



# TIME FOR CHANGE



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Lesbian, gay, bisexual & trans people in the South West

# Transgender related issues and trans-phobia

*It is a common error that the 'T' in 'LGBT' means that trans people are lesbian or gay: trans people can be heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual. The term 'LGBT' refers to a wide range of diverse communities who encounter prejudice from those who assume that those born as female or male must only act in certain ways as regards[hetero]sexual orientation/love and gender behaviour. This document explains more about the diversity of the 'trans' communities and the issues they face*

This resource is dedicated to providing information about 'trans' people, the issues they face, including discrimination on many fronts in seeking to live their lives in the context of broader society where trans-phobia is not uncommon, and inability to relate to and appreciate the special needs of trans people on multiple fronts extremely widespread.

If one key point should be emphasised in both combating trans-phobia and appreciating the core issues involved in trans identity, it is the following:

For the trans population – unlike lesbian/gay/bisexual people who encounter homophobic bullying and discrimination from the ignorant – the fundamental issue involved in the discriminatory issues they face relates not to their sexual orientation (which can range from heterosexual to lesbian/gay/bisexual), but to their gender identity and its expression. The latter is the first and foremost matter for the person who has little experience of trans people and trans issues, to comprehend.

It is a common misconception that the 'T' in 'LGBT' signifies that trans people are lesbian or gay: trans people can be heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual. This is very wrong, since the history of the term 'LGBT' ultimately refers to uniting diverse communities that encounter prejudice from those who assume that those born as females or males, must and can only act in certain ways as regards [hetero]sexual orientation/love and stereotypical gender behaviour.

The remaining section of this resource comprises: **a)** a valuable profile provided by the Department of Health and NHS concerning attitudes towards trans people, definition of those who identify themselves as trans, and a valuable overview of the health needs of trans individuals, and; **b)** details of an exceptional UK school that fully appreciated its ability to help a trans child start their journey into adolescence safely with mature and ethically responsible support.

Support organisations and useful links are included in a final section of this resource after the above.

# Social attitudes towards trans people

Although social attitudes have become more accepting towards trans people, there is a persistent assumption that there are only two genders (female and male) and that one's gender is assigned from birth and cannot be changed.<sup>1</sup>

Trans people still face prejudice. This continues to limit their employment opportunities (despite legislation prohibiting discrimination); their personal relationships; their access to goods, services and housing; their health status; their safety in both public and private spheres; and their access to health and social care.

Trans activists have lobbied for a shift in social and health perspectives from gender pathology (a disease or abnormality) to gender nonconformity (trans people do not conform to society's narrow view about gender).

## Who are trans people?

'Trans' is used to capture experiences of being gender variant in behaviour and preference, as well as social and legal gender change or transformation.<sup>2</sup> Trans is primarily a UK term, developed in a political context to refer to a diverse and inclusive community of people ranging from part-time cross-dressers to transsexual people who undergo gender reassignment surgeries. Trans is used in the context of personal rights: that is, to support the claim that all trans people are entitled to have their human rights upheld.

'Transgender' is an alternative umbrella term used in many parts of Europe and North America. In the UK, transgender is used as a policy term to describe those people who live part or all of their lives in their preferred gender role – they may use hormonal treatments to change their body form, but they will generally not seek to undergo gender reassignment surgeries.<sup>3</sup> Transgender is also used to refer to cross-dressers and transvestites (drag queens and drag kings).

## What are trans people's health needs?

Like lesbian, gay and bisexual people, trans people often meet with discrimination and prejudice in their everyday lives. Many, regardless of social position or class, experience isolation and face limited understanding of their lives. These experiences place many trans people at risk of alcohol abuse, depression, suicide, self-harm, violence, substance abuse and HIV.<sup>5,6,7</sup>

**Victims of violence:** Because many (MTF) trans women are visibly trans for several years after starting living in their new gender role, (transphobic) violence is more often directed at them than (FTM) trans men.

**Self-harm and suicide rates:** The UK's largest survey of trans people (N = 872) found that 34% (more than one in three) of adult trans people have attempted suicide.<sup>9</sup> Similar rates were reported in a US study.<sup>7</sup>

**Young people's concerns:** Young trans people report insecure housing, economic hardship, legal problems and difficulty in accessing appropriate healthcare.

**Source:** NHS Briefing 11, Trans People's Health (page 4):

[http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod\\_consum\\_dh/groups/dh\\_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh\\_078349.pdf](http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_078349.pdf)

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A five-year-old boy who rejected his gender is now living as a girl with the support of his family, doctors and school.

Zach Avery was three when he started questioning his gender, and began wearing dresses and ribbons in his hair.

Following a psychological evaluation he was diagnosed with Gender Identity Disorder (GID), and has now been living as a girl for more than a year. The disorder ... prompts Zach to feel like a girl trapped in a boy's body.

According to his mother Theresa Avery, until the age of three Zach was a regular boy who loved Thomas the Tank Engine, but suddenly he became obsessed with Dora the Explorer and started dressing in girls clothes. ...

Eventually NHS doctors officially diagnosed Zach with GID, one of the youngest affected children in the UK.

Ms Avery said: "They told us that although he had a male body, his brain was telling him he was a girl."

Zach's primary school now addresses him as a girl and has changed the toilets to Unisex. Ms Avery said the school has been very supportive and Zach had experienced no bullying from other children.

"We explained to the other kids at the school that Zach's body was that of a boy but in his brain he was a girl. We said Zach was just happier being a girl than a boy," Ms Avery told the Daily Telegraph.

## Useful links

The South West England LGBT Collective organisation details can be found at:

<http://www.lgbtcollective.org.uk/lgbt-groups?catid=18>

and those for trans groups at:

<http://www.lgbtcollective.org.uk/lgbt-groups/trans-groups/>

<http://uk.lifestyle.yahoo.com/five-year-old-boy-opts-to-become-a-girl.html>