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X in the Wrong Place

Tests Confirm What She Knew All Along: A Newcastle Woman's Dispute with Lawn Bowls N.S.W.

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... she found herself in the middle of a knock-down, drag-out fight with the sport she loved most ... lawn bowls.

A Newcastle woman had tests worth \$3,000 last year to prove something that she already knew, and had known since she was four ... that she was female. A Queensland laboratory prepared a map of her chromosomes, showing clearly that the apparently male body she had been born with in fact had X (female) chromosomes, XXY.

She was president of her local club and had played in the State Championships. But the New South Wales body wouldn't let her play as a woman.

She suffered a birth defect, but for years she had to fight educated, authoritative people who insisted she had not. It was a psychological problem she had, they assured her. Couldn't she see her own penis and testicles?

Well, yes she could. What's more, they worked. With the help of another woman - a woman who was legally her wife, who knew her only as a man - those little

extras produced three children.

But she felt the old trouser snake, the wedding tackle, had nothing to do with her. All the time she was working as a truckie, captaining her lawn bowls team, living the life of a nice ordinary bloke in the Australian country town of Werris Creek, they had nothing to do with her.

That's why, in 2005, Tanya Appleby had them cut off. Fortunately, thanks to her own determination, she didn't have to do it the way one victim did ... read up on it on the Internet, castrate himself without anaesthetic and almost die from blood loss.

No, Tanya's operation was professionally performed "gender reassignment surgery", also known (and preferred by many) as "gender correction surgery".

Now she takes hormones, has a birth certificate that shows a female infant named Tanya Jane was born on her birthday, in her home town, to her parents, and at fifty-nine she lives a new life in Newcastle as the president of Agender New South Wales.

On behalf of her clan, the intersexed and transgendered, Tanya stands up to unsympathetic doctors, governments and psychiatrists. She networks with organisations around Australia and in New Zealand, liaises with the police on related matters (including domestic violence), and keeps lines open to churches, charities, government housing, the Departments of Education and Aboriginal Affairs, Centrelink and social welfare.

She, or some other member of Agender, will help a person find where to start, direct them to understanding doctors and even tell them what to wear to interviews (not pants, even if most other women wear pants) or help them shop.

It's a job that needs a fighter. Tanya's got the credentials, though. When she decided to live the rest of her life as the woman she had always been, she found herself in the middle of a knock-down, drag-out fight with the sport she loved most ... lawn bowls.

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Tanya took her case to the Department of Sport and Recreation, the Anti-Discrimination Board, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and Bowls Australia. It took six years to win it, but win it she did.

She lost a lot: her marriage, her children, her privacy, her past. She gained confidence in herself as an advocate for intersexed people.

"What if your husband wanted to be a woman?" she asked me. "I'd support him," I told her, without thinking. "Ah, but what would people think of you? If you are living with a woman, are you a lesbian? What would you think of you? And what would your children think?"

Then there's the question of qualifications, she said. If you need experience to get a job, and all your experience was gained under your former assigned gender, can you trust your new boss with the explanation? Or do you just wipe out that part of your life?

It might all seem straightforward - after all, nobody would blame a person for a birth defect, so surely the intersexed can reveal their status. But this is a defect of gender, and ordinary English uses "gender" and "sex" interchangeably.

From "sex" it's an easy step to "sexuality", and the uninformed or prejudiced then associate "gender defects" with criminal sexual practices, such as child molestation or sexual assault. (Ironically, quite often the intersexed or transgendered are asexual, not attracted to either sex).

Recent research suggests that male and female brains are different: the feeling of having a male brain in a female body or vice versa, has a physical basis. The defect that shaped Tanya's life, Klinefelter's Syndrome, affects just 0.8 percent of human beings, though it gives rise to ninety different conditions.

One in 400 babies have some form of gender variation. It may go unnoticed. It may be surgically dealt with at birth (a practice some call genital mutilation). Or it may leave a young person desperately waiting until they turn eighteen, so they can have surgery to affirm brain-sex. Not surprisingly, the suicide rate is estimated at 30 percent among the young transgendered.

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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.