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The Seahorse Society

Welcoming those who Cross-Dress Infrequently to those who Identify as Transsexual

by Leslie, Seahorse Society President

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Although many, if not most, of the readers of *Polare* will have heard of the Seahorse Society, it is apparent that there are a number of misconceptions about Seahorse. Rather than try and address the various ideas that are about, let me just give you a brief run-down on the history of Seahorse, and where we are today.

Seahorse still believe that one of its main functions is as a 'first-step-out' for those with enhanced gender feelings.

The moves to form an association for heterosexual transvestites began in 1969, and culminated in the formation of the Seahorse Club in 1971. The early meetings were held in the members' homes and at restaurants. By advertising in the newspapers, Australia-wide, and by appearing on the television, the club

was large enough by 1976 to hold a conference which took place in Newport, on Sydney's Northern Beaches. A second conference was held the following year. These were basically three day events, and by all accounts were quite successful

Soon after this, there developed a schism in the club, probably caused by distance and personality clashes and the various states set up their own clubs. When I joined Seahorse in the early 1980s, the term heterosexual transvestite was still being used, although there were at least three members who had undergone, or were undergoing, hormone therapy and S.R.S.

By the late 1980s, it was apparent that it was inappropriate for the club to maintain such a strict limitation on membership, but as in all associations the need to change the underlying philosophy has to be member-driven, and it took a couple of years of reasoning, plus a talk from a solicitor attached to the Redfern Legal Service, before we could adapt.

At the same time, a decision was made to incorporate the club and in 1990 it become the Seahorse Society of N.S.W., Inc. And at the same time the requirements to be specifically anything were dropped and Seahorse welcomed anyone with enhanced gender feelings. However, it would be fair to say that Seahorse still believe that one of its main functions is as a 'first-step-out' for those with enhanced gender feelings. And as such we welcome anyone, whether they wish to dress infrequently in clothes of the opposite gender, live fulltime in the same way, who are on hormone therapy, or who have identified as transsexual or intersex.

In our membership application form there is no requirement for anyone to state their sexuality, or their genetic intentions. We do, however, ask our members and their quests to behave in a manner which wouldn't cause offence to anyone, member, partner or guest, so that those just coming out into the community, who very often have a partner who has pre-conceived ideas about the situation, find that the meetings are very low-key indeed.

We have had a couple of recent incidents where persons who have obviously identified themselves closely with a specific group, have made the comment that, "They're just men wearing dresses!". I find it ironic that these same people will no doubt insist on total acquiescence of their own lifestyle. We cannot force individuals to hold specific views, but the committee of Seahorse is trying to reduce the 'pigeonholing' of people, and to work in a complementary way with the Gender Centre.

Our meetings are held on the last Friday of each month, except for December, which is the second Friday and may be completely social, or we may have a presentation of clothes, or shoes, or make-up etc. There is no alcohol supplied at the meetings, and members are not encouraged to bring any, because we would require a liquor license. So we make do with tea, coffee and soft drinks, and some small nibbly things to eat. The evening runs from 7:30pm to close to midnight, and there is a \$5.00 meeting fee to cover the cost of hall hire and catering.

Each month we also have a restaurant night, where those members who wish to come along can do so. We try and vary the restaurants, although if we find one we like we do make return visits. Again we try and keep the cost down to about \$25.00 for two courses and most of the time, we succeed.

If any member of the community feels that they might enjoy coming along to either of these meetings just call our phone line, on 9807 7395 and have a chat.

Shortly with the agreement of the Gender Centre Management Committee, we will put up a poster bringing Seahorse to your notice.

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The Gender Centre is committed to developing and providing services and activities, which enhance the ability of people with gender issues to make informed choices. We offer a wide range of services to people with gender issues, their partners, family members and friends in New South Wales. We are an accommodation service and also act as an education, support, training and referral resource centre to other organisations and service providers. The Gender Centre is committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of people with gender issues. We specifically aim to provide a high quality service, which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.