

THE KINFOLK REPORT

**Older Trans and Gender
Diverse Australians:**
family, support services
and control over gender
identity and expression.

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My message to older TGD people is:

YOUR RIGHTS MATTER

WE SUPPORT YOU!

♡ ELDER RIGHTS
ADVOCACY

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Introduction.

There is now a body of evidence that increasing numbers of older people are transitioning, or living out their gender diversity in later life (Barrett, 2008, Barrett et al., 2009, Latham and Barrett, 2015, Crameri et al., 2015). This is not surprising given the current generation of older people has grown up with limited choices for gender expression outside the gender binary. Many who had inklings of their gender diversity early on in their lives, knew that disclosure could result in imprisonment or attempted ‘cures.’ In this context, repression of gender diversity was one of the few options for personal safety.

However, the world has changed, and gender diversity is now increasingly valued. This shift has contributed to a surge in information on gender diversity and increased numbers of people recognising and asserting their gender diversity as older people. Living out gender diversity late in life can be a liberation for older Trans and Gender Diverse (TGD) people. However, these late-life changes may also result in restrictions to gender expression by family members and service providers who hold binary views of gender, and family members who have difficulty adjusting to such changes.

This Report outlines the findings of the Kinfolk Project, which was established to promote older TGD people’s control over their gender expression. The Report begins by outlining the evidence that was a catalyst for the project, then presents the findings of the Kinfolk research and the resources developed.

Emerging evidence.

In Australia's first research project focused on older TGD people's experiences of ageing and aged care, Latham and Barrett (2015) described how some older people are now recognising and affirming their gender diversity. Narratives from that research are shared in this Report to highlight the key issues underpinning the Kinfolk Project. The narratives begin with Sandy, a Transwoman, who shared her experiences of repressing her gender identity when she recalled that:

I tried very hard to fit in with society. My parents knew [about my gender diversity] ... from a very early age. My father tried to have me cured...with psychiatric and electro convulsive therapy. ...I got married three times, had four children, tried very hard to be normal. I became a body builder at the request of some of my psychiatrists, they decided if I made the perfect male body, I would be more happy with it (Latham and Barrett, 2015 p. 13).

Similarly, Caren, a Transwoman, reflected on the pressure to conform to the gender binary from an early age, when she said:

Depraved is how I felt for most of my life. I mean my greatest fear in the world has been to be seen as gay, sissy, wimp, unmanly. ...I got beaten up and bullied...because I was different. I was absolutely sure I was only the person who behaved like this or felt like this or did this. That's why I felt depraved. It's...the tribe thing, if you do something that's different from the rest of the tribe there's a terrible fear of being left behind, or cast out or ostracized or punished. And I was desperate to belong to the tribe, but unfortunately the tribe didn't [want me]. I felt ashamed of myself. It made me avoid situations. It used to horrify me and terrify me because I didn't know how to talk like a bloke, or act like a bloke, I tried very, very hard (Latham and Barrett, 2015, p. 12).

The research outlined how some older TGD people, who felt unsafe to express their gender diversity, had few options other than to suppress it. This was emphasised by Jeanine, a Transwoman, who described repression using the following metaphor:

... it's like being in a house and you have this room that you never quite enter. Or you do enter it at times but then it's shut off and you don't go back in there again. I considered this a part of my life, meaning this room that I just didn't enter. I knew that it was there but most of the time I tried to just shut it out (Latham and Barrett, 2015, p. 16).

While shutting out gender diversity may have been the only safe option in the past, significant legislative, policy and social reforms have resulted in some older people now recognising and affirming their gender diversity. This was emphasised by Beatrice, who recounted:

I'm almost 67 and I didn't understand anything about the trans world until four years ago. That's been a pretty huge leap for me, overcoming a lifetime of conditioning. When I look back there were tell-tale signs along the way that I never linked to... the way I am in life (Latham and Barrett, 2015, p. 1).

Recognition of gender diversity comes as a liberation for many older TGD people. This was illustrated by Sandy, who described seeing herself in a hospital mirror after gender affirming surgery and recalled:

...I saw a sparkle in [my] eyes that [I'll] never forget. [When I looked at my reflection in the mirror I saw] a very contented woman looking at me. ... that was the moment that I felt complete...as a whole human being. From time to time the sparkle, it does fade a little bit...but it comes back again (Latham and Barrett, 2015. p. 30).

Alongside these positive effects of late-life transition, older TGD people describe a number of unique challenges. For example, the options for gender transition may be limited by the cost of surgery, surgical risk and the limited effectiveness of hormone therapy (compared with starting hormone therapy in earlier years). Additionally, repression of gender diversity may have resulted in struggles with mental wellbeing and substance abuse, and subsequent strained family relationships.

Changes to the ways gender is expressed in later life may result in difficulties within families, including severing of relationships with intimate partners, children and grandchildren; or the imposition of restrictions to gender expression (Barrett et al, 2009; Latham and Barrett, 2015; Crameri et al., 2015; Barrett, 2008). These difficulties are particularly prominent for people living with dementia and those with reduced capacity to make autonomous decisions (Latham & Barrett, 2015; Barrett, 2018). While older TGD people may accept concessions to preserve family relationships, the repression of gender expression may adversely impact on their mental wellbeing (Latham and Barrett, 2015).

Restrictive dynamics between older TGD people and their family members may continue after an older TGD person enters a residential aged care service. This is particularly problematic where service providers do not understand their role in advocating for the rights of TGD people (Barrett et al, 2009; Latham and Barrett, 2015; Barrett, 2008). Additionally, even without the influence of families, some older TGD people accessing aged care services may find their gender identity restricted by service providers who are Transphobic (Latham and Barrett, 2015).

Older TGD people need to be given the opportunity to access information about their rights to gender expression. Additionally, information needs to be provided to family members and aged care service providers about respecting gender diversity. At the time the Kinfolk project was conducted, there were no resources in Australia to assist older TGD people and their families work through conflicts related to changing the way gender is expressed. The Kinfolk Project addresses this gap and to support the development of TGD inclusive services.

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The Kinfolk Project.

The aims of Kinfolk were to work with older TGD people, their families and service providers to improve older TGD people's control over gender expression. To achieve this the project conducted the following activities:

- 1.** Established a network of older TGD people to guide the project.
- 2.** Conducted interviews and a survey with older TGD people and their family members.
- 3.** Facilitated a workshop with older TGD people and family relationship services.
- 4.** Facilitated a workshop with older TGD people and aged care service providers.
- 5.** Developed a Gender Genogram resource.
- 6.** Developed a Ripplegram resource.
- 7.** Developed a resource for aged care service providers.
- 8.** Disseminated the resources through social media, service providers and LGBTI groups.

The project was coordinated by Alice's Garage, took place between 2018-2019 and was funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health. The project team included Dr Catherine Barrett, Kaye Bradshaw, Toni Paynter, Sally Conning and Kathy Mansfield. Three older TGD people co-led the project, which was critical to the outcomes achieved.

This report outlines the project findings and the resources developed. It begins by describing the lessons learned from older TGD people and their family members. Following this, the information gathered from the workshops with service providers is outlined, and finally the resources and strategies for change are presented.

Summary narratives from older TGD people and their family members are presented across the three key research sections of the report. It is hoped that these narratives will assist in readers understand the experiences and needs of older TGD people and their families.



Learning from older TGD people and their families.

Learning from older TGD people and their families was considered essential to develop effective resources. An online survey and semi-structured interviews with older TGD people provided an opportunity to explore family responses to their changes in gender expression. Interviews were also conducted with family members to document their perspectives.

Potential interviewees were provided with an information sheet and consent form, and 11 people participated in phone interviews. Most interviewees were Victorian [10] and Transwomen [8], with a smaller number of family members [2] and one gender diverse person. Notes were made during the phone interviews, written out in full, read back to the interviewees, amended in response to their feedback and then emailed to participants for verification and deidentification.

Seven people participated in the online survey, all were aged 65-74 years; three lived in Victoria, two were from New South Wales and two from Queensland. Five were located in rural or regional areas and two metro. Six participants described themselves as Transwomen and one as a gender diverse person. Strategies to engage Transmen in the research were unsuccessful.

Thematic analysis of the interview data was undertaken using Framework (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994) and survey data was utilised to strengthen the emerging interview themes. Three primary themes identified were:

1. the difficulties experienced by older TGD people and their families in keeping their world intact.
2. the characteristics of supportive families.
3. the valuing of gender diversity.

Examples of these themes are outlined in the next section, followed by narratives from the interviews.

Keeping my world intact.

The measures of success are not just transitioning, it's also about keeping your world intact. Your supports matter. I don't know how people cope who lose their partners and children (Interview, Sam).

Sam articulated succinctly what many older TGD interviewees discussed; that keeping their world intact following changes to gender expression required careful planning.

Understanding the factors that might threaten interpersonal relationships was considered necessary to assist older TGD people in planning to minimise potential difficulties. These factors included understanding the ripple effects of changing gender expression, acknowledging the gap between acceptance and respect, and living with restrictions to gender expression.

The Ripple effects.

Many of the interviewees described the influence of transphobia on their family's experiences and responses. Some described knowing from an early age that their family was transphobic, and how this was a factor in the repression of their gender diversity. For example, Clara recounted her mother's response to her teenage expressions of gender diversity in this way:

Mum only ever wanted to have interaction with her son; she could not accept my gender identity. I suppose a lot of it went back to her religion and the lack of knowledge about gender diversity in that era. In my teens she talked to the priest about my cross dressing and he told her 'it's a sin.' Mum also had to sit with me for three sessions with a psychiatrist, who said he was going to cure me (Interview, Clara).

As Clara and others highlighted, unsupportive responses from family members occurred throughout their lives, until many reached a point in their older years, where their need to express their gender diversity finally surpassed the pressure to conform to family expectations.

Decisions to express gender diversity were not made lightly by older TGD people; who were acutely aware that transitioning could result in rejection by family. As Georgia reported: I've got partial acceptance from my four children. I've got less acceptance from their married partners - there has been additional difficulties because of their social, religious and business affiliations... (Interview, Georgia). The social pressure that families feared and experienced was passed on to older TGD people as pressure to conform to the gender binary. In addition to the potential occurrence of social, religious and business isolation, there were also threats to personal safety, as Sam described:

Soon after I transitioned, I was walking around late at night and a car went past and someone yelled out: you are a fucking disgrace. It has contributed to a bit of anxiety around young drunk people. I'm a bit more careful than I used to be. There was some anxiety by my wife; but now we just don't go places where we put our safety or health at risk. We love travelling, but we have to be careful where we go because of the laws related to Trans people (Interview, Sam).

Threats such as these resulted from lesbophobia as well as transphobia, particularly for older people who transitioned from male to female in heterosexual relationships. For example, Georgia described how, following her transition to female, there was an incorrect assumption that her wife was a lesbian and how the toll on her wife became that: If she walks down the street with me, she will be seen as something she is not. She has had to carry all the pressure... It hasn't been fair on her (Interview, Georgia). Similarly, Nettie described an assumption that she was a lesbian because her partner Sandy had transitioned to female. Nettie said:

I think because I go everywhere with Sandy maybe they think I am a lesbian. There is a loss of identity for me; it's a bit strange. Some people look at us strange... The loss of friends was hurtful... We also had friends down the road who didn't want to be associated with us. Not just Sandy; it was me as well. It was hurtful (Interview, Nettie).

The adjustments for Nettie included adapting to changes in her marriage, negotiating the attitudes of her local community and managing her family's response to her partner's transition. For Nettie, managing family relationships was particularly difficult as she described:

Some of my family were outraged. My son-in-law wanted to know when we were going to leave each other. That's the way he thought about it. Rather extreme. I needed to keep people calm so they would think it about it clearly. That responsibility fell on me (Interview, Nettie).

This responsibility to mediate family relationships was also felt by Angela, who recalled her mother's response when her sister Tessa began transition:

I got a call from my mum who was distressed. Tessa was coming out more and she and her wife split. I had to deal with mum's angst all the time; mum thought Tessa would stop cross dressing and was in angst that she hadn't. I was in two worlds. I needed to heal from my family's lack of willingness to deal with it and I wanted to be an advocate for Tessa as well. I told Tessa the impact of it all on me. She had no idea and was very apologetic. I never had anyone

there for me; I felt like I was there for all of them. People don't realise that, when they see us now. We are very close. It was mum and dad's fault for wanting us to appear 'normal' to the rest of the family and the world (Interview, Angela).

Angela's narrative described how the pressures from outside families exacerbated the difficulties experienced within families. Similarly, Sam outlined these pressures when she reflected on her wife's understanding that:

...the problem wasn't within our relationship; obviously she wasn't too pleased because she married a guy and it was a bit of a change to get used to; but she realised it was worth working at. The problem wasn't with us, it was with other people's attitudes and she had to put up with other people saying: why don't you leave? A lot of it was her fear of what other people would say, rather than what they said. She had times when she was angry and pissed off and I had times when I had doubts and wondering why I am like this. However silly it is, it is (Interview, Sam).

Managing these complexities without information and resources presented particular challenges. All the older TGD interviewees described the importance of working at family relationships, and how TGD-inclusive families provided a space where they felt connected and safe in a world that can be hostile towards TGD people. Family relationships were treasured and the fear of consequences for families was reported to be the 'biggest barrier' for older people transitioning. As one survey participant described:

As an aging elder who lost their partner to disease two years ago, my main issue is day-to-day loneliness. It is pretty bad and the recent attacks on the trans community both overseas and locally leave you isolated and feeling pretty poorly. Facing all this alone is very difficult and when other things go wrong, well it doesn't take much to make you fall in a heap (Survey 7).

Given the value placed on family, it is not surprising that older TGD participants welcomed the development of the Kinfolk resources to mediate difficulties and build family relationships. Historically, older TGD people have had limited

access to relationship services, and even recent experiences indicate some of these services are not TGD-inclusive. This was illustrated by Nettie, who described her experience of accessing psychology services in this way:

My wife went to a psychologist who helped her transition at work. That was good for the people at work, but I found the psychologist very black and white. She explained that things were not going to go well for us as a couple. That wasn't helpful. It was like saying: you'll never get through this. At the time we weren't sure where we were going and we needed guidance. I think she needed to be more compassionate and understanding; she could have said: maybe these things can happen and you should be aware of how your family could have support to help you get through this. It was frightening. We needed someone to say that there is hope and that we just needed to take it slowly (Interview, Nettie).

Fortunately, Nettie and her wife found ways to get through the challenges they were experiencing, despite the lack of optimism in the psychology service they were accessing. The stories shared by Nettie and other participants highlighted the ripple effects of transition that TGD-inclusive family relationship services could work through. There is hope.

In response to the ripple effects articulated by interviewees, a Ripplegram process was developed (see forthcoming section) to help older TGD people and their family map out and plan for the ripple effects of changing gender expression. It is hoped that this planning will increase the likelihood that family responses to changes in gender expression can shift from acceptance to respect.

The gap between acceptance and respect.

Given the importance placed on family connection, many older TGD participants described wanting their family to respect their gender identity but instead having to settle for acceptance (or tolerance). In emphasising the gap between acceptance and respect, Sam described how her son missed her being a male role model for him and how one of her daughters: is accepting, but not embracing. ... She feels she has lost a daddy and feels she got someone who is not so worthy of her respect (Interview, Sam). The difficulty of moving beyond acceptance was also noted by Georgia who described:

I had a HUGE battle with my eldest daughter's husband putting me down mightily. He is Catholic. Fortunately, he has grown to accept me because I have helped the family around the house and he has seen my caring and usefulness. There is a grudging acceptance from him; but it is acceptance (Interview, Georgia).

Most of the older TGD interviewees focused on acceptance by family members as a preferred option to rejection, and there was reluctance to discuss what family relationships would be like if gender diversity was respected. Some older TGD people opened their interviews with statements such as "I'm lucky, I haven't had trouble". However, as discussion progressed, most interviewees discussed difficulties with family, including restrictions to gender expression. In discussing this further, it appeared there was difficulty sitting with the gap between acceptance and respect. This was described by Georgia as being: stuck between two worlds (Interview, Georgia) and any depth of focus on the losses within this gap appeared to be challenging.

Where gaps were identified, they were often rationalised by interviewees. This was particularly apparent in the use of personal pronouns, preferred names and titles by family members. For example, Transwomen Georgia and Ninnian reflected on their experiences:

I am grandfather to my son's children and they still know me as grandfather. My eldest son's children live with their mother and she is a humanist and they call me Gram; which is a part way point between male and female, I guess (Interview, Georgia).

One of my nieces is around my age and while she accepts me as Ninnian and she says: I really understand the way you are, but you will always be Len to me. She is not being nasty or inconsiderate about it, so why should I expect her to change? ...Even though I am happy with how I am now, it would be nice if she called me Ninnian. But, you got to give as well as take – and we don't take, we accept. We are asking people to make a quantum leap. We need to give people time (Interview, Ninnian).

Perhaps in order to live with these concessions, older TGD participants tended to focus on what they had, rather than what was missing. When asked, Ninnian said that she would like her niece to use her female pronouns, but Ninnian's focus was not on what was missing, it was on what she had – a relationship with her niece.

While older TGD people find ways to live with the gaps between family acceptance and respect for their gender expression, there is a cost. For example, Chris reflected on the responses of her family, and reflected that:

There's relatively few of them that are accepting and understanding. Of my five siblings and offspring; three sort of tolerate me and two refuse to have anything to do with me. In one case this came about through my transition, so I presume it's to do with my gender presentation. The other one was for something completely different; but I am ignored the same. I'm a very tolerant person and to be effectively rejected by some members of my family is quite demoralising. I suppose it has a serious negative impact on my self-esteem. I think my life would be much richer if all of the family accepted me with all my complex issues and diverse outlook on life (Interview, Chris).

In everyday encounters with family, service providers and the broader community, older TGD people experience misgendering and microaggressions that can erode their self-esteem and mental wellbeing (Barrett, 2017). Additionally, the experiences of older TGD people and their families have been ignored until now; leaving them to face considerable challenges, with little support. Perhaps one of the most pressing challenges older TGD people experience is restrictions to their gender expression by family members.

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Restrictions to gender expression.

A small number of participants reported that they did not experience restrictions to their gender expression in the community. For example, one survey participant noted her community membership included: I am a deaconess at Seventh-day [Adventist] church. I teach children's church and sing out the front. Motorcycle clubs. RSL - I was in the army (Survey 3). Another survey participant noted: I have transitioned totally. Every social transaction is consistent with my gender identity. I play music with a concert band and in the recent past with an orchestra. I have found them both accepting (Survey 7). However, these participants, and most others described some form of restriction by family members.

Restrictions appeared to be imposed by family members who were embarrassed by or ashamed of the older TGD person's gender diversity. One survey participant described how family members would no longer come to the home she shared with her wife and how instead her wife: meets them in a local coffee shop (Survey 2). Another participant recounted reduced access to family events and dress restrictions when she said: I'm not invited to any family/friend gathering in case I cause problems for others. ... My mother asked me not to wear a dress in their house because it would be too embarrassing for them (Survey 4).

The onus of responsibility was placed on some older TGD people to express their gender in ways that did not upset the status quo/gender binary. In her interview, Georgia described how this occurred and the impacts on her when she recounted:

I dress as androgynously as I can at family functions to avoid creating family disharmony. I am focusing on the positive there. I have to. If I don't see this as positive I am stuck between two worlds and the price of failure is huge [interviewee crying]. This goes to the validity of the discussion and the importance of this Kinfolk project and the importance of families. The price for me if he, my eldest daughter's husband, couldn't cope any more, could be that my daughter ends up with broken marriage for my actions. And potentially broken lives. This is the cost of my decisions on my loved ones. Every action has an equal and opposite reaction (Interview, Georgia).

In discussion with Georgia and other older TGD interviewees, few options other than compromising gender expression seemed possible. As, Clara recounted:

Five years ago, my mum said straight out to me: I do not want to meet Clara. I sort of accepted that at her age, in her mid 90s, and with what she had been through, that I needed to acknowledge where she was coming from. When I went to visit my mother, I struggled; but I did it for mum. I had to wear boy's clothes and take pain killers to manage the stress headaches (Interview, Clara).

In her reflections on the impact of these restrictions, Clara said that: I would have liked mum to have met me – even just once – to have had that acknowledgement of my real self. The real me (Interview, Clara). Having gender diversity accepted or respected by family members validates gender identity, as Chris described:

For TGD Elders who do not have family support it can be bloody difficult and a terrible dilemma. We need a lot of support for TGD Elders who are not accepted by their family; at the moment there's not a lot of support. TGD Elders need to know they are valid and they also need to embed in their thinking that what other people's opinions are might not be something they can control; they need to get on with their life. That goes against the grain of what we have been taught. We were taught to be friendly with everyone and that we will get friendly back; it doesn't always work like that (Interview, Chris).

The pressure from families experienced by some older TGD people resulted in them questioning the validity of changes to their gender expression. For example, Sam described how her father was not supportive 'in any way' and how: the shame and secrecy about this part of me has been difficult. There are times where I wanted to disown myself and get rid of my girl clothes (Interview, Sam). The feelings of shame were exacerbated by awareness of the potential difficulties for families as described by Sam:

I felt I was letting down my family by transitioning. That hurt. It has been a distraction in my career as well. I have been largely jobless since I transitioned, it has distracted people who wanted to employ me. That was not so good. It has had a huge impact on my family. I'm close to retirement and superannuation isn't what it should be. I'm not earning and that makes it stressful and annoying and depressing actually (Interview, Sam).

In the context of Transphobia, it was difficult for some older TGD people to validate and affirm their own gender identity. Oppression was pervasive and some older TGD people struggled to resist the message that they were of less worth because of their gender diversity. The complexities here were apparent in Ninnian's reflections:

If you are transgender that's your business, don't put it out there to the world because people will only criticise you. When the truth does come out, don't hide it. As much as I support the LGBTI movement I don't support the Pride parades because it puts us out there too much. We are creating a possible negative. It allows us to be classified as a little crazy. If you aren't identifiable as Trans you can earn respect and people can like you (Interview, Ninnian).

The weight of history is still apparent in the expectations of some older TGD people, that they should not be identifiably TGD if they want respect. This may be an impossible task for older TGD people whose late-life transition may mean they will always be read by others as gender diverse. This exposes older TGD people to negative judgement by others and threats to their personal safety and the safety of their families. But, rather than calling for older TGD people to restrict their gender expression to avoid upsetting others, there is a need to understand the experiences and needs of older TGD people and to provide support for the expression of gender diversity. This support needs to include working with the families of older TGD people and could also include working with older TGD people to foster Pride and resilience.

In the context of Transphobia, it was difficult for some older TGD people to validate and affirm their own gender identity.

The characteristics of supportive families.

In order to capture what works in families, participants were asked to describe the positive responses of their family members. One participant described her family as 'loving, supportive' and family responses to her transition as 'total acceptance' (Survey 6). For others like Georgia, the focus was re-adjusting expectations, or compromise, as she described:

What has worked well is that we are still considered family. However, if there was an in-depth conversation about my living a pure, free-flowing female lifestyle – I don't have that; but I still do have family relationships, something that possibly many of my peers may have lost (Interview, Georgia).

When asked 'what worked,' participants described the importance of peer support, giving families time to adjust to changes, having conversations, and being loved beyond gender.

Peer support.

In absence of support services, some older TGD people and their families described taking family members to meet other TGD people to destigmatise gender diversity. As Nettie recalled:

For a while we struggled to find someone to help explain it more. Then someone told us there was going to be a ball that had a lot of Transgender people going to it and so we went. My wife Sandy asked me if I would go so that I would see that Trans people are gentle and kind and normal. There were only three family members there. It was helpful for me to go. It was an eye opener that they all dressed up. In my mind there were all 'out there' people. They were University Professors and engineers and high achiever type people – it said to me that everyone was included in this group. They weren't doing this for a Saturday night entertainment. They were serious about this. It was inspirational, just that people could go on with their lives as well as trying to cope with this Transgender thing they were going through. For some this was their only outing for the year. I thought they were very brave; that they had to keep their gender under wraps for the rest of the year. We kept in contact and went to the ball the following year. It helped me to understand. It was very helpful (Interview, Nettie).

Nettie's experience of meeting other TGD people who were 'high achiever type people' helped her to value gender diversity and recognise how innate it is. Similarly, Angela described how contact with TGD people helped her to adjust to her sister's transition. She recounted an experience in her workplace where:

The coordinator of a local support group for cross dressers came into my work to photocopy their member's magazine. I found one underneath the photocopier and got invited to their Christmas party, where I talked to lots of people and got given a book to read. The coordinator told me to stop feeling sorry for myself and go on with supporting Tessa (Interview, Angela).

The guidance offered by other TGD people was a turning point for Angela to support her sister at a time when there was very little positive information related to gender diversity. Peer encounters appeared to help normalise gender diversity and help family members adjust.

Taking time & talking.

The importance of giving family members time to adjust to changes in gender expression was also reported by many interviewees. This was discussed in the context of older TGD people having waited most of their adult lives to understand and express their gender diversity. Because they had waited for so long, some older TGD people wanted to fast-track their transition at a pace that did not work for their families. Families needed more time to adjust, as Sam articulated:

A lot of TGD people who want change, want it straight away. They want to do it all at once. I found it helped immeasurably to wait two years. My wife agrees that slowing it down was helpful – and even though, because you have waited all your life – two years can seem like a long time, it is worth waiting (Interview, Sam).

Similarly, Nettie described how her wife wanted to transition quickly but needed to give her family time to adjust, as Nettie told her wife: I keep saying... take it easy with family and be patient. They really want you to be there for them (Interview, Nettie).

The importance of giving families time to adjust was also highlighted by one survey participant who noted her family were 'initially shocked', but that:

They are trying to adapt but have visions of me in the opposite gender, which is only natural as to them for most of my life, I was. It makes Christmas [a] gender nightmare for me. They are trying though. ... They still accepted me and are trying to adapt. The older the family member the harder it is for them (Survey 7).

Slowing things down for families presented difficulties for some older TGD people, as Georgia described: my wife couldn't cope when I first told her about my gender identity. The psychiatrist told me not to tell her for a while, but I couldn't cope with the duplicity. She has gradually come around (Interview, Georgia). Examples of giving families time included Clara describing two years of phone calls to her sister who was travelling overseas, to talk about her transition and feeling significant support when her sister returned to Australia. In other examples, Ninnian and Sam described being patient and giving family time to adjust:

In the process of making time to adjust to change, it was deemed particularly important to have conversations about what was happening.

In relation to what worked; the first thing that springs to mind is waiting two years from conversation about transitioning to transition. We had an agreement that I would dress female five days a week and male two days and promised I would not make any decisions about transition for two years. I went to see a psychiatrist who said I wasn't crazy. He said hormones were my best form of therapy. The two years of waiting gave my wife time to get her head around the strange phenomenon of her husband wanting to be a woman. It took two years to get her head around it (Interview, Sam).

... with family – I had to let them know me and respect me for who I am. If they say something nasty, I pull them up a little when necessary, but I have to give them time to adjust. Some people are slower than others to adjust. If you throw it into people's faces there will be a knee jerk reaction. I sent my nephew an email that said: You need to get prepared, sit down, your uncle is no longer an uncle, she's your aunty. I didn't throw a photo at him straight away; I let him get used to the idea and then asked if he would like a photo. He said yes. That was better than giving him a photo and saying: like it or lump it. It's about patience on my side and me being patient with the other side (Interview, Ninnian).

In the process of making time to adjust to change, it was deemed particularly important to have conversations about what was happening. Angela described the impact for her of family's secrecy around her sister's transition and the difficulties this created for her:

The trauma for me was around the secrecy. I had grief around that. I wanted to meet another sibling of a Trans person, so I would have someone to share this with. I numbed my mind with drugs and alcohol. Mum knew what was happening but couldn't deal with it. Dad couldn't deal with it either, at one of the sessions with the psychiatrist, dad walked off. I was mum's confidante to help her through it. There were secrets and we couldn't tell anyone or talk about it and it twisted me inside. That's what secrets do (Interview, Angela).

Years later Angela described how she disclosed to a partner that her sister had transitioned and the impact this had on her was: I felt I couldn't tell anyone about Tessa. No one told me I couldn't, I just knew. Later, when I told my partner about Tessa I felt I had betrayed my family (Angela, Sister Interview).

The time taken to adjust was, in part, necessary because of the long-established relationships that were changing. Some interviewees had been in relationships with the same partner for over 50 years and gender roles and expectations in these relationships were well established. The importance of mapping out these roles and expectations led to the development of a Gender Genogram process (see forthcoming section) to understand how gender works in families and how adjustments can be made.

Loving beyond gender.

A number of interviewees described the joy of responses from family members whose love transcended gender. Some interviewees recounted how family members affirmed their gender diversity, resulting in the forging of stronger relationships between them. For example, Clara described her sisters support: She was happy because she could see I was happy; and how her sister sent her a birthday card that read: happy birthday; I'm glad I've got a sister (Interview, Clara). The capacity of Clara's sister to manifest 'love beyond gender' was a great source of joy for Clara and their relationship strengthened as a consequence.

Gestures that demonstrated respect for gender diversity were highly valued. One survey participant described how family support involved being: invited to my sister's wedding. Regular phone calls. Always hug when greeting (Survey 3). Another survey participant described: my wife is my fashion adviser, buys most of my clothes, allows me to live full time, trans., uses my cosmetics and borrows my clothes (Survey 2). Ninnian elaborated on the importance of such gender-affirming gestures when she described:

I was married for a while, to a woman called Daisy. We separated, and she is still my best friend. When I told Daisy that I was female she said: tell me something I don't know. She is so supportive. She buys me clothes and she gets my sizes right. She never, ever goes back to anything related to my old ID. She doesn't use male pronouns when she refers to me. None of this 'he' business. People can call me anything as long as they smile. Transition is a lot for families, and anyone who has known you, to handle. I know that. But Daisy has acknowledged that I am Ninnian and that I am a woman (Interview, Ninnian).

Ninnian described: I'm still the same person, I'm just in a different package (Interview, Ninnian) and recognition of the person beyond their gender seemed to be a critical element of supportive families.

Older TGD people wanted supportive families but were unsure what they could do to help make this happen. Sam reported that there was a general understanding that people change in relationships and it would be very helpful to include an understanding that gender might be one of the things that changes:

When you get married you don't write a contract to say: thou shalt never change. What do you do when you marry someone, and they become obese? You don't leave them...but you certainly do if they are Trans. There is a whole driving force behind TGD people not coming out – that they think they can't because of the children. How is it weaker to come out? (Interview, Sam).

Working through changes and challenges in families was considered important. Angela reflected on the work she and her sister did following her sister's transition and how this work was: the seed for the strong relationship we have now (Interview, Angela). Information, resources and TGD inclusive services are necessary to adequately support older TGD people and their families adjust to these changes and potentially strengthen the family bonds that are so critical for older people.

I'm still the same person, I'm just in a different package.

Reflections - valuing gender diversity.

The narratives from older TGD people and their family members highlight the barriers that TGD people have endured and this speaks volumes about the importance of gender diversity in their lives. Shining through the stories of rejection, oppression, doubt, depression, threats, abuse and isolation is the indisputable clarity of how much gender diversity and family both matter. The older TGD people we spoke with want to express their authentic selves, and want to bring their families along with them. Transition was described as a point of liberation, of increased self-confidence and an enormous relief. The support of family was described as critical, and even small gestures were cherished.

That any older TGD people and their families have been able to negotiate changes to gender expression in long term, intimate relationships, with the support of their adult children and grandchildren - without formal supports, is a significant achievement. ***There is now a pressing need, to provide older TGD people and their families with information and support services, so they are not navigating this complexity on their own and so that they have the best possible chance of success.***

My message to older TGD people is:

So glad you made it! ♥

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Stories from older TGD people and family members.

The first five narratives in this section were shared by older TGD people and the remaining two

narratives were shared by family members.

Clara: My sister my rock

The day after my 58th birthday I went out in public as a female for the first time. My little sister, who was two years younger than me, was overseas and we talked a lot about my transition. When she came home I said her: come and meet some of my Trans friends. We went to a pub and had a great night talking and mingling. From the outset she has been supportive of me being me. Its great having a sibling who is supportive – she is an ally, she has helped me to survive. My sister - my rock. She has always been there for me. My 65th birthday card from her read: happy birthday; I'm glad I've got a sister. She was happy because she could see I was happy. Once when we were out together she noticed a man staring at me and she said to him: she's my sister! And he stopped starrng. She tried to talk to mum about me - but mum couldn't accept my gender identity.

Mum only ever wanted to have interaction with her son – she could not accept my gender identity. I suppose a lot of it went back to her religion and the lack of knowledge about gender diversity in that era. In my teens she talked to the priest about my cross-dressing and he told her 'it's a sin.' Mum also had to sit with me for three sessions with a psychiatrist, who said he was going to cure me. I was just a teenager – I didn't speak in any of the three sessions with the psychiatrist at all and so he couldn't 'diagnose' me.

Five years ago, my mum said straight out to me: I do not want to meet Clara. I sort of accepted that at her age (in her mid 90s), and with what she had been through, that I needed to acknowledge where she was coming from. When I went to visit my mother, I struggled – but I did it for mum. I had to wear boys' clothes and take pain killers to manage

the stress headaches. I don't know that she ever noticed that I wore the same clothes every time I visited (the only boy's clothes I owned).

At mum's funeral, I went as the son – because it was about mum, not Clara. My sister and daughter both acknowledged to me that there were two funerals that day. Hers and his. The first was mums. The second was me – never having to do boys clothes ever again. That was the last thing I ever did as mum's son.

My sister says mum and Clara would have been good for each other – we talked about what I would wear if mum had have agreed to see me ... something quiet, not my usual loud attire. I would have liked mum to have met me – even just once – to have had that acknowledgement of my real self. The real me.

I think the only way through this is to have mediation. My sister could have mediated but mum wasn't open to that. I know that it works to have a mediator – I've done that for other TGD people and it works. I did mediation from the perspective of a person with lived experience – but we also need professional mediators.

I also think the attitudes of families can change if they meet TGD people and realise we are just being ourselves. Talking to people with lived experiences can help to erode the barriers. I can tell people – hey it's not that scary ... we are people first.

Chris: Validation is important

I think the only response that worked in a positive way from my family, which is two siblings and three offspring, is acceptance that I'm more complex than they would have believed possible – having tried to fit me into a rigid binary gender identity during the first 50-60 years of my life. It's the acceptance that I am still me and a little bit different to 95% of the population. All the older members of my family passed away before I transitioned.

I think my family accepted that I am more complex – because they have a wide world view of life. It's important that they accept I am more complex. We are designed to live in a community and family is one aspect of community. If I didn't have family that accepted me, it would be a very lonely place.

There's relatively few of them that are accepting and understanding. Of my five siblings and offspring – three sort-of tolerate me and two refuse to have anything to do with me. In one case this came about through my transition, so I presume it's to do with my gender presentation. The other one was for something completely different – but I am ignored the same. I'm a very tolerant person and to be effectively rejected by some members of my family is quite demoralising. I suppose it has a serious negative impact on my self-esteem. I think my life would be much richer if all of the family accepted me with all my complex issues and diverse outlook on life.

I think there is a need to promote respect for diversity in the community as a whole – and particularly in the aged care area where older people tend to have a limited number of people they are in contact with. There needs to be more extensive training for all service providers about diversity.

In the family context, formal training is not a reasonable or viable method of improving family acceptance. There needs to be more widely distributed information about the validity of TGD people, our identity and self-determination. There also needs to be the availability of more technical training for family members - including definitions and a description of the different ways to express gender and what's involved in transitioning. But I think the technical gender description type training is of less significance than exposure to a wide variety of different gender expressions. It's about acceptance of difference.

For TGD Elders who do not have family support it can be bloody difficult and a terrible dilemma. We need a lot of support for TGD Elders who are not accepted by their family – at the moment there's not a lot of support. TGD Elders need to know they are valid – and they also need to embed in their thinking that what other people's opinions are might not be something they can control – they need to get on with their life. That goes against the grain of what we have been taught. We were taught to be friendly with everyone and that we will get friendly back – it doesn't always work like that.

*I think there is a need
to promote respect
for diversity in the
community as a whole*

Georgia: There is no such thing as a free lunch

I'm still alive. I came out about 10 years ago. I've got partial acceptance from my four children. I've got less acceptance from their married partners – there has been additional difficulties because of their social, religious and business affiliations. What has worked well is that we are still considered family. However, if there was an in-depth conversation about my living a pure, free-flowing female lifestyle – I don't have that; but I still do have family relationships, something that possibly many of my peers may have lost.

I am grandfather to my youngest son's children and they still know me as grandfather. My eldest son's children live with their mother and she is a humanist and they call me Gram – which is a part way point between male and female, I guess.

My eldest granddaughter's acceptance was make or break for me, as I had just started my transition. I needed to receive acceptance from her; I didn't want to lose her love and respect, because I believed that I would have lost her younger sisters as well then. Her mother is a very supportive alternative, dreamy sort of person – her entire philosophy is around caring acceptance. With her, I have freedom to adopt the dress standards that I feel comfortable with. I can (and need to) wear a wig. I had a HUGE battle with my eldest daughter's husband putting me down mightily. He is a Catholic. Fortunately, he has grown to accept me because I have helped the family around the house and he has seen my usefulness. There is a grudging acceptance from him – but it is acceptance. I dress as androgynously as I can at family functions to avoid creating family disharmony. I am focusing on the positive there. I have to. If I don't see this as positive I am stuck between two worlds and the price of failure is huge (crying). This goes to the validity of the discussion and the importance of this Kinfolk project and the importance of families. The price for me if he (my eldest daughter's husband) couldn't cope any more, could be that my daughter ends up with broken marriage for my actions. And potentially broken lives. This is the cost of my decisions on my loved ones. Every action has an equal and opposite reaction.

Both of my daughters buy me feminine clothes. I offered them professional counselling, but they couldn't talk about it. I am crying now, but this is worthwhile, and I am safe. There is no 'one size fits all' in this discussion. The potential knock-on effect of this not being managed, well is too great.

My wife couldn't cope when I first told her about my gender identity. The psychiatrist told me not to tell her for a while, but I couldn't cope with the duplicity. She has gradually come around. We don't have sexual relations because she is heterosexual. If she walks down the street with me she will be seen as something she is not. She has had to carry all the pressure. We had to leave our Church because two parishioners said they would leave if I didn't. It hasn't been fair on her, but her attitude is that our marriage vows said we would take care in sickness and in health.

This project is immensely important, it opens up the possibilities of family support. We all have dreams for family and we have built our lives on those dreams and transition smashes those dreams. When I first came out I was advised that your family either fully accept your new life, or you cut them off. What I would like people to understand is that there is a midpoint pathway – there needs to be flexibility on both sides. Transition is not a T-intersection – left or right; that families either accept you or you leave. There are many more options – IF we get the support we need. We need to make it easier for families to stay together. This is not a free lunch, this changing gender.

Ninnian: It's about give and take

When I was growing up it wasn't safe to be different, suppression was the only way to be safe. I didn't transition until I was 69. I'm still the same person, I'm just in a different package. I recently found out that I was born a hermaphrodite. I got told by the dental hospital that there was a footnote in my medical records, written by the doctor, that said I was born a hermaphrodite. It said I had an undeveloped vagina and so they stitched it up. I never knew that. Never.

I was married for a while, to a woman called Daisy. We separated, and she is still my best friend. When I told Daisy that I was female she said: tell me something I don't know. She is so supportive. She buys me clothes and she's got my sizes right. She never, ever goes back to anything related to my old ID. She doesn't use male pronouns when she refers to me. None of this 'he' business. People can call me anything as long as they smile. Transition is a lot for families (and anyone who has known you) to handle. I know that. But Daisy has acknowledged that I am Ninnian and that I am a woman. She has always been a nice person, she's one of those people that if she knows you and you need help, she is the first to offer

I am the last of my family. I had three sisters. They didn't know about my transition. I have nieces and nephews. We have all been out together as Ninnian and the husband of one of my nieces said: I don't have a problem with you, when you are born you don't get to pick who you are, it's just declared.

One of my nieces is around my age and while she accepts me as Ninnian and she says: I really understand the way you are but you will always be Len to me. She is not being nasty or inconsiderate about it, so why should I expect her to change? We practically grew up in adjoining cots, we've been together most of our lives. A lot of Transgender

people get upset because their family doesn't recognise them... that's being greedy. It takes time. We are family and those bonds will never be shattered. Even though I am happy with how I am now it would be nice if she called me Ninnian. But, you've got to give as well as take – and we don't take, we accept. We are asking people to make a quantum leap. We need to give people time. I'm not keen on pronouns – they are a sticking point. If someone smiles when they speak to me, I will forgive them for using the incorrect pronoun.

If you are transgender that's your business, don't put it out there to the world because people will only criticise you. When the truth does come out, don't hide it. As much as I support the LGBTI movement I don't support the Pride parades because it puts us out there too much. We are creating a possible negative. It allows us to be classified as a little crazy. If you aren't identifiable as Trans you can earn respect and people can like you. It's similar with family – I had to let them know me and respect me for who I am. If they say something nasty, I pull them up a little when necessary, but I have to give them time to adjust. Some people are slower than others to adjust. If you throw it into people's faces there will be a knee jerk reaction. I sent my nephew an email that said: You need to get prepared, sit down, your uncle is no longer an uncle, she's your aunty. I didn't throw a photo at him straight away – I let him get used to the idea and then asked if he would like a photo. He said yes. That was better than giving him a photo and saying: like it or lump it. It's about patience on my side and me being patient with the other side

This project is immensely important, it opens up the possibilities of family support.

Sam – a world intact

I'm married with three kids and my wife and I have been together for over 30 years. I have had a female side to me all my life. My wife knew I liked to cross-dress since before we were married. She was a bit distressed by it in the end, because she thought it was a reflection on her in some way, that there was a problem in our relationship. My female identity became more and more important to me over the years until I couldn't fight it anymore.

In relation to what worked – the first thing that springs to mind is my waiting two years between the first conversation I had with my wife about my need to actually be female, and when I transitioned. We had an agreement that I would dress female five days a week and male two days, and promised I would not make any decisions about transitioning for two years. I went to see a psychiatrist, and they assured me I wasn't crazy. They said that hormones were the best therapy for people in my situation. The two years of waiting gave my wife time to get her head around the strange phenomenon of her husband wanting to be a woman. She realised that the problem wasn't within our relationship – obviously she wasn't too pleased about me transitioning, because she had married a guy, and it was a bit of a change to get used to; but she realised it was worth working at. The problem wasn't with us, it was with other people's attitudes. She had to put up with other people saying: 'why don't you leave him?' A lot of her problem was her fear of what other people would say, rather than what they actually said, or what she felt herself. At times she was angry and pissed off, and I had times when I had doubts and wondered why I was like this. But however silly it seems, I am what I am.

When you get married you don't write a contract to say, 'thou shalt never change.' What do you do when you marry someone, and they become obese, for instance? You don't leave them ... but you certainly do if they are Trans. That is a driving force behind TGD people staying hidden – they think they can't transition because they will lose access to their children, or will hurt them by transitioning.

I did have an initial period where I dressed like some ultra-female from 50 years ago, all flouncy dress, high heels and dreadful wig – it's an irresistible stereotype for Trans people. But my goal was to be comfortable in my own skin, with

jeans and T-shirts. But you can't get away from this new puberty feeling at transition. I wore bling, thick makeup and false boobs, but that stage didn't last too long.

And I had to get through first time things. They are some of the worst experiences for people changing gender. I had to tell my children. I had to go to the tyre shop where they laughed at me... my neighbour, a young lad working there, told them that I was a good person, so they should stop laughing. Another positive thing was me being more authentically myself.

When I first came out, my eldest daughter was 27 and she struggled to be 100% positive with my transition. Today she is accepting, but not embracing. She feels she has lost a daddy and feels that I am someone who is not so worthy of her respect. My son had both a positive and a negative reaction. He felt my coming out gave him permission to be whoever the hell he wanted to be. But he also missed me being the male role model. My other daughter was 100% supportive in her response to me. She spent a number of years discovering herself before she went to Uni. She is really interested in people and helping people and so she has insight by way of her natural personality and through her Uni course. She is an empathic person. We went through her degree together, I helped her with all her assignments and that made us closer. Quality time together is important. I think you really need to devote chunks of life to your children, but you can't do that with people you meet in the broader community. All you can do is offer them small slivers of yourself.

I felt I was letting down my family by transitioning. That hurt. It has been a distraction in my career as well. I have been largely jobless since I transitioned. Being Transgender may have distracted people who might otherwise wanted to employ me. That was not so good. It has had a huge impact on my family. I'm close to retirement and superannuation isn't what it should be. I'm not earning and that makes it stressful and annoying and depressing actually.

I used to play Badminton and one of my male friends told me that the women who played in the group wanted me to use the male bathroom. I couldn't get him to understand that transitioning meant I wouldn't be able to use the male

bathroom. I changed Badminton clubs.

Soon after I transitioned, I was walking around late at night and a car went past and someone yelled out: 'you're a fucking disgrace'. It has contributed to a bit of anxiety around young drunk blokes. I'm a bit more careful than I used to be. There was also some anxiety for my wife – so now we just don't go places where we put our safety or health at risk. We love travelling but we have to be careful where we go because of the laws in some countries related to trans people.

The shame and secrecy about the girl part of me has been difficult. There are times where I wanted to disown myself and get rid of my girl clothes. My father wasn't supportive of my transition in any way.

I think primary carers need to have suitable knowledge of Transgender things... not just LGBTI issues broadly. We Transgender people have particular needs and they need to be understood. We need suitably trained medical specialists including psychiatrists, psychotherapists, endocrinologists etc. There is almost no knowledge of how to care for TGD people. If you are in a residential aged care home, for instance, there is also not much you can do about the conservative, transphobic attitudes of other residents.

A lot of TGD people don't understand their legal rights and there is not a lot of support to fill out forms – to help protect them against a family that doesn't support their gender identity. Who is helping TGD people fill these forms in?

We need more role models in the media. We need more TGD people who are out and proud to address the stigma and make it more acceptable to be TGD. Why should we be looked down upon by people who are part of the 'in group'? We still have a long way to go to change the role models in the media away from TGD people being just a joke or a sin ... we need some normality.

There is bullying at school, from other students and teachers. I cannot fathom how a teacher could be transphobic. It is unacceptable, and that needs a lot of effort on its own. The other parents need to be educated as well. And children should be allowed to know if their parents are transgender. They are resilient.

Workplaces need policies that support and embrace TGD people, and the policies need to be enforced. We need to make sure they are enforced. We need the voice of TGD people in government and policy and workplaces.

A lot of TGD people who want change, want it straight away. They want to do it all at once. I found it helped immeasurably to wait two years. My wife agrees that slowing it down was helpful - and even though, because you have waited all your life – two years can seem like a long time, it is worth waiting.

The measures of success are not just transitioning, it's also about keeping your world intact. Your supports matter. I don't know how people cope who lose their partners and children, their job and their house.

*I felt I was letting
down my family by
transitioning.*

Angela: what secrets do

In our teens my sister Tessa was cross-dressing. My aunty worked at Berlei and she gave me all these amazing colourful bras, corset and stockings. I had a canary yellow corset. Tessa was taking my clothes. I would get my clothes back and because she was bigger than me they were stretched. I knew it, but there was some block in my brain. I knew I couldn't talk about it. In those days you couldn't talk about it. I could feel her pain and I identified with her as not being normal. So when she came out I supported her.

Tessa got taken to a psychiatrist by mum and dad. I was taken to my friends to play and they told me 'we are going shopping'. But when they came back and they had no shopping and so I knew that she was being taken somewhere.

The trauma for me was around the secrecy. I had grief around that. I wanted to meet another sibling of a Trans person, so I would have someone to share this with. I numbed my mind with drugs and alcohol. Mum knew what was happening but couldn't deal with it. Dad couldn't deal with it either, at one of the sessions with the psychiatrist, dad walked off. I was mum's confidante to help her through it. There were secrets and we couldn't tell anyone or talk about it and it twisted me inside. That's what secrets do.

I felt I couldn't tell anyone about Tessa. No one told me I couldn't, I just knew. Later, when I told my partner about Tessa I felt I had betrayed my family.

The grief I felt was that I knew she was different and I knew that I was as well. I knew I was bisexual and had feelings for women but didn't act on that for a long while. When I came out I felt like I was off the grid as well, I was also different. This is the seed for the strong relationship we have now.

The coordinator of a local support group from cross-dressers came into my work to photocopy their member's magazine. I found one underneath the photocopier and got invited to their Christmas party, where I talked to lots of people and got given a book to read. The coordinator told me to stop feeling sorry for myself and go on with supporting Tessa.

I rang Tessa up and said, come over and let's talk. She came over and got to the door and said: I think I know what this is about, can I go and dress? And I said yes. I went into the lounge room to wait and when she came out she didn't want to do any of the talking I wanted to do, she just wanted to be dressed.

I used to worry that she would take her life. She says I lifted the lid on the secrecy. I triggered something by acknowledging her. I had never previously acknowledged her because I didn't have any structures and supports, and I was a mess anyway.

I was overseas and I got a call from my mum who was distressed. Tessa was coming out more and she and her wife split. I had to deal with mum's angst all the time – mum thought Tessa would stop and was in angst that she hadn't. I was in two worlds. I needed to heal from my family's lack of willingness to deal with it and I wanted to be an advocate for Tessa as well. I told Tessa the impact of it all on me. She had no idea and was very apologetic. I never had anyone there for me – I felt like I was there for all of them. People don't realise that when they see us now. We are very close. It was mum and dad's fault for wanting us to appear 'normal' to the rest of the family and the world.

*We also need to get
aged care services
on board with
the Rainbow Tick
accreditation.*

I have always wanted Tessa to be Tessa. I was overseas when she turned 60. I rang her on her birthday and she had been out for two years. I have wanted her to do this for 40 years. I told her that I wanted to meet her friends. I was so happy that she was out. We went out to night clubs together.

We need to look at an end-of-life planning so that families respect gender identity if the Elder is not able to express their wishes. We also need to get aged care services on board with the Rainbow Tick accreditation. We could do end-of-life workshops for TGD Elders and family and have an advocate in every family. We also need LGBTI-specific aged care homes and to educate funeral directors to get them on board as well.

We need to offer mindfulness meditation strategies for TGD Elders to get rid of some of their old stuff and be true to themselves and to let go of the fantasy of family. Some families can't be repaired because they are just so stuck. To some families, the TGD person may have died. Families need to understand there is a grieving process and they need to be supported to grieve. There can be a jostling in families – when one person changes, the whole family system changes. Sometimes the family hurts all come up as well. Families may need a trained mediator – someone who is trained to work with family systems. Even a pamphlet to describe in bullet points that: this might be how it feels, that this is a grief process. If we continue not to offer this support then families might be all at sea and feeling the feelings but stuck in anger and unable to get to acceptance. It may also be useful to create new family rituals – some acknowledgement of the hurt and the change.

*We need to offer
mindfulness
meditation
strategies for TGD
Elders to get rid of
some of their old
stuff and be true to
themselves*

Nettie: take it easy and be patient

We have been married for almost 50 years. I think having a sense of humour about it all worked well for us. When Sandy told me, I'd just come back from interstate and we had some significant family issues. She just been for a walk and came back and said this is who I am, I'm Transgender. I had no idea what that meant and I just wasn't in a state to deal with it. So I said: you'll just have to wait, I don't have time to deal with this now, I'll have to get back to you.

I know she was upset, but we had to understand each other on our own level. Sandy had been in touch with a Transgender organisation and they had advised her to wait before telling me. But Sandy being Sandy she couldn't wait. I didn't know what Transgender was, and you couldn't blind me with science, I needed to come to my own understanding.

Some of my family were outraged. My son-in-law wanted to know when we were going to leave each other. That's the way he thought about it. Rather extreme. I needed to keep people calm so they would think it about it clearly. That responsibility fell on me.

For a while we struggled to find someone to help explain it more. Then someone told us there was going to be a ball that had a lot of Transgender people going to it and so we went. Sandy asked me if I would go so that I would see that Trans people are gentle and kind and normal. There were only three family members there. It was helpful for me to go. It was an eye opener that they all dressed up. In my mind there were all out there people. They were University Professors and engineers and high achiever type people – it said to me that everyone was included in this group. They weren't doing this for a Saturday night entertainment. They were serious about this. It was inspirational, just that people could go on with their lives as well as trying to cope with this Transgender thing they were going through. For some this was their only outing for the year. I thought they were very brave; that they had to keep their gender under wraps for the rest of the year. We kept in contact and went to the ball the following year. It helped me to understand. It was very helpful.

Some people are rigid about pronouns. People who transition can get really upset if you use the wrong pronouns. That won't be helpful to their journey. I refer to Sandy as she. But if she is arguing and I get flustered I use all the pronouns, I forget.

The loss of friends was hurtful. We were with a Church and some of the members were not very understanding. They believed in some text from the bible that I can't remember. They told us that if we stayed in the Church that they would lose their older parishioners. We were moving towns and decided not to continue going. It was hurtful, but then again we were moving anyway. Our new church is a wonderful group of friends that support us a lot.

We also had friends down the road who didn't want to be associated with us. Not just Sandy – it was me as well. It was hurtful but I could understand that this was what they were told in church more or less.

I think because I go everywhere with Sandy maybe they think I am a lesbian. There is a loss of identity for me – it's a bit strange. Some people look at us strange; but I don't know what they are thinking. We are in a small community, but no one seems to take much notice.

Sandy's transition had different effects on our children. One of our daughters feels like she has lost her father but she still buys Sandy clothing and comes to visit. Sandy has to put on a cap over her wig when they catch up because that helps our daughter to feel that Sandy is still her father. Our other daughter works at University and they have a lot of Transgender people going there and so she doesn't take much notice. Our son thought something was going on ... he took Sandy out to the garage and was going to punch her because he thought she had been having an affair. Sandy told him and the lights went on. He struggles with it. He is in a new marriage and his new wife has a gay child and she tells him to calm down and she helps him to adjust to life with Sandy.

It is a big change for us after so many years married. We lived on a farm and Sandy was milking cows and riding horses. But now we are in city. She still likes to chainsaw things and that male side of her is still prevalent. If there is a plumbing issue she will still get out and dig up the yard. That

male side is still there. She got rid of all her male clothes. I am used to all that now. I couldn't see her dressing up as a boy now. When she first went on hormones it was an up and down ride until they got that sorted. I wouldn't wish that on anyone in a hurry. She was depressed and then elated and wanting to dress up.

Sandy went to a psychologist who helped her transition at work. That was good for the people at work, but I found the psychologist very black and white. She explained that things were not going to go well for us as a couple. That wasn't helpful. It was like saying: you'll never get through this. At the time we weren't sure where we were going and we needed guidance. I think she needed to be more compassionate and understanding – she could have said: maybe these things can happen and you should be aware of how your family could have support to help you get through this. It was a frightening. We needed someone to say that there is hope and that we just needed to take it slowly.

Having friends outside our family circle was important. Having transitional friends was important – especially for Sandy. They were people who were willing to talk to her, who were transitioning themselves. We tried to get our family to have some sort of counselling help, but they weren't really willing to do it. They didn't want Sandy to change – it seemed scary to them. Counselling would have let them ask more questions. But some of the family don't believe counselling is helpful anyway. I don't know what you do in those cases.

Have you ever watched that program on the ABC?: You can't ask that. They did one on Transgender people and even though it was a light-hearted show, it gave people the opportunity to ask questions in a way that is not detrimental to the Transgender person. The Transgender people were very open in their answers and educated people in a way that is not in your face and not disruptive to your mind.

I keep saying to Sandy, take it easy with family and be patient. They really want you to be there for them.

I keep saying to Sandy, take it easy with family and be patient. They really want you to be there for them.



Learning from service providers.


The project team worked with a range of service providers to develop the Kinfolk resources. Four workshops were facilitated, one with family relationships services and three with aged care service providers. The workshops provided the opportunity to draw on the expertise of service providers and engage them in learning more about the experiences and needs of older TGD people and their families.



*Celebrate the person
that you were.*



*it is a growth
process to
become who you are.*



*I didn't think of it
as family violence
I just thought of it
as difficulty*

Working with family relationship services.

A workshop was facilitated with seven family relationship services, to shape resources for older TGD people and their families.

The workshop was co-facilitated by older TGD team members and began by presenting an overview of the themes emerging from the Kinfolk research. Participants were given a series of blank 'Lego' style building blocks (seen opposite) and were invited to utilise these to document key points and messages of hope as the Kinfolk research was presented. The focus on hope was considered important given the content was expected to be confronting for older TGD team members.

At the end of the presentation, workshop participants were asked to reflect on the building blocks produced and what was missing; this information was incorporated into the resources developed. Service providers participating in the workshops were asked what they could do to promote TGD inclusivity in their service and were also asked to review a draft Gender Genogram (see next section).

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Working with aged care service providers.

Three workshops were facilitated with a diverse range of aged care service providers. These included elder abuse services, faith-based providers, a GP, rural services, hospital services, aged care assessment, and home care. The first workshop involved presenting draft principles for promoting older TGD people's control over gender expression and inviting workshop participants to respond. A film was produced at the first workshop, showing workshop participants reading out the principles and articulating their commitment to TGD inclusive services. The second workshop focused on reviewing the film and working through a draft educational resource that was developed.

The third workshop was facilitated at the Val's LGBTI Ageing and Aged Care Conference hosted in Melbourne. Thirty-two people participated in this workshop, which involved showing the film, reading case studies and taking participants through a paper-based resource and power point presentation developed for facilitators. Eighteen participants completed an evaluation at the end of this workshop and most participants rated it as very useful [11] or useful [7]. The case studies were reported to be the most useful part of the workshop and other evaluation feedback included:

- So pleased this is happening.
- It was a great session overall and well worthwhile.
- Keep up the good work.
- An excellent workshop and project. Congratulations.
- Brilliant!
- Just loving the education and insights.
- Great insights!

In the interactions with both groups of service providers, the language used to describe restrictions to gender expression by family were discussed. There was recognition on the part of service providers that what older TGD people were reporting was consistent with widely accepted definitions of Family Violence [oppression by a family member] and Elder Abuse [an act within a relationship of trust which causes harm or distress to an older person]. However, a number of older TGD people asked service providers to understand that they did not relate to this language for several reasons. This included the belief on the part of some older TGD people that they were to blame for inflicting difficulty on their family. It also reflected older TGD people's questioning regarding the lack of appropriate services:

1. If older TGD people conceptualised what occurred as Family Violence or Elder Abuse, how would this help/what would change for older TGD people and their family?
2. What were Family Violence and Elder Abuse services doing to understand the experiences and needs of older TGD people and their families?
3. What were Family Violence and Elder Abuse services doing to ensure their services are inclusive for older TGD people – including promoting their services to older TGD people?

These questions provide important reflections for service providers. Very few older TGD people were aware of any services that could assist to mediate with their family and they were unsure how they would encourage their family to access services.



The resources.

A Gender Genogram and Ripplegram resource were developed for older TGD people, their families and family relationships services as part of the Kinfolk Project. A third resource, called Our Authentic Selves, was developed for aged care service providers. This section of the Report outlines the resources which are provided in full on the project webpage.

Gender Genograms

This resource presents two Gender Genograms, as examples of the potential to utilise this approach to explore gender roles and expectations in families.

A genogram is like a family tree; it shows a person's family relationships and also includes their emotional and social connections. Genograms are used in social work, psychology and family therapy to explore family dynamics. They can help to show how family members relate to each other and bond. Genograms are drawn using symbols; and symbols for gender are limited to circles for females and squares for men. In the USA, the Multicultural Family Institute has developed a process for LGBTIQ inclusivity in genograms, which includes symbols for TGD people. However, to date the genogram approach has not been utilised to explore gender roles and expectations in ways that support family members of older TGD people or TGD people more broadly.

To address this gap, the Kinfolk team developed a Gender Genogram concept. It expands the traditional approach to genograms by focusing on the gender roles and expectations of every family member. In this way we acknowledge that gender is something everyone has; rather than just something to focus on when a person is gender diverse. A Gender Genogram can be a useful way of opening up conversations about 'the way gender works' in families and how this can shift when an older person changes the way they express their gender.

On the following pages we present two examples of Gender Genograms, one completed by a Trans woman and the other by the wife of a Trans woman. For each Genogram we invited the participants to draw their family tree using a square symbol for males, circle for females and triangle for TGD people. As participants drew their Gender Genogram they were invited to describe what they were drawing and the way each family member expressed their gender.

There is no right or wrong way to draw or describe a Gender Genogram; but here are some of the steps we invited participants to take:

1. You are invited to draw your family tree; include anyone you would like to include.
2. Draw each person's gender using square for males, circle for females, triangle for TGD people; or any other symbol you like. Use any colour you like.
3. Please tell me what you are drawing while you are drawing it; or after you have drawn it.
4. For each family member you have drawn, can you please describe their gender or the way they express their gender?

The scope of the current project did not extend to exploring interpersonal relationships and any changes to the way gender was expressed following transition. However, this may be a useful focus in family therapy to assist older TGD people and their families understand and adjust to changes.

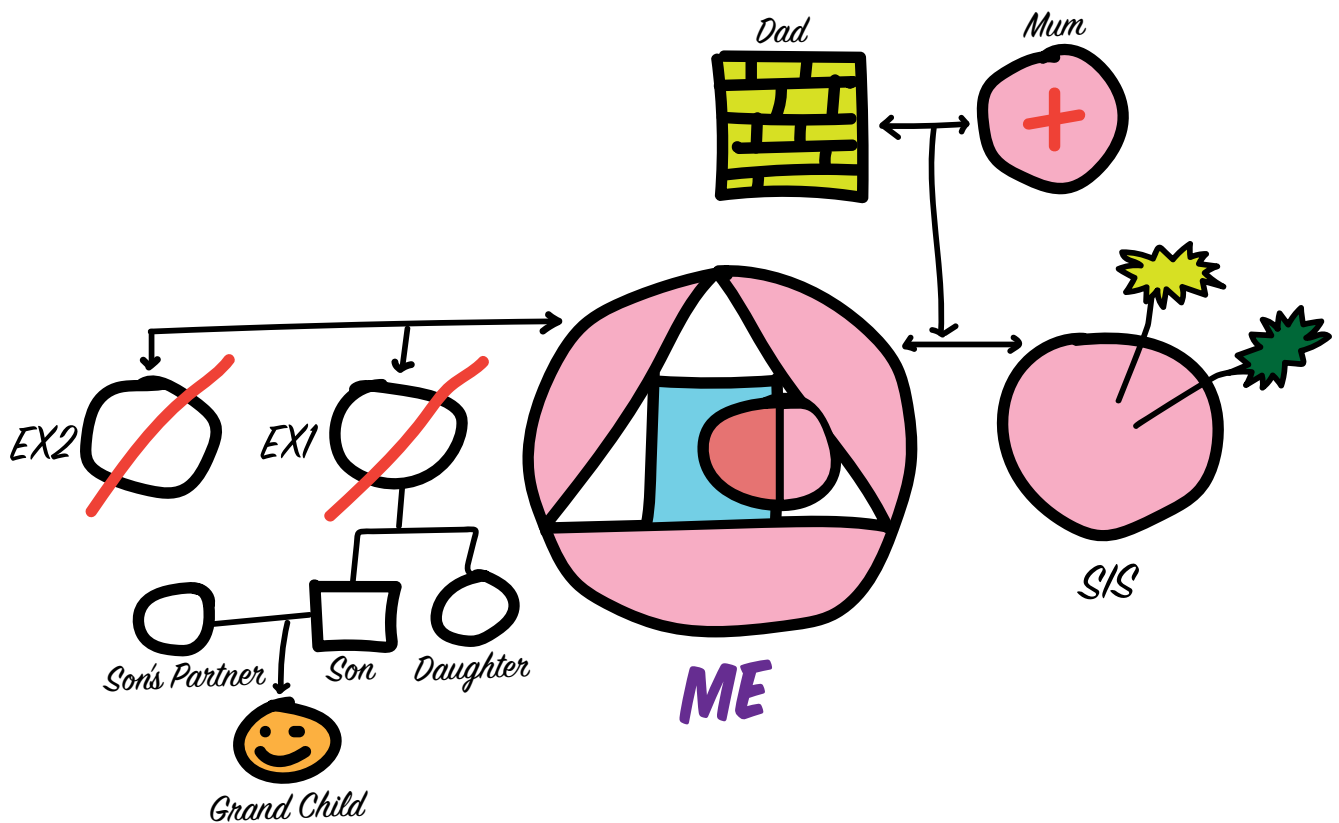
In the following section, two Gender Genograms, are presented as examples to demonstrate the potential utility of this approach to explore gender roles and expectations in families. The Gender Genograms are intended as a starting point for conversations about how gender works in a family and how the family can adapt to changes in gender roles and expectations. For example, Ellie reflected on the two 'failed marriages' in her Gender Genogram as evidence of the importance of communication about gender. The importance of adapting to change was also highlighted in Leanne's Gender Genogram.

We hope that family members, and older TGD people, will take the Gender Genogram resource to family relationships or counselling services to explore what gender means in their family. With the support of professional services, families of older TGD people can identify strategies to adapt to change and potentially make their family stronger.

*The message I got
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genders; you got one
or the other.*

Ellie's

Gender Genogram



*When I was a kid,
I was expected to
do the boy stuff like
mowing lawns and
getting fire wood.*

*This Gender Genogram was developed by Ellie,
a Trans Woman in her late sixties.*

I drew myself as a circle first; I'm a woman. But there's a square under there. And then in later life there was a triangle; Trans. I'm fully female, where I should be. I identify as female with a trans history.

When I was a kid, I was expected to do the boy stuff like mowing lawns and getting fire wood.

My sister did girly stuff, mostly inside the house. I know she had a cat that she used to dress up and push around in a little pram. She was very girly. Typical 50s attire for a girl; frilly skirts, black patent shoes, white ankle socks, twin set. In the 60s she would antagonise me, and I would chase her around the dining table and when I caught her I would thump her on the arm and she would wail and yell "he hit me, he hit me." And mum or dad would come out and yell at me for hitting my sister.

My sister was girly and had boyfriends and expressed her gender in traditional ways, in the sense for that era. But she has blossomed and has since had a female partner and is living the life she wanted. That puts her outside the beige box as well; the beige box is the way that women are expected to behave.

The message I got from school and society was that I was a male and I should be doing male things. There were two genders; you got one or the other. Gender wasn't really talked about; you were just expected to be one or the other and I was handed the boy identity. I was expected to do male things like helping with the gardening. At school, boys played footy or tag or other games like that. The girls were segregated, they used a different part of the playground and played different games.

All the while this was happening, I had a secret. I used to dress in my sister's clothes. I was very conscious of what the girls were wearing at school. I didn't know what it meant; I just knew I needed to do it. I used to get really tense and the pressure would build up and then I would dress in her clothes and the pressure valve would release and I would feel good again. I knew I was different, and I felt I was alone. I thought I was the only one. I got caught a couple of times and, from the response of my parents, I knew this was not acceptable behaviour for a boy. It was swept under the carpet, but I was also given the fairly strong message that it was not on.

My dad was the great provider. He went to work. He was the sole income earner. Everything had a place. Immaculately dressed, never a hair out of place. He went to war in his twenties and was flying around in a Sunderland looking for U boats. I think the air force helped him be the pedantic person he became. He was a brick wall. Saturday afternoon he would polish his shoes for the week. He might have taken the garbage cans out. I remember mum in the kitchen and dad in the dining room reading the paper.

My mum was purely the fifties and sixties housewife. Look after the kids. Make the school lunches. Make dad's lunch. Do the shopping. Prepare the meals. Do the dishes. Play nurse when someone was crook. She was very proud of who she was; married with two kids. She was a teacher at Sunday School, deeply involved in Church. She was confident, but all thumbs, awkward. Damn good cook.

I got a job in the late sixties as a technician in a blokey environment. I played the blokey role really well

*In the eighties
I was blokey with
a marriage and
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huge secret.*

in the seventies with excess alcohol and drugs (heroin), surfing, partying hard and roaring around in fast cars that we modified ourselves. We did some stupid things in cars.

In the eighties I was blokey with a marriage and two kids and a huge secret. My wife was a surfer chick who became a good mum. She must have known I dressed, but it was never discussed. As the marriage started to fall apart, I bought clothes and had a stash that I would wear when I could. I came home from work one day and she'd left me

a note saying, "I found your stash of clothes, I'm leaving." There must have been more to it than that, but that was the reason she gave.

Then I got married again and my second wife knew about my dressing. We discussed it forever and then the rules changed, and she got harsher and harder. I wasn't allowed to dress unless she was in the house. She would booby trap my clothes. She would ring and check up on me. It was a very complicated relationship. Enough was enough and eventually I walked.

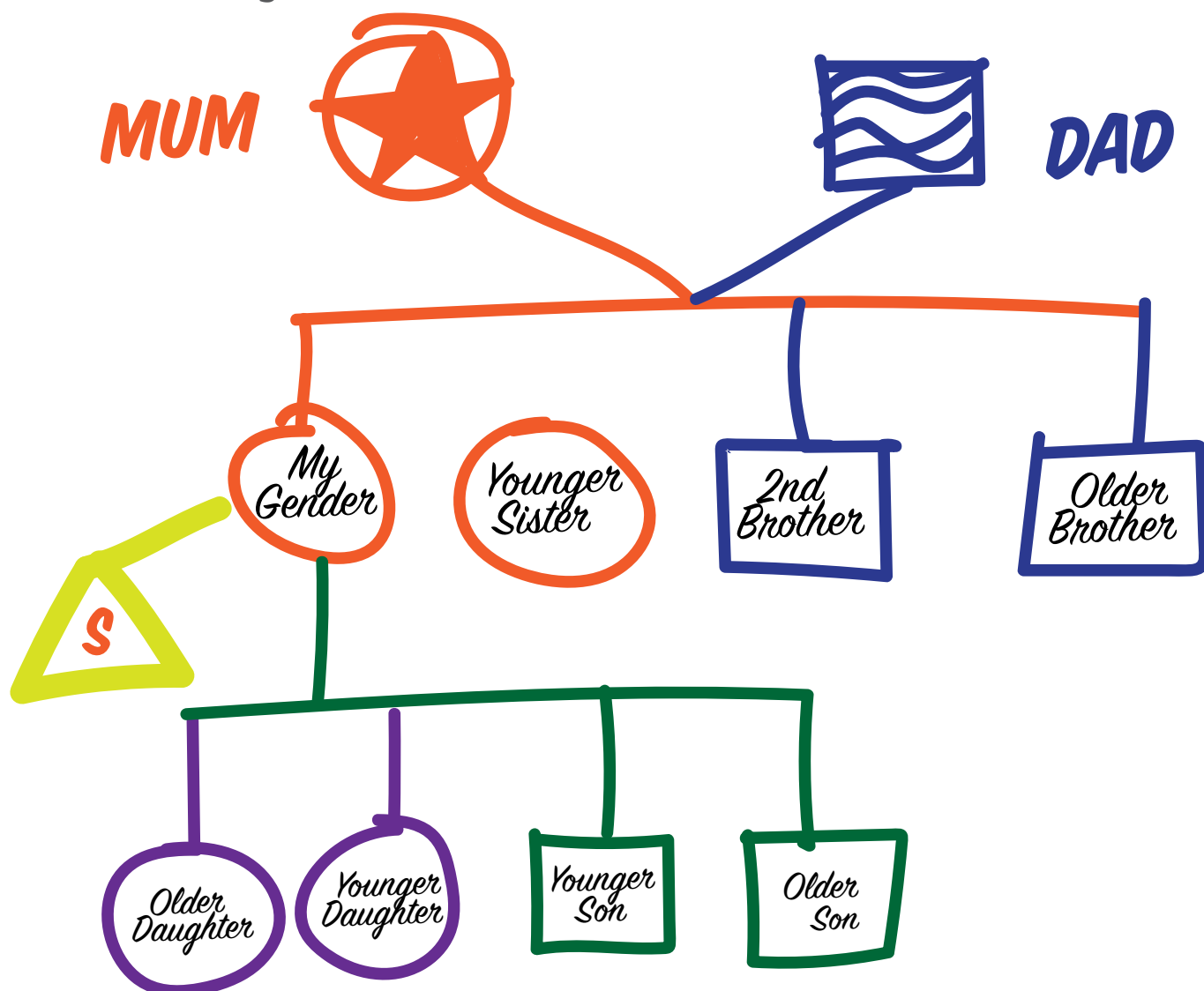
I have two adult children. My children and I don't communicate for other reasons other than that I am Ellie. My daughter's partner doesn't not acknowledge my gender.

A decade ago I ventured out in public for the first time. I've been on hormone therapy for eight years.

My mum told me she didn't want to meet Ellie. She died without ever meeting Ellie or knowing my full story. At mum's funeral my sister acknowledged there were two funerals – mum's and 'his'. That was the last time I ever had to dress as her son. I am living more and more as myself now. No more dual life. Here I am; Ellie forever.

Leanne's

Gender Genogram



This Gender Genogram was developed by Leanne, a woman in her seventies who is married to Shirley, a Transwoman.

My dad liked to invent things and he liked to dance and play the piano. He was an alcoholic; but they gave them cigarettes and alcohol during the war, maybe they thought it would numb things? Dad and his mates used to brew their own beer underneath their tent. He was hard working. He took on any jobs. He was a caretaker at the local school, which suited him because he would put the coal in the boiler at 6am and then he was off work till 3pm when he had to come back and sweep and clean up after the kids. He was a furniture polisher. He polished Grand Pianos and coffins. He was quite different. In the war he did truck driving. I would draw him in the Gender Genogram as a wavy line.

My mum was a dress maker and she also designed clothing as well. She was very inventive. We would go to dance classes and she would make our costumes. She was a frilly person. I drew her as a star; she liked to be the centre of attention. She was also a person who took charge. We were a family of four, so it was a busy household. Dad would help her to do the laundry and wash the dishes after dinner. The 1950s was about women being in the kitchen; but mum and dad did it differently. Mum and dad like to go out dancing.

My brothers were born before the war. My oldest brother was out there to be different from mum and dad. He was a bit of a rebel. He was the Elvis Presley of the time; he was a wild child. When the policeman knocked on the door ... mum and dad were a bit cross with him. He had some dubious friends. He married a strict church going Lady, which always made us laugh. He was reformed. He used to drink copious quantities of everything and now he drinks nothing.

My younger brother was everyone's friend and he was a person everyone was drawn to. He had lots of girlfriends. He was an engineer who loved to use his hands. He married and had two daughters; they are both Ballerinas and so are their children. So, he didn't get to pass on his mechanical skills. He would have liked to have had a boy to pass those skills on to. He is always making things for us; I think he feels it is a lost art.

My sister was pretty clever; she could have become a chemist, but she became a teacher. My mother said she taught her dolls, she would line them up and teach them, so it wasn't a surprise that she became a teacher. She is a very pedantic person and a bit up and down in her temperament. She gets depression. She is a very clever lady. With her hands she makes those origami cards and intricate icing for cakes.

My gender? I am a sewing nut. I do a lot of embroidery; it has come down through the family that way. Even my daughter sews. I was on the farm for a long time with Shirley, my wife. It was hard work, I had to chop my own wood and milk goats. We had sheep and cattle and they all had to be fed. I enjoyed it when I was fit enough, but after a while the wood chopping was a bit hard on my back and hands. It was a good life for our kids though. If we had poorly lambs, I would bring them in and feed them every two hours over night to keep them going.

My wife, Shirley was always inventive, and we've been a good partnership in that she would help me with everything we needed to do. There were times she wasn't there because she had meetings and committees, she was an active community member and sometimes that would work for me and sometimes it wouldn't. Shirley would do a lot of jobs outside on the weekend, she would milk the cow and cut up wood; everyone had to cut up wood for the fire to keep the hot water going. I would do a lot of cooking and cleaning ... we seemed to divide things up and support each other.

My oldest daughter was like a mini activist. When she didn't like something, she would go and do something about it. She protested Watership Down because it was bad for the rabbits when she was 10. She was quite outspoken. She did four university degrees, but she wasn't very organised; she was always running to exams at the last minute. She liked singing and shows and all that. She talked Shirley into auditioning for musicals.

My second daughter was always our clever rider, we had horses. She was a more scientific type brain. She did agricultural degree. She is an organiser. She's on a farm now with three children and manages to keep the family going. She is very pragmatic in what she does. She likes the girls to be dressed as girls, but she really is an outdoors person.

My oldest son didn't do any University degrees. He was just average and got disinterested in school at 15 and so, in the end, we took him out of school. He did farming jobs for a while and then met his first wife and did computer courses and now he is into IT and does a lot of jobs in IT. He is a father of three lovely daughters and they are all very clever too. He has a very angry streak and it is very hard to calm him down sometimes. He has remarried a lovely lady and they have seven children between them.

My youngest son is a calm sort of person, nothing phases him. He is married to a lady and they have two children and I think he is very happy. He has been doing a science degree for about 10 years, but he reckons he will get there in the end. Because he has a scientific mind he is more of a boy than anything else, but he is very laid back.

In my relationship with Shirley I can't see that it has changed a lot. I find that Shirley flip flops from one thing to the other. She wants to be a girl, but if anyone has a problem with something, she has to fix it and have an engineering overview to fixing things; it's a very masculine trait. That just shows up a real male trait; she gets surprised when I tell her that. It's not that I wished she didn't do it; I know that it is harking back to where she started. I know that she gets annoyed with herself, but I say to her that you can't just wipe out 60 years of behaviour. It's not annoying, it's just interesting to me. The two behaviours seem to go along beside each other. Like if she does the dishes, she wants me to give her an elephant stamp for doing them. I've been doing them all my life; I'm not passing out elephant stamps.

Our relationship in the here and now is a great thing as we move forward in our older age, we balance our individual personalities to blend our needs. It is an ongoing thing that keeps on evolving over time.

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Ripplegram.

A RippleGram, is a visual image and description of the intended and unintended consequences of transition or changing gender expression as an older person. The purpose is to assist in planning for these consequences and to guide family relationships services in supporting older TGD people and their families. In the Ripplegram process we invited participants to respond to the following:

1. We want to invite you to draw the process of your transition/changes to your gender expression. The reason for doing this is to help identify the intended and unintended consequences of change and strategies to manage any challenges.
2. Imagine your life as a pond; and imagine your transition as throwing a stone into the pond.
3. The stone has a ripple effect on the pond; this represents all the consequences (intended and unintended; positive and negative) of your transition or changes to your gender expression.
4. You are invited to draw the stone hitting the pond as the central image and then respond to the following questions. For each question please draw a response and describe what you are drawing as you draw, or after you have drawn:
 - A. What were the positive impacts/ ripple effects on you?
 - B. What were the positive impacts/ ripple effects on your family, friends, community and work?
 - C. What were the negative impacts/ ripple effects on your family, friends, community and work?
 - D. What were the negative impacts/ ripple effects on you?
 - E. Repeat question: what were the positive impacts/ripple effects on you?

The questions were ordered to invite participants to describe the positive effects of their transition or gender change first, followed by any negative effects on them. Discussion of effects on family was next and was emotionally difficult, particularly where the older TGD person felt responsible for negative effects on family, or had experienced a deterioration in family relationships. The discussions ended by revisiting the first question about the positive effects on older TGD people, as a reminder of why changes were made.

The questions exploring effects on family were expanded to include to friends, work and community when it became apparent that changes in each of these domains could have a direct impact on families. In reflection on these questions, the following prompts may be useful.

1. Prompts re-positive impacts on Family.

- Are family pleased or relieved to see the older TGD person happier?
- Has the family renegotiated what works?
- Have family connections been strengthened by improved communication?

2. Prompts re-positive impacts on older TGD people.

- Is there relief at being able to be your authentic self?
- Has mental wellbeing improved?
- Does the older TGD person have increased confidence in themselves?

3. Prompts re-negative impacts on family.

- Does the family feel ashamed, embarrassed or struggling to adjust?
- Is there now a hormonal/libido or gender mismatch in intimate partner relationships?
- Is the family experiencing difficulties (eg: restricted travel, reduced family business, declined group/church membership, limited community involvement, travel restrictions or threats to safety) from those who are transphobic or believe the older person who has transitioned is now in a same sex relationship?

4. Prompts re-negative impacts on an older TGD person.

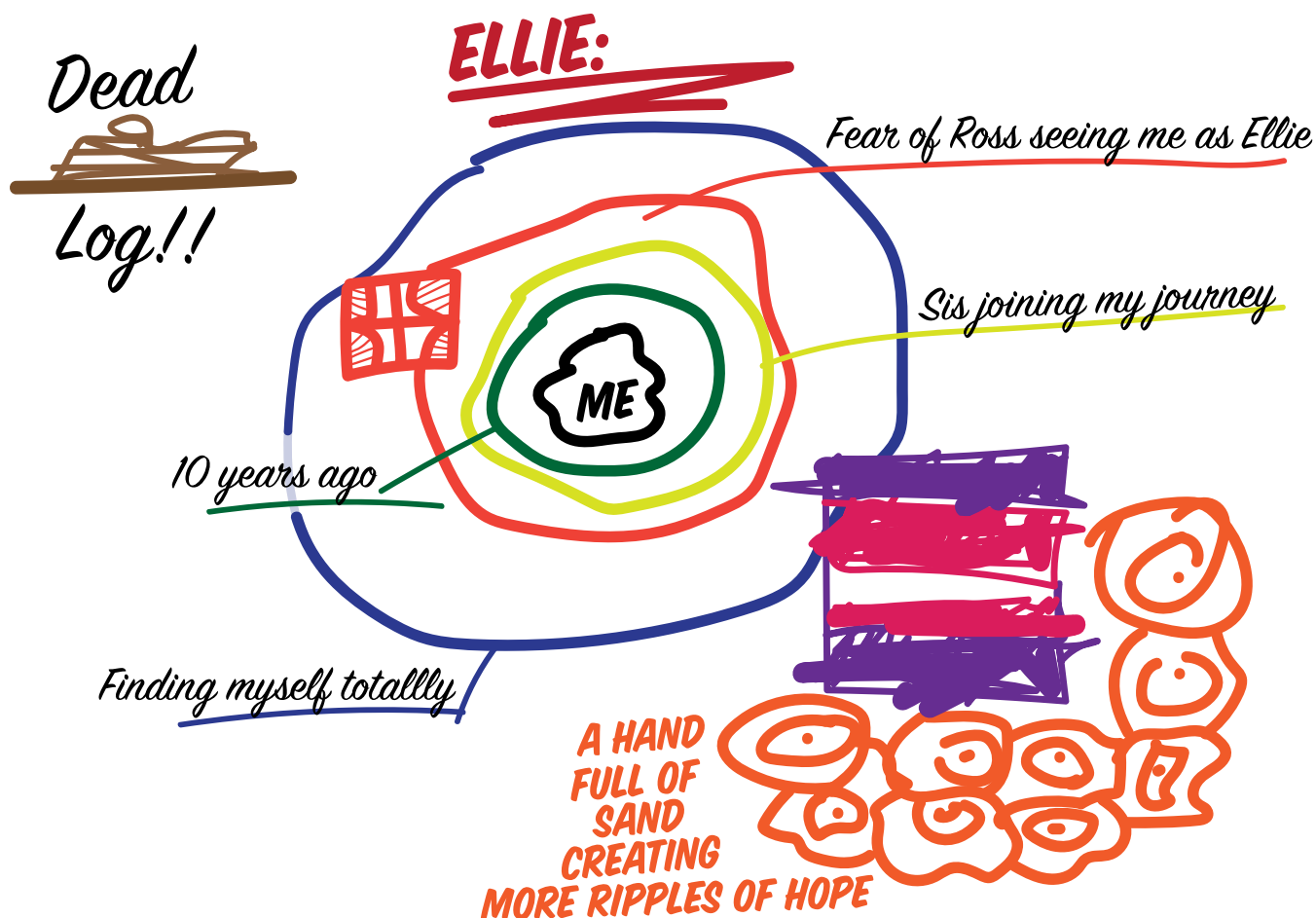
- Will family members withdraw (eg: loss of an intimate partner or restricted access to children and grandchildren)?
- Do family members impose restrictions on gender expression (eg: older Transwoman prohibited by family from presenting as female with particular family members, at family events or in the community)?
- Have gender changes negatively impacted on employment, income, travel, social connections and safety?

The ways in which Ripples are perceived is an important learning from the process. In conversations with older TGD people there is a sense of inevitability that changes to gender expression will upset some family members. In the Ripplegrams presented in the following section, ripples were described in one Ripplegram as a threat to family dynamics, and in the other Ripplegram as creating momentum for change. In both discussions, difficulties were experienced exploring both the positive and negative effects; although we agreed afterwards that it was important to document both.

In the following section two Ripplegrams are presented, beginning with the Ripplegram image drawn by the older TGD person. A description of the image and the responses to the questions were transcribed as the participant spoke and then read back to the older TGD person for verification and building on the Ripplegram story. The Ripplegrams were then emailed to the participants with the invitation to make any further changes.

The Ripplegram process is a powerful way to explore the intended and unintended consequences of gender transition or changing gender expression. Documenting the effects of such change may assist older TGD people to identify potential challenges and strategies to address them. It may also provide the opportunity to identify the effects of these changes on family members and work with family relationship services to mediate challenges and preserve or build family relationships.

In conversations with older TGD people it was noted that it may be difficult for some older TGD people to see any positive effects on their family. For others, there were difficulties describing negative responses, because of the trauma involved. Many older TGD people have powerful stories to tell and are able to tell them because they are survivors. However, transitioning or changing gender expression as an older person, while also bringing along family, friends, work colleagues and communities is a significant task. We hope that the process and support services outlined in this resource will go some way to making that task an easier one.



People now come up to me and acknowledge where I am in my life. I put myself out there more often now. I have got more confidence now and people respond positively to that.

Ellie

Ripples of Hope

I threw the stone into the pond more than once. Cross dressing was part of my life since I was five. Ten years ago, I acknowledged there was more to me than my current existence and that I had to do something about it. That was when I realised Ellie was there and needed to be seen. I became myself all of the time at retirement, on my 65th birthday. The biggest positive was that I had no fear of people anymore. There were people I avoided but I had no fear of people; because I knew who I was. Before that I had a good idea, but I was still living a double life.

People now come up to me and acknowledge where I am in my life. I put myself out there more often now. I have got more confidence now and people respond positively to that. People in my town now recognise me and they acknowledge that I exist. They are happy to acknowledge me and that affirms me and reminds me that I am where I need to be. Every time I stand up and tell people my story or be seen as an Elder in public, it is affirmation that I am where I should be. I am doing the right thing. I am who I am. I am myself.

Ten years ago I was suicidal. Not now. I am in a really good place; because I know who I am and I got to where I need to be.

I have drawn this using green for GO and yellow, because it is my favourite colour. These are happy colours. I can't use reds or blacks because they show negativity. If I can find pink and blue, I will be very happy because they are the colours of the Trans Flag.

My sister and I have become great mates. My sister's happiness is a response to me finally being me. She is happy because I am happy, and she is glad she has got a sister. I've drawn that here in yellow because it is my favourite colour. She was and is with me. She joined my journey. I acknowledge the shit she went through as a kid when I was nicking her clothes; we've talked about it and that has been extremely helpful for her. For me, talking about it helped me to realise I was so self-centred and had no concern for anyone else. I have acknowledged that with her in the talking we have done.

There was no negative impacts. My mum, she just said she didn't want to meet me. So, when I visited her, I went as her son. The only negative there was that I had to take a few nurofen. That is infinitesimal. My children and I don't see each other for other family reasons; they've met me, they don't care.

Cross dressing ended two marriages. The positive out of that is that I found out who I am. There is positives in the negatives. Second wife used to threaten me; she used to say: don't you dare be dressed when I come home. I don't see her now. I did toe in the water. She was the dead log floating in the pond. She was doing mental abuse. She was doing gender erasure. I was being told I couldn't dress at home unless she gave me permission or was there with me. It was mind games. She was booby trapping the draws my clothes were in. I think she was a narcissist; if she wasn't, she was practicing for a diploma in narcissism. She was always putting me down. That was her way. She was the rotting dead log in the pond. There were ripples within the relationship that became a Tsunami, which is why I left. There are now no ripples from that era because I threw my rock in the pond.

I was scared of them finding out at work. I was worried about my ex-boss finding me dressed. I had heard him ridicule others. I've drawn an open window with the curtains held back; that was my only fear. The fear was that he would spring me as Ellie.

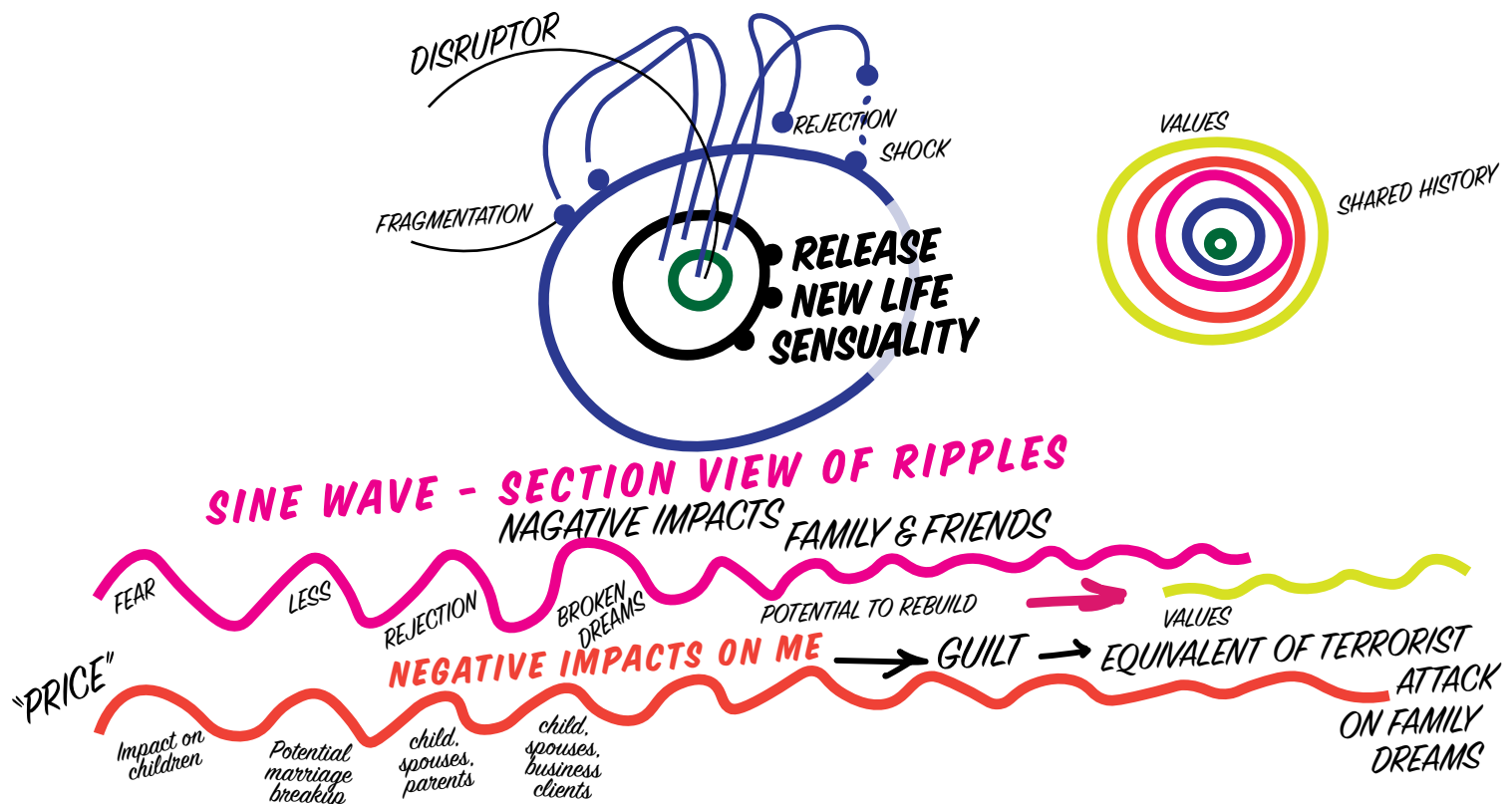
Carrying the huge secret for so many years was a negative. The transition wasn't easy. There was loneliness and silence and no friends. There was three years of total silence. I started playing with the black puppy dog that became the black dog. I would come home and drink to relax and dress and then the dog would become the BIG black dog; until that point when I chucked the rock into the water.

The ripple effect for me ... I didn't have much family and so there weren't many ripples and the edges of the pond were unknown. There weren't many barriers for me. I made a bold move. I'd had enough. That's why I chucked a rock into the water. It wasn't a rock; it was my millstone. I'd been carrying it for 50+ years and it was taking me down, holding me under. It was a dead weight. Throwing it into the pond was such a relief. Part of the burden was going ... there was still the coming out and all that rigmarole, but a big part of the burden was gone. The burden of carrying the secret for so many years was gone. The burden of two failed marriages was gone. The burden of the secret-ness of it all was gone. When it was gone it was a relief. I could stand up straight and proud. It was at the point I was playing with the black puppy dog and then the black puppy dog ran away. I cast aside the millstone and the black dog. That made it easier for me to deal with the ripples, the consequences, because the weight was gone. When you got all that weight on your shoulders you can't stand up straight.

I'm not worried about ripples from what I do or who I am now. But what gets me now is other people's negativity – or ripples – directed to LGBTI people. There is so much negativity directed towards the TGD community and I am throwing my sand and rocks into the pond to help others. My ripples are good; I am throwing sand into the pond ... I've drawn the orange circles around the Trans flag, to show that I am creating ripples to help others.

Ripples are good. I am proud. Ripples are creating energy that helps other people to get through the dramas of Transphobia and misunderstanding of Trans people and their families at the moment. A ripple is positive energy and it gives hope. Jump on board, hold hands with those going forward and don't let the ripples swamp ya.

GREEN POSITIVE IMPACT - DECISION MADE.



Pamela's Ripplegram

I've drawn a small green circle, 5% of the size of the page; green is positive, it represents the displacement object. The coming out. The centre of the ripple effect.

I am picking up black pen. I'm going to draw the positive effects. Relief. New life. Sensuality. I have drawn them in a semi-circle; its unfinished business ... there could be more things that I might see as a clear positive. I have drawn relief as the equivalent of a tiny circle, like an electron. A moon around a planet. The relief against constraints. The relief of being able to live as my reformed body before I die physically. A last gasp before I die. It is a relief to have the opportunity.

I have drawn new life as an electron as well. I am living a purer life that is synchronic or sympathetic to my emotional wellbeing. I have drawn sensuality. I have never had a ... English language is so clunky sometimes.... I have never been completely fulfilled in the sensual part of myself. Now I am diving into the opportunity to connect with myself in a peaceful environment where my dreams guide me; an inner fulfilment and dream world.

Transitioning felt right. I had visions periodically of having a female body since I was 10 years. Transition was seeking inner peace; becoming physically contiguous with the person that I wanted to be. The first time I went down to see a psychologist I was presenting as Pamela and there was a huge amount of fear

walking out the front gate and driving in the car to Prahran, Melbourne for three hours. When walking along Chapel street after my appointment, with the wind on my legs and arms and face was an elation. It said to me that this is right. It seemed so impossible when I was a child and then 50 years later it was realised.

I rejoice in knowing that I have opened my mind, the mind that was developed in a loving but traditional male orientated family. And I rejoice in finding that I haven't got concrete walls around my mind, like so many people. I am able to expand my dreaming, my thinking. I hope that I have lived an ethical life.

I find it hard to think / focus on about the positive impacts for me because I think about the negative impacts on other people in family or social connections.

I not sure that I can readily identify positive impacts on my family from their perspective. I am not sure how I have enhanced / modified their dream of having me as a conventional grandfather and all-round good bloke. My wife has said words like: you appear to be happier. There may have been some comment from my daughters like that. But trying to put myself in their shoes, I can't see a lot of positives for them. I think they would prefer that I had never transitioned, although I believe there is no retreat to the previous / or norm model.

I had a work colleague, and we had an antagonistic inter departmental, work relationship. My employer had a psychologist come to my workplace and explain my gender transition to my colleagues and it was too strange for many of them. This colleague then rang me on the first day that I re-entered the workplace as Pamela and suggested that she come to my office for morning tea with me. She was the only one. It was positive from her perspective; in a desert of unwanted change among other colleagues, it was life giving. ***We have since built an enduring friendship.***

I have drawn a circle around the original green impact circle. I feel like a burden on my family. But overall, they appear to be able to cope. My children

Transitioning felt right. I had visions periodically of having a female body since I was 10 years.

(quite reasonably) had / have, a grandfather plan, dream / image for their children. They were totally shocked when I came out. They still love me. I am still in their lives. The image of the perfect grandfather is blurry, but they still love me. I have no doubts about that.

I drew the ripples from the initial sheet of water as a very sharp splash with some drops off it and then they fall back into the water and I have labelled them shock, fragmentation and rejection. Then I drew a progressively reducing sine wave as the first "ripple" to represent ongoing effects. The first was fear, the second was loss, the third was rejection, the fourth was broken dreams, followed by the opportunity to start to rebuild as the ripples spread. The families have to come to an adjustment in their minds. They need to acknowledge that this person has changed a lot, but there are a lot of values that remain in that body that walks around and responds to their name – dad, to most of my family.

I was hugely work orientated. I had a small number of male friends. I lost almost all my friendship group. Work folk were more than happy to get rid of me.

The price. There is always a price. The price was ... I have to paddle a bit slowly here. The price was the impacts on my children, the effects on their happiness and the potential to cause marriage break ups for them. The effects on their spouses' parents and their spouse's business. No one wants to be associated with ... I was going to say, a strange person, to them. Transgender family was not part of their lexicon, their dreams of the future. There are so many taboos that conventional folk have difficulty coming to terms with.

The negative effects were the price. Knowing that I had done all that to them, to my family. It was out of their control; I was out of control. It was the equivalent of a terrorist organisation coming into a peaceful village.

The stone into the pond ...I can come to an emotional understanding that it is a good thing, but it is a disruptor. You are a social and emotional disruptor in a typical social sense. It was a way out for me to do it. It was the act of a wrecker. I smashed dreams. I had suicide ideation because I couldn't see a way out other than to do what I did. To drop the stone into the pond. People say it's just a life style; but it's not. I didn't want to do it. I needed to do it. It was life. I needed to do it to live.

I am blessed to have a wife and a local pool and a town I can wander around in in my new persona and it is a wonderful life by and large.

I get to do readings at church. I go to ladies' social meetings. I am treasurer of some local committees. I've got a life of ease and relative luxury compared to many. We have food on the table every week.

How do I celebrate my gender identity? I live it. I celebrate it on the rare occasion I get to go out in party type clothes. There are some disappointments, but I am still planning for another 30 years at 70!





Our Authentic Selves.

This resource was developed for aged care service providers to promote the rights of older Trans and Gender Diverse (TGD) people to be their authentic selves. The resource addresses:

- The rights of older TGD people to determine who they are.
- The rights of older TGD people to express their gender identity.
- The responsibilities of aged care service providers to support older TGD people.

These rights and responsibilities are a critical component of Dignity and Choice, the first of the eight Quality Standards for Aged Care Services. For the purposes of this resource, Dignity and Choice are defined in the following ways:

- **CHOICE:** the rights of older TGD people to be their authentic selves.
- **DIGNITY:** the result of actions supporting older TGD people to be their authentic selves.

The resource outlines 10 elements of Dignity and Choice, an eight point action plan and links to further information and resources developed for the Kinfolk project.

Elements of Dignity and Choice.

1. COMMUNICATING A MESSAGE OF WELCOME

I understand it is important that you feel welcomed and safe in our service. We will ensure that our staff are well trained and supportive, and that our online and printed information is TGD inclusive. We will also educate our assessment and reception staff to make sure they send you a message of welcome.

2. RESPECTING GENDER IDENTITY

I understand that you have the right be your authentic self and this includes your right to choose how you express your gender identity. I will listen to your needs, respect your gender identity and provide genuine options to support you. I understand you may change your gender identity and the way you express your gender. Please let me know how I can support you.

If your gender identity or expression is restricted by families, staff, other consumers or anyone else, I will advocate for your right to be your authentic self and choose how you express your gender identity.

I will listen when you tell me your name and I will respect it. I will refer to you by the name you give me and the personal pronouns or salutations you choose. Please tell me if your name or pronouns are not respected by service providers or consumer and I will talk to them.

3. UNDERSTANDING HISTORICAL EXPERIENCES

I understand you may have been discriminated against by health services in the past because of your gender identity. I understand that these experiences may have reduced your trust in aged care services. We will educate all staff to help understand this power imbalance and to send a message that you are welcome.

4. WORKING WITH TGDPHOBIC FAMILIES

I understand that decisions about your gender identity and expression are yours. If your family do not respect your decisions I will work with your family to help ensure they understand that these decisions are yours.

5. UNDERSTANDING POWER IMBALANCES

I understand that you might be fearful of TGDphobic discrimination by staff and that this may limit your willingness to share all your needs. We will deliver education to help staff understand how their own values and beliefs influence the services they provide to you and that we expect them to provide culturally safe services to you.

Elements of Dignity and Choice continued.

6. **PROMOTING CULTURAL SAFETY**

I understand that service providers who come to your home are entering your private space and must respect your privacy and circumstances. We will provide staff education to ensure all our staff are aware of this.

I understand that you may be fearful of the responses from other consumers, residents, families and visitors in residential aged care. We will work to ensure that your right to privacy and safety in shared services and communal living is respected.

7. **ASSESSMENT & PRIVACY**

We will ensure that our assessment forms and questions are TGD inclusive. I want you to know that you are welcome to discuss any and all of your care needs with me. I understand that you may wish to share your private and personal information with us; but you also have the right not to. It is your choice and we will respect your choice.

I will work hard to promote your right to dignity and choice – if we don't get it right please tell us so we can make improvements.

8. **UNDERSTANDING DEMENTIA FACTS**

I am aware of a transphobic myth that all TGD people who have dementia 'revert' to gender assigned at birth. I know the fear this myth generates. I understand that if you have dementia you may lose the capacity to assert your choices and needs and that this may mean that TGDphobic families and service providers act in ways that do not respect your right to be your authentic self. If this occurs I will advocate for you.

9. **CARE FROM THE HEART**

I understand that some service providers are curious about TGD people and may ask unnecessary or invasive questions. I understand this is disrespectful and may compromise your Dignity. We will educate all staff on the importance of seeing you as a person - not just a gender.

10. **TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR EDUCATION AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS**


I understand how important it is that we take full responsibility for workforce training and do not expect you to educate us.

I will work hard to promote your right to dignity and choice – if we don't get it right please tell us so we can make improvements. If you have a complaint we will take it seriously and look at how we can improve our service so that the issue is resolved and does not happen again.

Suggested actions.

This check list of actions may assist a service to promote Dignity and Choice for older TGD people:

- Develop a policy on TGD inclusion to guide and educate all staff.
- Conduct an audit of online and print resources to ensure TGD inclusive language and images.
- Ensure all staff are aware of their responsibilities to advocate for older TGD people.
- Ensure assessment forms and processes are TGD inclusive.
- Check that complaint and feedback processes have explicit reference to feedback from older TGD people.
- Provide education to ensure that all staff have a basic understanding of the experiences and needs of older TGD people and not reliant on older TGD people for basic TGD education.
- Provide staff education that includes the following: historical experiences of older TGD people, power imbalances, cultural safety, advocacy strategies, the elements of Dignity and Choice outlined in this document, the vulnerability of TGD people with dementia to transphobic staff and family members.
- Adopt an approach to services that shifts staff from a curiosity about gender to Care From The Heart – or services that focus more broadly than gender.



*Families matter at every
age – and for older
people, expressing their
authentic self while
bringing along their
long-term partner,
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The final word.

This project is immensely important, it opens up the possibilities of family support. When I first came out I was advised that your family either fully accept your new life, or you cut them off. What I would like people to understand is that there is a midpoint pathway - there needs to be flexibility on both sides. Transition is not a T-intersection, left or right, that families either accept you or you leave. There are many more options, if we get the support we need. We need to make it easier for families to stay together (Interview, Georgia).

Georgia's reflections on the project powerfully summarise older TGD people's historical experiences with family, and the future possibilities outlined in the Kinfolk project. Older TGD people and their families need to be understood and supported by family relationship services and aged care service providers. The wave of older people living out their gender diversity in later life is only just beginning and is likely to continue for decades to come. The Kinfolk project highlighted the role for resources like the Ripplegram and Gender Genogram to help move family responses from acceptance to respect. Until this change is achieved, there is an urgent need to build the capacity of older TGD people to withstand the compromises they feel they need to make to maintain family connections. Families matter at every age – and for older people, expressing their authentic self while bringing along their long-term partner, adult children and grandchildren is a complex but critical task.

Being **Trans** or
Gender Diverse is not
a mental illness and
many governments
and services are
working to right the
past wrongs...

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More Information.

Project webpage: the project webpage includes the other resources from the project and links to support services. Check it at: alicesgarage.net/kinfolk

Family relationship services: in every state and territory there are family relationships services that can assist you to complete a Gender Genogram. These include Relationships Australia, see: relationships.org.au

Immediate support: if you need to talk to someone immediately and you are not sure what your options are 1800RESPECT is a website and 24 hour support service that offers counselling and information about support services.

Qlife: provides anonymous and free LGBTI peer support and referral for people in Australia wanting to talk about sexuality, identity, gender, bodies, feelings or relationships. Phone: 1800 184 527 (3pm – midnight) or website: <https://qlife.org.au/>

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Alice's Garage, Melbourne.

Available from: alicesgarage.net/kinfolk

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