

A Day in the Life of Mama Trans

There is a constant buzz of activity in the Gender DynamiX offices: walk-ins, phones ringing off the hook, e-mails, presentations, networking, conferences and time with researchers as well. The more Gender DynamiX is becoming known in the Human Rights sector, the busier we become, and the more walk-ins, phone calls, e-mails, presentations, networking, conferences and researchers we manage. So how do we do what we do all day? This month, we will look at a typical day in the life of our Executive Director, Liesl Theron.

Liesl's day can start as early as getting to bed just before the time she needs to get up to be ready by 08h00, when most of her meetings are scheduled. On the days that she does not attend meetings, she gets to the office shortly after 08h00 and has already crossed off a phenomenal number of tasks on her "To–Do" list. Liesl leads by example, and so is very hands-on with the business of the office, but delegates the work when she should so that she can spend an extraordinary amount of time at her computer – actually a laptop – writing proposals for grants to keep Gender DynamiX going.

Liesl started Gender DynamiX just over five years ago. At the time, being the partner of a transgender FTM, she realised that an organisation like Gender DynamiX was needed to assist transgender people through the difficult stages of transitioning. Also at that time, there were a number of Gay and Lesbian organisations who added the TI(Transgender/Intersex) acronym to their LGB (Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual) acronym, but were not really able to offer any assistance to transgender or intersex people. The reason was basic; they themselves (LGBs) did not understand transgender or intersex issues.

As a result of Liesl's efforts, Gender DynamiX has grown from a one person organisation working pro bono, to an established, entirely African organisation employing six people. As well, the team at Gender DynamiX serves as mentors to students from all over the world who choose to practice their internship at Gender DynamiX as part of their practical studies.

But Liesl's work is not just about grant-writing and welcoming students. She networks with other organisations, associations and committees from all over the world, adding the techniques and methods utilized in more developed countries to her repertoire of knowledge and skill. To this end, she has visited the USA, UK, and many countries in Africa including Nigeria, Mozambique, Namibia, Botswana, Ethiopia and Uganda. She also travelled to Spain. She is often invited to present a paper on the raison d'être and evolution of Gender DynamiX .

Liesl, who is also known as Mama Trans on the African continent, networks with other African transgender organisations so successfully that an exchange programme between Uganda and South Africa was created and attracted a number of transgender activist-participants from African countries including Uganda, Zambia, Botswana and Namibia. Another project in which Gender DynamiX is involved is a partnership with Botswana's Rainbow Identity. The great work being done by Gender DynamiX has snowballed into other initiatives and projects and includes the book, Trans – Transgender Life Stories from South Africa, the digital stories DVD, Transformations and a second digital stories DVD, Exquisite Gender.