

# *New South Wales* TRANS HISTORY



**When Professor Noah Riseman first contacted me back in 2019 about his research project into the trans history of this state, making a proper record of this had been on my mind, too.**

Jogged by the sudden death of a fellow activist (Nadine Stransen) from back in the day, and having been recently given a diagnosis of cancer, I was getting my own affairs in order, and was particularly keen for these stories to be properly told, while there were still witnesses alive. (As it turned out, the cancer I had was no match for modern medicine, and was smartly snipped out by a very clever surgeon.)

We corresponded a little, then Noah came to interview me in person, and showed such a depth of knowledge and understanding as a member of the GLBTIQA+ community and as a compassionate ally of trans and other sex and/or gender diverse people, I was happy to recommend him to my fellow activist from back in the day, Aidy Griffin (which I did not do lightly, for Aidy did not suffer fools gladly). This proved lucky for the sake of recording this history, for Aidy sadly succumbed to emphysema in 2021. When it came to the history of trans activism in this state over the last few decades, being a trans activist, and being a bit of a know-it-all, I thought I knew it all, but now I realise, I didn't know it by half. As an actor in some of these events, I thought I knew the script, but it turns out, I only knew my bits. This report tells not only the histories preceding and following my moments in the spotlight, but other things happening and people working on events at the time. I learned a lot seeing all the pieces put together for a more complete picture.

Professor Riseman has certainly done a deep dive on these stories and the historical socio/medical/legal contexts. This report is the result of extensive scholarly research and much time

and effort finding and engaging with the actual people involved.

These are stories about people who did not set out to become activists, but who faced discrimination just for being true to themselves, and worked for and/or found individual and/or collective solutions to anti-transgender discrimination and other obstacles against equal inclusion of sex and/or gender diverse people. Those solutions then became springboards for others, case precedents, legislation to improve on, examples to inform and inspire. The reader may find this collected, collated and curated history similarly engaging.

Progress is seldom linear, however, more often two steps forwards and one step back. Even now, after a long struggle for marriage equality in Australia decided by a plebiscite in 2017, and broader acceptance of sex and gender diversity including non-binary, there is a backlash targeting transgender people and their equal inclusion in school life as students and as teachers – including a recently defused effort by the prime minister to weaponise religious anti-discrimination legislation for this purpose. Yet, at the same time, there are more out and proud non-binary and other transgender young people insisting on living their lives true to themselves, and refusing to be cowed by old ideas of “propriety” used to reinforce social privilege and social dispossession.

Still, it's good to know where we've been, to see where we can go.

Norrie, 10 March 2022, on Gadigal land in Waterloo, Warrang (Sydney) NSW.

# Foreword By Norrie



Image: Norrie Portrait. Illustration  
by Oliver Vincent Reyes.

# Introduction

Yve Rees's recent transition memoir *All about Yves: Notes from a Transition* uses the adage "You can't be what you can't see" to explain the importance of trans visibility.<sup>1</sup>

It is a sentiment echoed in numerous oral history interviews with trans and gender diverse people ranging from age 20 all the way to 89: seeing other people "like them" gave language, a sense of connection and understanding about internal feelings they otherwise could not articulate. In a society long dominated by gender binaries and ideas of what it means to be male/female, masculine/feminine or boy/girl, finding that language and a sense of connection is vital to affirm someone's identity, feelings and mental health – particularly for people who do not fit into dominant gender constructs.

This report takes "You can't be what you can't see" a step further, applying the concept of historical consciousness. In scholarly terms, Jörn Rüsen says that historical consciousness "functions to aid us in comprehending past actuality in order to grasp present actuality."<sup>2</sup>

Put simply: historical consciousness is about understanding how the experiences of the past have shaped present communities and can inform their future. Rightly or wrongly, historical consciousness often legitimises a community's existence and voices – particularly for those communities which have been marginalised or disenfranchised.

Transgender historians such as Leslie Feinberg and Susan Stryker argue that finding historical examples of gender diversity can empower trans people as

experts in their own histories and can contribute to their liberation.<sup>3</sup>

This report aims to contribute to trans historical consciousness by providing an overview of New South Wales trans history. It reconstructs the legal, medical, media, social and – most importantly – lived and living experiences of trans and gender diverse people. Although the report goes back to time immemorial, by virtue of the sources available and the language of "trans" which emerged post-Second World War, much of the report focuses on the period since the 1950s.

This report draws on research funded by Australian Research Discovery grant DP180100322: "Transgender Australians: The History of an Identity."

## The main sources come from:

1. **Oral history interviews** with trans and gender diverse people who live or lived in New South Wales, especially past and present activists, and a small number of cisgender allies and health professionals who have worked closely with the community;
2. **Personal archives** generously shared by interview participants, including press clippings, scrapbooks, old pamphlets, research reports and organisational records relating to the Gender Centre, the Transgender Liberation Coalition and other trans groups, past and present;
3. **Newspaper reports**, accessed through Trove [**National Library of Australia**], interview participants' personal archives and online database Factiva;



Image: Carmen Rupe, unidentified and Roberta Perkins at The transsexual and society seminar [Australian Transsexual Association], Wayside Chapel, 9 December 1981. Photo courtesy AQuA.

4. **Articles in the LGBTIQ+ press**, accessed through the **Australian Queer Archives** [AQuA] and the online database Archives of Sexuality and Gender;
5. **Papers in the National Archives of Australia**, State Library of New South Wales and AQuA, including the papers of Roberta Perkins and old recordings of the Australian Transsexual Association's monthly *Gaywaves* radio spot in the 1980s.



Image: Yves Rees, *All About Yves: Notes from a Transition*.

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**The author expresses gratitude to all interview participants who were generous to share their life stories and personal papers**

All interview participants had the option of being identified or using a pseudonym; those who elected for a pseudonym are identified in quotation marks. It is not appropriate to name all interview participants here, but particular thanks go to those who shared personal archives or networked with other interview participants: Eloise Brook, Teddy Cook, Katherine Cummings, Norrie, Lisa Taylor and Emma Thorne. Eurydice Aroney put me in touch with Roberta Perkins before she passed away and also was generous to share some of Roberta's tape recordings of interviews with trans women from the 1980s

Thanks to the New South Wales representatives on the advisory group that has been working with this Australian Research Council project: Teddy Cook and Katherine Cummings, who sadly passed away in early 2022 just as I finished drafting this report.

Thanks as always to the wonderful volunteers at AQuA, especially Nick Henderson who provided so many images for this report, and to research assistant Geraldine Fela for her tireless work.

Finally, thanks to graphic designers Oliver Vincent Reyes and Jaime-Lee Collinson.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this report contains the names of people who are deceased.

**As a warning to all readers:**

**Given this is a report about the past, at times it engages with terms which are now considered outdated and even slurs. The report will generally only use outdated terms either in a discursive manner, when they came from direct quotations or when they were part of a group or place name. While this may cause discomfort to some readers, this is part of the history and it cannot and should not be erased. The next section will give historical context to some of this terminology.**

# THE CHALLENGE OF LANGUAGE



Archives scholars Kelly Rawson and Cristan Williams define the word transgender as referring to people "whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth."<sup>4</sup> It is an effective and succinct definition. Yet, the definition has never been static; it has changed in meaning and has consistently been debated and probably will continue to be contested and evolve in its usage. Indeed, some non-binary people reject the word transgender because they see it as linked to a binary reading of gender, while others see the term as encompassing gender diversity beyond the binary.

One simple question not often asked is: **Why do we use the prefix "trans" to refer to people whose gender is different from their sex assigned at birth?**

This dates back to 1910 when German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld coined the term transvestite to describe people who had an innate, unexplainable urge to dress in clothing associated with the opposite sex (and I am intentionally using the word opposite because Hirschfeld and other sexologists thought in binaries).

After the Second World War, the advent of gender affirmation surgery (at the time called sex reassignment surgery) led to new psychiatric definitions around gender diversity. Dr David Cauldwell in 1949 coined the term transsexual to describe those people who saw themselves as trapped in the wrong body and who desired gender affirmation surgery to transition to the opposite sex. Scholars now refer to this as wrong body discourse. Psychiatrists distinguished transsexuals from transvestites, who were heterosexual men who liked to dress in women's clothing and adopt women's personas part-time, but who did not identify as women or desire any medical interventions.

Rawson and Williams trace the first use of the word transgender to psychiatrist John Oliven in 1965. Oliven conceived transgender as almost an in-between space on a spectrum, with transsexual at one end and transvestite on the other. Transvestites only adopted women's dress part-time and transsexuals desired gender affirmation surgery.

Transgender people desired to live socially as women and may even take feminising hormones, but they did not want gender affirmation surgery. The term transgender had limited use in psychiatric circles and among American activists from the 1970s. Australian activist Roberta Perkins used the term in a 1984 radio interview on *Gaywaves*, but the expression transgender really did not take off until the 1990s after the publication of Leslie Feinberg's landmark manifesto ***Trans Gender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come.***<sup>5</sup>

Just as terminology has changed over time, so too have the meanings and connotations attached to them. For instance, while transgender initially referred to a particular demographic of trans women, when it became popularised in the 1990s it was used to refer to anyone who identified with a gender other than their sex assigned at birth, regardless of medical or surgical interventions.

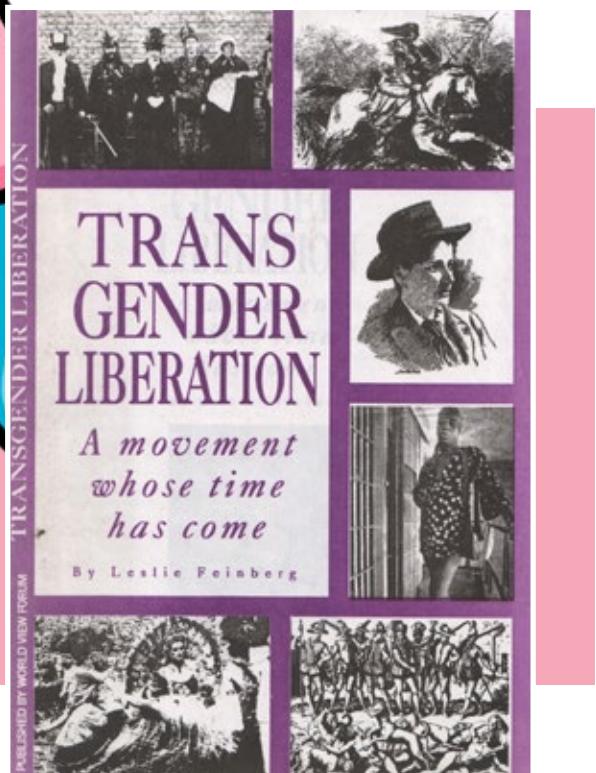


Image: Book Cover; *Trans Gender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come*.

Image: Illustration by Oliver Vincent Reyes.

This evolving terminology highlights the dynamics of change, as new, broader conceptions of gender have consistently challenged community members and society at large to rethink categories and labels. But these changes over time have also produced tensions. Identity is something very personal, as are the labels people apply to themselves.



Image: Susan Stryker, speaking at the Trans March San Francisco, June 2017.  
Illustration by Oliver Vincent Reyes.

Even though words like transvestite and transsexual are generally seen as inappropriate or derogatory, there are many trans people who still use them. Some trans people even still use the slang term trany/tranny, which is now considered a slur but was common lingo in the 1990s. It is not appropriate to challenge one's self-identity, but it is important to think through the context of why they may use particular words and why those meanings are important to them.

**American historian Susan Stryker effectively outlines the way we can use trans and transgender as umbrella terms:**

*[Transgender] refer[s] to people who cross over [trans-] the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain that gender. Some people move away from their birth-assigned gender because they feel strongly that they properly belong to another gender through which it would be better for them to live; others want to strike out toward some new location, some space not yet clearly described or concretely occupied; still others simply feel the need to challenge the conventional expectations bound up with the gender that was initially put upon them. In any case, it is the movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place, rather than any particular destination or mode of transition.<sup>6</sup>*

Stryker also presents an excellent list of terms, past and present, associated with gender diversity along with definitions and explanations.<sup>7</sup> TransHub offers a popular, Australian-focused language guide on preferred and outdated terminology.<sup>8</sup>

# NSW TRANS HISTORY BEFORE TRANS



Image: Edward De Lacy Evans,  
also known as Ellen Tremayne,  
1879. Image by N White.



*Image: The Transgender Project, Central Sydney Area Health Service, 1996.  
Image courtesy AQuA*

### Trans as a language emerged in Western cultures

and the English language from 1910 and especially after the Second World War. Scholars of queer theory regularly argue that language has been used to define and control, and by defining we inherently exclude those people who do not fit categories. Queer theorists also pose a historical dilemma: if the concept of trans as we know and define it did not exist in the past, then how can we say that someone from the past was trans? Put another way, can we say that a historical figure was trans if the concept of trans did not exist in their time, place and culture?

Transgender studies scholars have written about the concept of trans-historicities to work through this dilemma. Trans-historicities acknowledge that we can never definitively label past figures as trans or gender diverse, but still we can imagine trans possibilities when we look at examples of people who broke from or crossed gender norms. To apply trans-historicities to nineteenth and early twentieth century Australia means looking for examples of assigned female at birth (AFAB) or assigned male at birth (AMAB) people dressing or living outside their sex assigned at birth. Were these people what we would now call transgender but lacked the language to identify as such?

Were they only assuming a different gender for social or economic gain but still identified with their sex assigned at birth? Did they have other language or ways to think about their gender that we do not have now? Trans-historicities look at these possibilities and construct a lineage of gender non-conformity which leads to the present-day concept of trans and gender diverse.<sup>9</sup>

**Reconstructing a trans-historicity of New South Wales begins since time immemorial.** Dozens of Aboriginal mobs occupied present-day New South Wales and had their own cultural practices which often had gendered dimensions. For instance, certain stories, places, knowledges or practices were reserved for women or men. In present-day English parlance this is sometimes referred to as men's business or women's business. Yet, to say that there were gendered practices is not to say that Aboriginal cultures subscribed to binary readings of gender. For instance, in northern and central Australia, where more Aboriginal languages are still spoken, there are words for third or non-binary genders.<sup>10</sup>

**Non-binary Wiradjuri scholar Sandy O'Sullivan** argues that the imposition of binary genders on

# “How can we say someone from the past was trans?”

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities was part of the colonial project of dispossession.<sup>11</sup> As this report will highlight later, it is especially since the 1990s that **Aboriginal people have been more vocally reaffirming diverse gender identities**. The terms Sistergirl and Brotherboy are popular words that some Indigenous people use; Sistergirls are AMAB but have a feminine spirit, and Brotherboys are AFAB and have a masculine spirit. Of course, these are English words for cultural understandings which do not translate easily, and non-binary and other gender diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do not necessarily use these words. Indeed, this is a global phenomenon, as numerous non-European cultures have third, multiple or non-binary genders (e.g. Two-Spirit people in Native America; whakawāhine among Māori; fa'afafine among Samoans; Hijra and Khawajasiras in India and Pakistan respectively).

The first white colonisers arrived in present-day Sydney on 26 January 1788. The settlement was a mixture of convicts and officers. Within months, relations with the Eora people deteriorated and the cycles of frontier violence, disease and sexual abuse commenced. As settlers expanded from Sydney to other parts of NSW across the nineteenth

century, these cycles repeated and facilitated the mass dispossession and death of Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people and cultures survived in an adapted manner, especially in missions, reserves, on cattle stations, in town fringes and in parts of the state more remote from settler population centres. In the twentieth century assimilation and child removal policies further dispossessed Aboriginal people, while also having the consequence of accelerating the imposition of European understandings of gender.

The records in nineteenth century NSW are mostly silent about sexuality and gender crossing. It would be in the mid-1800s that a few famous cases of gender crossing emerged in Victoria, such as Edward De Lacy Evans in 1879 and Gordon Lawrence in 1888. **NSW newspapers reported on these and other cases of people caught dressing in clothing associated with the opposite sex**.<sup>12</sup>

More detail about these and other Victorian historical examples are available from the Victoria's Transgender History Report, published by Transgender Victoria. NSW-specific examples began to appear in newspapers from the 1910s onwards.

From the late 1800s through the 1920s, AFAB people caught dressed as men tended to be charged with vagrancy, which was a catch-all crime around sex work, homelessness and other vices associated with poverty. **These cases regularly appeared in the press because of the titillation they generated and because of the anxieties they could produce around sex and sexuality**.<sup>13</sup>

**AFAB people arrested for dressing could sometimes get away with it if they framed themselves as having a bit of an adventure living as a man.** Indeed, there was often press sympathy for AFAB people who dressed and/or lived as men to secure better job opportunities and status in society. This tolerance only extended so long as the people accepted – at least to the courts and the media – that they were really women.

# Trans Possibility



Image: Harry Crawford taken by the NSW Police Department.

**AAMAB people who were caught by police tended to claim that they were dressing only as a joke.** Comedy or the theatre were two of the few socially acceptable contexts in which AMAB people could dress as women. Digging deeper, several of the cases of arrested AMAB people seem like more than just a joke.

For instance, in August 1915, Sydney police arrested a man dressed in women's clothing and who appeared to be a "charming young lady." The accused claimed that it was all part of a bet with a friend. The accused placed advertisements in the newspaper and, dressed as a woman, had to rent a house and hire a housemaid and gardener. The person claimed they were so good at impersonating a woman that they often dressed up at night and attracted the affections of men.<sup>14</sup> The bet defence is plausible, but given the frequency and effort the person went through, this case also represents a trans possibility.<sup>15</sup>

Other examples from the 1920s of AMAB people caught dressing have even greater hints that the accused were not just acting on a joke or a bet. One hint was when they admitted that dressing was a regular habit rather than a one-off bet. For instance, in May 1921 Sydney police arrested George Augustus

Rocake dressed as a woman. *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported, "The Magistrate asked Rocake why he wanted to get about dressed as he was. Rocake replied that he only did it about once a fortnight, and did it only for a joke; there was no ulterior motive." The newspaper also reported that Rocake had been seen dressing as a woman in the evening for the last year.<sup>16</sup> If this was just a joke, why would Rocake be doing it every other week for a year? **And who was the joke targeting?**

From the 1920s especially, newspaper reports of AMAB people caught dressing had undertones that the person was homosexual. Moreover, the 1920s saw the rise of AMAB people being charged for offensive behaviour – the same charge used for homosexuality.<sup>17</sup> In part this was because gender crossing was regularly conflated with homosexuality – a myth that persisted until at least the 1980s – but also the circumstances of some of these arrests had a sexual element. One example was nineteen-year-old waiter Claud Phillips, arrested in May 1924 dressed as a woman after meeting a sea-cook late at night. A constable found them near St Mary's Cathedral – a known cruising place – and Phillips admitted to being a man.<sup>18</sup>

**Only a handful of reports give some indication of** the person's desire to be seen as women. In July 1922, police found someone dressed "in the height of female fashion" at a dance at Paddington Town Hall. The newspapers reported: "Many thought that the young man was rather a good-looking girl. He had many partners." Yet, there is no explanation of how or why police realised that the dance attendee was not, to use present-day parlance, a cis woman. The person was quoted as asking the police to let them stay until the end of the dance because they were "having the time of his life."<sup>19</sup> Was the person enjoying the male suitors, reflecting possible homosexuality? Or did they enjoy being seen as a woman, reflecting a trans possibility? The article ended with a description of the police escorting the person away on a tram; male passengers still believed it was a woman being arrested.

**Perhaps the strongest trans possibility was James Scott**, arrested in February 1922 in central Sydney dressed as a woman. *The Evening News* highlighted that numerous constables believed Scott appeared to be an almost perfect woman; only a tip-off led to it being discovered that Scott was AMAB and their arrest. Like other cases, Scott was not just doing this as a one-off; Scott dressed as a woman on nights and weekends "for as long as he could remember." Scott never claimed that this was a joke, but rather the newspaper reported, "There seemed to be no other motive for the man's strange conduct than a desire to be taken notice of and 'admired as a woman'."<sup>20</sup>

**The most famous NSW case from the pre-war period, though, was Harry Crawford.** Born E. Falleni and presumed female at birth, Crawford emigrated from Italy to Sydney in 1898 and began living as a man. Crawford married a woman named Annie Birkett, who disappeared in 1917. Three years later, police brought Crawford in for questioning and Crawford confessed to having been AFAB. Even though Crawford denied having anything to do with Birkett's disappearance, police charged Crawford with murder.

Crawford's trial was a media sensation, particularly when prosecutors wielded a dildo as evidence – referred to in the press as only "the article" and "something artificial". Notwithstanding the circumstantial evidence, Crawford was found guilty of murder and the judge sentenced Crawford to death, though this was later commuted. Crawford was released from gaol in 1931 and assumed a new female identity. In 1938 a car hit and killed Crawford.

Crawford's conviction and public attention are in a sense an outlier, but they also demonstrate some important trends about AFAB people who gender crossed before the Second World War. AFAB people who fit into an adventure narrative or were seen as adopting men's personas could be tolerated within certain bounds. Crawford was different, though. The sexual element and evidence suggested that Crawford genuinely believed to be a man, and this generated anxieties around sex, gender and sexuality.<sup>21</sup>

**Another person who was AFAB reinforces this point.** Harcourt Payne had been living as a man for fifty years in various labourer and clerical jobs in Sydney's western suburbs. He married twice and both wives passed away. When Payne fell ill in 1939, doctors discovered he was not a cis man (to use present terminology) and incarcerated him at the Orange Mental Hospital. Payne refused to accept that he was a woman, and doctors and psychiatrists looked for glandular disorders or other medical reasons to explain his behaviour and condition. Payne died in the hospital in 1940, never accepting that he was a woman.<sup>22</sup>

Absent in all the above cases was the sexology discourse that was emerging in Europe from the late nineteenth and especially early twentieth centuries. Although Magnus Hirschfeld coined the term transvestism in 1910 – and British sexologist Havelock Ellis used the term eonism in 1928 to describe the same phenomenon – the sexology discourse did not gain traction in Australia until the 1930s. Even then it was used sparsely, but it foreshadowed how medical and psychological discourses would come to define and control gender diversity from the second half of the twentieth century.

# **MEDICALISING TRANSGENDER: 1950 - 2000**

**THE  
TRANSSEXU  
PHENOME**

**ALL THE FACTS  
ABOUT THE CHANGING  
OF SEX THROUGH**

**The first Australian psychiatrists** to treat people whose gender identity was different from their sex assigned at birth were based in Melbourne in the 1950s. Meanwhile, international events in the 1950s-60s greatly influenced public discourses and understandings of trans people.

First was the publicity about American veteran Christine Jorgensen's medical and social transition in 1953. The other was the publication of American psychiatrist Dr Harry Benjamin's article "Transsexualism and Transvestism as Psycho-Somatic and Somato-Psychic Syndromes" in 1954 and his 1966 book *The Transsexual Phenomenon*.<sup>23</sup>

Jorgensen's transition and Benjamin's research cemented the language and medical approaches to transgender which would dominate until the 1990s. On the one hand, the language around transsexuals and transvestites meant that trans people could begin to articulate their internal feelings, search for others "like them" and access medical interventions.

Yet, the medical approach also meant doctors, especially psychiatrists, were creating diagnostic criteria to define who was and was not a "true transsexual". Those individuals who did not meet the criteria would be denied access to hormones and/or gender affirmation surgery.

When Sydney psychiatrists began working with trans clients in the mid-late 1960s, they adopted Benjamin's approach. Indeed, *The Transsexual Phenomenon* became somewhat of a global textbook for doctors working with trans clients. Benjamin framed a true transsexual as a heterosexual woman trapped in a man's body.

**Psychiatrists expected true transsexuals** to adhere to stereotypical, white, middle-class constructs of femininity and beauty (as Christine Jorgensen had). The expectation was that after completing genital reconstruction surgery, they would quietly disappear into society indistinguishable from cis women. In present-day parlance, this is sometimes referred to as living a stealth life: not being open to people about being trans.

Although we do not know when the first gender clinics began in Sydney, we do know that there were two in operation by the early 1970s. Professor Beverley Raphael ran one at the Prince Alfred Hospital until she moved to Newcastle in 1975. The more prominent clinic was at Prince Henry Hospital under the direction of psychiatrist Neil McConaghy.

McConaghy is a controversial figure in the history of sexuality and medicine because he practiced aversion therapy for gay men.<sup>24</sup> When it came to trans clients, though, his writings and the recollections of those who worked with him suggest that he was more affirming – at least within the medical model of the time around true transsexuals.

The expectation among doctors – and many trans people, too – was for clients to aspire for genital reconstruction surgery and a "stealth" life. To qualify for surgery first they would have to live full-time as women for at least twelve months and have regular appointments with the psychiatrist; this was referred to as the "real life test". Then the clients could commence hormones under the supervision of an endocrinologist for another twelve months at a minimum before being approved for gender affirmation surgery.

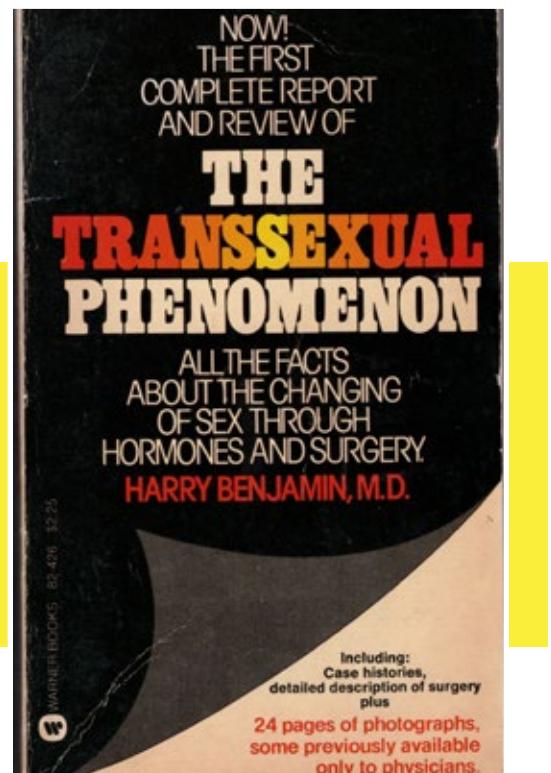


Image: The Transsexual Phenomenon.

**The entire evaluation process** was designed around ensuring that clients were certain that they wanted to be women and to judge whether the client could live indistinguishably from cisgender women. Although there are problematic aspects to both these points, the latter in particular was highly subjective. Doctors could decide that a client's physical appearance or mannerisms were just too masculine and they would never fit in as women. Some psychiatrists rejected trans women who worked as strippers or sex workers because they were not living sufficiently respectable lifestyles.

McConaghy and other psychiatrists of the 1970s-early '80s also conducted research with trans clients which involved measuring genital responses to sexual imagery. Trans people recall these tests as distasteful and inappropriate, and they also recollect that some of the doctors from the 1970s-80s would conduct invasive physical examinations which included inspections of their genitals. The reasoning behind these tests was to distinguish between homosexual and heterosexual clients – the belief being that clients attracted to women may regret the loss of their penis. Other psychiatrists were trying to distinguish true transsexuals from gay men who thought life



*Image: Portrait of Beverley, Sydney, early 1980s. Image courtesy AQuA.*

would be easier if they transitioned to become straight women. In the early 1970s doctors at Sydney's Prince of Wales Hospital were performing gender affirmation surgeries. It is not clear when the first surgery was; a 1981 interview with psychiatrist Ron Barr suggested that doctors had operated on about forty clients over a ten-year period to 1978, putting the first operation around 1969.<sup>25</sup> An article published in the *Medical Journal of Australia* in 1973 suggested that surgeries were conducted "regularly" only from 1971.<sup>26</sup> Other trans people who had the money to travel could access surgeries more easily in Morocco, Egypt or London (and since the 1990s Thailand has become the predominant site for less expensive gender affirmation surgeries). In 1978 surgeons at the Prince of Wales Hospital ceased performing gender affirmation surgeries.

**According to Ron Barr:**

*Well, several of us felt that, and the surgeon felt, he wasn't entirely convinced it was helping. Often people who had a place in gay society, would now be ostracized and left in a twilight zone between gay and straight society – not really fitting into both ... the operation does not usually lead to a better sex life, because most had fairly good sex lives before...I think being a transsexual is primarily an identity problem, not a sexual problem, because transsexuals are willing to take large doses of Oestrogens which greatly reduce/ knock out sex drive and anybody who is primarily interested in sex would not take anything to know [sic] out their sex drive, they are more concerned with identity.<sup>27</sup>*

**Transgender people who lived in Sydney in the late 1970s think there was a different reason for why surgeries stopped.** They believe that the surgeons were not properly trained and describe some trans clients as having been "mutilated" or "butchered" by the surgeons, with numerous complications.

The timing when Sydney public hospitals ceased conducting gender affirmation surgeries coincided shortly after the founding of the Melbourne Gender Dysphoria Clinic in 1975. That clinic – which is now known as the Monash Gender Clinic – would become the site of the majority of Australia's gender affirmation surgeries, including for clients from NSW. Until the 2000s trans clients had to meet the same rigid expectations around the real life test and psychiatric evaluations to be deemed true transsexuals eligible for gender affirmation surgery.

# “...adhere to stereotypical, white, middle-class constructs of femininity and beauty.”

From 1979 most psychiatrists and other specialists like endocrinologists strictly followed the “Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association’s Standards of Care for Gender Identity Disorders”. These guidelines were revised several times over thirty years, most recently in 2011 as the “WPATH Standards of Care for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender Nonconforming People”. The guidelines formalised the need to live two years in one’s affirmed gender (the real life test) and the other expectations around what it meant to be diagnosed as a true transsexual.<sup>28</sup> The extent of control doctors wielded over trans people’s medical transition options led to them being **popularly described as gatekeepers**.

From the 1980s-90s, health care options for trans clients in New South Wales were limited. Some psychiatrists and endocrinologists continued to see trans clients and continued to subject them to the rigid, gatekeeper approach to health care. Most surgical candidates went through the Melbourne Gender Dysphoria Clinic, meaning the added interstate travel expenses. From the mid-1980s **one plastic surgeon in Sydney** began to offer gender affirmation surgeries through the private system. He is still the only surgeon who performs gender affirmation surgeries for trans women in New South Wales. To qualify, though, surgical candidates

needed approval from two psychiatrists in line with the “Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association’s Standards of Care for Gender Identity Disorders”.

Notwithstanding the restrictive medical framework that dominated trans discourse and health care, trans and gender diverse people found ways to navigate the system and to affirm their genders in different ways. As early as the 1950s there was the occasional doctor who would prescribe hormones without going through psychiatrists or other specialists. In 1958, one doctor was prosecuted under drug charges for prescribing the female hormones to seventeen patients as well as self-medicating with them.<sup>29</sup>

Other trans women were able to source hormones on the black market, either from chemists who would sell them illegally without a script (and of course at a higher price) or from trans women who would share their prescriptions. Many also manoeuvred the gatekeeper doctors by “playing the game” – dressing conservatively in consultations and saying what they suspected the doctors wanted to hear. **By the 1990s, though, a new generation of trans people** would emerge to challenge the entire medical model and deeply held views about gender and the body.

# THE CAMP SCENE: 1950s - 80s



Image: Karen Chant performing at  
Ivy's Birdcage, September 1968.  
Photo courtesy AQuA.

**From the 1950s until the 1980s, what was known as the camp scene around Kings Cross and Darlinghurst was the main sight of trans visibility in NSW and Australia.** Camp was the term mostly associated with homosexual men until the word gay was imported from the United States in the 1970s. Yet, the camp scene was more than just gay men; it was full of gender non-conformists and anyone who challenged or did not fit norms of sexuality and gender.

Another way to think of it is to use the term “queer”, which while in the past was a slur attacking LGBTIQ+ people, has since the 1990s been popular among some segments of the community. Queer – like camp – is an umbrella term which eschews specific labels and encompasses anyone who sits outside dominant constructs of gender and/or sexuality.

Camp culture existed well before the Second World War. From 1922 the annual artist balls hosted in the Sydney CBD catered to camp people. Attendees dressed in lavish, often homemade dresses and costumes and were allowed to gender cross without fear of police attack or social derision – so long as they were home by a certain hour. The artist balls and then the movie balls continued in the post-war period, and often attendees would meet at Kashmir Cafe in Kings Cross. Members of the camp scene would also attend private parties, though police were known to raid them.



Image: Karen Chant - Golden Net, Tweed Heads, 1970s. Photo courtesy Karen Chant.

The 1960s saw the emergence of new bars and clubs around Kings Cross and Darlinghurst which catered to the camp crowd. Many of these venues were ostensibly drag bars. Importantly, drag is not the same as being trans. Drag is when people adopt a persona of someone customarily from a different gender for dramatic performance. But drag queens and kings are often cisgender. Still, drag has often been an entrée for trans people to experiment with diverse gender expressions. Moreover, during the 1950s-70s especially, when there was little trans visibility and few transition possibilities, drag was a way that trans people could express their affirmed gender at least for a short period of time.

**The first drag bar to open in Sydney was the Jewel Box in 1961.** During that same era, other bars that opened were the Purple Onion, Ivy's Birdcage, Capriccio's and, the most famous of all, Les Girls. A compère or host of such shows was highly regarded in show business, and was the stitching that held these campy entertainment venues together. Karen Chant is one trans person who worked as a compère at all these venues. Indeed, club owners often sought Karen when they opened new businesses because she was seen as so successful at promoting them. She recalls that in the 1960s especially, she and other performers would arrive and depart from the venues presenting as men because otherwise they could face police abuse and harassment, especially from the vice squad. By the 1970s, though, Karen was living and dressing full-time as a woman and felt much safer to do so.



Image: Carlotta and Bobbie Nugent, Les Girls, Kings Cross, c1965, unidentified photographer, Papers of Bobbie Nugent. Photo courtesy AQuA.

The different venues catered to different clienteles. Karen recalls the Jewel Box was a bit rough, as sailors from Kings Cross often went there and harassed gay patrons. The Purple Onion had a more regular crowd, while Les Girls very much catered to straight people from the suburbs who came into the city for a dinner and a show.<sup>30</sup> Even local and visiting celebrities were known to attend the shows at Capriccio's.<sup>31</sup> The Les Girls headline act Carlotta became a household name in the 1970s, regularly appearing in the media and even featuring on a few episodes of the popular and boundary-pushing soap opera *Number 96*.<sup>32</sup>

**Many trans people who were children or adolescents in the 1970s remember Carlotta, Les Girls and showgirls more broadly.** They had mixed reactions to this visibility. On the one hand, seeing trans showgirls provided a sense of connection to know that there were other trans people out there and they were not alone. But the showgirl imagery was so prevalent that many young or adolescent trans people feared that was the only career option, and that often pushed them to deny their authentic selves for years or decades.

Image: Karen Chant attending the 1955 Artist Ball. Photo courtesy Karen Chant.



The trans showgirl scene was mostly contained to Sydney, but there was a small presence in other parts of NSW. By the late 1970s Les Girls had a touring show that would travel to regional Australia and even to cities like Canberra, Adelaide and Perth. The trans women would perform their revue at RSLs and other clubs, usually to very welcoming crowds. Those who toured on these shows generally recall favourable receptions in the towns, though Vronni specifically recalls a tour in the early 1980s when Les Girls encountered hostility among a small group in Bombala in southern New South Wales. The person running the town hall would not let them use the women's toilets and referred to the performers as deviants. Although the town hall was packed with about 200 audience members, outside there was a small group of picketers with slurs. After the show, the situation got so tense that the tour had to leave the town early. That said, Vronni emphasises that Bombala was the exception; in most communities the Les Girls tour had no trouble.<sup>33</sup>

The other site of trans show girls was around **Tweed Heads and the Gold Coast**. In the 1970s there were several revue shows featuring drag queens and trans women. Most shows were either touring or based on the Gold Coast, but at least one in NSW was the short-lived Tweed Heads club the Golden Net. Karen Chant remembers that the venue was a converted boathouse located on a pier on the Tweed River. The owner was a gangster, and while the gig paid well, it had a very poor attendance and therefore did not last for long.<sup>34</sup>

By the 1970s, the Kings Cross/Darlinghurst scene had expanded to include stripper bars and sex workers. Trans strippers worked at establishments like the Pink Panther and the Pink Pussycat. It was always ambiguous whether the audience knew that the majority of strippers were trans women. Some of the performers had gender affirmation surgery, but the majority had not. Some stripteases ended with the performer revealing their genitals, but most strippers would effectively tuck and tape their penises for the entire show.

Image: Susan Le Gaye with Tony Monopoly, 1969.  
Photo courtesy Susan Le Gaye.



Image: Susan Le Gaye - Les Girls, 1964.  
Photo courtesy Susan Le Gaye.



# TRANNY LANE AND SEX WORKERS



Image: Frances Hughes, Julie Bates and Roberta Perkins, at an Australian Prostitutes Collective press conference, 17 April 1986, photo by Stuart Davidson for SMH. Photo courtesy AQuA.

**The other big group of trans women** in Kings Cross and Darlinghurst were the sex workers. Street sex workers operated all over Darlinghurst and parts of Woolloomooloo, with distinct spaces for gay men, cis women and trans women. By the 1980s the trans sex worker culture was embedded in the streets and laneways around Premier Lane and William Street which collectively became known as Tranny Lane. In the early 1980s trans and sex worker activist Roberta Perkins estimated that there were about twenty trans women working Tranny Lane each night. Trans sex workers recall that this number ballooned to as much as 50-100 on a weekend night by the 1990s.

Tranny Lane had a strict set of unspoken rules which any new sex worker would have to learn quickly if she were to get by. New girls had to start on William Street and usually had to prove to be tough enough to stand up to a top dog (or sometimes a woman who claimed to be a top dog). After doing their time on William Street – usually a few months – they could move up to Premier Lane. Even within Premier Lane there would be hierarchies based on seniority, with stronger personalities taking on top dog roles. The way former sex workers talk about Tranny Lane suggests that there was almost an equilibrium; those who did not figure out the rules quickly did not last long before being ostracised (or beaten).

**At the top of the social hierarchy** – the queen of queens as Phlan-Michelle Purss described her – was Carmen Rupe. A Māori trans woman from Aotearoa New Zealand, Carmen had worked as a showgirl, stripper and sex worker in both Sydney and Wellington. She gained notoriety for her shows featuring a snake and for running for mayor of Wellington in 1977 on a platform of legalising brothels and marriage equality. She subsequently returned to Sydney and was a regular fixture in Tranny Lane from the 1980s onwards.

Carmen's spot was on the Woolloomooloo side of William Street at the intersection of Forbes Street. She was not usually working with clients so much as looking out for the girls. Several former sex workers fondly recall having conversations with Carmen. One person remembers being saved by Carmen when a group of angry guys chased her, and another credits Carmen with influencing her to kick her drug addiction. Carmen Rupe passed away in 2011 at age seventy-five.

Some trans women performed sex work for only a few weeks or months, while others did it for years. Demographically trans sex workers came from all walks of life, though anecdotally there was a disproportionate number of women from Pasifika or Māori backgrounds. Indeed, a 1983 police submission to a parliamentary inquiry into prostitution noted that half of the sex workers in Tranny Lane were Māori.<sup>36</sup> Kooncha Brown recalls that on William Street, there were different spaces for the Māori and Pasifika, Asian and Aboriginal women and another space for new girls.<sup>37</sup>

Trans sex workers could see anywhere from just one client to a dozen in an evening depending on how much money they were after and how long they were willing to work. There were relatively set rates, and any girl found to be undercutting would face punishment from the other girls. They sometimes performed the job in clients' cars, doorways, on the streets or would direct the clients to drive to certain places they knew.

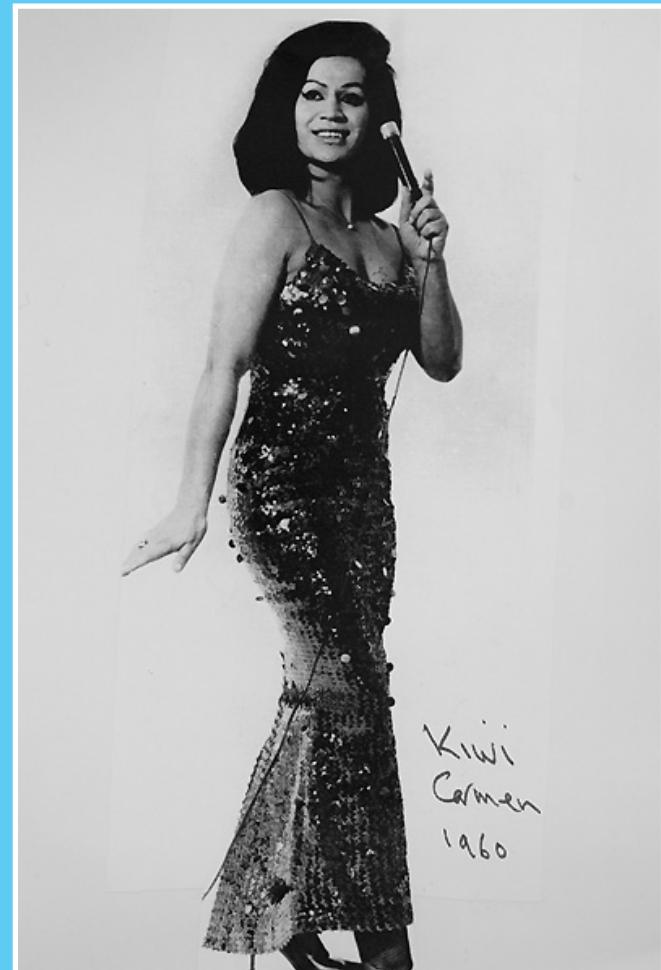


Image: Carmen Rupe; Signed 'Kiwi Carmen', January 1960.

**At the end of a shift, the most popular hangout was Taxi Club.** Originally known as the Grosvenor Club when it opened in 1956, this was Sydney's oldest licenced LGBTQ+ friendly venue, located on Flinders Street at Taylor Square. Taxi Club was not only popular with the sex workers but with all trans people – strippers, showgirls and trans women from the suburbs including members of the Seahorse Club (described in the next section). The venue closed in 2012.

Sex work could be dangerous, and the risks came from both clients and police. Sex worker interviewees reported being brutally beaten, robbed and raped by clients, some sustaining permanent damage from the physical trauma. Sex workers tried to find ways to minimise risk, such as jumping out of vehicles at red lights if something felt suspicious, or not getting into certain cars. Sometimes another girl would jot down the licence plate of a vehicle. Yet even these steps could never eliminate risk – particularly for sex workers who had been ostracised from Premier Lane and were sent to a part of William Street where only the worst clients approached.

**Starting around 1985, Roberta Perkins and the Australian Prostitutes Collective** (founded in 1983) began to compile information about abusive clients. They shared this information among sex workers to support their safety. Dubbed the Ugly Mug List, over time this data evolved to a pamphlet handed out by the Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP) to street workers with descriptions, pictures and licence plates of dangerous clients.

Police harassment was also rampant around Tranny Lane. The NSW parliament partially decriminalised street-based sex work in 1979, but still police arrested sex workers for violating laws prohibiting working in residential streets and for committing homosexual acts (which were not decriminalised until 1984). Police routinely would do round-ups, chasing and arresting the sex workers in Tranny Lane. Some police were physically abusive; others verbally harassed the trans women. More often than not, police would deny the trans women's affirmed gender and lock them in the men's cells, which could be another dangerous situation.

**Police harassment was a risk for all trans women in Kings Cross and Darlinghurst,** though generally strippers and showgirls were protected in the clubs so long as the managers were paying off the police. They could still be victims of harassment on the streets, though. Roberta Perkins's book *The 'Drag Queen' Scene: Transsexuals in Kings Cross* describes one stripper who was the victim of a brutal gang rape by nine police officers.<sup>38</sup> Oral history interviews with showgirls, strippers and other non-sex workers who socialised in the camp scene from the 1950s-70s did not like to discuss police relations at length. These interview participants also usually distinguished between individual cops who were kind versus others who were keen to harass and arrest trans women (and gay men).

Sex worker interview participants, however, almost unanimously reviled the police and were vocal about the harassment, brutality and corruption within the force. Those who worked the streets for longer



periods of time got a sense of police patterns like when they might initiate a round-up – such as when there were visiting dignitaries in town. When a round-up was happening, some sex workers could take refuge in PJ's: a café to support sex workers which was in the basement of St Peter's Church on the corner of Upper Forbes Street and St Peter's Lane. They also got the occasional warning from the friendly police officer that a round-up was coming.

Although Tranny Lane was the main site of trans sex work, there were others who performed work in other parts of Sydney and NSW. Newcastle, for instance, had a smaller trans sex worker scene around Hamilton Railway Station in Islington and near the Criterion Hotel where gay men hung out. Newcastle sex workers may also do work in Sydney, where they could have more clients in one night, and they faced the same risks of harassment and abuse from both clients and police.<sup>39</sup>

**Police harassment diminished significantly from 1995 as a result of two interconnected reforms.** First, amendments to the *Prostitution Act* repealed the neighbourhood restrictions on street work, and sex workers generally consider this the real moment of decriminalisation in NSW. The other catalyst for change was the 1995-97 Royal Commission into the New South Wales Police Service – more popularly known as the Wood Royal Commission. The Wood Royal Commission exposed entrenched police corruption and led to substantial reform within the operation of the NSW Police. Sex worker oral histories all demarcate 1995 as a turning point in relations with police, leading to a significant reduction in harassment and abuse.

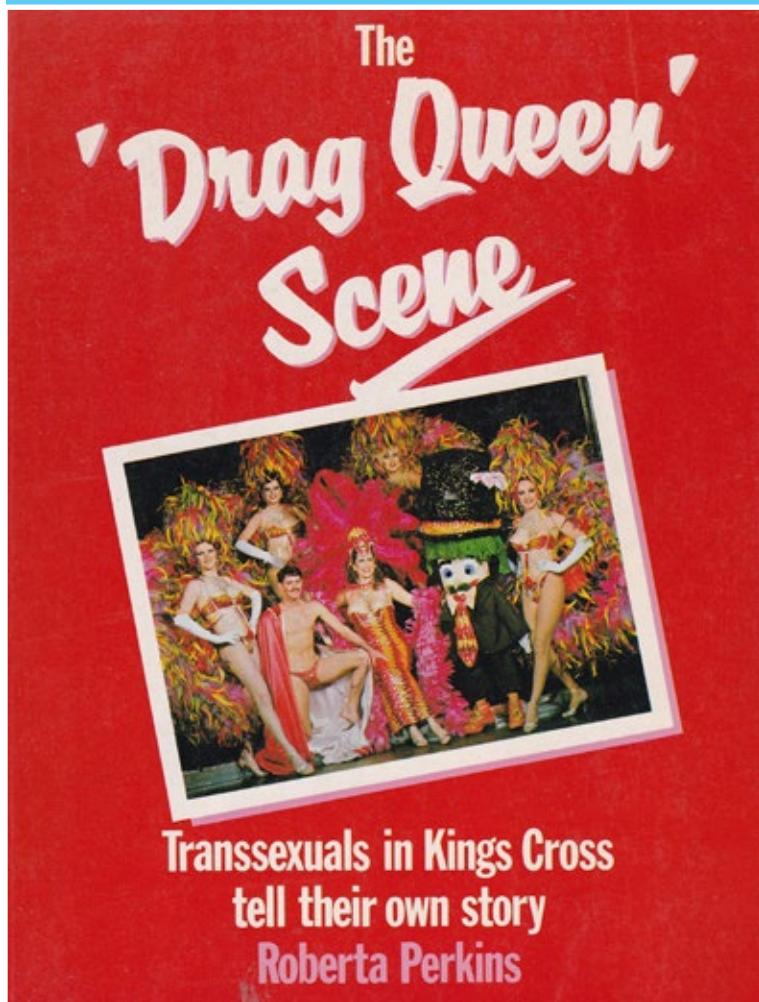
Another threat facing sex workers was sexually transmitted infections, and after 1983 HIV and AIDS were particular risks. The Australian public health response to the AIDS epidemic has generally been considered world-leading, with a focus on working with at-risk communities to develop prevention and education strategies. **Trans people were mostly overlooked in the public health response even though they were an at-risk group.**

Image: Transsexual [transgender] prostitutes [sex workers] in Kings Cross, Sydney, 5 May 1986, photo by Bruce Miller, SMH.  
Photo courtesy AQuA.

Image: Roberta Perkins' 1983 book *The 'Drag Queen' Scene: Transsexuals in Kings Cross* was a ground-breaking text.

There were some exceptions. For instance, the Albion Street Centre Outreach Bus regularly visited Tranny Lane, and in 1989 it reported an infection rate of 25% of those sex workers known to the program. The Kirketon Road Centre regularly had a van parked near Carmen Rupe's spot, offering condoms and testing for trans sex workers. Roberta Perkins' interviews with HIV positive trans women from the 1980s found that health professionals were generally supportive and respectful. HIV positive trans people were also able to access volunteer services such as the Ankali Project. Staff at Tiresias House (later known as the Gender Centre) also did outreach on Tranny Lane, but with the exception of the occasional program, organisations like the AIDS Council of NSW (ACON) were not targeting trans people in their outreach.

By the 2000s changes in the sex work industry and the local area led to the decline of Tranny Lane. Darlinghurst began to gentrify, bringing in more affluent locals and changing the demographics of visitors and the nightlife. Probably more influential was the rise of the internet, which several former sex workers credit as having killed off street work. As later sections explore, sex work has shifted online and to private residences, leading sex worker outreach groups to develop new strategies to engage with and support trans sex workers.



# TRANSGENDER ORGANISATIONS: 1970s - 80s



Image: Roberta Perkins holds aloft a cheque for the purchase of Tiresias House with Minister Frank Walker, Petersham, Sydney, photograph by Zakaras, 12 December 1983.  
Photo courtesy AQuA.

### Trans people were still mostly invisible in 1970s-80s

**Australia.** Newspaper reports, especially in tabloids, reported cases of gender crossing and by the 1970s took up the salacious language of the “sex change”. Most reports were exploitative and covered topics like sex work, showgirls, suicide or crime. That said, trans people who participated in newspaper articles were savvy at crafting their own narratives. Behind the shocking headlines, often the article content was relatively respectful. New magazines in the 1970s like *Cleo* and *Forum* sometimes ran reports about trans people which were quite respectful – and trans children and adolescents from the 1970s remember those reports. The ABC also occasionally ran news stories and features about trans people, including a special 1974 episode of *Four Corners*. By the 1980s trans stories were featuring in women’s interest magazines like *Woman’s Day*. Sensational and sometimes sexualised stories were also common in *Australasian Post*. Notwithstanding the problematic portrayal of trans people as objects or freaks, the visibility still continued the pattern of giving language and a sense of connectedness to trans people.<sup>40</sup>

**NSW and Australia’s first trans social and support groups were founded in the 1970s.** Rosemary Langton had long been dressing part time as a woman. In the 1950s-60s she resided in Hong Kong and the UK and came across transvestite organisations such as the UK-based Beaumont Society and American magazine *Transvestia*, published by Virginia Prince. Rosemary moved to Sydney in 1968, and in May 1971 she took a risk and placed a notice in the *Kings Cross Whisper* – a newspaper known for nudity and sexual classified advertisements.

Image: *Feminique* cover artworks (1994 & 1976)



### Rosemary’s advertisement read:

**“TV enthusiast would like to meet other TV enthusiast for mutual pleasure.”** About ten Sydneysiders and another twenty-five or so people from other cities answered Rosemary’s advertisement (as well as a few people who thought TV was referring to television, rather than transvestites).

Rosemary organised a meeting of an inner circle of trans friends at a Malaysian restaurant. At that gathering they decided to form a group for heterosexual transvestite cross-dressers (as they called it then), and they adopted the name Seahorse Club of Australia. Rosemary says that she suggested the seahorse as the emblem because the males keep the fertilised eggs in a pouch until the baby seahorses mature. Seahorse held its first meeting in August 1971, becoming the first known trans organisation in Australia.<sup>41</sup>

In its first four years Seahorse was a national organisation with state convenors outside of Sydney. A 1974 membership directory listed forty-three members across Australia and even one in Aotearoa New Zealand. In and around New South Wales, twelve members lived in Sydney along with one in Lismore, one in Newcastle and five in Canberra.<sup>42</sup> Four times a year the group published the newsletter *Feminique*, and since the 2000s the newsletter was called *Seahorse Magazine*. By 1975 the national approach was not really working, so the other states formed their own separate organisations. Victoria and Queensland retained the name Seahorse, while South Australia adopted the name Carrousel Club and Western Australia named their group the Chameleons Society.

### Members derived from all walks of life

including carpenters, clerks, doctors, engineers, lawyers, policemen, teachers and even sports stars. The early membership list has people aged from their twenties through to their fifties, though since the 1990s the organisation has tended to attract new members over forty and with an ageing core membership.

The membership has always been predominantly white and caters especially to trans people who like to cross-dress and adopt feminine identities part-time. Indeed, until the 2000s Seahorse explicitly identified as a club for heterosexual transvestites, rather than transsexuals or transgender people.

That said, many members who began as cross-dressers would go on to medically affirm their gender and moved on from Seahorse. In a sense, Seahorse was often a transitional group during people's transition.

Seahorse would hold monthly meetings in a private location either on Sydney's northern outskirts or on the Central Coast (in the 1990s they also sometimes used the Gender Centre). Members would show up, could dress as women and socialise, and then would return home. **Secrecy was of the utmost importance**, so people who wished to become members had to apply and go through an interview screening process to ensure they were serious about being trans. By the late 1970s the group was running a few other events, such as the first Trans-Seminar conference in 1976. The program featured topics on trans people and the law, family life, support for partners and what psychiatry had to say about transvestism.

Seahorse also participated in media requests, such as features in *Cleo* and a spot on the popular *Mike Walsh Show* in 1974 and other radio and television programs. Their aim was to normalise trans people and present them as respectable individuals who just liked to dress in women's clothing from time-to-time. Those members who participated in television programs commented on how respectful the production crews were, particularly the make-up staff.

Importantly, Seahorse never was and never intended to be an activist organisation; it was always intended to be a social and support group. They did make a submission in 1975 to the Royal Commission on Human Relationships as well as met with commissioner Anne Deveson. Moreover, one could say that to the extent that the personal is political, participating in media reports to promote acceptance of trans people was a form of activism. But as an institution Seahorse never lobbied politicians for law reform, funding or trans rights.



**Sometime around 1978**, Noelena Tame (sometimes spelled Noelina or Noelene) founded another group called the Australian Transsexual Self-Help Association. Unlike Seahorse, this group was for trans women who had or intended to have gender affirmation surgery. In its first four years, it, too, was a support group. By 1981 members were meeting at the Wayside Chapel in Kings Cross.

**Noelena was, in some ways, an accidental activist.** In late 1982, members of the Moore Park Women's Lawn Bowls Club discovered that Noelena was trans and moved to have her membership revoked. Noelena was devastated and took to the media, where reports in newspapers and a feature in *Woman's Day* presented sympathetic portrayals of a respectable grandmother who simply wanted to play lawn bowls. She also lodged anti-discrimination complaints and wrote letters to state and federal ministers. Unfortunately, Noelena's efforts were unsuccessful because state and federal anti-discrimination laws had no protections for trans people.<sup>43</sup> Noelena continued to be involved in transgender support, but stepped away from leadership roles.

Noelena's successor as leader of the Australian Transsexual Association would prove to be Sydney and Australia's most prominent transgender activist: **Roberta Perkins**. Born in 1940, Perkins had long-held interests in Native American cultures, anthropology and gender. In the late 1970s Roberta transitioned and began to conduct research on transgender lifestyles for a Master of Arts thesis at Macquarie University.<sup>44</sup> This was the beginning of decades of fieldwork working with trans people, especially sex workers. From the 1980s onwards, Roberta was known for her research and activism around both trans and sex worker rights.

Roberta continued to run the Australian Transsexual Association support group at the Wayside Chapel and also transformed it. In January 1982, two trans sex workers – Phyllis McGuiness and Vicki Harris – were arrested and charged as men for having procured males for an indecent act. Their September 1982 trial became an important test case: *it was illegal for men to solicit other men, but female sex work was legal*. Witnesses included psychiatrists who argued that transsexuals were women. Roberta, as spokesperson for the Australian Transsexual Association, drew on the importance of self-identification to affirm the women's gender.



Image: Roberta Perkins

The magistrate rejected these arguments and found the trans women guilty of procuring males for an indecent act. The legal ramifications and the appeals are discussed in more detail in the later section on law reform.

The McGuiness and Harris verdict devastated trans women. **Roberta spoke in a radio interview** about several trans women ringing her, crying and feeling humiliated. Roberta decided to take action and on 2 October 1982 staged Australia's first known public demonstration for trans rights at a shopping centre in Manly. It was only a small turnout, which Roberta attributed to the fear many trans women felt about the consequences of being visible. Still, this was an important turning point because, as Roberta put it:

*"I think the time has now come for transsexuals to really start demonstrating to the public through, if necessary, through the public demonstrations that were held last Saturday. But show the public that we're not weird, that we're not freaks or anything else. We are people with feminine identities, and these feminine identities are quite firm."*<sup>45</sup>

Running in tandem with Roberta's burgeoning activism was her research. Indeed, it is because of Roberta's work that we have so much information about trans life and the sex work industry in Darlinghurst in the 1980s. Former sex workers and colleagues remember Roberta fondly for her pushiness, which produced results.

**She was able to compile interviews and surveys with dozens of trans women** (and hundreds of other cisgender women sex workers).



Images: 1) Jamie Holme and Kathy Lennard at the opening of Tiresias House, Petersham. 2) Frank Walker (Minister for Youth and Community Services), Roberta Perkins and members of Tiresias House at its launch, Petersham. 3) Frank Walker talks with residents at the opening of Tiresias House, Petersham. All photographs by Zakaras, 12 December, Sydney 1983. Photos courtesy AQuA.

this data to prepare submissions to government inquiries and to publish books which exposed the challenges, lifestyles and subcultures of trans women and all sex workers in Sydney.

**One of those books was *The "Drag Queen" Scene*,** published in 1983. As noted above, the book was an ethnographic study of the different trans subcultures in Kings Cross and Darlinghurst. It was very nuanced; it was supportive of the sex industry while also highlighting that the reason so many trans women worked as strippers and sex workers was because of the discrimination they faced in society, with no other employment options.

The NSW Minister for Youth and Community Services, Frank Walker, read a copy of *The "Drag Queen" Scene* and it moved him. He met with Roberta to discuss the problem of homelessness facing trans women, remarking:

*"Roberta, we have got to find them a place where they can lay their heads at night."*

**Walker secured funding for Roberta to open a refuge for homeless trans women. Tiresias House opened in October 1983 with enough beds to house twelve people.<sup>46</sup>**

**Demand for Tiresias House was huge**, and by 1984 the Department of Community Services had provided additional funding for two more houses in Ashfield and Haberfield. Most people stayed at Tiresias House for up to a few months, but there was no official time limit. Residents came from all walks of life, though workers from the 1980s recall that there was a large number of trans women in their late teens and a high proportion of Māori girls. Almost all residents were trans women, but a 1988 *Midday Show* story about Tiresias House included a trans man. This was one of the earliest examples of trans men's visibility, and it resonated with other trans men who saw the clip and realised that there were others out there like them.<sup>47</sup>

**Residents at the original Tiresias House** had shared accommodation and lived under supervision. Those who had been good tenants could be moved to one of the other houses, which were unsupervised and had a bit more privacy. Tiresias House employed primary care workers to

do almost every necessary task from the supervision of the house through to outreach to clients and trans women in prison. By the late 1980s Tiresias House also employed youth workers to support trans young people. As the AIDS epidemic hit, Tiresias House case workers were also distributing condoms and clean syringes to trans sex workers in Kings Cross.

Outside of Seahorse and Tiresias House, there were few other organised trans groups in the 1980s. Away from the visible scene in Kings Cross and Darlinghurst, unknown numbers of trans people lived quiet lives. One such example was **Katherine Cummings**, who worked as a librarian at the Sydney College of the Arts and transitioned in 1986. Katherine did a series of radio interviews on the ABC about her transition and in 1992 published her autobiography *Katherine's Diary*. The book won a Human Rights Award in the Literature Non-Fiction category. Katherine went on to hold librarian positions at Macquarie University then UNSW. Around 2001 Katherine began working at the Gender Centre as editor of the quarterly magazine *Polare*. She continued in that and other roles at the Gender Centre – including planning the organisation's first Trans Day of Remembrance commemoration in 2003 – for eighteen years.<sup>48</sup> Katherine Cummings sadly passed away in January 2022, age eighty-six.

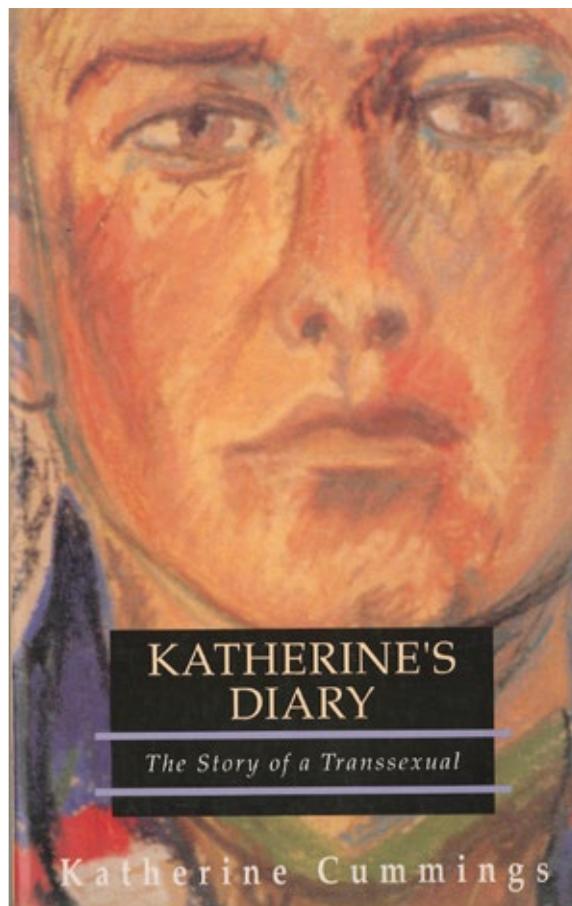


Image: Katherine Cummings, *Katherine's Diary*.

By the 1990s, Tiresias House was the main site of trans community organisation in Sydney. That said, the activism that first spurred its founding had gone quiet. **Tiresias House was primarily a refuge, gathering place, and site for information dissemination around topics relating to trans health care – including transition options.** Since 1993 the organisation has published the magazine *Polare* five times a year. *Polare* is an amazing resource which has consistently shared information on a range of legal, medical, social, historical and cultural topics of interest to trans and gender diverse people.<sup>49</sup>

In 1993, the Department of Health began jointly funding Tiresias House with the Department of Community Services, expanding its remit to include HIV prevention and support for the trans community. **The organisation changed its name to the Gender Centre, just as a new generation of activists was emerging.**

Images: S.S. Tiresias float [Tiresias House, transgender float], Sydney Gay Mardi Gras Parade, 1988, photo by Barry Lowe. Photos courtesy AQuA.



# TRANS MEN: BOYS WILL BE BOYS



**Trans men were mostly invisible until the 1990s.** The dominant medical discourses around transsexualism and transvestism overwhelmingly assumed trans people to have been AMAB, though researchers overseas and interstate did acknowledge the existence of trans men. The most commonly touted figure was that trans women outnumbered trans men by a ratio of 3:1.

There were multiple reasons for trans men's invisibility. First, from the medical standpoint, the notion of wrong body discourse and genital reconstruction surgery as the end objective did not fit trans men so easily because surgical options to construct a penis were limited to a handful of specialists in Europe. Even though many trans men did not see their identities as bound to a penis, their doctors did. That said, beginning in the 1970s a small number of top surgeries were performed in Sydney, which proves that there were trans men transitioning.

From the social side, there was a longstanding history of people presumed female at birth who dressed as men and lived either as butch lesbians or as masculine women. There are some very sensitive debates when discussing this history. One argument is that many – but by no means all – butch lesbians were actually trans men. Just as drag was an entry point for many trans women when there were no other transition options, so too was living as a butch lesbian a way trans men could express their gender in eras when there were no other transition options. There is some truth to this theory in that many trans men interviewed for this project did indeed live as butch lesbians before they transitioned. But one must also be cautious not to label all butch lesbians as trans men because that would erase and deny what was, and still is, a real identity. Instead, this is just an acknowledgement that in an era of trans men's invisibility, **butch lesbians were one site of trans men and trans masculine possibilities.**

The other reason for so much trans men's invisibility was because, for those who did commence hormones and had top surgery, it was easier to disappear quietly into society. The effects of masculinising hormones – growing facial and body hair, male pattern baldness, dropping of the voice – has made the experience of being "stealth" easier for many trans men to access. In eras when being openly trans was dangerous and could lead to discrimination, it is not surprising that most trans men chose to disappear quietly.

**This began to change, on a small scale, in the 1990s.** Jasper Laybutt was well-known in Sydney and indeed across Australia as co-founder of *Wicked Women*: the country's first lesbian magazine with a focus on sadomasochism and erotica. Jasper also hosted several popular parties and competitions catering to lesbians and bisexual women with BDSM interests.

Through his networks, Jasper became aware of the American magazine *FTM*, founded in 1986 by Lou Sullivan. Jasper credits *FTM* with changing his life because he learned about **the existence of trans men and the possibility of transitioning**. Jasper experimented with gender expression, dressing in masculine clothing in daily life and in a more pronounced way when going to clubs and bars. Jasper then realised that he was a man.

Jasper saw a psychiatrist and ran into delays transitioning because of false assumptions the doctor made about Jasper potentially regretting becoming a man and not being able to bear children. Fortunately, Jasper had the support of a good friend who was also transitioning, and he persisted.



Image: Jasper Laybutt.

It was 1991. Jasper was still going through his transition, and he was frustrated with the gatekeeper health professionals and felt disempowered. With his friend Max Zebra-Thyone, Jasper was able to assemble a small group of trans men for a series of meetings.

**Out of this gathering, Boys Will Be Boys formed: Australia's first known trans men's group.**

Boys Will Be Boys was a national organisation, but the majority of members and events were organised by Jasper in Sydney. Boys Will Be Boys hosted a small number of meetings in a café or someone's house. It was a mix of social and support group, usually with only about four or five people attending. The meetings were not very frequent; both Jasper and Max suggest that they were only a few times a year, with a larger annual event that attracted about a dozen people.<sup>50</sup>

From February 1992 Boys Will Be Boys published a monthly newsletter, and this was able to reach a wider audience. By August 1992 the membership was seven people in Sydney, two in Newcastle, one in Bathurst,

Images: Boys Will Be Boys  
No. 10; December 1992.

one on the Central Coast, one in Melbourne and two in Queensland. The monthly newsletter reported on international news and, perhaps more importantly, shared letters and stories from the members. Later issues even had letters from a member in Darwin.<sup>51</sup>

Around 1994, Jasper was no longer in a position where he could continue producing the newsletter and events. Boys Will Be Boys ended in its original format, but Craig Andrews took over as leader and morphed the organisation into FTM Australia. This, too, existed primarily as a remote organisation but grew in membership with the advent of the internet. It later became the Facebook group FTM Australia and subsequently changed its name to Trans Masc Australia.

**The 1990s also witnessed a bit more visibility and support for trans men at the Gender Centre.** As mentioned above, Tiresias House did have a small number of trans men as clients. Indeed, as early as the

## LETTERS

This is an excerpt from one of Sam's recent letters:

Dear Jasper,

Thankyou for the latest newsletter. I read with much interest the feelings of Julian. It is absurd to think that the medical profession in one sector will, without any hassle, give the go ahead for surgery when we have undergone the required time of hormone treatment, and then in another sector they seem to be oblivious to the mental anguish of having to be told no when we have done our time, so to speak, how to take away someone's dignity. For crying out loud, isn't it obvious the trauma we have to go through if we have facial and chest hair, look and sound like a man and yet have to wear breasts 24 hours a day, trying to hide them so we don't betray ourselves and thus becoming the focal point of entertainment for some uneducated and ignorant people. Sure I may sound bias being a fellow transsexual, but even before I accepted who I was, there was no question in my mind that this process of operations is an obvious and natural step and nobody has the right to be telling us what we should be doing. I have had no hormone treatment or surgery but the confidence I feel when I am relatively flat chested when strapped down is bliss and in my own small way gives me a bit of dignity. So I can well believe Julian when he says that the most important move in his life was the removal of his breasts, giving back freedom and dignity. Yes, we have every right to demand, not ask, but demand the right to surgery and the control over our own lives and bodies. So I wish you all the success Jasper and to any other brothers out there.

Yours in brotherhood,  
Sam. Darwin

## CONTACTS

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## STOP PRESS

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AUSTRALIA  
2012  
(02) 319 2034

## BOYS WILL BE BOYS MONTHLY NEWSLETTER #10 DECEMBER 1992

### INTRO

In this issue of our newsletter, I have included a questionnaire that Max and I put together. Max and I are due for surgery sometime next year but the both of us are not in a financial position to undertake our respective mastectomies. Unlike our transsexual sisters, a significant portion of our surgical process is not covered medically or our costs reduced to a reasonable level because of supply and demand. Therefore we decided to embark upon a campaign to get Medicare to change its policy on our situation.

no-one else around us (ie the gay and lesbian community, the medical profession, Social Security, MTF groups etc) is doing anything about our situation then I guess we have to haul out our armour and wage our own battle.

It is my opinion that our situation as

FTM is a women's issue as we are

genetically female, and as such, like

Thanks to Jamie for  
donating \$50 to the  
BWBB newsletter and  
its running costs

### SNAPSHOT



photo: Jamie

any women's issue, the government is ignoring it. We suffer from patriarchy despite our male identification. So it is up to us brothers to make ourselves heard and our right to human dignity felt. Therefore I urge all of you to fill in the questionnaire as truthfully as you can and to return it to BWBB as fast as you can. Even those of you who are fortunate to already have surgery, please fill it out as breast surgery is only the first step in getting government assistance. Other surgeries may follow. Once received, the questionnaires will be converted to statistics which, along with other research into the private health system and extent of MTF medical coverage, will then be presented to Medicare. In order to give these statistics validation and to make them LEGAL we need you to give your name in this instance. We are all on record somewhere anyway (ie Social Security, Births registrar, Medical records etc) so don't inhibit yourself in the name of privacy...

Max and I are doing it for all of us. We hope to set a precedent that can follow in each State. If we can get some financial coverage, if not all, for our surgeries then we can all hope to gain peace of mind more quickly and less stressfully than we had previously expected.

\*\*\*  
I wish all of our brothers a Happy Christmas and may you all find what you desire under your Xmas tree. Jasper

The questionnaire is designed to make the government aware of our position as FTM transsexuals - a group that is virtually invisible in society's eyes and even less so to Govt departmental bodies. And as

first anniversary of Tiresias House in 1984, a trans man named Ray was part of the celebrations. Yet, for the most part staff at Tiresias House did not have experience or knowledge about the needs of trans men. Around 1992 staff at Tiresias House approached Jasper Laybutt to **provide education around trans men**. In 1996 the Gender Centre hired Jasper to work as designer on the publication *Polare* and he also provided peer counselling for trans men. The numbers were still small; Jasper estimates that he only saw up to two clients a month.<sup>52</sup>

Images: 1) FTM Connect; The Gender Centre. Brochure courtesy AQuA.

2) *Polare* - August 1995 back cover.  
Image courtesy The Gender Centre

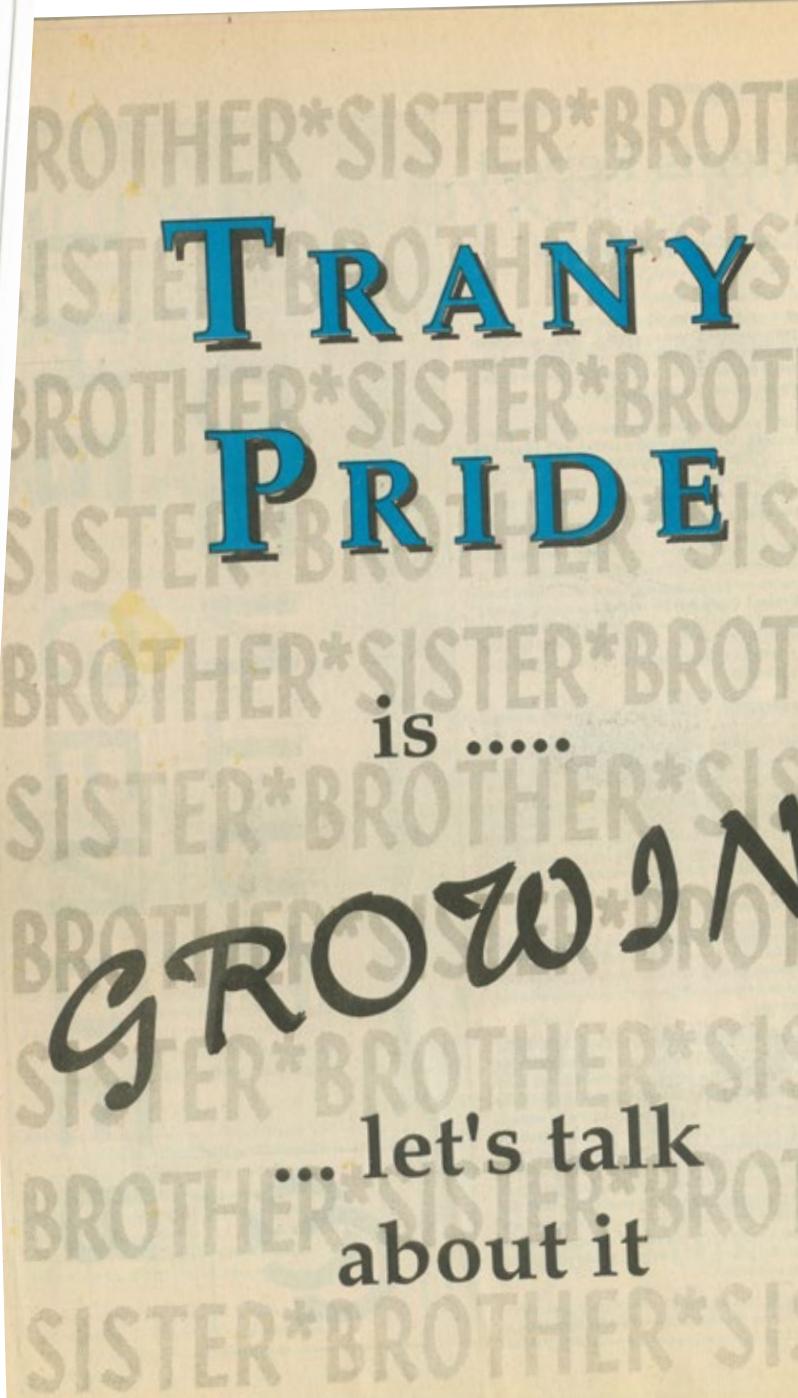
In the late 1990s Craig Andrews, who also worked at the Gender Centre and took over Boys Will Be Boys/FTM Australia, would continue to provide peer support for trans men. From 1996-2000, Sean Taylor was employed at the Gender Centre and was organising social groups and events for *trans men like a bush camp, Winter Solstice party* and *World AIDS Day* commemoration. On Tuesdays Sean hosted a drop-in meal. As a social and support worker Sean also developed a good relationship with the Department of Housing to support clients needing affordable housing, as well as helped clients having difficulties with Centrelink.<sup>53</sup> **From the mid-2000s trans men's visibility began to grow substantially.**



**FTM connect is a monthly group for transgender gender diverse and gender questioning men providing a safe supportive space for men to connect and be themselves.**

**For more information  
call 95197599**

**GENDER CENTRE**



**GROWIN  
... let's talk  
about it**

# LAW REFORM



Image: Artwork Cover of  
Polare - August 1995.

**In the 1990s there were two interrelated areas of law reform which transgender activists targeted:**

**1. Legal recognition of people in their affirmed gender, and**

**2. Anti-discrimination protections.**

These were not as simple matters as they may seem. Indeed, both subjects generated divisive debates within the trans community over definitions, terminology and who should be the beneficiaries of any legal reforms.

The need for law reform was nothing new, though the problems associated with legal recognition only came to light in the 1980s. As early as 1978, the Family Law Council published a report titled "Birth Certificate Revision of the Sexually Reassigned". The document explored international practice around legal recognition for people who had gender affirmation surgery.<sup>54</sup>

Image: Phyllis McGuiness and Vicki Harris outside the Court of Petty Sessions, Sydney, 24 September 1982.



Photo by Gerrit Fokkema.

Photo courtesy AQuA.

**Although the report did not make any specific recommendations, it did highlight an important point:** almost all Australian laws which related to sex recognition relied on a person's birth certificate, and there were no legal mechanisms in any Australian state or territory for a trans person to change the sex marker on their birth certificates.<sup>55</sup>

From 1979 through 1985 the Standing Committee of Attorneys General regularly had Sexual Reassignment as an agenda item. The Committee aimed to prepare a unified national approach to gender recognition, and in 1984 the group prepared a template of model state/territory legislation. Under the proposal, a person who had gender affirmation surgery could obtain a certificate of recognition in their affirmed gender, which would be recognised for all legal purposes that required a birth certificate. In the end, only South Australia adopted this law as the *Sexual Reassignment Act 1988* and the issue disappeared from the federal agenda (Western Australia eventually passed similar legislation in 2000).

In the absence of any state legislation, common law rulings guided how courts and other entities did or did not recognise a trans person's affirmed gender. The main precedent was a 1971 British divorce case called *Corbett v Corbett*. The judge took a biologically essentialist view of sex versus gender, ruling that even though a person could change their gender they could not change their sex. The *Corbett v Corbett* case underpinned the aforementioned 1982 conviction of Phyllis McGuiness and Vicki Harris as males who procured a male to commit an act of indecency.

#### **McGuiness and Harris appealed their convictions.**

In 1984 the District Court dismissed the appeal, so McGuiness and Harris then appealed to the Supreme Court of NSW. It took a few more years, but in a 2-1 ruling, in 1988 the Supreme Court overturned the lower court rulings and broke from the *Corbett v Corbett* precedent. The justices relied heavily on a mix of medical and psychological evidence and determined that a person who had gender affirmation surgery did, for the purposes of the law, change their sex. As an interesting twist, this meant that only Harris's conviction was overturned because McGuiness did not have gender affirmation surgery. *R v Harris and McGuiness* set an important precedent, but still in the absence of any legislation

or regulations, there was no process by which trans people in NSW could obtain a birth certificate or other certificate of recognition in their affirmed gender. This meant that documents ranging from bank accounts to drivers licences to social security records could only be in their sex assigned at birth. **Trans people could not marry if their partner was the same as their sex assigned at birth.** It caused problems in child custody disputes. Incarcerated trans people usually were housed in prisons associated with their sex assigned at birth, where **they faced harassment, abuse and often sexual assault** (though some trans women were able to find powerful men as sexual partners to protect them in men's prison).

**In the 1990s a new generation of activists led the campaign for legal recognition and anti-discrimination protections.** They fit into two rival organisations that bitterly hated each other: the Transgender Liberation Coalition (TLC; sometimes called the Transgender Lobby Coalition) and the Transsexual Action Group (TAG). As their names suggest and will be discussed more below, their different agendas hinged on whom they defined as trans and **who should be eligible for recognition in their affirmed gender.**

TLC was founded in 1991 to pressure the state government to increase funding for Tiresias House. In 1992, new leaders Aidy Griffin and Norrie transformed TLC into a more activist group. Indeed, it was Aidy who proposed changing the original name "*Transsexual*" to "*Transgender*". **TLC was the first known organisation in Australia to use the term transgender**, and this reflected a conscious effort to shift away from the medical, embodied understandings of gender in favour of a social-constructivist interpretation.

Aidy explained in 1993:

**"Transgender is a far broader term that covers everyone.** At least the way we use it, it covers everybody who lives outside gender norms. It's not an identity, it's not a condition, it's not a personality type, it's not a category."<sup>56</sup>

TLC leaders were particularly interested in the emerging ideas around gender socialisation and performativity being written by scholars like Judith Butler, and as the decade went on they also adopted many of the ideas of queer theory.<sup>57</sup> To put it another way, TLC was living and espousing the ideas of queer theory before scholars took those ideas to pen and paper (or computer and printer).

TLC aimed to build alliances with other organisations, including Boys Will Be Boys and various gay and lesbian organisations. TLC members also conducted or participated in research projects to produce evidence about the challenges facing transgender people in NSW. One of those projects commenced in 1993 was called the **Trany Anti-Violence Project**. Over a six-month period, twenty-three trans people reported nine incidents of discrimination by employers and service providers along with thirty-four examples of verbal, physical and sexual assault. **Examples included:**

- **one person living in a country town** who was punched by a stranger when she went to purchase a coffee at a local café;
- **a group of men** who groped a trans woman's breasts in inner-Sydney, then knocked her to the ground and kicked her. The police were rude to the trans woman and refused to enter the house where the assailant lived;
- **a sex worker's client** was angry when he learned that the trans woman did not have gender affirmation surgery. The client ripped off her clothing and hit her while shouting homophobic abuse.<sup>58</sup>

**The other vital piece of research** was a 1994 report authored by Roberta Perkins. The title "Transgender Lifestyles and HIV/AIDS Risk" is misleading because this report was not about HIV/AIDS. Rather, it was the first comprehensive research study into transgender people across Australia. The survey covered topics including sexual health, physical and mental health, employment discrimination, welfare access, sex worker experiences, relationships, family and substance abuse.<sup>59</sup> Aidy Griffin was one of the researchers on the project and noted that in 1996 this report would prove instrumental at garnering the support of key parliamentarians for anti-discrimination reform. Indeed, when Victorian lawmakers debated anti-discrimination protections for trans people in 2000, Transgender Victoria activists and parliamentary allies, too, referenced Roberta's 1994 report.

TLC saw anti-discrimination law as fundamental to securing any wider rights and opportunities for transgender people. According to both Aidy and Norrie, gay and lesbian groups were at best ambivalent and at worst hostile when it came to trans rights. The hostility especially came from a contemporaneous group called the Lesbian Space Project: a group aiming to purchase property in inner Sydney for the exclusive use of lesbians. The organisers of the Lesbian Space Project opposed trans rights and represented what in present-day parlance would be called TERFs (trans-exclusionary radical feminists). Aidy challenged the Lesbian Space Project's discriminatory approach in the *Sydney Star Observer*. The project never raised sufficient funds to fulfill its goals, in part because of the debates within the organisation over trans inclusion.<sup>60</sup>

# Transgender Anti-Violence Project

**Free, confidential services to support people affected by transphobia**

**To report an incident or get ongoing help call us on**

**02-9519-7599**

**or visit**

**[www.tavp.org.au](http://www.tavp.org.au)**

**If it's an emergency ,call the police on 000**

**You can also report to your local police**

**THE GENDER CENTRE INC**  
SERVICES FOR THE  
TRANSGENDER AND  
GENDER DIVERSE COMMUNITY

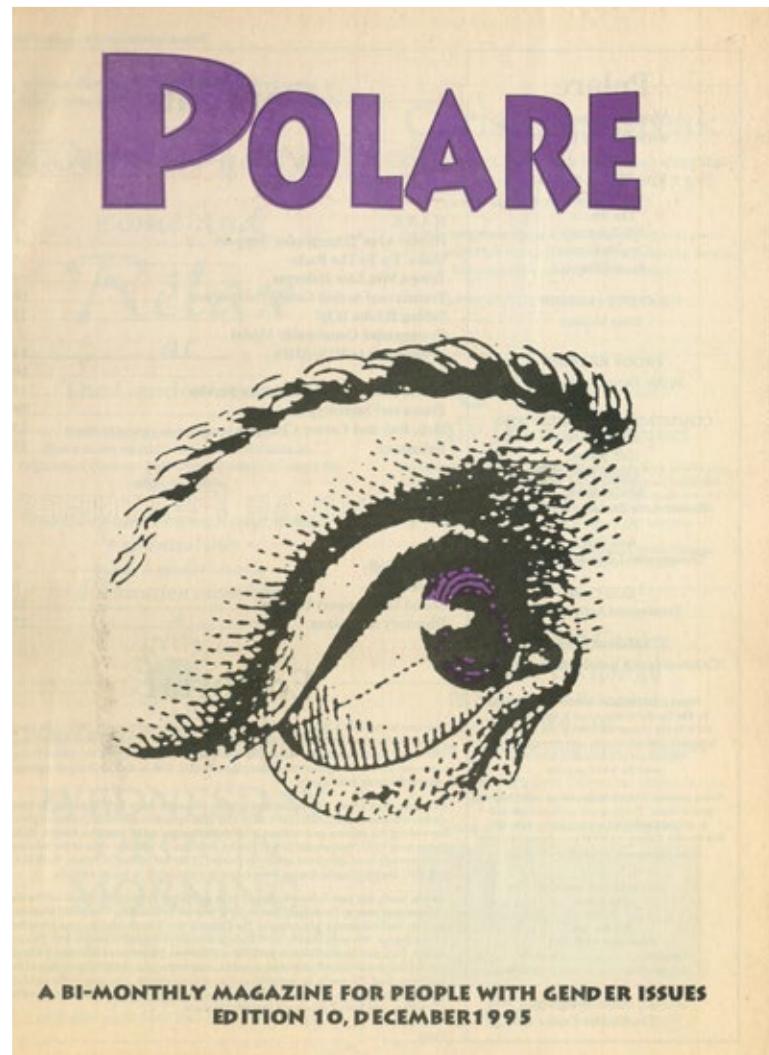
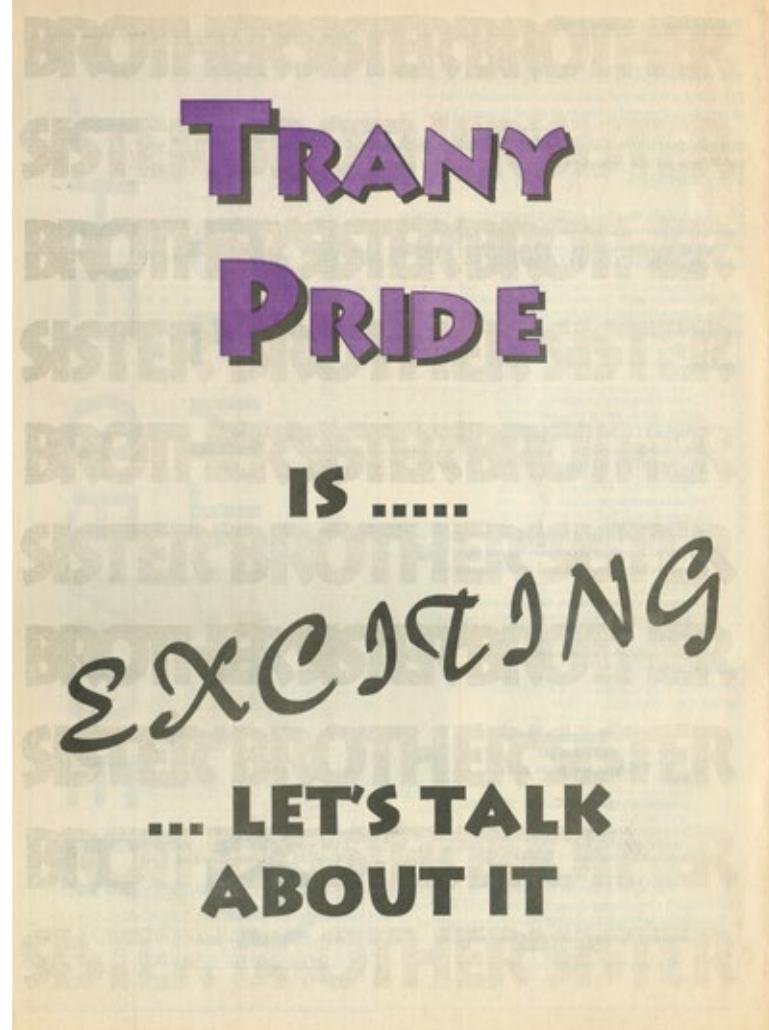
Image: Brochure for a new Transgender Anti-Violence Project run out of the Gender Centre since 2011. Brochure courtesy AQuA.

Aidy and Norrie recall that the **NSW Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby** was not anti-trans per se, but rather were only interested in gay and lesbian rights. At the same time that TLC was lobbying politicians for inclusion in anti-discrimination laws, the NSW Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby had its own legislative reform agenda and wanted theirs to take precedence. Norrie confronted the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby with some provocative public statements, leading them to expel Norrie. Yet, Aidy credits Norrie's expulsion as having an unintentionally helpful outcome: because the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby did not want to appear transphobic, the organisation then pledged to affirm trans rights and support TLC in its endeavours.<sup>61</sup>

**The other trans group, TAG, formed around 1994** from trans people who thought TLC's approach was **too militant**. TAG rejected TLC's umbrella definition of transgender, instead subscribing to the medical model of true transsexuals versus transvestites and others who did not desire gender affirmation surgery. Its membership was pretty much just two people, and their main objective was to lobby only for birth certificate reform. Whilst developing the amendments, it became clear that there would be difficulty passing a bill which catered for people who had not undergone gender affirmation surgery. Not wishing to come away empty-handed, TAG got behind this model.

**The rivalry between TLC and TAG was vicious** and played out in the pages of *Polare*, in meetings with politicians and at Gender Centre meetings. TAG leaders tried to emphasise their respectability, with Ricki Coughlan (then Carne) being one prominent member. Ricki had made international headlines in 1991 when she was outed as a transgender person competing in women's athletics competitions.<sup>62</sup> TAG maligned TLC's leadership for their connection to sex workers and their brash demeanour, believing such an approach would not be effective with parliamentarians. Importantly: years later, Norrie and Ricki reconciled and are now on good terms.

Moreover, just as ideas around gender and the body have evolved, so, too, does Ricki now accept and espouse social constructivist ideas about gender and supports the rights of all trans and gender diverse people to be able to express themselves, live their truths and be affirmed in law regardless of medical or surgical interventions.<sup>63</sup>



Images: *Polare* - December 1995 front cover & back cover.  
Image courtesy The Gender Centre

**TLC and TAG had their respective allies in the NSW state parliament.** TLC had the ear of the independent Member of the Legislative Assembly, Clover Moore, who introduced amendments to the *Anti-Discrimination Act* in 1994. Clover adopted the broad terminology of transgender, arguing that

**"The bill does not canvass the means by which people make the transition from one gender to another. I do not consider it necessary to discuss the motivations or reasons for people making this transition... The real issue, the only issue, is eliminating this discrimination."**<sup>64</sup>

Clover introduced her private member's bill during the final year of the Fahey Liberal Government. The 1995 election ushered in Bob Carr's Labor Government, which was more favourable to LGB and transgender rights.

The new Attorney General Jeff Shaw proved to be a huge ally for trans people. He met with TLC representatives and prepared amendments to the *Anti-Discrimination Act* which built on Clover Moore's bill. In addition to adding transgender as a protected category, the legislation also amended the *Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act* to, for the first time, offer a pathway for trans people to change the sex markers on their birth certificates to their affirmed gender. Even with ALP support, though, to pass the upper house the bill would need support from either the opposition or minor parties. Aidy Griffin, along with TLC members J Hooley and Nadine Stransen, lobbied politicians regardless of party, but the Liberal and National Parties would not support it. They did, however, secure the support of the Greens, Democrats and the Better Future for Our Children Party – just enough numbers to pass the upper house.

Aidy later wrote in *Polare* about TLC's efforts:

**"We apologised to nobody, we made no excuses for our lifestyles, we made no discrimination between the various choices that trans can make to resolve their issues. We were defiant, out, proud and successful."**<sup>65</sup>

Amendments to the *Anti-Discrimination Act* passed the NSW parliament in May 1996, making it the second jurisdiction after the ACT (1991) to include all transgender people as a protected category (South Australia anti-discrimination law since 1986 protected "transsexuals" who had gender affirmation surgery under the definition of "sexuality").<sup>66</sup>

There was one part of the bill where TLC did not achieve all its goals, and that was on birth certificate reform. TAG had two principal allies in the cabinet who proved influential: Minister for Transport and Tourism, Brian Langton, and Minister for Police, Paul Whelan (who also was Acting Attorney General when Shaw was on leave). Ricki Coughlan remembers telling her story at a meeting with Whelan, who then arranged an unscheduled conversation with Premier Bob Carr. Ricki told Bob Carr about the challenges she experienced as a trans woman who could not update her gender marker on legal documents. She recalls Bob Carr's response: "This is really easy; it's a matter of equity."<sup>67</sup> Brian Langton successfully argued in cabinet that birth certificate reform should only be available for those people who had gender affirmation surgery. Although TLC was disappointed that trans people could not self-identify to change their birth certificates, they still supported the overall legislation.<sup>68</sup>

The debates over anti-discrimination protections exposed deep divisions within the LGB and transgender communities. On the LGB front these began to heal, and the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras is a good example that demonstrates this change. Transgender people had been marching in Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras for years, and Tiresias House even had its own float sometime around 1988. Still, there were public debates in the early 1990s over trans inclusion in the organisation.

In late 1994 Norrie and Carmen Rupé organised the Tranny Pride Ball at the old site of Les Girls as a fundraiser to get a Tranny Pride float in the Mardi Gras. The ball was a raging success, and in 1995 Norrie organised the Tranny Pride float "for everyone who's proud to be a tranny, and everyone who's proud to be seen with trannies."<sup>69</sup> Around that time the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras officially opened its membership to transgender (and bisexual) people, and by the end of the 1990s the acronym LGBT had taken hold. The rifts within the transgender community, though, faced one further battle before they would heal.

# THE GENDER CENTRE TRANY WARS AND THEIR AFTERMATH



Images: *The Rainbow* newsletters, c. 1997, insulting Aidy, Norrie and TLC. Courtesy Norrie.

**The rivalry between TLC and TAG was part of a much larger fight within Sydney's trans community.** Although both groups were small in membership, they symbolised two large blocs of trans people: those who still subscribed to embodied, medical ideas about transsexualism and transvestism versus those who believed in social constructivist ideas of gender. These ideological differences played out especially over the direction of the Gender Centre and its leadership. This period in the Gender Centre's history in 1996 is popularly known as the Trany Wars.

The Gender Centre was still primarily a refuge and site of support and resources for trans people. Yet, according to TLC activists like Norrie and Aidy Griffin, the resources, workshops and guidance mostly aligned with the medical model. Pamphlets, for instance, provided information about medical and surgical options. Some clients complained to TLC that the majority of counsellors were cisgender and did not adequately understand their needs.

Those staying in the refuge had to sign statements promising not to criticise the Gender Centre, and other clients found it difficult to access services such as HIV peer support. The Gender Centre ran events featuring psychiatrists and other doctors as guest speakers. J Hooley and three other TLC activists tried to attend one of those sessions to ask a surgeon a challenging question. The Gender Centre hired a security guard who barred them from entering, only further enraging TLC.

**The LGBT press** – particularly *Capital Q* and the *Sydney Star Observer* – closely followed the Trany Wars, in part because Norrie and Aidy wrote extensive letters and reports for the respective publications. In one letter to *Capital Q* Norrie outlined TLC's position:

*Despite what the doctors said about us all these years, we are not sick or disordered or dysphoric. What we are is mad! Mad that there are still other people dictating "what's best" for us. Mad that the Gender Centre is still teaching other people that tranys are sick, disordered and dysphoric. Mad that non-tranys are running trany affairs. Mad that they've banned the tranys who got anti-discrimination for us.<sup>71</sup>*

**In addition to moving away from the medical model**, high on TLC's agenda was ensuring that the staff at the Gender Centre were all transgender.

The Trany Wars came to a head at the September 1996 annual general meeting. Even the build-up to this meeting was rife with controversy. TLC alleged that the Gender Centre management committee tried to block the nomination of eight TLC-aligned candidates. The Gender Centre staff alleged that TLC activists were consistently bullying and harassing them. A mediation sorted this disagreement, and the TLC-aligned candidates were allowed to go ahead. The meeting was a raucous affair, with accusations of what might be called branch stacking for both the TLC-aligned and non-TLC candidates. There were fights over procedures and the voting system, not to mention who had a right to speak.

One of the more dramatic moments was when Roberta Perkins – who as an elder statesperson had been silent during the Trany Wars – rose to speak over the chair's objections. Roberta had held her cards close to her chest, and at last she revealed her position in support of community control and the TLC-aligned candidates. The meeting was so chaotic that the chair adjourned it early to be reconvened the next week.

**In the interim, there had been somewhat of a peace deal between TLC and the Gender Centre management committee.** The management committee agreed to TLC's main demands – abandoning the medical model of transsexualism, implementing an affirmative action policy to hire transgender staff and a review of the centre's management – if Norrie withdrew their candidacy for the management committee. Norrie agreed to this, believing that TLC candidates could still win the elections and that achieving TLC's main aims was more important.

**A lawyer attended** the resumed annual general meeting the following week. Norrie still made several interventions around procedure, winning some motions and losing others. When the election was finally held for the management committee, TLC-aligned candidates won three and the outgoing management committee's candidates won three. The seventh position was a tie. Everyone agreed that the winner would be determined by pulling the name out of a hat. The winner was Nadine Stransen, a TLC-aligned candidate. With majority control of the

## The Gender Centre Trany Wars and their Aftermath

Gender Centre management committee, TLC had essentially won the Trany Wars.

**Some of the changes** that the new management committee ushered in were around language, shifting away from expressions like “pre-operative” and “post-operative transsexuals” to “non-operative”.

They shifted away from working with doctors and instead ran workshops and education programs, beginning with a two-day convention in January 1997. The program included sessions covering what transgender is, health services, substance abuse, relationships, families, cross dressing and challenges confronting Indigenous trans people and trans people from non-English speaking backgrounds. The Gender Centre later developed education workshops around anti-discrimination rights, HIV support, education programs with employers and embarked on more community outreach. Many staff left the Gender Centre over the next year – some because they no longer felt comfortable in the new environment, but others because of poor management and harassment.

Opponents of TLC continued to attack its leaders and the changes happening at the Gender Centre. Norrie recalls anonymously-published leaflets appearing at sex shops and other venues on Oxford Street under the title **“The Rainbow? The Promise.”** Norrie saved these leaflets, which contain derisive and an often-sarcastic tone that attacked TLC, Norrie and Aidy. One example portrayed Norrie as essentially running a re-education **“Camp Norrie”**:

*Images: The Rainbow newsletters, c. 1997, insulting Aidy, Norrie and TLC. Courtesy Norrie.*



*AAIright you miserable creatures – assume the position! You are here at Camp Norrie to learn the meaning of Gender. You have been arrested for trying to blend into society and lead ordinary lives. You cannot hide in your attic and must be punished for this.*

## *Rule 1. Do exactly as I say!*

*Rule 2 .... Well, rule 1 seems to cover that!*

*But ... but ...*

*Shut up! And eat your cabbage soup! Now remove your shoes. This will prevent escapes and make you copy the Transgender superbeing – me! Everybody happy? It's difficult to see you clearly with this mirror in front of my face, everybody sing!*

*You might be congratulated ....*



## **TLC Wreck Gender Centre!**

For TLC there was only one way to get their hands on the jobs that they wanted and that was to get rid of the existing staff! A year of intimidation, bullying, harassment and "we can do your job better than you" (in typical Norrie-May Welby fashion) meant that staff who had given loyal and selfless service to the Trany community were just left to creep away in tears, after the abuse they suffered.

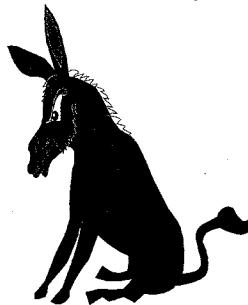
How can caring relationships exist in the Trany community if this is the way people are treated? '*Concerned girl*'

Camp Norrie!	TLC rule not OK	Muckraker
<p>Alright you miserable creatures - assume the position!</p> <p>You are here at Camp Norrie to learn the meaning of Gender.</p> <p>You have been arrested for trying to blend into society and lead ordinary lives. You cannot hide in your attic and must be punished for this.</p> <p>Rule 1. Do exactly as I say!</p> <p>Rule 2. ...Well, rule 1 seems to cover that!</p> <p><i>But...but...</i></p> <p>Shut up! And eat your cabbage soup!</p> <p>Now remove your shoes. This will prevent escapes and make you copy the Transgender superbeing -me!</p> <p>Everybody happy? It's difficult to see you clearly with this mirror in front of my face, everybody sing!</p> <p>"I oughta be congratulated..."</p>	<p>As we, the staff at The Rainbow, sip our Pina Coladas and gaze from our patio at the chaos that TLC have caused, we reflect on one thing.</p> <p>The people (TLC) who talk about Tranny involvement in health care, empowerment of Trannies, and decision making by Trannies, are actually speaking in code. What does this code mean? It means for <i>Trannies</i> read <u>TLC</u> no one else counts.</p> <p>'Amanda'</p>	<p>Dear Oh dear!</p> <p>TLC's ideas of "balancing the books" seems to be putting them on their heads and walking in a straight line! And haven't there been a lot of treasures! Nothing seems to add up - but then that's true of so much of TLC isn't it.</p> <p>'Anklebiter'</p> <p><b>In future issues of The Rainbow we profile the coup leaders, dish the dirt, slop the sleaze, and generally stick our hand down the U bend to drag out the stuff they'd rather you didn't see!</b></p>

**Get your defamation solicitors ready!**



Norrie's bad hair day!



TLC's health "achievements"

1. Three Gender Centre staff resign in protest at intimidation and sectarianism.
2. Three more staff under sentence now!
3. Gender Centre funding now under threat.
4. Gender Centre services dead in the water due to Aidy and Norrie!
5. Now impossible to gain access to gender reassignment surgery in NSW for new girls.

**Their secret agenda!**

Do you remember the meeting where you asked Aidy Griffin and Norrie-May Welby to say psychiatrists were no longer needed because from now on TLC would decide who got surgery? No? Neither do we. Do you remember anything in Roberta Perkins election statement that said *anything* about sacking the Gender Centre staff? No? Neither do we. *Al Zimmer*

**Laughing Hyenas!**

Psychiatrists are shy, gentle, gazelle-like creatures that are easily disturbed and run for cover. Imagine when they tied to a stake in a meeting with TLC! As these hungry predators circle around and Norrie-May-Welby's megaphone like mouth has their sylph like forms heading for the horizon. Then they lie in wait for unsuspecting Trannies, as they make their once in a lifetime gender migration to the sunlit uplands of their gender identity. TLC search out the weak, the old, the defenceless and the whole pack joins in for the kill.

*D. Atttenborough*

We want a community health service!  
Not a theme park for sectarian identity politics!



**Don't give up your day job Aidy!**

Aidy "you'll all use string" Griffin is thought to be "making plans" for a new job since her attempt to become Gender Centre manager failed. It's a bit hush hush, but Rainbow can reveal that it involves an unpleasant substance, manual labour, and the use of a shovel. *H. Radish*

**Dinosaur sighted at Gender Centre!**

As Roberta Perkins lumbers through the Woodstock backwoods like a dinosaur refugee from Jurassic Park, her wildly swinging tail is costing the Trany community valuable support! Flick out go 3 staff, flick out go the rest? All that to be the biggest dino in the pond? *M. Smithsonian*

**A Magnificent Response!**

**To letter writing campaign!**

There has been a fantastic response to the idea of sending letters to the Health Minister - Andrew Reeshaugh, Clover Moore M.P. and the Anti-Discrimination Board. The thing that TLC fear the most is the idea that Trannies may be able to think and act for themselves without *their* control! Let's make that fear a reality!

**Keep on writing!**

**Questionnaires?**

What form of printed questionnaire will be sent out to service users? How will they be contacted? When will these be sent out? How will the community have input into the questions put to it? How will results be collated and publicised?

**Your part in the**



Failing the above, can Rainbow be invited to the next Capital Q office party where Transgender health issues are obviously discussed (now don't get all bitter and twisted luv Ed.) Who knows, we may catch a glimpse of a written statement of TLC aims and policies, - that great white whale of the gender ocean

'Omerta'

**Trany health non-debate!**

**In oral histories, the Trany Wars and their aftermath** tend to conflate two unrelated but contemporaneous problems. The first was, of course, the divisions wrought by the Trany Wars and the personalities involved. But the other was an unfortunate period of poor management and corruption which immediately followed the Trany Wars. Roberta Perkins had to step aside as president of the management committee due to ill health, and a different person took on that role. As former Gender Centre general manager Elizabeth Riley recalls, the person tried to pit the staff against the management committee and vice versa. The person also became an employee, which went against normal practice around conflict of interest and separation between the management committee and staff. The person also wanted to sit in on counselling sessions as an observer, to which Elizabeth Riley profusely objected.

Riley was forced to reapply for her job, and it was through that process that she was able to expose the poor management that had plagued the Gender Centre in 1997. Roberta Perkins was on the selection committee, and Riley had a private word with Roberta exposing the other person's behaviour and challenges. Roberta then observed the person behaving inappropriately and that marked the end of her leadership. By 1998, with Riley as general manager of the Gender Centre, calm was restored and the organisation henceforth proceeded to run smoothly.

**The Gender Centre continued to operate a refuge, HIV support groups, other peer support and counselling programs, workplace education programs and outreach – including to incarcerated or paroled trans people.** In 1997, Craig Andrews put together the Gender Centre's first website. It included links to information about training programs, education resources, legal rights (including around anti-discrimination, recognition and prison policies), back issues of *Polare* and links to other national and international organisations that supported trans people. For years, the Gender Centre's website was the country's largest repository of resources for anything trans and continues to highlight such information and the ongoing activities of the Gender Centre.

Images: The Rainbow newsletters, c. 1997, insulting Aidy, Norrie and TLC. Courtesy Norrie.

**Gender Centre staff worked with government departments** such as the Department of Correctional Services to develop policies to affirm and support trans and gender diverse people accessing services. Indeed, Elizabeth Riley remembers the work with the corrections system as one of the most significant achievements of her time as general manager of the Gender Centre. Previously, gaols and prisons were inconsistent in whether trans people would be housed in facilities for their affirmed gender or sex assigned at birth. In men's facilities trans women and men both consistently faced the threat of sexual assault and violence. The negotiations took a long time, and the revisions to the *Anti-Discrimination Act* were instrumental at securing reform.

Under revised guidelines released in October 1998, trans inmates would be managed on a case-by-case basis and self-identification would be at the cornerstone of determining the inmate's gender. The policy on the Management of Transgender Inmates stated:

**"that transgender inmates will be accommodated in a correctional centre of their gender of identification unless it is determined through case management that the inmate should more appropriately be assigned to a correctional centre of their biological gender."**

When the prison Governor deemed that a person should be housed in a facility for their sex assigned at birth on the grounds of safety, security or good order, they would have to submit a report to a Case Management Team for approval. The policy also had checks and balances like a review process; said that people would be referred to by their affirmed name and pronouns (and not as "it"); and, even if in a prison for their sex assigned at birth, trans inmates would have access to uniforms and items like cosmetics for their affirmed gender. Those trans people who were already on hormones would continue to receive them, but those who had not commenced hormones would have the right to apply for access.<sup>74</sup>

There have still, of course, been substantial challenges confronting trans people in the carceral system. Reports from trans inmates show that prison staff have not always applied this policy consistently, and indeed many have not even been aware of it. Trans inmates – particularly trans men – are often placed in facilities or solitary confinement on safety grounds

Image: Gender Centre webpage snapshot, *Polare* magazine captured on 9 April 2001

Image: Housing Service, The Gender Centre. Brochure Courtesy AQuA.

Misgendering and harassment from both other inmates and prison staff are also common. For this reason the Gender Centre and other organisations consistently ran outreach programs to support trans prisoners and have lobbied for further reforms.

**Recognising that there was not enough support for trans men.** Riley also aimed to bring in more support programs that specifically targeted them. In fact, several trans men recall the work of Sean Taylor offering peer support groups and other outreach for trans men from 1996-2000. The Gender Centre also began to work more actively with Sistergirls and Brotherboys, with an Aboriginal member of the management committee in the late 1990s. From the late 1990s through the 2000s, the Gender Centre organised the annual Trany Pride Ball.

**In 2002 the Gender Centre worked with the organisers of the Sydney Gay Games** to develop a new policy on transgender inclusion. The Gay Games organisers also met with representatives from Pasifika and Indigenous groups. The Gay Games adopted a new definition of transgender that shifted away from medical models: **“A transgender person is someone who was born anatomically male or female, but has a strong and persistent, bona fide**

**identification with the gender role other than that assigned at birth. A transgender person may or may not have had medical treatment to transition to their chosen or self-identified gender.”**<sup>75</sup> Transgender competitors only had to provide evidence that they had been living in the affirmed gender for two years, and the evidence was intentionally flexible so that people from diverse cultures and nationalities could meet the requirements. One hundred fifty-eight transgender athletes from twenty-eight countries registered for the Sydney Gay Games.<sup>76</sup>

The TLC activists mostly left the Gender Centre after the Trany Wars and the group disbanded, having fulfilled its goals. Aidy Griffin backed away from the transgender scene almost entirely and passed away in October 2021 after a long battle with emphysema. J Hooley became an academic. Nadine Stransen turned to art but over the years her mental health deteriorated and she died under mysterious circumstances in early 2016.<sup>77</sup> Norrie continued to be involved in trans rights activism; they worked as a project officer for SWOP, was a performance artist and in the 2010s would mount a monumental legal case testing the rights of non-binary people in NSW (discussed in the section Legal Victories and Shortcomings).

The Gender Centre

Tuesday, February 27, 2001

education		
training		
resources		
medical		
legal		

our services

What's New?

contacts | counselling | directory | education | email | events | factsheets | index | kits | legal | links | medical | notify | policies | policy | research | resources | search | services | training | what's new | webpages

trans network

Previous | List | Random | Next

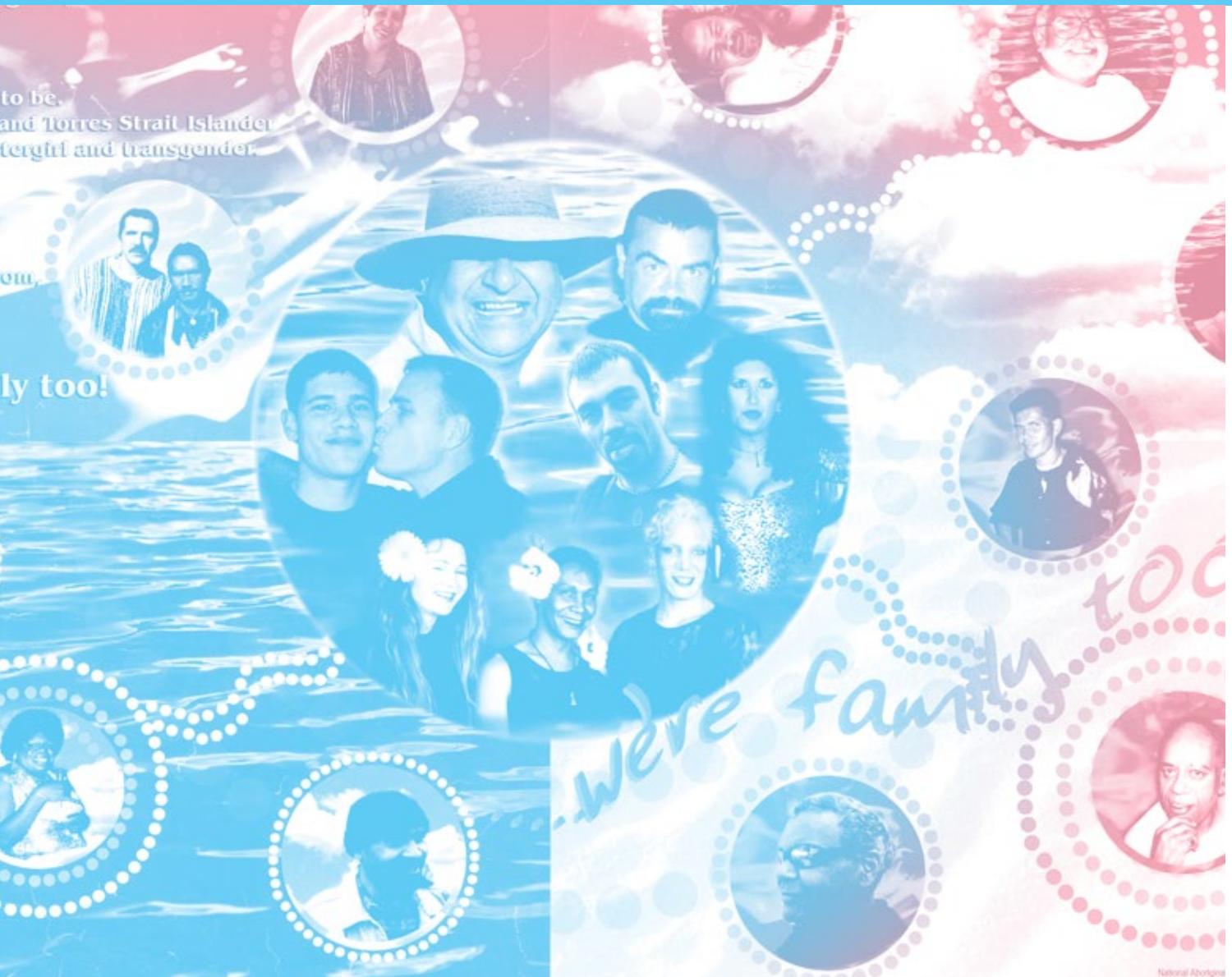
I am a Feminist

This Feminist Webpage is Maintained by THE GENDER CENTRE  
[Next Page] [Return to Main Page] [Print Page] [List All]  
Want to see the site? Find Out About It here!  
This Page is Run Through PageUp

100 differently-gendered visitors since 1 Feb 2000  
Last Updated on 25 February 2001

Image: Webpage snapshot, Gender Centre homepage, captured on 9 April 2001

# Sistergirls, Brotherboys & Gender Diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mob



Images: *We're family too*, 2000 (AFAO Indigenous Gay and Sistergirl-Transgender Project). Image courtesy AQuA.

**Aboriginal communities across Australia** have long held a place for Sistergirls, Brotherboys and gender diverse people. As Kooncha Brown explained in a 2003 video produced by ACON, Aboriginal communities did not necessarily use English words like gay, lesbian or transgender, but still there were cultural understandings of sexual and gender diversity. Indeed, Kooncha had family (her mother's cousins) who were Sistergirls, and one even married her husband in a church. In that same video, **Lillian described how members of her community recognised her feminine spirit long before she understood her own identity.** That said, the Sistergirls in the video also spoke about encountering verbal abuse, misgendering, ostracism and other discrimination within their families and communities. Several of these Sistergirls moved to Sydney or other urban areas as a safer place to explore their gender.<sup>78</sup>

**It was in the 1990s that Sistergirls began to organise nationally.** Much of this activism came out of the HIV sector, starting with a 1994 conference that identified the need for AIDS councils to have identified Aboriginal project officers. Building on this work, Perth-based Aunty Vanessa Smith took a leading role in advocating for recognition of the distinct needs of Sistergirls.<sup>79</sup> In July 1999, Aunty Vanessa chaired the First National Indigenous Sistergirl Forum on Magnetic Island, the lands of the Wulguruwabu peoples. On the organising committee were representatives from NSW: Kooncha Brown, Paula Hartigan from the Gender Centre and Ku Ahomiro from SWOP. The conference brought together thirty-five Sistergirls from across Australia (except for Victoria and Tasmania), including Lisa Taylor who worked at the Gender Centre.

**Aboriginal people have always been a part of Sydney's trans scene.** Kooncha recalls that when she moved to Sydney in the early 1980s, an informal network of older Sistergirls would organise barbeques, parties and other gatherings. As time went on, this group of Sistergirl Elders also helped younger Sistergirls to access support services, such as ACON. It was also in Sydney that Kooncha first heard the word Sistergirl and found it to be an inclusive term to describe herself and many other feminine Aboriginal people who had been assigned male at birth (in her community the expression "funny h" described people who were sexually or gender diverse such as herself). When Kooncha arrived in Sydney in the 1980s, Sistergirls and gay Aboriginal men were a relatively insular group, but over time they mixed with LGBTIQ+ people from diverse cultural backgrounds.<sup>79</sup>

**Sistergirls were workers on Tranny Lane, clients at Tiresias House/Gender Centre and faced prejudice from police and other parts of society.** Indeed, Phyllis McGuiness – one of the two people whose court case led to the first legal recognition of trans people's affirmed genders – was an Aboriginal person. The Aboriginal Legal Service represented McGuiness, and although she lost her appeal, the victory of her co-defendant Vicki Harris marked an important legal turning point.



*Image: Lisa Taylor and Aunty Vanessa Smith.  
Image courtesy Lisa Taylor.*

### Conference discussion topics focused

especially on identity, violence, human rights and substance abuse affecting Sistergirls. The attendees contributed to a final report which made recommendations about the importance of education programs and visibility of Sistergirls within LGBTIQ+ and Indigenous communities and service providers.

### Some of the specific recommendations included:

- *That governments and government-funded agencies promote employment opportunities and training for Sistergirls, particularly in the health sector.*
- *That Aboriginal Legal Services ensure their services are accessible to all Indigenous Australians,<sup>83</sup> particularly Sistergirls, and that these services be funded adequately to provide necessary legal representation.*
- *Indigenous health services, including outreach services, provide support, education and counselling to the families of Sistergirls to promote family reconciliation.*
- *That all corrective services, juvenile justice and prison authorities respect the gender of Sistergirls as is currently done in NSW, and that visits to Sistergirls by other Sistergirls be facilitated for counselling purposes.*
- *That Indigenous and all government housing authorities allocate housing to Sistergirls on a non-discriminatory basis and recognise the particular housing needs which Sistergirls may have due to marginalisation.*
- *That a national Indigenous Sistergirls network be created, with the support of AFAO [Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations] and the AFAO IGSSC [Indigenous Gay and Sistergirl Steering Committee], to promote education, information, communication and networking and support the Sistergirls representative on the IGSSC, and that this network include Sistergirls from the Torres Strait Islands where possible.*
- *That “sistagirl” from now on be spelled “Sistergirl”.*
- *That governments fund community and school anti-violence programs, and that they include Sistergirl issues.*
- *That nationally applicable Indigenous Sistergirl resource materials be developed by AFAO/ NACCHO/AIDS Councils and AMSs and that these resources address safe sex and drug use, gender issues and mental health.*

- *That the AFAO IGSSC investigates other options to promote communication and education within Sistergirl communities including a database, newsletter and website.*
- *That AIDS Councils, AMSs and other health organisations establish support groups for Sistergirls.*
- *Indigenous health services, including outreach services, provide counselling services for Sistergirls, with this counselling ideally being provided by Sistergirls themselves.<sup>80</sup>*

Aunty Vanessa Smith continued to work to support Sistergirls, Brotherboys and gender diverse Indigenous Australians until she passed away in January 2022.

**Subsequent to the 1999 forum**, there was a short burst of activism around Sistergirls in NSW. In September 1999 ACON appointed Kooncha Brown to work in the Aboriginal HIV prevention space. Kooncha expanded her role also to serve as ACON's first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Transgender and Sistergirl Project Officer. Kooncha later wrote that her role entailed:



*Image: Lisa Taylor and Uncle Dean Gilbert. Image courtesy Lisa Taylor.*

- *Acting as a contact point for Sistergirls, and providing outreach services.*
- *Working with individual clients to ensure they have access to appropriate services.*
- *Developing health education strategies for Sistergirls.*
- *Supporting community development activities among Indigenous Australian gay men, lesbians and Sistergirls.*
- *Networking with Sistergirls, sexual health workers and other relevant individuals and organisations.*
- *Assistance in training for service providers in the HIV and broader health sector; and*
- *The production of resources to meet the current needs of Sistergirls.*<sup>81</sup>

**This final point came to fruition in 2003** in the form of a video resource for ACON which featured Sistergirls telling their own stories about community, sexual health, family and their transition journeys. The video – funded out of a donation from the Diva Awards – was targeted at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as well as sexual health service providers.

**In 2000, Kooncha and other staff in ACON's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander unit organised a float in the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras under the theme Our Country, Our Queen.**

Designing and building the float was a community development project bringing together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from the queer community, including Sistergirls. In an interview on Aboriginal radio program *Awaye!*, the project coordinator Chris Lawrence explained:

*"Our float is about visibility and it's about celebration of the diversity within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities being different sexualities. It's about breaking that silence and allowing a place and a sense of belonging for our sexual identities and the issues that encompass that."*

The float centrepiece was a sixty-four year old Sistergirl named "*Her Majesty, the Black Queen Francine*", who represented Mother Earth.<sup>82</sup>

**From the 2010s, Lisa Taylor proved to be one of the most visible NSW advocates for Sistergirls** and, importantly, Brotherboys. Around 2009 Lisa became the Sistergirl representative on Anwernekenhe National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander HIV/AIDS Alliance. Lisa served in this role for six years. She organised the first Brotherboy panel at the 2015 Anwernekenhe conference and (unsuccessfully) pushed for the creation of a Brotherboy representative on the board. In 2012 Lisa started the closed Facebook group Sistergirls & Brotherboys Australia, which is still a popular site to connect Sistergirls, Brotherboys and gender diverse Indigenous Australians.<sup>83</sup>

**Brotherboy visibility has also been on the rise** since the 2010s thanks to figures like Kai Clancy, Taz Clay and Uncle Dean Gilbert. All of them have featured in short documentaries that aired on SBS and have made themselves available to mentor young Brotherboys or AFAB gender diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Uncle Dean, a Wiradjuri man, has lived all over central NSW and the Central and North Coasts. He was working at ACON with Kooncha Brown when he transitioned and describes incredible support from his mob. He participated in forums like the 2015 Anwernekenhe conference and a 2016 gathering of about eighty-five Sistergirls, Brotherboys and gender diverse Indigenous people in Wurundjeri Country (outside Melbourne) entitled Kunghah. He is also involved in broader Aboriginal advocacy, such as in the foster care and carceral systems.<sup>84</sup>

Sistergirls, Brotherboys and gender diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have consistently exposed the disadvantages and layers of discrimination confronting intersecting communities. They have pushed both the trans community to be more cognisant of the challenges and cultures of Indigenous people, while also pushing Indigenous communities to be aware of the needs of Sistergirls, Brotherboys and gender diverse people. **Their knowledge and cultural experiences also consistently expose Western ideas about gender and sexuality for what they are: social constructs.**

# NEW TRANSGENDER GROUPS: 1990s - 2010s

The 2000s and 2010s witnessed the rise of trans visibility across Australia and around the world. One driver of this was the effect of anti-discrimination laws: it was now safer for trans people to come out and transition in the workplace. There were more openly trans people in professions, and there were more employment opportunities beyond the common pathway of showgirls or sex work. That said, trans people very much could still be subjected to discrimination in the workplace. This was hard to prove or could be costly to contest through anti-discrimination boards. It was also common for employers not to hire trans people and to use the nebulous justification that they were not the right "cultural fit".

The advent of the internet brought new opportunities for trans people's awareness and ability to connect. Oral history interviews with trans people who transitioned since the late 1990s often point to the importance of the internet to learn more and connect with others. People like Adrian Barnes used the internet to great effect, setting up a Geocities page in 1996 as a primitive form of what we now call blogs. The internet thus offered forums where trans people could post information themselves, free from the shock and derision so often underpinning media reportage.

The internet also presented new opportunities for existing transgender networks, though many were slow to take these up. In the 1990s Seahorse still identified as an organisation for heterosexual transvestites. The membership base when it was founded in 1971 ranged from their twenties through forties; several of the original members

were still involved in the 1990s-2000s, which was a testament to the significance of the club in their lives, but also reflected how the group represented an ageing demographic.

From 1999 there was a change in leadership at Seahorse, with Adrian Barnes and her friend Lynne Johnston leading the charge to rejuvenate the club. This meant organising more public activities beyond the private monthly gatherings: nights at restaurants, trivia nights and treasure hunts, for example. In 2001 the reinvigorated committee organised the Seahorse Ball to celebrate the club's thirtieth anniversary, and in 2002 many Seahorse



*Image: First ever TgR Cafe Night.  
Image courtesy Adrian Barnes.*

members attended the first Canberra Glitter Ball. In 2002 Adrian set up Seahorse's first website and, controversially, added an email address option to the membership application form. There was a bit of a tension about this because of concerns around retaining the group's secrecy and privacy of members. From about 2006, another change in Seahorse leadership steered the group back towards its earlier approach of primarily just holding the private monthly meetings.

Adrian Barnes' interest in **facilitating online spaces** led to the development of another new group. In 1997 Adrian started an online forum called Crossdressing in Australia. This was before the days of website moderators, so pretty much anyone could post material onto the forum. In the first few years, there were about fifty regulars who contributed to the site. In 2001, Adrian moved the site to a different platform and changed the domain name to Trannyradio. The name was a pun on both the term tranny, which was still in vogue, and the idea of a transistor radio (Adrian as a kid always had an interest in transistor radios).

**From 2002 people could become members of Trannyradio with a \$5 fee** (waived for those who could not afford it). By July 2004 Trannyradio had 153 members, and it increased to 500 by March 2007. The membership of active participants – meaning those who posted at least once in a calendar year – peaked at 728 in 2011. That same year, in recognition that "tranny" was now seen as a derogatory slur, **Adrian changed the group's name to TgR.**

TgR is still active and is open to any trans and/or gender diverse person. There are numerous forums on the website on topics ranging from shopping, dress tips and make-up through to discussions and advice about medical and surgical options for transitioning. **Demographically, the majority of members are trans women**, with a balance between dressers and those who desire or had gender affirmation surgery. In the past decade Adrian has had to moderate the site to remove personal attacks. Adrian credits the attacks to some people's lack of empathy and failing to see that every transition journey is different.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, this is a challenge that has driven many of the divisions within the trans community including the Tranny Wars: accepting the diversity of trans experiences versus seeing one's personal journey as "the" model for everyone to follow.

**Another new organisation, founded in 2001, was Sex and Gender Education (SAGE).** Established by Tracie O'Keefe and Norrie, SAGE's aims are around campaigning for trans legal rights. The group has always been small (about six people in its early years) and focused its work on writing position papers and submissions to various inquiries.<sup>86</sup> As outlined later, where SAGE was most effective was in working for legal recognition of gender diverse people beyond the binary.

The 2000s and then 2010s also saw the rise of more social events and opportunities for trans and gender diverse people. From 2010-18 Adrian Barnes organised monthly café nights in Balmain then Glebe. During the same nine-year period, Adrian organised an annual weekend in Katoomba known as Transformal. The centrepiece of the weekend would be a dance, but the weekend also involved smaller social events and a series of education seminars.<sup>87</sup>

**The rise of Facebook and social networking sites** generated a plethora of other trans social groups which have met online and face-to-face. One such group began in 2015 when a small group of trans people gathered at a café in Darlinghurst.<sup>88</sup> The idea originally came from Peta Friend. She wanted to form a new social group which could change the narrative of trans people from one of suffering to one of resilience, vibrancy and celebration. **From that first meeting, Trans Pride Sydney was born.** The group began with monthly social meet-ups around days of significance or days when trans people may feel isolated or lonely (e.g. Trans Day of Visibility, Trans Day of Remembrance and Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras). When the organisation set up a Facebook page, Peta set a goal to have 100 members before Christmas, 2015; the group had over 500. As members joined from across Australia and even overseas, in 2018 the group incorporated and renamed itself Trans Pride Australia.



*Image: TgR Xmas party 2016.  
Image courtesy Adrian Barnes.*

**Trans Pride Australia was always open to anyone under the trans umbrella**, though in its formative stage mostly trans women and trans feminine people attended the social gatherings. The founders wanted the group to be more representative of the trans community in all its diversity. This meant educating themselves about trans men and non-binary issues, and AJ Brown joining the leadership team in 2016 and running the Facebook group substantially facilitated this goal. By regularly posting articles covering topics across the gender spectrum, cultures and ages, Trans Pride Australia was able to break down stereotypes and barriers within and across the trans community. Indeed, one of the great successes of Trans Pride Australia is how it really does have a membership and participation base that almost equally draws on trans feminine, trans masculine and non-binary people.

**Members of the closed Facebook group must be trans, yet there was great interest amongst allies and families of trans people to be a part of the online community.** Organisers of Trans Pride Australia – especially AJ Brown, Peta Friend and ally Lisa Freshwater – subsequently created multiple Facebook groups: one for allies, one for partners and one for parents of trans and gender diverse people. As of February 2022, the Trans Pride Australia Facebook page has around 2,200 members; the allies group has 2,300; the parents group has a few hundred; and the partners group have about 100 members.

**Trans Pride Australia has continued to offer social opportunities in Sydney** and provided forums for trans people to meet and share stories. To showcase the success of trans people, in 2016 the group organised a panel on Transitioning and Career Success which featured five trans women. Trans Pride Australia also partnered with the Gender Centre in 2016 to deliver a Trans Day of Remembrance candlelight vigil – an event which the two groups organised separately in subsequent years. Mardi Gras has been another annual event, and since 2017 Trans Pride Australia has not missed a year of entering a fabulous float. Other festive days are also important for getting together as a community. “You are not alone” was the motto, so days where trans people may feel isolated or lonely also became days to form bonds and celebrate in safe spaces.



Image: Trans Pride Australia (then Trans Sydney Pride) at the 2017 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. Image courtesy Peta Friend and AJ Brown.



Image: Trans Stories 2016, Sydney. Image courtesy Peta Friend and AJ Brown



Image: Trans Pride Australia and the Gender Centre event for Trans Day of Remembrance, 2016. Image courtesy Peta Friend and AJ Brown.

In June 2017 Trans Pride Australia organised Trans Stories: A Celebration at the Stonewall Hotel on Oxford Street, where trans community members presented narratives from their life or transition journey to a public audience. The event was so successful that Peta pitched it to be part of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras program in 2018 as Trans Stories. The Trans Stories format subsequently travelled to other parts of Australia, with over sixty speakers taking part.

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit in 2020, Trans Pride Australia began to offer online Zoom meet-ups on a recurring basis. The weekly Friday night meet-up is still going as trans people from across Australia pop in for short or long periods of the evening. The Friday Night Social even won the WayAhead Mental Health Matters Rainbow Inclusion Award in November 2021, recognising Trans Pride Australia's amazing work within the trans community.

The emergence of new groups both online and face-to-face have also presented new opportunities for trans people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Multicultural trans people have, of course, always been present. Indeed, as noted earlier, a large proportion of sex workers at Tranny Lane were Pasifika or Māori, and many of the Tiresias House/Gender Centre clients were from these cultural groups or were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Yet, the majority of social, community and activist groups have been predominantly led and patronised by white/European people.

Trans people from multicultural backgrounds have at times joined or founded their own LGBTQ+ multicultural groups. One good example is Geeta Nambiar, who comes from an Indian-Malaysian background. In 2006 Geeta founded a social and support group for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people from the Indian subcontinent called Salaam Namaste. This was around the same time that Geeta began dressing in women's clothing (she had a particular love of saris). Salaam Namaste was part of her coming out and transition journey and had a membership of about 100 people. The group hosted dinners at local restaurants and had a float in the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras.

Geeta found challenges within Salaam Namaste and other later organisations for South Asian LGBTQ+ people such as Trikone Australia. She notes that the gay men in these organisations were sometimes dismissive of trans people. They had their own cultural and religious barriers to acceptance, especially those who came from strong religious backgrounds. Yet, they still were unsupportive of trans people, which many saw as even more objectionable to their faiths than homosexuality. Consequently, Geeta and other trans people have quietly left some of these organisations.<sup>89</sup>



**SWOP – the Sex Workers Outreach Project – is another organisation that is not exclusively trans but has long worked to support the trans and gender diverse community.** The Australian Prostitutes' Collective, founded in 1983, morphed into SWOP in 1990 and has always taken an interest in supporting trans sex workers. Indeed, Roberta Perkins was a leading member of the Australian Prostitutes' Collective, and in the 1990s people like Norrie worked at SWOP in the role of transgender outreach worker. Their tasks included regularly visiting Tranny Lane to meet with trans sex workers, to discuss and raise matters of concern and provide sexual health and safety resources like clean syringes and the Ugly Mug Book. Especially in the post-Wood Royal Commission era, SWOP also worked with police to provide training programs.<sup>90</sup>

Since the decline of Tranny Lane, much of the SWOP transgender outreach has shifted to meeting with sex workers who work privately. Trans men and trans masculine sex workers tend to access the male outreach worker rather than the transgender outreach worker, which is also a sign of how SWOP is inclusive as an organisation. Chantell Martin, who has been a transgender outreach worker since 2011, also describes her role as offering support for trans people seeking or going through drug rehabilitation and meeting with incarcerated trans people. Indeed, Chantell started a peer support outreach program to gaols, which has been especially important to support trans women incarcerated in men's prisons. The changing nature of sex work as well as the Covid-19 pandemic also shifted a lot of SWOP's work online to run programs and training.<sup>91</sup>



**The other space where there has been more trans visibility, especially in the 2010s, is in regional NSW.** As early as Seahorse's founding there were always members in regional NSW. Indeed, a membership list from 2001 included people from near Tamworth, Hunter Valley, Wagga Wagga, Coffs Harbour, Wollongong, Port Macquarie, Nowra, near Bathurst and Canberra. Quite a few retired trans showgirls moved to the Northern Rivers and Tweed regions since the late 1980s. These trans women tended to be stealth, but they highlight that there have always been trans people living outside of Sydney.

**Many former trans activists, especially trans men, moved to Newcastle in the late 1990s and early 2000s.** Trans people in Newcastle sometimes attended gay-friendly venues like the Gateway Hotel in Islington. In the 2000s several trans residents began offering support services – such as a social group for trans boys founded by Wez Saunders in 2010.<sup>92</sup> Another social and support group that operated in the early 2010s was Newcastle Transgender Support. That group hosted coffee nights and meetings at the Junction, often attracting about 15-20 people.<sup>93</sup> In 2015 the Hunter Gender Alliance formed to provide support and resources to trans and gender diverse people in the Newcastle, Hunter and New England regions.

The 2010s witnessed increased visibility and changes within regional NSW. People like Kirsti Miller bravely came out in Broken Hill in the early 2010s. Kirsti was even a member of one of the local women's AFL clubs, but she faced significant discrimination when she dared to challenge vilification that she faced on the pitch. Because sport and community were so entwined, the prejudice permeated all parts of her life including threats of violence. Over time, though, the situation improved; by 2018 Kirsti was reporting in the press how changing attitudes led to her acceptance as "Kirsti the taxi driver".<sup>94</sup> Since 2015 Broken Hill has also hosted the Broken Heel Festival: an annual celebration of drag and gender diversity.

Other regions have also recently supported more trans visibility. Dianne Harris has raised the profile of trans people in Tamworth, though she notes that still the number of openly trans people in the region is very small. In 2019 Tamworth held its first Pride Fair Day, with Dianne one of the key organisers along with other LGBTIQ+ locals.<sup>95</sup> Wagga Wagga held its first Mardi Gras in 2019, organised by trans woman and local soccer player Holly Conroy.<sup>96</sup>

The growing diversity and opportunities for trans people across NSW is in line with changing societal attitudes. Indeed, Time Magazine famously described 2014 as a trans tipping point: a moment when attitudes had shifted such that more people support than oppose trans rights. However, there are still numerous challenges confronting trans and gender diverse people and new battles over rights and inclusion that waged in the past decade.



Image: Trans Pride Australia (then Trans Sydney Pride) at the 2017 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. Image courtesy Peta Friend and AJ Brown.

# DISCRIMINATION AND ITS EFFECTS

*Image: 'Rights & Justice', Page 1.  
Brochure courtesy ACON.*



## RIGHTS & JUSTICE

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A guide for trans &  
gender diverse people  
in NSW

**Examples of discrimination in the workplace** are still common, notwithstanding the advent of anti-discrimination laws. Cases are hard to prove and can still destroy a person's career or livelihood.

Julia Doulman, for instance, was driving buses for the State Transit Authority of New South Wales when she transitioned in 2001. Suddenly, managers began to give disciplinary warnings over minor matters. Before her transition, this did not occur, nor did supervisors discipline cisgender staff in the same circumstances. Soon after Julia transitioned, she received four retrospective formal warnings over matters dating back two years. The final straw was a road rage incident, which unfortunately is common for bus drivers in Sydney traffic. An angry car driver left his vehicle, got on the bus and attacked Julia. She attempted to kick the man in self-defence, which numerous passengers witnessed. In other incidents where drivers are assaulted, usually the State Transit Authority would support the drivers. Yet, when this incident was reported, Julia was sacked. Julia is convinced that transphobic managers within the State Transit Authority targeted her and that is why incidents that otherwise would have been dismissed as unfounded were used to undermine and then terminate her employment. Julia later spoke about the discrimination she faced and challenges facing trans people in the documentary *Becoming Julia* and as a panellist on the ABC program *Q&A* in 2015.<sup>97</sup>

**What happened to Julia was a reminder that a change of law did not necessarily mean that trans people were suddenly accepted.** Indeed, surveys over the last two decades have consistently showed the discrimination and prejudice confronted by trans people in all aspects of society. People like Caroline Layt and Kirsti Miller confronted prejudice in the sporting arena – Caroline while playing rugby in Sydney in the mid-2000s and Kirsti while playing AFL in Broken Hill in 2013.<sup>98</sup>

**Trans and gender diverse people have also continued to be subjected to violence** which rarely led to prosecution of perpetrators. This is perhaps not surprising during the 1970s-90s when police seldom investigated hate crimes perpetrated against gay men, lesbian women or trans people. One case from that era which did get some media attention was the brutal murder of Wendy Wayne. In 1985, a friend found the popular showgirl dead, naked and face-down in her apartment. The autopsy determined that she had been knocked unconscious

with a blunt object then shot twice at close range in the back and the head. Wendy's murder was never solved, and it is one of the few hate crimes that attracted publicity in the press.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, Gender Centre media officer Eloise Brook's extensive research into the names of trans hate crime victims in Australia has only uncovered three official homicides.<sup>100</sup>

**The invisibility around hate crimes** has led many trans people to see their lives as worthless in the eyes of the criminal justice system. The outcomes of the few cases that did attract attention have only furthered this apprehension, such as the 2019 murder of twenty-five-year-old Mhelody Bruno. Mhelody had just moved to Australia from the Philippines to be with a man whom she had met online. That relationship did not work out, and Mhelody met another man in Wagga Wagga. They had a fight, and later that evening the man choked Mhelody to death. The perpetrator alleged that this was a sexual act gone wrong. The killer was found guilty of manslaughter – not murder – and sentenced to twenty-two months in gaol. This controversial verdict epitomised to trans people the devaluing of their lives, particularly when journalists exposed evidence which prosecutors never presented in court.<sup>101</sup>

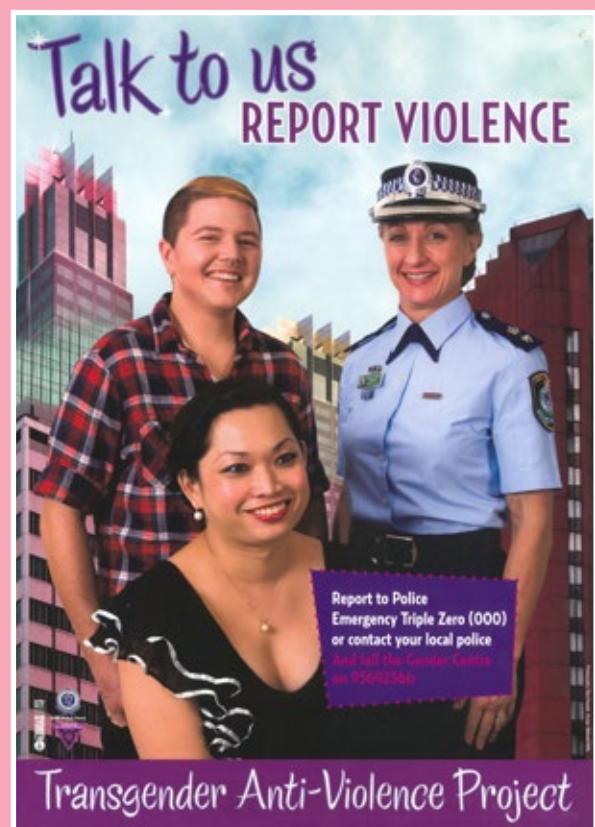


Image: 'Talk to us, report violence' (Transgender Anti-Violence Project. Image courtesy The Gender Centre.

Murder and hate crimes have only been the extreme effects of prejudice against trans and gender diverse people. Roberta Perkins' 1994 report "Transgender Lifestyles and HIV/AIDS Risk" highlighted high unemployment, drug use and poorer sexual, physical and mental health outcomes for trans people. It also found that out of 146 respondents (ninety-three of whom were from NSW, seventy-eight being resident in Sydney and fifteen in regional NSW), 33 per cent reported having been raped by one person, 12 percent pack raped and 19 per cent being subjected to some other form of sexual assault.<sup>102</sup>

**Since the 2000s there have more trans-inclusive surveys which have consistently reported about the effects of stigma and discrimination.** The 2006 Private Lives national survey of LGBTIQ+ people found that 88.2 per cent of trans men and 80.3 per cent of trans women respondents reported seeing a counsellor or psychiatrist in the previous five years. The continuing prevalence of the medical model of transsexualism may in part explain this data, but of importance are also what those respondents identified as their main reasons for seeing counsellors or psychiatrists. The three most common were depression/anxiety (63.3% of trans men and 50.9% of trans women), sexual identity (36.7% of trans men and 56.6% of trans women), and improved self-understanding (36.7% of trans men and 20.8% of trans women).<sup>103</sup>

On questions about discrimination, Private Lives found that 79.4% of trans men and 83.3% of trans women sometimes or regularly modified their daily activities out of fear of discrimination or prejudice. The most commonly reported personal experiences of discrimination, harassment and violence included personal insults or verbal abuse (73.5% of trans men and 69.7% of trans women), rumours about themselves (52.9% of trans men and 51.5% of trans women), being socially excluded or ignored (44.1% of trans men and 56.1% of trans women), threats of violence and intimidation (29.4% of trans men and 46.9% of trans women) and refused employment or promotion (23.5% of trans men and 34.9% of trans women).<sup>104</sup>

# TRANSGENDER LIFESTYLES AND HIV/AIDS RISK

Funded by  
The Commonwealth Department of Human Services and Health  
Sponsored by  
The Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations

Project Co-ordinator: Roberta Perkins  
Research Assistant's and Fieldworkers: Alyd Griffin and Jeddah Jakobsen

School of Sociology  
University of New South Wales  
1994

Image: "Transgender lifestyles and HIV/AIDS Risk", 1994. Image courtesy AQuA.

It is against the law in NSW to treat you unfairly because you are trans, or because you have a relative, friend, associate or work colleague who is trans.

Anti-Discrimination NSW



Image: 'Rights & Justice', Page 3.  
Brochure courtesy ACON.

**In 2020 Private Lives 3 reported some improvement in the experiences of trans people, but still the statistics were damning:**

- *69.8% non-binary (AFAB) and 57.6% of non-binary (AMAB) participants reported being diagnosed or treated for a mental health condition in the past twelve months.*
- *67.4% of trans women and 65.3% of trans men reported being diagnosed or treated for a mental health condition in the past twelve months.*
- *90.6% of trans men and 86.2% of trans women reported ever having thoughts about suicide.*<sup>105</sup>

Only one in two trans women and trans men, and four in ten non-binary participants, felt accepted a lot or always at work. Over three quarters (77.5%) of trans and gender diverse participants reported that they had been treated unfairly to some degree because of their gender identity in the previous twelve months. When asked if they experienced verbal abuse in the previous twelve months, 51.6% of trans women, 45.0% of trans men and 49.4% of non-binary participants responded in the affirmative.<sup>106</sup>

Mental health outcomes have been another consistent area of transgender disadvantage. LGBTIQ+ Health Australia reported in April 2021 that:

- *35% of transgender people aged eighteen and over reported that they had attempted suicide in their lifetime.*
- *41% of transgender people and non-binary people aged eighteen years and over reported thoughts of suicide or self-harm in the last two weeks*
- *57.2% of trans and gender diverse people over age eighteen have at some stage in their life been diagnosed with depression.*
- *The poor mental health outcomes do not reflect anything disordered about being transgender. Rather, they are the outcomes of societal discrimination and stigma which continue to harm and disadvantage trans people.*<sup>107</sup>

A common topic in many oral history interviews was the effect of the 2017 marriage equality postal survey and its aftermath. The organised “no” campaign did not target same-sex couples and marriage so much as they used trans people as a proverbial punching bag to foment fear and stoke the no vote. Indeed, the no campaign focused on topics like the Safe Schools Coalition (explained in the next section), gender fluidity, so-called religious freedom and the effects of marriage equality on children (while of course disregarding the rights and feelings of LGBTIQ+ kids and the children of LGBTIQ+ parents).

**Oral histories suggest that the no campaign disproportionately and detrimentally affected transgender Australians.** There are even reports of trans people who completed suicide because of the distress caused by the no campaign. The organised “yes” campaign mostly did not engage with the specious arguments because they knew these were intended to distract. The yes side won with 61.6 per cent of the vote nationally and 57.8 per cent in NSW (the lowest yes vote of any state or territory). The marriage equality legislation passed through the Commonwealth parliament on 7 December 2017. In the aftermath of the campaign, some LGBTIQ+ activists have criticised the yes campaign for not taking a stronger stand against the transphobic no campaign, particularly as the transphobic arguments subsequently became more pronounced topics of public debate.

# TRANS AND GENDER DIVERSE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



*Image: 'Two Young Transgender people' illustration, 2022. Artist Oliver Vincent Reyes.*

**In the 2010s, there has been a significant increase in the visibility of trans and gender diverse children and young people.** Transgender oral histories indicate that many knew from a young age that something was different about them. The lack of trans visibility, language and societal stigma left most transgender people without transition or affirmation possibilities until adulthood. But trans children have always existed, even if silence and discrimination have rendered them mostly invisible.

**The first reports of trans children seeking to transition came out of Victoria in 2003.** In April 2004, the Family Court approved doctors at Melbourne's Royal Children's Hospital to provide puberty blockers and then affirming hormones to a thirteen-year-old trans boy. One unintended consequence of the ruling was that the provision of the law under which the Family Court authorised hormone treatment classified it as a "special medical procedure". This meant that any trans children across Australia who sought medical interventions would have to go through the Family Court for approval.

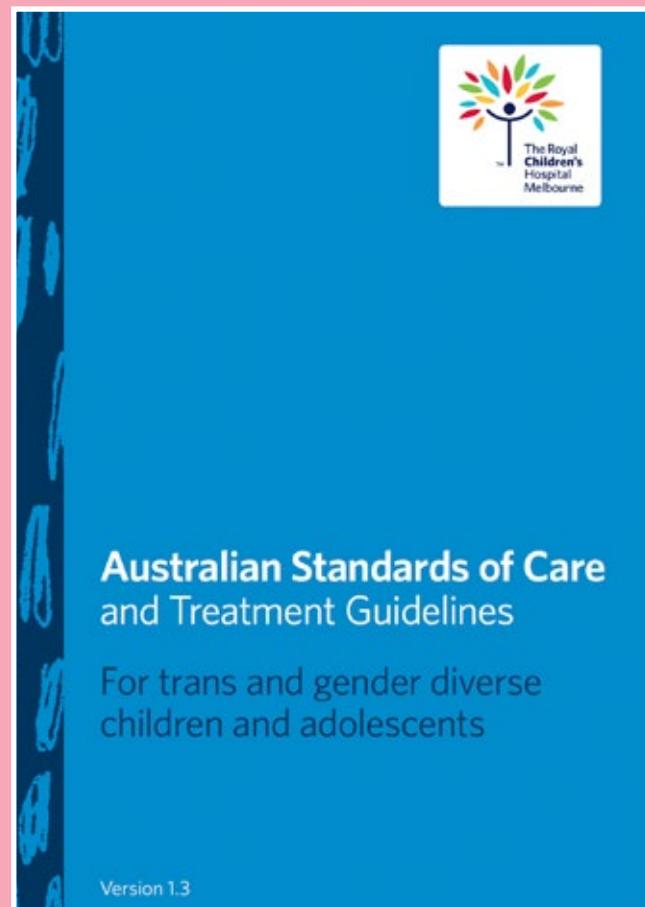
Through the 2000s and early 2010s, most of the visibility around trans and gender diverse children and young people came out of Melbourne. The doctors at the Royal Children's Hospital Gender Service (formalised in 2012) worked with trans children and their parents to publicise the legal challenges facing trans children who needed to access hormones. It took another series of Family Court rulings to change the laws around children's access to hormones. In 2013, *Re: Jamie* removed the requirement of Family Court approval for stage one puberty blockers. *Re: Kelvin* on 30 November 2017 finally set a new precedent: **children and families no longer required the authorisation of the Family Court to access stage two affirming hormones.**

A subsequent ruling in *Re: Matthew* a few months later also overturned the need for Family Court authorisation for gender affirmation surgeries.<sup>108</sup>

Associate Professor Michelle Telfer, director of the Royal Children's Hospital Gender Service, also worked closely with trans children, their families and other specialists to develop the first "**Australian Standards of Care and Treatment Guidelines For trans and gender diverse children and adolescents**". Released in late 2017, the standards of care received the endorsement of the Australian Professional Association for Transgender Health

(AusPATH) and in 2018 were published in the *Medical Journal of Australia*.<sup>109</sup> The internationally-renowned medical journal *The Lancet* published an editorial endorsing the standards of care, dubbing them an international gold standard for providing affirming care to trans and gender diverse children and young people.<sup>110</sup>

NSW Health has offered some support for trans children and young people, but the state's gender services have been less resourced than Victoria. The Children's Hospital at Westmead in Sydney and John Hunter Children's Hospital in Newcastle have both offered some clinical services to support trans and gender diverse children and young people since 2013, but they were not adequately resourced to deliver the necessary multi-disciplinary specialist care. Westmead and John Hunter both had one referral in 2013; this increased to 56 at Westmead in 2017, and John Hunter was up to 44 referrals by 2018.



*Image: Front Cover, 'Australian Standards of Care and Treatment Guidelines For trans and gender diverse children and adolescents', the Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, 2017.*

**In late December 2016 the NSW branch of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists prepared a detailed proposal to establish a child, adolescent and young adult gender dysphoria service.** The College proposed the founding of a hub in Sydney which could link to regional spokes, GP networks and transgender organisations.<sup>111</sup> In the 2018-19 financial year NSW Health provided Westmead Children's Hospital with \$160,000 to found a multidisciplinary gender service.<sup>112</sup> In early 2021 NSW Health allocated additional funds to increase the capacity of Westmead's gender service, but still the clinic operates only one day a week and has a long waitlist.

**Around late 2019, NSW Health** conducted a review of the state's gender services for children, consulting with organisations like the Gender Centre, ACON, Twenty10, AusPATH and Parents for Trans Youth Equity. The review recommended an affirming model of care that is holistic and interdisciplinary, working with clients' schools, community groups, bringing in psychologists, dieticians, endocrinologists and other specialists. The first site to implement the model of care which opened in 2021 is Maple Leaf House at Newcastle's John Hunter Children's Hospital: a new specialist hub for trans and gender diverse children and young people in Newcastle and the Hunter Region. Newcastle was chosen because the doctors there already had extensive experience providing affirming care to trans and gender diverse children and young people.<sup>113</sup>

**In early 2021 several senior doctors associated with the Westmead Children's Hospital Gender Service** published two peer-reviewed articles which sparked widespread controversy. The second article used colourful language around the prescribing of hormones, and the authors argued that the clinic was not providing adequate psychosocial support for children and young people who identified as trans or gender diverse.<sup>114</sup> The articles added fire to conservative politicians' and media's ongoing attacks on affirming care for trans and gender diverse children and young people.

**The Gender Centre put out a media statement which was a nuanced response to the journal articles and media reporting.** The Gender Centre agreed that there was a need for more psychosocial support for trans and gender diverse children and their families. Yet, this was not meant to be a replacement for hormone therapies but rather

families as they navigated the challenges of being transgender in a society that still discriminates. As the Gender Centre statement summarised:

There remains serious concerns from gender clinicians, support organisations and professionals – not about the right or rightness of trans and gender diverse children to live their authentic selves – but rather as a direct consequence of historically inadequate funding, and a focus on medical transition without the absolutely essential social and welfare support that is vital to making sure that families and their trans and gender exploring young people get to be their authentic selves healthily..<sup>115</sup>

**The push to support trans and gender diverse young people** has been about more than just access to affirming health care and the children's hospitals. The organisation Twenty10 was founded in 1982 as a project to support gay young people. For most of its history Twenty10 primarily worked with LGB children and young people, but by the 2010s like many other organisations it had shifted to support all parts of the LGBTIQ+ rainbow alphabet. It is the largest organisation targeting support for trans and gender diverse children and young people in NSW.<sup>116</sup>

Other organisations support parents of trans and gender diverse children and young people. Rainbow Families NSW was founded in 2015 to support and advocate for all families with parents who are LGBTIQ+. In July 2019 Rainbow Families published its first *Trans and Gender Diverse Parents Guide*, providing personal stories about trans and gender diverse parents.<sup>117</sup> Transcend is another organisation founded in 2012 to support parents of trans and gender diverse children and young people. It started in Victoria as Australia's first parents-led peer support network and now operates nationally.<sup>118</sup>





The most high-profile initiative to support trans and gender diverse children and young people was the **Safe Schools Coalition**. This was a program in schools with two express purposes: **to combat bullying, and to affirm young people with diverse sexualities and genders**. The program began in Victoria in 2010 and from 2013 went national with federal funding. In early 2016, conservative politicians and commentators began to attack the Safe Schools Coalition, arguing that it was so-called cultural Marxism, sexualised young people and was a form of child grooming. A review commissioned by the federal government found the program to be appropriate, but this did not stop the virulent opposition from conservatives and the right-wing media.<sup>119</sup>

The Safe Schools brand became, in the eyes of many politicians, toxic, and premiers and chief ministers across the country ceased their support for the program. **Only in Victoria did the premier stand by Safe Schools and even expand its rollout.** In NSW, then-Premier Mike Baird supported the outcomes of the federal government's review and promised more engagement with parents as the program continued. However, in April 2017 the NSW Government announced that it would not continue the program when federal funding ran out at the end of June. Instead, the **NSW government promised to implement a broader anti-bullying strategy which was not LGBTIQ+ focused.**<sup>120</sup>

Image: Front Cover, 'Trans and Gender Diverse Parents Guide'. Researched and written by Jacqui Tomlins, 2015.

**The moral panic around Safe Schools** and affirming health care highlight the ways that conservative forces have weaponised children in their campaigns against trans and gender diverse people. Society may have passed a trans tipping point, but for every legal or cultural victory there would be a backlash and more battles to affirm trans rights.



"REFERRALS IN ORBIT. REQUESTING MODULE FOR INFORMED CONSENT"

#### **Approval Letter model**

Some trans and gender diverse people want to see non-GP specialists for endorsement prior to starting hormones, and that's ok. We are all about self-determination, and celebrate trans people making informed and autonomous choices about how we access gender affirming healthcare.

Image: 'Starting Hormones', Page 6. Brochure courtesy ACON. Artist Samuel Luke.

# LEGAL VICTORIES AND SHORTCOMINGS

The political football that was Safe Schools reflected the changing landscape around transgender issues in the 2010s. As the decade rolled on there were new programs, organisations, social media groups, activists and events to celebrate transgender lives and diversity. The Australian Defence Force lifted its ban on transgender service in 2010, and in 2011 the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade changed passport guidelines to allow citizens to self-identify their gender without requiring medical or surgical interventions, or to use the non-binary marker X. The Commonwealth government amended the *Sex Discrimination Act* in 2013 to provide federal anti-discrimination protections on the grounds of sexuality, gender identity and intersex variations.

The logo for the Safe Schools Coalition. It features the organization's name in a large, white, sans-serif font. The text is arranged in three lines: 'Safe' on the first line, 'Schools' on the second, and 'Coalition' on the third. The logo is set against a dark blue circular background.

In NSW, trans activists have consistently pushed to update the 1996 birth certificate law on two fronts: to remove the requirement that a person have gender affirmation surgery to change their sex marker, and to recognise non-binary genders. On the latter matter, a series of events and the determination of activist Norrie and their allies ushered in some reform. Norrie says that what set the process in motion was a March 2009 Australian Human Rights Commission report entitled *Sex Files: The legal recognition of sex in documents and government records*. The report recommendations all centred on making it easier for people to update their sex and gender markers on legal documents – including removing the condition for medical or surgical interventions, reducing evidentiary requirements and shifting towards self-identification. The report also recommended that gender categories be updated to allow people to select “unspecified”, rather than forced into the male/female binary.<sup>121</sup>

SAGE had worked hard to support *The Sex Files* report, and founder Tracie O'Keefe thought Norrie could prove an effective test case around the recommendations. DFAT informed Tracie that they would issue passports with an X gender marker if a person had a birth certificate indicating an unspecified gender (note this was before DFAT changed passport rules to allow self-identification of gender). Norrie spent several weeks gathering evidence including two doctors' statutory declarations indicating that their sex was “not specified”. Norrie lodged the application to change their birth certificate sex marker with the NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages in November 2009. The request was elevated to the Registrar and there was a bit of to-ing and fro-ing with Norrie's doctors. In February 2010, Norrie received confirmation that their sex was now registered as “not specified” and that the matter was resolved.

**On Friday, 12 March 2010**, a *Sydney Morning Herald* cover story reported about Norrie's change of sex recognition to not specified. On Monday, 15 March 2010, Norrie received word that the Attorney General had overruled the Registrar and disallowed their change of sex to not specified. The Attorney General asserted that sex could only be male or female. Norrie was devastated at first, but then worked with Tracie O'Keefe to lodge an appeal with the Administrative Decisions Tribunal as well as a complaint with the Australian Human Rights Commission. A lawyer took Norrie's case on pro bono; they lost in the Administrative Decisions Tribunal, but then appealed to the NSW Supreme Court. Norrie won in the Supreme Court, and the NSW Attorney General then appealed to the High Court of Australia. On 2 April 2014 – over four years after lodging their application with the NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages – the High Court unanimously ruled that Norrie's sex need not be binary and ordered that their sex be legally recognised as "non specific".<sup>122</sup>

**Norrie's High Court victory set the national precedent that state governments could recognise genders beyond the binary.** Moreover, the High Court explicitly recognised "non specific" as Norrie's gender marker – alleviating worries by Organisation Intersex Australia (now Intersex Human Rights Australia) that intersex and trans were being conflated and that intersex should not be a discrete sex category.<sup>123</sup> Still, the ruling had its limitations because the 1996 NSW law on transgender people changing their birth certificates still applied. Namely, to change sex markers on a birth certificate, a trans person still needed to undergo a "sex affirmation procedure", defined by law as "a surgical procedure involving the alteration of a person's reproductive organs carried out: a. for the purpose of assisting a person to be considered to be a member of the opposite sex; or b. to correct or eliminate ambiguities relating to the sex of the person."<sup>124</sup>

Trans activists have consistently lobbied for the gender affirmation surgery requirement to be removed for people to change their birth certificate gender markers, but to no avail. Currently NSW and Queensland are the only Australian jurisdictions that retain this requirement. That said, at the time of writing, the Queensland Government has flagged that it will introduce legislation to remove the gender affirmation surgery requirement.<sup>125</sup>

Longstanding trans advocate, Miss Katherine Wolfgramme FRSA, also used the threat of legal action to facilitate change in NSW and Australia. Since 2000 a drag queen hosted a popular bingo night in pubs and clubs across Sydney under the brand name Tranny Bingo. In 2017, Wolfgramme secured solicitors who sent letters to the pubs and organiser of Tranny Bingo threatening action through the Australian Human Rights Commission if they did not cease using the offensive term "tranny". The organiser expressed disappointment that this could not be resolved without the threat of legal action, but he did change the name to Genderbender Bingo (he also claimed the name change was already in train at the time of the legal threats).<sup>126</sup>

Action in the courts and Australian Human Rights Commission thus have proven effective to facilitate change, but they are limited in that they can only go to *interpretations* of the law. Substantive reform requires changes to the law itself. Currently, the top two priorities for transgender law reform are around birth certificates – removing surgery requirements and making it easier to recognise genders beyond the binary – and to ban so-called conversion therapy. These reforms have already passed in several states and territories, but the NSW government has shown little interest in introducing such legislation (though independent Member of the Legislative Assembly for Sydney, Alex Greenwich, has been lobbying for them).

**Since the 1996 amendments to the anti-discrimination law and birth certificates**, there has only been one change to NSW law to expand transgender rights: in the aftermath of passing marriage equality, the NSW government in 2018 amended the *Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act* to remove the requirement that trans people divorce before they could change their birth certificates. Other than that, trans people's rights under NSW law have been unchanged for over twenty-five years.

# CONTEMPORARY SUPPORT SERVICES

**Looking at the current situation in NSW, the Gender Centre continues to provide the majority of direct services to trans and gender diverse people.**

A mapping exercise conducted by the NSW Ministry of Health in 2019 found that the Gender Centre delivers 93 percent of trans-specific services in the state.<sup>127</sup> Much of the Gender Centre's current work builds on foundations from the Riley years and 2000s. For instance, the Gender Centre offers a range of programs and peer support groups to support different constituencies within the trans community. One such group that started around 2007 was F.T.M. Connect: a monthly discussion and support group for trans men and trans masculine people. Each month would centre on a different topic, be it around chest surgery, how to be good men or discussions about people's affirmation journeys and feelings. The group started small but within months was getting 20-30 attendees – some popular topics attracted even up to 100 people. The Gender Centre website currently lists nine different support groups for different subsets of the trans community (e.g. trans men and trans masculine people, over 40s, partners).

**The Gender Centre has also offered support groups for trans children as well as their parents.** Transtopia began as an eight-week program for trans people under eighteen and over time evolved to a monthly group. The first family of a trans child approached the Gender Centre in 2007. Around 2009, seeing a growing number of inquiries from parents of trans children and young people, Gender Centre staff started peer support groups for parents. **This program also grew rapidly and now runs in Sydney, Wollongong and online.** On average, about twenty parents per group per month attend,

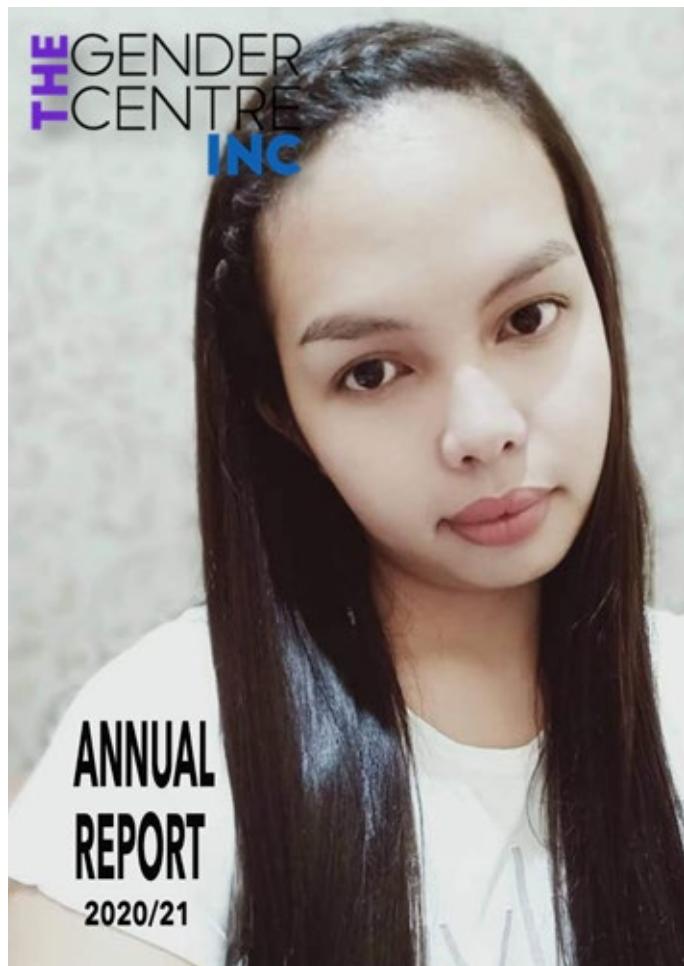
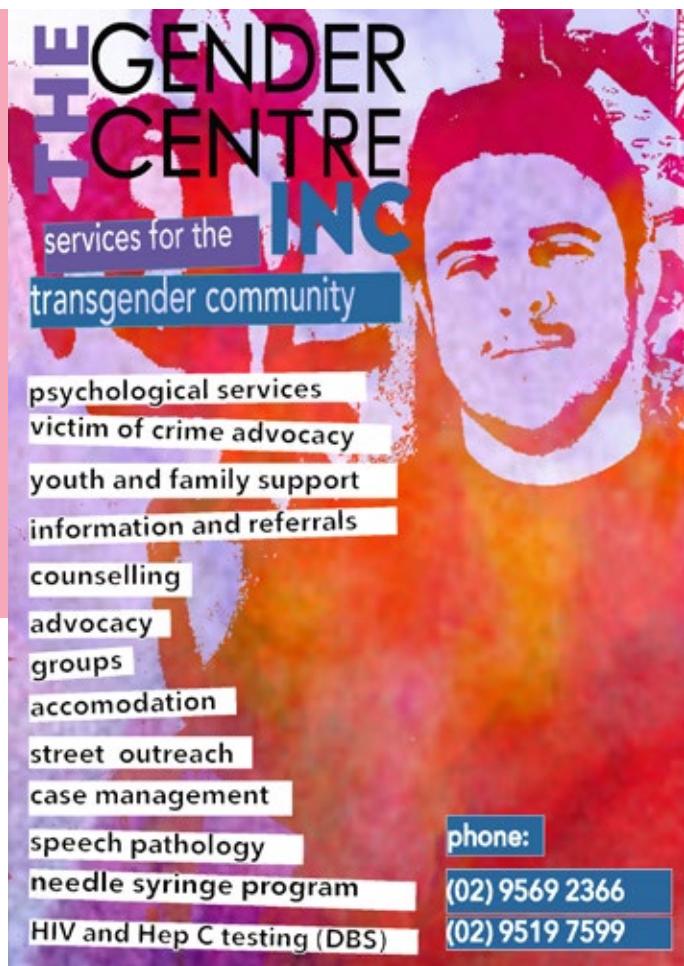


Image: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags. Image courtesy TransHub/TransMob.

and 355 families approached the Gender Centre for case work support in the 2020/21 financial year alone.<sup>128</sup> Teddy Cook, who used to address some of the parents' groups in Sydney Wollongong, observes that often the distressed newcomer parents are, within months, the enthusiastic old hats inducting and affirming the new members.<sup>129</sup> In 2014, the Gender Centre also prepared "First Steps" – a resource bringing together interviews and stories with parents of trans children along with other tips and information to support parents.<sup>130</sup>

The Gender Centre has, since 2011, run the Transgender Anti-Violence Project to offer support, advocacy and referrals around hate crimes and other violence targeting trans people.<sup>131</sup> In the 2010s, Gender Centre staff expanded their outreach to work with local health services in regional NSW. These programs, which started in Dubbo and surrounds, aim to provide education to local health services so that counselling and other health care can be brought to the regions, stemming the flow of trans people who previously felt compelled to move to Sydney. The Far West program has also been successful at working with Sistergirls, Brotherboys and gender diverse Aboriginal people residing in Dubbo and Indigenous communities around western NSW.<sup>132</sup>

**The Gender Centre is still a regular point of contact for workplaces** or other organisations seeking advice or training, trans inclusion and supporting



Images: The Gender Centre annual reports outline their service delivery and activities. Image courtesy The Gender Centre.

individuals who are transitioning. As throughout its history, the Gender Centre continues to offer counselling and housing services to trans people in need – including housing for trans people transitioning out of the carceral system. The Gender Centre also continues to refer clients to affirming health services. Staff are currently finalising a series of booklets for GPs and other health care workers titled “**Exploring Gender**”. The booklets will provide education and information so that health professionals who are new to trans health care can support clients through gender affirmation.

**Since 2018 the Gender Centre has partnered with the Albion Centre T150 program which offers HIV, sexual health and affirming care services to trans clients.** The Gender Centre provides a peer case worker to support T150 clients to navigate gender affirmation, be it around education, legal changes, workplace or personal development. The peer case worker also offers other supports, be they around material aid, referrals to drug and alcohol services or tenancy advocacy. In the period 2020-21, peer case workers supported 128 clients in anything from one session through to six months.<sup>133</sup>

**The Gender Centre has especially been active working with schools** to provide guidance and support for transitioning students. The NSW Department of Education Legal Issues Bulletin 55 – “Transgender students in schools” – since at least December 2014 has provided advice about uniforms, name changes, pronoun use, privacy, toilets, sport, psychosocial support for students and families and a raft of other information. The bulletin mentions a “Gender Centre Fact Sheet, Gender Variant Students: For teachers dealing with transgender students” as one of only four resources to support schools.<sup>134</sup> By 2021, Gender Centre staff were fielding inquiries from approximately one new school per week from across the state, independent and even Catholic sectors.

In 2020, Gender Centre staff documented a framework that had guided their work with external partners, workplaces, schools and other organisations for years, which they refer to as the RIDE model: respect, inclusivity, dignity and equity. The RIDE model acknowledges that different people have different worldviews, some of which may not be embracing of trans people. But by focusing on respect, inclusivity, dignity and equity, the

conversation is about making space to include trans people without it having to change or challenge their worldview. As "Liz" summarises it:

*"We've used [RIDE] consistently to promote the rights of trans people so that people don't go, 'You're pushing an agenda and I have to accept you.' It's not; we're pushing an agenda of inclusion. We're not pushing acceptance. You don't have to change your belief system. What you have to do is respect and adhere to models of good citizenship which is RIDE."*<sup>135</sup>

Other organisations like Trans Pride Australia, SWOP, SAGE, Twenty10 and the many other LGBTIQ+ cultural and advocacy groups offer other sites for trans inclusion and visibility. There has also been a shift away from the gatekeeper approach to health care towards an informed consent model. This has meant GPs taking a bigger role in primary care to prescribe and monitor hormones, rather than requiring trans clients to go through extensive evaluations by psychiatrists and endocrinologists to fit a restrictive interpretation of what it means to be transgender.

**Finding a trans-friendly GP can still be challenging.** and NSW does not offer any trans-specific GP clinics. That said, LGBTIQ+ friendly practices and sexual health clinics are generally trans-friendly and practice informed consent models around gender affirmation. There also has been an increase in people affirming their genders without desiring medical interventions, as well as more psychologists and counsellors willing to provide psychosocial support as trans and gender diverse people navigate what is still a predominantly binary and discriminatory society.

From the mid-2010s, ACON, too, stepped up and has transformed into a major advocacy and support service for trans people in NSW. This was an important transformation; ACON had employed trans staff on occasion since the 1990s, including a Sistergirl officer since 1999. Still, ACON's programs did not target trans people and the organisation had a reputation for caring only about cis gay men.<sup>136</sup> Dana Forrester, for instance, recalls being turned away from a Newcastle ACON safe sex event in the 2010s when the manager told her: "This is not for transgender people. It is for gay people."<sup>137</sup> Wez Saunders, a trans man who worked at ACON's

Newcastle office, similarly believes that the organisation was not supportive of trans people in the 2000s and early 2010s.<sup>138</sup>

### From the mid-2010s, ACON went through a transformation to become more trans-affirming.

Much of this came through the leadership of ACON employee and trans man Teddy Cook, who had long advocated for the health and wellbeing of trans people of all genders. Teddy joined ACON in 2012 and by 2017 worked as regional outreach development manager overseeing southern and western NSW. In that role, he met trans people across regional NSW and saw that not only are trans people everywhere, but they are also facing similar challenges everywhere in terms of accessing gender affirming healthcare and being able to engage with trans-affirming services, organisations and institutions. Teddy also regularly worked with staff across ACON to find ways to make their programs and resources more trans-affirming, including incorporating queer trans men within ACON's programs for queer men. As Teddy describes it,

*"the interest and commitment from the staff was definitely there, even if the capacity wasn't back then, it certainly is now."*<sup>139</sup>

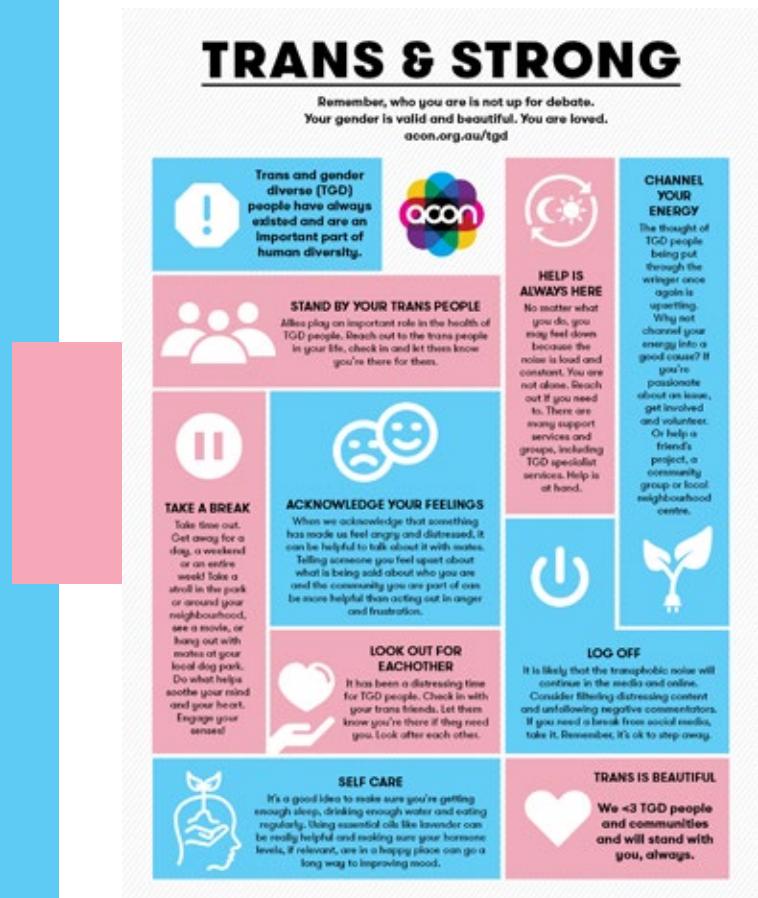


Image: 'Trans & Strong' Poster.

Image courtesy ACON.

From the mid-2010s an increasing number of trans people were accessing ACON's community care services, and by the 2020s most new enquiries to these services are from trans people. The real turning point was in 2017 when, alongside internal advocacy from Teddy and the increasing number of trans staff, trans media advocacy group Rainbow Rights Watch called for ACON to start playing a major role in improving the health and rights of trans people in NSW. Three representatives of Rainbow Rights Watch met with ACON's President, CEO and Deputy CEO, discussed problems facing the trans community and encouraged them to step up ACON's advocacy and support services in the trans space.<sup>140</sup> It was a difficult meeting because it forced ACON leadership to reflect on their practice as an organisation. It also convinced the leadership to step up ACON's advocacy and support services in the trans space.

As a first step, in 2018 ACON hired a consultant to work through a consultation process with trans people in NSW. They prepared a trans community survey which elicited 450 responses and facilitated several consultation meetings across the state. The culmination of this consultation process was the 2019 document "A Blueprint to Improve the Health and Wellbeing of the Trans and Gender Diverse Community in NSW", which highlighted six priority areas to promote trans and gender diverse people's health and wellbeing in NSW:

- **Clear and easy pathways for accessing gender-affirming care**
- **Affordable and available gender affirming healthcare**
- **An inclusive and knowledgeable NSW health sector**
- **Official government I.D.s and records that reflect trans people's gender through simple administrative procedures**
- **Workplaces, education settings and other environments that are inclusive and respectful of the needs of trans and gender diverse people**
- **A vibrant, resourced trans and gender diverse community advocating for its own needs and priorities.<sup>141</sup>**

## Around the time the blueprint was released,

Teddy Cook was appointed leader of ACON's new Trans Equity Health team to develop a comprehensive strategy to support trans and gender diverse people in NSW. Teddy employed Liz Duck-Chong shortly thereafter as ACON's first Trans Health Equity project officer, who took the lead on the team's first big project.

## ACON's next major output to support trans and gender diverse people in NSW was TransHub.

Created by Liz Duck-Chong, Mish Pony and Teddy Cook and launched on 31 March 2020, TransHub is an online resource for trans and gender diverse people, health practitioners and allies which provides information on topics including: language, advice around social, legal and medical affirmation, health tips, a list of gender affirming medical practitioners and education resources for doctors and allies. A Yarning Circle advisory group also supported the development of TransHub to ensure that the information is accessible for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Accompanying TransHub is TransMob: providing information and resources for Sistergirls, Brotherboys and gender diverse trans mob.<sup>142</sup>

Image: 'Understanding LGBTQ2IA+ Identities'. June 2019. Image courtesy TransHub.

## TransHub is only one part of ACON's strategy.

The organisation has focused especially on three conceptual areas: self-determination, autonomy and health equity, and has focussed attention on sexual violence, incarceration, building the capacity of health professionals and preventing trans suicidality and suicide. For the latter two, ACON developed a series of resilience-building workshops, online training and a toolkit called Trans Vitality, which is accessible through TransHub, and a trans-affirming practice eLearning with ACON's Pride Training.<sup>143</sup>

From September 2020 and again during the 2021 NSW lockdowns, ACON offered Trans COVID Care: financial and peer support for trans people across NSW who were in need of assistance. A large proportion of applicants who received aid were Sistergirls, Brotherboys and gender diverse trans mob. ACON is also piloting P4T, a trans peer navigator service to offer guidance for trans people who need assistance with anything from identity exploration and affirmation to accessing affirming health care.<sup>144</sup> ACON's Trans Health Equity team also work with ACON's staff, projects and services on trans-affirming practice, develop new education resources, undertake consultation and co-design,

advise government, peak bodies and service providers, and support trans community members to run workshops, host events and self-advocate. These additional steps are important because, as valuable as TransHub is, some trans people facing challenging circumstances require more support and interaction than a website alone can offer.

Finally, in March 2022 – just as this report was being finalised – [NSW Health released its first "NSW LGBTIQ+ Health Strategy 2022-2027."](#) The document centred gender affirming healthcare along with access and equity, partnerships, human rights and person-centred care as its guiding principles. One of the strategic priorities referred specifically to responding to trans people's health needs and the three actions were to elevate capability, to support evidence-informed care for trans young people and their families, and to establish accessible pathways for gender affirming care.<sup>145</sup> Given the great work trans and LGBTIQ+ organisations are already doing on the ground, there are clearly able and willing partners which, if properly supported by NSW Health, can drive the success of the strategy.

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HEALTH & GENDER AFFIRMATION IN NSW

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## TRANS MOB

Trans and gender diverse people are ancient.

We have lived, survived and thrived across every human civilisation since the dawn of time and can be traced throughout history<sup>146</sup>.

First Nations cultures have always recognised and integrated much richer and diverse concepts of gender that expand far beyond the Western concepts of binary cisgender experiences and identities. We have been, and continue to be part of every First Nations population around the world, including in Australia.

First Nations people who are trans in Australia might use the term **Sistergirl** and **Brotherboy**. Trans people are likely part of every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

The lands of the Eora, the gathering places of Sydney, have also played a big role in bringing Sistergirls and Brotherboys together from across the many countries and nations of Australia to access services and to connect with the broader trans community.



Image: Webpage snapshot, TransMob captured on 25 March 2022.

Image: 'P4T' Poster. Image courtesy TransHub.

# P4T

Peer navigation for trans people

P4T is a free telehealth peer navigation service for all trans people over 18 in NSW.

A trans peer navigator can help you access the care, mental health and wellbeing services and community supports you need, because we understand what it's like.

Visit [transhub.org.au/P4T](https://transhub.org.au/P4T) to apply.

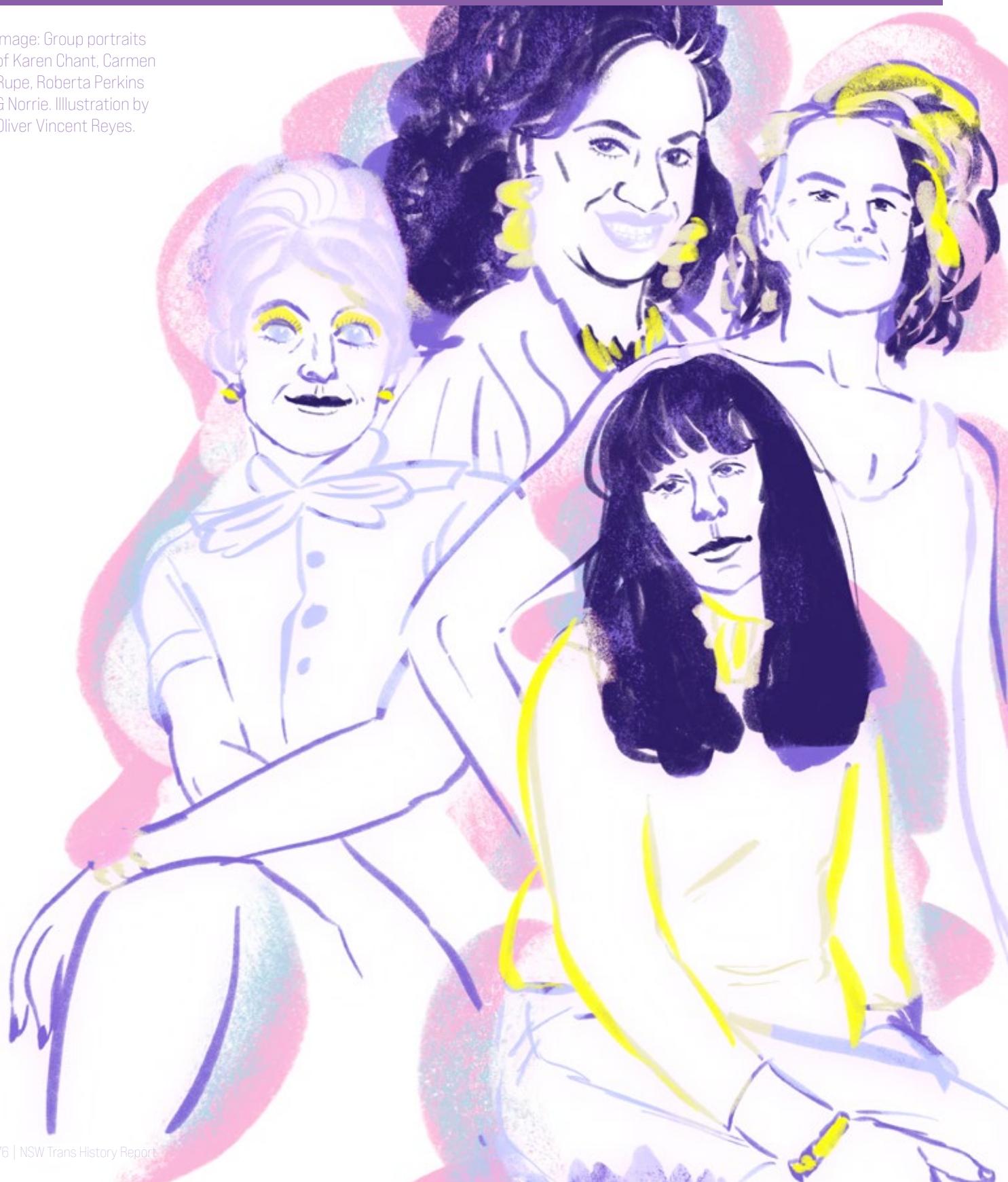


**Mental Health  
Commission**  
of New South Wales

**P4T**

# CONTEMPORARY POLITICS

Image: Group portraits of Karen Chant, Carmen Rupe, Roberta Perkins & Norrie. Illustration by Oliver Vincent Reyes.



**The increased trans visibility of the 2010s has also met a substantial anti-trans backlash** which has played out in the political arena and the media. The attacks on trans rights have especially targeted trans women, sport, health care and children and have grown louder in the aftermath of the marriage equality vote. **One of the loudest voices from NSW to attack trans rights** has been One Nation member of the Legislative Council, Mark Latham. In August 2020, Latham introduced an education bill that would ban the teaching of the trans experience and trans people (politicised as “gender fluidity”) in schools and would force schools to consult with parents before teaching anything relating to so-called moral issues – including gender and sexuality.

**Latham's bill went to an upper house inquiry** which critics slammed for its anti-trans bias. Indeed, of the forty-two witnesses who testified before the inquiry, only one was a trans person: Teddy Cook, who was speaking in his capacity as vice president of the volunteer-led AusPATH (there were also two parents with trans children). Many of the witnesses came from avowed anti-trans organisations, and groups like the Gender Centre were not invited to give evidence. It was no surprise when, in September 2021, the inquiry final report recommended passage of Latham's bill. This was even though experts highlighted how the bill would further marginalise trans and gender diverse children and young people and add to the already appalling mental health barriers facing them.<sup>146</sup>

### **The NSW Government was given until March 2022 to respond to Latham's inquiry and bill.**

As one sign about their intentions, on 23 February 2022 the Liberal, National, Labor and Green parties all united to vote down another bill of Latham's which would have entrenched the rights of religious organisations to discriminate. On 16 March 2022, the NSW Government tabled its response rejecting Latham's education bill. Among the reasons given, the report stated:

**“the Bill may lead to targeted discrimination against a marginalised community which already experiences poorer mental health and wellbeing outcomes.”**<sup>147</sup>

Notwithstanding the loud anti-trans voices, trans and gender diverse people have continued to support each other and worked with allies to promote acceptance and inclusion in all walks of life. For instance, one centrepiece of the 2017 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras was the attendance of about thirty Sistergirls from the Tiwi Islands.<sup>148</sup> As another example, ACON's

Pride in Sport program worked with nine peak sporting bodies to adopt guidelines around trans and gender diverse inclusion – launched in October 2020 at the Sydney Cricket Ground.<sup>149</sup> At the same time, Alex Greenwich – the independent Member of the Legislative Assembly for Sydney – introduced a motion into the Legislative Assembly that read:

*That this House:*

*[1] Notes the contribution made to New South Wales from the trans and gender diverse communities.*

*[2] Commends leading organisations supporting the trans and gender diverse communities including The Gender Centre, ACON, the Inner City Legal Centre, Twenty10, Trans Pride Australia and Equality Australia.*

*[3] Notes the national sports codes trans and gender diverse inclusion measures.*

*[4] Notes the disproportionately high discrimination, and health, mental health and economic impacts experienced by the trans and gender diverse communities, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

*[5] Notes the importance of ongoing funding support for organisations and health and welfare services supporting the trans and gender diverse communities.*

*[6] Calls for the trans and gender diverse communities to be treated with dignity, fairness, respect and equality.*<sup>150</sup>

Members from the Liberal Party, ALP and Greens all spoke in favour of the motion and it was adopted unanimously.

**One constant across NSW trans history has been the power of visibility. Individuals can connect to others “like them” and see possibilities for a better life in their affirmed gender. Although each trans journey is distinct, history shows that, as Teddy Cook powerfully summarised in his 2021 testimony to the Latham inquiry: “The reality is that trans people have always existed. We have always been here.”**<sup>151</sup>

### TIME IMMEMORIAL

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander occupation of the continent. Several of these cultures include terms in their languages for a third gender beyond the binary.

### TIME IMMEMORIAL

Cultures around the world recognise gender identities beyond the binary and often these people have special roles within the societies. Examples include Hijra (India), Whakawāhine (Aotearoa New Zealand), Fa'afafine (Samoa) and Wíñkте (Lakota).

### 1880s ONWARDS

AFAB people caught dressed as men charged sometimes for 'vagrancy'.

### 1901

Australian colonies federate.

### 1888

Gordon Lawrence arrested for being dressed as a woman at Melbourne's Centennial International Exhibition at the Melbourne Exhibition Building.

### 1879

Bendigo-based Edward De Lacy Evans discovered to be AFAB, born Ellen Tremayne. Evans features in numerous newspaper reports and is forced to live the rest of their life as Tremayne.

### 1788

First Fleet commences European colonisation of the continent.



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1910

German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld publishes *Transvestites: The Erotic Drive to Cross Dress*, for the first time identifying a category of 'transvestism' in Western discourse.

1920

Harry Crawford murder trial.

1912

First mention of 'transvestism' in Australian newspapers.

1920s Onwards

AMAB people caught dressed as women often charged for 'offensive behaviour' – the same charge levelled for homosexual conduct.

1928

British sexologist Havelock Ellis uses the term 'eonism' to describe males who have the urge to dress in women's clothing.

**1930-1931**

First gender affirmation surgeries performed on Danish woman Lili Elbe in Germany. She died from complications following surgery.

**1930s**

Psychiatry and psychology professions begin to use language of transvestism and eonism, though not frequently.

**1936**

Zdeněk Koubek from Czechoslovakia has female-to-male gender affirmation surgery.

**1960**

Virginia Prince begins publishing magazine *Transvestia* in the USA.

**1961**

Jewel Box opens as Sydney's first drag bar. Drag was often an entrée for people to experiment with gender expression in a socially tolerable environment.

**1963**

Les Girls opens in Kings Cross.

Dr Harry Benjamin publishes "Transsexualism and Transvestism as Psycho-Somatic and Somato-Psychic Syndromes," outlining a medical model of transsexualism.

**1954**

Former American GI Christine Jorgensen undergoes gender affirmation surgery in Denmark and becomes a global celebrity.

**1953**

Psychiatrists in Melbourne begin treating patients whose gender identity was different from their sex assigned at birth.

**1950**

Compton Cafeteria Riot in San Francisco marks a turning point in transgender people fighting for rights.

**1966**

Beaumont Society founded in UK as a social group for dressers.

**1966**

**LATE 1960s OR EARLY 1970s**

First gender clinics open at Prince Alfred Hospital and Prince Henry Hospital.

**1969:**

Stonewall Riots in New York City, begun by trans women of colour Sylvia Rivera and Marsha Johnson, marks the beginning of the modern LGBT rights movement.

Daughters of Bilitis (Melbourne) and Homosexual Law Reform Association (Canberra) founded as Australia's first gay and lesbian rights groups.

**1969****BLACK = NSW****BLUE = AUSTRALIA****PINK = INTERNATIONAL****1970:**

Sylvia Rivera founds Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) as an activist and support group for trans women, especially sex workers and women of colour.

**1970**

Campaign Against Moral Persecution (CAMP) founded in Sydney. CAMP would be the most prominent gay and lesbian rights group in the 1970s.

**1971**

Seahorse founded, becoming Australia's first known trans organisation. It was primarily a social and support group for dressers.

**1971:**

*Corbett v Corbett* case in UK sets common law precedent – later applied in Australia – that people can change their gender but not their biological sex.

**1978**

First Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras.

**1978**

Cessation of gender affirmation surgeries in Sydney public hospitals, leaving most trans people who want gender affirmation surgery to go to Melbourne.

**c 1978**

Noelena Tame founds the Australian Transsexual Association as a support group.

Report from Family Law Council notes the challenge of states implementing reforms to birth certificate laws in order for recognition of transgender people's affirmed genders.

**1978**

Gender clinic founded at Melbourne's Queen Victoria Hospital. This would become the present-day Monash Gender Clinic.

**1975**

First cases of AIDS diagnosed in the USA.  
**1981**

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**1982**

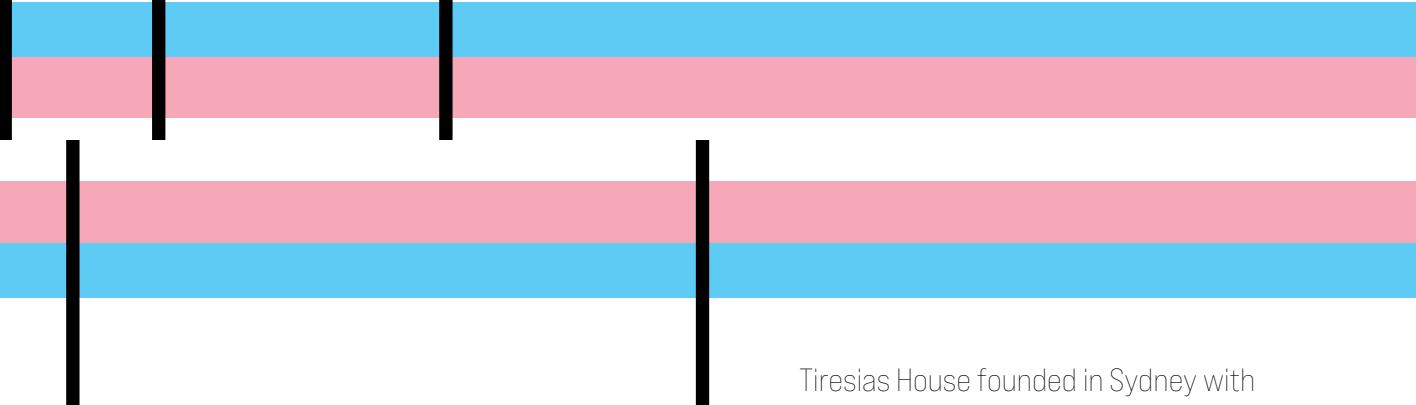
First case of AIDS diagnosed in Australia.

**1982**

Roberta Perkins transforms Australian Transsexual Association into an activist group and stages Australia's first trans rights protest at a Manly shopping centre.

**1983**

Roberta Perkins' book *The "Drag Queen" Scene* is published, documenting experiences of drag queens and trans women in Kings Cross and Darlinghurst.

Tiresias House founded in Sydney with the support of the NSW Government as a refuge and support service for homeless trans women. This would later become the Gender Centre.

**1983**

Trans sex workers Phyllis McGuiness and Vicki Harris convicted of being males procuring other males for an indecent act. They would go on to appeal their convictions.

**1982**

**1984**

Reforms to passport regulations allow people who have undergone gender affirmation surgery to have passports issued in their affirmed gender.

**1986**

Lou Sullivan founds FTM International in the USA.

**1988**

South Australia passes *Sexual Reassignment Act*, allowing those who have undergone gender affirmation surgery to apply for a 'certificate of recognition' as a new identity document. This is the first state to introduce a mechanism to recognise transgender people's affirmed genders.

Toye de Wilde runs as an independent in Queensland state by-election. She is the first known openly transgender person to run for parliament in Australia.

**1989**

NSW Supreme Court rules in *R v Harris and McGuiness* that a person who had gender affirmation surgery should be legally recognised in their affirmed gender. The state still has no mechanism for people to facilitate or register such changes.

**1988**

**1991**

Jasper Laybutt founds Boys Will Be Boys as Australia's first trans men's group.



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**1991**

Transgender Liberation Coalition (TLC) founded. The group was initially lobbying for more funding for Tiresias House, but a change of leadership in 1992 transformed the group towards activism and the introduction of new, social constructivist ideas about gender.



Trany Anti-Violence Project records and documents examples of hate crimes and other discrimination experienced by transgender people.

**1993-94**

Tiresias House renamed The Gender Centre.

**1993**



Publication of Leslie Feinberg's *Trans Gender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time has Come.*

**1992**

**1994**

Roberta Perkins publishes Australia's first comprehensive, national study on challenges facing transgender people: "Transgender Lifestyles and HIV/AIDS Risk: National Transgender HIV/AIDS Needs Assessment Project."

**1995-97**

Wood Royal Commission exposes endemic corruption in the NSW Police Force and ushers in reforms that also mean significantly less police harassment of trans sex workers.

Independent Clover Moore introduces bill to amend *Anti-Discrimination Act* to protect transgender people.

**1994**

Transsexual Action Group (TAG) forms to lobby for reforms to birth certificates but only for people who underwent gender affirmation surgery.

**1994**

Amendments to the *Prostitution Act* remove the neighbourhood restrictions on street sex work; sex workers generally consider this the real moment of decriminalisation in NSW

**1995**

Norrie and Carmen Rupé organise Tranny Pride Ball to raise funds for a float in the 1995 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras.

**1994**



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**1996**

TLC lobbying efforts secure passage of amendments to *Anti-Discrimination Act* to protect transgender people, broadly defined. Under TAG's influence, amendments to the *Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act* require trans people to have gender affirmation surgery to change their sex marker on their birth certificates.

**1996**

The Trany Wars: a series of public debates between TLC and advocates of the medical model of transsexualism. The Trany Wars culminate in a chaotic annual general meeting at the Gender Centre, where TLC-backed candidates win a majority of positions on the Management Committee.

Julie Peters runs for seat of Batman in federal election for Australian Democrats; she is the first openly transgender person to run for the federal parliament.

**1996**

**1996-97:**

Senate Inquiry into Sexuality Discrimination canvasses structural and legal discrimination against transgender Australians and recommends passage of a Commonwealth *Sexuality Discrimination Bill* which would protect LGBT people from discrimination.

Transgender Day of Remembrance founded by Gwendolyn Ann Smith to remember transgender victims of hate crimes.

**1999**

First National Indigenous Sistergirl Forum held on Magnetic Island, Queensland.

**1999**

Era of poor management at the Gender Centre, but a change of leadership puts an end to the Trany Wars. The Gender Centre launches its first website, which for years serves as Australia's largest repository linking trans services and resources.

**1997**



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### **2001**

Trannyradio set up as an online forum for trans people across Australia to post questions and discussions. In 2011 the name was changed to TgR.

SAGE (Sex & Gender Education) founded by Tracie O'Keefe and Norrie as a group to lobby for trans law reforms.

### **2003**

First Trans Day of Remembrance commemoration organised by Gender Centre.

ACON staff member Kooncha Brown becomes organisation's first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Transgender and Sistergirl Project Officer.

**1999**

Melbourne's Royal Children's Hospital has first case of a transgender child seeking and ultimately approved to medically transition.

Family Court approves children's medical transition in *Re Alex* but classifies the treatment as a 'special medical procedure'. The precedent means the Family Court must authorise all cases of stage one and stage two hormone treatment for children.

**2003**

**2009**

ANZPATH (later renamed AusPATH) founded.

**2009**

First International Transgender Day of Visibility.

**2009**

Norrie lodges application to change sex marker on birth certificate to 'not specified'. In early 2010 they are notified that this was approved, but then the Attorney General overturns it. Norrie launches legal action to challenge the Attorney General's decision.

Passport regulations updated to allow self-identification of gender and option of gender marker X.

**2011**

Safe Schools Coalition founded in Victoria as a school program to combat bullying and affirm children's genders and sexualities.

**2010**

Ban on transgender service in the Australian Defence Force lifted.

**2010**

First Transformal weekend event held in Katoomba.

**2010**



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**2013**

Commonwealth Sex Discrimination Act amended to add sexuality, intersex variations and gender identity as protected categories.

**2013**

In *Re Jamie* the Full Court of the Family Court repeals requirement that the Family Court authorise stage one hormones for children, but still requires court approval for stage two treatment.

**2015**

Trans Pride Australia founded, initially as Trans Pride Sydney.

In High Court case *NSW Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages v Norrie*, Norrie is successful at having their sex recognised as 'non specific' on their birth certificate. This forces the state to offer that option, but still trans people must have gender affirmation surgery to request it.

**2014**

ACT becomes first jurisdiction to remove requirement of gender affirmation surgery to change birth certificates and to allow non-binary gender markers on birth certificates.

**2014**

Safe Schools Coalition made a national program.

**2014**

**2016**

Kungah gathering of Sistergirls and Brotherboys hosted on Wurundjeri country.

**2016**

Safe Schools Coalition comes under attack by conservative media and politicians.

**2017**

Marriage equality plebiscite and legalisation of marriage equality.

**2017**

Family Court ruling *Re Kelvin* overturns requirement that Family Court authorise stage two hormone treatment.

**2018**

Family Court overturns requirement for court authorisation for gender affirmation surgeries in *Re Matthew*.

Gender Identity Disorder removed from World Health Organisation's diagnostic manual of mental disorders.  
**2019**

*Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act* amended so that trans people no longer need to divorce to change their birth certificates.

**2018**



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**2020**

TransHub launched as a significant online resource with information for trans people, health professionals and allies on a range of social, legal and medical topics.

**2020**

Pride in sport works with nine sport peak bodies to develop trans and gender diverse inclusion guidelines, which are launched together at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

ACT and Queensland are first Australian jurisdictions to ban so-called conversion therapy. Victoria follows suit with an even tougher ban passed in 2021.

**2020**

NSW Health releases its first "NSW LGBTIQ+ Health Strategy 2022-2027," which explicitly supports gender affirming care.

**2022**

NSW Government rejects Latham's education bill.

**2022**

One Nation MP Mark Latham introduces anti-trans education bill into the Legislative Council and also chairs an inquiry which critics label as biased against trans and gender diverse people.

**2021**

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