

RELEASED INSIDE

CONVERSATIONS WITH
TRANSGENDER PRISONERS AND
THE STAFF THAT CARE FOR THEM

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Introduction

Phil Forder

We live in a binary age which for convenience tends to categorise data, and unfortunately people into polar opposites. Nowhere is this more obvious than when it comes to gender. We are requested to tick the box either marked M or F. After years of misunderstanding, ridicule and persecution, transgender people have had to struggle with such seemingly simple tasks that most people take for granted. However, since the Equality Act 2010, which recognises trans people as a 'protected characteristic', such polarities as the gender boxes need to be reviewed because as they stand they are no longer relevant. It is relatively easy to add another box to a piece of paper but that isn't the case when the box is a well established institution such as a prison that for centuries has been divided into male and female estates.

There have always been those, including prisoners, who throughout history, have suffered what is known as gender dysphoria. This is the formal diagnosis of stress experienced when the sex and birth gender are at odds with how an individual identifies themselves. Often those as such will say 'I am a woman trapped in a man's body'.

When an offender is given a prison sentence, the type of prison selected was, and still is, determined by what is written on their birth certificate, which in turn is determined by one's genitalia. For those transitioning between genders or those who have transitioned but haven't got the paperwork, this can prove problematic. The case highlighted recently (October 2015) of Tara Hudson, who had lived her entire life as a woman is such an example. She was subsequently

convicted for assault and sent to HMP Bristol- a male prison- because her birth certificate showed that the male box had been ticked. It took a petition of 15,000 signatories and a lot of media coverage to get her transferred to a female estate. For those who haven't lived their entire lives in their chosen gender and find themselves on the wrong side of the law, there is no choice as to which prison they go to. What is written on the birth certificate decides. The inner identity is not taken into consideration. One wonders whether Tara would have raised so many signatures and been moved so quickly had she not looked so completely feminine.

From the limited research completed for this book, the majority of those who identify as transgender in prison have started transitioning since having been incarcerated. Ironically, being locked away from the public gaze often allows individuals to take steps they were previously unable to do. For these, the decision as to which prison they are in has already been made. However, prisons are obliged by law to assist and facilitate prisoners who decide to transition but as so often happens the resources are limited and time is increasingly in short supply. Prisons may have policies in place, some training packages for staff delivered, but most are unable to realise the practical support that such policies recommend. The transgender world is complex and a mystery for many staff working on the landings and more often than not the role of transgender support is tagged onto a long list of other duties and is seen as a burden. It will demand much time to take on seriously what is required and as those who work in prisons know, time is something increasingly in short supply.

Having worked as LGBT Lead in HMP/YOI Parc for several years, I have undertaken to try and put together some practical insights to assist prison staff working on a daily basis with Transgender prisoners. Alienation is a recognised precursor to many breaking the law. Rehabilitation is a key objective of any prison and as such they have a duty of responsibility to

help integrate those on the fringes of society to feel that they 'belong'. Transgender prisoners present one of the greatest challenges to this existing practice.

There are those who will dismiss the prisoner wishing to transition as manipulative, doing so to get attention, get special treatment, cause trouble, and possibly there are some who do. But as has been again proved recently by the cases of Vikki Thompson who committed suicide in Armley Jail and Joanne Latham who too was found dead in HMP Woodhill within a month of each other (November 2015) this certainly is not true for everyone.

This project began by interviewing trans prisoners themselves to hear what problems they were having in prison as well as any positive experiences. I would like to thank them all for talking with me so openly and being co-operative. It takes great courage to be trans. One of the things I asked them was to say what their ideal prison regime would be and what they thought we could do to make it easier. The prisoners were all very individual, at different stages of transitioning, different ages, different abilities but their answers are all remarkably similar which made for a great start that empowered me to move on.

Secondly, I interviewed staff assigned to care for trans prisoners of their perceptions, frustrations and the daily challenges their roles entail. To these people working on the landings I give my utmost respect.

Finally, I would like to thank the Directors of both HMP / YOI Parc and HMP Rye Hill- Janet Wallsgrove and Richard Stedman, Governor RJ Butler of Stafford and Sue Sayburn from the Isle of Wight whose support and shared ambition have allowed me to carry this project forward.

Phil Forder
Community Inclusion Lead
HMP / YOI Parc.

HMP Albany

AL, Age 33, HMP Albany

I chose my name from the film *The Never Ending Story*.

I've always known I was trans from a very early age although at that time I didn't know that was what it was called. I just knew I wasn't like other boys. All my friends, as a small child, were girls and I used to prefer to wear girl's clothes. I felt much happier being in the kitchen with my mum than being outside doing manly things with my dad. I wasn't discouraged by anyone and was pretty much left alone to be myself. I think I became aware that I was different from others at about seven or eight years old.

When aged eleven I went to a senior school and this was when I remember having to conform. All my family had been to this school and I was now expected to act like a bloke, to keep up the family image I suppose, even though everyone knew what I was like. I tried to act like a boy and cover up my real self but I felt awkward. Thinking back I just came across as a really camp, gay guy. I even tried having a girl-friend to prove I was straight but it didn't work. I didn't have any trouble from anyone though as I come from a well-known, extended family in the area, that has a bit of a tough reputation. My mum for instance, would not let anyone bully her kids and everyone knew that. School was alright but I hated doing sports so ended up going on the trampoline and stuff like that. I had nine particular school friends, they were all LGBT, seven of them were gay and the other two became trans.

After finishing school at sixteen I entered college to study hairdressing. I found that OK as a lot of hairdressers are gay and I came across as such. (I love hairdressing and still do it now on the wing.) I was still only cross dressing in private at

this time although I did go out to 'Martha's' on a few occasions 'dressed'. I then began to train as a nurse but that didn't work for me either

My first boyfriend was gay he had lots of gay friends one of whom was trans. The stars were aligned, I tried to resist it but found I was drawn towards her. Encouraged and excited I eventually bought a lovely red dress, however, when my boyfriend came home and found out, he was not happy and told me to take it back to the shop. He said 'I don't want a tranny boyfriend.'

My next boyfriend was bisexual but it was not a happy relationship. I used to cross dress but he thought I was a Drag Queen and didn't take me seriously. He thought it was all a bit of a joke.

Finally, I met a guy who was gay and really cute. I really loved him and tried to make it work and on many levels it did. He was all for equality between the sexes and as two gay men he thought we should always share everything, but I wanted to do all the 'girly' things about the house like cook-ing and ironing – I love ironing- but not the rest of it so it ended up not working. I am quite traditional when it comes to roles, even sexually too.

I was very alone after that and I started working for a Broadband company. While there I met a man called Marcus with whom I shared a house, I rented a room there. One day I saw a picture of a trans person on his computer. I thought he had guessed and was now testing me. 'What do you think?' he asked. It turned out it was a picture of himself. He told me he was starting to transition. This was 2005. This gave me confidence as I was able to dress and be with him. He introduced me to a wider trans circle but I found most of them very bitchy and after a short while decided I didn't need them.

I decided to officially start the process and was referred to be psychologically assessed after a visit to my GP in 2007. I was diagnosed with Gender Dysphoria and I received pre

counselling, but this ended rather abruptly as when I was a child I was 'interfered' with and it was about this time when I was out shopping, I saw the man who did it. He was now old. It brought back all sorts of things I had repressed and really set me off. I ended up taking lots of drugs and began drinking heavily. It's a sad story but it culminated with me stabbing someone. I've got a habit of getting involved with whatever is going on, sometimes to my disadvantage.

I was sent to HMP Winchester where I stayed for three years. I met a manager there (Jo) who was down to assess me. I couldn't stop looking at his hands as they were so small and also his suit seemed too big. It didn't make sense so I just spurted it out. 'Were you born a girl?' It turned out he was a female to male trans. After that he was so helpful to me and gave me lots of information. He would come and talk to me in my cell and look things up for me.

In 2008, with Jo by my side, I told the wing staff I was trans. They suggested I went to the VPU (sex offender wing) I told them that I was not a sex offender and I wanted to stay where I was. During a break I went and sat with the toughest, hardest prisoners on the wing and told them I was in the wrong body and wanted to change. I said 'If you want to beat me up then do so.' They all said they thought I was brave. I did get a lot of banter but it was harmless and I wasn't at all threatened by it.

The following year I changed my name by deed poll. I don't think the staff quite knew what to do so it came to the attention of the DDC (Deputy Director of Custody), who was brilliant, she even came to see me. She made sure things were in place for me and talked me through processes. I think it was the first time a serving prisoner had sat in such a person's office and had tea. So eventually, one day shortly after, I took the plunge and came out of my cell as AL, wearing make-up and female attire. There was banter, things like 'Your face is looking a bit orange today.' Although I did have the piss

taken out of me, it was all good natured. I felt the prisoners supported me.

Then in 2010, I was moved to HMP Grendon. It was the worst place ever, not at all progressive. Grendon is different from other prisons in that it is a therapeutic community. On arrival I had to hand over all my female clothes and make up. They said I had to prove I hadn't got a mental condition and live as a boy and then re-apply to be female. I was incensed and thought I'll prove it so I went to the gym every day to bulk up and look hard. I went from 12 to 16 stone in a year. I wanted to be butch but I couldn't cope with it and had a nervous breakdown. Also, in Grendon you have meetings with 'group members' who help you make decisions, (and stop you doing things). In such a meeting I told them about seeing the man who had abused me and how that had affected me. They made me contact the police and report it. It was a long time ago and it was my word against his and nothing really happened. I felt really terrible through this time and went very thin again. I was stressed. Eventually I got permission (given begrudgingly) to continue my trans journey. I was told I could live 'in role'. I hate that expression because it implies that you are acting like a stage character and it is not real.

I wasn't in prison when I decided to tell my parents. I emailed my mum a photo of myself. She thought it was my girlfriend. She said 'She looks a bit like your sister.' I never told her it was me. When she later found out, she took it badly. She said 'It feels like I've lost my first son he has just died.' My dad, on the other hand, I never got on with, I hadn't spoken to him for five years. I saw him walking ahead of me so I walked up behind him and tapped his shoulder to say hello. He physically jumped when he turned round as he was shocked. Surprisingly, from then on I got on really well with him.

I started HRT in 2013. I also received Gonadatrophin which is a blocker. It stops the production of testosterone. I get an

injection every three months. It hurts. It is 1.5 inch needle for a start and the drug is like viscous tar it takes ages to go in. It's horrid. When I first started treatment I felt 'super-strong', I thought I could lift anything but after a month that feeling went.

I then became over emotional.

I've had no hormones in me now for two years, except for the barest minimum. It's as if I'm menopausal. It was only two days ago I started taking oestrogen. The immediate effect was that I just cried for no reason then ended up laughing. It has now settled down and I'm more emotionally balanced. I have to take this medication for the rest of my life. I was told that I had to go this long without hormones to rid myself of the past. It's like starting a fresh painting, it's better to use a clean canvas. People have asked if this has made me more sexually active- the answer is 'No'. I am doing this so I can finally be myself. Once I have the final operation I will have had my testicles removed and I can then stop the blockers. That is when I will eventually be me. Once I get to be forty years old I will have HRT patches like other women do. I want to go the whole way and have a fully functional vagina. I know this will require dilation at first to keep it from healing up but once I'm in a monogamous, loving relationship that will not be necessary any more.

When I get a new partner after the operation, I don't think I will tell them straight away, though I think that will be hard as I'm so 'gobby'. I am nervous at the thought of dating as a woman. I'll try to go with them for five dates before letting them know that I have transitioned. I do fall in love very easily.

I get make up in prison from the Avon catalogue. I act as an Avon rep. The money I make goes to charity. The Governor had to approve this. This prison is generally good in supporting me but it only takes one officer to not comply to mess it all up. I can be quite confrontational when this happens. To the

officer that doesn't comply - well what's it to them? All they have to do are simple things like change how they address me- It's no big deal but to me it's enormous, it's my whole life. I think the concept of transgender people is very new to the Isle of Wight staff. They often see me as creating problems and being difficult but I am not, it's me just wanting to be recognised for who I am.

I don't go to the gym because you only get an hour and it would take me a long time to put my make up back on and I'm not going out there without it. Thankfully, the female staff here know what I'm talking about. A lot of the trans women here shower with the men- I don't think they should be allowed.

I want to go to a female prison. I was turned down to go to Styal as they were concerned about my 'security risk' as I still am pre-op. I was told that the women prisons would be too interested in 'what I've got downstairs', but it's no different than the men here being 'too interested in what I've got upstairs', in my opinion. Anyway, I'm now four years over tariff of an IPP sentence.

Since I started HRT I have seen changes in my physical body. My skin has become very soft and my breasts are growing. My shoulders are shrinking and I am developing women's hips. I think I am looking increasingly like a woman and I'm pleased about that, I just wish I wasn't so tall. I feel that my bones are different than they were and my feet have shrunk from a size 9 to a size 7.

As for the future? When I get out of prison I would like to set up or work for an organisation that supports trans people in prison. There is a great need for this and I've been there and done it. I would like to set up some sort of advisory service if that was allowed.

HMP Parkhurst

AM, Aged 50, HMP Parkhurst

I was brought up in Preston and as a child I was bullied a lot at school because I liked my sister's toys and I preferred her clothes and was more girly than the boys. I always knew I was different from other children. My family were reserved but they thought there was something wrong as I was getting trouble from bullies at school. They decided that I needed to toughen up so sent me to a boarding school that was mixed – boys and girls. Unbeknown to me, before I went, I was assessed by a psychologist who diagnosed me with Gender Dysphoria. It wasn't until years later, when I was in prison and I looked at my medical records, that I found this out. I was very angry that no one had told me.

I was brought up by my mum and my step-dad who was in the SAS. One day he came home from work unexpectedly and found me wearing my mum's nightie. He dragged me out into the street to show everyone how wrong I was. I felt very humiliated. Looking back, I think he always did what he thought was best for us kids. He had been brought up as a fundamental Christian and even though he had rebelled against it, he fervently believed that being gay was wrong. However, when I was 14 my parents split up and strangely, I chose to live with my step dad even though he was in denial as to who I was and didn't want to accept me. When I left school he encouraged me to take up 'manly' trades and suggested I become an electrician, a carpenter or a plasterer. None of them appealed, when I saw the man mixing plaster by hand, my first thought was 'It'll ruin my nails'. I decided to go to secretarial college which wasn't good enough for my step dad and he didn't like it. I eventually, however, took

up work in catering, first waiting tables and then cooking in a kitchen, helping the chef, just mucking in. I was and am a natural cook. My dream when I leave prison is to open a 'Cosmopolitan Breakfast Bar'.

My mum married her new partner as a career move. The American company she worked for preferred employees to be in settled relationships. It turned out though that he was gay and they never had sex. I found out he was gay when he invited me to go to Blackpool with him to the 'Top Hat', a well-known gay haunt. I thought he was doing this for my benefit but he wasn't. My mum asked me at this time 'Are you gay?' I replied 'No'. She was thinking do I like men and I don't. I like women, but I am gay because I want to be a woman and then I will be a lesbian. My sexual orientation will not have changed.

At this time I had a one night stand with a girl. I wanted to prove to myself, as well as others, that I could do it but I didn't enjoy it. But it did make me realise that I could do it and I could do what was expected of me.

I worked nights with a woman called Angela. She was a single mother who had suffered a serious blood infection that had left her physically scarred. We went on a date to a bar and very soon after we got married. We were like two lost souls coming together. We had children together very quickly one after the other. But as time went by it became more and more fraught. I found it increasingly difficult to perform sexually and eventually, after ten years together, we split up. We were both lonely souls and got back together again-off and on- as neither of us were good on our own.

As I said I was working in catering and I felt very lonely. There were lots of people at work but the gay group stuck together, the waitresses stuck together, the chefs stuck together. I felt totally left out.

Angela and I finally split up for good. We had started fighting in our relationship and cleaning was the catalyst. My

mum always kept an immaculate house whereas Angela's didn't. We both had different standards.

I'm not what you would call religious though I do consider myself to be a spiritualist. I believe we are put on this planet to learn a lesson like patience or humility. I think my lesson is to learn to fit in. I don't like the attitudes of Christian priests, they say it's OK to be gay or trans as long as there is no sex. 'We hate the sin not the sinner'. There is bound to be sex, by saying that they are setting you up to suffer and fail. It's a big rejection.

I was cross dressing during my relationship with Angela and used to wear her clothes. I had to squeeze into them as she is small. Although I felt comfortable wearing them, I also felt very guilty too. I loved it when in the 1980s silk shirts became the rage for men they felt like female clothes yet were acceptable. I loved them and had loads.

I went into a Trans chat room on the internet and found it very helpful. I asked a trans woman about cross dressing and she typed 'Do you do it to get sexually aroused or to feel comfortable?' I replied to feel comfortable. She typed back 'You are Trans then.' I found chat rooms helped me a lot.

I started working in the Car Retail business and there was a transgender person working there. Unfortunately, she was horrible. She argued with everyone and used the 'trans card' everytime she didn't get her own way. She was very disliked and didn't do the Trans cause any good. I didn't want to associate with her. Eventually she got sacked.

I was able to afford really good clothes now as I was on a good salary earning over £40K a year. I began buying clothes online, but you can't try them on and sizes can be misleading, so I began going to shops. I told the assistants it was a present for my wife but they must have guessed as it was always in my size. It was the same with make-up but as I got more confident I ended up not caring and would just go in and buy whatever I wanted. There are two types of transgender – those

who want to stand out and be 'trans women' forever and those who want to be ordinary women and disappear. I am the latter I don't want to be 'an Aunt Sally'. I'd been doing this for about nine months when circumstances brought me to prison. I decided to get rid of all I'd acquired and gave my make-up to my mum. She told me it was far more than she had.

I bought male clothes to take to HMP Preston yet on arrival I told them I was trans. This was 2010. They were not sure what to do with me and tried to send me to HMP Rye Hill, but they would not take me as they are a Cat B prison. I stayed and had to cell share. There was one other trans prisoner called Marie in the prison and she was allowed to wear female clothes. I told her in confidence that I was trans as well as one of the Listeners. I then put in a request to purchase some female underwear which was turned down. The officers told me it wasn't allowed. I pointed out that Marie had female clothes so why not me. The same day, six officers went to Marie's cell and took all her female clothes off her. She didn't complain but let them do it. I later spoke to her and was relieved she didn't blame me for doing what I did.

After a while I put in a request for a single cell on the grounds of being trans and the next day I was transferred to HMP Frankland. This was strange as there was a three month waiting list for everyone else who wanted to go there. At Frankland you could buy female clothes but were only allowed to wear them in your cell. Once again though I'd seen one trans prisoner walking around in female attire and asked how come one can and others can't. The reply was 'O that's Dusty, she's been here for years, if we let you do it as well then everyone will want to do it.' I knew the law had changed and that a Prison Instruction from the government was imminent so I just bided my time. After a few weeks I bought female clothes.

I was diagnosed with Gender Dysphoria by my GP but I missed following appointments as I came into prison.

Everything is so slow in here. I was told the Gender Clinic in London didn't want to treat you in prison if you hadn't started the process already. They said you can be on the trans pathway but you have to wait. However, I have just had my first blood tests -in the last few weeks- to assess my hormone levels, in order to start the treatment. I've been in this prison for two and a half years so far and have been waiting for five and a half years to get HRT. When I first came in I thought it would start immediately.

I often get called Mister instead of Miss and he instead of her but I don't always correct as I don't want to turn staff against me. Some trans in here over-react. I have changed my name by deed poll, I am now Toni AM. Toni was my gran. I never came out to her as I thought she was too old and might not understand. Also my granddad was homophobic and it would have caused difficulties for them. I think I protected them.

I've been in prison for five and a half years of which that last two have been here at Albany. My parole is not that far away and my Offender Manager is hoping to move me to a female hostel along with a course in cognitive therapy to meet my needs. The prison wants me to do Healthy Sex Programme before I leave, but my biggest concern is that it is written for men about male behaviour. I don't think it fits someone on the pathway. They tell me that I committed my offence as a man before I started transitioning therefore I have to do it, but I think even though I started transitioning a few years back I have been in the wrong body as far back as I can remember and my mind has always been female.

I know that the Gender Identity Clinic at Charrings Cross has a list of approved psychs. I think one of these psychs should be part of my sentence plan. I have completed SOTP (Sex Offender Treatment Programme) even though all the psychometric tests are designed for men. I did learn from the course though. When I first came to prison I did a psy-

chometric test and the doctor said I was not transgender. He said I was male when I latched onto my victim but I wasn't, I was trans. Anyway my Offender Manager says I have to do it and it could take up to 60 weeks and there is up to a 2 year waiting list. That takes me way past my parole date. Also if I get transferred to the female estate then I can't do it as female prisons don't do it. I often think prison is like a dustbin with a bin liner in it, but the liner has a split in it and some things fall out and get caught in between. I think I apply to that.

My personal officer is a good person but he doesn't understand. Dealing with transitioning requires specialism, it needs expertise. I would like to see a Unit for trans prisoners somewhere in the UK. As it stands the prison service cannot provide the facilities as it is. I think there are about 80 trans prisoners in the prison estate, that is 1 in a 1000 roughly. Compare this with the outside where it is 1 in 10,000. I think the system is changing for the better but it is so slow. When I first went to HMP Frankland it was rubbish but it has improved immensely. The Gender identity Clinic now sends in experts on a monthly basis including a speech therapist as well as psychologists. This is probably cheaper than transporting trans prisoners halfway around the country, under escort. In Frankland the psych two clients in the morning and two in the afternoon.

I have heard there are or were some trans officers in the prison service but I'm not sure where they are. Norwich and Winchester I believe.

My goal in life is to be a fully functional woman. I have heard the advances in surgery are increasingly making headway. I have heard that nowadays you can reconstruct from the discarded male genitalia secretion glands that will stop the need for dilation. My biggest fear is to be transferred again before I finish my sentence and having to start again. Prison is a post code lottery.

JP Age 35, HMP Parkhurst

From a very early age I had always thought I was different. I remember at my tenth birthday party I asked all my friends who were there, who were all girls by the way, to dress me up. I had always wanted to wear dresses. When they had finished I went to see my Gran. She had brought me up and I was very close to her. When she saw me she just said 'So! You have found your true colours then.'

I was born in Rome and my father was Italian and my mother English. My grandparents recognised there was something different about me and decided to move with me to the UK. They said it was because that if I stayed in Italy I would probably end up getting involved. I guessed it was organised crime. I told my mother I liked girl's things but she told me to keep it quiet. She went out of my life at an early age and I hadn't spoken to her for twenty two years. It is only recently I've made contact with her again.

My grandparents sent me to boarding school where I kept it quiet. The teachers and headmaster knew though. I got into trouble a lot when I was younger and it culminated in me committing arson in a paint factory and as a result I was sent to a 'special' school in Blackburn. The teachers let me dress up at night. I didn't tell the other lads but as soon they were asleep I would be given my box of clothes and make-up. I got thrown out of this school when I attacked the headmaster and was sent to Brailton Towers, a school in a manor house. It was much stricter there.

When I was 12 or 13 years old I was sexually abused by some of the other pupils so I told the teachers. The police were called but the teachers closed ranks and said they didn't believe it and thought I'd made it up. So nothing happened and I got segregated from the other children. I told my grandparents about what had happened and before I knew it my granddad appeared at the school. He went straight into the

headmaster's office and an argument ensued which ended up with my granddad head butting the Headmaster. My granddad was arrested but all the charges were dropped as the teachers didn't want to attract bad publicity about the school.

I then was sent to a children's home, it was my choice as I had been there before and I liked it. I used to spend spells in there as my grandparents were often off travelling.

I first came to prison when I was seventeen and decided I had to leave the trans me at the gate. I was only in for two weeks. The staff were trying a new approach by asking me what I wanted to do. I didn't tell them I was trans but talked about drugs instead.

I was in prison again at eighteen after two attempts at armed robbery. I didn't tell anyone anything until recently when only one year and one month ago in HMP Albany, I met AL who is trans herself. She somehow could tell I was in the wrong body by a kind of Transdar I guess. I talked a lot to her and announced at an LGBT Support Group meeting that I was trans. I got in trouble at Albany because I sleep very deeply and have difficulty waking up. Several times I missed the call for work etc and got put on basic.

I then got transferred to HMP Parkhurst and it was here that the Equalities Group gave me my certificate saying 'Congratulations, You are on the Pathway.' I then met with a multi disciplinary team to oversee my journey and it was from that point on I was allowed to buy female clothes and have make-up. The first time I walked around the wing I was expecting a bigger reaction than what I got. No one seemed to bat an eyelid. I like wearing tights and a skirt in one. I have no problems walking around as such, all my clothes are now female. I wear padded bras and have catalogues for clothes- Fashion World and Spirals- All the trans prisoners in Parkhurst have single cells but in Albany there are none with in cell washing facilities so you have to use the communal showers. They give us a sign to put on the door. It reads 'Do

Not Enter Shower In Use By Transgender Prisoner’.

I think the biggest problem among the staff is terminology. I hate being called Mister.

My intention at the end of all this is to fully transition and go the whole way. 100%. I don't mind if I die in prison I still want to get this done. I see my body as a shell and I'm in the wrong one. What's down there, between my legs, is part of this shell that I want to change.

Working With Transgender Prisoners

Sue Sayburn – Head of Equalities HMP Isle Of Wight

You'd have thought 25 years working with prisoners both at an operational, and later non-operational grade, would set you up for everything that comes your way. Over the years I have worked with males, females, young offenders, long and short termers, murderers, burglars and sex offenders. There have been times I have been "rolling" around on the floor during an incident and other times sitting on a prisoner's bed who is in deep distress and threatening to take his life. So was I set up for everything? No!

2015 saw a change in my role at HMP Isle of Wight when I became the Head of Function and Equalities Lead. I had to give consideration to the various Acts and legal processes which gave rise to an immediate uphill learning curve. I had to understand the meaning behind each of the "Protected Characteristics" and establish the fundamentals of political correctness. I was suddenly required to ensure that both staff and prisoners within the establishment worked and processed equality both in written and physical forms. I needed to ensure that staff held all the tools to help them go about their daily lives understanding what equality actually means and how our actions with prisoners links into these processes. I suppose my role within the "bigger picture" is to assist the Governor of the establishment to remain compliant within Equality law, with a secondary wider effect of ensuring the establishment is performing well within all aspects of equality and equal treatment.

So, after saying that, the next word I use is "HELP"!!

A part of my new role involved working with the transgender prisoner population and HMP IOW held 10 at the time, who were in various stages of being on the "transgender pathway". The term transgender pathway was a test to me in its own right. What did it mean? What did I need to under-

stand and who could I ask to help? – This was indeed a new venture for me and on this one, the “gloves were off”.

The transgender pathway suggested to me that this was a journey someone was on but where they were heading and what was at the end of that journey - I didn't know. I therefore entered onto my own pathway which was to understand what and who a “Transgender” was.

Initially, I turned to my best friend better known to the wider audience as Google. She, or he, had assisted me on many occasions in my life when I was required to understand rapidly what a word or term meant and this time Google needed to pull-out all the stops. The information was complex yet informative and gave me a handle on terminology.

Since my appointment transgenderism in prisons has been growing in popularity with the media. There have been recent newspaper articles which are either damming or make a mockery of how we, the prison service, manage the transgender population.

Media coverage on transgender prisoners has been encouraged recently with the campaign led in the latter part of 2015 by the transgender prisoner Tara Hudson who was successfully moved to a female prison.

This was followed in close succession by the notification of the sad deaths of transgender prisoners Vicki Thompson and Joanne Latham who took their own lives while being held in male establishments.

More personally, the latest newspaper article released earlier this year notifies readers that HMP IOW currently holds up to 35 TG prisoners and they have a regime which implies no standard management as such.

So in a nut shell - what does being Trans now mean to me? Transgender, or Trans means someone whose gender differs from the one they were given when they were born. Transgender people may identify as male or female, or they

may feel that neither label fits them.

In order to express their chosen gender, transgender people may transition, or change, from the gender they were given at birth. They may change their names, pronouns or style of dress. Some transgender people also choose to medically transition with the help of medical specialists, who will prescribe hormones and/or surgery.

There, thanks to Google my mind is much clearer but where are the guiding principles for managing transgender prisoners?

So how do I, me, them, us the world of the Prison Service begin or even start to consider the management of transgender prisoners? Back to the electronic library where I found the following documents are available for my advice and guidance: -

Local Transgender Policy 2014

PSI 07/11 Care and Management of Transgender Prisoners

The Equality Act 2010

Gender Recognition Act 2004, and

The Human Rights Act

From the above noted documents I came across a few facts taken from Transgender Prison Rules which start by saying prisoners should be placed according to their gender “as recognised by UK law”, usually as stated on their birth certificate. If a person has obtained a “gender recognition certificate”, they will have a new birth certificate in their “acquired gender”. Prisoners who obtain a gender recognition certificate while in prison “should in most cases be transferred to the estate of their acquired gender”. But, the rules also say some transgender people will be “sufficiently advanced in the gender reassignment process” that they could be placed “in the estate of their acquired gender, even if the law does not yet recognise they are of their acquired gender” and where issues arise, a “case conference” should be held to “review the prisoner’s individual circumstances and make a recommendation”.

Now I need to consider how Transgender prisoners are managed within the establishment. From research gained from local / national documents it is clear that some prisoners feel uncomfortable in the gender of their birth and may apply to go on the Pathway. One very useful document, left to me by my predecessor, highlighted the Pathway process as follows. *“On receipt of the application from a prisoner, a Multi Disciplinary Team will assess the prisoner risks and will allow, or not, a compact to be written and signed by the prisoner. These are individual documents for each prisoner according to their particular risks. Only at the point of signing is a prisoner considered to be on the Pathway and their details can only then be entered on the local recording document. Prior to that, a prisoner is NOT transgender and must be treated exactly as other prisoners are. Those going on the Pathway must be made aware of their rights and what they can and cannot do. Under paragraph nine of the local Transgender Policy it states that “Any offence paralleling behaviors will be considered a breach of the risk and care plan / compact and will spark an immediate review as to whether the agreement is still viable, depending on the individual circumstances”.*

Having taken all this information on board my next steps were to share it with the rest of the prison, staff and prisoners alike. The aim for 2015/16 of the Equalities Team is to raise awareness of the transgender question and dispel certain myths surrounding them, all with the hope that this would lead to greater awareness of transgender prisoners and the issues surrounding them.

Well, there we are, with the help of Google and information at my fingertips supplied by NOMS and my predecessors I now feel fully informed on the matter of transgender prisoners. So, why do I feel so uncomfortable? Looking deep into my own mind I am educated well enough to understand the principles, reasons, whys and wherefores of managing transgender prisoners but there was still something missing which was unsettling me.

So, how did I remedy this? Easy really, I reverted to type!!! I went and spoke with a couple of transgender prisoners about their position. They spoke openly and with knowledge. They took time to explain their separate life stories and how it was not a choice they had made. They both said that from a very early age they had a feeling something was wrong and potentially they were in the wrong body. They had gone through traumatic times trying to live a life where their bodies and minds screamed out to be something they were not supposed to be. They explained the sadness, and in most cases, the loneliness of their life akin to being in a personal prison. In some sad cases they reminisced over lost families who could not come to terms with a son becoming a daughter. They recorded how they had mixed with the “wrong type” usually to feel that they fitted in somewhere. I now understand why I felt so unsettled. It was because I, we, us, all too often refer to these prisoners as “transgender”, as if by labelling someone we say we actually understand their predicament. Labelling without understanding, dehumanises and allows discrimination to run rife purely on the basis of our own ignorance and inability to empathise.

So, in a nutshell the term “transgender” is nothing more than a descriptive, a state of person, and a code of discipline which is outside the norm. But in actual fact, transgenders are exactly the same as you or I. My experience is that they are individuals who, in most instances, have gone through struggle most, or all, of their lives and are trying to rectify how they identify.

And there we have it, a whirl wind tour indeed, (not a pathway), but one I needed to go on to come out the other side a better informed person and more able to understand the transgender process. Hopefully this will enable me to offer ongoing support to those prisoners and continue to raise awareness throughout the establishment.

HMP Rye Hill

SK, Age 40, HMP Rye Hill

I knew I was trans when I was four years old. I always loved girl's toys and dolls and also all the other girls accepted me. When I was older all my friends were either gay or trans. However, I did get married and tried to be 'normal' but it didn't work. I've had both male and female partners as I am bisexual. I definitely do not feel like I am part of society.

I became trans in 2010, I was diagnosed with gender dysphoria when I was in HMP Brixton. I then signed up to the GIC at Charing Cross. I am now in the second stage of transitioning. I am on HRT, I see a counsellor and I have changed my name by deed poll.

When I was in HMP Whatton I came out and actually presented and lived as a female. Since then all my friends and support network see me as a woman.

The recent issues with Tara and Vicky (Transgender prisoners who were sent to male prisons in the headlines recently) have made me very sad. It emotionally upsets me to see people treated this way. I am working with the Beaumont Society, they are a transgender organisation that is trying to help, they are in contact with me regularly.

I get a lot of stigma from staff as I don't hide who I am. My safety is paramount. There is a lot of trans and homophobia on the wings but I keep it to myself. I know a lot of officers here are trying to get me to move to another prison.

When I was on the outside I was receiving HRT. I was self medicating and I initially got them from another trans I knew. It was Proscar and Metoprolol.

My dream is to get as much treatment as possible as I want to go the whole hog.

I would like to set up a trans support group which I think I should lead as I have lived it more than the others on here. The officers are OK, some female staff have been helpful with make up tips.

KX, Age 23, HMP Rye Hill

I was seven or maybe eight years old when I first realised I was in the wrong body but I was never taken seriously by anyone the few times that I mentioned it. My childhood was quite chaotic. I have 36 brothers and sisters- my father married 21 times in all. I grew up with my mother and three sisters. We would all play dressing up as children and as most of the clothes were female I used to cross dress. I knew then I felt happy in women's clothes. I first went to prison when I was 15 years old to Parc and apart from a short spell out I've been in ever since. I am serving 21 life sentences with over 10 years still to serve before any parole.

When I was released I was out for ten weeks. I hung out with a mate who was gay and also extremely racist. He was getting civil partnered to his boyfriend. On his stag night we all dressed as women and went on the town, I felt very happy wearing these clothes. It was the only time I went out dressed as a woman

I have wanted to be trans for a while now. I have been in 17 prisons so far but never felt comfortable to talk about it to anyone as some of them were very rough and I was scared to be myself.

I was in Parc when MG went Trans on the wing. She inspired me. I liked Parc as they have dogs there. I liked them because the dogs don't judge you. They love you for who you are.

It was during a Healthcare appointment here at Rye Hill when I went to see the prison doctor about my self harm that I told him I wanted to go transgender. He referred me to see a psychologist. I am still waiting to see him.

I think it would be good if there was an LGBT wing with officers who possibly were LGBT themselves so they would understand the issues.

RD Age 60, HMP Rye Hill

I was about eight or nine years old when I realised I was not what I was supposed to be. I loved dressing up with my sister and used to do it as often as I could. My mum didn't approve and took me to see a psychologist who told her that I would grow out of it but, of course, I didn't. When I was 15 years old I came out to my family. My mother said 'It's your life, you get on with it.' My father told me to leave. Neither of them tried to stop me going, it was in the 1970s and being gay and being trans were not acceptable especially in working class families.

I was sleeping rough on the streets for five years. This was a very hard time for me. I found myself living in dock areas where I would cross dress and go to the ships where I would get somewhere to sleep for the night. I needed to protect myself. Prostitution was a means to an end and although I was ashamed and desperate, the new people I met saw and accepted me for who I was.

I started transitioning with the Charing Cross clinic quite a while back but in the early stages I was late for one of my appointments as I couldn't get there on time. I didn't live in London and had little money so getting there was always a problem. As a result they wouldn't see me again. I went to my local GP who put me on hormone replacement tablets. I took these for over three years but when I came here (Rye Hill) they refused to carry on with the prescription. I lived for six and a half years as a woman before coming here. It has been really difficult to go back to being a man again and I still have another four to five years to go.

I have been told that I will have to start the whole process again. I want to present as a woman. I do not care what other people will think of me- It is who I am. Most prisoners and staff accept me for who I am but as I said it doesn't matter to me. If I get the chance I want to go the whole way and become

a woman. I am 100% definite about that.

Before coming to prison I changed my name by deed poll however, on my birth certificate I still have my male name. I don't understand how as I thought the records were changed by deed poll. I don't have any paperwork as it all happened a long time ago. The prison here says I have to prove that I have officially changed my name. I no longer have the paper work, to get a duplicate costs £70 which I do not have. I wish this was easier. It pains me a great deal after all the struggle to get this far to have to go back every time I am called my old male name it really hurts.

If you are not transgender you maybe wouldn't understand this. It means a great deal to me.

I wish we had bespoke staff who understood the whole trans issue. I personally prefer female staff.

I was interviewed a long time ago by a psychologist, possibly a psychosexologist, at Withington Hospital in Manchester but I cannot remember the man's name. But it should be on the hospital records.

I shower on the wing and they have arranged for me to do it at separate times to the others for privacy.

Generally the healthcare staff do not have a clue. I wish they were more switched on.

I have been referred by the prison doctor to visit the Charing Cross GIC clinic.

SW, Age 49, HMP Rye Hill

I started cross dressing when I was 12 years old. I felt very confused. I didn't enjoy the company of boys at school and all my friends were girls. My parents didn't approve as this was the 1970s and people didn't understand, so I used to dress up in secret but always went out as a man. It wasn't until 1998 I started cross dressing and going out. I preferred it. Living as a male depressed me.

In 2010 I came to prison, first Gloucester then Parc. In Gloucester I kept it under wraps but when I came to Parc I felt I could talk about it. What empowered me was seeing other trans prisoners there.

So I came out in Parc two years ago. I had problems initially convincing staff that I was gender dysphoric, they thought I was a transvestite and was doing it to gain privileges. I wrote a long 25 page letter to Healthcare there to prove my case. Eventually I got to see a doctor. He saw me twice over a six week period and then referred me to a specialist NHS clinic in Wales. Whilst waiting to see him I was shipped to Rye Hill. I saw him for the first time three weeks ago.

My intention is to go the whole way through. I want to be a woman.

I wish the staff had a better understanding. If only we could have an officer who was clued up on the transgender issues. Also it would be good to have a Healthcare specialist person on the team.

I don't think it would be a good idea to have all transgender prisoners on one wing, it would present a tainted view but I can see it would be easier to practically manage. I do think though we should have an active LGBT forum where Trans people from outside the prison come in and talk about their own experiences.

We are allowed to 'dress' in our cells but not on the wing. I

think this is wrong as we transgender people need to present as our recognised identity. We need to be able to buy make up and clothes from the canteen.

SW was very animated throughout the interview but was unable to tell me the names of any doctors she had seen or the names of any she was going to be seeing. She also wasn't sure if she had 'officially' started the TG journey as yet. She came across as frustrated and ill informed.

A Mother's Perspective

Tracey Maxey, Security Administrator, HMP Rye Hill

I wasn't completely surprised when Lilah told me that she was trans, it wasn't quite what I was expecting to hear but it wasn't a total shock. I guessed when she called to say she wanted to meet up to tell me something and wanted to just speak to me, that she had something important to tell me. I thought she was going to say that she was gay or bi-sexual so I was a little bit taken aback when it wasn't quite what I thought I was going to hear.

Lilah was born Jamie, a cute, little bundle of baby boy, just perfect. It hadn't been a great pregnancy, I was very sick, there were difficult problems and they eventually induced me early. Growing up, Jamie was a quiet, lovable little boy.

I would say that I started to notice a change at around the age of 14. Jamie began to grow his hair longer, started wearing a bit of makeup and painting his nails. I thought it was a 'goth' phase as it seemed to fit in with the type of music that he liked to listen to. He started to show an interest in girls and had girlfriends. At about 15 he started to hang around with one boy in particular, slightly older, maybe about 17/18. Jamie became quieter, a bit withdrawn. I asked what was wrong and he told me that this boy was his boyfriend and they'd kissed.

After Jamie told his Dad about the relationship, his father called me to tell me it was all my fault. I'd made him gay by taking him away from his father and because of the people I was friends with and as a result, he didn't have a 'proper' male role model. We had split up when Jamie was about 9. A few of my friends were gay so he thought it was because of that. It made me angry that he'd say such things and not accept his own child because they didn't conform to how he thought they should be.

Not long after this Jamie stopped seeing the boy. He

became extremely withdrawn, shutting himself away in his room, not wanting to do anything with the rest of the family. We were on a family holiday when I saw marks on his arms that weren't tanning. Turns out my beautiful, precious child was cutting himself. These were big looking marks all over the inside of his forearms and then I saw they were on his legs as well.

We talked about it and Jamie admitted that he was cutting and that it was the only way he thought he could cope. I asked if he wanted to speak to someone and we made an appointment at our doctor's. This turned out to be the most pointless, upsetting appointment ever. When we told the doctor she turned to me and said that it was attention seeking behaviour and that obviously 'the child' has a 'mental problem'. She said that if they wanted to do something useful with their blood, why didn't they become a blood donor!!!! She completely ignored Jamie and spoke directly to me. I was absolutely gobsmacked that someone who was supposed to help and look after us could be so wrong, so narrow minded and totally unprofessional.

About this time, I realised Jamie was drinking. He 'stole' vodka from the Christmas drinks cupboard, hid empty bottles of wine, cans of cider and beer under his bed. I was at my wits end. I became a bit of an emotional state as I wanted to help my child but didn't know who to go to. The doctor had dismissed us. Help came from a source I hadn't even considered, Safer Custody, here at the prison. They invited Jamie to come into the prison. They spoke to him and sat with him while prisoners showed them their scars from self harming and told them about the risk they could be putting themselves in if they cut too deep and no-one was there to help them.

The self-harming seemed to be less after this but Jamie still didn't want to leave the house much. School finished and no job seemed to be on the horizon. Life carried on like this for the next few years. It was hard as I was telling my other child

that they needed to knuckle down at school and get good results to get a good job and yet I couldn't do anything about Jamie and didn't seem to be able to help.

At about the age of 21 Jamie moved out and went to live with a friend and their family. Shortly after this he called to say that he wanted to meet up with me, just the two of us, outside of home. We went to a local coffee shop and that was when she explained to me about how she felt and that she didn't want to be male and had never felt that the body everyone saw was what fitted. She asked me was I shocked and I told her no, but it wasn't quite what I expected. We had a coffee and some lunch and talked about what it meant; clinic appointments, psych evaluations, change of lifestyle for her, name change.

It was a lot to take in and she said "Go away and ask Google Mum!!" So I told her I loved her no matter what and off I went to do some searching.

To start with I wished I hadn't. What it told me was that the causes probably happened while the child was still in the womb. I thought *IT'S ALL MY FAULT*, I made my baby this way, I didn't make him/her properly. I felt guilty that because of me, one of the most precious things to me in the world had been through years of confusion, self-loathing and trauma. As a mother how could I have not realised that my child was in so much pain and I'd done nothing to help. I cried for the harm that I felt I'd done to my baby and had let happen to him/her. I know it's not my fault, but at the time I think I was looking for some way to reason as to why things had happened and turned out how they had.

I can say that things are a lot better now. I don't blame myself, Lilah has never blamed me and I have a daughter who is a strong, brave independent young woman who makes me proud that she had the courage to be who she wants to be and not try and conform to what people expected her to be.

There are people, even in my own family and friends, who

don't understand what it's all about. They don't understand and some of them don't want to. Even Lilah's Dad still addresses cards to 'Jamie' and you can see the disappointment on her face when she gets them. It's hard to make some people understand.

It's been a long, slow road but we are getting there. When people ask what children do I have, I love being able to say that I have a son AND a daughter. When they ask where I came up with her name I tell them she picked it herself. The looks that I sometimes get are hilarious and then the questions start, didn't she like the one she was christened with? Why did she change it? So I tell them. Some are shocked and ask how do I cope with that? My response is always the same, she is my child and no matter what I love her for who she is be that male, female, straight, gay, whatever, as long as she is happy, I am happy. I don't wish she was any other way than how she wants to be and she is safe and happy.

Introduction To The World Of Transgender

Andy Gullick, Head of Community Engagement

“Andy, you are the Equalities lead...” they said.

“The what?” I replied.

“The Equalities lead. You know, that stuff to do with protected characteristics, race and disability and other stuff. Oh, and you also need to sort out what we are doing with the blokes who want to dress up like women cos apparently we should be letting them walk around in dresses”.

This was my introduction to the world of transgender prisoners at my current prison. From that day, I have been on an incredible journey of learning, compassion, anger, frustration and understanding. I now write this article at a point where we ‘go live’ with our transgender policy across the prison in four weeks’ time and I am determined to make a success of it!

So what have I learned on this incredible journey that I have been on?

It is ok to ask daft questions. After the first few days of treading around certain issues, being afraid of offending people, exposing myself as some sort of bigot I found out that transgender people actually don’t mind being asked questions (well certainly the ones I spoke to – I’m trying not to generalise). They would rather I got it right, than second-guess and communicate the wrong information.

Just because you are a transgender prisoner does not mean that you are gay or bi-sexual. That was my first stereotype shattered!

Transsexual prisoners are very different to transgender prisoners. Upon learning that little nugget I had to re-write the first draft of my ‘transsexual’ policy.

Some prison staff are very nervous about seeing a transgender prisoner on the wings. Some prison staff think that the world has gone mad allowing “men to dress up as

women". Some prison staff think that we shouldn't allow it as "they are only dressing up so that they can change their identity to escape or to avoid taking responsibility for the offence they committed as a man". A lot of prison staff are actually very interested in learning more and have taken time out to try and understand what it means to be a transgender prisoner.

Some prison staff have transgender children or relatives of their own. Who knew? Why didn't we know? Why didn't they feel that they could tell us? Why should they tell us – is it that unusual?

A lot of staff are afraid to ask the questions that I was also afraid to ask: "are they allowed to wear wigs?", "should we allow them to use the female toilets?", "do we use their female name on prison paperwork?"

What has struck me most whilst travelling along this journey of mine is that underneath all of the questions, the complexities, the politically-correct terminology and the stereotypical attitudes is a personal story behind every transgender prisoner. Each prisoner has their own story and often they have often spent a long time with no audience to tell it to. Their stories are ones of bravery, of angst, of realisation, of persecution and of hope for a better future. At my prison, that better future is just about to begin.

Andy Gullick
Head of Community Engagement
HMP Rye Hill

HMP Parc

MG, Age 52, HMP Parc

I came to prison just over two years ago and apart from a brief month in HMP Cardiff I have been in Parc the whole time. I had already started my transgender journey when I arrived here. In fact I was considerably down the path. I am 52 years old.

Looking back I have always known I was transgender, in fact my earliest memory was at the age of four dressing up with my sister and realising just how comfortable that made me feel. However, growing up in a strict Roman Catholic family, I never spoke to anyone about it. I went through life with a secret. This made life very difficult so I ended up joining the army. I did so because at that time a lot of soldiers were being killed and I thought if that happens- well it's a way out. After two years I got married and had a family. It was only when my wife and I parted company after an affair came to light in 1995 that I began cross dressing, As a result I lost contact with my children and grandchildren and didn't see them for years. I moved into a bedsit with very little possessions. Upstairs lived a lesbian and she became my friend and supporter. She helped me present myself, we used to buy clothes from charity shops together. I worked at college and most people I knew there supported me, however, I lost many of my so-called friends.

I knew I was in the wrong body and wanted increasingly to transition. Initially I went to my GP in Barry, who referred me to a local psychologist. It cost me £150 and he just asked me questions such as Have you ever had a gay affair? Do you fancy men? I told him I was in the wrong body and it wasn't a question of sexual orientation.

I was referred to the Charing Cross Clinic where I was interviewed by two psychologists who had to both agree that I was genuine. I was then referred to a psychosexologist who was to oversee my treatment.

There were many things I had to do to support my transitioning. I had to change my life style and live openly as a woman – there was to be no hiding in the flat. They suggested I take up voluntary work. Also I regularly had blood tests as I was not allowed to smoke, drink alcohol or take any drugs whilst under medical treatment.

From day one I was made aware that the three main risks to transitioning were:

- being singled out for bullying and abuse
- that the Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) makes you prone to heart attacks and stroke
- and finally to have the operation you must not be overweight (you need a waist of 36-38ins max).

Since I have begun the HRT in 2011 certain physical and emotional effects have taken place.

Over time all my muscles seem to have turned into adipose tissue. I have lost so much of my strength and lifting things that previously would have been easy has become hard. I have developed ‘bat-wings’ where previously I had biceps.

I have also found that since I started HRT my eating habits have totally changed and I like foods that previously I didn’t and I don’t eat the same quantities.

Also I cannot abide any form of cruelty. I cannot watch any television programmes where animals are hurt for instance. And finally I found I was unable to draw any more which previously I enjoyed doing.

Personally, my testicles are being drawn up into my body to ‘kill them off’ so to speak and my penis has shrunk to a minute size in preparation for the operation. This causes me a

lot of difficulty when peeing as my bladder has also shrunk. I find myself going to the toilet up to 30 times a day. I buy pads to wear from the prison canteen but they are £8 for a 100 and I can get through many in the course of a day. The ones available that the prison stocks are designed for men. This bothers me !

As my hormones are kicking in the strangest thing of all is I've found myself suffering period pains and experiencing the mood swings associated to those times of the month.

Also I have grown breasts which when I got to a point that I needed to support them, I didn't know what to do, who to approach. It is strange that they were getting in the way so much. Choosing a bra in a male prison is daunting. Fortunately, at Parc, there was a female officer (Cerys) on the wing who was so supportive and helped me a great deal without judgment. She advised that I got a 'sports bra ' as there are no hooks involved. Having Cerys on the wing made a big difference to me. Also I want to mention Steve Meynard who also was a great support to me. Unfortunately, both these officers are now not on my wing.

When I split from my wife, I suffered alopecia and lost all my hair, all over my body. It didn't come back for years. But when it did, to my surprise, it was as female hair, even though it grew in all the same places as before and I found facial hair returned. An epilator became essential.

Since I've been in prison the transitioning has slowed right down. I've been to Charing Cross Clinic a few times but there have been occasions when the appointment has been cancelled at the last minute due to lack of two officers to escort me. I need two apparently as I could run away with just one. If only they realised how important this is to me- there is no chance I would run away.

My main complaints I guess after that would be little things which to many from the outside would seem insignificant but are immensely important to me. One is the ability

to buy make up. The provision is there but it is incredibly expensive and incurs a handling fee on top as well. I know for a fact that Tesco's basic range is much cheaper for instance and of better quality. At present I only use eye brow pencil and liner.

Also the whole environment literally smells so male. I would like my own sheets as many I get do smell .

If I was able to change the way prisons are run for trans people I would encourage more female staff and that those that are around us stay with us as they will be aware of the issues of being trans. It can be a very macho environment.

I would like all the trans prisoners in Wales or G4S to be housed in the same prison and on the same wing. I am at present on a sex offender wing – I am not a sex offender but this was the safer place for me.

Personally, when I have this operation, I will no longer identify as a trans person as I will be a woman. And I will want to be treated as one. When I get my GRC (Gender Recognition Certificate) which after my last visit to Charing Cross I am now eligible for, I will have my gender changed on my birth certificate as well as all other official documents. Then like all other women, my biggest issue would be – Why are there no female prisons in Wales?

As it is now I am happy to be at Parc. It hasn't always been like this. The biggest support comes from staff. If they are with you it makes a huge difference. I get on well with everyone so wouldn't want to move just for the sake of it. I would like to be able to see more films and hear more music from transgender people as it helps me feel less isolated.

RZ, Age 23, HMP Parc

I was 13 when I realised that I was transgender. I'd always preferred to play with girls as a child. At first it was Ok then I started to get a lot of stick from the boys, saying things like 'Are you gay? Why are you always with the girls and not us?' It got bad- lots of bullying, name calling and getting beat up. It's why I started taking cocaine, smoking weed and drinking heavily. It was a way of trying to suppress all the negative energy. I never told the teachers. I left that school as soon as I could at 16 and decided to come out as gay. I got help from female friends who accepted me. A lot of them said 'O that explains everything.' I then went on to Newport High School. It was easier there and I had both girl and boy friends and I realised I am bisexual. Several times my girlfriends found me trying on their clothes and taking a keen interest in their make-up when I visited. My boyfriends liked the female side of me. I started to cross dress at the age of 14. It was always in private and was always my mum's or sister's clothes when she was out with my dad down the pub, and my siblings were asleep. I realised then I was in the wrong body. I felt like an alien. I was very aware at that age how uncomfortable it felt to go into male public toilets. I felt I shouldn't be here and would always sit on the toilet rather than use a urinal.

I thought for a while that I could change myself and I tried to resist being female and for a long time I believed I had a split personality. I had actually been diagnosed as such but when I started to find out more about trans I realised I wasn't ill.

There was a long period of my life where I wanted to prove that I was masculine and I would over exaggerate this side of my character to impress others and prove myself. This included drinking as much as I could, take drugs, get into fights. It was one such display of machismo that ended me

up in prison. I tried to prove myself by committing armed robbery. Strangely, I was living two lives, during the day I would hang out with the girls going to the hair salon, getting their nails done , having picnics, but then in the evenings I would be totally the opposite with the boys.

I then saw the Kardashians on TV. It was a programme about a group of sisters whose father became trans. He went from Chris to Kate. Watching that made me realise I was not the only person who felt like this. It made me feel OK and that I was not mental, but even so there still was no one to actually talk to about it. And it still was a taboo subject where I came from.

I came first into HMP Cardiff but when asked on induction if I was 'gay or straight', I told them I swung both ways. I didn't tell them about anything else. I didn't know Trans was an option. On the wings I pretended to be straight. I was on a Young Person Unit as I was 18 at the time and the other prisoners were very homophobic let alone transphobic.

I then got transferred to HMP Parc. When I had inductions there I told them I was bisexual. I was now on one of the main adult wings and I felt it was safe to tell some people that I was bi. They told me that there were trans prisoners in Parc , but I had never seen any as they were on The Vulnerable Prisoner Unit. It was only talking to other prisoners that I found out what it was to be trans and realised that this was me. I was really shocked. I told my friend in the cell next to mine that I thought I should be a woman. He, at first, didn't take me seriously and said ' Have you just come up with this?' I told him that I had known this for the last 10 years but just hadn't realised what it was called.

He advised me to tell the Healthcare champion and the wing manager. They were both good and listened to what I said. The manager told me that he would get the Equalities Manager to come and speak to me who came after a couple of days and explained the transgender process to me. Each

time I told someone it felt like a great weight had been taken off me. I then started to 'adapt' my prison clothes and made a pair of hot pants and a cut off top. However, word leaked out on the wing that I was trans and I started to get negative comments. I was scared as I had been beaten up before when in prison so I decided to make a blade for protection. This was a mistake as it got found by staff and I ended up down the block for a while. While there both the prison Director and the Equalities Manager came to see me. I decided that I couldn't go back to the wings so chose to go to the Vulnerable Prisoner Unit. It was here I met another trans prisoner who was well into her transitioning. She has been a great help to me. I see her every morning for about 15 minutes.

Since then have actually told my mum. Her response was 'why didn't you say so before?' but I didn't because I was afraid that I would be disowned. She has now told my dad and he has told her he accepts it. I bet it was hard for him. He is a macho kind of guy and works as a builder. I used to help him on the sites and I still will but it will be now as RZ not Kieran.

I now have a personal officer called Rhian. She is really good and seems to know a lot about trans people. She is easy to talk to. It is a lot easier being down here. I also spoke to my Offender Supervisor who has recommended me for assessment by a psychologist.

Now I know more I want to go the whole way and become a woman. I want to help other trans prisoners to be themselves, maybe this is something I could do when I get out.

JB, Advisor for the Unity Project

JB is a transgender woman living in Swansea who is an advisor for the Unity Project –An LGBT Support Group whose advisory role includes South Wales Police. I realised I was trans when I was six years old and was walking to school with my mother. I was talking about how the boys and girls in school were treated differently. It led to my mother asking me if I would rather have been a girl. I immediately knew the answer was yes, but equally I somehow knew it wasn't the answer I was expected to give – my mother was from a very traditional family. So I lied at the age of 17 I came out and told a friend I was trans. This was a big mistake because he thought this was an invitation to have sex with me and he tried to rape me. I told no one and had no support from my family and so bottled up the trauma. It took its toll though and I became very depressed and suicidal. I ended up in hospital. I tried talking to my parents at this point but they took it very badly and didn't want to know. I went back in the closet so to speak and was very unhappy. I was living with my partner – a woman- who knew I was trans, and that I cross dressed at home behind closed doors as a sort of interim measure. She was very supportive. But I was still suffering a lot of stress. I knew I was trans and not being able to be myself resulted in self harming, eating disorders and depression. At the age of 25 I had had enough and decided to take matters in hand. I went to my GP, a lady doctor and told her I wanted to transition. She had not long qualified, I thought she would be more switched on but unfortunately, while supportive, she hadn't a clue what to do.. She asked me 'What do you want me to do? I suggested counselling and so it began. My counsellor just listened but I used these sessions to 'soundboard' my thoughts. After three months it was clear what was behind all my problems, I was in the wrong body, I needed to transition. I began by

reading up everything I could on the subject. I then told my bosses at work of my intention and I told my parents. The parents were relatively supportive at first but after a week I left my children with them while my partner and I went out and when I returned the extended family was waiting for me. They ganged up and tried to block me from my children. I had to physically force them away from the family who began physically attacking me. At this point they disowned me.

I began to actively live as a woman. I foolishly invested in £1000 worth of IPC- which claimed to remove facial hair permanently- it turned out to be a short term measure. Not showing facial hair is so important at this stage of transitioning as you are on edge all the time with concern that you are 'looking right'. One has very little self esteem at this point and public perception/ challenging/ridiculing can lead to self hate.

But you have to carry on. Buying clothes, make up etc can be very difficult if alone as can going to a public toilet for the first time- it's best to be accompanied by a friend or sister when starting this journey. Its exciting and yet terrifying at the same time. You always are expecting someone to walk in and challenge you. I am a slim person and could pass relatively easily but I still had transphobia directed against me and once even had a car try to run me over.

When you start the process you need to be interviewed by two psychologists who will ascertain whether you have gender dysphoria. Rarely, only one is required, but this is for those who are already very comfortable in their transitioning. 99% need two.

These psychologists will confirm to your GP that you suffer gender dysphoria, and your GP will then refer you to the GIC.

Eventually, my GP did refer me to the GIC. It is a very slow process, particularly if you are in Wales as they are different

Health Boards and there is a lot of time consuming red tape. There is a second clinic in Devon called 'the Laurels'. I had to wait 18 months to get my first appointment as everything had to be approved centrally by a person titled the 'Keeper of the Purse'.

This waiting period can be a very destructive time, as you have made the decision which is not done lightly and then it all seems to stop. It is important to keep busy during this time to keep yourself focussed. I got involved in such things as make-up training, voice cultivation and weight loss.

There are certain foods that have low levels of oestrogen in them. Designing my own diet to include these foods kept me on track. (These include Flax seeds, Chick peas, sesame seeds, dried fruits, soya products, alfalfa seeds, bran.) These are generally healthier foods but the value is in the psychological comfort they bring.

After the long period of waiting, you get your appointment at the GIC. It is at this stage many trans people get caught out as the interview is with a psychiatrist again who will interview in depth as to whether you have any doubts and also how far you wish to go. They are trying to avoid starting the programme and then halfway through you wanting to go back, but it can be problematic for people who are more gender-fluid or just don't fit into the neat little boxes the NHS like people to fit into.

The next appointment is usually with an Endocrinologist who will be the person overseeing your Hormone Replacement therapy (HRT). At this appointment you are subjected to many tests; Blood, physical, hormone levels until they have an overall picture of you, and can determine if there are any factors which may impact on which hormone supplements can be issued - for instance, if the liver has been damaged in any way it may mean that oral hormones aren't appropriate..

The hormones are given either orally (which is preferable) or by a gel that is skin absorbent (this is less preferable and in-

volves you not touching any men as it can cross contaminate, It does not effect women.

Initially, when I started taking prescribed HRT I felt fantastic and very happy as a result, but it doesn't usually last and this can make one feel very disillusioned. The reason being that having taken a large amount of oestrogen the body compensates by producing higher and higher levels of testosterone to cancel it out. This can be a very difficult time. To get you back on track the GP has to prescribe a 'Blocker' This medication blocks the production of testosterone. Unfortunately a blocker tablet is extremely expensive and GPs can be wary of ordering them for you as they are at present about £300 a tablet. I have had to chase up again and again my GP to get them for me.

The blocker unfortunately works by stimulating the glands into overload, so for a short period you will be producing far more of the hormone than is usual, which can impact on facial hair growth amongst other things. There is a second blocker that can sometimes be prescribed that blocks the side-effects of the first blocker- so a blocker blocker, so to speak, but unfortunately people who have issues with depression have reacted badly to it and therefore it isn't prescribed for anyone who has had depression – which, regrettably, is most trans people.

It is so important to only use HRT under supervision. Many Trans people get impatient and buy drugs off the internet and self-prescribe. This can have dire consequences even if they are the genuine hormone supplements (which is by no means certain), one of the most common being the uneven development of breasts. When and if full surgery is carried out and the testes are removed then blockers are no longer required but as said earlier the HRT has to continue .

Continued hormone use will manifest certain effects, Gel users will find this slower than tablet users, but the amount of change and the speed of the change will vary between

individuals due to personal physical qualities such as weight, natural hormone balance, metabolism etc.

The physical effects include breast growth, the softening of facial features, the shrinking of male genitalia, The reduction of muscle mass and the formation of 'batwings', the redistribution of fatty tissue, the reduction of foot size (JB went from an 9.5 to a 6 and they are still shrinking. Obviously not every transwoman will experience the same changes, or at least not to the same degree.

When at this stage of transitioning, some trans individuals perceive themselves as two separate people – the old male person and the new female person. Alternatively they might come to see their old selves as a mere mask, while some actively embrace their old life. Often there is a subconscious shunning of the old person and everything associated with that. This can include foods, hobbies and lifestyle. During this period, blood tests are taken every eight weeks by your GP and sent for assessment of HRT levels. The results need to be then forwarded to the GIC. I found this very difficult as I had to constantly badger my GP to do this. In the end I asked for the print outs of the results and took them to London myself.

As well as seeing the endocrinologist, you continue seeing two senior psychologists at the GIC alternatively every six months. They support and oversee your psychological state during the transitioning process. This includes ensuring that you are actively living as a woman as well as not locking yourself away. They encourage you to go out and live in the world. They oversee your mental well being. Many trans people think that to present as a woman you need to wear long dresses and over the top make up. This is not the case. They assess your interaction and how you are rather than what you look like. However, many trans people feel the need to overstate when it comes to appearance. Obviously if you turned up wearing a hoodie and jeans with cropped hair they would pick up on that, but they wouldn't necessarily mark it against

you. Every woman has a different style, after all.

They also are assessing and preparing you for final surgery. To get this the two psychologists have to 'sign you off'.

The surgery is usually carried out at Kings Hospital in London. Unfortunately there is a two year waiting list at present after you have been signed off.

Once the operation is complete there will be further visits with the GP who will check everything is working as it should and who will refer to counsellors or the GIC if needs be. This is the point when you get your Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC). The GRC allows you to change your birth certificate from 'male' to 'female'. The GRC is a medical document and is therefore not available to be seen. You cannot ask to see a GRC, but you can ask to see a birth certificate.

As far as post-op care goes, it depends a bit. There are two types of surgery available for transwomen. One gives a purely cosmetic vagina, the other a pseudo-functional one. The first is the easier op and requires less aftercare. The latter is a far more complication op and requires dilation several times a day immediately after the op - which you can't do yourself due to the other impacts of the op - and then weekly for the rest of your life to prevent it effectively closing back up. I believe it's possible to get nurse assistance with this, but can't attest to it. You can also get post-op appointments with the GIC if you need, and they do signpost to some support groups.

For the most part, though, the NHS says you're on your own afterward!

There are other medical procedures that can take place after surgery such as facial reconstruction, breast implants etc but these are only available if the patient needs them for medical/psychological reasons. Otherwise these are private.

LQ, Age 42, HMP Parc

LQ was not in a good space to talk to but after three separate attempts, over three weeks – she agreed.

The staff on this wing need to be educated. They don't understand, one officer told me I needed a GRC but I don't. He said that people were complaining about me dressing up so he asked me to stop wearing female clothes. So I don't come out of my cell and I am in pain cos I have had an operation on my stomach (This is not true). I have post operation pains. (It turns out she meant pre operation pains). I don't want to be on this wing I want to go back to X3 I felt safer there and the staff understand trans better. I know I caused an assault but the others have gone and I want to go back I've been punished enough.

I first started to cross dress because my parents wanted a girl not a boy so they used to dress me up as a girl all the time. When I was seven I started to do it for myself - at school I was a boy but at home a girl. It wasn't till I was older I realised I was different from others. I first started going out as a woman at night so no one could see me. When I was in my thirties I started going to clubs as a woman.

On the other wing is Cerys (- staff member) she is good. MG (another trans prisoner) is on that wing I want to be there. I feel isolated. People on this wing are always trying to get money off me to pay their debts, they see me as an easy target. I'm also getting hassled for my medications for my operation. I got barricaded on the landing recently so I don't go out .

The staff on here have a sniffy attitude towards me- they don't understand trans people. They need educating. They try and put obstacles in my way when I'm ordering things I need. I want help not hinderance. I want a second chance. (It should be pointed out that one member of staff on the wing is pro active in supporting trans prisoners and along with her

partner is responsible for organising Swansea Sparkle – the second largest TG event in the UK. Also the wing manager is openly LGBT.)

The rest of the interview was a list of questions and one word answers.

P When did you start transitioning?

L One and a half years ago I was here in Parc.

P Have you started HRT.

L No.

P Have you been to Charing Cross Clinic.

L No.

P So have you been assessed for transitioning?

L Of course! You know I have. (I don't.)

L A man came from London and did an interview with the prison psychologist and another one.

P Do you know who they were? Were they psychologists?

L I think so. They said I was Trans but no one listens.

P What has happened since then?

L Nothing! It all dragged on and there was no funding for my HRT and Sarah was helping me (Sarah – bespoke nurse in Parc who is no longer employed) she's gone and nothing has happened. It's down to funding.

P Why did you turn down parole a few weeks back? Don't you want to get out?

L I want to do the whole sentence (Another 31 months). I am not going early they will tell me where to live I want to choose for myself. I'm not going to a hostel.

P How far do you want to go with the trans journey?

L The whole way. I want to be a woman. Why is this taking so long – people here are ignorant.

Personal Officer Interview

Clare, Chris and John HMP Parc

Clare is the present personal officer for a trans prisoner at Parc. John and Chris have both been in the past and are working on the wing where the trans prisoner is resident.

‘When it comes to treating our trans prisoner on a daily basis we treat her exactly the same as the other prisoners. Obviously, she is allowed to wear female clothes and make up on the wing and at work as long it is befitting the job she is doing. We also adhere to the searching guidelines. She has her own in cell shower. We always address her in the correct gender and if we slip up we apologise.

We have a good working relationship with our trans prisoner and we are there for her should she have a request or needs to see one of us. This good relationship has come about because she has been with us a length of time.

We are not aware of the effects of the transitioning process or what that process involves and will rely on her to tell us. We know she is on hormones but we don’t know how they affect her.

There have been things we have had to find out about like when MG needed a new wig fitted. We had to bring in a professional wig fitter and then find out who was paying for it etc.

We would support additional activities for her such as spa sessions re make up as well as speech therapy sessions.

My one concern would be what if she was to physically attack another male prisoner, as a male officer how should I pull her off? It would be good to know these things.

Personal Officer Interview

Rhian Absalom, PCO6, HMP & YOI Parc

Having only been a prisoner officer for past 16 months, I find myself still learning new skills on a daily basis. However, little did I know I would become involved in an area which some people struggle to understand, yet I, in my personal life, have been involved with for the past three years.

When I initially started working on my block I was introduced as the new officer and got to know various prisoners during my first week or so. Two of these prisoners were transgender. Now many officers would struggle with how to react due to their own levels of acceptance and this, at times, was quite obvious. However, to me I did not see these individuals as any different to any other prisoners on the unit.

As time has progressed and my experience has increased, (along with the population of the prison), I have also come to know many different members of staff from different areas - including the diversity team. I have always been passionate about diversity both in my work and my personal life, so I spoke to Phil Forder and Ruth Birch regarding an event I have been involved with for the past three years. It is called Swansea Sparkle. I asked them if the prison would like to be involved and attend the event to promote the work done within the jail, supporting LGBT groups. Both Phil and Ruth agreed and from that moment on my journey really began. So, last year, for the first time, HMP / YOI Parc had a stall at the event and it was a roaring success. I felt proud to be there to represent the prison as a supporter of LGBT.

As already mentioned, I have been involved with Swansea Sparkle for some time prior to working at the prison. For the last three years I have been a volunteer and have gained many friends in doing so. Swansea Sparkle aims to raise Transgender awareness by engaging with the public about LGBT is-

sues. It is also an opportunity for various LGBT groups to network and exchange information with each other .

My role at the event is as a 'meeter and greeter', which has enabled me to engage, communicate, help bridge gaps, break down barriers and improve relationships by speaking to people who attend. It has gone from strength to strength since it began in 2012 and is now the largest Transgender event in Wales. Swansea Sparkle was started by Sadie., the founder of Tawe Butterflies - a Transgender support group, set up in 2009. The group was established to offer support and guidance to members of the Trans community and their families.

Tawe Butterflies now has hundreds of members from across Wales and the UK.

Sadie and the Tawe Butterflies have built up a strong working relationship with South Wales Police, Swansea Council and many other service providers who are part of the Swansea Bay LGBT Forum.

Recently there has been a new addition to our wing -RZ. She is a prisoner who has been relocated to our unit in order to be better supported as she starts her transgender journey. Now before RZ arrived I was asked if I would be her personal officer to which I was happy to assist. She was a little reluctant, even nervous when she first arrived on the unit, but as time has gone by, I have seen her confidence increase as she spends more and more time out of her cell where she happily interacts with other prisoners . She is also now employed as a wing cleaner which I know is a job she takes great pride in. She is still in the early stages of her journey and she understands it's going to be a roller coaster ride at times but she is happy with the support she is receiving from both myself and my colleagues. At present we are arranging for a specialist to visit the prison to enable RZ to be fitted with a wig, which is something I know to be a huge step for her. She is receiving counselling and is well supported by all members of staff.

I look forward to continuing my work with RZ and

other transgender prisoners within HMP & YOI Parc, and to carry on raising awareness and understanding of the LGBT community.

HMP Stafford

KF, Age 38, HMP Stafford

I am now 38 years old and am in HMP Stafford. I realised at a very early age, about three, that I liked playing with girls a lot more than playing with boys. Next door to where I lived were twins and it was always the girl I felt more comfortable with. I remember my father bought me lots of Star Wars toys which were all the rage, but I never even opened the boxes as they meant nothing to me. At school I always played with the girls and had no boy friends whatsoever. This was during my primary school years in the early 1990s. I never ever had my hair cut so it was long –down my back and the uniform at the time, for girls, was like a short skirt over trousers which I used to wear. I think most people thought I was a girl as I certainly looked like one. I didn't receive any negativity at this time.

I entered puberty late and still many thought up until this point that I was a girl. I missed most of year 8 because I was involved in a car accident, but when I returned to school, in year 9, it was obvious I was a boy. This is when I started to draw attention from others, particularly from one boy who gave me a lot of grief. One day he confronted me and asked if I was a boy or a girl? I replied a boy and he kneed me very hard in the groin. I ended up in hospital. As a result I decided I didn't want to return to school and spent the last three years avoiding the education authorities instead.

I couldn't wait to finish school but my problems didn't go away. My sexual orientation is Straight and I did get married. My goal is to be a fully functioning woman in a lesbian relationship with my wife.

I used to cross dress all the time and I don't think I ever

wore male clothing from the ages of 14 to 25. Now, I think what you wear is irrelevant really, it's how you feel inside that counts. The fact that my outer clothes are androgynous is the same as most women today. How many women wear dresses all the time nowadays? However, I am still wearing female underclothes which makes me feel good although nobody knows that except me. Women today can wear anything they like and it's accepted but men can't, it's more restricted, though it is changing. I wouldn't wear a dress on the wing and I keep make-up to a minimum. I have some but its knowing how to apply it.

When I left school I got a job as a lighting engineer in a straight club and I was wearing such things as sequined tops and my waist length hair was bleached blond. The DJ was openly gay and used to call things out to me like 'The woman trapped in the man's body' and 'My wife the lights'. But it was all good natured and I never got any problems. Most people when they met me still thought I was a girl.

I got remanded in prison in Oct 2011. I was sent to HMP Dovegate, I told the reception officer that I was transgender. They didn't know what to do with me and sent me to one of the Mains wings where I had to cell share. I asked the wing manager to move me to a single cell which he did. But it wasn't long before there were complaints that I was taking up space and I was told I was 'causing a complication'. I was then sent on a one for one swap to HMP Hewell. On arrival it was obvious that information hadn't been relayed across and they were surprised I was trans and a Vulnerable Prisoner. They again put me on Main Location and I was terrified. I didn't come out of my cell. Consequently, I was put on an ACCT. Every wing tried to get rid of me, so I moved around the jail from wing to wing, sometimes only being in a cell long enough to unpack my things before I was moving again. Eventually I ended up on the Segregation unit until I got moved to Healthcare where I stayed for a week. This could

have been a good move as I was seen by the GP who agreed to give me a script for HRT. I was pleased to eventually get the ball rolling again but before I got the medication I was moved to HMP Birmingham on the following Monday. It was like a repeat film, I was moved from wing to wing as they too didn't know what to do with me and once again I ended up on the Healthcare wing. However, there were some volatile other prisoners housed there, so to keep me 'safe', I was only let out of my cell when they were banged up. I stayed on that unit for three months and I never spoke to anyone except the nurse. It was a very depressing time, I had none of my own clothes and I was very low. I felt I had been abandoned in solitude and no one cared. The one time my wife visited me I couldn't go to the Visits Hall so they brought her to see me on the wing instead, which wasn't good. I couldn't see anyway out, it was while on this wing I tried to commit suicide. Had it not been for a quick witted officer who gave me mouth to mouth resuscitation I would have died.

I had started taking HRT which I got from my GP before I came to jail. (Ethinyl Estradiol- a synthetic oestrogen) but it wasn't working fast enough for me so I foolishly started overdosing – sometimes six times the daily amount as well as taking HRT I got from a friend who was going through the menopause. I was not having any blood tests to regulate my hormone levels and as a result I eventually blacked out . I woke up in A and E at a hospital. I felt very sick and had excruciating pain in my back which lasted for days. They asked me what I'd taken and I told them. It turned out I had a blood clot caused by the overdose of HRT. To remove it they put me on Warfarin to thin my blood. I stayed on the ward for a few weeks. As a result today I have one breast slightly larger than the other which is a result of un-regulated self medication.

Eventually, in HMP Birmingham, the doctor referred me to the Nottingham GIC and I was diagnosed with Gender Dysphoria. This meant I could start HRT officially. However,

because I was scheduled to complete a Sex Offender Treatment Programme (SOTP), the HRT was put on hold so to speak as I was told that in order to complete the programme you had to be in your previous gender. I was put on the waiting list to do the programme and as a result the medication once again never materialised.

I was then transferred to HMP Stafford. When I first walked in I thought 'here we go again' and was expecting to go to Healthcare as before. I dreaded this as my time spent there was so lonely. I sat in Admissions waiting to hear the usual. Within a few minutes Andrew Holmes, a wing manager, came to see me and actually asked what he could do to help me. It was a relief and a surprise but I was still very scared. I was taken to the VPU where I was given a single cell. However, I was so afraid of being left alone again that I told the officers I wanted a cell mate. They found one who was great, I felt he had been especially selected. He was openly gay and was totally accepting of me. I told Andy Holmes that in Birmingham they had made prisoners sign compacts if they cell shared so Andy introduced this here. My cell mate was a great support and I got on well with him.

Eventually, as is the case in prisons, my cell mate got transferred, and the replacements weren't so good so I decided to request my own cell again. At this time the prison went entirely VPU. Having settled I now wanted to start transitioning but again I still had to do the SOTP programme first., I felt cornered by programmes. However, Andy started a support group for LGBT prisoners called the 'Breakthrough' group and I joined it and it made me feel supported.

I still get occasional prejudice from staff especially on visits where they have refused to do a rub down search and have said they would only do it if I was a 'real man or woman.' And also I remember, on one occasion, prisoners saying loudly 'I'm not standing next to that freak' and nobody challenged it. But generally the staff here are good and I feel they actually

know what to do and how to behave.

I think that the reason this place works is because I have been here a while and everyone knows me and they see me as an individual, not a problem. They have established a place where I feel supported and safe. I am able to talk to staff who understand what my position is like and respect who I am. I think personalities bring about change especially in a prison environment with both prisoners and staff, and Stafford is one such place.

DI, HMP Stafford, Programmes Manager & Protected Characteristic Lead for Sexual Orientation & Gender Reassignment

I was given the role of lead for Gender Reassignment and Sexual Orientation in August 2015. Previously-for a very short period of time- I had been the Equalities Manager but when this role disappeared due to benchmarking, the different strands of the Protected Characteristic got allocated to various line managers instead. I was on maternity leave when this happened and on my return, not surprisingly, I was allocated Pregnancy and Maternity as my strand. Last year, however, it was all change again.

I had only been leading in my present role for a few months when a prisoner got in touch with me and said that he wanted to transition from male to female, from being Gavin to KF. She had already done this at HMP Stafford about 18 months previously, but because she still had to complete the SOTP (Sex Offender Treatment Programme) course, she had been told she could only do so as a man. She couldn't be KF while looking at offences she committed as Gavin. From what I had been told it was quite a complicated situation in which KF felt she had no choice but to comply. KF has since told me that she did not feel supported at that time but felt reverting to Gavin would make things easier for her.

Due to this process having started once before, I was able to look back on all the notes and documents to see what had been put in place. I had heard it had been quite problematic for both KF and some staff. We needed to learn quickly and alongside Andy Holmes and KF's Offender Supervisor we set out a plan of how to best manage Gavin's transition. We worked within PSO 11/2007 while also ensuring KF was supported and treated with decency. KF was residing on C wing at the time - the same wing where she had been located previously in her chosen identity. When I spoke to the staff

there, some did have the attitude of 'here we go again', 'he's pulling the wool over your eyes', 'you are naïve to what he was like last time', 'it's just a game'. I had to spend considerable time talking to the wing staff about procedures that we have to follow by law, regardless of their thoughts and attitudes. They needed to remain professional at all times and ensure KF got what she was entitled to.

The Deputy Governor at HMP Stafford, was very helpful and agreed with me that KF should be relocated to another wing- G wing, the enhanced wing in the prison, as soon as a place became available. In the meantime -2 weeks- KF stayed on C wing and chose to remain as Gavin until the move actually happened. During this two week period, I had time to speak to the new staff, rewrite the original compact that KF had signed and speak to Security ensuring everything was in place to make the transition slightly easier for KF. We arranged for Kelly's wife to bring in some clothes for her, and I ordered some make-up as well from the AVON catalogue.

KF moved on to G wing and it went quite well. Some of the staff still refused to call her by her first name, and persisted in referring to her as he. I had to keep reiterating the expected behaviour to the point where sometimes I felt that some officers viewed it as my own personal agenda and opinion rather than the law. I told them this is how we should behave and treat others. The greatest resistance came from the older officers. They said things like 'you can't change an old dog' and I sometimes think they saw me as a young, naïve, non-operational female living in a dream land. However, once I had challenged them, they soon realised that this wasn't the case. On one occasion I had to report an officer to their line manager regarding the way he spoke to me about working with KF. I have personally spoken to most of the people who work with KF and have dispelled some myths and allayed some fears. Generally, most staff are scared that they

will say or do something wrong rather than actually not be supportive. KF has been residing on G wing for 4 months now and I hear less complaints from her as the staff and other prisoners have become more accepting. As time goes by they have got to know her more as a person rather than just viewing her as her gender.

SK came to HMP Stafford a couple of week ago, having been transferred from HMP Hewell. I was informed of SK's arrival and managed to secure her a single cell for when she arrived – the manager in OCA had no idea why we would give her a single cell but again once I had had a chat with her, she was really helpful. I also spoke to the wing officers on D wing so they were aware that SK would be arriving and sorted out arrangements for her to shower. SK has since told me she has been pleasantly surprised at how she has been treated in the last couple of weeks, the staff are now very accommodating. I wasn't on duty the day she was transferred in, so Wing Manager, Andy Holmes went to speak to her. He is her Offender Supervisor. As SK arrived on a Friday I ensured that one of the officers from the programme's department checked in with her over the week-end. SK has said she felt really well looked after. Since coming to Stafford SK is now doing a carpentry course and getting on really well. SK's biggest concern, at present, is that her mum is visiting her next week and she has not seen her yet as SK. I have arranged for the visit in a private room which will be supervised by one of our chap-laincy team. I feel since SK's arrival at Stafford, there has been a real acceptance and shift towards trans prisoners. This, I think, is partly due to the fact that SK arrived at the prison with no history, unlike KF who was known as Gavin before. Also she presents as stereotypically female wearing make-up, a wig and stereotypically female clothes, unlike KF who is very male looking. I often get asked why KF doesn't 'dress like a woman', to which I always answer

‘what does a woman dress like?’ Just because one woman wears make up and another doesn’t, doesn’t make her less of a female? I was actually asked this by a female officer to whom I pointed out the differences in appearance between the two of us and asked ‘Who is most female?’

I have really enjoyed being involved with the Gender Re-assignment strand, I face many battles and hurdles along the way alongside Andy, and often feel like I am guessing at what I should or shouldn’t be doing but I follow the principle that if things can be accommodated and don’t create a security issue and fall within the PSI/PSO then I will try! There is a very supportive SMT and Governor at HMP Stafford.