

Day in life GdX Advocacy Manager

A Day In The Life Of Robert Hamblin Gdx Advocacy Manager

A large part of the work that Gender DynamiX (GDX) does revolves around lobbying and advocacy. While more and more people are learning to understand the challenges that transgender people face daily, there are still people – especially service providers – who need to be educated about transgender issues and how they can provide services beneficial to transgender persons. And that is where Robert Hamblin, Advocacy Manager and Deputy Director of Gender DynamiX, fits in.

A typical day in the life of Robert Hamblin starts at six am when he checks his 1001 emails and sets about planning his day, wishing a day has thirty hours. His job is a high contact one and there are days when he comes into contact with up to fifty people throughout the day. These include the nine staff members at GDX, contacts via emails and telephone, pop-ins, support groups and presentations. Robert forms part of the Management team which includes Liesl Theron and He-Jin Kim and they are constantly in consultation with each other.

His advocacy is directed at the relevant government departments and the public. Information is constantly provided to the powers-that-be such as Social Services, the Departments of Health, Education and Home Affairs, constantly pushing them to do their jobs and sometimes even having to explain to them what that job entails when it comes to trans people. He also disseminates information to the public, including transgender and cisgender people. And as Gender DynamiX expands as an organisation, so his job becomes more involved since in his role as Deputy Director he is responsible for local programming while Executive Director Liesl Theron concentrates more on international transgender affairs. Currently Robert is also training three people in outreach. This forms part of GDX's vision to empower transgender people to become activists. Thus Robert is part of the management team that takes care of all organisational aspects, ensuring the smooth running of the organisation. "I have to know everything about everything," Robert says.

A more recent addition to his workload is advocacy and outreach amongst transgender sex workers, facilitating a support group and hitting the street between midnight and two am on Friday nights looking for and doing outreach with transgender sex workers. This support group is also currently lobbying for the decriminalisation of sex work.

Robert also facilitates a Parent Support Group for parents of transgender children. Their primary focus is lobbying for reform at the Department of Education regarding gender variant children in schools.

Robert is in the process of building up a team of advocacy volunteers to relieve him of some of the pressure: Estian Smit was instrumental in bringing about reform which culminated in Act 49 of 2003, allowing transgender persons to apply for an identity document which recognises their gender identity assists Robert in a lot of his work. Dr Arnaud de Villiers assists with the medical aspects since of Gender DynamiX advocacy work. There are only two hospitals catering for transgender people – Pretoria Academic and Groote Schuur Hospital. Leigh-Ann van der Merwe, a recent intern at GDX, initiates a large number of reports that are co-edited with Robert and Arnaud and Estian reporting on human rights violations of transgender people.

Other aspects of Robert's job include liaising with the Gender DynamiX Board as well as with lawyers and international key transgender activists. The Media plays a big role in advocacy and lobbying and Robert often advises them, especially on how to refer to transgender people and the best way to deal with them. He also does presentations at seminars and universities especially on the difference between Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation by defining the two concepts.

He certainly does not have a nine-to-five, five-day-week job, but fortunately he has a wife who also works for and NGO and understands the challenges. They often make dates with each other and every three months or so they try to get out of town for a day or two. And he does try to get home before the sun goes down which is hard to do in winter.

To wind down Robert takes a swim in the sea or sits on the beach watching the waves, this helps him to forget about work for a while. "I also have children in my life and when I play with them it, helps me realise what is important. My family sustains my energy so I can work hard. Without them I will just wither and be of very little use for our movement" he says.