably the best word to use to describe it.

BS: Do you need to do research, looking at other small charities, or going to see any other charities and learning from their experiences, so you could implement that?

MD: There was a little bit. I mean we were fortunate in that we had a strong working relationship with Stonewall Housing, even at that point. And my counterpart at Stonewall Housing had also relatively recently started working there, I think about maybe a year before I started working at Galop. So I actually leaned on her quite significantly in terms of nicking templates <chuckles> for things and seeing ... I think before she'd started they also had a much more comprehensive set up anyway, but she'd certainly come in and

freshened it up and revolutionised certain things in working practices and systems there.

So I was quite lucky in that I was able to borrow a certain amount of stuff from them in terms of best practice and all that kind of stuff, because they were just that much further down the road in terms of having set stuff up. So that was very useful <laughs> from my point of view! It saved me a good deal of reinventing the wheel! And yeah, so I'd say that was the main source that we used, just because they did have such a good set up, it seemed silly to go elsewhere when they were just down the corridor.

<Interruption>

OK, so where were we?

BS: Talking about working with Stonewall Housing and getting the ...

MD: Yeah, I don't remember working with that many other organisations. I mean I think certainly at that point, we didn't really have that many working partnership relationships with any other organisations. And I suppose because I was quite new to the LGBT community sector in terms of working within it, I wasn't that aware of ... I mean I was aware of other organisations, but I didn't have any particularly strong links with them. So, I personally didn't interact that much with other LGBT organisations, other than just becoming aware of them and what they did, and I suppose, logically, the consequence of that was is that I probably started interacting more with them. But certainly I would say the first year, 18 months for me was quite a learning process in terms of who all these organisations even were, what they did and all the rest of it. So it was more for me I think about building up my knowledge of the LGBT sector and then subsequently, just as a matter of course, developing links with them. But certainly at the beginning for me, I don't think I had that much interaction with other organisations apart from Stonewall Housing, who seemed to be able to provide pretty much everything <laughs> I needed, so it seemed a bit silly going elsewhere!

<End of Part 4>

BS: Should we talk a little bit about your involvement in the policy work as time went on? So how did you get involved in that?

MD: Well I think because it was such a small organisation. I mean effectively, in terms of management posts, although I can't <laughs> ... supposed to be a manager, the bizarre thing is that I wasn't actually managing anybody. But it was pretty much, in management terms, it was pretty much me and the Chief Executive. So by default, because everything got discussed openly in the office, I became more drawn into the development, because she was developing a lot of strategic stuff and policy stuff. I, by default, got drawn into it and then, at some point when it became clear that I was interested in doing stuff over and above just managing the office, we had a conversation and she basically asked whether I would be interested in shifting the focus of my job slightly, to start incorporating more strategic and development stuff.

I think probably one of the earliest things where that happened was we decided to rebrand the organisation. And I think that partly came out, I'm not sure now whose idea it was, but I think it partly came out of a lot of the

consolidation stuff that I was doing in terms of all the documentation and getting everything in to coherent systems, that it seemed like Galop didn't really have any kind of, well, for want of a better word; corporate identity, although corporate is the wrong word. But it didn't really have any kind of strong visual cohesion to what it was producing, and obviously what Tor was aiming to do was to start producing, or to start positioning Galop in the outside world as being an organisation who was trustworthy, and who had something to offer, and who had a wealth of experience, and a background to draw on. I think at that point her focus was mainly on positioning us back in the LGBT community as a trustworthy organisation, but also very much positioning us with the Metropolitan Police as being an organisation that they could work with and who could help to boost their own processes and understandings.

So I think those were her two focus points. It felt like Galop really didn't have an identity, particularly a visual identity. And coincidentally, around the same point, I was starting to become personally more interested and involved outside of Galop with design work. And in fact, I now work mostly freelance as a graphic designer. So I went through an interesting personal process whereby I started to develop my own design skills, in conjunction with developing Galop's identity and visual branding. We redeveloped the logo and all the stationary and stuff like that, and actually developed a very definite set of colours, and the way things were used, and the way things were placed, and all that kind of stuff which hadn't ... well, I'm not aware it ever really had that branding exercise applied to it before that point. So I mean obviously it had logos and stuff like that, but I think it was the first time really that it started to develop a visual presence which was carried through consistently to pretty much everything that was produced. So things like annual reports, or if we produced reports on certain subjects and stuff. It was important to make sure that all of that stuff was part of the Galop brand, that everything that went out, as much as possible, was identifiably Galop. And I think that was quite important in terms of what Tor was trying to do with the organisation at that point in terms of making it recognisable visually as much as anything else, so that it had a visual presence that was tied in and synonymous with the work that it was trying to do.

And yeah, that was probably one of the first major, well I suppose, departures, from the traditional <chuckles> office management role, if you like. And yes, it was an interesting period for me, 'cause like I said, I was developing that side of my own skills outside of Galop at the same time. So it was an interesting symbiotic development in <laughs> some ways! I learnt on the job, but it was an environment 'cause it hadn't been done before where that was possible. So it was great for me to make my mistakes without somebody firing me, or shouting at me because there wasn't anything already; so anything was better than nothing in some ways! And there were a few mistakes made along the line, but we developed stuff and yeah, that was probably, I'd say, the first big change over and above just the everyday office management stuff.

BS: But has that approach continued?

MD: Yeah, very much so. I mean certainly because I've continued to develop my own outside design work, that ... As my skills and level of growing, they've been reflected back into Galop. So the next big thing that we did was to develop a website, which we didn't have previous to that. So again, that was the next stage of the branding process if you like, to create a website that A), enabled people to find out what we were doing, but also, there was a very

strong emphasis on having it as a resource for people to be able to find out information about how to keep themselves safe, what to do if things happened to them. Which was partly a strategic decision taken to A), to enable more people to access our services without necessarily having to ring up the helpline. Also to some extent, to ease the burden if you like on the case workers because we developed things like fact sheets and all kinds of resources like that. So it enabled the caseworkers, rather than having to reinvent the wheel every time with every single client, because there are obviously issues that come up quite regularly. So by focusing on those and creating things like fact sheets around those, we were able to give people instant information that they could even just access themselves without having to ring the helpline, through the website.

So I think that was quite an important step in helping to make Galop's services more accessible, and just widening the scope of them. So I suppose it was at that point that I started to become more aware of the scope of client work and the nature of the issues that were involved because I was quite closely involved in writing fact sheets and producing them and obviously in conjunction with the other staff. But I had the overall responsibility for pulling everything together and actually getting the stuff out there, getting it online, creating a website, writing all the copy and stuff like that. So yeah, I'd say years two to four or five were probably really the real development ones.

I think by that point Tor had been in post for a good couple of years and had developed a very definite sense of direction for the organisation and was obviously making good positive links with the other communities, and with the Metropolitan Police in terms of Galop's position and focus. So my role became much more about working alongside her to find the best way to develop those platforms, and then to go away and develop them. So I think in that period, that was probably the period of the most, if you like, creative development of the organisation, certainly from the point of view of how it was portrayed from the outside world. It was the period where we set up and developed pretty much all the stuff that was the basis for how Galop is viewed today. And some of the stuff is still in use, but certainly a lot of it has formed the basis for the further development that's gone on. So yeah, it was quite exciting actually, that whole period. I mean just obviously, we were kind of winging it, <chuckles> 'cause neither of us had done it before! But I think a lot of it worked, so yeah.

BS: Can you look back and see the impact that that has had, the outcome?

MD: Yeah, I think definitely. I think giving Galop a visual identity on such a large scale, I think, has probably proved quite invaluable in helping it to be respected and recognised. And certainly I know that we get people liaising with us now, whether they're clients or from other organisations, or the police or whatever, who are very definitely aware of Galop as a brand, if you like, who are aware of how we look, how we put things out. And the branding has gone through ... well it went through a major-ish revamp about 18 months ago, 2 years ago, from where it had been developed, just because there were certainly things that needed to be changed and new avenues that were opening up, so we needed to refresh how we were presenting. But I mean it's all been based on the initial stuff that we did right back in the early period. And I think keeping that consistent over the five years has ... I think it's paid dividends. I mean I think people now, who have any link with Galop, are very aware of it in visual terms and what that stands for. And I think it sounds

slightly nebulous to say how something looks can influence somebody's opinion of what the organisation stands for, they seem like two quite separate things. But I think that whole branding exercise has actually played quite an important part in how Galop is seen now, both by the public and by other organisations.

BS: What other aspects of strategic work do you remember working on?

MD: I don't know, it's difficult to say specifics because obviously through the process of doing the whole branding stuff, I built up a fairly strong working relationship with Tor, which basically involves the two of us telling each other what was going on all the time. So they weren't specific issues necessarily that I was drafted in to help with. There was an ongoing organic process of development of stuff, and I was just involved in that process and when Zoe Gold took over from Tor, that continued. And I think partly as well with Debbie, I know that she's said that she ... at that point when she took over, I was the member of staff who'd been there the longest I think, and I certainly am now. And so I think certainly when she started she found my knowledge of the systems, a lot of which I'd set up, was really helpful. So I think she continued that working relationship with me in that she quite often bounces ideas off me because she knows that I know where Galop's come from and I've been through that process of how it's got over the last five or six years, from where it was, to where it is now. Yeah, we've still got that relationship of just bouncing ideas of development stuff. It just happens organically, it's not that there aren't specifics in terms of issues, and I don't get involved in everything.

But I think quite often, both with Tor and with Debbie, they would run something past me, and it may not be something that I actually end up being involved with. But I think yeah, that's seems to be how it works, rather than there being specific issues which I'm, 'that's my role to do deal with.' It's <laughs> quite an organic process, which is a bit difficult to describe. But yeah, it just involves a lot of talking around issues. And that's always been, I mean since I've been with Galop, I mean that's generally been the way the office works generally. I mean I'd say that the relationship between me and the Chief Executive has possibly been closer just because we've ... well, Tor and I developed that whole side of things together, and then it's carried on to some extent with Debbie.

But generally, pretty much most things get discussed in the office. It's a small office, there's only, well, there's only five or six of us now, and that's the largest it's ever been. So a lot of things were quite often decided by just somebody looking up from their desk and addressing the office and saying, 'What do you think <chuckles> about this?' So I mean there are official decisions that get made by the management committee and a strategic direction that is decided by them in conjunction with Debbie. But I've always felt that as a whole, certainly its day to day working practice, Galop's ethos has always been that everyone's involved. And we've always been small enough for that to pretty much work. And the more staff we get, not everybody's involved in everything, and therefore I suppose I'm probably involved in more non-client stuff certainly, than maybe all the other members of staff, just because my work quite often means that I will have an overview into lots of different aspects. Whereas a lot of the other staff tend to focus on specific projects, so they might not necessarily have the overview of all the other stuff going on as well. But in general, everybody talks about everything pretty much, so yeah.

BS: How has the partnership working developed? 'Cause that sounds like quite a key thing and so seems to be a strengthening, how's that ...

MD: Yeah, it's certainly become much more key, over the last, well I'd say probably since Debbie took over, which I can't remember how long she's been there now, I know it's at least two years, probably about two and a half years. And I think to some extent it's been born out of necessity as much as anything else, because of the way the funding system works. There are quite a number of small LGBT organisations in the sector, all of whom do different things. But because of the way central government funding works, and to some extent private funding as well, quite often we're all chasing the same pot of money. And so I think at some stage it just became obvious that the best way ... and I think possibly born out of the fact that because we had strong working relationships with Stonewall Housing anyway, we'd started to put in joint bids for funding projects, and it seemed to be working and it meant that the result of that meant that both organisations got some money to enable them to keep working, doing what they do individually. And so I think through the success of that, it just seemed to be obvious that there were a number of other organisations who were in similar position who had complementary skills to each other, which seems to have become quite a success way of obtaining funding.

So I think it's grown on that level, as much as any other, certainly from where my view point perhaps seems to be, I mean Debbie may have an alternative view point on it. But it's also, I think, a good way ... Galop only has a remit to deal with hate crime, Stonewall Housing has a remit to deal with housing. And quite often there are clients who have issues that overlap lots of different areas. And obviously we can signpost clients to other organisations, and we can refer them on to other organisations, but I think the idea with partnership working is that the organisations are more linked in to each other, and I think ultimately that's got to be a good thing for the client, because then they're not so much passed around from pillar to post, from one organisation to another. I mean they may be dealing with different people in different organisations, but there's very much a sense that the overall management of that client's situation is being handled jointly between the organisations. And I've certainly got the sense that it seems to be the way of the future, it seems to be the way a lot of funding bids are going now, and it seems to work quite well in practice I think. <Laughs> I think some of the caseworkers might disagree! But I think generally, I think it strengthens the service that we can offer to the clients.

BS: Are there any bits, on that theme, I'm not sure what that theme was, but?

MD: No, I'm not sure <laughs> what that theme was either!

BS: Some of the things I think we've already covered in the next few questions, some of them you might want to add to. We can always come to another theme.

<End of Part 5>

BS: Did the key issues for the organisation change over the time that you've been involved with it?

MD: Yes and no. <Pause> I think the issues in terms of positioning, in terms of where Galop stands as an organisation and what its objectives are very

different now from what they were when I started. I think a lot of that's been a gradual process of Galop establishing its position, and as a natural consequence of doing that, other issues arise and they are followed up and ... I think particularly since Debbie came in there was, I think, both from her and from the management committee, there was a very definite shift in focus in terms of how they wanted, what they wanted Galop's core focuses to be. I mean obviously going through all of that is the consistency of client work is which at the root of everything we do, and is effectively our reason for existing.

But I think there's been a very strong move to try and develop the other aspects of Galop, such as contributing to it, to wider policy and influencing strategic decisions at local government level, at policing level. And I think certainly fairly recently there's been a much more marked shift towards trying to position Galop as the authority that other organisations can turn to, I think particularly in relation to the Metropolitan Police, but also with other LGBT organisations. And although I don't think we've achieved this quite yet, but I think that there's definitely an aim to try and position Galop in that respect with non-LGBT organisations as well, so local governments, things like housing associations and stuff like that. So I think that's a definite shift from when I started, where the focus was very much on just keeping the helpline going and casework, just basically keeping our head above the water. I mean some of Tor's work was about creating links, in terms of positioning Galop. But I think that's definitely increased a lot in terms of focus of what Galop's purpose is, since Debbie's come in.

BS: How's the referral pathway changed from the ... how were people getting in contact with you at the beginning of when you started and how do they get in contact ...

MD: In terms of clients you mean? That's a good question! Well one of the things that we focused on quite early on, around the same time that we rebranded, well it was the next stage after the rebranding and the website, was promotional stuff. Traditionally we'd produced ... I mean when I first started and when we first did the initial rebranding, we produced one poster which was fairly traditional in LGBT voluntary sector terms, i.e. it had a lot of information on it, it wasn't visually massively interesting, although I tried to make it at least be colourful. And subsequent to that, when Debbie started, we had a very concerted drive to develop, well initially it was three, then we added a fourth strand, of very targeted posters and adverts which we're still using at the moment, and they seem to have served us well. We targeted one specifically at scene venues, so clubs and pubs. We targeted one at non-scene venues, such as doctor's surgeries, schools, stuff like that. There was one specifically for housing related hate crime, and then we had a post start around sexual abuse; so we developed another strand of advertising and promotion for that. And the feedback from that, I think we've had a lot of clients say that the adverts have become recognisable, that they've now been running and the posters have been out there, for a I suppose a good couple of years, two or three years, probably about two and a half years. And I think they're having an impact on that level now. Again, they've become identifiable parts of the Galop brand and they're becoming recognised by clients.

So I think that's certainly contributed to the level of awareness within the community, in terms of clients knowing about us. Interestingly, I was having a conversation with one of the staff last week, one of the caseworkers, who said

that, 'The majority of the clients that he asks how they've found out about Galop, tends to be through the internet.' So obviously that is a complete ... I mean we didn't have a website when I started <laughs> so. So that's obviously a totally different way of people knowing about us. To be honest, I'm not sure what the main pathway was for clients knowing about us when I started, because I wasn't that involved with the casework, I'm not sure what the route was. I mean we didn't have a lot of money, so we hardly did any advertising at that point. We didn't really have any promotional material. So yeah, god knows <laughs> how they found about us, I don't know! I guess from possibly through directories and stuff. But I mean that's one thing that we did seem to have a legacy of when I started, was it being included, I guess, as a hangover from previous people working with the organisation, being included in directories and listening and stuff like that. So that was one strong way in which our details were out there and we've obviously maintained that. So I guess that that's probably how people found out about us in the early days of me being there. But now, I think it's definitely via the internet that people come across us, so yeah.

BS: Do you think that works through links? Or have you done anything like ... I mean if they didn't know the name Galop, how have they come across you?

MD: I think possible through search engines, and just having a web presence means that we'll show up in a search engine. Although actually interestingly, that's one of the things that we're now focusing on as a next stage, we've just re-launched the website and we're now looking at a much better system of promotions through Google and making sure that our search terms that bring us up are much more targeted.

I think probably though links on other websites, and I guess probably the fact that our promotion ... I mean we took a very calculated decision when we rebranded. When we developed the new logo we intentionally included the web address as part of the logo, so it's impossible for anyone to put our logo on anything without it also having our web address. So that was a very conscious decision and I think possibly that's contributed to a lot of people finding us, because they may well have seen something that had our logo on it and that's a direct link to our website.

And again, I just think through the promotion at everything that we do, by default, has our web address on it. So yeah, I would imagine that's probably the reason why it's ... And also I suppose the rise of the internet generally over the last five or six years has probably helped that side of things. But yeah, that was a definite decision that we took to try and drive stuff towards the internet as much as the helpline. I mean obviously everything on the website has got our helpline number and all the rest of it on it. So I mean it's ... And when we did the second mini rebranding, after Debbie started, we actually developed what we called the 'Galop Sidebar' which we developed a small catchphrase, we includes our helpline number and the full website address as well, and that tends to go on pretty much every piece of literature, promotion material that we produce. So again, it's just getting all that stuff out there constantly, I think, has probably helped that side of things.

BS: How have you built relationships with non-LGBT organisations in terms of promotion? 'Cause you mentioned housing associations, you mentioned schools ...

MD: Yeah, I'd say that's probably the area in which we've been the least successful, and I think that's partly because we just haven't ... I mean it takes ... <laughs> I haven't had the time or the resources. I mean it's a fulltime job just making sure that everybody in the sector knows you're there and all the rest of it. And it's certainly been something that's been on the agenda, actually probably since the later stages of Tor's being with the organisation, and certainly it's stayed on the agenda since Debbie's been in with Galop. But we haven't quite managed to get it to take off yet. I think possibly because we've been focusing on getting all sorts of other things in place and because our focus is the LGBT community, that's been our priority.

I think we're probably in a place now where we're just about ready to be able to focus more on forging closer links with non-LGBT organisations. But we haven't done a massive amount about it so far. Certainly not in terms of promotional stuff. I mean there's been attempts, we've produced an annual report, I think, it would've been in '06, which we very consciously developed as a means of targeting non-LGBT organisations. It took the form of a folder which contained various sheets, basically explaining who Galop was and what it did, which obviously we don't necessarily need to do in such detail for the LGBT community. So it was developed with non-LGBT organisations in mind. We did do a mail out of it, but again, shortly after that the organisation started to go through a period of flux where we lost a certain amount of funding and around the same time there was a change in chief executive and the focus just drifted a bit by necessity because we were just keeping ourselves going as much as anything else. And then there's been other issues since then that have kept it lower down the agenda. So it's still a working progress, I don't think we're as linked in as we would like to be. I'm not sure that we've worked out the right way of linking in yet either. I think, from conversations that I've had with Debbie, it seems that possibly again, partnership working, we've done a number of partnerships with local authorities to develop reports for them. So that's maybe potentially a way that that could go forward. But I mean I have the feeling that we need to be doing more to hook other non-LGBT organisations in who maybe don't know who we are or what we do, because we can add value to their services, and they may not necessarily know about us. But I'm not sure what the best way of doing that is yet, because we haven't had that discussion. But I'm aware that it's there and it needs doing more. But yes, that's a working progress <laughs>, I think, that one!

<End of Part 6>

BS: What differences do you think Galop has made for LGBT people?

MD: Since I've been there or just in general?

BS: Either.

MD: Well I mean in general, I think it's made <laughs> a massive difference. I think it's been very influential in getting laws changed, in getting attitudes changed. It's obviously not the only organisation out there that's been working on those issues. But particularly when it comes to policing and the law, I think it's made a fundamental difference.

In terms of the differences that it's making now, I mean there's the obvious level of the difference it makes to individual clients, we have a lot of clients

who ... one of the biggest things that we deal with is neighbour harassment and the old harassment by family members or neighbours. And some of the situations that people have found themselves in are fairly horrendous and they're ongoing and I think one of the strengths that Galop has is that we are able to offer ongoing advice and advocacy with situations. So rather than just there being a one off incident, I mean it may start with a one off incident, but it may be part of an ongoing pattern of abuse or whatever it is. And I think Galop is able to, once we have a client in our system, that we are able to hold their hands, and advise them and direct in the right directions in terms of procedure, of what they need to do, and follow it through with them. Often, over quite long periods of time, if it's something like neighbour harassment, it can be quite a long process for somebody just because that's the way the law works, that you have to go through certain stages, and they're not necessarily stages that the average person would know! So we're able to advise what they need to do, what records they need to keep, who they need to talk to, who they don't need to talk to. And if it comes to things like going to court, we can go to court with them, all that kind of stuff that we're able to follow through a process. So I think on that level, we can add quite a lot of value, over and above just saying, 'Well this is what you need to do,' and letting them get on with it. But we offer quite a hands-on service, that if they need it, we can really be quite ongoing in terms of how we help people.

So what how else have we made a difference? I think just in terms of policy fairly recently in advising the Met on issues, and getting involved. Also we now sit on various advisory groups to the Met and other authority bodies. In particular I think when it comes to critical incidents, things like murders, or severe incidents like that, that we're right there when it happens. There's something called a 'Gold Group,' which I don't know that much about, but it's what happens when a murder or something of that nature happens; it's an emergency panel and we're part of it. And so obviously that means that, for example, the other people who sit on that panel will be from the Met, there will probably be somebody from the local authority in which the incident's happened, all that kind of thing. So we're able to advise them on the best way to deal with it and to actually be in the process of how they then take that out to the public, and the methods that they use to find further information. And we're able to be a point of contact for the public. I mean quite often what happens is that the police will give Galop's helpline number as a number for people to contact, because quite often people don't want to go to the police for whatever reason, maybe they don't trust them or that they feel that they'll somehow be involved in something they don't want to be involved in.

So on that level it means that we can have quite a significant impact in actually getting stuff solved, or making sure that it's put out to the public in the correct way and making sure that the correct terminology is used, and that it's done sensitively and all sorts of stuff like that. So yeah, I think on that level we're still having quite an impact on stuff like that.

BS: How do you think Galop's impacted on your life?

MD: Ah, that's an interesting one! Well it's been fairly immense I would say. I mean I mentioned earlier that I've gone through my own development process in terms of my skills, developing them as a designer, and in some <laughs> senses Galop has been, and still is, my playground on some levels. And I have the freedom with Galop to be really involved creatively with stuff, usually from a very early conceptual level. Which has been fantastic, and it's taught

me all sorts of stuff about how to do stuff, how not to do stuff <laughs>, things not to do again, as well as things to do again and what works. So yeah, I mean on that level it's had a huge impact. And when I started at Galop, I had no thoughts of being a designer what so ever! So it's something that's really developed alongside my time at Galop, and I think it's been of mutually integral benefit to both me and Galop. So yes, I can't really overestimate, or underestimate, whichever the word is, the impact that it's had on my life personally. And I mean I've gone from working, I've always been part time there, but when I started I was working two and a half days a week. And through a combination of funding changes and also my own personal design work taking off, that's now reduced to one day a week.

So yeah, from that level it's been <laughs> fantastic for me! It's enabled me to develop an entirely separate side career! But I think it's been a really ... I mean I wouldn't want to overestimate my contribution to Galop, but I think it's been a mutually beneficial contribution to both parties really. And I think it's been a significant impact on both sides and both of us have got good stuff out of it, so yeah, none of which I had any intention of <laughs> when I started, when I took the job. So yes, it's all been good!

<End of Part 7>

BS: And the last question's around change for the LGBT community and policing, but I think we've talked about that. Unless there's something additional, because the question actually is the changes you've witnessed for the LGBT community, both generally and in terms of policing, in terms of Galop's work.

MD: Well I would like to think, I mean again it's slightly different for me to be specific as I'm not that involved in casework, but I get the sense that our client numbers continue to go up, which means that more people know about us, which means that we're helping more people. So I think we've made a positive change in that level. In terms of the issues that are being faced by people, I mean I don't think really the fundamental ... I mean despite all the changes in the law and everything else, I don't think the issues that people are experiencing have really changed significantly since I've been at Galop, which is sad. I think the only thing that has changed is that now there are laws which enable people to be prosecuted for homophobia and transphobia, in a way that they maybe weren't previously, which obviously makes our job easier, because we can actually do something concrete about some of the issues that come along. But I'm not yet, slightly depressingly, I'm not sure that the issues themselves have changed particularly, yeah. <Laughs>

BS: Changes in the law, but not necessarily changes in ...

MD: In public behaviour, no. I think that's probably right. I mean I suppose what the changes in the law mean is that it's easier to prosecute people for their behaviour, which I suppose in the long term will mean that ultimately people will get the message. I mean I think possible one of the reasons that it's important for Galop to try and not just focus on casework, but also to have a wider impact in terms of policy and strategy, is that really it's only through education that long term change in people's behaviour and attitudes is going to come about. And that's not just stuff for Galop to do, that's on a whole load of levels, right up to the top governmental level.

So I think on that level it's important for Galop to keep doing it's other stuff besides casework and having a voice outside just casework, because I think if we don't, ultimately the attitudes that leads to us having to do casework in the first place aren't really going to change. I think the laws were a good first step, but clearly the impact of them hasn't significantly been felt yet I don't think. I think stuff like that takes a long time to become part of general consciousness and clearly there are still lots of people out there who don't know that they can be <laughs> prosecuted for stuff! Hopefully the more people that get prosecuted, the more that will change so. But I think that's a long term, a very long term thing. And there's a lot of entrenched homophobia and transphobia around. London may be a cosmopolitan city, but there are still a lot of people who have entrenched beliefs, yeah. <Pause> <Laughs> I've run out of things to say on that one!

<End of Part 8>

BS: Well it's not actually a question, but I think we've covered more of the questions, do you think there are any other areas you'd like to mention of Galop?

MD: No, I don't think so. I think we've covered a lot. Yeah, well it's been interesting actually 'cause it's made me think about some things that I've completely forgotten about. So there's probably all sorts of other stuff that I've completely forgotten about as well, that's still buried in there, but there's nothing that springs to mind that we haven't spoken about really.

BS: Well thank you very much.

MD: OK, great, lovely. I think you're allowed to press the stop button now!

<End of Part 9>

<End of recording>