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WHY SPECIALIST COMMUNITY LED SERVICES STILL MATTER

For more than 40 years, The Gender Centre has provided specialist services to transgender and gender diverse people, their families and communities.

During that time, language has changed, legal recognition has improved and transgender people have become more visible. However, the need for specialist, community-led services has not disappeared. In many respects, the work has become more complex.

Visibility has brought greater awareness, but it has also brought increased scrutiny, hostility and misinformation. At the same time, many transgender and gender diverse people continue to experience difficulty accessing safe housing, appropriate healthcare, employment, education and services that understand their circumstances.

These issues rarely occur in isolation. A person seeking counselling may also be experiencing homelessness. Someone needing healthcare may be reluctant to attend a service because of a previous discriminatory experience. A young person exploring their identity may be dealing with bullying, online abuse or conflict at home. Parents may want to support their child but feel overwhelmed and unsure where to turn. A person leaving violence may need accommodation, counselling, safety planning, financial assistance and advocacy at the same time.

This is why specialist services continue to matter.

The value of a community-led organisation is not simply that it understands the language used by the community. It understands how people's experiences intersect and how one barrier can quickly create another.

At The Gender Centre, lived experience has always been central to our work. It informs how we design services, communicate with clients and understand the situations people bring to us. It also allows people to enter a service without having to begin by explaining or defending who they are.

That sense of understanding can make the difference between someone engaging with support or walking away from it. Community-led practice does not mean that every person has the same experience or requires the same response. Transgender and gender diverse communities are not one uniform group. People come from different cultural backgrounds, generations, geographical areas and family circumstances. They have different identities, bodies, abilities, beliefs and experiences.

Effective support must recognise those differences.

It must also recognise that people may need different kinds of assistance at different stages of their lives. Some people come to



The Gender Centre seeking information or connection. Others require counselling, housing, casework, family support or help navigating health and government systems. Some people need assistance during an immediate crisis, while others may simply need a safe place to talk with someone who understands.

Our role is not to tell people how to live or what decisions to make. It is to provide accurate information, practical support and a safe environment in which people can make informed decisions about their own lives.

Over four decades, the services provided by The Gender Centre have continued to develop in response to the needs of the community. What began as a response to homelessness and exclusion has grown into a broad range of housing, counselling, casework, family support, health navigation, outreach, peer support and community programs. That development has not occurred because the original needs disappeared. It has occurred because we have gained a deeper understanding of how those needs are connected.

Housing remains fundamental to health and wellbeing. A person without safe accommodation will find it much harder to attend medical appointments, maintain employment, engage in counselling or establish stability. Similarly, healthcare cannot be separated from the way a person is treated when they enter a service. A technically available service is not genuinely accessible if someone expects to be judged, misgendered or required to educate the person providing their care.

Support for families is also an important part of this work. When parents and carers have access to reliable information and appropriate support, they are better able to respond to their child with understanding rather than fear. Supporting a family can strengthen the safety and wellbeing of the transgender or gender diverse person at the centre of that family.

Community connection is equally important. Isolation can have a profound effect on wellbeing. Whether connection happens through a support group, a peer worker, a creative activity or an online community, the opportunity to meet others with shared experiences can help people feel less alone. However, community spaces must also be safe. Inclusion is not achieved simply by opening a door or creating an online group. It requires clear boundaries, safeguarding, respectful behaviour and people who are prepared to respond when something goes wrong.

The same principle applies to mainstream organisations. Having an inclusion statement is not enough. Staff need the knowledge, confidence and organisational support required to put inclusive practice into action. Policies must be reflected in everyday decisions, and people must be accountable when those standards are not met.

Specialist organisations play an important role in helping mainstream services build that capability. We provide advice, training, referrals and practical guidance based on what we see through direct service delivery. We can identify where systems are working, where they are failing and where apparently small procedures are creating significant barriers.

This work depends on strong partnerships. No single organisation can provide every form of assistance a person may need. The Gender Centre works alongside health services, housing providers, government agencies, community organisations, correctional services and other specialist providers.

The purpose of these partnerships should not be to pass people from one service to another. They should create clearer pathways, reduce repetition and ensure that people receive the right support at the right time. Community-led organisations must also be properly resourced if they are expected to do this work well. Demand cannot be met through goodwill alone. Services need stable funding, skilled staff, effective governance, secure systems and the capacity to respond when circumstances change.

Short-term funding can create short-term activity, but it does not always create lasting access. Building trusted services and strong referral pathways takes time. So does recruiting and retaining workers with the right professional skills and community knowledge.

In October 2026, The Gender Centre received the Community Organisation Award at the ACON Honour Awards. We were nominated alongside three highly deserving organisations and projects.

The Honour Awards recognise the contribution of people and organisations working to improve the lives of LGBTQ+ communities and people living with HIV across NSW. To have The Gender Centre's work recognised in this way was both humbling and significant.

When our name was announced, members of our team accepted the award on behalf of the entire organisation. Our Board President, Dash, and Senior Housing Manager, Zed, reflected on the long history of The Gender Centre and the many people who have contributed to its work.

That history reaches back to 1983, when Roberta Perkins secured government funding to establish Tiresias House, Australia's first transgender-specific homelessness service. This occurred at a time when transgender people could be denied access to both men's and women's refuges and were frequently left with nowhere safe to go.

The establishment of Tiresias House was not simply the creation of another accommodation service. It was a direct response to a system that excluded transgender people when they were at their



most vulnerable. It established a principle that continues to guide our work today: if mainstream systems are not providing safe and equitable access, specialist community-led services must be supported to fill that gap while continuing to press for broader change. The Honour Award recognised that history, but it also recognised the work being undertaken today. The Gender Centre now provides services across housing, counselling, casework, health, family support, domestic and family violence, outreach, peer support and community connection.

The award did not belong to one person or one program. It belonged to every staff member who places the needs of clients and the service first. It belonged to the workers who answer calls from people in distress, provide counselling, manage crisis and transitional accommodation, undertake outreach, facilitate groups, support parents and families and assist people to navigate systems that can be difficult and unwelcoming.

It also belonged to our volunteers, Board members, community members, partners and supporters, as well as the many people who helped build and sustain the organisation over more than four decades.

An organisation is only as good as the people who work within it. The Gender Centre would not be where it is today without dedicated staff who bring professional knowledge, lived experience, compassion and persistence to their work. Much of what they do happens quietly, away from awards ceremonies and public recognition, but it changes lives.

Receiving the Honour Award gave us an opportunity to celebrate. It also reminded us of the responsibility that comes with being recognised. An award is not an indication that the work is finished. It is an acknowledgement of what has been achieved and an encouragement to continue improving, responding and listening to the communities we serve.

While we should recognise how far we have come, we must remain honest about how much work is still required.

Transgender and gender diverse people should not need extraordinary resilience simply to access the ordinary things that everyone relies upon. They should not have to repeatedly prove their identity, justify their need for support or navigate services that were not designed with them in mind.

Specialist community-led services remain essential because they provide more than programs. They provide knowledge, trust, connection and a practical bridge into systems that can otherwise be difficult to navigate.

After more than 40 years, the purpose of The Gender Centre remains clear: to listen to our communities, respond to changing needs and ensure transgender and gender diverse people can access support that is safe, respectful and grounded in an understanding of their lives.
That is why specialist services mattered when The Gender Centre began, and why they continue to matter today.

Phinn Borg
Executive Director
The Gender Centre

THE GENDER CENTRE AT THE ACON HONOUR AWARDS

You know what they say, it's an honour just to be nomina...
wait, we won???



In October this year, ACON hosted their honour awards, an annual event dedicated to recognising the contributions of NSW leaders, advocates, organisations and volunteers to the lives of LGBTQ+ people and those living with HIV.

I'd never been to an awards ceremony. These types of formal events are a novel space for me, and it felt quite intimidating at first! But, because it's literally an event about the LGBTQ+ community, it turns out there were a whole lot of queer people I already knew there from my personal life that were there representing the queer organisations they work at, and running into them made me instantly relax and feel at home. It was a beautiful and humbling reminder that we are as much a part of the community as we are part of the organisations that collaborate with it, and that this separation is an arbitrary one.

The night itself was a lot of fun. Everyone was dressed fabulously, and Reuben Kaye was our incredible drag host who brought such a high energy to the event that you could feel infecting the entire room. They did not pull any punches with their jokes either! I was a little shocked that they had such controversial jokes at an event this size – surely ACON had not signed off on these jokes – but when the crowd is on your side you can get away with anything. And to be clear, I was very much with the crowd here. The Gender Centre was nominated for the community organisation award, for our four decades of advocacy, support and crisis services for transgender and gender diverse people across NSW. We were nominated alongside INsolidarity's The Mound, the Sydney Stingers Water Polo Club, and the Walk On Walk Strong Project.

As much as I expected that this particular crown would go to any of these extremely deserving candidates, it was announced for The Gender Centre! So our team walked up to stand under the bright lights and wonder what to do with our hands while Dash, the president of our board, and Zed, the leader of our case work team, gave wonderful acceptance speeches acknowledging the brotherboys and sistergirls that have always been here, and paid tribute to the history of the Gender Centre all the way back to 1983 when Roberta Perkins was able to secure government funding to start the first transgender specific homelessness service (aptly named Tiresias House), at a time when trans people were disallowed from accessing refuge at either men's or women's shelters.

After the awards and speeches wrapped up, everyone just hung around and had a good time. The place was wall to wall with people chatting, connecting, celebrating, and eventually we all filtered out to finally head home (or to kickons at Universal!).

All up, we had a lot of fun getting dressed up fancy, eating too many spring rolls because we didn't eat dinner beforehand, seeing so many other fantastic groups of people and learning about many more, and I finally understood where the term rubbing elbows comes from.

Maxine Wild
Caseworker,
Gracious award recipient



THE HISTORY OF TRANS DAY OF REMEMBRANCE

Remembering, honouring and celebrating.

Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDoR) will mark its 27th anniversary on November 20Th to honour and remember the lives lost to anti-trans violence and hatred. It's a day dedicated to trans people and acknowledge the discrimination and prejudice but also celebrate the strength and resilience of transgender and gender-diverse communities.

The History Behind the Day

Transgender Day of Remembrance can be traced back to 1999 when transgender advocate Gwendolyn Ann Smith helped establish the remembrance vigil in honour of transgender people who lost their lives to violence.

The vigil was inspired by the murder of Rita Hester, a Black transgender woman who was killed in Boston, Massachusetts in 1998. Her death affected the community and criticism led to calls for greater respect and recognition by the media, focusing on highlighting the wider challenges transgender people faced in being heard and seen. This tragedy also highlighted the importance of remembering those who have lost their lives working towards a future where everyone is treated with dignity and acceptance. These traditions help ensure people are recognised as individuals, rather than forgotten statistics, keeping the purpose of the day alive for future generations.

The phrase "give us our roses while we're still here" is used as a reminder that while it is good to remember those lost to violence, it is better for us all to make efforts to help create a safer place for the trans community.

Roses will also feature at the Gender Center's Mardi Gras float next year, forming part of a celebration rather than the mourning and sense of remembrance that TDoR symbolises.



Beyond its history, Transgender Day of Remembrance carries a message that continues to resonate today. Its founder Gwendolyn Ann Smith, expressed this through a powerful reminder:

"Transgender Day of Remembrance seeks to highlight the losses we face due to anti-transgender bigotry and violence. I am no stranger to the need to fight for our rights, and the right to simply exist is first and foremost. With so many seeking to erase transgender people — sometimes in the most brutal ways possible — it is vitally important that those we lose are remembered, and that we continue to fight for justice."

Why is Trans Day of Remembrance Still Relevant?

Transgender day of Remembrance continue to stay significant as transgender people continue to experience discrimination, bullying, hate and violence. People continue to lose their lives over the years, serving as a painful reminder that hate still exists. These ongoing challenges demonstrate why continued awareness and understanding remain important.

The day provides an opportunity for communities to come together and see how we can make a difference by challenging discrimination and creating a welcoming environment where transgender people feel safe, valued and respected and encourage those who live authentically in a world where prejudice still exists.

Monica Horvat


Transgender Day of Remembrance
The Gender Centre
Est.1983
Join us as we come together as a community to remember those whose lives have been lost to transphobic violence, to commemorate those whose strength has shone in the face of adversity, and to honour those who continue to advocate for our rights.
NOVEMBER 20TH
10 LILYDALE ST
MARRICKVILLE
5:00PM-6:30PM
RSVP VIA QR CODE OR BY PHONE 9519 7599



TO THE PARENTS OF GENDER DIVERSE CHILDREN

In the three years I have spent facilitating the Gender Centre's parent support group, not once have I heard the phrase, "I'm so happy my child is trans!". Finding out you have a gender divergent child, whatever their age, can initially throw parents into a tornado of confusion and fear. They blame themselves, the media, peer groups, social contagion. Some accuse their children of attention-seeking. Some attempt to downplay the situation, fearing for their child's wellbeing if their trans identity is true, hoping their child is 'going through a phase', or 'just gay'. They can become depressed, deny the truth of the situation, rage at the universe.

If these reactions sound familiar, you are likely aware of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' Five Stages of Grief*. Denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and – where the Gender Centre focuses its energy – acceptance. It takes a while. Grief doesn't follow a neat, orderly pattern. Progress is not linear. You can feel completely calm and accepting one minute, and find yourself blubbing in the shower the next. The unpredictability of grief is completely normal, much as you may wish otherwise. And it is vital to feel each and every stage, often multiple times, to allow the grief to process thoroughly. If blockages occur, grief can become stuck, which leads to compounded angst for you and those around you.

One intensifying factor is the uniqueness of this type of grief. Parenting books don't cover it. The media is much more likely to portray negative stories than positive ones (although the needle is beginning to shift). It is rare for a parent of a trans child to know any other parents of trans children prior to their child coming out. This means there are likely zero people in your life who can understand and relate to what your family is experiencing, which often exacerbates feelings of isolation and helplessness.

Another complicating factor is when two (or more) parents are not aligned. A trans child may initially only feel comfortable coming out to one parent, resulting in secret-keeping and torn loyalties between partners. Separated parents may struggle to find common ground, leading to increased stress and further communication breakdown. Parents living under the same roof with differing views can experience a higher degree of conflict within their relationship than ever before. Some break up. Others 'agree to disagree' and



tension becomes the prevailing atmosphere within the home. Nothing about this journey is easy for parents. More pointedly, nothing about this journey is easy for your child.

To live in dissonance with your own body, to be judged negatively for an intrinsic element of self that is not chosen, to be misunderstood and live in fear of rejection – and still choose to let their parents see them for who they truly are – this is a level of resilience and courage cis people can never fully understand. To be afforded the immense privilege of chaperoning your child through such intense challenges is to know what true parenting can look like. ALL parents struggle, regardless of how well-informed and accepting they may view themselves as. A crucial part of the struggle is to lean on the right people, and to shield your child, who already has so much to process, from your own messy processing. That's where we come in.

As parents are such a significant factor in determining how well children cope with transition, the Gender Centre provides many forms of parent support. We run support groups, both online and in person. We have a specialist Parent and Family counsellor and a Parent Peer Support worker who has trodden the path and was once where you are now. We have a private Facebook group for parents of trans children. We have a trove of information created by people who have run the gauntlet ahead of you. We exist to assist trans and gender diverse people and their families live their own happiest, healthiest, and safest outcomes. We look forward to welcoming you and your family.

Naomi Crellin
The Gender Centre

CREATIVE CHILDHOODS SUMMIT

Safeguarding Young People

Our LGBTIQ+ communities know a dance floor can be many things: a stage, a playground, a protest, a place to play with gender, find our people and belong.

For trans and gender diverse young people, those creative spaces can be especially valuable. Which raises a less fabulous but very important question: are those spaces safe for them?

In the lead up to Child Protection Week, I went to Dance Arts Alliance's first Creative Childhoods Summit to find out what the sector is doing about safe spaces. The Summit brought together leaders from child protection, government, education, health and the performing arts to explore how sectors can work collaboratively to create safer, healthier and more empowering environments for children and young people.

The Summit also marked the launch of KidsPACE (Protecting and Advancing Childhood in Education) – an industry-led framework developed by Dance Arts Alliance (DAA) to support child-centred, evidence-informed and developmentally appropriate practice across dance and performing arts education. The framework is underpinned by practice principles that protect children and young people from sexualisation and promotes positive mental health, wellbeing, body confidence and creative development. www.kidspacecode.org.au/about

We know that trans and gender diverse children and young people engage in creative performance, which serves as a vital pathway for identity development, emotional coping, and social connection. Artistic mediums like theatre, dance, music, and songwriting offers a platform to explore gender expression outside of rigid everyday societal norms. As such, it is imperative that creative spaces are safeguarded to protect young people from maltreatment.

A 2022 study found young people who identify with diverse genders or sexualities were reported to experience higher levels of sexual violence than the general population.[1] Similarly, another study found **51.9%** of participants with a diverse gender identity reported child sexual abuse, compared with **37.3%** of cis women and **18.8%** of cis men.[2]

To gain a deeper understanding of safe-guarding practices I interviewed Dr Roar Murphy (they / them), Manager Knowledge Mobilisation, at the National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse.

Roar, tell us a little about your work at the National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse?

I work in research and knowledge mobilisation, which basically means looking at research findings and asking: how do we get this research into people's hands and lives in practical ways they can use?

My background is in using the arts for social change, particularly around gender-based violence. My PhD looked at live performance for sexual violence prevention, and I've used theatre, dance and performance with survivors. I also created Black Dog Institute's Social Circus Lab, where I took more than sixty studies on youth suicide prevention and translated that research through circus, storytelling, visual art and film.

I'm really interested in the arts as a vehicle for safety and social change. Research is incredibly important, but sometimes a report or a fact sheet isn't the best way to reach people! Art can let us feel, practise and experience ideas differently. That's a big part of what I bring to my work at the National Centre.



How can dance and the performing arts be a protective factor for child safety?

I have seen how dance and the performing arts give us ways of being in our bodies that go beyond, or even transform, experiences of pain, grief and trauma.

We know that trauma isn't only something we experience intellectually. We feel things in our bodies. In fact, sometimes it's our bodies that tell us first that something isn't right.

Readers may know the book 'The Body Keeps the Score' by Judith Herman that speaks of this.

What I love about dance and performance it can give us opportunities to experience our bodies differently. We can dance ourselves as free, solid, funny, connected and knowing. We're not limited to performing ourselves through pain or through what has happened to us.

I've seen this in my work using performance with people who have experienced gender-based violence. Over time, you can see a persons' confidence growing. People discover: "I can choose how I move. I can choose how close I am to somebody. I can choose whether I want to be looked at. I can choose how I interact with other bodies."

And I think that word choice is really important for child safety. Good creative spaces can give young people opportunities to practise agency, boundaries, connection and having a voice.

But I would add an important caveat: dance isn't automatically protective. All of those wonderful possibilities depend on the environment being safe and child centred. The adults around young people need to respect their boundaries, listen to them and make it genuinely safe for them to exercise those choices.

What does safeguarding children look like in practice?

It's important that safeguarding is recognised as a practice. It's not just a policy sitting somewhere, or something we suddenly switch on when a child discloses something. For children and young people, safeguarding is also about how a space feels, psychologically and relationally. Are the adults kind? Do they notice what's going on? Do they listen? Do they take young people seriously?

Young people are watching us all the time and working out whether we're safe! They might see how an adult responds when someone is bullied, or when somebody says they're uncomfortable, or when a young person pushes back against something. They're learning: If something happened to me, would this person listen? Would they believe me? Would they make things worse?

What systems could we implement to increase children's confidence in speaking up when they're feeling unsafe?

I think this is exactly how us adults think about safeguarding children and young people – but I wonder if we should flip it? Perhaps we could instead ask: "How do we make adults and organisations safer to speak to?"

Disclosure often isn't a child clearly saying, "Something bad is happening to me." It can be withdrawal, anger, avoidance or changes in behaviour. So, we need adults who notice, stay curious and don't simply treat the behaviour as the problem.

We also need systems where children have trusted adults, know what will happen if they raise a concern, and are involved in decisions about them. Mandatory reporting is vital, but it isn't the whole of safeguarding.

And this is somewhere the arts can be powerful. We can practise safety. Through stories, theatre, dance and creative scenarios, young people can explore boundaries, choice, relationships, asking for help and what safety actually feels like, without having to disclose something personal.

How can government and industry work together to strengthen safeguarding in large, community-based sectors that operate outside formal regulatory frameworks.

We must work together. Government can't reach every dance studio, sporting club, theatre group or community organisation, and individual organisations can't solve these huge systemic issues on their own.

What excites me is when we bring different kinds of knowledge together: research, lived experience, what young people tell us, and the practical knowledge of people working in these sectors.

We've seen that kind of collaboration at the National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse with SAY-IT (Survivor Aware Youth Informed Tools), a self-paced educational resource for people working with young people, particularly in sexuality and respectful relationships education, that helps them talk about sex and relationships safely while keeping the needs and safety of young survivors at the heart of their practice. And Dance Arts Alliance's KidsPACE work is another example of an industry asking, "What should good, child-centred practice actually look like in our sector?"

That's where I think the opportunity is: don't just give people another policy. Give them practical ways to create safety every day. And I'd love to see the arts themselves being part of how we do that, not just the sector we're trying to safeguard.



Links

www.nationalcentre.org.au/ - sign up to receive your free copy of SAY-IT digital modules
www.linkedin.com/in/roar-murphy-arts-based-research - keep up to date with Dr Roar Murphy's work.
www.hexagon-cube-ytdj.squarespace.com/ - sign up to access the KidsPace Code here

Reference

[1] *Youth Characteristics Associated With Sexual Violence Perpetration Among Transgender Boys and Girls, Cisgender Boys and Girls, and Nonbinary Youth. Ybarra et all, 2022.*

[2] *Prevalence of Diverse Genders and Sexualities in Australia and Associations With Five Forms of Child Maltreatment and Multi-type Maltreatment. Higgins et al, 2024*

Dr Roar Murphy and Zed Tintor
The Gender Centre

WHEN CHILDHOOD MEETS THE DIGITAL WORLD

The internet is now a big part of children's lives. It can be a great place to learn, connect with friends and find support. But it can also expose children to bullying, harassment, manipulation and exploitation.

Even when a child is sitting safely at home with their family, they can still be at risk through the screen in front of them.

Most children now have access to the internet. According to the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE), more than **95%** of children aged 8–17 and **81%** of preschool children aged 2–5 have access to the internet.

With so many children online, it is important that parents and carers understand the risks and know what to look out for.

One of the most serious risks is child sexual exploitation. This can include grooming, sexual abuse, manipulation, exploitation for money, or someone taking advantage of a child for their own benefit.

The number of reports received by the ACCCE Child Protection Triage Unit shows how serious the issue has become. In 2018, the unit received around 18,000 reports of child sexual exploitation. By 2024–2025, this had increased to 82,764 reports.

These are not just numbers. They represent children who may be at risk and show why online safety is so important.

Some children may be more vulnerable online

Children who experience loneliness, discrimination or a lack of acceptance may spend more time online looking for friendship, understanding and support.

This can be particularly important for transgender and gender diverse children and young people, who may use online spaces to find people who understand and accept them.

Online communities can provide valuable support and connection, but children and young people also need to know how to recognise unsafe behaviour and where to go for help.

Parents, carers and other trusted adults also have an important role.

Protecting children online is not just about telling children what they should or shouldn't do. Adults also need to understand how offenders may groom or manipulate children and how they may try to stop adults from noticing what is happening.

The most important thing is to make sure children know they can speak to a trusted adult if something online makes them uncomfortable, frightened or unsure.

Five simple things parents and carers can do The ACCCE provides practical advice to help families keep children safer online:

1. Talk openly and regularly. Ask children about what they do online and who they communicate with.
2. Provide appropriate supervision. Know which apps, games and websites your child is using.
3. Be approachable. Make sure your child knows they can come to you if something goes wrong.
4. Check privacy settings. Help children understand who can see or contact them online.
5. Know how to report concerns. Learn where to report suspicious behaviour, exploitation or serious online abuse.

These simple steps can make it easier for children to ask for help before a situation becomes more serious.

Transgender and gender diverse young people
Research referred to in the original article shows that transgender young people experience particularly high levels of online bullying and hate. The article reports that **83%** of trans young people experienced cyberbullying compared with **53%** of cisgender young people, and **71%** experienced online hate compared with **27%** of cisgender young people.

This makes supportive adults especially important.

Transgender and gender diverse children should be able to find friendship, information and community online without being placed at greater risk of abuse or exploitation.

Creating an environment where a child feels accepted and knows they can talk openly about what is happening online can help keep them safe.

What happens when a crime occurs?
When online exploitation or abuse occurs, police and other agencies have an important role in investigating what happened, protecting children and holding offenders accountable.

Technology can make these investigations difficult because offenders may contact children through social media, games, messaging services and other online platforms.

But keeping children safe cannot be left to police alone.

Parents, carers, schools, services and the wider community all have a part to play.

Most importantly, children need to feel safe, heard and supported.

A child who knows there is a trusted adult they can speak to is more likely to ask for help when something doesn't feel right.

Where to find help and support

eSafety Commissioner – Information, advice and reporting of serious online abuse.

Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE) – Information, resources and reporting of online child exploitation.

Kids Helpline – 1800 55 1800 – Free counselling and support 24 hours a day.

Bravehearts – 1800 272 831 – Information and support relating to child sexual abuse.

QLife – 1800 184 527 – LGBTQIA+ peer support and referrals.

Triple Zero – 000 for an emergency.

Crime Stoppers – 1800 333 000

Police Assistance Line – 131 444

Monica Horvat



BEING OUT, TRANSGENDER OR GENDER DIVERSE ONLINE

Going online can give you a vital source of support and information on LGBTIQ+ issues that you might not get elsewhere. So it's important to know how to keep yourself safe while exploring new online spaces.

In short:

- It can be exciting to find your community online, but make sure you are aware of the risks when meeting new people, to help keep you stay safe online and offline.
- It's always OK to leave conversations that make you uncomfortable or upset. There are many more online spaces where you can feel safe and welcome as an LGBTIQ+ young person.
- If something goes wrong or you experience online abuse, you don't have to deal with it on your own – help is available.

Meeting new people online

Online spaces can be a great way for LGBTIQ+ young people to find a shared understanding and connect with each other. But we also know people who identify as LGBTIQ+ are at a higher risk of negative online experiences – so we've gathered some advice on how to navigate the internet for your needs and interests.
Whether you're looking for your community, exploring your identity, testing ideas or connecting with others, it's important know how to manage your online experiences safely and respectfully.

Finding your online community

You may have already found your LGBTIQ+ community – whether that's in person, online, or even both – but if you're looking for information or want to explore your identity, where do you start?

There are many different identities within the LGBTIQ+ community, so some may feel more comfortable for you than others. No matter how you identify, or whether this changes over time, it's important that you feel welcome and included in the communities you choose.

Expressing yourself and connecting online

There are plenty of ways LGBTIQ+ young people use the internet to connect with each other. This includes through online gaming, social media, messaging apps or other platforms. Whatever you choose, it's important to take steps to protect yourself so you feel safe, respected and appreciated for who you are.

Although it can be good to be challenged by new and complex ideas, it's important to protect yourself especially if people are pressuring you.

Be careful not to agree to anything if you're unsure about it. And remember, it's always OK to stop the conversation and cut off contact with anyone who makes you feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

Check out our tips to keep yourself safe when you're chatting to people online:

- **Know the risks.**
  Check our list of the different types of risks to watch for online, to help you recognise if someone may try to harm you.
- **Check your privacy and location sharing settings.**
  Make sure you know what you're sharing with others when you're online, and who can contact you. You can adjust these settings any time to suit your needs. Check out The eSafety Guide for advice on how to do this on a range of different apps.
- **Go slow and only share information you're comfortable with.**
  If you feel unsure about sharing your preferences, interests, personal experiences or opinions on certain topics, you don't have to talk about it. Take your time getting to know another person and ask questions that help to figure out how comfortable you are around them. This might mean asking questions about what they want out of a relationship, or the way they approach love or sex. Set your own boundaries for the conversation, so you feel comfortable and safe.
- **Use a different photo.**
  It can be a good idea to use a photo or avatar that doesn't fully reveal who you are, to protect your privacy. Think about using one that's different to all your other profile pictures so it doesn't show up in an image search that reveals your name, especially if you feel unsure about how you want to identify or who you want to know about it. For safety, it's also best to choose a picture that doesn't show where you live or spend time (for example, make sure you crop out street signs and school logos).
- **Trust your instincts.**
  If something feels wrong, like the other person's story isn't adding up or seems fake, it's best to trust your gut. They may be trying to catfish or scam you. End the conversation with them if you're feeling unsafe, uncomfortable or suspicious.
- **Know how to report harmful behaviour.**
  No means no. If another person won't accept that you don't want to continue contact with them, it might be time to unfollow them and change your settings so you don't see their posts and messages. If they begin to harass, threaten or abuse you in any other way, you can report them and get help.

Online dating

A common way for LGBTIQ+ adults to meet is through dating apps and sites, but they are generally for people who are 18 and older. LGBTIQ+ online dating apps and sites are sometimes highly sexualised spaces where adults are looking to get into sexually explicit chat or to hook up. Also, some people use online dating to connect with others so they can scam them, stalk them or trick them into sex.

Apart from dating apps, people sometimes meet online through other platforms such as social media apps, games or chat services, then decide to date or hook up.
Being young and new to online dating may lead you into being pressured to send nudes, or to get sexual before you're ready.
It's important that you always feel safe with what you share, say and do online – especially in live chats that may be recorded (even without you knowing).

Make sure you know about the online dating risks and warning signs including:

- moving too fast
- sharing nudes without consent, or 'revenge porn'
- sextortion
- 'grooming' by a sexual predator
- love bombing and catfishing
- cyberstalking
- identity theft.

If you choose to date online despite the risks, follow our tips for staying safe including:

- limiting the information you share about yourself online
- avoiding moving the conversation to social media or messaging apps
- being careful about sharing your location
- preparing carefully if you plan to meet in person.

You can find more tips about online dating for young people. If you're 18 or older there's also more advice in our LGBTIQ+ learning lounge, including tips for staying safe when meeting online.

What are the risks of being online?

Socialising online can be a lot of fun and everyone deserves to feel safe about it, but there are real risks. They range from being contacted by someone you don't feel comfortable about, right through to being scammed, stalked or attacked.

Abuse can come from any online connection, even if you're not dating online. For example, a new online friend who you like at first could end up pressuring or harassing you, or become bullying or aggressive.

Sometimes LGBTIQ+ people are targeted by others who 'out' them (reveal they're LGBTIQ+ to others), 'deadname' them (refer to them by a name that no longer matches their identity) or even trick them into meeting in person to hurt or steal from them. It's never OK for someone to abuse, trick or take unfair advantage of you online

Bullying online or 'cyberbullying'

People in the LGBTIQ+ community are more likely to be bullied both online and offline. If you're being harassed, judged or made to feel bad about yourself because you are LGBTIQ+, remember that you don't deserve it — the problem is the other person's ignorance and intolerance.

If the cyberbullying is seriously harmful and the online platform or service doesn't help you, eSafety can have the content removed.

Online hate

This can be any hateful post about a person or a group of people for things they can't change – like their race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or disability. When online hate is targeted towards a specific person, it's called cyberbullying (or adult cyber abuse if you're 18 or older).
The LGBTIQ+ community and First Nations people are twice as likely to experience online hate than other Australians.

Unwanted contact

This when you feel uncomfortable or upset about a stranger or someone you know contacting you online, or sending you content that you don't want such as messages, photos or videos (including 'dick pics').

'Catfishing'

This is when someone uses a fake online identity to control you, usually by tricking you into believing you're in a real online friendship or romance with them. They may catfish you because they think it's funny or to be mean and make you feel bad about yourself, or to scam you.

Some people pretend to be LGBTIQ+ so they can encourage you to tell them your secrets, and then embarrass you by sharing them with others, or blackmail you for money or nudes. Or they may try to get you to share your personally identifiable information so they can steal your money or identity.
'Revenge porn' or image-based abuse

This is when someone shares (or threatens to share) a nude or sexual photo or video of you, which is illegal if you're under 18. It's also illegal when you are 18+, if you have not given your consent for the intimate content to be shared. Image-based abuse is sometimes known as 'revenge porn' if a person does it to hurt someone who's ended a relationship with them. But people do it for a range of reasons, including to be mean, boast, get the targeted person in trouble, 'out' them as being LGBTIQ+ or blackmail them. eSafety can have real and fake intimate images and videos removed online, or help stop the threats.

Sexual extortion or 'sextortion'

This is when someone blackmails you by threatening to share intimate images or videos of you unless you pay them. Often they hook you with a fake profile or catfish you first, then ask you to send nudes or get sexual online.

Scammers sometimes target LGBTIQ+ people, threatening to use the images or recordings to 'out' them to family, friends and other contacts. If this happens to you do not pay – stop all contact and follow our advice. It's not your fault and there's help available.

What to do if something goes wrong

If someone sends, posts or shares seriously harmful content about you there's help available – you don't need to deal with it on your own. Talk to someone you trust about what has happened, like a friend, family member or another trusted adult, to help you feel supported.

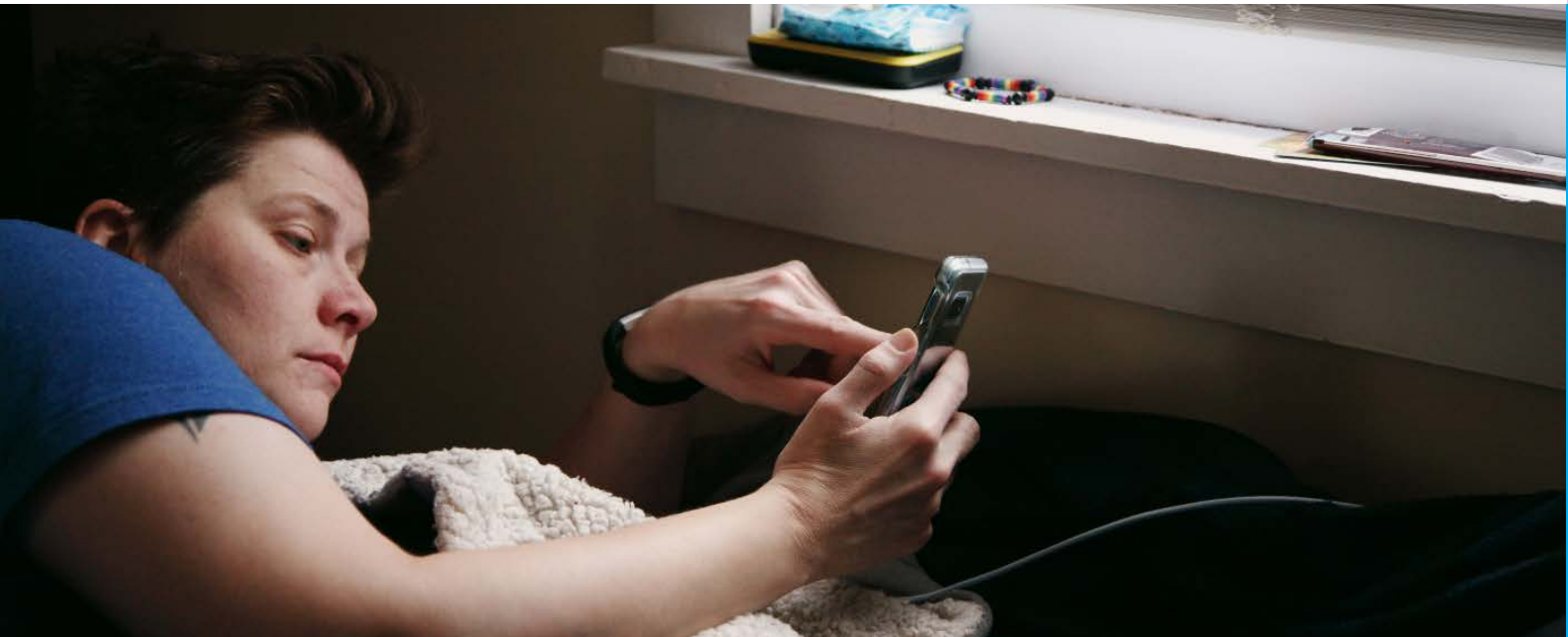
Click the links and follow the steps for collecting evidence, reporting the harmful content, preventing further contact and getting more help.

- If you're being bullied online
- If your nudes have been shared
- If someone is threatening to share your nudes

Online abuse can have a serious impact on your mental and physical wellbeing.

You can find more advice on our pages about how to manage the impacts of cyberbullying, adult cyber abuse, image-based abuse, as well as online hate targeting the LGBTIQ+ community.

Liz Ceissman
Program Manager
The Gender Centre



BUILDING A SAFER AND MORE INCLUSIVE ONLINE COMMUNITY

Sometimes, there's just no better feeling than finding your community online. That's why it's important for the online communities you're a part of to be safe and respectful – so everyone feels welcome.

There are ways you can help make the online world safer and more inclusive for people of all genders.

Share your pronouns

Many members of the transgender and gender diverse community highlight their pronouns. This can be a form of identifying themselves, and a show of support and respect for their trans friends. If you're comfortable, you could consider doing this in your bio or in an online post. Remember, not everyone will feel comfortable sharing their pronouns, which is also OK.

Show your support

Being active in your online community can help other Transgender and gender diverse young people who are not 'out' find safe and supportive spaces. Something as simple as adding an emoji or the inclusion or trans flag in your bio or username can show your support and let others know you're a safe person to talk to and interact with online. This is the benefit of representation – the more you see people who look and act like you feel, the more you feel comfortable being authentic online.

Liz Ceissman
Program Manager
The Gender Centre

Think before you share

If you're sharing photos of an community event or experience, be sure you have consent from everyone in the photos. Not everyone is 'out' – so tagging someone at a Pride party (accidentally or not) could have a serious impact. Read more about consent for sharing photos and videos on the e-safety website.

Be an upstander

There are many ways you can take action to support others in the transgender and gender diverse community online – go from being a bystander to an upstander. Depending on your style and what you feel confident doing, helping others could be as easy as sending a direct message to make sure they're OK. If it feels safe and right, you could step up and call out the bad stuff online, or even report the content. Read more about how to be an upstander on the e-safety website.

Build your online resilience

There are things we can all do to minimise the impacts of negative online experiences. If you're recovering from online abuse, make sure to give yourself time to heal. What you've experienced is not your fault, and talking it through with others, or a support service, can really make a difference. You might also find a new way to balance your time online and turn off your notifications for a while, until you feel comfortable being active online again. You can find more tips for how to strengthen your online resilience in the LGBTIQ+ learning lounge on the e-safety website.

INTEGRATED HEALTH AND WELLBEING SUPPORT FOR TRANS AND GENDER DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

TGD (Trans and Gender Diverse) people experience a variety of health needs that can complicate access and navigation of Australia's allied health system. Many often assume that the only health needs TGD people have, is related to GAC (Gender Affirming Care). This is a term used to refer to several biopsychosocial interventions that support a TGD person in expressing their gender identity, a key example being HRT (Hormone Replacement Therapy).

However TGD people experience a wide variety of health needs that at first glance, may seem wholly unrelated to their TGD identity, but somehow an overlap still complicates the process. For example, cervical screenings are so gendered towards feminine identifying people that transmen and transmasculine identifying people with a cervix experience a major barrier to essential screening. A mental health diagnosis is often attributed to someone identifying as TGD, speaking to the misconception of TGD identities being based in mental illness.

This is not a far cry from my own experience of a cancer diagnosis suggested to be caused by me taking prescription estrogen at first impulse, despite no further investigation or evidence to form this opinion.

The term for this phenomena is colloquially known as "trans broken arm syndrome". This is a form of medical discrimination faced by TGD patients where an allied health provider incorrectly assumes that a medical condition results from a patient's gender identity or medical transition.[1] The idea of this metaphor is to imagine a scenario where a TGD person presents with a broken arm, and somehow this injury will be misattributed to being TGD. This metaphor is intended to be humorously hyperbolic, but is an apt shorthand for how barriers can present to TGD people in healthcare.

These barriers can then lead to TGD people avoiding healthcare. Submissions to the Australian Human Rights Commission in their report 'Equal Identities: A human rights review of the experiences of trans and gender diverse people in Australia' noted that TGD people who experience mistreatment are more likely to avoid accessing healthcare services, which exacerbates poorer physical and mental health outcomes.[2] These outcomes then reinforce the 'trans broken arm syndrome' in the first place.

All this points to the purpose of this article: to introduce a new Gender Centre Inc. service titled 'Integrated Health and Wellbeing Support for TGD Communities', designed to support TGD people navigate the allied health system in NSW for needs other than GAC.



Integrated Health and Wellbeing Support Project

The Gender Centre Inc. has commenced work on the Integrated Health and Wellbeing Support for TGD communities project. Work on this project commenced 1 September 2026 and will conclude 30 June 2028. Integrated Health and Wellbeing Support for TGD Communities is funded by the commonwealth government's National Action Plan for the Health and Wellbeing of LGBTIQA+ People 2025–2035.[3]

The role appointed to manage this project is titled: Health Navigation Caseworker, designed to assist TGD people access the healthcare they need through advocacy, networking, and referral pathways. This program will be delivered in four primary components: 1-1 health navigation, health and literacy wellbeing programs, mental health support and outreach.

Please note: this program will not involve service provision of ANY medical services as the Gender Centre Inc. is not a medical service.

1-1 Casework component

The 1-1 casework component is similar to traditional casework, where the Health Navigation Caseworker meets with a client to establish a health-related case plan. A case plan is a set of agreed upon goals between client and caseworker. In this instance the focus will be on meeting health related goals, such as being linked in with specialist allied health services, affordable medical care, mental health services and so on. On commencing a case plan, a support period of 3 months begins. If at the end of 3 months a person still needs support with meeting any remaining goals, a review of the case plan is possible to determine suitably of extending support and if so, for what duration. If extending support is not possible, the alternative process would involve submitting a new request for Health Navigation Support which is processed as a new intake.

Examples of what this support looks like depends on the health needs of each person requesting assistance. For example, a TGD person experiencing health needs that upon further investigation indicates a potential intersex variation, will need to access specialized services that do not conflate the two, as being TGD and being intersex are very different experiences with unique health needs. As such focus of Health Navigation casework would be linking in with services like Interlink and Intersex Human Rights Australia for access to specialist medical and psychosocial services.

Health Literacy and Wellbeing Programs

Targeted wellbeing and health literacy group sessions will be information group sessions. These sessions will focus on preventative health, navigating health care systems, mental health resilience and strategies to improve overall wellbeing. The idea is that we liaise with medical practitioners, external support services and organizations who can run education sessions targeted for TGD populations and their allies. For example, this could involve running a workshop about the self collection cervical screening test, but targeted toward transmen and transmasculine people, or workshops on safe usage gender affirming tools like binders and gaff tucking underwear. There is a long list of potential health literacy topics, allowing extensive opportunities for preventative education sessions.

Mental health support

Mental health support is also a focus of this project. This could look like access to trauma informed counselling and facilitated well-being activities designed to support early intervention and improve mental health outcomes (significant overlap with the information sessions). Established contacts, professional relationships and referral pathways with acute care services, inpatient and outpatient units, community mental health, drop in mental health services, PSS (Psychology Support Services) navigation, among other referral pathways would enable access to more robust mental health support.

Community outreach and engagement

This will mean targeted outreach activities for individuals who are socially isolated or disconnected from the health care system. Outreach will include community education sessions, partnerships with local organizations and distribution of health literacy resources. The Gender Centre currently undertakes outreach to Western and Far Western NSW, which includes Dubbo, Orange, Broken Hill etc., as well as undertaking outreach to Springwood, Katoomba, Penrith and the Hawkesbury via the Link Wentworth Community hubs.

These are avenues to engage with isolated TGD populations with complex health, unsure how to navigate the system locally or from afar.

Want to have your say?

If you have any questions about this project, and upcoming service delivery please do not hesitate to reach out. You can contact myself as the Health Navigation Caseworker during business via aurora@gendercentre.org.au. You can also forward any emails to reception@gendercentre.org.au and or call 02 9569 2366 to make any inquiries.

Before the close of 2026, a SURVEY will be released aimed at TGD people and their allies. This will be released on our website, advertised in the Gender Centre Inc. office and among contacts/partner organizations. This survey will be anonymous, and is an opportunity express your interest in health areas that the project could take a keen focus in.

Thank for your time and I am eager to hear from you regarding the Integrated Health and Wellbeing Support for TGD Communities.

Reference

[1] *Wall CSJ, Patev AJ, Benotsch EG. Trans broken arm syndrome: A mixed-methods exploration of gender-related medical misattribution and invasive questioning. Soc Sci Med. 2023 Mar; 320:115748. doi: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2023.115748. Epub 2023 Jan 30. PMID: 36736052.*

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A MISCONCEPTION: TESTOSTERONE IS A CONTRACEPTION

Warning

The following article contains language discussing gendered body-parts and experiences. It is a factual article that offers some really important information, however, if you are triggered by language involving sexual and reproductive organs, please keep yourself safe.

There is a common misconception that being on testosterone means that you cannot get pregnant. The reality is different: testosterone is not a form of contraception.

For transgender men and non-binary people assigned female at birth, starting testosterone can stop or significantly reduce menstruation. Because of this, it can be easy to assume that ovulation has also stopped. While testosterone can suppress ovulation, it does not reliably stop it from happening (Asseler et al., 2024). Ovulation can still occur unexpectedly, even if you have not menstruated for a long time.

Put simply: If you have a uterus and ovaries, pregnancy is possible even if you are on testosterone and are no longer menstruating.

It's also important to know that not menstruating does not necessarily mean you are not ovulating. One-third of transgender people on testosterone ovulate despite not menstruating (Thornton & Mattatall, 2021). If you want to become pregnant, medical guidance recommends stopping testosterone while attempting conception or during pregnancy (Thornton & Mattatall, 2021). If you do not want to become pregnant, medical guidance recommends using reliable contraception.

There are several contraception options available for trans men and non-binary people on testosterone. The right option will depend on your body, preferences, health, and what works best for you.

Some commonly used contraception options include:

- Condoms and other barrier methods - these can help prevent pregnancy and condoms can also provide protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- IUDs - both hormonal and copper-IUDs are long-term, highly effective options. A copper IUD is non-hormonal, while a hormonal IUD releases a small amount of progestogen
- The contraceptive pill - both progesterone-only and combined oral contraceptive pills may be options for some people.

You may have concerns about contraception interfering with your transition, however, contraception does not necessarily mean that it will interfere with your transition. There are many options that may not affect you in ways you do not want.

If you are concerned about accessing contraception or reproductive healthcare, or if you experience an unplanned or unwanted pregnancy, the Gender Centre can provide information about where to go next, including a gender-affirming GP who can discuss your options.

And if you would simply like to talk to someone who understands these experiences from a trans perspective, you can speak with a Peer Support Worker at the Gender Centre. Peer workers can provide supportive, non-judgemental space to talk through your concerns, ask questions and work out what support might be right for you.

Reference

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HEALTHY MASCULINITY: BECOMING THE MAN YOU CHOOSE TO BE

For trans men and trans masculine people, masculinity is not one-size-fits-all. It should be shaped, softened, strengthened, and selected . . . It can be made your own.

There is no single right way to be a man. For many trans men, that truth can be both liberating and terrifying. So many individuals arrive at the point of presenting masculinely after years of knowing but never being seen for who they truly are. At the same time, these folks have witnessed versions of masculinity that might appear strong and admirable; but also felt harsh, closed off, controlling, or emotionally distant. So, the question becomes not simply, "How do I become a man?" but "What kind of man do I want to become?"

Right now, the world is facing a new challenge to healthy masculinity; and the trans community are not immune to this. Enter - the **MANOSPHERE**. You've likely heard about this social media-driven, 'anti-women algorithm', that operates like a vortex, claiming vulnerable young men and turning them into "prophets of misogyny". The manosphere can operate like a vortex, pulling in the uncertain young men who are often lost and seeking self-improvement.

For trans men, the idea of masculinity can be especially powerful because it is often so consciously examined, and the vulnerability that the manosphere seeks is ever present. It was 2016 when I wrote one of my first articles for this magazine, entitled, "The Key to the Gentlemen's Club". The article described how the notion of male-privilege is quietly yet frequently bestowed upon those who transition to a point of being recognised and addressed as male without explanation. But what my article didn't grapple with, was the struggle that men of all backgrounds have, with performing masculinity healthily.

Healthy masculinity begins with permission. Permission to enjoy the parts of masculinity that feel affirming: the haircut, the clothes, the voice changes, the name, the posture, the sense of ease that can come when your outside life begins to match your inside knowing. Permission, too, to leave behind the parts that do not fit. You do not have to trade kindness for manhood. You do not have to become less emotionally available, less gentle, less playful, or less connected, to be taken seriously. Trans men may feel added pressure to avoid being read as "too sensitive" or to prove masculinity by becoming harder. But strength is not the same as dominance. It is not about hiding emotions or proving that nothing affects you. Real strength can look like setting boundaries without meanness, apologising when you have caused hurt and asking for support before you reach breaking point.

Gender affirmation can bring joy, relief, and greater confidence, whether through clothing, binding, hormones, surgery, voice work, fitness, or simply being recognised as yourself. But your body is not a project that must be perfected before you deserve respect. Your body travels with you. It is where your life happens. Your body deserves patience, kindness and celebration now — not only after the next milestone.

Emotional honesty is another essential part of healthy masculinity. Many men are taught to shrink their emotional vocabulary, but emotions are not the opposite of manhood. They are information. Sadness may tell you what needs care. Fear may show you where safety is needed.

Community is important in the face of the manosphere. Masculinity practiced in isolation can become a toxic performance. Masculinity practiced in community can become accountable, generous, and alive. Other trans men and trans masculine people can offer mirrors that are rare in the wider world: people who understand the joy of being called "brother," the grief of being misunderstood, the awkwardness of learning new social rules, and the relief of not having to explain every part of yourself.

Intergenerational community matters too. Younger trans men deserve elders, and elders deserve to be seen as the living archives they are.

Healthy masculinity also makes room for difference. Trans men are not all the same. Some are binary, some are non-binary, some are gay, bi, straight, ace, queer, brotherboys, men of colour, disabled men, fathers, sons, partners, loners, leaders, artists, workers, carers, survivors.

Perhaps the best thing healthy masculinity can give, is a developing awareness of your values. With the people you love and the communities that hold you.

You do not have to become someone else's idea of a man. In a world that often offers restricted, brittle versions of masculinity, you are allowed to become your own.

Reference

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ABOUT THE GENDER CENTRE

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 acknolwedges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.

Design

Hannah Dockrill

Photography

All photography is open source or supplied by The Gender Centre

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

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