



# POLARE

MAGAZINE

autumn 2022  
Issue 118

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**OUR COVER:** Sammi Duckworth was 22 when she died suddenly of a gastro-intestinal haemorrhage. Her life was defined by a love of Sydney's Northern Beaches, and an incredible talent for capturing them in her work. Her images speak of the liminal spaces between wild nature and the messiness and frailty of the humans who wandered between shore and sand. Sammi's family have graciously allowed the Gender Centre to use her work in our re-launch of Polare Magazine.

The Gender Centre is committed to providing services and activities which enhance the ability of gender diverse people to live their best, most authentic lives. The Gender Centre is also committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of gender diverse people. We offer a wide range of services to gender diverse people and their partners, TGD families and organisations, as well as service providers. We aim to provide a high quality service which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.

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We are a free publication that depends upon community volunteers. Please consider donating to Polare to help us keep up the important work of promoting the voices of TGD people and families.

Donations can be made through the Gender Centre Website: [www.gendercentre.org.au](http://www.gendercentre.org.au)

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# WELCOME BACK

After more than three years on hold, Polare has returned to fill a much needed space. The Gender Centre's Eloise Brook discusses her vision for a new Polare.

## SECTION

Welcome back to Polare magazine.

I'd like to acknowledge the incredible work of our previous editor Katherine Cummings who ran the magazine for 18 years until 2019. Katherine passed away in January this year but her work lives on through her writing and in the spirit of Polare itself.

Polare had been continuously in print from September 1993 until 2019 and for decades was the main resource for the trans and gender community in NSW. Times have changed, and whereas in the past Polare was one of a few voices, in 2022 our community faces almost the opposite challenge: information overload. So much information and misinformation around the lives of TGD people and families bombards us from outside of the community that it's time started talking about the important things that effect us, the things

that empower and connect us, and the thing that unites us around our common, shared experiences.

Because of this we've stripped Polare back to its essential meaning.

Originally the word Polari was a secret, 19<sup>th</sup> century street-language, an *argot* spoken in the poorer parts of London. Fairground workers, criminals, sex workers and queer folk used *Polari* as a way to communicate safely and pass on important information. It was a language that united a range of different folk with a common shared experience, to communicate important information that under normal circumstances could be dangerous.

We want our rebooted Polare to do a similar thing. Three times a year we'll bring you important stories that reflect our commonly-held ideals, our shared conversations on relevant topics, and potential dangers. Things that affect the wellbeing of our TGD community. Stories that our community has asked to hear, want to learn about and need to be made aware of.

Our new Polare has a bigger vision too. While originally a NSW-focused publication, we are broadening our view to include all

of Australia. There is an important need for TGD people and families, TGD community focused organisations and TGD-led specialist services to be talking about issues that effect our wellbeing. TGD people frequently dismiss the idea that we might be a community or a temporary one at best. But I'm not sure how much of an option this is any more. Political currents nationally and internationally seem to be against us. We are more in the spotlight than we have ever been and our rights remain a hot topic. And yet, we are still being talked about more than spoken too. It's still a regular occurrence to have non-community allies called into translate our stories and needs on our behalf.

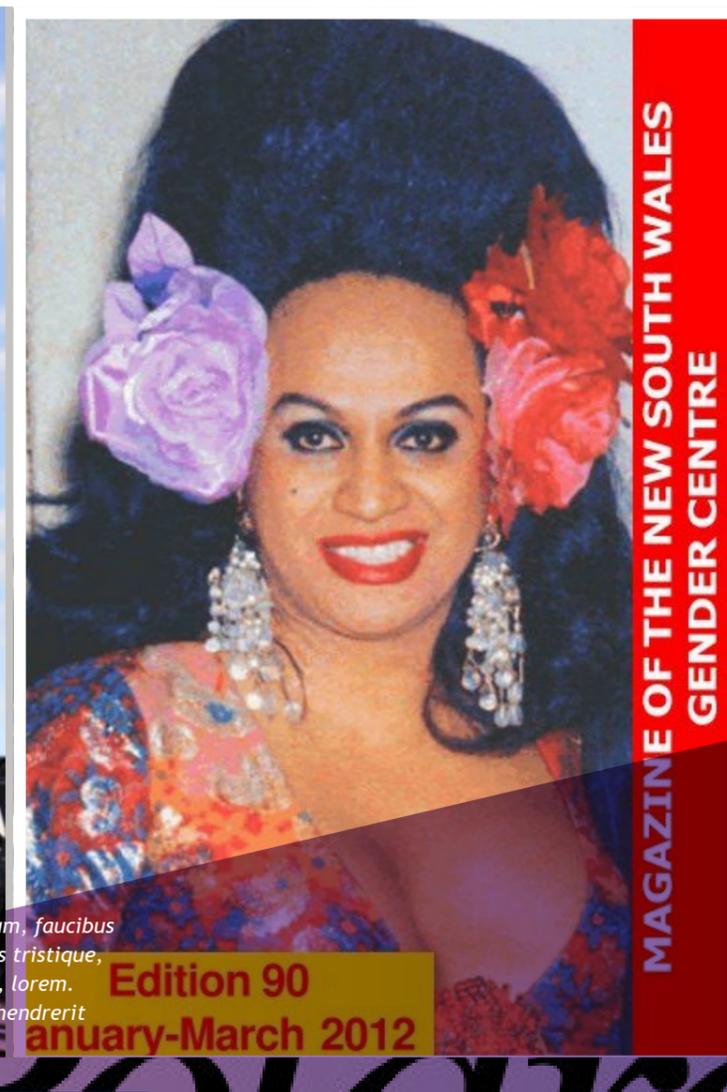
Autumn Polare touches on a collection of important issues for TGD folk and families. The state of TGD health, the power of regret, where to from here after the education amendment bill in NSW, how our young people need extra time to grow into themselves, how we push back against exclusive definitions of women, and the way voice work can give us power over our transition.



Polare Editor: Eloise Brook



Phoebe Hart



MAGAZINE OF THE NEW SOUTH WALES GENDER CENTRE



# GENDER CENTRE: 39 YEARS STRONG

Still confused on where to get the best support to transition? The Gender Centre provides over 90% of trans-specific services in NSW.



“There is a lot to learn on the journey of transition. No one transitions in isolation.”

**4. Finding your Cheer Squad**  
It's very important to find the right people to help you in your transition. Who do you admire? Who is it that you feel you can trust? Can you turn to family or friends? What about any other communities of support like school or even supportive cultural centres? This might seem like a contradiction but just because you come from a linguistically or culturally diverse background doesn't automatically mean that you can't find support. Remember too that while some of your cheer support maybe from the TGD community, you should always look wider and develop broader support. Every little bit helps!

**5. The Gender Centre** What makes the Gender Centre so unique? Front line, hands on support. Nobody else will work with you person to person to support your transition. Sometimes things can go wrong and you might need crisis accommodation or access to groups where you can meet other community members. Maybe you're in a rural or remote area. In all of these cases the Gender Centre is the best place to contact. Remember, you can find a lot information on the internet, but that information can change, or might not apply to where you are in transition or working towards being your best most authentic self.

Unsure what to do in transition?

If you are a NSW resident you can contact the Gender Centre on (02) 9519 7599 to get the best support and advice on your journey.

If you a TGD person looking to make connections with community please visit our website at [www.gendercentre.org.au](http://www.gendercentre.org.au) for information about our monthly groups, and the many other things we can help you with.

There are many challenges to a healthy, happy transition in Australia. While access to TGD information is more accessible then ever before, knowing the hows, wheres, whens and whys of your journey is still fundamentally important.

The Gender Centre has been a community led organisation, supporting trans and gender diverse (TGD) people on their journey since 1983 in all aspects of transitions. The staff at the Gender Centre support thousands of community members with a broad range of services every year.

Polare checked in with the GC's front line caseworkers and asked, "what's the most important thing that TGD folk need to know on their journey to becoming their authentic selves."

**1. Preparation and planning.** There are a lot of legal and medical aspects of transition that you have to undertake. Setting yourself goals and having a reasonable and achievable timeline is really important. Returning to your goals and having flexibility around them is key. Preparing for road blocks and stop signs is also a normal part of the journey. Taking time to process big changes is essential.

**2. Resilience Building** Maybe the most important resource that any TGD person or family needs to nurture is resilience. Your resilience effects everything about your transition. TGD people and families experience a lot of stress and anxiety. There are transphobic news articles everywhere, there are many anti-trans voices on social media, and politically too TGD people and families suffer abuse and discrimination. Bullying can be a serious problem in school for TGD children. TGD people frequently encounter situations of micro-aggression. That is, on a daily or even hourly basis ignorant people say mean or hurtful things, or act in ways that exclude or make us feel anxious.

TGD people often talk about how transition

can exacerbate feelings of exclusion and isolation. This frequently leads to TGD people removing themselves from situations where we feel exposed to cruelty and harm. Experiencing micro-aggressions even infrequently is bad for our health. Experiencing it on a daily basis drains us of resilience and our ability to cope. One of the best ways to build resilience is to work with a counsellor or psychologist who you trust and affirms your gender. This has nothing to do with having someone tell you if you're trans or not, and everything to do with processing the high levels of stress and anxiety that you experience and gets in the way of happiness.

**3. Finding the Right people to help you** While we are working towards becoming our best, most authentic selves it is important to understand that we are also working to unlearn those habits and conditioning of our assigned gender that we are unhappy with. Whether fem, masc or non-binary identifying, we all work to improve our ability to integrate as our authentic selves. This is not about being fem or masc enough, but about understanding any unconscious habits we may have from our assigned-at-birth gender that could hold us back or make us feel isolated.

# STATE OF PLAY

What should TGD health and wellbeing look like in a post COVID world? The rush towards online resources is a worrying trend away from essential face to face services.

Trans people are in a unique position. Decades of hard work from TGD advocates have led to historic improvements for the community. Our legal rights, public recognition of TGD people, and the ability to access basic services are as good as they have ever been. At the same time there are still so many areas of TGD health and wellbeing we're playing catch up on.

The incredible advocacy work our elders undertook was done by TGD people for TGD people. And though we have had invaluable allies along the way and built some incredible alliances with the broader Rainbow community, TGD people and families have always been best placed to advocate and find solutions for ourselves.

There are specialist needs that TGD people and families have fought for in the past and those needs continue to exist.

Within our rainbow alliance the 74% of Gay, Bi and Queer men, as well as 67% of Gay, Bi and Queer women consider themselves to be in good health. But only 50% of TGD people could say the same. When it comes to mental health 43-50% of same sex attracted folk report high or very high psychological distress compared to 70-75% of TGD and non-binary folk.

These figures help to illustrate that the TGD community continues to lag behind our

rainbow allies even as there is a greater push to include us under the rainbow umbrella health model.

The last five years has seen a move for LGBTQIA+ health services to be more trans inclusive. This is important, especially as these spaces have a history of not understanding the need of TGD people, not respecting our identities or simply ignoring us. But at the same time we have to be diligent about the worrying tendency for TGD specific health and wellbeing issues to be rolled into broader LGBTQIA+ services that lack sufficient experience or access to the full section of our community.

**“TGD people must be diligent in making sure that online resource support does not become the new normal.”**

This is particularly true of Black, indigenous, people of colour (BIPOC) trans folk, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) transfolk, as well as TGD families. They are an important part of our community but none of them fit easily under the umbrella. They also make up the most disadvantaged section of the TGD community. Each requires specialist, skilled services to be properly supported.

TGD families of course are of the highest concern.

Attempted suicide rates amongst TGD children and young people is twenty times the national average. That means gender affirming clinical care, but it also means psycho-social support services to help hold family's together around their TGD children. Clinical care that is not adequately balance by appropriate psycho-social support can aid in the accelerating breakdown of families. That environment of breakdown is where TGD children are most at risk of suicide.

Online training and online resources were useful during lockdown, but as COVID moves further into the rear view mirror, TGD people must be diligent in making sure that online resource support does not become the

new normal. The TGD community and families continue to battle daily with the mental health effects of isolation. Face-to-face support, TGD specialist services and trans-specific organisations engaging with community directly is the best way forward. We must ensure that what TGD specific services we do have are not lost in competition with LGBTQIA+ umbrella models. We must avoid the mental health hazards of TGD online resources without supporting trans-specific specialist services.

## THE POWER OF REGRET

Jesse Hooley discusses her life journey and the power of regret to shape her in positive ways.

*It is vitally important that trans and gender diverse people acknowledge and process their regret as part of the normal cycle of self-reflection, self-understanding and building resilience. Regret is a powerful catalyst for strength and wisdom.*

Years ago, I was involved in lobbying parliament to improve TGD lives.

I came out as a transwoman in the late 80s. I was happy, passed okay, I finished a university degree but couldn't get a job despite outstanding results. I became involved in lobbying to improve TGD lives. Research I did with NSW Health assisted the passage of the Transgender Anti Discrimination Bill (1996) through NSW parliament. I completed a PhD on transsexual identity. Gender reassignment surgery beckoned.

Yet some research I conducted showed 11 out of a sample of 21 transsexuals reported negative or disastrous outcomes of their gender affirmation surgery (GAS). Distressed by their regret, I pursued the issue to no avail.

This was also a time when the trans community was in conflict about whether medical or social issues deserved priority. I became exhausted and was 'burnt out'.

Coming home from a venue one night a few years later, I was assaulted. It was devastating. Afterwards, I struggled to leave the house. I policed what I wore, and I frequently dissociated. To everyone's shock, it led me to abandon my trans identity. I explained nothing. I kept my gay friends but hid from trans people. I tried to be 'normal'. Years passed with barely a conscious thought for my prior life.

I threw myself into work and became a landscape painter. Solitude gave way to loneliness, depression, moodiness, and increasing dissociation; I was emotionally struck dumb. 'I may as well be dead', I said to friends. But nobody understood my existential crisis, including me.

## “REGRET IS OFTEN OUR UNREFLECTED ACCEPTANCE OF THE WAY SOCIETY AND FAMILY EXPECT US TO BE.”

I was Para-suicidal, I found a therapist who reassured me that dissociation and trauma apart, I am a typical neurotic who needed to alter my patterns of interaction with other people. I decided to trust him and disclosed everything of my past. He described my art as my only safe place post de-transition; I had poured my desire to be a woman into prolific painting.

Vivid dreams led to profound self-recognition. I cried bitterly. I recovered. I experienced the joy of returning from repression.

Trauma makes you feel like 'no body'. So I focused on body work. I practiced yoga. I reclaimed my womanly self. I found trans friends. I had deeply lacked a sense of belonging, but being candid and trusting my therapist had been key to changing things.

While I recovered, painful regrets about de-transitioning came up. I had deceived myself. I lamented those lost years. Both professional advice to process de-transition, and affordable therapy for previous traumas, amnesia and dissociation had been essential but at the time unavailable.

But could I have made another decision?

Given my level of poverty, the life changing assault I experienced, and various traumas, as well as the research I'd undertaken on regret about GAS in the 90s, de-transitioning seemed a reasonable response in hindsight.

But I had to learn to forgive myself for fleeing. I had to acknowledge that I lost precious time; as Milan Kundera says, "Human life occurs only once, and the reason that we cannot determine which of our decisions are good and which bad, is that in a given situation, we can only make one" (1984, p.241). The philosopher Kirkegaard said, 'I see it all perfectly; there are two possible situations - one can either do this or that. My honest opinion and my friendly advice is this: do it or do not do it - you will regret both'.

What we can do however is foster skills and nurture our own resilience.

DBT STOP skills can help following distressing experiences.

# DIALECTICAL BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY

1. STOP

Stop, freeze, and name the emotion.

2. TAKE A STEP BACK

Take a step back, breathe deeply.

3. OBSERVE

Observe what's happening, don't be impulsive, gather relevant facts to

4. PROCEED MINDFULLY

Proceed mindfully, ask yourself what you want, stay calm, consider options for action.

1. Stop, freeze, and name the emotion.
2. Take a step back, breathe deeply.
3. Observe what's happening, don't be impulsive, gather relevant facts to understand and think about options.
4. Proceed mindfully, ask yourself what you want, stay calm, consider options for action.

The best response to those who dislike you? Give off your most positive energy, ignore negative reactions and remember, they have the problem, not you.

Some may 'pass' easier than others, but as a group we must support each other and commit to shifting ignorant, bigoted, cruel social attitudes which create regrets about transitioning. In Australia,

prejudicial social interactions and employer attitudes, and lack of adequate public health provision for trans people all produce daily struggle or unhappy times. The challenge of aged care is stark, given the non-existence of TGD specific aged care facilities. Poverty needs to be addressed urgently.

An accepting social and political climate is essential to foster respectful treatment of our community. Mistreatment by others is created by cultural beliefs about what people regard as an authentic gender.

People's sense of authenticity however, 'can only come from the senses of authenticity in a culture' (Phillips 1994). Until change in public understandings legitimises *our authenticity as we all are*, and creates acceptance, regrets must be met with courage and skill. To alleviate discrimination, we must change the culture and attain greater TGD rights.

Dr. Jesse Hooley

Two weeks ago, NSW's TGD families and allies breathed a huge sigh of relief after One Nation's Education (Parental Rights) Legislation Amendment 2020 was rejected in the NSW Parliament. Liz Ceissman talks to Polare about where to from here.

# Role Call

## SPECIAL EDITION

While a victory for trans families and community, TGD children will almost certainly be at the centre of future public standoffs around inclusive education in NSW.

On one side of that standoff, conservative media frequently focuses on the rights of parents to decide what their children learn, or argues the inappropriateness of 'sex and gender' education for school students and students who come from religious backgrounds.

On the other, transgender and gender diverse students face

hurdles to accessing education. TGD students still feel unsafe at school and absent themselves from the classroom rather than face bullying and ostracism from other students, or resistance and even refusal from schools themselves.

It's a standoff with consequences. Even before the attempted Parents Rights bill, transgender families faced the burden of caring for isolated, vulnerable and traumatised children who continue to fall further and further behind.

### So how long has the Gender Centre been supporting TGD families in schools in NSW?

*Since 2010. About one school a week. We're the service that NSW Education uses as its main referral point.*

### What does that usually look like?

*Parents contact the school wanting to get the best support for their child. The Gender Centre gets involved when and only with the permission of the parents of the TGD child and the school. Our goal is to make sure that a TGD child gets the same access to education as every other child.*

### And is that a problem in NSW schools?

*It's a combination of a lot of things. TGD kids can face risk of bullying. But helping highly anxious parents can be one of the first steps to improving things for children. Unlike the common stereotype that parents are unsupportive of their trans and gender diverse child, the reality is usually the opposite: almost all parents are fiercely protective of their child and will fight the school to get the best outcome they can. My job is frequently about finding the right balance between a child wanting to maintain space to be themselves and not be singled out as different from their peers, a parent pushing to make changes to a school to actively and visibly prioritise the needs of their TGD child, and also supporting staff to make sure that the school is promoting respect and inclusion so all students understand the importance of equity and respect.*

### RIDE WITH IT!

*For over ten years the Gender Centre has been working in NSW schools to support TGD students with a focus on good citizenship. The latest version of the GC's RIDE model poster.*

You don't have to follow other people's beliefs or identities

# RESPECT

But you do have to **respect** the right of others

# INCLUSION

to have their beliefs, values and identities **included**

# DIGNITY

in a meaningful way, that upholds **dignity**

# EQUALITY

for all and values each of us as **equal**

THE GENDER CENTRE INC  
www.gendercentre.org.au

for more information on the Gender Centre's RIDE school program visit: [www.gendercentre.org.au](http://www.gendercentre.org.au)

*For example, some parents feel the necessity of ensuring schools make an announcement on assembly on the first day of term about their child's transition. Such a request is fraught with significant risk and is not best practice. Schools in recognising the risks associated with public disclosure of a young person's personal information refer the parent to meet with the Gender Centre. The outcome is that there is no announcement on assembly. The young person's privacy needs to be respected. Their introduction into the*

*school setting is managed so that the young person is comfortable and empowered, and at the same time exposure to strangers of their unique and personal journey is minimised. This avoids such issues as the TGD student being singled out as the hot topic at school. By having the school introduction at the commencement of term, the school has the maximum amount of time to establish and model respectful and inclusive behaviours for students. It allows the school time to educate the whole of school community about*

## Role Call:

*Being transgender and/or gender diverse is not the only identity/ diversity in school.*

*Religion, race, disability and sexuality are also important to recognise as well.*

**“There is no announcement on assembly. A young person’s privacy needs to be respected.”**

*inclusion and respectful behaviour while addressing any push back from parents of other students (who are recognised as part of the school community as well).*

**Can you be more specific about how the Gender Centre approach these issues?**

*We developed and use the RIDE model. Respect, Inclusivity, Dignity and Equity, and a focus on*

*good citizenship. That means recognising that every student in school has the right to receive an education free from discrimination or exclusion. Being transgender and/or gender diverse is not the only identity/ diversity in society after all. Religion, race, disability and sexuality are some others. Good citizenship involves being respectful of the right of others to be themselves. That doesn’t mean you have to agree with*

*anyone else about who they are. But it does mean you don’t get to have your own diversity valued more highly than another, or use other people’s difference as a source of exclusion.*

**One of the points of contention that was the foundation of the recent Parental Right’s Bill was that parents must have the final say on what their children get taught. In other words, no teaching sex and gender in**

**schools. The bill also focused on the fear that some parents have that school staff are supporting transition, name change, pronoun choice, without parents being made aware.**

*Firstly, RIDE isn’t about teaching sex and gender. It’s about removing inappropriate questions and bullying based on diversity. For schools it’s about ensuring that the school knows how to avoid creating hurdles to equity.*

**Can you give an example?**

*Yes. Recently, I supported a family and school where a trans child was being bullied by another child. The child doing the bullying happened to be from a religious diversity which expressed a lack of acceptance of TGD people. However, the RIDE model is not about acceptance, it’s about good citizenship. A community, a school (like a workplace) depends on each individual respecting other’s right to education, inclusion and equity. The school was able to then communicate with the family of the student doing the bullying to make it clear about what the expectations of the school community was.*

**What does the future of RIDE look like?**

*RIDE came about because of the Gender Centre’s support programs for families. We are continually referred by NSW*

# TEENAGER, INTERRUPTED

**Candy Jacques** is the senior counsellor at the NSW Gender Centre. She chats with Polare about some of the unique issues that parents need to consider to support their TGD young person through transitioning and their late teenage years/early adulthood.

**Street Rally - Robert Knapman**

*Young people photographed at a recent protest in support of TGD rites.*

Despite what popular culture shows us, puberty and our teenage years are not the same thing. Teenagehood (13-19) and puberty overlap for approximately four years, but the end of our teens is usually that time when older kids/new adults explore independence and are test-driving adulthood. It is also frequently a time of firsts when a lot of us start dating and/or explore our sexual identity. Add to that the end of high school, learning to drive cars, flirting with alcohol and other drugs and tasting the consequences of no longer being minors. Squeezed between puberty and adulthood it's easy to romanticise about or even forget what a profound time this is.

As parents and carers we want to see our young people go through a gentle, gradual and well-supported late teenagehood. In psychological terms this is called individuation, and it means the process of moving away from the family unit and

**“LATE TEENAGEHOOD CAN BE VERY DIFFERENT FOR TGD YOUNG PEOPLE.”**

developing an independent identity. Parents frequently talk about the period from 15 or 16 when their children “disappear.” But ideally, this is a young person experimenting with freedom and trying to re-establish relationships with their family unit as an adult rather than as a dependent child.

But it's important to understand that individuation and late teenagehood can be very different for transgender and gender diverse young people.

With gender exploring young people we see a similar “disappearance” but these young people are most likely learning, reassessing and unlearning everything about being read or labelled as their assigned gender, while working out how to navigate the world as a new authentic self.

## “Imagine if you were given now, the space you had at 13 to explore who you are. That’s what TGD young people need.”

So from the time a gender exploring young person begins to question their gender identity to the time that they begin to step into the world and be seen as their authentic self, those late teen developmental milestones are put on hold.

Parents will tell you that their gender exploring children are literally stepping out of the world. Disengaging, often hiding in their bedrooms. Not socialising but spending a predominant amount of time either on social media or the internet.

Measured against what we widely understand as late teenagehood and early adulthood, this can cause anxiety in parents and carers. After all, there is a tendency to compare this phase and the usual social milestones that go with it (i.e. social interactions, parties, finishing school events and starting universities, bringing home partners or starting new jobs) as “normal” for this age group. But, gender exploring young people frequently use the internet as a “safe” way to do similar activities. We know as parents that the internet is not safe and that there are risks. However, it is the anonymity and ability to withdraw that is of such benefit for gender exploring young people in crafting identity and testing out ways of being their authentic self.

So how can parents help?

Firstly, it’s important to acknowledge that your TGD/ gender exploring young person is most likely doing this phase of their life differently from the way that you did it. That’s okay.

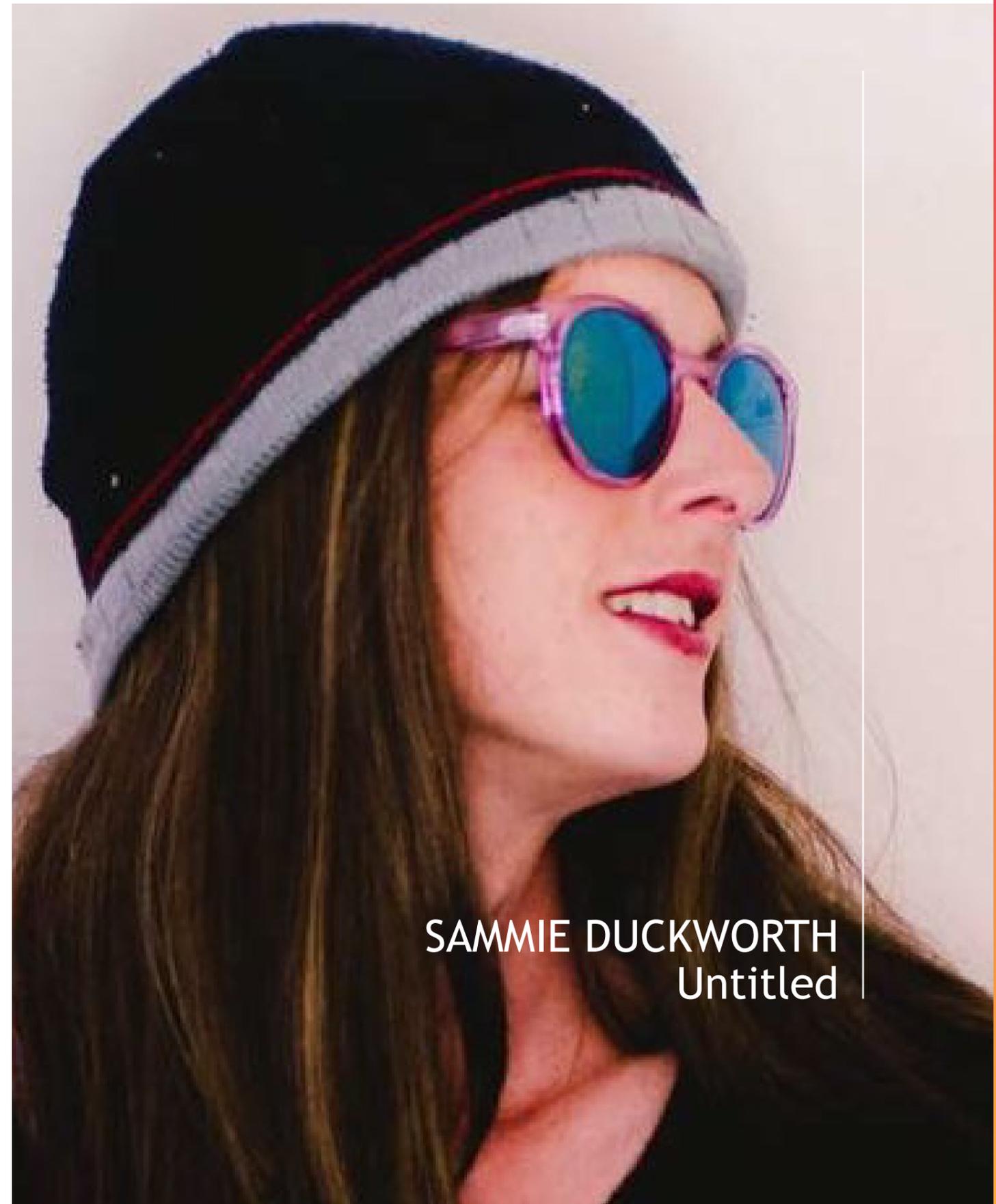
Secondly, while its important to foster and encourage individuation in your young person, don’t be surprised if they arrive later at some of their milestones. Exploring a new gender identity involves learning new skills and unlearning old ones and that takes up a huge part of their focus. While late-teens/ early-adults are frequently encouraged to engage in the work force or study, be mindful that your gender explorer/TGD young person might not be ready just yet.

You can help this by engaging with your young person in aspects of their gender identity. Have a TGD daughter? Consider a girl’s night in watching something you both like on the couch, doing mani/pedis, or practicing makeup. For TGD Masc young people safel engaging in men’s spaces or what’s considered typically male outings or activities with an appropriate parent, relative or carer can be incredibly affirming. Essentially, the gendered activities you enjoy

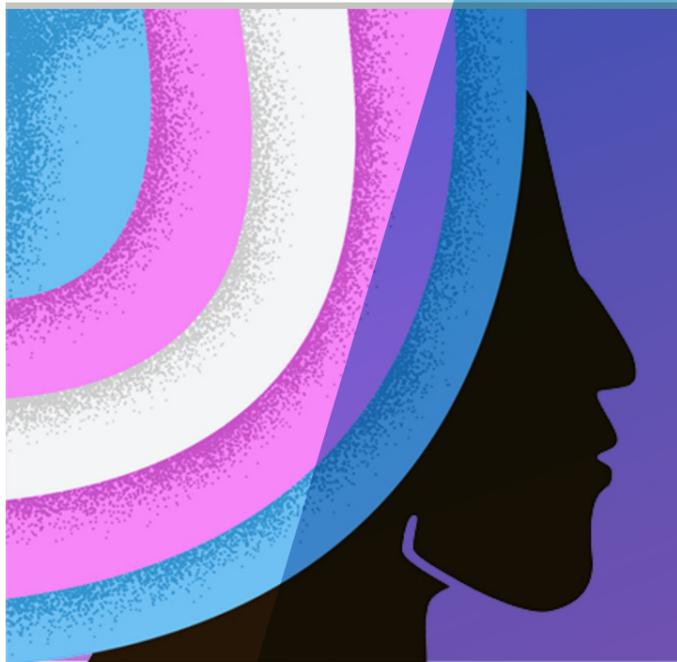
can represent a great opportunity to engage with your gender exploring/TGD young person and build connection and resilience.

And finally, by supporting your young person in feeling more affirmed in their gender you are helping to build their resilience. Resilience is really the most important measure of how a young person is ready to move on through the various stages of their life.

*If you’d like to discuss issues of resilience in your child, or how to support them in becoming their authentic selves, please check out the GCs website or contact the GC to discuss counselling support.*



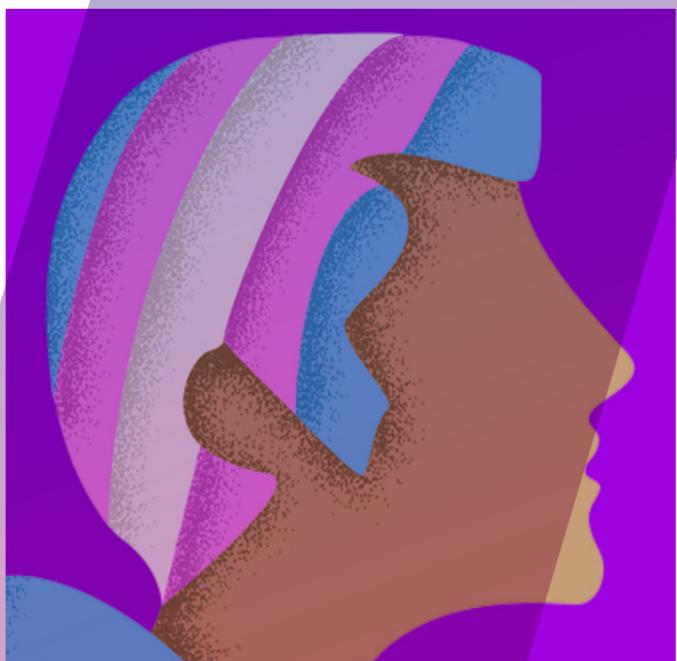
SAMMIE DUCKWORTH  
Untitled



# The Transplainer

## Woman: adult, female

SECTION



To improve the mental health of the TGD community each edition of Polare will contain a breakdown of some of the larger, more problematic lines of argument that are being put forward in the media around the legitimacy of trans and gender diverse people. This edition we look at one of the central arguments put forward by anti-trans voices around defining women.

Anti-trans advocates have been trying to exclude trans women by using dictionaries for the last few years.

Arguments around how we should define 'woman' and 'female' harkens back to a mid 2010s stoush over Harper Collins' definition of *Female*, [here](#). In 2018 a UK billboard version of defining 'woman' was covered [here](#). And more recently on [international Women's Day 2022](#). During the recent confirmation hearing for [Ketanji Brown Jackson](#) to the supreme court, she was asked to define woman in an attempted 'gotcha' moment.

Anti-TGD activist are trying hard to present inclusive definitions of women as an outrage to common sense, while at the same time dog-whistling back to the good old days when things were supposedly more sensible and reasonable.

Dictionary definitions still carry a certain gravitas when it comes to defining things. But that's complicated too. The older a dictionary is the more likely it is to reflect the sexism and racism of its time. Dictionary publishers have spent a considerable amount of time reviewing the unconscious

**“As if the complicated, difficult issue of sexual violence against women is a ‘One trauma to rule them all’ zero sum game.”**

bias in their dictionaries that can offer discriminatory ideas as authoritative. That still has consequences for minority groups in various settings, but in particular when it comes to the law and the legal system.

Despite all this, the **Woman: adult, female** argument is purposefully vague. Polare reviewed around twenty different dictionary entries looking at definitions of the word **woman**. Each was exactly the same or barely a variation on **Woman: adult, female**. And in 2022 that isn't as overtly against TGD women as it might seem. Each of the words in **Woman: adult, female** are applicable to all women - even the word female.

While it's true that *female* has been used to define sex characteristics in past and present editions, the majority of entries Polare reviewed had been updated to include *women* or *girl* as the second or third line entry of the definition *female* (if not the first). As dictionary definitions *include* all the variants in their lists (i.e. words can have more than one meaning or are nuanced), at least on paper *female* might not be such a contentious word for TGD folk going forward.

In a lot of ways it would seem a more straightforward argument for anti-TGD activists to sloganeer for **Female: human, woman or girl** rather than **Woman: adult, female** to exclude TGD women. A “let's return to sex characteristic basics,” would most likely have supporters.

Just not amongst most women.

One of the core tenets of feminism is the struggle to define women by more than our ability to bear children. The last thing anti-trans activists want to do is to draw the wider feminist community back into *that* argument. At least overtly. Promoting reproduction as the core characteristic of what defines a woman would be a return to the dark ages for all women.

After all, feminism has been having this fight with itself for decades. Women of colour were excluded from the suffrage movement in the 1920s. The late 60s saw feminists decry the Lavender Menace. Indigenous women, including in Australia, have struggled to be recognised in feminism even to this day. TGD women are simply the latest and recently most visible subgroup of women to run the gauntlet.

As in the past anti-trans activists are trying to continue a long tradition in feminism of policing gender lines and excluding those who don't meet gendered expectations. Exclusion dependant on a woman's race, sexuality, indigenous status and/or TGD identity always disproportionately harms some types of women more than others.

How, in terms of TGD women, is it possible to exclude those of us whose trans status is not evident except maybe in documentation?

The answer is, you can't.

Thus trans, cis, non-binary people and children who don't conform to gendered expectation are the ones who are far more likely to face violence and confrontation in bathrooms and change rooms. They face greater public violence. They are more likely to be refused services. They experience discrimination on public transport, at the shops or at the doctors. They get singled out for exclusion in sports teams and events. They experience poorer mental health outcomes. It is an extraordinary reflection of the

breakdown in trust in media and politics that a deeply cynical slogan like **Woman: Adult, female** continues to hold sway by asking cis-women and their allies to sidestep argument and reasonableness and buy into the panic that TGD women and girls who don't conform to gendered expectations are sexual predators. As if the complicated, difficult issue of sexual violence against women is a “One trauma to rule them all” zero sum game.

So here's a better definition for us to use to reframe the argument. And yes feel free to use it in scrabble. It's dictionary certified.

## Womaned (v);

- 1. A person who is subjected to misogynistic discrimination by society.**
- 2. A person who answers yes to the question, posed publicly or in the innermost realms of thought, as to whether they're a woman or not.**
- 3. The intersection of these two conditions arguably marks the status of belonging to womanhood in ways that do not depend on reproductive biology.**

(Thanks to the amazing Susan Stryker for this beautiful and authoritative [definition](#).)

# BRINGING OUT YOUR INNER VOICE

Speech Pathologist  
**Claire Barbagallo**  
discusses the power of practice to give TGD people empowerment and wellbeing.

Whether it's ordering coffee at your local, saying "Hi" to the bus driver, chatting over the phone with a friend or sharing your ideas at work - these are all moments, big and small, when we connect with the world. These are also the moments when we can be the most disconnected from ourselves, especially when it comes to how we feel about our voice.

Perhaps you've already begun voice and communication training, or you've thought about it from time to time. Maybe you feel like it's something out of your comfort zone. Voice and communication training can feel like climbing a mountain, but rest assured, with a little support, and by breaking it into stages, you can and will find your voice. Taking

**"VOICE BEGINS AND ENDS WITH AWARENESS"**

*"Voice training is a very self-driven act of gender affirmation, where you choose what exactly you want to achieve, and that feels very relieving after being put through an unfamiliar, uncontrollable puberty."*

*Lisa (she/her, 20)*

*"Training your voice is possible and within your reach."*

the time to understand how your voice works is a non-negotiable when it comes to improvement. Skipping this step is a bit like baking a cake without the recipe. You'll probably get there eventually, but it will take a lot longer, be frustrating and there won't be any guarantee things will turn out the way you want them to.

Our voice is a very intricate part of our body, connected to our emotions and the way we interact and connect with others. It is quite a complex system, which consists of many components: breath, resonance, pitch, intonation, articulation, and language. The amount in which you work on each of these components will depend on your individual voice goals.

As with choosing a cake recipe, the outcome of voice work depends on what you need, what your personal tastes are, and what resources you have. Often voice and communication training means that you get an array of strategies, and you then get to decide which ones work for you. There is no-one-size-fits-all approach. Progressing with your voice goals means learning a set of vocal strategies and improving your vocal awareness. For instance, you will learn to reflect on what you hear in your voice quality and what you feel happening inside your body. You will listen for smoothness in your voice, a higher or lower pitch or perhaps focus on a resonance that is more forward and brighter than you're used to. You may be feeling for a strong breath to power your voice, or more vibration in your head or chest. You will almost always have to

work on relaxing tightness or tension and getting better at not pushing or straining.

Awareness is very important, and something you can absolutely improve. Cultivating awareness is essential to gaining more control over your voice.

*"Voice training was a logical step in my transition. I knew I wasn't satisfied with my voice, and I knew I needed to take steps to improve it in order to feel happy and confident with myself."*

*(Mia, she/her)*

Consistency is key.

Just like learning to drive or learning a new instrument, voice is a skill that you can learn. We know that consistent practice of new skills helps our brain build neural pathways. Those pathways lead to new skills feeling more and more familiar and comfortable. In fact, skills that once were hard soon feel less like effort and more like habit. It is through consistency that skills in voice and communication simply mould into your everyday routine - like brushing your teeth!

**Allow space for mistakes.**

As Brené Brown says, “You can’t get to courage without rumbling with vulnerability”. Engaging in voice and communication training means facing your fears. Yes, you will indeed be making funny sounds with your voice coach or speech therapist, practicing the exercises on your way to work and using your new voice in public. Making mistakes is a part of the process. Along the way, it may get scary, frustrating, exhausting and there may be moments when you want to give up. It’s these times when you want to bring yourself back to your “why.” Why is this important to you? Why is this going to improve your life? How will you feel when you’ve found your voice? It is through allowing space for mistakes, that you can create space to breathe, make funny sounds and move towards your voice goals, and hey, maybe even enjoy the process!

*A special thanks to Mia (transwoman who attends Finding Your Voice Therapy) and Eloise (The Gender Centre) for collaborating on this article with me.*

*“I have voice dysphoria, but don't want to go in hormones in the foreseeable future, so once I found out I could alter my voice to fit my identity without HRT, I knew I couldn't pass up the opportunity. It's the perfect middle ground for me; I can reduce my dysphoria without the unwanted side effects.”*

**(Voice client, They/Them)**

*“My mantra has been “something is better than nothing.” My voice has improved incrementally over the time I have been voice training, in my opinion, this is largely owing to regular practice. On the days where I don't feel like voice training, or anything else for that matter, I will do something, anything, even if it is only warm up exercises, it all adds to my progress towards my goals. Rome wasn't built in a day and neither are our voices.”*

**(Voice client, She/her )**

psychological services  
victim of crime advocacy  
youth and family support  
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advocacy  
groups  
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needle syringe program  
HIV and Hep C testing (DBS)

**THE GENDER CENTRE**  
**INC**  
services for the  
transgender community

**phone:**

**(02) 9569 2366**

**(02) 9519 7599**

# IN MEMORIUM:

*I am sincerely sorry to hear of Katherine Cummings' passing, I consider Katherine not only my peer and elder but also my friend.*

*Katherine was born in Scotland in 1935, and transitioned in 1986, Katherine was an elder of all transgender women and pioneered traditions that we observe today such as the Transgender Day of Remembrance observance in Sydney on behalf of the Gender Centre beginning in 2003.*

*The power of the word was Katherine's friend, she was a brilliant writer who successfully published several books, and served as the editor of Polare Magazine, a monthly trans magazine - in itself ahead of it's time also winning the Australian Human Rights Award for Non-Fiction for her autobiography Katherine's Diary in the early nineties Katherine was always an outspoken activist of the Transgender Community Katherine and worked for The Gender Centre for almost 20 years in many roles beginning in 2001.*

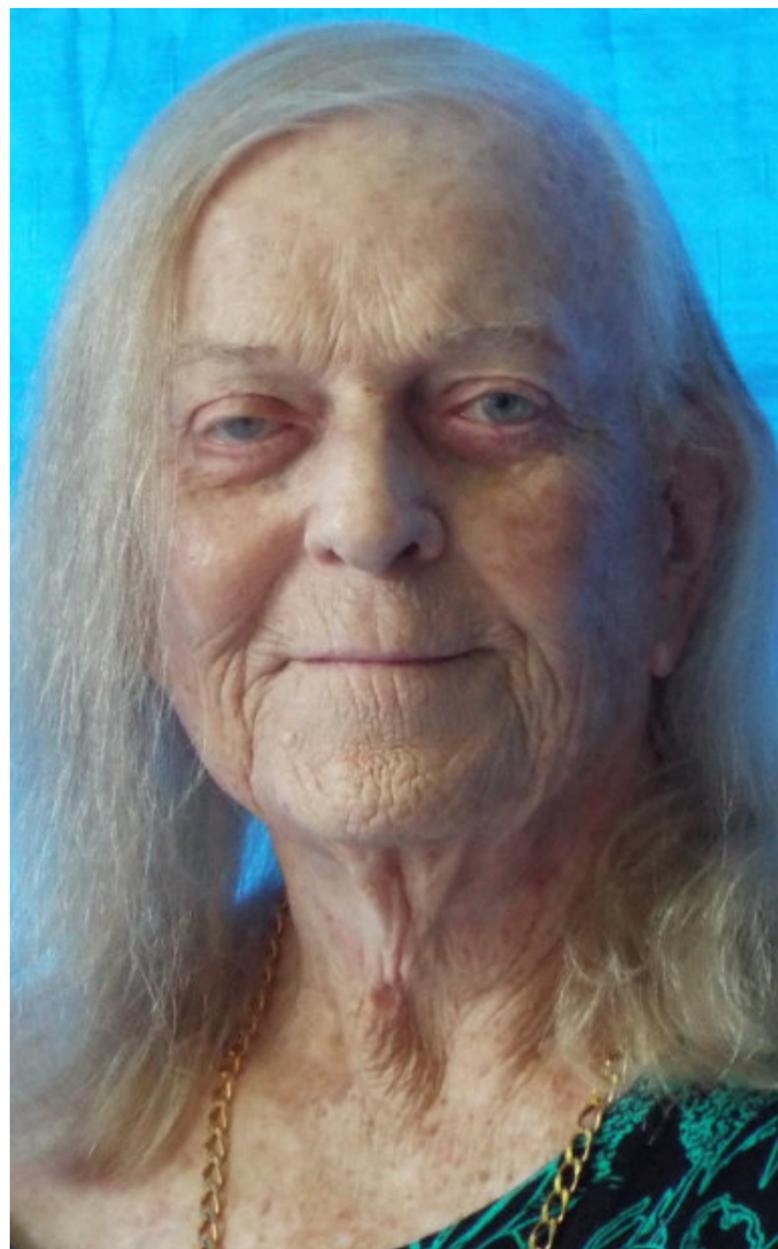
*Katherine was born in Scotland in 1935, and transitioned in 1986, winning the Australian Human Rights Award for Non-Fiction for her autobiography Katherine's Diary in the early 1990s.*

*When I asked Katherine about her hopes for the future Katherine replied "I hope for the day when trans is accepted as a simple variation from the norm, to be neither condemned nor praised. I hope that research will continue into gender and sex diversity and that when truths are discovered they will be publicised, not concealed." She also said "Do your best to leave the world a little better than you found it. Remember that you have responsibilities as well as rights and that the aim should be to*

*centre the pendulum, not to push it far over to the other side. Remember that trans is not a society but a small segment of society as a whole and that we should aim to make it fit into society, not stand out from it." I will always remember Katherine with great respect and reverence as my elder and my friend.*

Katherine Wolfgramme

**“A brilliant writer and winner of the Australian Human Rights Award for Non-fiction.”**



**VALE Catherine Cummings**  
**1935-2022**

# CONTRIBUTORS



**1. JESSE HOOLEY**

*Advocate, academic and a proud campaigner for TGD rights since the 1990s. Jesse was one of a handful of extraordinary TGD pioneers who changed NSW and Australian law for the TGD community.*



**2. ROBERT KNAPMAN**

*I focus on what I'm visually drawn to and what's important to me. This includes LGBTIQ+ issues, environmental change, social documentary work. I'm strongly influenced by human rights and social justice. I get a buzz if I can connect with an honesty in my photography work and communicate a contemporary message.*



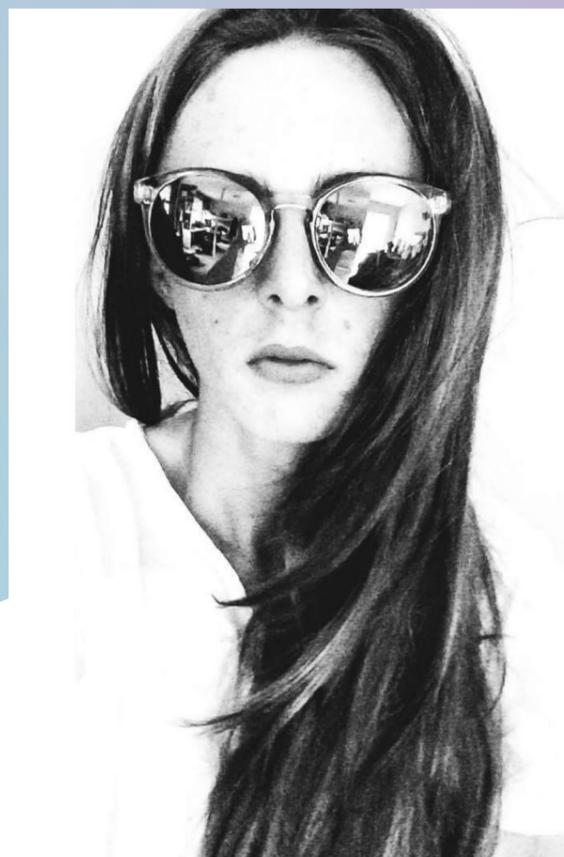
**3. CANDY JACQUES**

*Candy is the senior counsellor at the Gender Centre and works to help TGD folk and families. She is all about building resilience and insight through transition and beyond.*



**4. CLAIRE BARBAGALLO**

*Joined the Queensland Children's Gender Service in Brisbane during its very beginnings and set up the Speech Pathology role. It was around this time she established a private practice, Finding Your Voice Therapy. I now work in my private practice full time and continue to support trans, gender diverse and non binary young people and adults. Find Claire at: [findingyourvoicetherapy.com.au](http://findingyourvoicetherapy.com.au)*



**SAMMIE DUCKWORTH**

Sammie Duckworth was a talented visual artist and transwoman. Although she passed away in her early 20s she managed to leave a beautiful legacy of images and film work. Sammie's work was recently released in a short film, *Sammie's Story* for the 2021 transgender day of remembrance and can be viewed through the Gender Centre's you tube page [here](#).

A close-up, artistic photograph of a woman's face, focusing on her eyes and hair. The image is the background for the magazine cover. The text is overlaid on the image.

# POLARE

MAGAZINE

## Autumn

**“The streets are my catwalk. This day is the day of my liberation and freedom. Freedom from the character that I play every other day. Freedom to be myself: the privilege that many others are born with.”**

**- Samantha D.**