

“How can we help you?” – A true statement from First National Bank!

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Any person who wants to open a bank account needs to comply with FICA, the Financial Intelligence Centre Act. This means that proof of residence and/or work address needs to be submitted to the bank of choice. Under normal circumstances this should not be too difficult – unless you happen to be a refugee.

Local Transgender N.P.O. - Gender Dynamix is in the process of assisting a Burundian Transgendered person who has applied for refugee status, hoping to permanently stay in South Africa. She tried to live in other African countries, but there her life was in constant jeopardy and grave peril due to the fact that she is a transgendered person. True to herself she presents herself as female even though she was born male.

Gender Dynamix is helping her to settle here in South Africa and one of many challenges has been the initiation of a bank account for her. This was easier said than done – at first. After many failed attempts and much time lost, a bubbly Sales Consultant from First National Bank crossed paths with the CEO of Gender Dynamix, Liesl Theron. Mr. Kendall's first words were “how can I help you?”

On that same day a meeting was set up between Roy Kendall, the Sales Consultant, Liesl Theron and the person from Burundi. The meeting took place in the residence of the Burundian so that the correct address could be verified. The same afternoon Mr. Kendall phoned to confirm that the bank account had been opened and validated.

Among other things, the compassion, respect and professionalism of Mr. Kendall was deeply appreciated. He even offered to create a note on her profile screen to remind all bank employees that although this customer's name and passport may temporarily indicate that she is legally male, she is to be addressed as female. Mr Kendall was exemplary in this himself.

"This is one of the many headaches most transgender people are faced with", explains Liesl. "They are identified as the gender with which they present until the moment they are asked for identity documentation then bank tellers and security personnel are most often at a loss for what to do next."

Perhaps the next big challenge for banks will be to determine if a customer's title really needs to be stated on cheques and credit cards. If a valid reason cannot be given, then the omission of titles like Mr., Ms., Mrs., Miss, Mnr., and Mevr., can be a first step in serving the needs of transgender clientele.

Gender Dynamix wants to take the opportunity to thank First National Bank and Mr. Kendall for the huge amount of help, and hopefully the two parties can take up the next challenge together.