



Transcript Episode 18: How to be an ally?

[start tune]

00:09 Suzanne

Hello everyone, and welcome to this episode 18 of The Wyrd Thing. And this is our final season episode for this season. Today we have some very special guests with us to talk about inclusivity and allyship, being a good ally, what it means, how we might become better allies in ourselves to marginalised communities who are heathens. So, I am Suzanne, I am half your hosting team for today. And co-hosting with me today is Frigga. [Frigga: Hello] And our special guests joining us today for today's discussion are Sif [Sif: Hello], and Robert [(very faintly) Robert: Hello], and Richard [Richard: Hello].

So, folks, thank you very much for joining us for this episode. And we've talked to you all individually through this season of episodes, but is... We thought for the end of the season, we'd get people together to be able to create more dialogue, looking at things like intersectionality, looking at ways we can help support each other as well. So for our first question to start us off. Looking at being an effective ally, what are some of the common misconceptions or stereotypes around marginalised groups? So LGBT individuals, visually impaired people, that allies could be aware of and constructively challenge? And Sif, would you like to start us off?

01:49 Sif

Yeah, sure thing. I'm the LGBT+ manager for the [Pagan Federation](#), so I get this quite a lot of... in terms of exposure to the greater body of LGBT people and in terms of acting both as an ally and as I guess an information giver is, for lack of a better word. So yeah, I think there's a lot of misconceptions...

I'm personally bi which comes with its own bucket of problems and issues. But I guess in terms of the greater sphere of things, it's not a blanket statement. There's no cookie cutter approach, everyone has... The labels that we use are useful. [Suzanne: Hmm] But they're not, uh, like little explanation, the explanations for how people present themselves and how they identify. So I think it's quite important for allies to recognise that there are differences within labels and we're evolving, learning, growing, changing all the time to the point where from the outside looking in, it can seem like a confusing mess. But internally it's, it's because we're exploring labels within and without and finding what works for us. And in itself is the journey that I feel like many people are just getting on board with and learning. And it's, it's exciting time for people.

But at the same time it's a rather.... no need to kind of go into too much detail. The outside world at the moment isn't looking too great for LGBT people as a whole. So it's having that understanding of acceptance that we're still gender and sex and gender identity and sexual orientation and all everything that encompasses is very much a... We're still learning, you know, from LGBT people as well in terms of how we fit in. So yeah, I would say that... Just if you if you want to be a good ally, understand that, you know, we don't know everything, you know. Um, we're, we're, we're on a path of discovery too, essentially.

04:06 Suzanne

Mm. Thank you. Richard, do you have any. Are there any sort of popular misconceptions that you encounter about being a visually impaired heathen?



04:17 Richard

Yeah, not from the heathen perspective in particular, but from a blindness perspective at all. There are many misconceptions around regarding blind people. The main problem is that... most people are shy to address their questions directly to the blind and visually impaired person, and they are running around with some... Let's call it presumings, that not fitting reality. First of all, there is this myth that blind people hear much better, have a much better sense of spatial awareness using their ears or other, other orientation methods. Um. The main problem is that people have their ideas, how blind people act and think and interact with the world around them. Yes, sometimes you have to, you have to correct these assumptions. [Laughs.] When you are in contact with people, you're meeting the first time.

05:43 Suzanne

Hmm, thank you. Robert, Sif was talking there about that sometimes the LGBT community is still working things out as well. Do you find that also... Does that kind of thing also feed into the any misconceptions that you encounter as well?

06:01 Robert

Oh, yeah, plenty of it. In one thing we have to keep in mind is: everyone's different. Everyone's individual and no one label encompasses everybody. All these labels that we've seen popping up, the past ten years or so. It's because we finally have... I think it's partly because we have enough people finally that are part of the LGBTQAI+ communities that we're actually able to start exploring it. And we're starting to get into a safe space where we're allowed to explore it and figure out: 'No, I'm not just strictly this. I'm actually more gender fluid.' And maybe heading more that way or whatever it may be for that individual.

06:50 Richard

I think the main problem are stereotypes.

06:53 Robert

Yes, that is true.

06:57 Richard

People think you have to you have to act in a certain way, because you have a certain label. And they don't understand that people are different and cannot be generalised by labels.

07:10 Robert

Yeah. If we take a look in the, you know, the gay community in general... Here in the US, we've been having gay pride throughout the country in the past few weeks. And this weekend actually is gay pride weekend down in New York City. All the pictures you'll see coming out of gay pride are, generally speaking, skinny, mostly white boys wearing almost nothing or these absolutely outrageous outfits on drag queens. That's a small part of the gay community. That's not where I personally fit in. But that feeds misconception that this is what gay men are.

07:52 Suzanne

I think my personal favourite that I've heard is: 'Oh, you don't look gay.' Yeah, like, wait a second. What does a gay person look like? [Laughs.]



08:04 Richard

I've heard the same with blindness: 'You don't look... You don't look blind.' What does the typical blind person have to look like?

08:13 Robert

Exactly.

08:20 Suzanne

So, yeah, for me, it's, it's very much when we encounter those stereotypes, those misconceptions... For an ally who wants to help support that marginalised community helping dispel those, I think maybe the first step is being aware of those and being aware they, they exist. And that even though they are maybe said in all innocence, they can feel quite harmful. If that's the 23rd time in the day that you've heard that particular sentence.

And so thinking about allies and how they can educate themselves. How from your own personal perspectives would you want an ally to educate themselves about the experiences and challenges faced by LGBT people, by people with visual impairment? And how would you want that knowledge to contribute to them being more effective as an ally? What would you want to see that knowledge achieve?

09:28 Sif

So many things! [Laughs] You know, the number one rule about allyship, good allyship is listening and signal boosting. You need to go into the spaces where those people are. So personally, what I do is obviously I'm cis, so I really I try hard to be a good ally for trans people. How I do it is to go into I use social media. I, you know, I listen, I follow accounts that follow other people and boost news stories and recommend books and creators that are trans. And that's how I do it.

So on the flip side, in terms of if you just want to be an ally to the greater LGBT+ community, it's about listening to those that are members of those communities. And if you have a platform, signal boost them where possible, read books, listen to their voices and just.. It's that whole idea of: don't talk over them, listen. And that's me. That's important in terms of how I'd be a good ally to other communities as well. But yeah, that's the number one rule for me.

10:32 Suzanne

Robert, Richard, do you have any thoughts on how what kind of education you would want people to, to gain? Or where you would want them to gain that education, or that awareness building?

10:46 Richard

I've not much of importance to add there because everything has been said. I think the most important thing is ask questions, talk *with* the people and not *about* the people. What, which has been said already. Socialise with them on social media by forwarding their posts, joining their conversations about special topics. It's, it's not only for, for the blindness and visually impaired community, it's for the whole disability community. I think it doesn't, it doesn't matter which marginalised community we are talking about. These, these concepts apply to each of them.

11:38 Suzanne

Mm.



11:40 Robert

Yeah, I think the only thing I would add is this. Yeah. Yes. Talk. Listen. Learn from the people themselves. But within the gay community or LGBT+ community: don't out them. They you may know them personally and they may be trusting you with a great confidence that they trust you enough, that they're coming out to you as whatever label they desire to use. They may not, their family may not know. Their other friends may not know. Before you go saying something publicly about such as such a person, make sure they're comfortable with it.

12:22 Richard

And always try to be open minded and be able to question your own point of view, because things can change. You may come across another source of knowledge, another point of view, and you always have to align it with what you already know. Or what you already think to know.

12:45 Suzanne

Yeah, that. That sort of really strong point coming through there of yes, go into those spaces, but go into those spaces to listen first and to learn, respectfully learn. And that point about, you know, not outing somebody or not making those assumptions. For me, that's, that's hugely important to go into a space, say, where there are trans people and then to keep what is said in that space inside that space. And not bring it out even unintentionally, because that may increase the risk to someone's safety.

And so thinking about our heathen communities at the moment, what ways would you want to see allies step up to increase the inclusivity of those spaces of either online groups or in-person meetings or festivals? What are the things that allies who are not part of those marginalised communities, could do to help people inside marginalised communities feel safe, feel included in those spaces?

13:55 Sif

This is an area that I'm quite - I guess not active, let's say active - I'm quite active in. I'm, I'm currently in the process of setting up my own kindred. And I'm also on the committee of Asatru UK. And both of those elements mean that I have to help drive for an understanding in terms of accessibility and inclusivity, especially when it comes to my own kindred, it's making sure that you're openly inclusive in every way that that means and every possible descriptor of inclusivity you outline, outline those from the outset rather than it being an afterthought. I know that there's plenty of groups out there that say they're inclusive, but what they really mean is: don't be public about it. Don't you know, don't be 'outspoken' in quotation marks about it.

I think it's important then to really make sure that you're going in to when you're in these groups, when you're in a position of being able to dictate that a path forward. It's making sure that it's not an afterthought. It is something that you think about at the forefront. And implement it throughout the organisation or the event and publicise it. Don't try and hide it. And I know that, that's that, that in itself is quite important step of just making sure that you're really upfront about what LGBT+ people can expect or any person with accessibility issues can expect rather than, you know, them trying to seek out that information. I always very much prefer it to be on your front page, as it were.

15:40 Frigga

Oh, I can wholeheartedly agree with that. Last week I got an invitation from a heathen group for a gathering and there was totally nothing in it about accessibility. And I know the people. And I know



that if I would send them an email or contact them in anyhow, they would go to a whole length to help me. And to make things possible. And yet because there was nothing in the invitation, somehow it hurted me. At least say something that you are aware! And you know if the venue is accessible, or something.

And I think it was two days later I saw the, the post of [Asatru UK](#), in which was explained, what you said upfront, that they tell things about they want to be accessible and it has to be within reason and all these kind of things and about safe spaces and quiet spaces. And well, this is different! And it just simple if groups, specific if groups claim to be inclusive, then walk your talk. But have it on your front page. Have something in your your invitation. Maybe only one line, but that makes... that I feel visible and being part of it.

17:10 Sif

Exactly.

17:12 Robert

Being inclusive is an active thing. It's not a passive thing. So you have to go out of your way, make sure people know that they are welcome. When you're choosing your site venues, make sure that they're accessible. Make sure the menus have options for those that are, you know, vegetarian or gluten free or whatever allergies may be there. It's an active thing to do. It's not just saying putting it on the web page, saying we're inclusive, but it's actually showing it.

17:49 Frigga

Yep. And of course, if you... if it's about accessibility or this kind of stuff, yes. And it's, you have to ask. But it is... It makes it different asset if it mentioned and that it's not me that always have to ask or starts asking the questions, but it's an invitation.

18:11 Richard

I can only speak for me from a blindness perspective. Just talk about all outdoor activities with [my local group of heathens](#). I feel quite included because they show me the places where we go. They lead me around and show me the venue in first place. That's, that's fine. That's, that's great. And I feel heartily welcomed and included.

One of the main problems is the, the digital component when it comes to graphical content such as pictures or videos. Um, most content I come across is still lagging image description or accessible subtitles for video content. There is lots of great material out on the internet depicting our activities depicting heathen concepts. But yes, they are, they are sometimes without image descriptions. And so I'm out and I constantly have to ask, would you be so kind and add an image description? What's to be seen on the picture? And that's... It's sometimes a little unnerving to explain myself over and over that I rely on these descriptions.

19:52 Sif

I know that, that's something I need to improve when I do my posts. Yeah. Yeah.

19:59 Robert

We all do. I know because I've done some website stuff myself. The current standard for HTML is to require image descriptions. Otherwise your SEO goes down and it's always a good idea to run



websites through a screen reader to see what someone that is visually impaired is what they're getting. And that may completely change how you do everything in the future.

20:33 Richard

Indeed, yes.

20:36 Suzanne

Hmm. And thinking about that. No, we were sort of talking about organisers and groups and people with that position of maybe privilege or power who have that ability to change, maybe the direction of a group or how a group approaches setting up a site or a festival or a gathering outside. But thinking about somebody who's maybe in those groups who doesn't have that ability to direct change, what might you want to see from them as an active ally? Because we're very much talking about allyship as being active rather than just sort of having a little badge on that says 'Oh, I'm an ally', but not doing anything else. What would you want from people who maybe don't have those positions of authority who, who are not able to make change at that group level or at that festival organisers level? What kind of things would you want from those people who are also active allies looking to include marginalised people from marginalised groups?

21:44 Sif

I'll let the other two talk. [Laughs.] I'll go last.

21:52 Richard

If you can't help, you can always spread the word. Telling other people about the issue, are showing yours... I'm missing vocabulary here. Showing your allyship. Support... Showing your support on social media or if you are not the person in charge or responsible to solve the imminent problem, you can you can support the person in need and go together with them to the person in charge who can solve the problem.

22:34 Suzanne

Mm.

22:36 Robert

Yeah, I think that's exactly right. Show support however you can and try to make the change. Try to make changes that will be positive for the community. Uh, if you're someone that has no power within organisation, that means talking to people that can make the changes. [Suzanne: Mm] In the larger public that means supporting lawmakers that... and going be vocal about the lawmakers that are going against it, because we definitely have that issue here rising up again in the US, but...

23:13 Sif

Yeah, absolutely. That would be my stance in every single way is: do whatever you can. Um, also, also listening. It's about showing their support without shouting over their voices. Obviously if you're noticing that there is like a deficiency, if you like, in terms of addressing an accessibility or inclusivity kind of goal, then absolutely speak up.

I know that I've overlooked things. Again, image descriptors absolutely need to get on that. That's something I've overlooked. Um, and so, yeah, any good leadership person, position, team should be willing to listen to improve and you know and I think the... Yeah. As as I said any good one will



do that and you know exactly where you are. If you if you if you see resistance to any sort of improvement on those lines, it can be quite eye opening in terms of the space you're in. But yeah, what the other two said. Absolutely.

24:11 Robert

Yeah, I think the other thing is use whatever privilege you have to help. I know as a cis white male that does not look gay per se, I have a lot of privilege. Uh, I wish I didn't, but I know I do. And so my voice. Well, it shouldn't count for more, but probably does. So use that privilege to try to get this change.

24:39 Suzanne

Mm. Yeah. And and being aware of maybe that we hold privilege in certain areas, but we might not hold privilege in others. [Sif: Yes. Robert: Yep.]

And thinking about, you know, intersectionality, we all belong to multiple different groups in a way. You were saying there that, you know, as a white male who doesn't look gay, you, you have privilege, but you recognise that it shouldn't be so. But you also recognise that the societies that we each experience have ways of offsetting power in different directions. So we could be privileged in one area and marginalised in another.

So thinking about intersectionality, how would you want to see allies support people with multiple... belonging to multiple marginalised groups? Because we recognise that when you belong to one marginalised group, you're at a disadvantage. You belong to 2 or 3 at once, and it compounds. Things like microaggressions can come at you from several different directions. So what might you want to see from an ally supporting somebody maybe who recognises they belong to multiple marginalised groups?

26:05 Sif

It seems a bit reductive, but just, just being there supporting is great that, that just putting in some effort to learn and to listen and to stand side by side with marginalised communities, um, is good. Obviously there's the like a scale of of going above and beyond and all of that. But honestly, just in these in these times just standing side by side is, is a statement in and of itself.

And I think that's kind of like the minimum I would would say for allies these days is don't, don't be kind of like quietly kind of going, oh, yes, kind of, I kind of agree with them there. It's about like just showing up and saying, yes, this is, this is right. These people deserve to exist. That's, that's how I would say would be what we need to show in in the modern day in the modern times is, you know, potentially awful. As someone who's perpetually online sees the kind of very much the awful side of everything. Yeah, there's there's a lot of hate and awfulness in the world. So if you can put some good in there, do it. [Frigga: Yeah.]

27:18 Richard

I've nothing, nothing to add to the topic. Everything has been said. [Laughs]

27:25 Suzanne

Okay. So thinking about, you know, allies being on this continuous learning journey and, you know, having that awareness increasing, um, what resources or books or websites or what ways would you suggest somebody starting a journey in allyship? They say, well, yeah, of course I support, you know, visually impaired people or of course I support LGBT people, but don't know where to start



my learning. What sites or resources would you recommend? Just sort of 1 or 2 each about where people can begin that, that journey of understanding and starting to understand and get into that nuance that we've talked about, that those differences that we have?

28:17 Sif

Know that I always recommend [Mermaids](#). It's, it's a website. It's a charity for transgender, non-binary and gender, gender diverse people. And I think I'm pretty sure they've still got loads of resources on their website, so I always push them to [Mermaids.org.uk](#). I think it's a UK only charity, but those... that's a pretty decent one. Obviously the [Equality Project](#) and it's probably the top two ones because my area of being the LGBT manager for the Pagan Federation means that I spend a lot of time in those spaces and making sure I personally stay up to date and educated. So those would be two resources that I would suggest.

29:03 Suzanne

Thank you.

29:05 Robert

Yeah, that's kind of a difficult question because there's so much diversity within the communities. It's really no one starting point. I know there's a few organisations here in the US that are really large that support LGBTQA+ people. The [Human Rights Campaign \(HRC\)](#) is one. [The Trevor Project](#) is another, but just more focused on the suicidal end of things. [Suzanne: Uh] They all have great resources associated with them. Unfortunately, speaking of The Trevor Project, being marginalised and especially being a marginalised group within a marginalised group, like, you know, like most trans people tend to be, uh, suicide and self-harm and all that is very high. What happens? So, seeing resources like that. Trying to prevent that is huge.

30:12 Suzanne

Thank you.

30:13 Richard

When you are approaching the topic blindness or visually impairment, I would suggest not to approach the topic visually impairment and blindness directly. Uhm, sounds cryptical, but what I mean, blindness is not my, my main property. Blindness is not what defines me. A visual impairment does not define the whole person. The person consists of so many other things interests, abilities, dislikes, disabilities, ideas. And I would suggest socialise with the person. Follow hashtags on your preferred social media. There are certain hashtags to follow, and when you find people sounding, looking interesting to you regarding the topics they write about, talk about. Try to approach it from this side and then you will find out how these people interact with things, how these people deal with things, how they percept things.

For example, blind people on social media are not always writing or talking about blindness topics that they write and talk about almost everything they encounter in their daily lives. But from time to time you may find, for example, that they say 'I'm using this website and it's not accessible because my screen reader is doing this or that'. And then you can join the conversation and ask questions. Then you can do your research. What's a screen reader? How does it work? Why doesn't it work on the particular topic I'm reading about currently? And I think that that's much better than to focus mainly on the disability. I hope, I hope I could make this point clear.



32:37 Suzanne

Yes, very much so. Yes. Yeah.

32:41 Frigga

And on another group in the Netherlands, there is a website which is called [Wit Huiswerk](#), 'White Homework'. And that's a group of black people, people of colour, who collects interviews and articles and has a list of books. And I what... if I wanted to to learn a bit more on that group? I go there and see what new new books are there and what new articles are there. And I learned a lot from, from it.

33:17 Suzanne

I think for me, looking at being... Yes, I belong to some marginalised groups, but I'm also looking to be an active ally to others and that becomes my responsibility to grow my own knowledge and awareness in those topics. And yes, following people on social media and listening to them and learning from them about what, what things they find frustrating and helping boost their voices in getting those frustrations cleared.

33:50 Richard

Yes, I totally agree with that.

33:52 Frigga

Yeah.

33:53 Robert

Yeah.

33:54 Suzanne

So we're kind of running close to, to the end of our time with you all today. So I would like to just sort of pose a question of: If you could change one thing connected with the experience of marginalised groups, especially in, in modern heathenry, and you could change one thing for the future. What one thing would you change?

34:21 Richard

Oh.

34:27 All laugh

34:28 Suzanne

I know. It's narrowing it down to one. I know.

34:37 Frigga

That people are more open minded.



34:43 Richard

That's what I, that's what I would have... What I'd like to say. [Frigga: Yeah.] Be open minded. Talk to each other.

34:53 Sif

My brain is kind of doing that thing where it's like, say, if a genie only gives you one wish, and I'm trying to word it in such a way in my head of what, what's the cheat answer? [All laugh.]

35:07 Suzanne

How many things can I get into one wish. [All laugh.]

35:12 Sif

Oh. Oh. Oh, yeah.

35:16 Robert

I think I'm going to say believe what people tell you.

35:21 Suzanne

Mm. Yeah. If somebody is telling you their experiences.

35:26 Richard

Not only talk to each other, listen to each other. Understand each other better.

35:34 Suzanne

Mm.

35:35 Sif

Hmm. Oh, okay. Okay. I'll figure this out. Um. I would say. I'll go back to what I said earlier of it not being an afterthought. It to be, it'd be so refreshing if people just at the very foundational aspects of setting up their groups or events, they thought: 'How do I be more inclusive? How do how do I be more accessible?' That would be my wish.

36:05 Suzanne

That we include everybody from the start. [Sif: Yeah.] Yeah. And many of our experiences from listening to you are based on maybe a group or an event saying, Oh yes, we're inclusive, but maybe not putting anything else. And sometimes what it takes is an explicit statement to say: 'Yes, we are aware that these things are... Maybe this particular aspect is a difficulty for someone or a frustration for someone, or may mean that somebody can't come if we don't maybe look at ways to adapt that.' So yes, to have it built in at ground level as one of the first things maybe organisers or groups think of is. Do we do this as routine? You know, we need to do this as routine.

36:55 Richard

Hmm, exactly.



36:57 Frigga

Yeah.

36:58 Sif

Yeah.

37:01 Suzanne

Yeah. So, folks, are there any final thoughts maybe before we look at saying our goodbyes for this episode?

37:09 Sif

I just want to say thank you for inviting me and also doing this episode topic.

37:13 Richard

Same here.

37:17 Robert

Yeah, same.

37:20 Suzanne

Thank you all very much for joining us today. The discussions today I've found really illuminating and there are some things that I want to go away and start, you know, putting into my practice and start raising my awareness around certain things, around what other people's experiences might be like, where I can experience something.

One way somebody else may find that experience is not possible and how I can use my platform and my privilege to boost their voice and help them be included in, in what happens with all of us. We're all having very different experiences in very different countries in most cases, and very different understandings of where our communities are. But hopefully we are all heading towards the same understanding of we want to be more inclusive, we want more people to become active allies. And hopefully the things that we've discussed in this episode will help people start to be able to take those first steps into allyship with a particular marginalised group and then maybe towards supporting other marginalised groups to actively as well.

So I would like to thank you all for joining myself and Frigga on this episode, our last episode of Season Two. We will be back for Season Three, do not worry. But in the meantime you can find us on our social media platforms and [at our website](#) on The Wyrd Thing. So from myself. Sif, thank you very much for joining us. And Robert and Richard, it's been wonderful to talk to you for this episode and this topic. Folks, we will hopefully you will come and join us for our next episode. And until then, bye bye for now.

[end tune]

Suzanne: Okay. Okay. I think that's it. [Voices overlapping with laughter.]

Sif: Yeah.

Frigga: Yes.

Suzanne: Woo! We did it.

Frigga: Yeah.



Robert: Yeah.