

# Trans Youth

## information for transgender youth, their service providers, friends and allies

### Who Are Transgender People?

"Transgender" or "trans" are often used as umbrella terms to describe people who do not fit into society's assigned gender categories. The definitions listed below are not intended to rigidly define people in our communities, but to provide information on some of the ways people describe them-selves. Some people may identify with more than one definition, or with none that we have listed.

**Male to Female (MtoF) and Female to Male (FtoM):** (also written with a "2" or "T", eg. FTM or M2F)

transsexuals/transgender (ts/tg) people were assigned female at birth, but consider themselves male (some or all of the time), and MtoF ts/tg were assigned male but consider themselves female (some or all of the time). Some go through a physical transition which includes hormones and/or surgery, and some do not.

**Transgender and transsexual:** Transsexuals usually transition from male to female or vice versa with the assistance of hormones and/or surgery, and transgender people may or may not transition physically. Some people use the terms interchangeably and others use only one or the other.

**Two-Spirit:** Aboriginal people (First Nations, status or non-status, Inuit or Metis) who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

**Third Gender/Other Gender:** People who feel other than male or female, or a combination of the two.

**Pangender:** having mixed gender identity, not identifying as one static gender.

**Bigender:** People who are both male and female. Often bigender people will spend some time presenting in one gender and some time in the other.

**Intersex:** People born with gonads, hormones or chromosomes identified (usually by medical professionals) as not completely male or completely female. Used to be called "hermaphrodites", some still use this term.

**Drag Queens and Drag Kings:** Tend to be male-raised people dressing and/or performing as female, and vice versa. They may fully identify as the gender they were raised, or the opposite of the gender they were raised, or somewhere in between.

**Cross-Dressers:** At certain times wear clothing associated with the "opposite" sex. People who identify as cross-dressers often identify as the gender they were assigned and raised but this is not always the case. Also called Transvestite, although many prefer the term cross-dresser.

Other people who can be included by the terms trans or transgender are, for instance, men who are perceived as feminine and women who are perceived as masculine. Some people are targeted for "inappropriate" gender presentation or expression, but may not personally identify as trans.

### The Pronoun Thing

If you don't know whether to call someone he or she, just ask. They will probably appreciate that you care enough to

get it right. Some people prefer alternating pronouns, and others prefer avoiding pronouns as much as possible. Some people use gender neutral pronouns such as "ze" (instead of she or he) and "hir" (instead of his or her). Some people's preferred pronoun (and/or gender identity) may change over time, and some people's never changes.

It is important to strike a balance with being comfortable enough to ask the basic questions, such as what pronoun to use, without being invasive. Trans people are often asked very personal questions about the status of their bodies or identity; sometimes being an ally means respecting people's privacy.

### History

"There are societies all over the world that allowed for more than two sexes, as well as respecting the right of individuals to reassign their sex. And transsexuality, transgender, intersexuality, and bigender appear as themes in creation stories, legends, parables, and oral history." (Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors*, p.43. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996). People often want to know what "causes" transgenderism, as if it is a disease/disorder that needs to be cured. In reality trans people have always existed, and society's current rigid ideas about gender do not reflect the respect for gender diversity that has existed at different times and places all over the world. Access to the history of transgender people is important in understanding trans issues. A resource list is included at the end of this leaflet.

### Thinking about Gender

In order to be supportive of transgender youth, we think it's a good idea for service providers to do some work looking at what the dominant culture has taught us all about gender. We challenge those widely-held notions that there are only two sexes and two corresponding genders, and that there is no movement or fluidity between them. The restrictive "rules" around gender affect everyone, and everyone can benefit from working to end the oppression of trans people.

### Gender Identity vs. Sexuality

Often people confuse gender identity with sexual orientation, for instance, thinking that a trans person's sexual orientation is defined by their assigned gender, not their true identity (eg. thinking an MtoF with a male partner is a gay man, or that an FtoM with a male partner is a straight woman). Myths about trans people and gay people have been used to pit our communities against each other.. Lesbian/bisexual women are told that they "just wish they were men" and trans people are told "you're just gay/lesbian". In asserting who we really are, and correcting people about their assumptions, we must be clear that we all deserve respect. (eg. "No, I'm not a lesbian, because I'm not a woman, although if I were a lesbian, I would be proud!" or "No, I don't 'want to be a man', but if I were a transsexual, I would be proud!") Gender identity is about who we are, on our own. Sexual orientation is about who we relate to sexually and/or romantically. Trans people, like everyone else, come from all different sexual orientations, as well as economic classes, ethnicities, and abilities. In the past, some medical professionals working with transsexual people have insisted that transition includes the alignment of "proper" sexual orientation; for example, trans women were supposed to be with men, and trans men were supposed to be with women. It was seen as a success when a transsexual completed a

heterosexual partnership, because this meant that they were fulfilling their proper gender role. Queer trans people have been debunking the myth of the superiority of heterosexuality within our communities and with the medical professionals who work with us.

Some people (trans and non-trans) don't use terms like gay, bisexual or heterosexual to describe themselves because these categories seem to be based on a two-gender system that they don't fit into or believe in; for this or other reasons they may not identify with the as-yet-defined labels, or may use terms such as queer or pansexual. The term "queer" is also used generally to refer to any lgbt people.

### **Risks and Barriers**

Transgender children and youth, whether they know they are trans or not, may be taught to feel fear and shame about who they are. A young trans person who outwardly displays what is seen as gender ambiguity can be targeted with harassment, bashing, discrimination and peer and family rejection. Some trans youth are forced to leave home and/or school. If they are homeless or street-involved, trans youth often have few resources they can access that are trans friendly.

When youth can't or don't access services, they have less opportunity to get off the street, and longer street entrenchment puts youth at greater risk of violence, overdosing, suicide, etc. Trans youth are overrepresented in the sex trade and can be at high risk of contracting HIV, and other STD's. Discrimination in employment can severely limit other options for income.

When trans people try to access services such as safehouses, group homes, alcohol and drug recovery programs and transition houses, there has been discrimination ranging from being required to dress and present as one's assigned gender, to being refused service, to being required to not disclose transgender status (Transgender People and HIV/AIDS: Ki Namaste et al.). Trans youth have at times been faced with other direct harassment from clients or staff.

In order to make services accessible to trans youth, service providers need to address basic issues; for example, gender status on intake forms. Are male and female the only listed options? Are the bathrooms single and used by everyone or are there separate bathrooms for male and female? What support exists for clients who may be harassed in bathrooms? Is programming separate for male and female? Is there support for trans people to participate with the gender with which they identify? And how could the programming adapt to the needs of someone who is neither male nor female?

### **Suggested Reading**

Transgender Warriors, Stone Butch Blues and Trans Liberation by Leslie Feinberg/ Two-Spirit People by Sue-Ellen Jacobs et al/ Information for the Female to Male Cross-Dresser and Transsexual by Louis Sullivan/ Lesbians talk Transgender by Zachary L. Nataf/ Body Alchemy— Transsexual Portraits by Loren Cameron/ Gender Outlaw by Kate Bornstein/ Lessons from the Intersexed by Suzanne Kessler/ Trans Forming Families ed. Mary Boenke/ Living the Spirit: A Gay American Indian Anthology ed. Will Roscoe/ Our Trans Children by J.Xavier et al. (Washington D.C. PFLAG)

## **Vancouver/Lower Mainland Resources**

**FTM etc.** Peer-run support group for those assigned female at birth but who consider themselves male some or all of the time. Meets 3rd Sunday of each month from 1-4pm @ wheelchair accessible location near Commercial Dr.

Contact: 604-253-0480. Email: [lurrrkas@hotmail.com](mailto:lurrrkas@hotmail.com)

**Trans Discussion Group Through the (LGTB) Centre.** 2nd Tuesday of each month @ Reach Community Health Centre. Wheelchair accessible. 4th Tuesday of each month workshops on trans health and self-care. (various locations) Contact: The Centre 604-684-5307

**Trans Support and Discussion Group @ Pride Health Services** Thursday 5-6pm, Three Bridges Health Centre, 1292 Hornby St. Contact: 604-633-4201 leave msg.

**Trans Alliance Society** c/o 1170 Bute St. Van BC V6E 1Z6. Coalition of trans and ally groups. Contact: 604-684-9872 ext. 2044 [www.transalliancesociety.org](http://www.transalliancesociety.org)

Email: [communications@transalliancesociety.org](mailto:communications@transalliancesociety.org)

**Transgender Health Program** Referrals, advocacy and support for anyone with a trans health question or concern (including trans people, loved ones, and service providers). Trans health training for service providers. Call/TTY/TDD 604-734-1514; long distance (no charge): 1-866-999-1514

[www.vch.ca/transhealth](http://www.vch.ca/transhealth) Email: [transhealth@vch.ca](mailto:transhealth@vch.ca)

**LGBT Youth: Youthquest!** For youth 21 and under, drop-ins, support and education @ various locations in B.C. 604-523-9115. Toll free: 1-866-NOT ALONE.

[www.youthquest.bc.ca](http://www.youthquest.bc.ca)

**LGBT Youth: GAB Youth Services** For youth 25 and under. Drop-ins, support, events and education. 1170 Bute St. Van. V6E 1Z6 604-684-4901

[www.lgtbcentrevancouver.com](http://www.lgtbcentrevancouver.com)

### **Websites**

**The American Boyz:** information, contacts etc. for Female-assigned people of varying identifications, for whom "female" is not an accurate or complete self-description. East Coast-based. <http://amboyz.org>

**FTM International:** Regional, national (US) and international contacts, support group listings, bios, links. <http://www.ftmi.org/>

**Intersex Society of North America:** <http://www.isna.org>

**National Transgender Library and Archives:** Provides extensive resource lists. <http://www.gender.org>

**North West Two Spirit Society:**

<http://www.nwtwospiritsociety.org>

This leaflet was compiled by Jake Adrian and Jacob Simpson in 1998 and updated most recently by Jacob Simpson in October 2003. Feel free to make copies and distribute. To print copies online:

[www.transalliancesociety.org/education/publications.html](http://www.transalliancesociety.org/education/publications.html)

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Dedicated to all those brave and wonderful trans youth out there!