

Projects within Gender DynamiX

Gender DynamiX has a number of ongoing projects aimed at making the lives of transgender individuals easier while also educating the general public about transgender issues and challenges.

TG Support Group for Sex Workers

SWEAT (Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Taskforce), an organisation fighting for the decriminalisation of sex work, and Gender DynamiX have recently joined forces (see Edition 11). The two organisations have now started the Transgender Sex Workers Support Group. Male to Female Transgender Sex Workers are most vulnerable to discrimination, not only because of the work they do, but also because of their gender identity. Another reason is the challenges they face daily, in the community, but sometimes also in their own homes because many parents find it difficult to accept their transgender children and often evict or even disown their children. This often leads to homelessness and difficulty finding work, which in turn forces them into sex work in order to survive. A number of them end up abusing substances and are themselves the victims of abuse. They are also particularly susceptible to HIV. The support group allows them the freedom to live out their lives as is comfortable for them. They are taught the difference between gender identity and sexual orientation, and it helps them to go out and conduct themselves professionally. Most importantly they can go out there and apply what they have learnt and pass it on to other TG sex workers and encourage them to join the group.

Transgender Parent Support Group

This is a support group for parents of transgender children of any age. Parents share their experiences and knowledge and discuss strategies for the education of service providers.

T-Junction Social Group

The social group, T-Junction meets at a restaurant in Observatory, Cape Town once a month after the Transgender Support Group which is run by Triangle Project. The meeting takes place on the top floor – this is a private area where transgender persons and the SOFFAs (Significant other, Friends, Family and Allies) can meet without fear or embarrassment and just be themselves, amongst people who understand and share the same challenges they face. If they are not out yet, they can come dressed in gender clothes and change into their preferred clothes and walk around without the fear of ridicule.

Siyahlanguana Youth Group

This is a youth support group for under- twenty masculine identified female bodied persons – transmen and butch lesbians – who meet every last Friday of the month at Gender DynamiX offices. Many transgender men come out of lesbian communities and are especially friendly with masculine lesbians (butches). When they express their gender identity to their lesbian friends, it creates confusion of who is a butch lesbian and who is a transgender man and what the difference is and often there is conflict arising. Transgender men are often rejected by the lesbian community and end up alone. It is important to have a group like this in the township because female bodied persons with a male gender identity are vulnerable and are especially at risk of falling victim to violence, abuse and ‘corrective rape’. Currently some of the members are receiving counselling to help them understand and accept what they are.

African Exchange Programme

For the second year running, Gender DynamiX initiated an exchange programme between South Africa and twelve other African countries, supporting and capacity building for emerging transgender activists. The Programme concentrates on how to get the activist movement going in their own country as well as educating and encourage healthcare workers especially in the medical treatment of transgender persons.

Transgender Health and Research Conference

The very successful Transgender Medical Conference held in November 2010 was the first of its kind in Africa. A second Conference will be held at the end of November 2011, bringing together medical health professionals, government officials and transgender people. (See story elsewhere in this edition.)

Indigenous Knowledge Series of Workshops

A very interesting point of discussion was raised at the first Trans Health and Research Conference that was held in November 2010. How do transgender issues fit into traditional health practices? How is this issue perceived by traditional health practitioners and can it be facilitated on this platform. This burning question inspired another series of workshops facilitated by Gender DynamiX which sought to bring together the western and traditional approaches of transgender and looking to frame it in the cultural context.

Advocacy and Outreach

Theatre

Gender DynamiX works with a development theatre NGO, the Mothertongue Project, to help people articulate their

stories for advocacy and self expression and to use their dramatic skills to facilitate an exploration of self-efficacy. The ten workshops were done in two stages:

1. Theatre in Education
2. Empowering and training participants in order for them to facilitate such sessions themselves.

The project culminated in a series of trips to schools and public centres with the goal of increasing the visibility and acceptance of the transgender community.

Outreach

The idea of the Outreach Programme for rural areas is to establish a community peer educator and offer continuing support. Outreach officers go into communities, consult and teach them the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity. Questioning individuals can thus identify themselves and make informed choices.

HIV Programmes

These programmes are designed to reach out to rural areas in tandem with the above-mentioned outreach programme by focusing on HIV and how it links with transgender. This programme is important in order to make the links between being transgender which makes the person vulnerable to HIV exposure and how being transgender makes it difficult to access medical and HIV care.

In addition, Gender Dynamix also assists with referrals to medical practitioners, legal aids, general support, identity document applications, family mediation, school mediation and mediation with employers. Another important aspect of the work Gender Dynamix does is conducting quantitative research as there is little or no research done in South Africa on transgenderism. Researchers will ask questions like:

1. What is the situation?
2. Do they have a job?
3. Do they have schooling?
4. At which point are they thrown out of the home if such is the case?
5. Do they do sex work?
6. What is their HIV status?