

## Life Story: Lolita Marcelee

My name is Lolita Marcelee and I am a Trans woman. I identified as a woman from the age of six and understood that my physical body is different from what I felt it should be. I played with girls, and had my first relationship with a boy at Primary School at the age of seven. I did not like wearing my school uniform, but I found a way to feminise my clothing. All the children accepted me. They did not mock me nor were they nasty to me.

I was a good athlete, but had to compete in the boy's team. I was accepted at high school for my athletics; they wouldn't accept me at first. I wasn't interested in subjects for boys like woodwork and handwork. I wanted to do needlework and I always ended up in the office for this.

Then I went to Cambridge College where I could dress as I wanted and I was allowed to use the female toilets.

I actually grew up with my grandmother who died in her seventies when I was 22. She understood me and accepted me. But my parents did not understand. They wanted to take me to see a psychiatrist, but I refused to go. Recently, though, I discussed it with my parents and they are learning to accept me being transgender, especially my mother.

My first job was as supervisor in a Printing company. I didn't really have problems. Although I was forced to use the male toilets, the males were very understanding and nice to me. There I was involved with a guy for three years but we broke up when I left.

I started Reach for Life almost ten years ago when I tested positive for HIV, although we were only officially registered as an NPO in January this year (2010). The Reach For Life Foundation, which is based at my house, helps the LGBTI community with HIV/AIDS, abuse, including substance abuse. My main focus, however, is a shelter for LGBTI people.

I am a role model to a lot of children on the Cape Flats. I'm HIV positive, so I know what they are going through and I can make a change in people's lives. I feel I can add value to people's lives. Everywhere I go, when I deal with HIV-positive people, I am accepted for what I do for these people. My dream is to become one of the world's most powerful motivational speakers on HIV/AIDS. My big goal is to have gender reassignment surgery in two or three year's time.

Religion has always been a big issue for me. I used to be a preacher, but one day I stood up in church and told the congregation that I cannot see myself coming to church week after week wearing a suit and tie. I wanted to be a woman, I said. Then I left the church and never went back.

For three days now I've had the same dream, which resulted in me cutting my hair. I think this is because of my partner. This is his first relationship with a trans woman. I often wonder if he would feel more comfortable if I came across as more male and not be into these femme clothes I like to wear.

If I have any advice for anybody, it would be that you accept yourself for who you are. Make peace with yourself. Deal with all circumstances. And work on the ground. Experience the pain and deal with the issues of discrimination.