

THIS IS ME

Trans people in Norfolk
tell their stories*

www.norfolklgbtproject.co.uk



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Introductions

Welcome to "This is Me", a booklet about what it's like to be a trans person in Norfolk.*

We invited trans* people, as well as their friends and families, to fill out a short form telling us a little bit about themselves. We also asked them for their top tip for ensuring trans* people are treated with respect. Some people wrote tips for other trans* people; some wrote tips for the general public.

A key theme that emerged was that we all need to listen and learn, and to treat one another with respect.

That's what this booklet is all about – listening to people's stories, getting to know people as individuals, letting go of any preconceptions we have about what it means to be trans*.

The bulk of the booklet is the stories but we've also included a glossary of terms and details of some local and national support groups at the back.

Aedans STORY

My name is Aedan, and I grew up and transitioned in Norfolk. I currently live in London and I am about to qualify as a social worker.

I've been involved with the trans* communities for several years, running various youth groups and sexual health services. I've been very lucky in my transition, with great family and friends who have stuck by me, but not all trans* people get that kind of support.



TOP TIPS

LISTEN – It's pretty simple, but listen to what trans* people are telling you, and respect their wishes. If your friend Alfie tells you they want to be called Alice, then call her Alice. It can be really upsetting for trans* people to feel like their identities aren't being taken seriously, but just listening can make a huge difference.

I have lots of great people around me, and I love to go out, socialize and meet new people too. If I'm not spending time with my friends or at university, I like to work-out in the gym or be out and about exploring London.

Pixie's STORY

I have been post-op for 3 years. I transitioned when I was 18 and have been on hormones for 6 years.

I am a big dog lover and have a Labrador-Doberman cross called Nico who is 9 months old. I love make up and creative arts. I am a media creative artist and editor and do make up tutorials and offer trans* advice.

Pixie's top tip for ensuring trans people are treated with respect...*



TOP TIPS

Be confident, hold your head up high. Never disclose your gender identity to anyone who doesn't need to know. Doctors are the ones who need training with respect..

Sarah B's STORY

I work in sheltered housing and sought help in my 50s for gender issues. I transitioned in 2011.

I got a lot of support from those around me and because we were all prepared to learn, look and listen, my transition was a wonderful experience and fairly trouble free.

Having dealt with my gender issues it was time to deal with my sexuality.



It was expected that I would now want to fancy and have relationships with men, the reality is I don't and I am proud to say I am now a gay woman.

I have recently become a volunteer for a women's group called 'Women supporting Women' supporting those searching their true identity. I also sing in two choirs, one being the LGBT 'Sing with Pride' choir. I am fully accepted at all these groups.

Sarah's top tip for ensuring trans people are treated with respect...*



Bex's STORY

I was assigned and brought up as a female in a loving family. I remember vaguely from the age of 8 the feeling that something was missing, something made me different from all my friends and how my parents expected me to be.

I remember feeling lonely, frustrated that I couldn't seem to fit in, no matter how hard I tried.

I identified as a lesbian from the age of 14 and even though I was out and actively participating within the gay community, something continued to bubble away under the surface.

I chose to ignore my growing confusion regarding the disappointment and disgust I felt every time I looked in the mirror, until I could no longer do it alone and someone walked into my life whom I was able to share it with for the first time.

The most important thing about me now is that I am finally able to fit in, to feel like a complete person, in every area of my life and with all those who are important to me.

I am especially lucky to have a wife who loves me for me and sees me as no different despite my changing appearance.

The emotional battles between the grief of letting go of who I was and the exciting discovery of who I have always wanted to be, makes for a difficult roller coaster. I would say to anyone: don't be afraid to feel unsure, scared, sad and angry - all the feelings you would expect from letting go....equally embrace the feelings of relief, excitement, fulfilment and confidence that come from finding your true self.



TOP TIPS

Never assume that people know what you are experiencing and always be open to dialogue and discussion. Confrontations and misunderstanding are fuel for transphobia and discrimination.

Deanna's STORY

I transitioned at work with the support of my friends and my employer.

I remember how scared I was before I came out! But my world is better now - I am who I am and I'm not trying to fill what was, for me, the wrong gender role. Since then, the support and love of my friends has transformed my life.

Over the past few years I've worked alongside other volunteers to bring Norwich Pride to our community. If that has made a single person proud to be who they are, then I'm happy!

TOP TIPS

Don't ask a person about their gender. It's insulting!



Serana's STORY

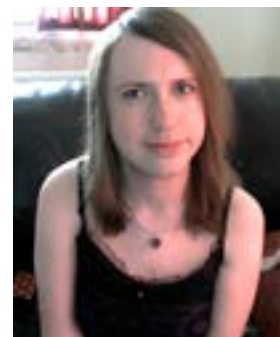
I am a trans female. I love gaming and socializing. I sometimes like to explain to people what being trans* or non-binary is, but it gets tiring quickly for me.*

Mostly I love chatting to other trans* people, because we have something in common already, and then we find out other things we might have in common like shared experiences or interests.

As someone who identifies as female, I don't always dress in female clothes. This can sometimes be a bit of a problem, as strangers often mis-gender me and use the wrong pronouns; whilst it irritates me, it may affect another trans* person's confidence and/or mental health.

TOP TIPS

Get their pronouns right!!



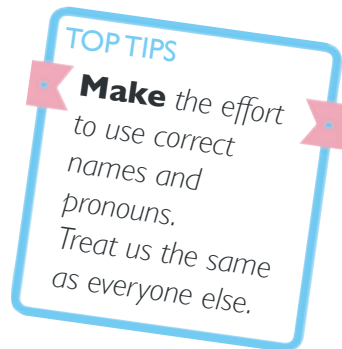
Luke's STORY

I'm 25 and I've been transitioning for 4 years.

I knew from a young age I was male, but didn't have the confidence and support to come out. Having accepting and supporting people around you makes all the difference. I'm now happier than I ever thought possible.

Everything in my life made so much more sense and fell into place once I was able to transition. I am so proud and happy to be who I am.

Luke's top tip for ensuring trans people are treated with respect...*



Amy's STORY

I have a very close friend who is trans and through him I have learnt a lot about the community.*

I have seen him experience a lot of prejudice, which has been very hard, but I have also seen a lot of support, some of it from unexpected quarters.

I find it very hard to understand that such a personal thing could be so contentious – it's not anyone else's business whether someone is cis or trans. I feel as if things are getting better though and the world is improving.

Amy's top tip for ensuring trans people are treated with respect...*



Poppy's STORY

I was born with Gender Dysphoria. I knew I was different, and at odds with the world from the moment I could tell the difference between night and day.

I am a poet, a writer and a survivor.
I have in my life time been hated, judged found guilty and condemned by my peers and family alike, stood tall been knocked down and stood up and knocked down again, but I have always believed in my right to exist.

I have had my share of breakdowns, attempted suicide, and lived in torment, all the usual symptoms of Gender Dysphoria. Faced my demons and walked my green mile. But in the end against all the odds, with the help of my children and grandchildren and my many friends I found the strength to stand tall and be counted, and came out at the age of 54.

I am passionate and absolutely committed to eradicating hate and bigotry in all its forms, and believe strongly in everyone's right to live a life free of discrimination and prejudice. I am scared of spiders and anything with more legs than there are days in the week, I have a weakness for ice-cream and my favorite colour is purple.



TOP TIPS

'Always hold your head high, and let no one doubt your right to exist'. 'Smile', be friendly and treat others with respect even if they don't treat you the same. Remember they are the ignorant ones not you, so do not stoop to their level with language which does not become a lady.

Mark's STORY

I am a gay trans man – I am not Mr Butch and never will be!*

There is a lot of pressure from within the trans* community, and also from the world at large, for trans* men to be “Real Men”, with all sorts of stereotypes attached – I'd rather be who I am.

Mark's top tip for ensuring trans people are treated with respect...*



TOP TIPS

Do not
impose your
own values and
expectations on
someone else!

Louise's STORY

Previously a very shy and self-conscious male, I transitioned 8 years ago.

I am lucky enough to be in long-term employment, which hasn't been affected by my transition, and may even have been enhanced by it.

Since transition I have flourished in a variety of circles including membership of professional women's groups, volunteer activities and leisure groups such as the local “MakerSpace” and motorcycle clubs. I am now the real me and making the most of life.

Louise's top tip for ensuring trans people are treated with respect...*

TOP TIPS

Treat yourself
with respect. If you
don't, how do you
expect others to? Be
proud of who you
are!

Sarah C's STORY

I am a proud intersex person.

I like people to refer to me as he, she or they. I was born part boy and part girl but I grew up as a girl. I went to university to study history which I loved and I now work for a bank.

TOP TIPS

Do not speculate on another person's gender identity. If you're unsure how to refer to someone, ask their preferred pronouns and name.

Natalie's STORY

I am full time in female role as MTF trans woman.

I work in further education and am the same height as the average supermodel.

TOP TIPS

Be equally respectful to other people.

Barbara's STORY

I'm a Gender Specialist Social Worker. I have been working with people questioning their gender since the 1970s.

I have worked with lots of wonderful people over the years. The biggest thing I've learnt is that we are all different. Some people, for whatever reason, may appear more different but everyone deserves to be treated with respect. People can't help who they are.

Barbara's top tip for ensuring trans people are treated with respect...*



TOP TIPS

To trans* people I say, know who you are and be who you believe yourself to be.

To everyone else I say – don't be frightened of difference; try to understand people.

Jen's STORY

I changed my name from Shawn to Jen in 2009 as a way of celebrating my gender-queer, or non-binary, gender identity.

I have always identified in this way but have often found it difficult to be myself in society as many people have very rigid ideas about what it is to be male or female.



Thankfully, there are also a lot of people who feel able to challenge these ideas and other gender identities are being accepted and embraced.

Jen's top tip for ensuring trans people are treated with respect...*

TOP TIPS

Please always remember that bullying is never acceptable. Your words, behavior and action can have a huge impact on others.

I was bullied from age 5 to 21 by other pupils and teachers at school, then by colleagues at work – and even by the general public and some family members for simply being a 'girly boy'. I won't ever get those years back – and that makes me very sad. Many trans* people, of all ages, have been affected by transphobia - if you know that somebody is being bullied you can take action to help them and make a big difference to that person's life.

Vicky's STORY

I'm 55 and happy to be part of the trans family.*

In fact I'm very happy to be a T.V. and started dressing fully 5 years ago. It's been a fun, fulfilling part of my life.

TOP TIPS

Be very confident of your self-beliefs.

Reid's STORY

I help run FTM Norfolk.

I'm disabled and have been on testosterone for 9 months. I'm married with a very supportive wife.

TOP TIPS

We need more education and awareness. The more people learn about gender identity, the better understanding there is. People need to see that non-binary is there and is important.

Anthea's STORY

I am 76. Until the age of 7 I attended girls' public schools – it was quite natural at that time as it was the end of the war.

In those days, one didn't understand such things as transgender and it was very difficult to find out.

My mother knew I wasn't quite normal and she was 97 before I came out to her. Later she said she had got to know Anthea better than the son she had previously known.

Anthea's top tip for ensuring trans people are treated with respect...*

TOP TIPS

Be humble. The people around you may find it very difficult to understand what you are doing.

Kⁱ & H^annah's STORY

I am a trans-man and have been for 4 years.

I have had chest surgery and am hoping for lower surgery soon.

I am Ki's partner and I have been through the whole journey to his happiness.

It has been an emotional rollercoaster that has been educational and stressful. I have grown myself through these challenges and found myself as well.



TOP TIPS

• **Ki:** Be confident in who you are and don't be too afraid of others. If you're happy as yourself, usually others are too.

Hannah: Listen & Learn.

Rⁱchard's STORY

I identify as a trans-man.

I am proud of who I am, and although life is hard sometimes, I am very happy with the changes I have experienced and they have made my life so much better. I am pretty open about my transition but not everyone is completely accepting and so I don't tell everyone as I reserve the option to be 'stealth' where I feel I need to for my comfort and safety.

Richard's top tip for ensuring trans people are treated with respect...*

TOP TIPS

• Ask the person what pronouns/title they would like to be referred to e.g. he/him, she/her, they/them. Also use their preferred name and don't ask or pester them to know their "birth" name. Don't ask about their genitals – that's just rude!

Glossary

*of terms used
in this booklet.*

Trans* and **Transgender** are umbrella terms referring to people whose gender identity (who they are on the inside) does not match the sex they were given at birth (what they look like on the outside). The asterisk refers to the fact that trans* can mean many things – transgender, transsexual, transvestite, gender-fluid, non- binary.....

Coming Out: When a person tells friends, family, co-workers etc about their trans* status.

Cis-gender: A term for non-trans* people i.e those whose (external) biological sex matches their (internal) gender identity.

FTM: A person who transitions from female to male. They might also refer to themselves as a trans man.

MTF: A person who transitions from male to female. They might also refer to themselves as a trans female or a trans woman.

Stealth: Living in your acquired gender without anyone knowing about your trans* identity.

Intersex: People who are born with the reproductive or sexual organs or chromosomes of both sexes.

T.V. is shorthand for transvestite - a person who wears clothes that are typically associated with the opposite gender; some people now prefer the term **Cross-Dresser**.

Gender Dysphoria: Medical diagnosis for the discomfort or distress caused by a mismatch between a person's gender identity (who they are on the inside) and their biological sex (what they look like on the outside).

Non-Binary: Challenging the idea that we can only ever be male or female. Recognising that gender is a spectrum. People who identify as gender-queer or gender-fluid might identify as both male and female or neither.

Transition: The process of changing one's physical appearance so that it comes in line with one's gender identity. It can take many forms, from changing the pronoun one uses, to changing the style of one's dress, to taking hormones and/or undergoing surgery.

Transsexual: Medical term for people who undergo gender-affirming surgery. Trans* people don't tend to use this term (no-one did in this booklet) as it sounds too clinical and like it's all about sex rather than identity.

Transphobia: Irrational fear, hatred, prejudice and abuse of trans* people and people who do not conform to traditional gender stereotypes.

Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDOR) is on 20th November. It's a day to remember those who have been killed as a result of transphobia. It was started in 1998 after the murder of Rita Hester.

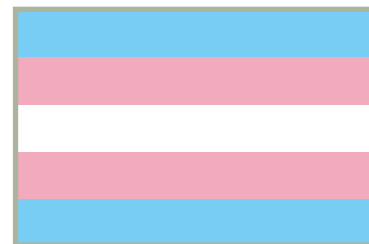
We launched this booklet on Transgender Day of Remembrance 2014 with a service at St John the Baptist Church, Norwich.

T transgender Pride Flag

The Transgender Pride flag is a symbol of pride, diversity and transgender rights. It was created by Monica Helms (a transgender woman) in 1999. She explains:

"The stripes at the top and bottom are light blue, the traditional color for baby boys. The stripes next to them are pink, the traditional color for baby girls. The stripe in the middle is white, for those who are intersex, transitioning or consider themselves having a neutral or undefined gender."

The pattern is such that no matter which way you fly it, it is always correct, signifying us finding correctness in our lives"



For more information and support

BLAH LGBT Youth Project

For young LGBT people aged between 13-25 living in Norfolk and Waveney.

Contact details:

info@blahyouth.co.uk
01603 219299
www.blahyouth.co.uk

Evolve

A monthly group run in Norwich by MAP for trans-gender, intersex, genderqueer and gender-questioning young people.

Contact details:

evolve@map.uk.net
01603 252746
www.map.uk.net

Oasis

A self-help and support group from the Barbara Ross Association for trans-people who need a place to meet.

Contact details:

www.transgender-advice.com/oasis.html

Norfolk Trans-Forum

A support group for trans women.

Contact details:

info@norfolklgbtproject.co.uk
01603 219299

FTM Norfolk

A support group for trans men.

Contact details:

FTMNorfolk@gmail.com
01603 219299

cliniQ

A free, holistic sexual health and well-being clinic for all trans* people, partners and friends. Based in London.
www.clinq.org.uk

GIRES

GIRES is the Gender Identity Research and Education Society. They provide information for trans* people, their families and professionals. They have a fabulous e-learning package that anyone can do – it includes three 20 minute modules.
www.gires.org.uk

Trans* Action

A biannual conference run by the Barbara Ross Association. We collected many of the stories in this booklet at the 2014 conference.
www.transaction2014.com

Providing support that is relevant to the health
and wellbeing needs of the LGBT community
in Norfolk and Waveney.



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