

CONCERNS FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS

THE GENDER
CENTRE
SERVICES FOR THE
TRANSGENDER AND
GENDER DIVERSE COMMUNITY INC



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lack of knowledge of gender challenges

Being trans and/or gender diverse is much more widely discussed in Australia though service providers coming in contact with transgender clients can feel they lack the knowledge in dealing sensitively or appropriately with transgender clients. Service Providers may feel that they do not know which questions are appropriate, which language is appropriate, and whether or not there is generally used language that may offend transgender clients.

There is a notable lack of services that can provide help and information to other service providers in dealing with clients with gender issues. The Gender Centre is attempting to network with a wider variety of health and welfare services throughout Australia. The Gender Centre staff are more than willing to discuss issues in dealing with transgender clients with other service providers should they require any assistance or information.

the challenge of bureaucracy and gender

There can be special challenges involved in dealing with transgender clients, challenges that go against workers' own perceptions of sex and gender. Bureaucracies are not set up to deal well with issues that are not obvious; they tend to work with cultural norms that are generally taken for granted. It can be difficult for service providers to work with clients who do not fit into "obvious" categories. Even the most basic forms require that the client fit into the standard cultural definitions of "male" and "female".

Issues of expectation and "special treatment"

Because there can be special issues involved in dealing with transgender clients, workers may have to deal with other clients and staff members' perceptions that these clients are receiving "special treatment". It can be necessary for agencies to think quite hard about where and how transgender clients "fit in" and to have to put quite a lot of thought into accommodating this client group. This has been an issue for many marginalised groups, and can create unnecessary resentments and misunderstandings in the workplace.

Another issue is that marginalised groups experiencing discrimination regularly expect to be treated with sensitivity and may take offence at language or procedures that other workers see as standard. This is understandable, but it may seem to workers that they are being expected to show "favouritism" towards a client by working with and upholding the client's sensitivities and preferences.

clients expectations of services

People who work in health and welfare agencies know that there are clients who really do have unrealistic expectations of services. There is really only so much any given service can actually do; however, many clients seeking help from agencies are hoping to find somebody to take responsibility from them or for them and can create trouble when this does not happen. This is a common worry that can apply to clients from many different groups. It is important to explain exactly what the agency can and cannot offer. If another agency is better suited to the client's needs, an explanation and referral is appropriate.

supporting transgender staff and clients

Service providers may feel uncomfortable or embarrassed by the attitudes and/or actions of other staff members or clients towards transgender people. However, they may feel that they cannot do anything about staff attitudes because it is not "their place" to do that or they worry about causing friction in the workplace. They may also feel that dealing with the attitudes of other clients may be seen as showing favouritism or advocating "special treatment". If a person in higher authority than the service provider has a negative attitude towards transgender clients, the service provider may be placed in an especially difficult position, with a duty to uphold the rights of the client mixed with concern for keeping their job or for harmony in the workplace. The Gender Centre can provide training if necessary.

dealing with multiple complex issues

Transgender people may present to agencies with a complex range of issues to deal with. In addition to gender diversity, there may be difficulties such as homelessness, criminality, ill-health, poverty, social isolation, drug and alcohol abuse, depression and others. Workers who are inexperienced in some of these areas may feel inadequate or feel that their service must be lacking. However, services in the health and welfare sectors are becoming increasingly specialised and consequently workers need to have an up-to date list of resources and referrals, rather than feeling that they should be able to sort out all issues on their own. All agencies deal with a limited range of issues, even though they recognise that where a range of issues exist each issue needs to be addressed. Many health and welfare agencies are over-accessed and under-resourced and thus there are time constraints that apply to clients.

"I can't deal with this"

There still tends to be a perception in health and welfare services that staff should be able to deal with "anything". This is an unfortunate attitude that does not guarantee that the client gets what is best for them. Workers, like clients, are people with histories and private lives that impact on their working lives (perhaps especially in welfare), and this tends to be forgotten. Workers in any occupation need to be able to define their own boundaries in relation to what they can and cannot deal with.

For some workers, there will be issues or people that they just cannot deal with. Everyone has "buttons" that can be pushed; everyone will find that there are people with whom their personalities will clash. In this case, it is certainly better to acknowledge that a particular client "pushes their buttons" and organise another worker to deal with the client, than to deal less well with the client. (This is differentiated from workers who simply refuse to work with certain clients or client groups because of prejudice).

psychological services
victim of crime advocacy
youth and family support
information and referrals
counselling
advocacy
groups
accomodation
street outreach
case management
speech pathology
needle syringe program
HIV and Hep C testing (DBS)

The Gender Centre is committed to developing and providing services and activities in NSW which enhance the ability of people exploring their gender identity to make informed choices. We offer a wide range of services to gender explorers, their partners, family and friends in NSW. We provide:

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