

Transition Support Course

26th & 27th January 2019

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, 102 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, 4 staff members and guest facilitator Vic Valentine 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 being Trans including those with non-binary gender identities.

Background

Delivered by LGBT Health staff members, Katrina Mitchell, Jack McLean-Foreman, Rachel Hendry and Alison Wren, the course also included guest facilitator,

Participants self-identified as:
Trans man, Trans woman, male, demi-female, woman, gender fluid, Trans masculine, Trans feminine, fluid trans woman, gender void / genderless, non-binary, no idea,

From: Edinburgh & Lothians, Glasgow, Falkirk & Fife

Age range: 17 - 60

Vic Valentine, Policy Officer at 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 Stapleton-Barnes 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.

Group Agreement

- Don't question others' right to be here
- Listen respectfully when others talk
- Respect cultural/language differences
- Confidentiality what's said stays in the room
- Be aware of others' knowledge levels
- Tolerance of mistakes - correct, apologise, move on
- Be gentle with each other
- It's OK to disagree
- Opinions "I think" "I believe" language
- Don't make assumptions
- Participate if you can / opt out is OK
- Respect others boundaries/comfort level
- It's OK to not answer / share
- Timekeeping
- Have fun



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:

To learn about transition options and processes

How to make Legal Name changes

That it is inclusive of non-Binary options.

Become better at introducing myself.

Hope to make new friends

Have a better idea of what to do.

I Hope to find myself and start to live.

That I can learn from others experiences.

Fears:

Not being accepted

Not being too young / old

Public speaking/role-play

That my anxiety will get the better of me.

Be too nervous to make the most of it.

Will I get to know the real me

That my mind will go blank during difficult conversations

How do we know when someone is self-confident?

- Body language
- Volume of speech
- Posture / open arms / stand up straight / steady / not foetal position
- Eye contact / too much can be misread
- Not looking down
- Smiling
- Being relaxed
- Walk tall
- Speaking with conviction
- Does not feel need to apologise / can admit when wrong
- Not caring what others think
- Comfortable in their own skin
- Happy to be outside their comfort zone
- Impossible to know – can gauge but not really know

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:

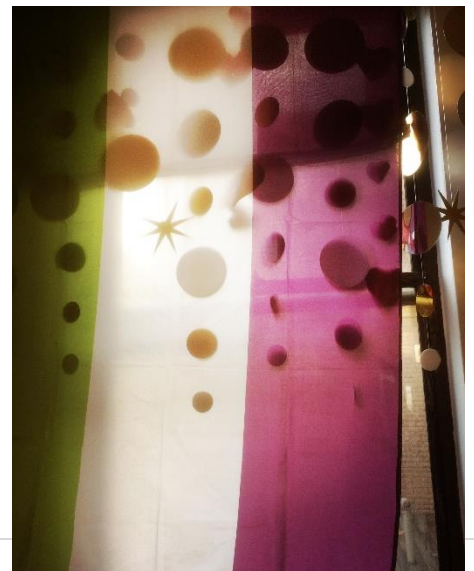
- At the gym: not fitting a gender stereotype
- Dating
- When you're worrying about being accepted
- When you are "outed"
- Travelling
- Family
- Phone calls

- When it's more hassle than it's worth
- Lacking self-acceptance
- When you're looking for work
- When you're not sure....
- When you're still questioning
- When you worry about acceptance

Self-confidence – Top Tips

This next section captures the responses of the group, when asked to come up with tips for Self Confidence.

1. **Leave/avoid negative situations**
2. **Know your rights**
3. **Don't make assumptions**
4. **Do what's comfortable for you**
5. **Try deflection / humour in tense situations**
6. **Find / know your allies and community**
7. **Confidence when challenging others' behaviour**
8. **Go at your own pace, small steps**
9. **Know / record your achievements**
10. **Know who you are, not who others expect you to be**
11. **Know your space / time**
12. **Go to see a Pride march and join in if you feel like it!**



Session 3: Trans rights Q&A with Vic Valentine

Vic Valentine, Policy Officer of the Scottish Transgender Alliance, joined us to facilitate an information session on options in transition. Participants had indicated or not, via registration, the topics that would be most useful for them. The discussions focused 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	A comprehensive guide to the Law regarding public/Business and workplace bathrooms. :- http://www.antheamakepeace.co.uk/toiletissue.pdf
❖ Gender on records: gender recognition certificate, CHI number, HMRC	Gender Recognition Certificate: https://www.gov.uk/apply-gender-recognition-certificate HMRC - Gender Change:

	<p>https://www.gov.uk/tell-hmrc-change-of-details/gender-change Statutory Name Change: Statutory Declaration Change of Name. Update CHI number (name and gender on NHS records): write to your GP requesting that they change your records centrally through Practitioner Services. You do not need any evidence or diagnosis etc to do this. https://nhsnss.org/services/practitioner/medical/patient-registration/sensitive-cases/ Ayla holdom talks about obtaining GRC. https://www.mamamia.com.au/podcasts/no-filter/wren-and-aylas-story-when-your-wife-is-trans/ Useful information for foreign nationals https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/773839/Use-and-change-of-names.pdf</p>
❖ Teaching others about gender identity	<p>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.gires.org.uk/information-and-support-for-families-of-adult-transgender-non-binary-and-non-gender-people/</p>
❖ What to expect from NHS Gender services ❖ NHS Lothian GIC	<p>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</p>
❖ 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
❖ Non-Binary options	http://www.lgbthealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Trans-and-Non-Binary-Community-QA-Information-Evening.pdf

Session 4: Feeling Better About Me – With Alison

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, 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:

What doesn't make us feel so good?

- ! Confusion over gender vs. sexuality
- ! Self-Acceptance
- ! Questioning / unhelpful thoughts
- ! Envy – Siblings / peers / friends
- ! Judgement – our own or others
- ! Anxiety about others thoughts
- ! Deadnaming / misgendering
- ! Intrusive questions
- ! Doubt / Uncertainty
- ! Loneliness / Isolation
- ! Feeling overwhelmed
- ! Pretending
- ! Attitudes
- ! Changes to relationships
- ! Having to explain constantly

Recognising when we don't feel so good.

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:

- ! Overcompensating - burnout
- ! Difficulty making decisions / overthinking things
- ! Impatience
- ! Destructive behaviour – food/alcohol/drugs/self harm/media
- ! Isolating yourself
- ! Binging and purging
- ! Short tempered / No empathy
- ! Loss of appetite / excessive eating
- ! Disrupted sleeping patterns
- ! Apathy
- ! Time dilation / compression
- ! Memory problems
- ! 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:

Mental wellbeing Top Tips



Make a list of achievements

Take a break / switch tasks

Confidence items - fallbacks

Pastimes you enjoy

Time out from life

Take pleasure from small victories

Overcoming difficulties

Venting / ranting – get it off your chest

Chunking - break it down into steps

Sensory deprivation / stimulation

Singing / music / poetry / writing





Animals

Friends and allies

Pamper yourself



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. 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:

“Very inclusive and warm”

“All the staff and volunteers
were awesome!”

“Wish I could do it all again,
now!”

“Thank you!! You were all brilliant”

“Katrina, Rachel and Jack
have been super supportive,
loving, listening and
wonderful people”

“This was a brilliant
experience - many thanks
again!”

“This was so fantastic, thank
you so much”

“Keep doing this outstanding work”



As a result of the 2018 course:

100% feel more informed about their options and rights

73% feel more able to cope

66% feel more confident about themselves

66% say their self-esteem has improved

73% say their social connections have improved

86% 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:

Sylvia Cohen, Development Worker (Lothian)

E: sylvia@lgbthealth.org.uk T: 0131 523 1102

Katrina Mitchell, Development Worker (Glasgow)

E: katrina@lgbthealth.org.uk T: 0141 271 2330 (Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursday 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, Vic Valentine is the Policy Officer

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.

Subscribe to this bulletin via - www.lgbthealth.org.uk/subscribe and by selecting T Monthly from the list of options.