

## MicDrop\_Kevin\_Interview\_Version2lo.mp3

**Mo** [00:00:00] Morning, Mic Drop podcast sessions we're doing today. My name is Mohammad. You can call me Mo. I work with the people seeking asylum and refugees and also, I've been working with the Many Hands One Heart since it's start. Many Hands One Heart is a group that supports LGBT+ people seeking asylum and refugees in Liverpool. Today we've got Kevin, is one of the oldest, if not the oldest member of the Many Hands One Heart, he started coming from the first meeting that we have here in the central library. Hi, Kevin. How are you?

**Kevin** [00:00:36] Hi, I'm fine, thank you. And you?

**Mo** [00:00:38] Not too bad, not too bad, a lot better seeing you. Just going back to the first day we had that meeting in the central library, you know, and we were sitting there, me and few other people from the Sahir House and Armistead and we were quite nervous, you know, thinking nobody's gonna turn up and as a matter of fact you know, we sat there for a while and there were people from Manchester there and we just thought, that's it, no one is going to turn up, and on one by one, four people turned up. And you were one of the first ones that came in, I dunno, it was you first or second person, do you remember that day?

**Kevin** [00:01:12] I did. I did actually, I think I was going around looking for the venue before I found the venue it was difficult

**Mo** [00:01:21] How did you feel? You know, because before that, you know, we knew there were LGBT+ people seeking asylum in Liverpool or in North West, but they were totally invisible. Nobody you really could if you asked me after six, seven years working Liverpool with the people seeking asylum, I could only name one or two people that I'd ever met that they actually came and told me that they were gay or lesbian. How did you feel? Were you nervous? Were you apprehensive? Were you excited?

**Kevin** [00:01:53] I was really nervous because I, I didn't know when I came down to Liverpool and I was going around and looking for a LGBT bars or wherever I can fit in as a gay man and it was difficult then I saw a poster you know.

**Mo** [00:02:20] Where did you see that?

**Kevin** [00:02:20] I just I saw it in the accommodation I was living in. Yeah I saw the poster, you know this is something you don't go about asking people, where can I find LGBT people or something like that, because it's not something you really want to do. So I saw the poster and I was really happy that I saw the poster. Then I on that day, I came and I was really nervous.

**Mo** [00:02:51] And we chose the name on that meeting or maybe the next meeting.

**Kevin** [00:02:53] Yeah we did.

**Mo** [00:02:54] Many Hands One Heart and you had a role in choosing that name, can you tell us what was the reason you used Many Hands One Heart or why you suggested that name?

**Kevin** [00:03:03] It was I think the second or third meeting, we we met and we chose the name because we wanted something that will, you know, unify the group or other people seeking asylum from different countries, different races, you know, so we think that Many Hands One Heart is something that can bring, you know, people together and something that...

**Mo** [00:03:39] I also remember actually that was one of the reasons, but another reason was even in those early stages, the members that they were there, they didn't want a name that would actually identify the group as a LGBT+ group, you know, there was you know, they were so apprehensive, they were so sort of nervous, they didn't want to actually say, oh, we are actually this group is for the LGBT, although, you know, there was a rainbow there but the name itself didn't actually have any clue, they didn't give any clue about their you know, this group is for the homosexuals and I think that was something that a lot of members at the start of were quite nervous. And today, you know, although still some members, they are very sort of they don't want their sexual identity to be sort of known by everybody else. But a lot of members, they don't have any problem with that. And it showed that there's been some sort of a progress in the mentality. Don't you think so?

**Kevin** [00:04:37] I do. Initially, you know, I can say that the reason why is the members who are feeling nervous and the other, it was because we were not living in accommodation that we could call our own. We were living in accommodation where you have a lot of people from different countries who do not know anything about or who do not accommodate LGBT people. And we come from countries that persecute LGBT people. So we really didn't want to, you know, make it something that...

**Mo** [00:05:23] Just, sorry to interrupt you but just let's go back to what you said about your country, because, you know, you're from Nigeria is that right? How old are you Kevin?

**Kevin** [00:05:31] I am 42 now.

**Mo** [00:05:34] You don't look it, you look a bit older. And what I was going to say.....I'm only joking and what I was going to say is, you know, obviously, I wanted to actually ask you, when did you realise about your sexuality? How old were you when you mean you sort of realised that you're a gay man?

**Kevin** [00:05:56] Oh, this is something that you cannot, you know, say that I know from this year or from this year is something that you feel, you know, you can't really put your finger, this is the year. No, no.

**Mo** [00:06:12] I wouldn't say exact date or year, were you a teenager?

**Kevin** [00:06:16] During your teen, you start having, you're trying to find we are you where you fit in. You know, you get some feelings and you don't know what they are and you ask yourself, what is this feeling? You're trying to fight, fight or fight it off on you.

**Mo** [00:06:34] Why do you have to fight it out?

**Kevin** [00:06:37] Because you think so many people think that yeah, it is not normal. This is not a normal behaviour and you think that coming from where you come from, you see people talking about gay men or lesbians are evil, they are this and they are not normal,

from churches you hear they will go to her and they they tell you that their behaviour or what their feelings are not normal.

**Mo** [00:07:10] Is it illegal in Nigeria?

**Kevin** [00:07:12] It is. Really it is.

**Mo** [00:07:15] And, you know, did you ever have any problem with regard to authorities or with the mob? You know, in regards to your sexuality, as you did they ever harass you or beat you up, you know, persecute you when you were, you know, back home in Nigeria?

**Kevin** [00:07:31] I can't say that I had but during that period you never come out you know.

**Mo** [00:07:37] Ah you never came out?

**Kevin** [00:07:38] Yeah you don't come yeah. But you do it without letting people knowing but now, due to the law, the government has passed or the bill the government passed in some years back, I think that it has given the authorities more power and people to prosecute gay men if you listen to news or read the news from the tabloid Nigeria in Nigeria, you see a lot of things happening to gay men.

**Mo** [00:08:23] And in regard to your family, you know, and I don't know your parents or your siblings, uncles, aunts, do they know about your sexuality? Do they know that you're gay or did you hide it from them as well?

**Kevin** [00:08:36] I did. I hid it from them, well my uncle I think he had a clue, you know, had a clue. My mom was late from you know, when I was young. So she didn't know. My dad I didn't know my dad.

**Mo** [00:08:51] Did they put any pressure on you to get married or have a girlfriend?

**Kevin** [00:08:56] Yeah, they did a lot because and because of that, I tried to do was to be the thing that I did, which I think affects my case today because of the expectation. I know at my age I'm supposed to have, according to tradition, I was supposed to get married and have kids. I, at the time tried to marry somebody, you know, just to let them know that, you know, yeah, I am stable.

**Mo** [00:09:38] I mean, I know that you're a very educated person, you've been to university. I don't know if you were a university and you've got a master in Nigeria or you finish your education here. But let's go back to, like you say you're a young man in your country, apart from your sexuality, what were your aspirations? What did you want to be? What do you want to do with your life? Let's say when you were 18 or 19 years old?

**Kevin** [00:10:05] You know, when I was young, somebody asked me a question, what would you like to be when you when you grow up? I told them I want to be government. You know, the reason why I say that? Because over when you hear over the radio government to give money, you know, for road construction and government, give money for electricity, so I thought government was a person. So I said, I will be a government you know, cos I'll be busy helping people, giving people money. So that was what I thought. Yeah. But when I grew up and I realised that government is not who I thought it would be so I decided that, OK, that idea of helping people, I want to be United Nations ambassador

you know or a volunteer in the United Nations, so I can go to many places and help people.

**Mo** [00:11:12] Yeah. So you just wanted to make change, make life better for other people. And did you go to university back home?

**Kevin** [00:11:20] I did.

**Mo** [00:11:21] What did you study?

**Kevin** [00:11:22] I studied sociology.

**Mo** [00:11:23] Sociology. And then when you come to live to UK.

**Kevin** [00:11:27] I come to UK in 2008.

**Mo** [00:11:30] And did you study here as well?

**Kevin** [00:11:32] Yeah I did, yeah.

**Mo** [00:11:33] And what do you study?

**Kevin** [00:11:34] I studied social work, you know, just to help and you know and empower people as well.

**Mo** [00:11:42] Do you I mean, in regard to your family back home, are you in constant contact with them or do they, you know...

**Kevin** [00:11:48] No

**Mo** [00:11:50] Is it because of your sexuality or is it because you know what? If don't want to talk about it just..

**Kevin** [00:11:56] No, I don't know, really. I only have my uncles children, my cousins. But we don't, but we're no longer in good terms since my uncle died, you know, he was the one who was my sponsor so before then, they weren't happy that he sponsored me to this place.

**Mo** [00:12:19] And so when did you seek asylum?

**Kevin** [00:12:22] I sought asylum in 2015.

**Mo** [00:12:25] And based on your sexuality is that right?

**Kevin** [00:12:29] It is.

**Mo** [00:12:30] And what happened?

**Kevin** [00:12:33] Since then I've been, I've been in detention for five months. I was released in that period I'm not sure 2015 then I, since then I've been, Home Office has refused on my application and denied me and said they believe me, and other stuff but I am still going through it.

**Mo** [00:13:00] If you don't mind me asking if I obviously if you don't want answer that's fair enough, you know, I believe you were homeless for a period of time?

**Kevin** [00:13:07] I was, I think, yeah, I was. I was.

**Mo** [00:13:11] Did you live on the streets or did you...

**Kevin** [00:13:13] I did. I did. And I did sofa surfing. That wasn't too nice. Thank God, it was the summer period. I slept at the Albert Dock, you know, outside. I slept there. I was very, very scared, very afraid. I didn't know what was gonna happen. I was just sleeping like a dog, you know how the dog sleep with one eye open and one eye closed. So it wasn't a nice feeling.

**Mo** [00:13:42] One of the things is when we started Many Hands One Heart and I would honestly say that your leadership qualities was there I could see, we've seen, and you were actually, you know, heart and soul of the group, you make everyone laugh and you had a good sense of humour and everything else. And I gradually noticed that you became a little more, you know, sort of recluse or you didn't want to, and I remember it, you know, like you disappeared for a while. And then I saw you in the streets, I think it was in Kensington. And, you know, you didn't look very well but you didn't want to say anything, I think my impression is that you did want to share it with other people you're a very proud person. Is that right?

**Kevin** [00:14:25] The thing is, you know, you you go through and you don't know where to seek help, and you know it's something that I don't go about telling people about it.

**Mo** [00:14:39] You can always tell me, because that's my job.

**Kevin** [00:14:42] It was a really, really difficult period for me.

**Mo** [00:14:46] And you are in an accommodation now?

**Kevin** [00:14:50] Yeah.

**Mo** [00:14:50] You've applying for a Section 4 is that right?

**Kevin** [00:14:53] Yeah.

**Mo** [00:14:53] Which means that you can basically you can get access to accommodation and some help from Home Office you know why you're waiting for a fresh claim. OK, so let's put this this way, like, you know, let's hope and I'm sure that that's a good possibility that you get your status and you become a refugee or you become a citizen of this country. Where do you see yourself in five years time if that happens?

**Kevin** [00:15:23] Oh. So I have to go back and do maybe a refresher course for my, for the course that I studied, you know, so to get a job. From there I'll see, maybe my aspiration and my you know, see if I can get a job in the United Nations, that's like my dream, you know, to be that person now, you know make a change.

**Mo** [00:15:57] You want to contribute to this

**Kevin** [00:15:59] Yeah, you know, and also have people that are going through what I'm going through now.

**Mo** [00:16:04] I'm sure you can actually be absolutely positive and you can make a positive contribution to this country and to the LGBT+ people seeking asylum. Thanks very much, Kevin.

**Kevin** [00:16:15] Thank you.