

Parents and Family Members of Trans People in the UK

A Report on the Issues



gendered intelligence

understanding gender diversity in creative ways

www.genderedintelligence.co.uk



consortium

of lesbian, gay, bisexual & transgendered
voluntary and community organisations

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Who are we?

Gendered Intelligence

Gendered Intelligence is a company that delivers arts programmes and creative workshops to young trans people from across the UK. We facilitate workshops for trans and non-trans young people within schools, colleges and other settings in order to generate discussion and debate around gender and the ways in which it presents challenges in our everyday lives. Our professional development and trans awareness training for teachers, youth workers and other service providers of young people and their families is also key to ensuring that staff can feel confident and equipped to tackle discrimination of trans people head on. Our aim is to promote multiple and diverse expressions of gender identities in all aspects of young people's lives.

The Consortium of LGBT VCO's

The Consortium of Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Voluntary and Community Organisations (herein known as The Consortium) operates as a national membership body for LGBT organisations throughout the UK. Different to other national LGBT charities, the focus of the Consortium is around the development and support of LGBT groups, organisations and projects, rather than actually delivering direct services or campaigning for individual LGBT rights. It champions the value and importance of LGBT specific organisations and groups, as well as the need for their existence.

As a membership organisation, the Consortium exists to represent the needs and support requirements of those LGBT organisations, groups and projects that subscribe to a set of shared values and a vision of the LGBT sector. By listening and working with members, the Consortium can advocate to Government and other policy makers the concerns and issues that members have with regard to funding, capacity and local engagement.

About this report

This report gathers some of the issues and needs of parents and family members of trans people and maps out any provision that is currently available in the UK. It aims to identify any gaps or barriers to the service provision of parents and family members of trans people from within the voluntary and community sector, as well as other service areas that all families typically come across.

It was felt that an in-depth report into the issues and needs from within the clinical provision of transsexual people across the UK is beyond the scope of this report. However, some parents and family members did wish to emphasise that the various medical care pathways are a key area of concern, when looking to meet the needs of both young trans people and their family members.

In order to get a picture of what life is like for parents and family members of trans people, Gendered Intelligence put out a questionnaire (see Appendix), ran 2 focus groups and carried out some interviews to ask parents and family members of trans people, as well as some young trans people themselves, about their thoughts and experiences in relation to support and services.

Any names mentioned in this report are pseudonyms.

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| Attended Focus Groups | | |
| | Parents | 10 |
| | Young trans people | 5 |
| Total | | 15 |

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| Questionnaire | | |
| | Parents | 8 |
| | Sibling | 1 |
| Total | | 9 |

| | | |
|-----------|--------------------|---|
| Interview | | |
| | Young trans person | 1 |
| | Parent | 1 |
| | Sibling | 1 |
| Total | | 3 |

In total we reached:

- 19 parents
- 2 siblings
- 6 young trans people

Relevant organisations were also consulted in this research. These include:

- The Depend Yahoo group
- Mermaids
- FTM London Significant Others Support Group
- PACE
- Gender Identity Research Education Society

The professional background of parents included teachers, social workers, drama practitioners, magistrates, senior executives and bankers. Participants spread from across the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland, Scotland, the South East and the South West.

What is trans?

Trans is an umbrella term for various people who feel that the sex that they were assigned at birth does not match or sit easily with their sense of self. The world is generally divided into two categories - men and women. Sometimes it is thought that trans is complicated because a trans person does not fit neatly into these two categories. Indeed the concept of 'trans' raises questions about what it even means to be a 'man' or a 'woman'.

The trans spectrum encompasses transsexual people, transgender people and cross-dressers, or anyone who challenges gender norms. It may be that trans people feel more the 'opposite' sex and so choose to use medical intervention in order to align their body with their mind, their outside appearance with their internal feelings. Cross-dressers may dress to express the more masculine or feminine side of themselves, or simply because those clothes feel more comfortable.

It is estimated that there are between 15, 000 and 45, 000 trans people in the UK¹. We do not know how many of these trans people are under the age of 25, but we might estimate between 5, 000 and 15,000. Like all communities, the trans community is diverse. There are trans people all over the world, who come from all different ethnic, cultural and faith backgrounds. As a result of this trans people might have different self-understandings of their trans identity. Trans people can identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, straight or asexual. Many trans people have histories from within the lesbian, gay and bisexual community or go into it after transitioning or identifying as trans. Others will feel themselves to be part of the heterosexual world and not have any affiliation to the lesbian, gay and bisexual community, regardless of their own or their partners' gender identity.

1 *"Guidance on trans equality in post-school education"* The forum on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Post-School Education. Also see <http://www.gires.org.uk/assets/GIRES-Prevalence-Abstract-1.pdf> for a gathering of studies on the trans population.

Language

It is often thought that there are many different terms used around trans identities, which can often be the cause of some confusion. Language is often slippery and subject to change and this has both positive and negative outcomes. It is important to have the right words so that we can describe our identities, however as soon as we create categories for ourselves there are others who continue to slip between such categorisation.

For this reason trans is deliberately a loose term. There are other words, such as transsexual, transgender and cross dress, which may offer more of a description of those who feels themselves to fit within the trans spectrum. It is generally good practice to use adjectives, the words that describe us, rather than nouns, which say what we are. For example, say 'a transsexual person', rather than 'a transsexual'. This allows for people to feel that they have the opportunity to shift and change as they go through life, rather than be fixed as one thing.

| Key terms | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| A transgender person | Like 'trans', this term is often used as an umbrella term to include transsexual people, cross dressers, gender queer and gender variant people |
| A transsexual person | This is a more clinical word used in the medical world and usually describes those who have decided to undergo procedures such as hormone therapy or surgical intervention |
| FTM | Female to Male (also known as a trans man) |
| MTF | Male to Female (also known as a trans woman) |
| Intersex | Someone whose genitalia, reproductive organs, chromosome or hormone make up can not be defined clearly as either 'male' or 'female' |
| Cross dresser or Transvestite | People who sometimes wear hair, clothes or makeup commonly associated with the 'opposite' sex. |
| Gender variant or Gender queer | Someone who does not fit into neat categories of man or woman. These descriptions also allow for a person to identify outside of the gender binary (man/woman). |

Sexual orientation

People sometimes confuse gender identity with sexual orientation and as a result think that trans is another category of sexual orientation or sexuality. Trans, however, describes how you feel your gender identity to be. From that self-identification you may use another word to describe your sexual orientation or sexuality. For example, a trans man who tends to be attracted to men might describe himself as a gay trans man. A trans woman who is attracted to men might describe herself as straight or heterosexual. Those trans people who do not wish to define their sexual orientation in terms of the gender binary (man or woman) may describe themselves as queer.

| Other useful terms or expressions | |
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| Transitioning | Transitioning describes the journey going from female to male or male to female. This may or may not be through taking hormones or having surgical intervention. |
| Coming out | Disclosing your trans status to another person. |
| Gender dysphoria | This is the clinical diagnosis for transsexualism. |
| Sex change | This is a popular expression, and one that people tend to understand very quickly. It does imply, however, that a person changes their sex through just one single operation, which is not the case. |
| Full time or part time | Full time refers to the step taken where you appear in the world in the gender role that accords with your gender identity, in all aspects of your life. Other trans people choose to cross dress only some of the time. |
| Transphobia | Transphobia is the fear or dislike of someone who identifies as trans. |
| Heterosexism | Privileging a heterosexual lifestyle implicitly or explicitly whilst simultaneously excluding, undermining and/or deleting non-heterosexual and non-normative gendered identities |
| Pre-operative / Post-operative | Refers to where a trans person currently is in relation to any gender-related surgery he or she may have had or will be having |
| Being born in the wrong body | A popular expression used by some people to describe how a trans person may feel about his or her own sense of self. Other people find this expression has become clichéd. |

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| <p>Living stealth</p> | <p>Living stealth means for a trans person to choose not to disclose his or her trans status to others after living in his or her new gender role.</p> |
| <p>Gender Normative / Non-normative gendered expressions</p> | <p>Gender normative is expressing one's gender through cultural acts that fit within the binaries of man and woman, boy and girl, e.g. for a girl to wear nail varnish or a boy who likes to play football is gender normative.</p> <p>Non-normative gender expressions are acts that do not fit within the binaries of man and woman, boy and girl, e.g. for a boy to wear nail varnish or a girl who likes to play football is non-normative gendered behaviour.</p> |

What are the issues for parents and family members of trans people?

Emotional labour

It can be a difficult time when a parent or family member is told that their loved one is trans. Parents and family members go through a spectrum of emotions such as confusion, shock, denial and even grief on processing the news. There may be a sense of loss for the anticipated future of that relationship. Other emotions are worry, anxiety, fear, guilt and responsibility.

“Alex came out to me and I wasn’t paying attention. It was a pretty intimate moment. We were talking about honesty. ... Alex told me that Alex was a member of the gay/ straight alliance and I thought that meant that Alex was gay. I thought no big deal. I didn’t quite get that it was really about the gender. With my partner, I’m accepting but I’m confused... and with family and friends how do you balance that with the interests of Alex? For us we love Alex. I’m happy to have Alex and hope to have him go through this journey and come out with what Alex is looking for.” (Parent of a trans person)

“I was not particularly taken aback, but I was taken aback by my own physical reaction, because I just couldn’t stop crying. It was uncontrollable. I tried to analyse why that was the case. I think it’s wrapped up with a parental guilt. I wanted to have been able to help my child. The second thing is the realisation of the pain and confusion that my child must have gone through. But I’m very, very happy and positive for him.” (Parent of a trans person)

Such thoughts and feelings usually shift over time. Some parents and family members of trans people we spoke to were also keen to express that being

trans does not change the person inside, even though he or she may go on to look different.

“I feel it’s the same person... the person inside is exactly the same person that I’ve always loved.” (Parent of a trans person)

“It’s not a different being. It’s the same child.” (Parent of a trans person)

When a loved one is coming to terms with his or her own trans identity it is not easy and this no doubt has an effect on all members of the family. A trans person might put barriers up or distance themselves from their family. Emotions might run high as it can be a particularly anxious time and trans people can be very sensitive to the smallest of comments. Also, because so little is understood about trans, family members might have questions that their trans loved ones do not even know how to answer. Despite all of the best intentions parents and family members of trans people can end up feeling rather helpless and lost. It can be hard seeing a loved one struggling or feeling unhappy. It is equally hard to manage one’s own feelings as a parent or family member when trying to do what is best for her or his trans loved one.

“You feel responsible for them being miserable.” (Parent of a trans person)

Understanding causes of trans identities

Many of the parents we talked to were keen to understand the causes of trans identities and found it frustrating that this could not be answered easily. Some parents were keen to know whether being trans is a medical condition, something one is born with, or if it could have been prevented in anyway. This debate is caught up in the various feelings of responsibilities and guilt that parents especially have about their child's trans status. Some parents stressed that they felt guilty or responsible for their loved one's trans identity.

"Have I done something wrong?" (Parent of a trans person)

It is important for parents to realise that they have done nothing wrong. It also takes time for people to realise that there is nothing wrong with being trans.

"You wouldn't go and see a comedian and ask why are they funny? Or [ask] is it in their genes?" (Young trans person)

"I had to accept that it is real. It's so clear that our daughter wants to go down that path. The sort of unhappiness that she's had in trying to deal with the outside world, and you observe this and you think well you wouldn't be doing this if it was just some psychological problem that perhaps some counselling would solve." (Parent of a trans person)

Access to information and gaining understandings around trans identities

Throughout our research a number of parents and family members pointed out that information around trans identities can be contradictory and confusing. Also people access information in different ways. Reading about scientific findings and medical research will appeal to some people, whilst others will gain a better understanding by reading a novel or a biography about personal stories. Many parents and family members often carry out their own research and gather information from different places. This can feel exhausting. Nevertheless, this allows for parents and family members to form their own thoughts and work out how they can best understand and develop their relationship with their trans loved one.

Professional services

Staff in schools, colleges, universities, as well as other service providers and agencies (such as health, social care and housing) for young people and families tend to know little about trans identities. This means it can be left to trans people and their family to provide basic information. In some instances parents and family members of trans people have experienced excellent support from particular members of staff such as school counsellors, heads of year, social workers, which have been an enormous benefit to families. It does, however, seem to be ad-hoc and predominantly down to the individual staff member who has gone out of his or her way to investigate and gain knowledge around trans issues.

Siblings of trans people

When there is more than one child in the family, siblings of trans people can also have struggles and questions that also need attending to. For parents this is an important concern.

“The sibling might feel that their whole paradigm of what their childhood was gets twisted because they [the trans person] are saying it was so different for them”

(Parent of a trans person)

A sibling of a trans person may experience difficulties from their peers, and are at equal risk of being bullied as young trans people. This may add conflict to the sibling relationship, especially if there is blame. One family who we interviewed talked to us about a series of bullying that was carried out on the sibling of a young trans person.

“There was one point when I was actually threatened with physical violence... School became a really scary place.

I felt quite isolated by it because I felt that I was going to cause more problems if I discussed it with anyone. Mum had difficulties thinking about it” (Sibling of a young trans person)

“Danny felt guilty because he thought he was the cause of it all” (Mother of a young trans person)

“I felt incredibly guilty... I knew it was going to be difficult for her [sibling] when I transitioned but I didn’t know that she’d get bullied about it.” (Young trans person)

“I never believed that it was Danny’s fault” (Sibling of a young trans person)

Siblings, like parents and other family members, need to be included in any support offered, including access to information about trans identities. It may be appropriate to offer information in a way that suits the age range of the sibling as well as taking into consideration the different social context of being a sibling, rather than a parent.

Key points

- When a trans loved one comes out it can be an emotionally difficult time
- Parents may feel that they are to blame
- Information about trans identities can be conflicting and unclear
- It takes time to understand about trans identities and to know that there is nothing wrong with being trans
- On the whole, professional services are not equipped when supported young trans people and their families
- Siblings of trans people may need to gain knowledge about trans issues in a different way
- Siblings of trans people are at equal risk of being bullied as young trans people

Identifying the needs of parents and family members of trans people

Increase in wider understandings of trans identities

On the whole, understandings of trans identities by the wider public is limited. Parents and family members stressed their own ignorance, but due to the lack of knowledge more broadly, this can directly lead to transphobic negative experiences. If there was more fluidity between sexed and gendered identities, as well as people understanding and fully accepted trans people in society, this would increase the general well being of young trans people and their families.

“I’ve got to say, that if this was done in sex education in year 6, and in year 9 and all that, people would understand it more, and therefore they wouldn’t be as afraid of it. Therefore there’d be less bullying. But, transsexualism, and homosexuality, are just seemingly pushed under the carpet.”

(Young trans person)

Offering concise and clear information

One of the main needs of parents and family members of trans people is to have accurate straightforward information around what it means to be trans and what the choices might be for their trans loved one. Finding information and knowledge from medical professionals and community members, as well as various websites, Internet forum spaces, academic writing, social and medical research can be overwhelming, especially when opinions and advice may differ.

Questionnaire:

- Has there been anything missing with regards to any support offered? If so, what?
- *“Agreement on treatment between organisations”* (Parent of a young trans person)

Education and trans awareness training for professional services

There was a sense by the family members that we spoke to that professional staff such as teachers, general health care professionals, social workers and housing officers on the whole have a limited knowledge of trans issues. This impacts on the services offered to trans people and their families.

“We are surrounded by professionals who don’t know anything about it [trans issues]” (Parent of a trans person)

Training and resources that covers trans issues should be offered to all service staff that are involved in the families and children, education and health sector. Such providers set up to support families in anyway should be made knowledgeable enough about trans within a framework of equality and diversity measures as well as discrimination prevention.

Professional support

It was also felt by the parents and family members that we spoke to that greater access to counsellors and therapists who have an understanding of trans and what issues trans people and their families face should be made available. Added to this, it was thought that sessions should be offered for appropriate lengths of time rather than just one off sessions.

Peer support

Whilst support networks for trans people across the UK are growing, for parents and family members of a trans person finding someone to talk to about their own feelings is not so easy to find.

“There was nobody I knew in my situation that I could talk about it with.” (Parent of a trans person)

“There is nobody to talk to and sometimes I think I’m going to explode.” (Parent of a trans person)

“You feel so isolated because you don’t know anybody else in a similar situation and there is so little information. You don’t know whether it’s real. Whether the person is masking some other psychological problem.” (Parent of a trans person)

Safe and supportive community spaces are needed for those who are going through or have experienced a loved one coming out as trans. The parents and family members that we spoke to stressed that they were keen to come together to share stories and strategies around coming to terms with the trans status of a loved one and to think through choices and decisions to be made about the future. In these spaces it was agreed that skilled support would be needed for families to negotiate and communicate feelings in a safe and productive way.

Key points

The needs of parents and family members of trans people are:

- Basic information about the spectrum of trans and gender variant identities and expressions
- Training and resources to be made widely available across family and young people services
- Better access to professional counselling and therapy services for appropriate periods of time
- To come together to share experiences and stories about some of the issues that parents and family members of trans people face

Current support services for parents and family members of trans people in the UK

Support for parents and family members of trans people has been gained through accessing various community organisations, on line forums as well as ad hoc events organised from within the trans community in the UK. Various community groups for trans people offer opportunities to meet other trans people and their family members through various social events.

“It’s helpful to get other trans people’s perspectives on things. To have a meeting where some of you [trans people] can talk about how you felt and experienced life. It offers a wider perspective on things rather than just my child.” (Parent of a trans person and Committee member of Mermaids)

| ORGANISATIONS SUPPORTING PARENTS AND FAMILY MEMBERS OF TRANS PEOPLE | |
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| GENDERED INTELLIGENCE | Gendered Intelligence run projects for young trans people from across the UK. They also run a support group for Parents and family members of young trans people meeting bi-monthly on the last Saturday of the month. |
| | E-mail – jay.stewart@genderedintelligence.co.uk Website - www.genderedintelligence.co.uk |
| GENDER IDENTITY RESEARCH AND EDUCATION SOCIETY (GIRES) | GIRES' workshops provide a supportive, confidential and safe environment for families to ask questions, and to share fears, confusion and grief with others in the same situation. Research-based information is given to help families understand about gender variant conditions. The aim of the workshops is to help families come to terms with the changes in their lives and to build better and more supportive relationships with their trans family-member. |
| | E-mail – admin@gires.org.uk Tel - 01372 801554 Website - www.gires.org.uk |
| DEPEND | Depend is an organisation offering free confidential and non-judgemental advice, information and support to all family members, spouses partners and friends of transsexual people in the UK. There are private online support lists for family members (parents, siblings friends etc), spouses, and one for Trans people who wish to learn how to support their loved ones. |
| | Website - www.depend.org.uk |

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| MERMAIDS | Mermaids is a support group for gender variant children and teenagers, also parents, carers and others. There are private online support lists for teenagers, and for parents of gender variant children and teenagers |
| | <p>Help line number - 07020 935066 (3pm - 7pm. Mon – Sat)</p> <p>E-mail - mermaids@freeuk.com</p> <p>Website - www.mermaids.freeuk.com</p> |
| FTM LONDON | FTM London is a support group for trans masculine people who meet monthly. They also run a group for Significant Others, including family members. |
| | <p>E-Mail - info@ftmlondon.org.uk</p> <p>Website - www.ftmlondon.org.uk</p> |
| TRANSFABULOUS | Transfabulous is a trans community arts festival. They organise events for all trans people and their families. |
| | <p>E-Mail: info@transfabulous.co.uk</p> <p>Website: www.transfabulous.co.uk</p> |
| THE GENDER TRUST | The Gender Trust offers caring support and information for anyone with any question or problem concerning their gender identity, or whose loved ones who are struggling with gender identity issues |
| | <p>Helpline number - 0845 231 0505</p> <p>E-mail - info@gendetrust.org.uk</p> <p>Website - www.gendertrust.org.uk</p> |

| OTHER FAMILY SERVICES | |
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| FFLAG | Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays is a continually growing national voluntary organisation and registered charity with telephone helplines across the UK and parents' groups which hold regular meetings across various regions. |
| | <p>Helpline number - 0845 652 0311</p> <p>E-mail - info@fflag.org.uk</p> <p>Website - www.fflag.org.uk</p> |
| PARENTS ENQUIRY SCOTLAND | Parents Enquiry Scotland is a voluntary organization run by parents of LGBT children providing help, information and support for parents of LGBT children |
| | <p>Telephone - 0131 556 6047</p> <p>E-mail – parentsenquiry@hotmail.com</p> <p>Website - www.parentsenquiryscotland.org</p> |
| MANCHESTER PARENTS GROUP | Manchester Parents Group provides support and information for parents of lesbian, gay and bisexual children. |
| | <p>E-mail – ask@manpg.co.uk</p> <p>Website - www.manpg.co.uk/index.htm</p> |
| BIRMINGHAM PARENTS SUPPORT GROUP | Birmingham Parents Support Group is for the family and friends of lesbian and gay men. |
| | <p>Telephone - 0121 742 0230</p> <p>Website - www.birminghamparentssupportgroup.co.uk</p> |
| The Parenting Project LGBT CONSORTIUM | The Parenting Project is focused in Croydon, Greenwich, Hackney and Southwark and is also working with Families Together (the London FFLAG group) to develop services across London. |

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| | <p>Email - information@lgbtconsortium.org.uk</p> <p>Telephone - 020 7064 6502</p> <p>Website - www.lgbtconsortium.org.uk</p> |
| <p>PACE</p> | <p>The Family Support service at Pace offers FREE counselling, support and advice to all family members whatever their age or sexuality. This service includes parents who may need support when they discover that their child is lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans</p> |
| | <p>Email - pacehelpline@hotmail.co.uk</p> <p>Telephone - 0808 1807 223 (Mon 9:30am-12:30pm and Thurs 3:30pm-6:30pm)</p> <p>Website - www.pacehealth.org.uk/family_support/</p> |

General parent services

From the sample of parents and family members that we talked to none of the participants so far had accessed any generic parent service either national or locally run. It was felt on the whole that they would prefer to gain support from other parents who had similar experiences, rather than feeling that they had to explain about trans identities before getting the support they required.

LGB(T) parent support groups

Parents and family members of trans people also tend not to access LGB parent services. The parents and family members of trans people that we talked to felt that support groups for parents of LGB people will have little knowledge of trans issues. Parents and family members felt they would gain better by attending or accessing support through a trans only group.

Family therapy services

Some of the parents and family members of trans people that we spoke to have privately accessed qualified family therapists and counsellors that were either local to them or that their trans loved one or themselves as individuals had accessed prior.

PACE

Family Therapy Services from within the LGBT voluntary sector, such as Pace, are also becoming increasingly utilised by parents and family members of trans people.

Per year PACE offers:

- 480 hours of help line support
- 600 hours of family therapy
- 1440 hours of couples counselling

Approximately 8 trans individuals have accessed the family service in the last 6 months.

Community groups and organisations specifically supporting parents and family members of trans people

Mermaids

Mermaids' website offers information and experiences around the needs of young trans people and their family. On average Mermaids receives 728 telephone calls and e mails from parents and family members of trans people, and young trans people themselves annually.

Depend

Depend is an organisation offering free confidential and non-judgemental advice, information and support to all family members, spouses partners and friends of transsexual people in the UK. There are private online support lists for family members (parents, siblings friends etc), spouses, and one for Trans people who wish to learn how to support their loved ones.

Currently Members of Depend on line forum consists of 109 Partners of MTF people, Partners of FTM people as well as family and friends.

FTM London Significant Others Support Group

FTM London is a social support and information group for trans masculine people. Each year, the parents, partners, siblings and friends of FTM London group attendees are invited to join in with its monthly meeting. This meeting brings significant others together to share their experiences in small groups. In November 2007 the Significant Others attending the meeting suggested that they also wanted to have their own space to meet on a monthly basis.

The FTM London Significant Others' group started in January 2008. Like FTM London, it is volunteer led and run by the communities for the communities. The group is currently facilitated by the mother of a trans man. She is an associate member of FTM London and has had a strong involvement in the trans community for the last decade. On average six to eight people attend the monthly group, the majority of which are parents. The group offers a confidential space for Significant Others to talk, ask questions, and share their feelings in a supportive environment.

As the group evolves it aims to be responsive to the needs of Significant Others. It is considering offering ad-hoc contact via email and telephone in-between monthly meetings for those coming to the group as attendees have often been from outside London in isolated areas.

Gendered Intelligence

Since the support group for parents and family members of young trans people began in February 2008 Gendered Intelligence has supported 15 parents of trans people. It is currently developing the service and seeking funding opportunities to allow parents and family members of trans people to come together and meet other parents and family members of young trans people from across the UK.

Gender Identity Research and Education Society (GIRES)

Over the years GIRES has run 11 family workshops and seen approximately 230 family members, 25% of those being trans people who attend meetings with their trans partners/spouses, brothers, sisters, children. Findings gained from these workshops have formed a report, which can be found at: <http://www.gires.org.uk/famtrans.php>. In the last year GIRES has supported approximately 35 parents, spouses and siblings in face-to-face meetings, and through telephone and email support.

Key points

- Peer support for parents and family members of trans people is offered through on line forum spaces to good effect
- Peer support for parents and family members of the trans community in real space and time is rather ad-hoc
- Current peer support groups from within trans community groups are new and unfunded
- Barriers to parents and family members accessing support groups are travel costs, fear and anxiety as well as simply knowing that the services exist
- Pace offer family therapy services for trans people and their family
- Outreach and profiling of support for parents and family members of trans people is necessary to let people know support is available

Summary

Parents and family members of trans people can experience huge emotional anxiety in relation to their loved one coming out as trans. It may take time for parents and family members to gain an understanding of trans identities.

The issues and needs of parents and family members of trans people are diverse. Meeting those needs means services should come from a combination of generic, LGBT and trans organisations. Some people may need to access parents and family services and organisations locally. Such services such should have some basic information and knowledge about the issues and needs of trans people and their families.

Current professional family counselling and therapy services are meeting the needs of some families of trans people. However, trans people and their families may not know what services are available to them.

Limited capacity and resources restricts the trans community voluntary sector in terms of provision and support it could offer parents and family members of trans people.

Further reading

Downloadable PDFs

Gender and Sexuality Psychosocial Programs

<http://snipurl.com/2b4rj>

www_childreinsnational_org

Information for families

<http://www.gires.org.uk/families.php>

For Parents, Guardians and Family Members of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Two-Spirit, Transgender, Intersex or Questioning Youth

<http://www.gabiclayton.com/familybrochure.pdf>

Mom, I Need to be a Girl

<http://www.transproud.com/pdf/beagirl.pdf>

A guide for young trans people in the UK

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_074258

Transgender experiences – Information and support

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_081579

A guide to hormone therapy for trans people

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_081580

Medical care for gender variant children and young people: answering families' questions

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_082976

Reducing health inequalities for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people - briefings for health and social care staff

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_078347

Guidance for GPs, other clinicians and health professionals on the care of gender variant people

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_084919

Guidance on trans equality in post-school education

<http://www.unison.org.uk/file/A7002.pdf>

Trans staff and students in higher education

http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/pubs_guidance.html#m20080304-TransStaffandStudents

Books

DeCrescenzo, Teresa and Gerald P. Mallon *Serving Transgender Youth: The Role of Child Welfare Systems: Proceedings of a Colloquium* September 2000; Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America, 2002

Fish, Linda Stone and Rebecca G. Harvey *Nurturing Queer Youth: Family Therapy Transformed* New York: Norton & Company, 2005

Israel, Gianna E. *Transgender Care: Recommended Guidelines, Practical Information, and Personal Accounts* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997

Lev, Arelene Ishtar *Transgender Emergence: Therapeutic Guidelines for Working with Gender-Variant People and Their Families* New York: Haworth Clinical Practice Press, 2004

Ramsey, Gerald *Transsexuals: Candid Answers to Private Questions* Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1996

Matthew Rottnek, editor *Sissies and Tomboys: Gender Nonconformity and Homosexual Childhood* New York: New York University Press, 1999

Mary Boenke, editor *Trans Forming Families: Real Stories About Transgendered Loved Ones* Imperial Beach, CA: Walter Trook Pub, 1999

Other websites

TransYouth Family Allies: <http://imatyfa.org/about/>

Gender Spectrum Family: <http://www.genderspectrumfamily.org/index.shtml>

Transfamily: <http://www.transfamily.org>

The Safe Schools Coalition: www.safeschoolscoalition.org

PFlag: <http://community.pflag.org/NETCOMMUNITY/Page.aspx?pid=194>

Press for Change: www.pfc.org.uk/

FTM Network: www.ftm.org.uk

LGBT History Month: www.lgbthistorymonth.org.uk/index.htm

School's Out: www.schools-out.org.uk/

Women of the Beaumont Society: www.beaumontsociety.org.uk/

Appendix 1 – Questionnaire

Questionnaire for parents and family members of trans people



Please describe your relationship to your trans loved on. Eg. Parent, sibling

1. Mother
2. Mother
3. Parent
4. Father and Mother
5. Mother
6. Parent
7. Sibling
8. Parent

What is your current profession or employment status? (If applicable)

1. Self employed
2. Director of Finance
3. Housewife, mother of four young adults; P.A and accountant
4. Artist and Midwife
5. Life Coach
6. Self employed
7. Nurse
8. Social worker

Which region of the UK do you live?

1. London
2. London
3. Reading
4. Kent
5. Bristol
6. South East
7. South east
8. Bedfordshire

What support mechanisms, if any, have you accessed in relation to your loved one identifying as trans? Eg. Friends, family, counselling, community support groups

1. Portman, Mermaids, Gendered Intelligence, family therapy, friends, family
2. Counselling, although not initially. I was okay 'til my brother reacted very badly and I needed support for that
3. Friends, Family, Church
4. GIRES, Depend, Mermaids, internet, TV, Radio 4 and friends
5. Mermaids (a life saver!); husband
6. None
7. Friends
8. Talked to friends

What were your initial thoughts about trans?

1. That it would have a huge impact on /disruption to all our lives
2. I was shocked though relieved to find out what the issue was then able to support. It was quite a few years ago not and I was surprised to find out that it was not just an mtf issues – there had been fair coverage of the mtf issue but not ftm
3. Not the right way. Young person's problem was lack of confidence and had not found a peer group
4. Shocked, very concerned, a sense of grief, ignorance, inadequate, devastated that we hadn't known earlier
5. Before our daughter told us that she had been born into the wrong body, I used to watch TV programmes & see trans women around and think that this must be very real for people to put themselves through it, but I didn't have an in-depth understanding of the condition. When it was our child we were talking about, we grieved as a family for about 2 years, whilst supporting her through her (very tough) journey, which was not helped in any way at all by the Tavistock GID service. We worried for her mental health (several suicide attempts), her safety and her future.
6. –

7. I was mainly worried about his voice changing and not sounding or looking like the same person anymore.
8. Brought up with Christian values. Hard to accept that this was okay. Feelings of loss, losing a daughter, felt devalued as a parent when child changed names as this was the name we had chosen. Also felt a failure as a parent as why had we not noticed something was wrong and had we caused it?

Where did you go, if anywhere, to access more information about trans?
Eg. Websites, books, community organisations, parent services, social services (please state which ones)

1. Websites, books, mermaids
2. Books (all 2.5 available at the time), FTM Helpline (Stephen Whittle, 6-8pm on a Wednesday night)
3. –
4. The internet and GIRES, Depend and Mermaids
5. Library – only 1 book there, by Dr DiCeglie; however, this gave the Mermaids web site address at the back of the book. GP – he laughed and said ‘he’ll grow out of it’. Apart from the support from Mermaids, it was a very lonely road to travel and we felt very isolated and not understood by anyone in the caring professions at all
6. Websites, talking to son
7. None at the time – was 7 years ago. I accessed books and websites such as the Press for Change website and the White Book to do my dissertation which was on Nurses attitudes towards FtM trans people. The books used were – True Selves by Brown and Rounley and Transgendered Care by Israel and Tarver.
8. Information provided by son including books

Has there been anything missing with regards to any support offered? If so, what?

1. Agreement on treatment between organisations
2. Realignment issues were very scary. At the time the NHS were unwilling to help and I really needed one person to oversee the whole thing even if we did have to go private. I felt very responsible for supporting him through major surgery while not really having much of a

clue about the medical issues. Felt like being out on the open sea in a very leaky boat

3. Social services and councillor only discussed with young person and not with parents. We were excluded and our input not regarded. If things go wrong, the parents and siblings are the ones who pick up the pieces
4. Lack of response from the Welsh health service including GPs, psychiatrists and health commission
5. No support was offered to us, apart from by the lovely CAMHS Psychiatrist who was supporting our daughter. She was not a GID specialist, but she gave us more, as a family, than the under 18's GID service, which treated both our daughter and us with disdain, disrespect, lack of & understanding or empathy and a distinct lack of compassion – as parents, we were treated as the enemy; as if we were somehow forcing our child down this route. It was distressing for all of us, in an already terribly distressing situation, draining and frankly despicable. In desperation, and feeling utterly defeated, we actually withdrew our daughter from the NHS when she was 17 and saw a private specialist. She and I went to Thailand, when she was 18, so that Dr Suporn could do her gender correction surgery.
6. No
7. More information in mainstream society
8. Didn't have any organised support

What could have made or would make for a more positive difference?

1. See above!
2. Having somewhere authoritative and experienced to go around the medical issues. Access to an advocate who could help me battle with the NHS and avoid taking the local authority to court at a time when he [trans child] was very vulnerable. We emptied our savings instead.
3. Group discussions with parents, siblings and chosen friends and relatives included.
4. Treatment and recognition for our daughter.
5. One person working within the PCT who is familiar with GID issues in young people – someone representing the 'establishment' who is impartial, non-judgmental, non-critical, empathetic, compassionate and

supportive. Not having to travel to London for every appointment – we need local services for young people, run and worked in by people with experience and knowledge of the issues involved with GID in young people. Failing that, different staff, with an entirely different approach, at The Tavistock GID Trust. They (especially the endocrinologists) simply did not have even a basic understanding of the condition and the impact it has on the person unfortunate enough to have it and her family. Being able to see the ‘specialists’ more than once a quarter; the time lags, for a desperate adolescent whose body is changing at a rate of knots, is unbearable. In our case, it led to our daughter trying to hang herself twice, because she felt that nobody was listening and nothing was happening. A knowledgeable and supportive GP.

6. –
7. General training for the public so that it is a normal and accepted thing
8. Another parent to talk to in a similar situation