

The Gender Centre Inc. is a Non-Government Organisation, (NGO) and an Incorporated Association and is committed to developing and providing services and activities that enhance the ability of people exploring their gender options to make informed choices.

The Gender Centre offers a wide range of services to people that are exploring their gender options, their partners, family members and friends. We are an accommodation and counselling service for our gender-questioning clients from the age of sixteen and above, and we act as an education, support, training and referral resource centre to other organisations and service providers.

The Gender Centre, based in Petersham, is committed to educating the New South Wales public and service providers about the needs of people exploring their gender options. We aim to provide a high quality service, which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.

Roles & Functions

Our Role in the Community

Transgender people are among the most marginalised in the community. As such, these people unfairly face many issues including higher rates of homelessness, unemployment, social isolation, prejudice and discrimination, family rejection and mental health issues.

With gender identity being a fundamentally different concept from sexual orientation, other groups within the gay, lesbian and bisexual communities have fallen short of addressing the unique issues faced by transgender people and others exploring their gender. The Gender Centre has undertaken to address these issues and as stated above to educate those in the wider community about the needs, concerns and interests of people exploring their gender identity.

The Gender Centre is not a medical centre and thus does not provide medical documents and/or medical care and we cannot make referrals to any medical services. We can however, provide information regarding health care service providers for our clients to access independently. We do not give recommendations regarding particular service providers.

The Gender Centre also offers training, support and workshops to employers, service providers, students and other people interested in gender issues.

The Functions We Perform

The Gender Centre is committed to developing and providing services and activities which enhance the abilities of people exploring their gender options to make informed choices. We are committed to assisting clients reach their full personal potential through the provision of psychological counselling services and other programs. We are committed to achieving this with fairness and integrity.

The Gender Centre provides advocacy support for transgender and gender-questioning people to help facilitate effective outcomes. The most common advocacy support provided is in dealings with the police when reporting a crime or being questioned in relation to a criminal matter, with the Department of Housing to prevent evictions, with Centrelink to establish payment of correct entitlements, with Aged Care services to provide suitable supported care options and disability support programs and to acquire suitable appliances and equipment for independent living.

We aim to provide a high quality counselling service which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect, dignity and confidentiality. It is of particular concern to remove barriers to clients' achievements which may result from their gender, age, cultural and national background, socio-economic background or disability.

Our residential service provides temporary accommodation in a safe and supportive environment to transgender persons who are homeless, distressed or otherwise in need of accommodation. Case Management is also an integral part of our residential program and is provided to all residents in

refuge accommodation to assist these clients to move through the refuge and into independent living. A case management service is also provided to community clients.

The Gender Centre's Outreach Service provides specialised case management and outreach to transgender people confined to hospital, correctional facilities within N.S.W., to all courts within the greater metropolitan area, and to all transgender street-based sex workers in the metropolitan area of Sydney. The outreach education officer provides referrals to specialist medical, HIV/AIDS, education, legal, welfare, housing and other community services.

We also offer our gender-questioning clients who are freely able to access the Centre a service that includes workshops, support groups, outings and social events that are organised at intervals throughout the year.

The Gender Centre produces a range of print and online resources relevant to gender-questioning people their families and their service providers. Information packages (kits), fact-sheets and other printed materials including our quarterly magazine *Polare*. As part of the resources provided by the Gender Centre we have a library with an array of books and audio-visual material on issues pertinent to gender-questioning and transgender people. These are available for loan free of charge.

Management Structure

As an Incorporated Association, our constitution is bound by legislation under the Associations Incorporation Act 1984 (NSW).

Our Management Committee is constituted in the terms of the Associations Incorporations Act and the organisation in general, including the Management Committee functions as provided by the Act and Regulations. The Constitution and Rules of the organisation comprise the Model Rules provided in the Regulations, and these provide clear statements of structure, election and conduct of office bearers and committee, rights and responsibilities, and provide the delegation of day-to-day managerial matters to the General Manager by the Management Committee.

Management Committee

The Management Committee holds the ultimate legal and managerial responsibility for the Gender Centre Inc.

The Management Committee is primarily responsible for the management of the affairs of the Gender Centre, including financial management and accountability, funding agreements and contracts, administration and accountability in matters relating to incorporation, internal operational policy development and implementation, ensuring adherence to legislation and other binding rules and regulations as well as staff employment and supervision.

Staff

The Gender Centre is an Equal Employment Opportunity (E.E.O.) employer and employs both fulltime and part-time staff. Position titles and duties vary slightly from time to time, however the service currently employs staff in the following positions: Manager, Administration Officer, Counsellor, Receptionist, Residential Case Worker, Community Case Worker, Outreach Education Officer, Resource and Information Officer, Over 55 Support Officer and Transgender Anti-Violence Program Officer.

Positions do occasionally become available; please check the Positions Vacant page on our website for further details.

Funding

The Gender Centre Inc. is funded in part by the N.S.W. Department of Human Services, Community Services under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (S.A.A.P.), and by Sydney Local Area Health District. Our Over 55 Support Program is funded by the Commonwealth Department of Social Services. We also periodically apply for government grants for different projects, receive the occasional donation and hold occasional fundraisers.

History

Australian Transsexual Association

In the very early 1980's, a small band of transsexual people founded the "Australian Transsexual Association" (ATA) with the aim of supporting transsexual people by advocating for legal and social changes. A member of this group, Roberta Perkins, who had earlier completed an honours thesis about transsexuals, had approached Reverend Bill Crews of the Wayside Chapel Crisis Centre to ask if he would consider the use of the chapel as a regular meeting place offering support to the transsexual girls of Kings Cross.

After consultation with Reverend Bill Crews and Reverend Ted Noffs together with Roberta Perkins, regular weekly support meetings for transsexuals commenced.

Many of the girls working the streets of Kings Cross, from Darlinghurst Road to William Street were vulnerable to assaults, robberies, rape and harassment. Problems of increased dependence on prescription and illicit drugs were also an issue. Often drugs were a means of managing a multitude of issues as a transgender individual, such as limited employment opportunities, no secure housing, verbal and physical abuse, violent attacks etc. These negative experiences reduce an individual's already low self esteem.

Other issues of concern were incidences of transgenders being evicted and discriminatory treatment by landlords and some service providers.

In July 1983, Roberta Perkins met with Frank Walker, State Minister for Youth and Community Services, after he had read her recently published book, *The "Drag Queen Scene"*, a book based on a study that she had undertaken about the transgender subculture in Kings Cross.

During this time, the media had also become involved in the issues of transsexuals and had produced a documentary movie titled *"Man into Woman"*. This film had also highlighted the plight of transgender people in Sydney, particularly Kings Cross. Public awareness of the issues faced by transsexual people was most certainly on the rise.

But what had disturbed Walker about Roberta's book the most was the semi-nomadic lives that young transgenders experienced, forced from their apartments by landlords and unable to get overnight residence in either a men's or a women's refuge. The problem of homelessness was significant and providing transsexuals with a safe refuge was crucial. Most refuge services at the time would not cater for transsexuals.

Walker's words have never left her: "Roberta, we have got to find them a place where they can lay their heads at night."

She made a submission for funding to open a refuge for transsexuals. Frank Walker approved this plan, two months later a cheque arrived addressed to Roberta and a house was provided as a refuge strictly for transsexuals. In October 1983 the doors opened at 75 Morgan St., Petersham, and its twelve bed spaces - two double-bunk beds in each of three bedrooms - were filled immediately.

On 14 December 1983 Frank Walker officially opened Tiresias House.

Tiresias House

The opening of Tiresias House was the ATAs proudest moment, the name "Tiresias House" decided upon in honour of the hero in Greek mythology whose sex was changed by the gods from man to woman.

With the premises in Petersham being provided by the Department of Main Roads, Tiresias House became the first government funded service specifically for transgenders in Australia.

The first group of residents consisted of young transsexuals that had been traumatised by being cast out of their parental homes or had drifted around Kings Cross searching for identity roots but before long, Tiresias House found itself bursting at the seams with prospective residents and had to increase the available bed spaces to sixteen by turning the lounge room into a fourth bedroom.

Soon after Frank Walker's department provided a second house located in Ashfield and a third house was also soon provided in Haberfield. By mid-1984 we had a structured residential system from short-to-medium term accommodation.

Also by mid-1984 a new group sought accommodation. These were transsexuals who had spent time in gaol and were on parole. Most of them had worked on the streets to support a heavy addiction. Tiresias House was registered as a halfway house for their benefit but the mix of the street-wise with the earlier group of naive middle-class kids proved to be a disaster.

Walker's department once more came to the rescue by providing a fourth house alongside the Petersham railway station. These premises became the official halfway house complete with a detoxification unit and residential nurse.

By 1993, DOCS and the N.S.W. Department of Health entered into a joint funding agreement. This meant that Tiresias House was funded to provide services to minimise the effects of HIV/AIDS on the transgender community. These services included Outreach and a Community Worker position. At this time, Tiresias House was incorporated and renamed The Gender Centre Inc, to reflect the change in services and service philosophy.

The Gender Centre Inc.

Rather than targeting simply young transsexuals, the service began to target people exploring their gender, which included people who identified as transsexual or transgender, cross-dressers and any other person who experienced issues, problems or difficulties relating to the gender assigned to them at birth.

The introduction of amendments to the N.S.W. Anti-Discrimination Act in 1996, recognised the legal existence of transgender persons. The term transgender replaced the term people with gender issues which had been used to identify the target group served by the Gender Centre.

By 1997, many links had been formed with both the public and the private sectors. Training among employers and employees began to take steps in easing transgender individuals' path to maintaining their employment during gender transition and raised the awareness of gender issues throughout society.

Today the Gender Centre remains committed to the support and well-being of transgender people, employing 8 staff and housing up to 15 residents at any one time, in 3 refuges and 4 exit houses.

Our Services

Counselling

The Gender Centre provides counselling to residential clients, community clients, partners, family members and friends of gender-questioning people at no cost. The counselling service also provides support and education to school counsellors as well as counsellors in rural areas.

Residential Program

Up to 11 residents can be accommodated in three crisis refuge houses. Residents are supported to move towards independent living, residents are encouraged to consider a range of options available to meet their needs.

Exit House Program

The Gender Centre provides semi-supported transitional accommodation in partnership with a number of community housing providers in self-contained units. Residents can stay for up to 12 months and are supported to move towards independent living, residents are encouraged to consider a range of options available to meet their needs.

Case Management

Intensive Case Management is provided for those who find themselves in Gender Centre Housing as well as the Gender Centre Exit Housing Program.

Community Case-Management

Intensive case-management is provided to all community clients accessing the Gender Centre within the borders of New South Wales as well as co/case-management with other service providers.

Advocacy Service

The Gender Centre provides advocacy support for transgender and gender-questioning people to help facilitate effective outcomes. The most common advocacy support provided is in dealings with the police when reporting a crime or being questioned in relation to a criminal matter, with the Department of Housing to prevent evictions, with Centrelink to establish payment of correct entitlements, with Aged Care services to provide suitable supported care options and disability support programs and to acquire suitable appliances and equipment for independent living.

Over 55 Support Project

The aim of this project is to offer support and advocacy to clients who are over the age of 55. Support services range from front line crisis management to psycho-social support and other specialist care services.

Training for Service Providers and Others

The Gender Centre offers training, support and workshops to employers, service providers, students and other people interested in gender issues. Topics covered include implications for staff and clients in relation to anti-discrimination legislation and equal employment opportunity issues, workplace harassment and provision of goods and services as well as many personal aspects of the transgender process. Training is provided 2 times per year to the Centre for Community Welfare Training Centre (C.C.W.T.).

Training and Education for clients

The Gender Centre offers training, support and workshops to residential and non-residential clients of the Gender Centre, workshops include recreational and general interest courses, employment, work skills development training, health, nutrition, cooking and living skills courses as well as nights when guest speakers present mini forums on current issues relating to the lives of transgender people living in New South Wales.

Outreach

Available to clients confined in their homes and in hospital in the inner and outer city areas from Monday to Friday. Night Outreach is available to street based sex workers and private parlours in the inner city and surrounding areas on a Wednesday evening from 8:00pm to midnight. Gaol Outreach is available to all Transgender and Gender questioning clients confined in a correctional centre within the borders of New South Wales (all Gender Centre staff are Authorised visitors). Court and Cell Outreach is available to all transgender and gender-questioning clients within the inner city and surrounding areas.

Resource Development

The Gender Centre Produces a range of print and online resources on HIV/AIDS, medical and other information relevant to people with gender issues and their service providers. Information packages (kits) fact-sheets and other printed materials including Polare. As part of the resources provided by the Gender Centre we have a library with an array of books and audio-visual material on the issues pertinent to gender-questioning and transgender people available for loan free of charge.

Partners Family Members and Friends

The Gender Centre provides Support, education as well as referrals to a wide range of specialist counselling, health, legal, welfare and other community services that are available to the Transgender community.

Social and Support

The Gender Centre Provides social and support groups and outings to people with gender issues.

Drug and Alcohol Service

The centre provides counselling support, education and referrals to a broad range of services.

N.S.E.P. Service

The Gender Centre runs a secondary N.E.S.P. service, Needle Exchange, condoms and Lube.

Client Confidentiality

The Privacy Amendment (Private Sector) Act 2000 which amends the Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988, sets out your rights and The Gender Centre's responsibility relating to any personal information held about you as an individual who uses The Gender Centre's services.

The Gender Centre maintains a record of each resident, community client and others accessing the Gender Centre either in person, by telephone or email. The Gender Centre Inc. will collect only the information, which is necessary to provide you with the highest standard of service.

This information is recorded so that a clear record of the client's needs is maintained over time; staff can continue to work effectively with clients who present for counselling on a number of occasions with a number of different workers; we can maintain knowledge of the range of issues affecting clients of our service; staff can gain a view of the overall progress of the client or resident through the counselling or case management process; and so that accountability and consistency is maintained.

Information about you will not be used in any way without your consent or other than for the reasons for which it was collected.

The Gender Centre Inc. undertakes to ensure that all personal information is kept in a secure place and that only staff access your information and only in the performance of their duties in the provision of a service to you. The Gender Centre Inc. will provide you with access to personal information it holds about you upon your request.

Wherever practicable and lawful, and if you want to, we will provide you the option of interacting with The Gender Centre Inc. anonymously.