



A Mile In Our Shoes:

An exploration of identity, resilience and expression

‘A Mile In Our Shoes: An Exploration of Identity, Resilience and Expression’

For International Women’s Day 2024 the Scottish LGBTI Police Association, Scottish Women’s Development Forum and National LGBTQ+ Police Network have joined forces to create ‘A Mile In My Shoes: An Exploration of Identity, Resilience and Expression’.

This project has been designed to ensure LGBTQ+ women and non-binary people are represented in our annual celebration of women.

We hope this collection of photographs and accompanying content showcases the diversity within UK policing. As police services, we are striving to better reflect the communities we serve. It is our hope that this project might fall into the hands of a prospective applicant; if that’s you, our wish is that you might recognise yourself in these pages and realise that you too can belong in policing.

Through these pages we seek to debunk stereotypes – relating to both gender and sexuality. We will explore identity, resilience and expression through an intersectional lens and present elements of cherished queer culture to raise awareness and understanding of our amazing community.

The admonition to walk a mile in someone else’s shoes means before judging someone, you must understand their experiences and challenges. The full idiom is: Before you judge someone, walk a mile in their shoes. In effect, it is a reminder to practice empathy.



We invite you to walk a mile in our shoes. In the coming pages, we will discuss how our chosen footwear reflects our identities and explore how we have embraced our identities as LGBTQ+ women, non-binary people and allies.

Officers and staff from all over the UK were asked to take a picture of a pair of shoes they own. The only stipulation was they had to reflect their identity in some way.

We then asked them to consider:

- How do these shoes represent your identity?
- How have you embraced your identity?
- If someone was to walk a mile in your shoes, what might they learn?





“To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to change you is the greatest accomplishment”.
(Emerson)

This photo represents one of my favourite sayings:- "give the ones you love roots to grow and wings to fly". My daughter's Docs picture courage, resilience, non-conformity, personal discovery and those fragile, formative years when unconditional love, acceptance and the freedom to explore and express your own beliefs and choices are so important. My snowboard boots picture the fact that life begins at the edge of your comfort zone and that our identities never stop evolving if we're brave enough to embrace all the amazing adventures life has to offer.

Anna (she/her)
Police Scotland



I have always loved skating and spent much of my childhood on wheels. I recognise now that my attraction to skate counterculture makes complete sense given that I grew up feeling a bit on the fringes due to being queer. Skaters are made of tough stuff – when they fall, they get back up and try again. This was a good lesson for me to learn as a young person.

If I'm wearing my Vans nowadays, I'm likely in the local skatepark with my wife and young sons. We love the accepting vibes of the skatepark and the universally recognised etiquette of picking up folk who fall. It's heart-warming to witness older kids, strangers, offer a hand to my 4-year-olds when they inevitably crash. My Vans represent my love of alternative scenes. Wearing them is a celebration and an act of quiet rebellion in equal measures; no one should ever be excluded from a sport because of their gender or any other reason.

If you were to walk a mile in my Vans you'd learn I've wrestled with internalised homophobia and it took me many years to feel comfortable presenting in a way that feels authentic.

Now, I embrace my identity by spending time with my queer friends. At work, I bring people together through staff networks and advocate for those who don't have a voice. I wear what I want, style my hair how I want and worry much less about what other people think of me.

Ash (she/they)
Police Scotland



**Walk a mile in my shoes
and you will realise that
anyone can overcome
adversity and find the
path they are truly meant
to be on.**



Growing up I struggled to fit in with any social norms. I never knew how to express myself and didn't know who I was or where I belonged. I was bullied for this throughout my school years. I became a single mum early in life at just 18. I decided to go back into education and managed to gain a BA Hons and a post graduate certificate in education.

It took years before I realised I am pansexual (having known deep down I was not your typical heterosexual female from an early age). This became only part of my journey in understanding who I am and where I belong.

I experienced a variety of career paths before ending up in the police. I now strive to use my position to support the LGBT+ Network and am passionate in my role as a domestic abuse champion. I continue to stand for parity, diversity and equality not just in the workplace but in my day to day life.

I recently received a late diagnosis of Autism. I will continue to offer a voice for those misunderstood. I delight in my differences and channel my freedom to express who I am, however different that may look! These Converse were a present to myself on receiving my first pay in the police 5 years ago.

**Helen (she/her)
Cheshire**

When I was invited to partake in this piece of work, I was so excited, and a little glum that it wasn't my idea if I'm honest.

For me, footwear is up there with my hairstyle, it is a critical part of my identity. Whether that be at work, in sport, going to Pride or out with my partner, it's the one thing I choose most carefully. It matters.

It instils strength in me, gives me confidence and sends out a sign to some, to all, that I am Me. That whilst you cannot assume my gender identity nor my love, you see something which might resonate, which gives you an in and, wow, does it start conversations.

As a coach of a girls' football team, my rainbow laces have led to players coming out to me, to them sharing stories of their family members it shows that visibility really matters. They know I'm safe and I will not judge. As a police officer especially in a non-uniform role, my shoes matter as much as my suit. They give me self-confidence when the daily imposter syndrome creeps up to say Hi. Have DM brogues will conquer I say.

Whether it's my work Dr Martens, my rainbow Dr Martens (complete with rainbow flugelbinders, an aglet to some), my football boots with rainbow laces in, my vegetarian boots or my various converse attire - this is a critical part of me, who I am and my confidence in my identity.

As a non-binary lesbian who has served my force for almost 30 years, I always wear my shoes with Pride. They give me a spring in my step, a poise, a way of being me from toe to top.

Now, flugelbinder - who knows where this word comes from?

TOH (she/they)
Merseryside





**They are surrounded
by love as am I.**

To be allowed to be open and proud and wear my colours with pride is important for me to show my children what it means to be part of the LGBTQ+ community. By wearing these shoes it shows that it's ok to be who we are and open and honest about my identity and to ensure it's an open talking point as a family.

If you were to walk a mile in my rainbow Converse you would see the struggles that I have gone through to accept my identity and my place in the world. To embrace the life I lead and be free to create a family as a gay woman and the trials and tribulations that came with that process.

I embrace my identity by being open and trying to continue to drive change within the policing world through the LGBT Network. Being with my friends from the community who embrace, not just me, but a very energetic 6 and 4 year old who are learning everyday about who they are and where they sit in the world.

**Vik (she/her)
Staffordshire**

**Hope will
never be silent.**

These boots have walked many, many miles over my police career but they were given some sparkle and colour with these rainbow laces when I had the absolute privilege to be Bronze Commander at the Glasgow Mardi-Gra/Pride parades in 2022 and 2023.



Whilst being responsible for the on ground policing success of these parades eliminating any risks, threats or harms to attendees and the people in Glasgow, I was also immensely proud to be an Ally of our fabulous LGBTI Association. It was an honour to watch my LGBTQ+ colleagues and friends take part in these parades. The smiles from each of their faces on these days with the addition of the numerous flags being flown quite simply lit up Glasgow.

I do my best as an Ally to spread the awareness that every one of us deserves to enjoy our lives free from harm, assumptions and hatred. Allowing our LGBTQ+ officers to be part of these fabulous parades and to be their true selves highlights Police Scotland's mature, compassionate and modern approach to inclusion.

As an ally, I am proud to be the additional voice for our LGBTQ+ family, friends and colleagues to amplify the message that they are not alone and certainly not invisible and we should all be treated as equal, no matter who we are or who we love. I will continue to walk side by side all of my LGBTQ+ friends and colleagues with great pride encouraging everyone to feel free to live life to the fullest.

**Elaine (she/her)
Police Scotland**

These are my muck boots, they keep my feet dry and warm whilst out walking my dog Ollie in the unpredictable Scottish weather – one of my favourite things to do! They are practical and comfortable which in some ways reflects a part of me.

When I was younger I struggled to fit in, there was very much a separation between genders, pink for the girls and blue for the boys. I loved playing football, skateboarding and running around with a Sheriff badge, gun holster and a cowboy hat (no one really knows why!). The boys didn't accept girls playing with them and the girls were somewhat bemused as to why I found playing with dolls or 'Dream Phone' tedious.

So my experiences with acceptance started from a young age and continued when I realised I was gay. I'm going to be 40 this year, this comes with some trepidation but on reflection also liberation in that I have been resilient over the years and grew to be comfortable with who I am.

If you walked a mile in my boots they would take you on a journey of self-realisation and acceptance. I actively support and encourage people to be their authentic selves, yes there may be difficult times when faced with prejudice and discrimination but you are not alone. I am a proud member of the LGBTQ+ community and feel, especially now, I am also supported and valued as part of the Police community.

My boots aren't particularly feminine, they aren't particularly fashionable (according to my wife!) but they serve a purpose and perhaps my adult woman version of a little girls "cowboy outfit".

Vicky (she/her)
Police Scotland





**This is
me.**

This is me. Sometimes I can wear my rainbow on the outside and be fully present in any moment, 100% true to me and all those around me. Sometimes I am black-and-white and my rainbow that represents the true me must be hidden from view. But I'm still there, I'm still the same person, my values, my identity, my beliefs are all there, just hidden from view.

I am not ashamed of who I am, I will not be made to feel like I am. So look beyond what you can see, because this is me.

**Jacqui (she/her)
College of Policing**



I have never classed myself as sporty but I literally changed everything about myself in 2018. I found a new lease of life which included turning my back on a 23 year career in banking and following my dream by joining the police force. I truly believe that I found me and a sense of freedom I hadn't really felt before.

I now see myself as a runner with an interest in strength training. Runners are fiercely independent, goal focussed and continually testing themselves with either a new distance or a faster time. Those of us that strength train looking for progression and development and refuse to be beaten by the extra little bit of weight. There is always a new target to achieve.

Strangely enough the above also applies to everything I do.

If you were to walk a mile in my shoes, you would learn that you are never too old to go after what you really want, and that a little humility and understanding goes a long way in getting people to open up to you and have faith in your abilities to help. As a passionate Ally, it is important to advocate, listen and support all.

Ree (she/her)
Northumbria Police



Sporty, Resilient, Loved

I think these three words manage to describe my football boots and reflect my identity.

Sporty - playing Aussie Rules, Shinty, football and Gaelic Football have been a huge part of my becoming into the person I am today. Above sport being a fun outlet for all my overflowing energy. It allowed me to find a place/people where I felt a true sense of belonging which had often felt a bit of a struggle elsewhere in my life.

Resilient these shoes have been: in all weather, in all terrains, in wins and losses. Never failing to get me through. I think this is a reflection of my identity too. Determined in life and all that I do.

And loved. I am very lucky to have really great people in my life who truly love me for me. It has shaped my identity by giving me the support and space to be unapologetically myself but also to be kind, caring and gentle with others too.

Evie (she/her) Police Scotland





What can I possibly do make a 'slipper-like life' accessible to all?

**Susie (she/her)
Police Scotland**



These are my slippers. As an active ally my slippers represent a parallel for me.

If I am wearing my slippers it means that I am home. I have shed the burdens of the outside world; I've closed the door on the external chaos, and I'm tucked away from the storms and uncertainties of life. I am in my sanctuary. No matter the mess indoors, I am in my peaceful place.

I am my truest self, free from the judgement of others, with the people that I love most and who love me. Even at my most vulnerable, I am at my most content at home and in my slippers.

My slippers mean warmth, cosiness, and comfort. They mean safety, security and belonging. When I'm in my slippers, it is time to relax and re-energise. Slippers are respite from the miles walked in trainers or walking boots, the hours danced in wedges or stiletto heels and the days worked in, slightly uncomfortable uninteresting, shoes or boots. I am in MY time.

Slippers are the 'shoe parallel' to my life. My life is one big pair of cosy warm slippers. But as an ally, I want everyone to enjoy a life like a warm and cosy pair of comfortable slippers because we all deserve slippers!

Slippers are my reminder of the miles that I've not had to walk in another's shoes, a humbling reminder of the unearned privileges that I get to enjoy. They represent the paths I've never had to tread, struggles I've never had to face, and realities I've never had to encounter.

The comfort my 'slippers' provides me, allows me to consider those whose lives aren't like slippers. What can I possibly do make a 'slipper-like life' accessible to all?

So, my slippers tell me that I should listen intently, learn earnestly, and amplify the voices of those whose 'domestic footwear' differs from my own. It is through this mindful awareness that I come to realise that I must act compassionately, inclusively, and equitably to help transcend the boundaries of difference and build bridges of 'slipper solidarity'.

My slippers easily carry the full weight of all of my identities with ease and comfort, and if yours do for you, then I urge you to be an ally to those where that is not the case.

Susie (she/her)
Police Scotland



I always like to go for something different.

I love these boots! My friends often laugh at me as they say I go to the crazy shoe shop! The truth is apart from my work shoes, I hate wearing what I see as dull, boring shoes. I always like to go for something different. Maybe that's because in policing we have to conform to the same uniform and having worn that for nearly 30 years, in my private life I like to be a bit different, hence the yellow boots.

I was on a train once and a group of young lads saw my boots and said what I thought was 'Cool Dreads'. I was so pleased I retold the story to my young nieces, thinking I was suddenly cool. When they feel about laughing and told me they hadn't said 'Cool Dreads' they had said 'Cool Treads' I realised that not only was I perhaps a little deaf, I also most definitely wasn't different or cool! You can rely on young people to bring you right back to earth!

**Vanessa (she/her)
Northumbria Police**

I choose to take a photo of my slippers - so not really shoes but bear with me.

My slippers, for me, are a sign of comfort and only in very recent years have I decided to truly embrace being fully comfortable in my own skin. As a 17 year old teen, I told my mum I had a girlfriend. This did not go down well. Over time and with understanding this improved, but I still had to hide my relationships from family members for years after this.

Fully embracing my identity to everyone not long before joining the police, I thought 'now is the time'. However when I then entered into a relationship with a man after a few years' service this confused colleagues further. Being attracted to all genders for me makes sense - it is the person that I fall in love with, and that person is now my husband. This does not take away from my LGBTQ+ identity and this is what you need to know to walk a mile in my shoes.

I am not a straight woman with a husband and child, I have had struggles and challenges with family members, work colleagues and friends who didn't understand me; so my hope is if you walk a mile in my shoes - or slippers - you will see that I see the beauty and love in all people and I encourage you to do the same.

Bex (she/her)
Police Scotland

**I decided to truly
embrace being
fully comfortable
in my own skin.**



A Mile In Ma Shuin

Bauchelt an hattert
uised tae the grind
o traipsin uphill
heavy laid, heavy mind
Bent set an focussed
oan makkin impruivement
settin examples
bein adjuvant
But nocht e'er comes easy
there's niver a break
It's like pushin watter
uphill wi a rake
Ance wan flake is lowpt
there's aye twinty mair
wi each soddin wan
mare wide than afore
Yet thay juist keep muivin
nae pretence an nae guise
fur in thair ain pouer
thay ainly kin rise
Sae thay'll aye keep oan gaein
an end up juist fine
wi ma twa feet in tham
Thae treners o mine

K

Polis Scotland



A Mile In My Shoes

Beaten and tattered
used to the grind
of staggering uphill
heavy load, heavy mind
Determined and focussed
on making impruivement
setting examples
being adjuvant
But nothing ever comes easy
there's never a break
It's like pushing water
uphill with a rake
Once one hurdle is jumped
there's always twenty more
with each sodding one
more wide than before
Yet they just keep moving
no pretence and no disguise
for in their own power
they only can rise
So they'll always keep on going
and end up just fine
with may two feet in them
These trainers of mine



**“For the first time in my life I am free to live as I please; and I please to live here. I ride like a Borderer, walk like a pedlar, climb like a mountaineer, sometimes on excursions with kind and merry neighbours, sometimes all alone for the day in the mountains.”
(Harriet Martineau, Lake District, 1845)**

**Jenni (she/her)
Police Scotland**



Walking in the hills of Scotland has always been an important part of who I am. As a child I would accompany my Dad on many a day walk, evolving into some long-distance walking as I got older. I've walked the West Highland Way, Southern Upland way, climbed Munros, Corbetts, Grahams and Donalds. I remember rain, wind, a heavy pack and black tea out of tartan thermos.

My photo was taken beside the 'Three Brethren' on the Southern Upland Way near Selkirk in the Borders. It's one of my favourite walks, and I've walked the 214 miles coast to coast twice, with day sections many times over. For me, my walking boots represent the journey taken, the resilience and strength required to overcome obstacles related to identity, societal expectations or discrimination, and the diverse paths we all take in the queer community. But my journey has also been one of self-discovery and acceptance. There's no better place to face acceptance than when you're up a few thousand feet with the elements baring down on you with no place to hide. You really get to the root of who you are, and you learn to be proud of yourself, and love yourself. So you can go out in the world with pride, and feel like you truly belong.

If someone had to walk a mile in my shoes, they would be getting into well worn, weathered and experienced boots. They've had a few knocks in their time, but they keep progressing one step after another to defy all expectations, they continue to break the mould and discover new possibilities.

Jenni (she/her)
Police Scotland



This is a picture of my football boots, something I have been involved in since I was 7 years old both playing and coaching. As time went on I made friends with people of like mind who were open and welcoming and I felt comfortable to be myself. It was the one place for a very long time I felt I wasn't judged.

Within Police Scotland I have found similar friendships and feel comfortable and confident to be myself within my team.

I struggled to choose between my football boots and police boots as both pairs of shoes have given me confidence to be the person I am. Maybe I have been lucky with the people I have around me but it's the one place I can look back on with the fondest of memories.

Emma (she/her)
Police Scotland



**I felt comfortable
to be myself.**



There was never much to do growing up in Coatbridge as a young teenager but you could guarantee that most of your pals would be at the Friday night ice skating disco at the Time Capsule. No matter who you were, or where you came from - everyone went for the mediocre hot dogs and GBX tunes. It was a sense of community that every young teenager could experience.

For me, my love of ice skating went beyond Friday nights. I went every weekend either with my brother or my friends. But one thing that

stayed constant was that no matter how many people skated around you - you could be your own independent person and no one judged you for how terrible you were. Some people liked to hold onto the barriers as they weren't quite comfortable with the ice yet or they would be like myself, zooming around the rink but realising at the last second that I didn't quite know how to stop myself in time before crashing out.

Ice skating for me reflects that sense of independent flare. I've always marched to the beat of my own drum and didn't really understand growing up why I wanted hockey skates instead of figure skates like all of the other girls - or why I'd race the boys around the rink instead of trying fancy spins.

If you took a skate in my boots you'd learn that there was a lot of confusion as a teenager around the idea that I didn't really fit in with the other girls. Dating never really interested me and I spent a lot of time trying to figure out why. As an older teenager, coming out as a lesbian really helped solidify my sense of identity and made the world around me make sense. The people I have met along the way have made me realise that it's okay to be different and now I aspire to be that support for others that may not have had the same positive experience as me.

Just like the rink - I want to support people so that when they're ready to skate away from the barrier I can be there to help them on their journey forward.

**Denise, (she/her)
Police Scotland**

I have always been obsessed with football for as long as I can remember. Whether it's playing, watching, coaching or just merely talking about it.

I started as a 5 year old girl playing locally with the boys. When I turned 12, a Scottish FA ruling meant I could not continue to play in an organised league setting within a boys'

team, leaving me confused and devastated. I was determined and vowed that nothing would hold me back from my football. I quickly found a girls team and continued on my football journey. This set back was a valuable lesson which developed a strong resilience within me and the drive to ensure equality for all.



Coming from a small village, there was no role model or anyone who I could confide in or talk to about my sexuality. On joining a ladies team at 17, I had my first interaction with the LGBTQ+ community and quickly found myself at home. I was able to be my true self without question and thrive in an environment which was accepting without judgement.

I embrace my identity by always being unapologetically myself, ensuring the quiff is on point, keeping got2b glued hairspray in business (other brands are available). In relation to negative opinions, I now come from a place of education rather than anger.

If I hadn't played football, I am not sure if I would have had such a positive experience. On reflection, I find myself very fortunate that my love for football led me to the other love of my life, my wife Ally, whom I met through the ladies police football team.

If you were to walk a mile in my puma kings you might score a few goals along the way! You would learn that it was often tough to be my true self in my teens and I often felt uncomfortable trying to fit in but football really helped me achieve this and for that I am very thankful.

Natalie (she/her)
Police Scotland

When I was first asked to participate in this, I panicked (don't tell Ash!!!). Most of my shoes scream BARBIE rather than ALLY and although we can all learn a lesson in empathy from the movie, was Barbie really the message I wanted to send / base my message on? Sort of.

The Barbie movie is an ode to being yourself and the power in being who you are. The real world we're living in has naivety, discrimination, privilege, influence, expectations, and definitions. There are a lot of different ways to be a person and it's hard when we're all trying to be what others and society expect of us, especially if we don't fit in the box they think we should fit in.

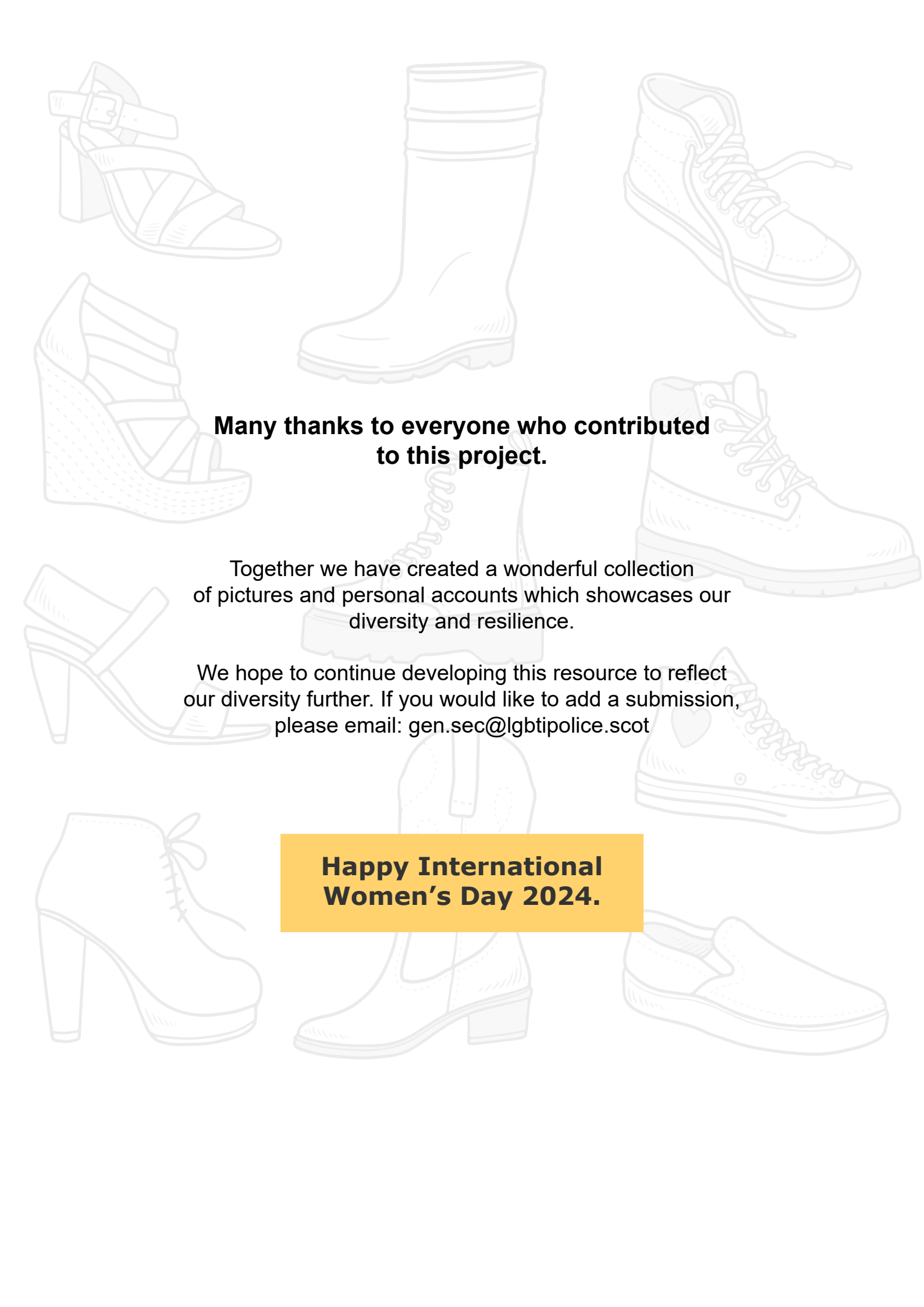
I've taken this as an opportunity to reflect - why is being an active ally so important to me? Reading about the lived experience of others internally from LGBTQ+ history month recently has really opened my mind. Being part of a minority and experiencing inequality that others may sometimes struggle to see can make it really difficult for people to address prejudice against them. As an ally, I'm passionate about building relationships based on trust, consistency, and accountability to support and empower others. Giving a voice and platform to those who don't always feel they have one is the most important part for me.

Allies both for and within the LGBTQ+ community are more important now than ever and I would encourage everyone to get involved. We all have a role to play in helping and advocating for others and ensuring everyone feels able to be their true selves. Allyship empowers us to challenge ourselves and others to promote meaningful change and to help create an environment where everyone can thrive. Everyone deserves to feel able to be themselves at work - confident in being who they are and aiming high.

And so....in a world full of Barbies and Kens, be an Ally. Support each other regardless of differences – perceived or otherwise!

Ashley (she/her)
Scottish Police Authority





**Many thanks to everyone who contributed
to this project.**

Together we have created a wonderful collection
of pictures and personal accounts which showcases our
diversity and resilience.

We hope to continue developing this resource to reflect
our diversity further. If you would like to add a submission,
please email: gen.sec@lgbtipolice.scot

**Happy International
Women's Day 2024.**