

Transition Support Course

27 & 28 January 2018

Summary notes and reflections



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.

This is a unique course that has been shaped and developed from direct engagement with trans people and since commencing, 86 individuals have now taken part. LGBT Health delivers a similar course annually in

Glasgow, as part of the Glasgow Transgender Support Programme.

The 2-day event this year involved 16 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.

“Each year, participants bring unique experiences and perspective and the course provides an important space to reflect upon these. Through empathy, familiarity and understanding, genuine moments of peer support and affirmation arise, that last way beyond the weekend.”

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

Participants do not need to have begun a process of transition, received a gender dysphoria diagnosis or even attended a Gender Clinic. The course is for anybody questioning, or who has questioned their gender identity and are 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 including non-binary gender identities.

Background

Delivered by LGBT Health staff members, Jules Stapleton Barnes, James Cuddihy and Alison Wren, the course also included guest facilitator, James Morton,

Participants self-identified as:

Non-binary, trans man, trans woman, man, woman, trans masculine, trans feminine, undecided and without a label

From: Edinburgh & Lothians, Glasgow, Falkirk & the Borders

Age range: 17 - 60

Manager of the Scottish Transgender Alliance, an organisation that LGBT Health maintains a close relationship with.

Every year, this course is adapted and shaped to meet the needs of each group of new attendees. A strong focus is given to the information provided by participants on their registration forms. The information they share helps to shape the content and pace of the course, ensuring each participants' needs are addressed in an accessible way.

The Lothian and Glasgow Transgender Support Programmes welcome trans female/feminine, trans male/masculine, genderqueer and non-binary identities as well as intersex people and people who cross-dress and those who have a trans history. Anyone who lives in, or travels to either Edinburgh or Glasgow can access both programmes (although all events are delivered in Edinburgh and Glasgow).

Session 1: Welcome, getting to know each other & establishing a safe space

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 for participants, 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 was 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.



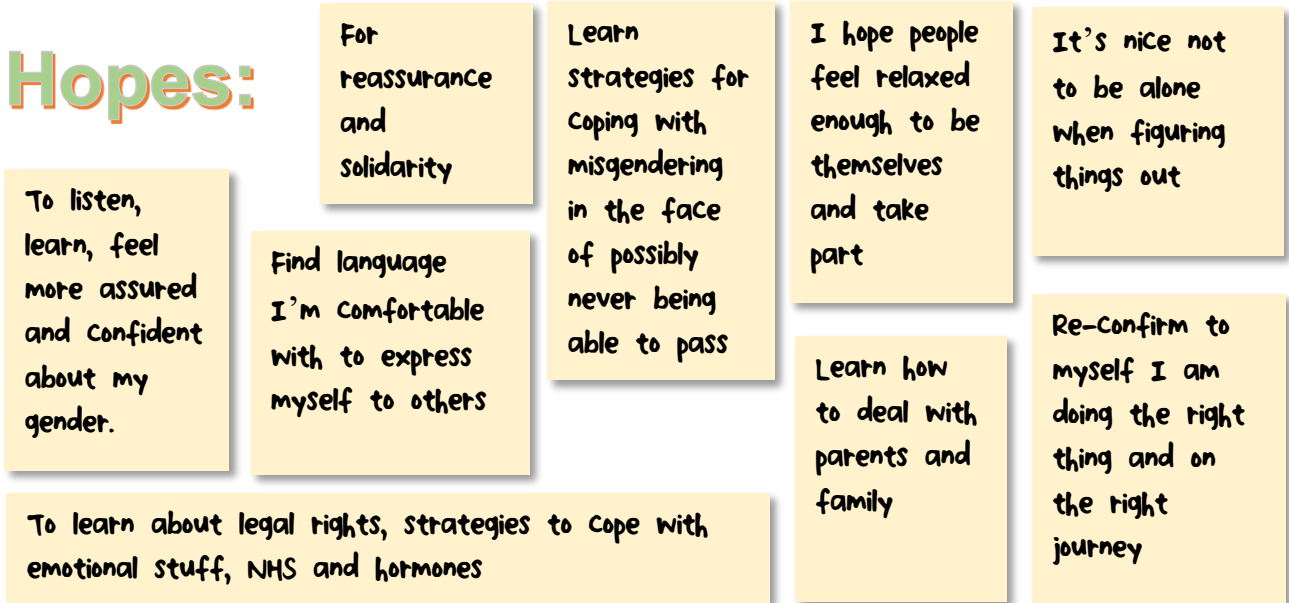
Safe Space Agreement

- Be mindful of topics that might be triggering
- Take care of yourself – take time out if needed
- Try not to make assumptions (gender, sexuality, identity, feelings or situation)
- Confidentiality
- Respect
- Try not to speak over people – give people time
- Respect each other's differences
- Try to let staff know if you'd like to leave the space

Hopes and fears for the weekend

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 might appreciate most. Staff use this session to get to know the participants better and to be more aware of the areas where they may need more time, support and information.

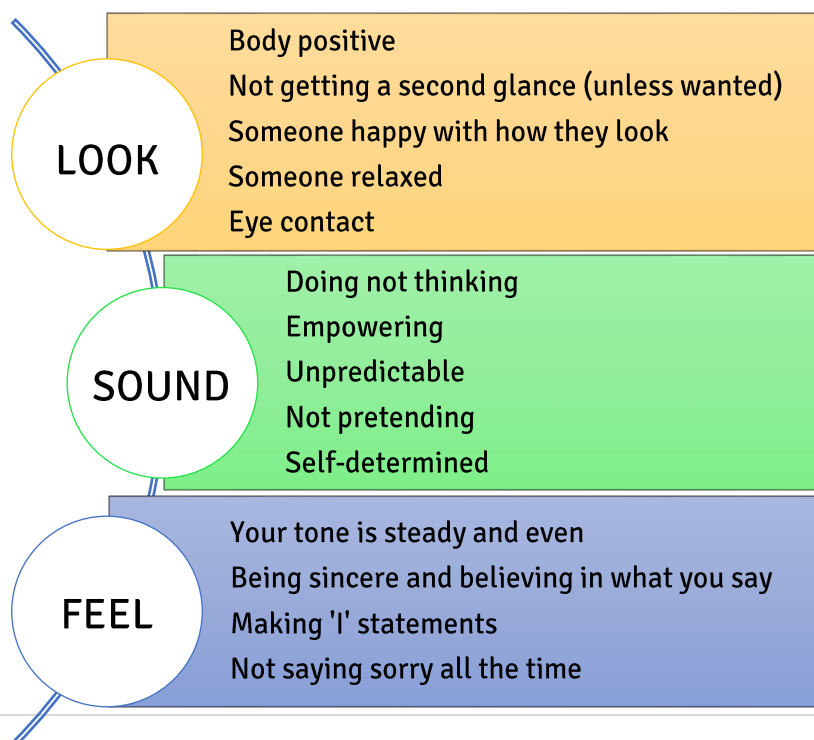
Hopes:



Session 2: Identity & Self Confidence

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

This next section captures the responses of the group, when asked to think about how they recognise confidence in others and when it's hard to be confident as a trans person:



When is it hard as a Trans person to be confident?

This required people to consider their personal experiences of feeling low in confidence, and how that relates to their gender identity. There was a general acknowledgment in the room that most people experienced challenges in terms of confidence and they related this closely with the following:

- At the gym: not fitting a gender stereotype
- Dating
- When you're worrying about being accepted
- When it's more hassle than it's worth
- Lacking self-acceptance
- When you're looking for work
- When you are "outed"
- Travelling
- Family
- Phone calls
- When you're not sure...
- When you're still questioning
- When you worry about acceptance

How can you be sure you're trans?

The following two sections feature some suggestions that emerged from discussions, for when somebody is not feeling 'trans' enough and for when your confidence needs a boost.

"Take it at your own pace"

"You can stop anytime"

"It's important to recognise that people come to it at any stage/age and it doesn't make you any less trans"

"Take it step by step... my visit to the gender clinic really helped"

"Try things, step by step, see you how you feel, whether it feels rights. Then move on to another step and keep checking - are you happier?"

Ideas for building confidence from other trans people...

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

Do more of what you love! Getting experience and building skills, builds confidence **Fake it ‘til you make it!** **Trust that you deserve to feel confident** **Try using more open body language; hold you head up, look people in the eye, try not to cross your arms so much and relax your shoulders**

Remember nobody feels confident ALL the time ”



Session 3: 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. Here are some links to resources discussed at the course:

Topics	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 Information and support for families of adult transgender, non-binary and non-gender people: http://www.qires.org.uk/information-and-support-for-families-of-adult-transgender-non-binary-and-non-gender-people/
❖ What to expect from NHS Gender services ❖ NHS Lothian GIC	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 National Gender Identity Clinical Network for Scotland: http://www.ngicns.scot.nhs.uk/support/ NHS Lothian Gender Identity Clinic Website: http://www.lothiansexualhealth.scot.nhs.uk/Services/GIC/Pages/default.aspx
❖ 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



Session 4: Feeling Better About Me

Starting day 2 of the workshops, Alison Wren from LGBT Health's Mental Health programme, led a relaxed, supportive 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. Here are some key responses to a discussion around things in that make us feel bad:

Things that make us feel bad

- Self-hate
- The impact we have on other people
- Not being 'out' (feeling a fraud/keeping secrets)
- Feeling out of control and that other people have power over our lives
- When there's no space for uncertainty
- Comparing yourself to others
- Having to give things up — grieving the loss
- Bullying
- Waiting — putting your life on hold
- Feeling isolated
- Lack of self care/not looking after yourself
- Media coverage
- Feeling dismissed
- Dwelling on the past
- Misgendering

- ! Walking on eggshells
- ! Changes to relationships
- ! Having to explain constantly
- ! Feeling like a burden

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:

- ! Crying
- ! No appetite/stop eating or binging
- ! Overworking or apathy
- ! Avoiding social situations
- ! Anger — usually a sign our needs are not being met
- ! Stopping communicating — shutting down
- ! Making decisions based on fear/anxiety
- ! Losing concentration — getting stuck on negative thoughts
- ! Feeling numb
- ! Obsessive actions and thinking e.g. cleaning to channel anxiety



- ! Disorganised
- ! Using alcohol and drugs to escape
- ! Difficulty communicating
- ! Depression
- ! Storing up your anger — disproportionate responses
- ! Having feelings we don't understand
- ! Losing time — dissociation
- ! Sleeping problems — too much, too little
- ! Not doing things that make you happy
- ! No pleasure from the things you usually enjoy
- ! Treating others in a bad way
- ! Lack of motivation
- ! Changes to libido / sex drive
- ! Changes to a long term mental/physical condition
- ! Body changes — stomach trouble and tension

CHECK YOUR MOOD

Mood Self-Assessment Tool from the NHS:

<https://www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/Mood-self-assessment>

After acknowledging the more negative impacts of suffering low mood or poor mental health, the group turned their attention to discussing the things that help. The responses were varied, informed by experience and the energy in the room became much more positive as the group enjoyed providing the following list of suggestions:



Crying / screaming into a pillow

Singing / dancing (naked)

Taking time off / giving yourself permission to do nothing

Have a routine, use a planner or diary

Make a list of things you like to remind yourself

Take your younger self out on a play date

Get dressed and leave the house

Go to T time or other social groups

Help others / volunteer

Laughter - be around funny people, find funny books or TV

Celebrate yourself / treat yourself!





Listen to music - sad songs can be cathartic



Push yourself to do things you like

Get some fresh air / light exercise / go for a run



Allow yourself to be angry

Be mindful how you channel your anger and who towards

Tell people when you feel OK and when you're not OK



Counselling / art therapy / trans and therapeutic support

Listen to other people's stories - feel empathy and get perspective

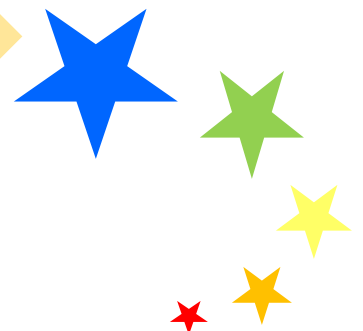
Find a balance between online and real life



Pet therapy! Visit a cat / dog



Get creative, reignite a hobby!



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 staff. 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:

“The space (metaphorically), time and patience given to me was super helpful in making me feel safe and not socially anxious. Which also helps in accepting myself”

“It has changed my whole view of my life - for the better”

“I am 100% more knowledgeable about my rights and have a more in-depth knowledge about the GIC and options available to me. I feel more able to plan and cope with the journey ahead.”

“I think the important part, was that we could talk and ask about anything in safe space. It has given me insight, comfort and a chance to reconnect with my community.”

“It was tremendously energising and rewarding for me to listen and learn from everyone, giving me much required confidence. The rich expanse of trans lives, living and potential, was demystifying, making me feel more included, hopeful and validated.”

“I feel more at peace with where I'm at and have more confidence in myself”

“I was able to better reflect on my environment; the toxic people in it, unhealthy situations etc. I've got perspective now.”

“Hearing other people vocalise feelings and questions that I've internalised for so long, I already feel much more confident and reassured in my trans identity”

As a result of the 2018 course:

100% feel more informed about their options and rights

100% feel more able to cope

92% feel more confident about themselves

100% say their self-esteem has improved

69% say their social connections have improved

92% feel more confident in expressing their views and needs

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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