

Transition Support Course 2017

Summary notes and reflections



“There was a trust placed in each other and the space which lay the foundations for the support and learning opportunities that the course provides”

~ Jules Stapleton Barnes, Development Worker for the Lothian Trans Support Programme

Delivered annually as part of the [Lothian Transgender Support Programme](#), the Transition Support Course is designed for anyone looking to explore gender transition options and be themselves around other trans and non-binary people in a safe and non-judgemental space.

The 2-day event this year involved 12 participants, 3 staff members and guest facilitator James Morton from the Scottish Transgender Alliance. The course provided a range of informal workshops aimed to help boost confidence, provide information as well as give participants the opportunity to make new connections and explore their next steps.



Participants:

Self-identified as: **non-binary, genderqueer, male, trans masculine, female and trans feminine.**

Travelled from: various parts of **Edinburgh & Lothians**, as well as **Paisley and Inverness.**

Ranged in age: with the youngest in their 20s and oldest in their 60s.

Participants did not need to have begun a process of transition, received a gender dysphoria diagnosis or even attended a Gender Clinic. It was for anybody questioning, or who has questioned their gender identity and were looking for information and support about what they might want to do next. The course is open and welcoming to anyone who self-identifies as having trans* and/or non-binary gender identities.

Each participant had unique experiences to share and consider and each their own relationship with transition. Some were there to consider NHS gender services whilst others were focussing more on emotional support opportunities and how they were feeling about their gender.

Background

The Transition Support Course was delivered as part of a programme of support for transgender people living in or travelling to Edinburgh. [LGBT Health and Wellbeing](#) offers this support through our Lothian Transgender Support Programme (LTSP). This is delivered by LGBT



“I was worried I would leave empty handed, absolutely not! No embarrassment or awkwardness in describing my situation, so now I feel empowered to progress.”

- Course participant, 2017

Health staff members and this year by Jules, Matson and Alison Wren. The course also included guest speaker James Morton, Manager of the Scottish Transgender Alliance, an organisation that LGBT Health maintains a close relationship with.

With the growing success of the Glasgow Transgender Support Programme (GTSP), the 2017 Transition Support Course also benefited from strong links between the two cities and programmes.

Our Trans Support Programmes welcome trans female/feminine, trans male/masculine, genderqueer and non-binary identities as well as intersex people and people who cross-dress. Anyone who lives in, or outwith either Edinburgh or Glasgow can access both programmes (although all events are delivered in Edinburgh and Glasgow).

Day 1 - Morning session - Welcome and Introduction

Introductions began weeks before the course took place. With Jules, course facilitator, engaging with participants by email and phone, providing preparatory information and reassurance ahead of the weekend itself. Committing to a full two-day programme of workshops and discussing sensitive information and experiences can be daunting, particularly with people you don't know. Therefore, making a connection with staff and having a good sense of what to expect, is important.

Once at the course, creating a safe, welcoming and relaxed space was a priority. This is also something that all present were asked to commit to, and in addition to LGBT Health's Safe Space Statement, it felt important as a group to create a unique 'Safe Space Agreement', specific to the needs of those in the room. These notes were visible throughout the course to help remind us of our commitment to each other.

Participants were asked to then share their **hopes** and **fears** about the weekend ahead, and about the prospect of exploring topics relating to transition. Many people were feeling anxious about the same things but also shared similar hopes for what the course would help them achieve. It highlighted feelings of low confidence and worry but also the areas of discussion that individuals

Hopes:

To feel less alone

To feel more confident being respectfully persistent with people, to have them use my correct gender

To feel a sense of belonging in the trans community

Know who to turn to for emotional support

To have a better idea of how my transition will progress

To make friends, find mutual support, even with just one other

To know my rights and have the confidence to defend them

To get advice on coming out at work

To confirm & consolidate my recent transition from non-binary to FTM & to feel accepted

might appreciate most. Staff got to know the participants a little more and became more aware of the areas that they might need more support with.

Identity & Self Confidence

Confidence, or rather a feeling of low confidence was a strong theme emerging from the personal information shared by participants both at registration and at the beginning of the course. We wanted to give people the opportunity to explore what it means to feel and show confidence. So in groups the participants explored this further:

As a result of the course:

91% feel more confident in expressing their views

100% feel less isolated

What does self-confidence look, feel and sound like?

“ **Decisive.** **Someone who makes eye contact**
Open body language **Speaks clearly** **Someone in their**
Someone practiced **Knows what they want** **comfort zone**
& skilled at something **Someone who performs** **Assertive**
Confidence **Someone who holds their head high** ”

Along with these observations, participants were keen to provide suggestions of how confidence could be achieved, or at least performed. The group seemed to agree that they knew what it looked like and even shared tips on how you can build confidence. But it felt important to progress the conversations from speaking generally, to more specifically exploring the unique challenges facing trans people:

When is it hard to be confident, as a trans person?

This required people to consider their personal experiences of feeling low in confidence, and how that relates to their gender identity. Collectively we gathered suggestions of **when it's hard to be confident** and in green, some suggestions of **what might help**:

- ❖ **Buying clothes** - Go with a friend / supporter, ask others about trans inclusive shops
- ❖ **Swimming** - Join a trans friendly / exclusive swimming group (See T Monthly for listings!)
- ❖ **Using public changing rooms / toilets** - Know your rights, use accessible toilets, visit: <https://transfriendlyedinburgh.wordpress.com/tag/gender-neutral-bathrooms-edinburgh/>
- ❖ **Small social circles** - join trans groups (on and offline) to make new connections
- ❖ **In a church community** - start a support/social group at church? Other trans people will then know how to reach you
- ❖ **Living in a small town** - See above!
- ❖ **When you don't know anybody else like you** - See above!

“ **Copy others!** **Feel fear and do it anyway!**

Do more of what you love! Getting experience and building skills, builds confidence

Trust that you deserve to feel confident

Try using more open body language; hold your head up, look people in the eye, ”

try not to cross your arms so much

Remember nobody feels confident ALL the time



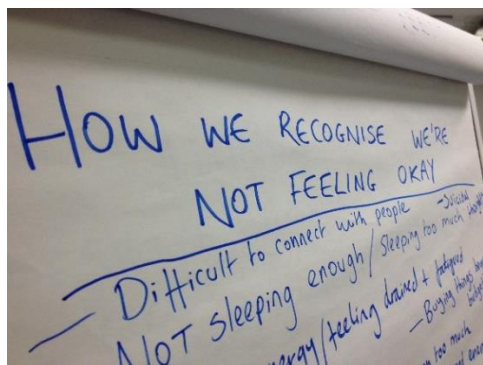
Day 1 - Afternoon session - Your Options and Your Rights

James Morton, Manager of the Scottish Transgender Alliance, joined us to facilitate an information session on options in transition. Participants had indicated via registration, the topics that would be most useful for them and James shaped the discussions around these and other suggestions on the day.

Topics discussed	Useful links
❖ Name Change	Visit - http://www.lgbthealth.org.uk/services-support/transition-support/ and read under 'Links to Useful Documents'
❖ Coming out to other people	http://www.lgbthealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Coming-out-helpsheet.pdf
❖ Your right to privacy	Confidentiality: http://www.scottishtrans.org/trans-rights/practice/confidentiality/
❖ Hate crime; difference between incidents and crimes, how to report & what to expect	Reporting a hate incident or crime: http://www.scotland.police.uk/contact-us/hate-crime-and-third-party-reporting/
❖ Employment rights	Transgender Workplace Support Guide: http://www.lgbthealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/TWSP-Info-Guide-Final.pdf
❖ Complaining if you experience discrimination; <i>The Equality Act 2010</i>	Scottish Trans Justice Guide: https://www.scottishtrans.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/STA-trans-justice-guide.pdf

❖ Using toilets and changing rooms	Refuge Restrooms: http://www.refugerestrooms.org/
❖ Gender on records: gender recognition certificate, CHI number, HMRC	Gender Recognition Certificate: https://www.gov.uk/apply-gender-recognition-certificate HMRC - Gender Change: https://www.gov.uk/tell-hmrc-change-of-details/gender-change Statutory Name Change: Statutory Declaration Change of Name.
❖ Teaching others about gender identity	Gender Identity Booklet: http://www.lgbthealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/gender_identity.pdf
❖ What should you expect from NHS Gender services?	Gender Reassignment Protocol for Scotland (2012): http://www.sehd.scot.nhs.uk/mels/CEL2012_26.pdf NHS Lothian Gender Clinic Q&A / Info Session report: http://www.lgbthealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/NHS-Lothian-Gender-Services-Information-Session-Report-2016.pdf
❖ Surgeries (masculinising)	http://www.scottishtrans.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/lower-surgery-transmen.pdf
❖ Surgeries (feminising)	http://www.scottishtrans.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/lowersurgery-transwomen.pdf

Day 2: Feeling Better About Me



Starting day 2 of workshops, Alison Wren from LGBT Health's Mental Health programme, led a morning session on exploring mental wellbeing through transition.

Some participants are connected to NHS gender services whilst others are not, but regardless of whether participants are receiving clinical support, this session provides a much-needed focus on emotional wellbeing.

How we recognise we're not feeling okay

The group shared a number of different behaviours that indicated they're not feeling so good. We discussed how recognising these behaviours and signs give us better insight into what's happening with ourselves:

- ❖ Difficult to connect with people
- ❖ Not sleeping enough/sleeping too much – suicidal thoughts
- ❖ Lack of energy/feeling drained and fatigued
- ❖ Lack of motivation – buying things beyond budget
- ❖ Going into overdrive – taking on too much– heightened energy

- ❖ Drinking heavily, drugs, smoking (addictions)
- ❖ Seeking escape - (TV, video games...)
- ❖ Avoiding contact with people – hermit mode – dread/foreboding
- ❖ Despairing
- ❖ Irritable and angry (unmet needs)
- ❖ Emotional and teary
- ❖ Self-loathing
- ❖ Unhelpful, intrusive and negative thoughts
- ❖ Self-contaminating
- ❖ Increased anxiety levels – no sex drive / panic attacks
- ❖ Easily over stimulated – sexual hang ups
- ❖ Self-harm – increase
- ❖ Risk taking behaviour – recklessness
- ❖ Physical symptoms of anxiety – IBS, skin condition – shakes

As a result of the course:

100% feel more informed about their options and rights

100% feel they have made new friendships and connections

83% say their self-esteem has improved

83% say they feel more confident

Things that help

- ❖ Shower, personal care, cleaning the house!
- ❖ Dispose of wine bottles – or things related to behaviour you wish to avoid
- ❖ “To do” list – break things down into manageable tasks
- ❖ External validation – from others
- ❖ Feeling pride in achievements
- ❖ Get outside – even for a short time / Exercise – feeling a physical release
- ❖ Care for animals/pets
- ❖ Feeling able to say no = plus not having to explain why
- ❖ Singing and music – Voice App recommendation:
https://www.reddit.com/r/asktransgender/comments/5hgusl/hacking_the_voice_a_physicists_approach_to/
- ❖ Talking to someone: friends / helplines / counsellors / therapists
- ❖ Eating well and nourishing ourselves with food
- ❖ Planning, buying and preparing food
- ❖ Mindfulness and meditation
- ❖ Returning to past positive hobbies and interests
- ❖ Volunteering and helping others
- ❖ Educating yourself and get informed about why we feel the way we do



Closing Session and Evaluation

In order to bring the weekend to a close and consolidate the learnings and impact of each of the workshops, the group was given the space to verbally share their reflections of the course; what they had gained and what they were grateful for.

A 'My hidden gifts' sheet was provided for each participant, with contributions added from everyone taking part, including. The course reflections provided a platform for highlighting the strengths of each individual and the (sometimes unexpected) positive impacts they had made on each other.

Staff participate too, which offers an excellent opportunity to thank individuals for their unique contributions and honour the effort and courage it has taken to participate fully in the experience.

Feedback from participants:

“This has made me feel a lot better about myself, not just for being trans but in general. I feel a lot more secure about who I am.”

“...confirms my resolve to tackle prejudice head on!”

“I feel like it's improved my self-esteem. It's helped my feelings of social anxiety. I've never felt so accepted in a social setting. I don't feel as outnumbered as a trans person in society.”

“It's given me a sense of community. Friends! Lots of useful information. A sense of where to go/what to do next.”

“Finally had a great night's sleep last night and my chronic gastritis has eased up since making contact with Jules and LGBT Health. My mood has shot up a few notches! This has been a turning point I will never forget – priceless.”

“It has helped counter some of the negativity and lack of acceptance in my immediate family.”

“This has given me information and strategies which might improve my transition overall”

I feel less alone. I've felt very lonely and isolated lately. Coming here has really helped with that. I feel a bit more confident about asserting myself, believing in myself more than when I started, which is invaluable.”



Further information

LGBT Health and Wellbeing

LGBT Health delivers a varied programme of services, groups, courses and events in Edinburgh and Glasgow. We welcome people with a diverse range of identities.

W: www.lgbthealth.org.uk T: 0131 523 1100

Transgender Support Programme (Lothian and Glasgow)

A holistic programme of support for trans people delivered in both Edinburgh and Glasgow, including newsletter, information and 1:1 support, managing transition courses, confidence building workshops and regular social events.

Contacts:

Jules Stapleton Barnes, Development Worker (Lothian)

E: jules@lgbthealth.org.uk T: 0131 652 3281

Katrina Mitchell, Development Worker (Glasgow)

E: katrina@lgbthealth.org.uk T: 0141 271 2330 (Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesday morning)

Scottish Transgender Alliance

The Scottish Transgender Alliance works to improve gender identity and gender reassignment equality, rights and inclusion in Scotland. James Morton is the STA Manager.

Email: sta@equality-network.org W: <http://www.scottishtrans.org> T: 0131 467 6039

National Gender Identity Clinical Network for Scotland (NGICNS)

This National Managed Clinical Network was set up to support the Gender Reassignment Protocol for Scotland. It aims to ensure equitable access to planned gender identity services. They hold occasional events, aimed primarily at people who may want to access treatment via the Gender Reassignment Protocol for Scotland. Send a message via their contact form for further details about future events - www.ngicns.scot.nhs.uk



T Monthly

Stay in touch with our monthly trans-specific e-bulletin!

T Monthly is LGBT Health and Wellbeing's free trans-specific e-bulletin that shares news, events and support opportunities for transgender and non-binary people across Scotland.

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