



When Matt became Jade

An experience in working with a youth who made a gender transition change in a High school environment

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“Oh, and by the way, I like to dress in women’s clothes”

And that was my first introduction to a youth who would begin a journey...



Forward
When Matt became Jade
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This booklet was made by request to document Jade's story and how the process of the transition took place at Northern Secondary high school. The manuscript had been asked to be forwarded to the Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI) for publication, "Talking about Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity in Education", which will focus on real experiences of a diverse group of students, teachers, teacher educators and parents. The goal is to produce a book that will open the discussion on the importance of considering sexual orientation and gender diversity in education.

The manuscript has also been forwarded to other agencies and support networks in the hope of providing a framework of resource and direction.

The manuscript was written with full permission and authorization by Jade.

Jade's story continues to demonstrate the courage and strength of Jade and her family. It was an experience that shifted and touched many for their commitment to ensuring equality and compassion.

It is important to note that being transsexual for Jade is a reality – not a choice or decision. She finds it quite difficult to be referred to, hear and/or read about her previous gender. She was always Jade. "Matt" was just another name she went by to survive in the world until her transition. She finds it very uncomfortable to be constantly reminded of the transition by the use of "that" name and the male pronoun. It is with this in mind that I only use the name of "Matt" to the importance of trying to help educate and clarify.

With thanks to all those who have assisted in the formation of the manuscript with their input, guidance, thoughts and opinions. In particular;

*Jade and Jade's parents Anne and Michael
Delisle Youth Services staff, management and board members
Northern Secondary School support staff members
Northern Secondary School Principal Bob Milne
Northern Secondary School Acting Principal Tony Kerins
TDSB Human Sexuality Social Worker Steve Solomon
The 519 Community Centre Social worker Jake Pyne
Director Atkinson Counselling and Supervision Centre Scott Pope
Northern Secondary School Parents Council Chair Jane Steele Moore
Toronto Star reporter Leslie Scrivener
Michele Mandel – Toronto Sun
Paul Zalewski –Teacher/Editor of initial drafts*

Follow up source information:

*Egale Canada
Transgender Health program- Vancouver-Social and Medical Advocacy
Ontario Human Rights Code
Transgender Network of PFLAG
How to respect a Transgendered person
Transgendered Law Centre
Trans Care Youth
Safe Schools Coalition – Washington State*

Disclaimer

This experience of an individual's personal story about being transgender and transitioning in a high school environment was documented on behalf of Delisle Youth Services. It can be used as a tool to assist to create awareness and knowledge about this specific story and challenges that took place. It should be recognized that all individuals and situations are different. The story and information collected may need to be adapted to other situations and environments. The overall content of this manual is provided for information only.

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How the work was done through the experience:

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8. ***Transition from High school to University***
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10. ***Views and perspectives of the counselor working with Matt/Jade***
11. ***The Journey continues...other transitioning information that may be helpful- changing identification and records, education about the Ontario Human Rights code, individual rights vs. parental rights, advice to parents,, educators and trans adolescents, trans adolescents dealing with other kids in the school, high school policies and culture***

Delisle Youth services within the school – accessibility and safe

Delisle Youth Services is a multi-service social service community agency based in Toronto Ontario, committed to supporting the developmental, emotional and social needs of youth and their families.

One component of community partnership is their school based prevention and intervention model, Delisle in the Schools program.

The Delisle in the Schools model serves young people who are at risk of dropping out of school or experiencing lack of success in the schools due to a variety of complex personal and social problems in their daily lives. Working with the Community to bring supportive services into North Toronto schools, the model reflects a concept of not just simply placing a worker in the school, but of a commitment from the agency to make its full range of services available to the school in an effective and efficient manner. The model reflects the belief that services for school age youth are designed to support youth, their parents and community professionals. The model is in the community, is school site-based, and focuses primarily on prevention and early intervention.

The service is flexible enough to address the mental health issues that are specific to each school. By giving students at the school access to mental health services on site, students are more likely to utilize the help that they need, with results that impact both their behaviour and their academic standing in a positive manner.

The model services are delivered directly in the educational setting. This way youth are provided with easily accessible, trustworthy counseling, and educators are supported so that they can understand and respond well to a range of challenging behaviours they may experience, and can access ways to help themselves and the students. A range of services offered includes: individual counseling, groups for youth on topics such as bullying, relationships, sexuality, anger management; workshops for educators on issues of concern, assisting with crisis intervention, and connecting individuals and families with needed community resources.

One successful partnership has been in place since 1989 in a Toronto area school. With a student population of over 2000 students, Delisle provides a full time counselor in the school for students, staff and parents to access. Access to service, consultation and counseling supports is available throughout the entire week.

Students over the age of 14 (who understand the implication of their own consent) may receive counseling without parental consent. The student makes contact with the Delisle staff in the school in order to begin scheduled appointments.

The challenge has always been to create safer, more accessible and educational support learning opportunities for youth. Helping students hold onto hope, treating them with respect, and supporting them to value themselves is paramount.

The Delisle in the Schools model aims to break down barriers and help schools better understand that they need more careful exploration of proactive ways to break institutional and individual youth silences so that they can address youth concerns.

Working with the school team, the Delisle staff develops an individualized plan that helps each student cope with his/her particular areas of need. The youth workers provide support to students experiencing issues beyond academic problems and needing the opportunity to discuss and explore their issues in a confidential and supportive atmosphere.

About Matt who was Jade

Matt was a 17-year-old male attending the High School. With 2000 students in the school, one way of not missing him was that he imposing in stature, standing 6 foot, 4 inches tall. He had just been elected the new incoming Student Council President for the year 2004-2005. I didn't know of him within the school; his performance and campaign seemed to enlighten the assembly and after that, there was a buzz around the school about this young man. This seemed to be a young man who would now be noticed. He liked to run, - "Forest Gump" they used to call him. He was skilled with computers and fantasy stories. He had a wit and bite to his humor, which helped him relate to his peers, and attract those that didn't know him. He was, by nature, an introverted person – he did have a small group of close friends, but seemed to shy away from public gatherings and activities.

Being the Delisle worker, but also sharing my time with involvement in school activities, I was the Student council staff advisor. I met Matt for the first time during a meet and greet session for the new Student Council. Being June of that school year, we had about 3 meetings prior to the end of the school year to talk about Student Council initiatives for the following year. Matt seemed focused, driven and excited about the upcoming school year and on what the Student council could do for the student body.

In early July 2004, I received an email from Matt asking if he could set up a counseling appointment with me to talk about non- student council stuff. He had been having a hard time and wanted to talk with someone about his struggles.

Our first counseling meeting took place near the end of July 2004.

Matt was there to get support and advice on stressors in his life. Asked to explain further, this was difficult for him – he was not one to usually speak to someone about things personal. One major anxiety in his day- to- day functioning was his ability to conclude an ongoing work of fantasy that he had been working on for years. The struggle for Matt was not how to end the story, but feeling like he needed to end the story.

Matt had a close friend die this year from a sudden undetected onslaught of cancer. He had known this young man during his junior school years. Matt was in mourning and felt significant remorse from losing contact and friendship with this person while in High school.

There was also the overwhelming effect of his need to get to know and learn how to interact with a young female he knew of in the High school. He found himself attracted to her, but had not approached her. Knowing how to interact and develop a more intimate relationship with someone was a struggle.

"I think I might be bi-sexual. No one knows this. Not even my mother – who, probably would be okay with it because she is a lesbian." This appeared to be perhaps the more significant of his stressors. How do I interact and develop a more intimate relationship with a female when I m attracted to males as well?

Matt was open to exploring these stressors for himself. Not to overwhelm or push Matt to talk about too much, too soon, we decided to book another appointment.

During our second appointment Matt was able to provide background information and shared more about his stressors.

His parents had divorced when he was 11 years old, in Grade 7. His mother had come out as a lesbian. The divorce was amicable and his father lives close by to where Matt, his mother and his younger sister live. His relationship with his father has been strained, and he spends very little time with him. However, recently, the relationship had improved.

Matt wanted to talk more about his longing for an intimate connection with this female he knew of at the school. He just didn't know how to begin trying to break down the barriers of approaching and getting to know her. We talked about developing the skills and opportunities to get to know others...the basic social skill to meet and greet and instigate conversations.

"I have this overriding sense of confusion at times. I just can't explain it. I feel at a loss, not knowing what to do – it just hits me." he said, and then began to cry, sob more like it. He appeared to lose his ability to engage in a dialogue, waving me off to give him some time, crying, drooling, his breathing enhanced. He needed several minutes in silence just to regain composure. ***"This happens periodically,"*** he told me. ***"Happens at home or when I'm walking down the hall in school. I have this sense of crashing, needing to be away from others."*** It appeared Matt may be struggling with some degree of social or anxiety related condition.

I brought up his potential struggle with sexual orientation. I shared with him that throughout adolescent development, sexual awareness emerges, the capacity for close friendships develops, older role models become mentors and idols, and adolescents begin to be aware of a variety of attractions. Some people will be confused by their feelings or experiences. Equally important, is the fact that emerging homosexuality sexual feelings are both unexpected and unwelcome to most adolescents. And most will go through a period of not wanting to be gay or lesbian. The fear of rejection and stigmatization can be at times the basis for denying, rejecting and fighting against those feelings. The conflict between the feelings and the fears results in confusion.

Matt seemed to struggle with, and be paralyzed by his confusion. He seemed to have a hard time verbalizing the exact nature of his feelings and his challenges.. His behaviour indicated that these feelings of confusion, perhaps around his sexuality, were impacting his anxiety and his substantial need to develop an intimate relationship with the young female at the school.

Matt appeared to be acting out anxieties, conflicts and confusion through his daily life. He willingly shared his distress. Was Matt struggling with confusion about his sexual orientation, or, was Matt struggling with a specific or generalized anxiety condition? Or both?

*Just as we were wrapping up our second appointment, scheduling another time, Matt calmly stated, **"Oh, something else, I also like to dress up in women's clothes"**. This seemed to catch me off-guard for a moment...not something that usually comes up as part of the counselling I had been used to. This was a new revelation in the scope of understanding more about Matt's sexual identity and stressors. **"Tell me about that"**, I asked. He explained the most difficult thing about this was actually finding appropriate clothing because he was so tall.*

"Who else knows about this?" I inquired. Matt replied, ***"Not a lot of people"***. ***"I m not really comfortable yet in telling my mom. And my Dad is out of the question"***. ***"I think we should explore this more. It may provide some insight as to some of your current stressors and this may provide exploration opportunities to some of your anxieties and feelings of confusion."***

I had a lot of questions to ask Matt about what it meant for him to dress as a woman. How important was this part of his life in his overall daily functioning? We agreed that in our next meeting we would focus more on how this part of who he is impacts his life.

Just before school started again in September 2004 we had our next meeting. Matt had spent some time at his cottage with his mother and relaxing during the last part of the summer. There had been more developments in his evolution towards identity clarity for him.

Matt let me know that he had had a conversation with his mother about his need to dress like a woman. He said it was one of the most uncomfortable things he had ever done. **“Even though my mother had come out as a lesbian, to talk to her about something as personal and different as this, was so difficult.”** he said.

“Trying to identify as a female in a male’s body is not something that is easy to talk about with your mother. I really didn’t know how to first describe it. Just more or less as the need and desire to dress in woman’s clothing was the start.”

Since coming out as a lesbian, Matt’s mother had always been hopeful that her children would see the importance of being true to oneself. Trying to understand exactly what Matt was saying, and needing, was a realization for her that Matt was telling her something about who he was at this point in his life.

Transgender to Matt in that early stage meant, “being born in the wrong body”. Not feeling like, or identifying with the gender that corresponded with his sex and genetics. He had felt this way from his earliest memory: **“I knew for the longest time...but ...wasn’t ready to deal with it.”**

I still wanted to understand the possible correlation between this apparent need to identify as a woman, and his overall anxiety and moods. Matt seemed to struggle significantly at times with “panic attacks” and feelings of being overwhelmed. It was not clear how the attacks played a role in his sexual identity.

The attacks seemed to focus on an overriding sense of loneliness. Like a wave of emotion taking over him. A sense of feeling like he had no friends, and his solitary lifestyle was very hard on him. A sense of needing to escape, tensing up and losing emotional control would last him between ½ hour to 45 minutes at a time. He had noticed these anxieties and feelings for the good part of the past 5 years of his life.

His fixation on the young female at the school continued. An overriding need to connect and develop a relationship with her, despite his need and desire to dress as a woman. My idea in this initial stage was to try and refocus away from relationship development, and more toward coping strategies and skills around his confusions and anxieties.

Triggers to his uncontrollable release of emotions would come in a variety of ways; the phone ringing; high-pitched sounds; movements; large group situations/social aspects. Massive feelings of depression overwhelmed him as well as feelings of helplessness. With no real gradual transition, it would come up very quickly. Rapid thoughts, not being able to concentrate, feeling like he was afraid of something, everything being positive or negative, - nothing in between. Could it be that aspects of his identity and personality were repressed for so long that now these feelings were flooding out in all different aspects of his life? It seemed to be practically unbearable at times for him.

Matt decided not to come out at school as it started in September 2004. He would dress as a woman at home. His mother and he went shopping for clothes. He would slowly begin the transition to being who he really was and letting others know when he was ready. But this still wasn’t enough for him. He was not happy to have to hide, “be in the closet” – away from others. He would come to school, walk the halls, be in the community, hang with friends, do his Student Council activities, and still felt a longing to be who he really was. It just wasn’t good enough to be at home dressed as woman. I really felt that this was a young man on a course of self-discovery, where the evolution of becoming what had been repressed for so long was just a matter of time.

I was concerned about how Matt was coping. I recommended that perhaps a more complete assessment of his anxiety should be done, and that perhaps more intensive long-term support should be looked at towards his sexual identity.

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto has a gender identity clinic and Sunnybrook and Women's College Health Science Centre has an anxiety disorder clinic. I recommended to both Matt and his mother that these facilities be considered.

There was reluctance on both of their parts. Matt's mother was aware of Matt's anxiety over the past few years. They had seen someone in the past who had recommended medication but this was not explored. Matt at the time also began periodically seeing a counselor to assist with discussion about coping. The exploration of how his anxiety and his development towards sexual identity seemed to be having a significant evolving impact on his ability to cope. However, as a clinician, I could only encourage and strongly recommend the additional resources. Matt and his mother would have to reach the point where they would need to understand this for themselves.

Matt and his mother gave me permission to speak with Matt's individual guidance and support counsellor. Both this worker and I had come to similar formulations as to what would be the most beneficial in better understanding Matt and his struggles. This individual worker had been focusing on helping Matt explore his sexuality and would now begin to assist with his sexual identity supports. My work could focus on continuing to provide a more immediate on-site school support to Matt and his daily struggles with anxiety and identity.

School work seemed fine for Matt – actually, interestingly enough, even early on, it was turning out to be one of his better school years with regard to his marks, work completion and successes. However, Matt's internal struggles continued to surface more frequently. There were apparent incidents of intense moments when his emotional feelings would come to the surface all at the same time – episodes possibly relating to conflicts; male vs. female; building an intimate relationship vs. the need for social isolation; safeguarding his true identity vs. the fear of being found out.

For the first few months, Matt wore women's clothes only at home. Isolated, but with a sense of freedom. An opportunity came up at Halloween with a Student Council Dress-up day. Matt decided to dress as a woman at school. Dressed in a pink dress, with a wig – there was no mistake – Matt was dressed as a woman. He had brought the outfit to the school and changed in the Student Council office. People thought it was funny and he did get a few “odd looks” - but hey, - it was Halloween after all.

This proved to be a testing ground for Matt. Could he stand the comments, the looks and have the confidence to be able dress the way he felt and wanted to live his life?

*We talked about how this day went for him soon afterwards. To Matt, it almost was a brush off to suggest it was anything out of the ordinary or made him anxious. In fact he said, he felt very positive and carefree, relaxed and engaged with everyone. **“I really didn't care what people thought.”***

Near the middle of November 2004, Matt began to discuss for the first time the possibility of dressing as a woman at school. He had begun to take steps bridging out from only dressing up in his home as a woman. He had begun to wear women's clothing outside in the community, walks around the block, shopping with his mother. He had also begun to consider attending a Transgender Teen support group run through the 519 Community centre in Toronto. There was a desire to connect with others who had the same interests. It was clear that Matt appeared to be taking that invisible step-by-step process to test out his comfort/safety and seek out support resources to help move along in his transition.

In our November 19, 2004 counselling meeting, Matt let me know that he wanted to come to school dressed as a woman. How could he do this? We had an open discussion about the most practical sort of immediate concerns and considerations; would the school allow this?; how could we ensure his safety?; how did his parents feel about this?; when could he begin?; was he ready emotionally?; who needed to be consulted?... Questions, - a lot of questions.... but Matt seemed ready, and needed my help to move forward.

The starting point..... Educating about the differences between gender identity, sexual orientation and transgender

Making a clear distinction between “sexual orientation” – the preference of sexual partners, irrespective of sex or gender which is most often expressed as gay, straight, heterosexual, homosexual or lesbian, and “gender identity” – the sex of the soul, who they are on the inside, – how they show themselves to the world, - was paramount to understanding the shift within Matt.

Being transgender for Matt was seeing himself as a female in a male body. Although Matt had an emotional and perhaps sexual attraction to both genders, his gender presentation was a need to begin a lifestyle - who he really was.

Questions could and did arise – “Is he gay?”, is he a “cross-dresser”, “does he just want to dress in women’s clothes”?

The biggest misunderstanding to overcome was assuming that because Matt dressed up in women’s clothes, that he must be gay – tying his sexual orientation to how he wanted to present himself as a member of the opposite sex.

It was interesting that if the transition was as simple as Matt being “gay”, that it would be more easily understood and perhaps accepted. That Matt needed to express and present himself as a woman was not understood, and was disturbing and confusing.

And there was no easy answer – most of the transgender issues in the community and definitions are hard to specifically classify – most overlap, but there are clear differences. One of the hardest tasks was to educate those differences for those who would perhaps work with Matt and help with the transition.

There are differences and similarities in what is known as cross-dressing, drag queens, transvestite, transsexuals and transgenderists.

Matt was transgender. He saw himself as a female in a male body. He wanted to live his life as a woman. He may or may not be gay. A sex reassignment/change may be something he would explore in the future.

Preparation for the change

<i>It’s my choice, need and time– challenges ahead</i>

Matt was clear – this is something that he wanted to do. He had already begun to dress as a woman at home and in the community. School, where he spent almost 8 hours a day, was the last place that was left. And for Matt, it wasn’t just about the need, it was also about the right to be able to do what he thought was just a natural extension and representation of who he was.

Challenges... There were many. How would we start? Who would we need to get “permission” from? Who do we need to involve? How would Matt’s role on the Student Council be affected? What were the safety precautions that would need to be considered?

Rights and responsibilities within the school system- isn't there a special program he can go to?

Under the Toronto Board of Education policies and equity foundation statement guidelines – Matt had the right, and the school had the responsibility to ensure the transition. It was clear with regard to their statements, that students have the right to learn and work in environment free of restricting biases.

Under Section 3 – Anti – homophobia, sexual orientation, and equity

“The Toronto District School board mandates all persons in schools, workplaces, and meeting places associated with the board abides by its commitments to Equity Policy Implementation”. Further, “The Toronto District School board policies, guidelines, and practices shall ensure that the needs and safety of all students, employees, trustees, parents, volunteers, visitors etc... are addressed. These shall reflect the diverse viewpoints, needs and aspirations of members of these communities, particularly those of groups whose voices traditionally and systemically have been marginalized and excluded on the basis of their sexual orientation. This includes lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, two-spirited, transsexual and transgender people and their families.”

Under Section 3.4 – Curriculum

“A curriculum that strives for sexual orientation equity provides a balance of perspectives. The Toronto District School Board acknowledges that inequities have existed in the curriculum; therefore, the Board is committed to enabling all lesbian and gay students, and students who identify themselves on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, to see themselves reflected in the curriculum. “

Under Section 3.7 – Guidance

“The Toronto District School Board recognizes that informed counselors, teachers and staff in counseling roles can help remove discriminatory barriers for students in the school system and in work-related experiences. The Board shall respond effectively to the needs of lesbian and gay and other students who identify themselves on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity by:

- *3.7.I. providing counseling services that are culturally sensitive, supportive, and free of bias on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity*

So the policies and practices were clear – Matt had the right within the School system. But, how would the school interpret those policies and practices to ensure the principles and values of the policies were followed?

***Involving school staff –informing the administration/planning/informing his teachers –
Can't he wait until the end of the school year? -Whenever is it a good time?***

1st step conversations within school – contacting the various appropriate administration within the school that would need to be involved in the transition; guidance counselor; head of guidance; school social worker; Vice-Principals; Principal.

2nd step conversation – consultation with Matt's individual counselor outside the school

3rd step conversation – contact and consultation with the Toronto District School Board sexuality counselor

It was important to understand that no direct conversations had been held with any of Matt's family members yet since the school needed to examine the potential barriers/considerations to the school's “position” of support and how to concretely make the transition begin. Matt however, was encouraged to

discuss this desire with his mother and his father, although he appeared quite reluctant to approach the latter at that point.

It was decided that in order to have some direction and feedback re the considerations, the Toronto District school board Sexuality Program Social Worker would be invited to attend a meeting with the administration members of the school to discuss the transition.

4th step conversation – information provided in a meeting of the school’s “Local School Team” – guidance counselors, vice principals, social worker, Special Education Curriculum leader, Gifted Studies Curriculum leader, and the School psychologist about the transition

5th step conversation – individual meeting with administration and Matt’s eight core subject teachers. A note was sent to teachers about the need for an immediate meeting:

CONFIDENTIAL – MEMO OUT TO INDIVIDUAL CLASS TEACHERS BY THE VICE-PRINCIPAL
“A situation is unfolding re Matt that you need to be made aware of. With that in mind, you are asked to make yourself available for a meeting. If you are unable to attend, please speak to myself (Vice-Principal) or the Principal at the first opportunity. In the meantime, I would ask that you refrain from discussing the planned meeting with Matt. Many thanks for your assistance and cooperation. I apologize for the short notice”

I remember this meeting well – all of Matt’s eight core subjects teachers were seated around a large table – this author announced that Matt had decided to make a “gender presentation” change at school and that he would begin living his life at school as a woman. There was silence in the room. Time was needed to digest what had been just said. It was then that a few questions came up. Isn’t there a special program he can go to? Doesn’t it make more sense for him to wait until the end of the school year when he has left Northern? The school administration that was present in the room stated the equity policy and that Matt had indeed the right to do this. That there were obvious conversations and consultations with Matt’s parents and community resources, and that plans were being discussed to make this as smooth a transition as possible. What support would they require in their individual classes? This author would be traveling with Matt on that first transition day from class to class – Would the teachers need to address this in the class? Were they comfortable doing this themselves? How would they be comfortable dealing with any class discipline problems? The meeting did not go on for too long – the purpose was to involve them in the planning and knowledge stage, and have them approach the people working directly with Matt separately to ask questions, share concerns.

6th step informing – letter sent out to staff within the school. This letter was circulated after several re-writes from consultation with the Toronto District School Board sexuality counselor, Matt, his parents, the administration and this author. It was sent out in a sealed envelope to all staff in their mailboxes. The letter was sent out after it was firmly decided that Matt indeed would begin dressing as a female at school and had a potential start date. The thinking was not to send out such a letter if it was not going to happen – so we had to wait for Matt and his family to give the “go ahead” sign.

LETTER SENT OUT TO ENTIRE SCHOOL STAFF

DATE: 1 WEEK PRIOR TO TRANSITION START DATE
TO: All staff
FROM : Principal

"One of our students, Matt, has made a "gender presentation" decision (which is defined as the way we show ourselves to the world- by way of sex, gender or sexual orientation). In the near future Matt will be dressing as a female at school and in the community. During that time, he would like to be known as "Jade". You will appreciate that this has been a highly personal and difficult decision for him and his family.

TDSB equity policy supports Matt's right to make this decision and states that the Board shall respond effectively to the needs of students who identify themselves on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity...and assure all students experience personal growth and reach their full potential in academic and life paths.

Matt is a wonderful and courageous student. It is his right to live his life in the manner he chooses, both at school and in the community. Matt will be as smart and funny and nice as before, except he will be dressing differently in order to feel more comfortable. It is our professional duty, as Board employees, to support Matt to the best of his abilities. As well, it is our responsibility to help each other and our students to respect Matt's decision and not tolerate harassment or bullying in the school and ultimately to get on with the main task of educating students.

There are two important messages that Matt would like to communicate to staff:

- i) he anticipates that this change may make others uncomfortable and they may need some time to adjust and*
- ii) He is not an "exhibit", but a student who would like to pursue his education, like all the other students in his classes.*

Matt has asked that this decision be shared with you and anyone else you feel is appropriate.

In the near future, the TDSB Sexuality Program Social Worker, who has been guiding us in our deliberations, will present a workshop to the entire staff on "Sexuality and Gender Identity." This should assist us to meet the diverse needs of students in our school.

Please be assured that we have engaged in numerous meetings with Matt, his family, Board personnel, our own counselors and Matt's teachers to make this as seamless a transition, as possible, for all involved. One the occasion of Matt's "gender transition" a counselor will be in each of his classes to assist as needed. As well, our other counselors will be available to discuss any concerns with students.

Attached please find a list of resources to assist you in learning more about "Transgender Youth and Their Families: (i.e. a person who wishes, and seriously acts upon the sense of having the wrong body) should you want to explore this area in more detail.

I realize this is a complex transition which will require great sensitivity on everyone's part and should you wish to discuss this further please drop by.

Thank you."

***Involving community and school support resources-is there a training manual of to how to do this?-
what manual?***

Contact was made with two key sources; the 519 Church Street community centre in Toronto – www.the519.org -(A community centre providing services for HIV-positive people, Homeless or street people, Men: Gay Men, Women: Lesbians, Youth: Gay Men, Youth: Lesbians, transsexual or Transgendered People), and a Social worker from the Toronto District School Board sexuality program. The first obvious question that I had as a worker working with a youth going through this transition, - Was there any written documentation or information detailing how to bring about such a transition into a regular high school environment? The answer was “NO!” Thus began the process of getting “pieces” or direction about how to work with a youth who is beginning the transition of acknowledging they are transgender and applying those principles, values and rights/responsibilities to this particular situation and environment.

When the Social Worker from the Sexuality program came to speak with the administration at the school, it was more of an informal discussion and question/answer time than a step-by-step process of what to do and not to do. As a collective we came to some “responses” or directives that we would follow. There were basically no right or wrong answers – paramount were the rights of the individual, how the school could best accommodate and support him, and how best to involve and balance the desires of Matt’s parents in dealing with this transition.

Matt’s mother was already aware of the planning meeting that was going to take place since Matt had indeed let her know that this was his desire and that the school was having conversations about how to best support this need. It was felt that having parents at this initial planning meeting would not be helpful as the school needed time to plan, consult and be given possible direction as to what could or couldn’t be done. They needed to get their thoughts and ideas together before involving the parents.

Matt and his mother were supportive of this need on the school’s behalf.

Meeting which took place with School administration and Toronto District School Board Sexuality program Social Worker:

This meeting was quite helpful. Right from the beginning it was made clear that this decision was not a question of approval, but that the school would need to facilitate support around Matt’s choice. This decision was explained as a student transition – if someone is different it is okay. They were encouraged not to make it bigger than it is. Not making Matt an “exhibit” would be key. Uncomfortable ness and time to accept such a change from a fellow student was to be expected. Dressing as a person of the opposite sex as a way of exploration is often mislabeled and a misconceived lifestyle. Problems relating to class discipline could involve the Vice – Principals office. Questions from staff and or students/parents could be directed to the support services within the school.

Discussions and questions/answers that arose:

1. What name would Matt like to be addressed as? “Jade”
2. How would he dress? -He would go by appropriate dress expectations as per regular student population rules
3. What are the school’s plans to address teachers- engage his core subject teachers first. Departmental curriculum leaders can also be addressed who will be able to filter information to their staffing groups. Local social team meeting was addressed
4. Providing education to staff about the equity policy. Provide written information about the policy to staff group
5. Early in the new school year (January) provide Professional Development information about Gender identity and forum for questions or concerns to be raised. This would be facilitated by this author and the Toronto District School Board Sexuality Program Social Worker
6. What washroom would Matt use? Would be provided use of 1st floor unisex staff/special needs washroom for use. Matt could access the key to this via the Principal’s office.

7. *Safety concerns – Consider having Matt take a different route to school in regards to a less traveled area through more residential areas. Need to report any harassment, taunts, and incidents. Follow up meeting with School's Youth Services School Liaison police officer should occur re safety planning*
8. *As soon as possible, a face-to-face meeting should be held with Matt's mother (preferably both parents) and Matt to discuss the desire for the transition at school*
9. *Principal would then have a face-to-face meeting for follow up and discussion with Matt*

There was also a rich conversation about the need to inform Matt's father – who, at the time of the meeting had not been informed about the transition. Matt and his mother had contact with his father but up until that point, neither had informed Matt's father about what was in the planning stages. The school staff questioned what legal need they had to duly inform. Direction was given that it would be best for Matt and his mother to inform Matt's father about this transition in order to avoid Matt's father finding out about it without prior knowledge or involvement. It was also legally evident, that, as a secondary caregiver, Matt's father could ask and inquire about academic matters within the school; however, non academic matters, such as what was currently being discussed, would need written permission from Matt himself to inform. Informing Matt's father was the responsibility of Matt and/or his mother. The School had no grounds to take on the role of breaking confidentiality/privacy if it was against Matt's wishes.

<p><i>Involving family members – are you sure? Telling his mother, involving his father, sensitivity to his younger sister at another local high school.</i></p>

The meeting involving Matt's family and himself took place the day after we met with school administration and the Toronto District School board Sexuality Program Social Worker. We were just expecting Matt and his mother, and were still uncomfortable about Matt's father apparent non-involvement. However, we were quite surprised and relieved when we entered the meeting in the Principal's office and Matt's father was also present. Matt and his mother had telephoned Matt's father the evening before.

*Matt's father was told that Matt was cross-dressing and that he wanted to begin a transition at the school. He came over to the house that evening. He didn't want Matt to think that he had hesitated for a moment. **"In theory I had a choice". "In reality, it was a no-brainer". "There was nothing to do but be completely supportive. It was a turning point."** Matt's father had waves of emotion as the news settled. **"My first reaction was sadness and fear for the future, that he was exposing himself to a lifetime of hardship. Life is hard enough."***

"My second reaction was sadness for the past. There were many periods of Matt's childhood when I wondered why Matt wasn't happier. I was now able to understand that Matt for his whole life felt uncomfortable wearing clothes we'd bought for him. My third was admiration. You tell your kids to respect others despite differences.... to be themselves and not what other people want them to be. I was proud to have a child who had the courage to do that."

But what lay ahead? "I wanted to make sure my child was doing this with eyes open, so he understood from an adult perspective what this meant. Was this something you need to do at school, could you pick your times, - after school, weekends, social occasions? Beyond school, there's university, and beyond university...."

Matt's father wanted him to consider all of this. But he never wanted to talk him out of the change. "Here was a child who had wondered, does my father really support me? I realized how important my role was."

The meeting was fairly straightforward. All involved were naturally concerned about safety for Matt and that this was something he was ready for emotionally. There were conversations about the true nature of how Matt saw himself and how best to describe the transition to others. Should we pre-empt publicity by approaching the media? Not necessary. When would this actually start? We discussed some concrete

considerations and implementation factors, which had been discussed the previous day in the administration meeting.

Matt's parents were very appreciative about how much sensitivity and time the school had taken to try and "cover everything". It was left that Matt would need to finalize a decision with his parents and then the Principal would have a final meeting with Matt to confirm that he would indeed go forward with the transition at school. We had looked at a potential start date - about 2 weeks from the meeting time with parents— just before the Holiday break. We would now wait to see if we moved forward.

The next day I received an email message from Matt.

"I still want to go through with it, but my parents wish me to wait probably until 2005 because they want to work things through with my sister. The point was made that her life, although in (another local school just down the street) may be affected by this and just want to ensure she doesn't suffer any serious backlash."

"Personally I'm really annoyed. I know the risks, but it's been 15 years coming and I know this is what I want and need to do. If you have any suggestions on this, don't hesitate to contact me. I've also sent an email out to the other members of the Student Council informing them of the situation. But since my parents insisted, I guess I can hold off."

It could be interpreted by his email that he was feeling quite dejected and frustrated. I think he struggled with the belief that his parents were understanding and supportive, but also with what they faced ahead. They would require the same courage, effort, commitment and love that is needed when anyone is forced by circumstances to face facts that one would prefer to deny or to ignore. He didn't ask to be transsexual. He took the terrible risk of rejection that a disclosure could entail. A situation in which the pain was undeniable. Matt reached out to his parents and others. And it appeared he was so close to being able to realize that he could begin living his life as he needed to. They were concerned for their son, but also needed to be concerned about a potential impact on Matt's sister. Matt's sister was already aware that Matt was cross-dressing at home and in the community. The worry was, Matt being the Student Council President at the one school, talk could filter over to the other school and have an emotional toll on his sister going through High school. Matt's parents were not sure that his sister would be ready and handle such a toll. Adults could possibly deflect and understand the complexities of the transition but a 15 year old with friends who was the "sister of the transsexual" may not be able to.

Matt was clear that he would try and establish more of a concrete "timeframe" of comfort from his parents. It was needed for him, and would be helpful for planning purposes for the school.

<p><i>Involving school kids and parents – he will not be made to be an exhibit! Should we address the school, classes prior to the transition?</i></p>

As noted earlier, Matt began his first connection to inform peers via an email to his other Student Council members. It was a sign that he was letting more of his peers know that he was moving towards the transition.

"For the past six months I've had a radical change in lifestyle. And have come to acknowledge to family and friends that I cross-dress. This lifestyle has affected all aspects of my life and I now virtually live full time as a female – when outside of school."

This leads me to my next point – I've been meeting with the administration, guidance and Dale about doing it in school. This will occur with some consistency sometime in the next few weeks, going by the chosen name Jade. Probably in 2005. As you can guess, the President of the Student Council cross-dressing in school is something that you should know about with some prior knowledge."

This is expected to and will present some challenges that no one would ever have thought about before.

If you have any questions, concerns, comments, opinions, don't hesitate to reply to this email. Also, what do you think about the name? (I'm not changing it in case you were wondering)"

There was discussion about how to breach the transition with the student body and parents – should the school send out a general memo to be read in class, should there be any vague or generalized announcement over the P.A.? Should a letter be sent home to families? It was decided that none of the above should be pursued since doing any of those things would present the “exhibit” of the transition, - which was counter to getting on with the business of being a student. As said several times already in this writing, a smooth transition was key to Jade.

The Parents Council was duly informed about the transition of Matt to Jade. Once Matt made the transition, the chair of the council did receive a call asking if the council was going to “address” the issue. The response was, “we didn't have an issue to address.”

Just prior to the transition, this author sent a note around to Jade's individual teachers. Asking them what level of support they would like within their classes on the transition start day.

<p><i>Safety considerations- involvement of the community police in safety planning – do you have a cell phone?</i></p>
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We decided it best to meet with the school's community police officer. This way we could provide some direction to Jade and her family in regards to providing some safety considerations while the transition was happening and for reference on available supports if Jade was feeling uncomfortable or victimized. Although we could provide a more contained and controlled environment while at school, it was acknowledged the “community” presented more challenging safety issues. Considerations took place as to the most appropriate travel routes to and from school – Jade usually walked to and from school each day – so, travel on appropriate transit was not too much of a concern. (Jade had already shared with this author that taking the transit was still anxious provoking for her – she had taken it, but usually felt more unsafe with more people around.)

It was important to look at accessing support along Jade's typical travel route from school – where the pay phones were, what stores she could go into, the community centre and as a last resort, knocking on doors along the street for help if needed. The use of a cell phone for accessing support was also strongly recommended. Jade was also advised never go into a secluded area, be aware of her surroundings, and observe individuals in her travel.

Jade decided on two separate travel routes to and from school – this way she could change the routes if feeling vulnerable. She did get a cell phone for the initial purpose of calling home prior to leaving school so someone would know she was on her way. It took approx. 25 minutes walking the travel routes so if out longer than that time, someone could potentially suspect that Jade needed help. Any changes of plans or timing should be communicated to someone anticipating the call from Jade.

Jade's best defense was not to become a “creature of habit”. Silence was to be avoided and she should create a commotion if she was feeling targeted or in danger while in the community. If attacked, protecting her core self and vital body parts was paramount. The unusual is always an easy target, and Jade needed to be aware that sometimes people decide to act on feelings of discomfort.

<i>Role-playing scenarios of harassment – if they call you this...how to respond.</i>
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Understanding that references to “Jade” may need appropriate time to acknowledge was the first consideration. Jade had to anticipate that reactions and feelings towards her basically threatened the more primitive feelings and thoughts people hold about sexuality and identity. The need to normalize people’s discomfort and provide open and honest discussion was important. It was acknowledged that it was best that Jade not respond aggressively towards any name calls, derogatory comments or statements. That the best approach would be to encourage those who may have questions to ask her directly, or, feel free to approach someone within the school who could provide some education or awareness about a question they might have.

She needed to be aware that persons may not be able to understand what exactly Jade was doing for herself. Misconceptions and awkwardness could be inherent in their discomfort.

Start day – support and challenges- what we did. The questions asked.

“Is this for real? Why is he doing this? Is he gay?”

That first day, she chose her outfit for her first school day. She changed in the Student Council office in the basement. She had decided she just wasn’t ready yet to walk to school dressed as a woman. She met this author in my 3rd floor office, ½ hour before class and school start time.

*Jade has admitted she was frightened that first day as she walked through the school. Yet her fear was also balanced by a new feeling of being comfortable for the first time. She was very tuned in to what was going on around her; there was some laughter, but no one came up to her directly. At the end of the day, it was kind of “surreal.” **“I never expected anything to happen after years of longing.”***

We had discussed how Jade would get through the classes that day. Would she need and want support? Should this author go to the individual classes prior to the start date and have a discussion with the class? It was decided that Jade and this author would go to her classes that first day together. As this author was a high visible and known figure in the school, it would send a visual message that Jade had support and incidents wouldn’t be tolerated.

Having already heard back from Jade’s teachers that they didn’t feel they had to specifically address Jade’s start date in class, this author and Jade went to the home form class and she sat in her regular seat. This author sat in close proximity to Jade in the class. There was a balance of providing Jade the visual and emotional support, but also respecting a certain degree of privacy and space to allow her to deal with questions/comments or participate in the class on her own. That’s what she had wanted.

The most interesting response was not necessarily comments, but looks and stares. This author observed many occasions in which students in the class were just looking at Jade in her presentation and you could literally see the processing of what was in front of them on their faces.

Transitioning from class to class during the breaks was also noteworthy. It appeared that some students were caught off guard as Jade rounded a corner of the hall and met them face- to- face. Some incidents did occur in which you saw students approaching other students to whisper or bring them closer to see Jade. There were some giggles, laughter and snide remarks. However, fitting into what we expected, all were within the normal, “ not sure what I’m seeing/uncomfortable” category.

Jade and this author had lunch together in the cafeteria with other kids in the school. We carried on a conversation as if we were oblivious to all those around us. Jade then decided that she needed some time just to sit and reflect in the Student Council office alone. We met up again after lunch.

Her afternoon classes were with teachers who fully supported her and were more than comfortable providing advocacy or limits to anything that would occur in the class as a result of Jade's presentation. Therefore, these teachers actually let this author know that he did not have to accompany Jade to those classes, so Jade went to her afternoon classes by herself, and handled the transition periods in between classes as well.

At the end of the day, Jade and this author spoke in his office. Jade said she had thought the day had gone very well. Tomorrow was another day. Jade was ready for it.

Most important pieces for the start date and regular class attending:

1. *Find out what level of support Jade wanted*
2. *Connect with the individual teachers to see what level of support they needed*
3. *Let teachers know that "Matt: would like to be referred to as "Jade" when attendance roll call was done*
4. *Ensure that an appropriate washroom is available for use*
5. *Be prepared for a possible substitution or "supply teacher" in absence of full time teacher. This person would need to know about what might be happening in their class*
6. *Balance safety, security and support with a need for privacy and need to advocate for themselves*
7. *Plan what will happen for times when not in class; transition between classes, lunch, assemblies*
8. *Make available time for school support staff to accompany that first day*

Jade also decided to do an interview with the school newspaper, Epigram. In it, Jade answered the questions students may have been too polite to ask; what transgender meant; which washroom was Jade using; what Jade's sexual orientation was; advice for other questioning youth; and would she be having a sex change?

Jade had said, "The world around us, it seems is becoming more and more accepting of differences. However, very many people will never be comfortable with individual living choices or differences among peers, which they were taught to be wrong. Exposure to different cultures and lifestyles will make us more accepting. Nevertheless, high school can be a very intimidating community in which to reveal oneself when maturity can be scarce and experience lacking."

It was important to Jade that the transition be transparent. She didn't try and hide it. "This is what I'm going to do – I'm not embarrassed and I won't allow myself to be a target." Jade did not remove herself from her group of friends, or stop doing what she typically did on a regular school day. She walked down the same halls in the school, and went to the same meetings. It appeared most thought of her as the same person – she had just changed her look.

The added challenge of also being the Student Council President – the holiday school assembly, Grade 8 orientation meet and greet (Union Rep says "this may affect jobs!"), chairing student meetings, representing the school, the closing year end assembly

Having been elected to the role of Student Council President in June 2004, Matt now being identified as "Jade" did bring up some discussions. Some did feel that the School President should reflect more closely the majority of the students. "As a student, he has the right to express himself in his own way, but as a representative of the school – maybe some things should have been brought forward in the campaign. I voted for Matt, not Jade" said one student.

Some students were talking about impeaching or removing Jade from the role of the President, but this really didn't go anywhere. When posed to the administration, the question asked by the student group

against such a movement was, **“What are you going to do about it?”** This question was redirected back to the same concerned student group, **“What are you going to do about it?”** Peer support and advocacy about Jade’s right was better served within the peer group as opposed to the administration.

Dealing with diversity straight on, the administration made it clear such a “movement” would not even be allowed to be brought up. The school can’t say they respect Jade’s rights and then stand by and allow a “movement” to grow towards removing Jade’s right of office.

It was felt that Jade and Matt were one and that she represented the school as before, except her visual presentation to others had changed. Therefore, typical Student Council President roles of involvement would just continue. The difference now, was that we had to consistently pre-plan how to deal with potential problems or disruptions.

The rest of the members of the Executive Student Council of which Jade was a part didn’t hesitate, nor did they ask if there be a difference in how Matt was involved in council affairs, or how “Jade” should be involved. It was simply expected that there would be no difference.

Jade’s first public appearance at an entire school event was at the “Holiday assemblies” – two gatherings of all grades within the auditorium. There was a set agenda, and Jade was assigned to one aspect of the assembly. It was really the first “target” focused forum where Jade would be visually seen in front of a large crowd. Jade was situated on the stage as part of the “platform party”. We had already discussed with Student council and Jade what to potentially expect from the crowd – be prepared for “snickers”, be prepared for more movement and activity within the crowd. However, keep focused on the topics being introduced, stop if the noise level became too loud, and if need be, have a staff member address the crowd to settle them down.

Recall that our guiding principle was to continue as if Jade was just another person on the stage – not to call attention to or make remarks specifically to address what people may be seeing and trying to understand for the first time.

At one point Jade got up and addressed the crowd about a specific holiday celebration. It seemed to go off without a problem.

In the crowd were also the various teachers and staff members who had brought their classes down to the auditorium. In subtle ways they addressed any chatter/shout-outs or unusual large group disruptions.

On the same day, Jade was one of the judges at the Holiday gingerbread-making contest in the front hallway of the school. This author was also one of the judges and was able to support Jade by being in close proximity – respecting boundaries, but close enough to be available for support for Jade and, to address any student questions.

Jade also chaired Student Council Senate meetings – a group of elected students representing various clubs/activities and committees within the school. At the first meeting, Jade invited questions from the group. Jade provided clear and direct answers to any questions, which seemed to help build an understanding of what she was going through and why she made the decision she did. Again, in their eyes, the group overwhelmingly seemed to want to move on to the more important items of getting Student Council business done.

Jade’s position in the school did raise some questions. What part, for instance, should she play in public events in the community, such as the Grade 8 orientation assembly and meet and greet. Initially approached by an administration member to look at having someone else introduce and welcome the students from feeder schools, the question was raised, **“If this is a role typically performed by the Student Council President, then why would we be considering having someone else talk to the students?”**

The initial position was that perhaps the school didn’t want “Jade” to be the focus of the assembly. Following the practice of rights and roles, it was concluded that the school could not “have it both ways.”

They couldn't talk about and practice supporting and respecting Matt's rights to identify as Jade, but then, when it came to certain events, not allow Jade to represent who she truly was. Then they started talking, "compromise" – allowing Jade to be up in the auditorium but not directly addressing the students from the stage. This was discounted for similar reasons.

The resolution was that Jade and the Vice President of the Student council would address the audience together. This would provide Jade with the forum as Student Council President and also have another person at the microphone to dilute focus on Jade.

It was even considered whether the feeder schools should be informed about the Student Council President. It was decided that Jade was not the reason students were coming to the school, it was the school itself. Actively informing the schools, it would simply draw attention to the situation and have people formulate their judgments even before entering the school for the visit. So, no contact was made to the feeder schools.

When Jade did speak at the opening part of the assembly, there was a bit of laughter, but it seemed the older students provided modeling for the younger students though stern looks, comments or closeness and the laughs faded. It was about setting the tone and maintaining the respect of whoever was addressing the crowd.

One interesting aspect of the feeder schools coming to the school to visit and Jade addressing the group, was that the school staff Union Rep did approach this author and state there were "rumblings" within the staff group about what would happen if these potential students were so turned off, scared, or embarrassed about coming to the school because of someone like Jade, that enrollment went down and impacted job security amongst staff. An incredible path to think out about how 1 person could have so much effect and influence on a student and staff group. The staff Union Rep basically answered their own question by saying that such trickle down thinking and impact were ridiculous; that a choice to come to a certain school is that – a choice – regardless of who and what is presented or being presented in an assembly. It would be a shame if such thinking warranted families to think twice about attending our school.

Skipping ahead, it was an incredible sight in June to see during Jade's last Presidential year-end review speech at the closing year-end school assembly, that the applause was overwhelming and not heard for anyone else who spoke during the assembly.

Special functions – France trip exchange, attending the Formal

One of the next "big hurdles" was the pre-booked France exchange trip in March. Obvious concerns about Jade attending were on the minds of everyone. Initially, no one was sure whether Jade even wanted to go to France after the transition. The France trip had been planned and paid for prior to Matt realizing he was going to make a transition. However, it was decided back in December, as the transition was initially being planned, that the first thing to do would be to get through those first days and then worry about what the plan was for the trip in March.

After the transition, Matt decided that he wanted to travel to France as "Jade." Initial concerns were raised by the travel agent that Matt traveling as Jade would be a distraction for the trip and that the "homestay" part of the trip (where Matt would stay with a billeted family) would also be out of the question. That considering the transition at this late stage, it would not be fair to the family because it had not been the original plan. There was also a concern as to who Matt would room with as part of the traveling hotel stay part of the program as each student did need to have a roommate. The travel agent was prepared to provide a full refund.

After investigation, it was deemed that Matt's rights were being violated by that premise as Matt was protected under the sexual orientation clause under the Ontario Human Rights Code. The travel agency could not provide restriction to who Matt was identifying as. However, instead of filing a Human Rights complaint, Matt and his family decided that they wanted to try and make something work for the trip. As consultations continued, it was apparent, after the initial concerns, the travel agency was reasonably accommodating in trying to work out the situation.

It was felt that the travel agency could do some research of their own in France on accommodating support groups for Matt to travel as Jade. There was no reason why Jade could not go on the exchange. Other questions and concerns were also raised, although the school environment could be contained and/or provide support, the reality of traveling to another country could not be contained or referenced potentially in a safe and reassuring manner.

*In trying to accommodate the request for Jade to attend the trip, the question had to be asked, “**what could Jade accept without feeling compromised?**”*

In consultation with Jade’s family and the travel agency, it was decided that the trip could go forward. Jade would share a room with a friend of hers that was also going on the trip for the 1st part of the planned trip. The peer had been consulted and was very comfortable with the arrangement. In dealing with the billet family section, all were in agreement that a shortened trip would be requested, (with full refund granted for that portion to Jade) and that Jade would return home early to avoid any need for separate room accommodations (which would have cost an additional sum of money for Jade)

Safety planning on the trip was the next piece to be discussed. Jade, the teachers accompanying the trip, the school administration and Jade’s family were part of the discussion;

- *Matt would travel as “Matt” to and from the airport and while traveling aboard planes*
- *Matt would need to give “some distance” away from the airport prior to changing into Jade clothes. The concern being that in this day and age of safety/security, Jade would potentially cause alarm if seeming to be in disguise*
- *Matt would not be able to be addressed as Jade in the airport /safety/security areas due to Matt being Matt in official documents*
- *Anticipate that in another country that safety, supervision and increase in perceived harassment may be needed or felt*
- *During parts of the trip the school he would be sharing bus rides and/or activities with other students. Matt should respond similarly to previous situations of discomfort or harassment and seek out staff support if required*
- *If needing support around any safety/security problems, Matt would need to see one of the staff immediately.*
- *As per regular student trip expectations, no student is to travel alone, always with 2 or 3 other students*
- *On free time, Matt would need to let school staff know where he is going*
- *An official letter of recognition would be carried on Matt at all times in France. This letter could be used if security personnel/other question Matt about his presentation;*

“This is to acknowledge that Matt/Jade is a student of _____Secondary School in Toronto, Ontario Canada. Matt is on a school exchange trip to France which began on March 11, 2005.

Matt recognizes and dresses himself as “Jade” as a “gender presentation” decision. Matt presents as a female both at school and in the community.

The student’s presentation is not a “disguise” but the way in which he is most comfortable presenting himself.

The teachers from the school are aware of how this student is presenting himself and he has their support.”

Jade went on the trip in March with no apparent disruptions and/or problems as a result of being transgender. School staff reported that individuals that came into contact with Jade were respectful and appropriate. It seemed more and more as we planned for the “worst case scenarios”, of the way people and situations presented themselves, we had either become lucky, or people were respectful within appropriate social norms.

The most important pieces about involvement in an out of school trip were;

- *Ensure that appropriate organizations or planning groups are involved in the process*
- *Know and be clear on the rights of the person*
- *The school should be clear as to what expectations they have with planning groups as to how an impacted student will be dealt with*
- *Find out if there are any limitations or considerations as a result of someone being transgender traveling abroad*
- *Discuss openly the comfort and availability of a single room or sharing room accommodation*
- *Check local, international and specific country information/rules/regulations/customs as to how being transgender may have an impact in that locale*
- *Ensure proper documentation if someone is traveling as transgender*
- *Have a clear safety plan to deal with incidents of personal need and security*
- *Be clear on the role of school staff in regards to support/security and comfort of the student while on the trip*

With June of the school year, came the regular high school “Formal.” An end of year celebration dinner and dance event at an outside school locale that all graduated students are allowed to attend. Jade, as the current Student Council President, and a graduating student, was certainly leaning towards and encouraged to attend the “Formal.” There was anxiety for Jade. Large events seemed to create more feelings of being overwhelmed and she just didn’t appear comfortable at these type of events. However, as a seemingly “right of passage” towards ending the school year, she decided to attend. We briefly talked about the usual safety concerns and comfort level of her attending such an event. However, Jade was clear that there was no need to consider safety precautions as these were her peers and they already knew who she was and how she presented.

The next difficulty for Jade was finding an appropriate “Prom dress.” Jade and her mother agreed it had to be special. Three days prior to the event, they were able to find a local shop specializing in prom dresses – remember, a little complexity was that Jade was also six foot four in height. When they went to the shop, the owner had put aside eight dresses for Jade to look at and try on. Jade really didn’t like any of them. She picked her own outfit out – a black cocktail dress trimmed in pink and it looked great on her. The “prom” is meant to be a special time in the finishing of a high school student’s career although there were parts of the prom that she felt she couldn’t take part in. You could see in Jade’s face that she loved her dress and felt a part of that special time.

Jade attended the “Formal” on that special Friday night in June. When speaking with her afterward, she let this author know that, “overall it was a good night, and I’m glad that I came.”

Transition from High school to University

Jade had decided to leave home in the fall to go to University in another province. There were obvious anxieties centred on this big shift. A shift away from home was one thing, but the other shift was looking at a new situation, presenting himself as transgender. Jade and her parents researched how open and welcoming the University would be. It was important for them to let the University know of the special considerations and circumstances that Jade potentially presented as she made her choice to attend their University. She looked forward to university and her ability to live her life more independently and with more personal freedom.

Counselling Matt who was Jade – what did he/she want and need

Looking in the mirror these days, Jade says she “feels right.” “I just feel more comfortable viewed as a woman.” I think what might be useful is that no one knows why exactly someone becomes transgender and feels the way they do. The cause is unknown. I do know I need to express myself and have the world view me as who I really am.”

Jade is content cross-dressing for now, though she hasn't ruled out the possibility of a sex change operation. By law, she would need to live as a woman for two years before beginning the process.

“A lot of people think because you're transgender, you have to be very femmy....In the transgender community there's a wide spectrum, many different people and some get into looking like Barbie dolls, very very feminine. Some don't feel the need to express femininity. It's more or less how your brain is – it's not dependent on interests.”

She wanted people to know that it's completely natural and that there is nothing wrong with her. That she didn't go rushing into this. Coming out as transgender changed her life and it was frightening.

One of the incredible aspects of all of this was Matt's ability to come forward and begin his journey. Such a brave and courageous act!

I was careful through the whole process to ensure that Matt was feeling validated, not rushed and in control.

It was important to understand that Matt was also just a “normal” teenager with struggles similar to most: school work, exams/assignments, conflicts with parents, interactions with friends, looking for a job: All these areas overlapping his need to live her life in the way he wanted to present himself.

Our conversations just didn't center on his whole identity as a person being transgender; it was also about how as a person, he was coping and maintaining normal everyday routines and a lifestyle. It seemed he needed to know that his everyday existence did not focus solely on his transgender.

Views and perspectives of the counselor working with Matt/Jade

Working with a Trans youth was a new experience for this author. Although I am aware that any special issue or concern could be brought up in my professional work, especially since the service is directly accessible at a high school in a high traffic area, I was briefly taken aback as to how to proceed. However, after a few seconds, that internal connection of working with youth clicked on once again. Matt was asking for help, support and direction. It was not something that had to be rushed into, and I was clear from the beginning that this was a new experience for me. And for Matt too. Being open, honest and straightforward with him throughout this process was what was needed. His agenda, his pace, his goal was the foundation to the work. With respect to his wishes, confidentiality and the complexities of needing other people's involvement, Matt was the driving force.

It was critical that other professionals who needed to be involved in the transition were allowed to participate and help in a multi-disciplinary approach. Being aware of the rights, policies and procedures as it related to sexual identity and orientation provided a legal foundation to Matt's transition.

In dealing with this transition, it appears that many things seemed to align in a positive manner. Involvement from parents and school officials was positive, and respect from students was present. It seemed that in dealing with this sometimes uncomfortable and unknown topic that most things worked out in Matt's favor. Surprising! – And perhaps a rarity? We anticipated many potentially unsafe and risk areas, but did not need to deal with them. It was however, beneficial that we had anticipated and planned for some occurrences.

I had looked for a “handbook” on how to implement or work with a student transitioning in High school – I couldn't find one. A lot of what we had to do was “new” – even though Trans youth have been with us for years.

Through the experience, I did unearth some information that was available for use with regards to guiding principles in working with Trans youth;

Don't panic;

- *A counselor has a very important role in reassuring parents, families and other service providers that trans people are healthy, happy and whole people*
- *Preventing a youth from being transgender is not possible and should not be considered as an option – supporting the youth and their family is the best option*

Build Trust;

- *Listen*
- *If not listening, professionals may be seen as the ones standing in the way of the transition*
- *Transitioning is necessary, for many trans people living as their birth gender is not possible*
- *Trans youth may be in a hurry to make decisions because their bodies are changing in the opposite direction from how they feel (puberty) – this is a time of enormous stress*
- *If supported, trans youth can and do make healthy decisions*
- *If not supported, many youth will find other means of transitioning which are less safe*
- *Be aware of the extreme discrimination that trans youth may be facing and the frustration that this elicits*
- *Be aware of your own feelings about this issue – seek outside support for your concerns – trans youth should not be expected to educate the adults around them*

Training for staff;

- *Advocate for all professionals involved to get the training to work effectively with this community*

Inform Youth of Options;

- *Involve youth in the process every step of the way*
- *Youth will need all the information to make a good decision*
- *Support youth to research safe resources themselves*

Connect Trans Youth and their families with Community Resources;

- *Trans youth often exist in isolation from each other which is a major factor in low self-esteem, self-harm and suicide risks*
- *Youth will need someone to talk to who does not have power over their transition*
- *This is a challenging process for any family but there are resources for parents and families to help them learn to accept and appreciate a trans youth*

I feel I was honored to work with and through this transition with Matt. He allowed me as a professional to experience and support him through one of the most sensitive, intrusive and revealing periods of his life.

Adolescent sexuality is usually a topic that most adults discuss with some discomfort. It raises many perplexing moral, emotional and practical issues for adults and caregivers. But the experience while universal is highly personal and unique to all and should be treated with patience and compassion.

Although it is obvious that attitudes towards this specific population may have begun to change, young people like Matt are still vulnerable to all of the perils inherent in having to live his daily life as he needs to.

Open, accessible and supportive services and professionals need not be shaken or hesitate in working with and interacting with populations that they would not normally deal with or service. There are exciting opportunities of growth and more exciting developments of helping those in need that will come out of those exchanges and alliances.

I believe the opportunity to document this experience will provide a foundation and resource to the many individuals, services and organizations that work with vulnerable populations. A framework for guidance and resource will be a valuable source for future transitions.

The Journey continues....other transitioning and transgender information that may be helpful

This follow up section hopes to provide additional information for some other questions/scenarios that may develop as a result of transitioning. The information was collected via a variety of different sources.

Changing identification and records – Ontario- June 2006

Transgender people who use a name that is different than their legal name or prefer a different pronoun than their legal sex designation may require assistance to advocate for use of preferred name/pronoun at work, or school, in health/social service settings etc...It is not only considered disrespectful to use the wrong name or pronoun to address a transgender client, but may legally be considered harassment if done intentionally or persistently. Employers, teachers, health/social service professionals, and others are expected to use the name and pronoun that a transgender person has indicated is preferred.

****Source- Social and Medical Advocacy with Transgender People and Loved Ones*

Change of Name

*Many transgender people change their names informally or formally to better match their sense of self. Some people may be satisfied with informally asking others to use their preferred name; others want to legally change their name. Virtually all institutions require legal name. Advocacy to enable recording of preferred name both validates clients' autonomy and right to self-define identity, and also makes it easier to ensure consistent use of the preferred name. If a worksite, school, or other institution uses a computerized system that cannot be changed to include a field for preferred name, alternative accommodation should be sought.****

****Source-Social and Medical Advocacy with Transgender People and Loved Ones*

A person can have a legal trans name change and still have opposite sex designation identified. Without a legal name change, non-legal documents can be changed to identify trans name identification -ie. School class lists – this could be noted/changed under “preferred name” under the Ontario “Trillium” school identification system which would provide trans name identification on all items such as class lists, timetables (e.g. noting preferred name in a “notes” field)

In Ontario, contact the Registrar General's office and request an “Application to change an adult's name”. You will need original copy of your birth certificate, a signature of a guarantor, and a signature of a commissioner. Present cost is C\$137.

Ontario will issue amended certificates, changing either name or sex, and the certificate will not reveal which items were changed. The change of the sex designation on the birth registry is a separate process from the change of name. A copy of the long form of the certificate will list the original name and sex, along with the new name and new sex, plus annotations describing the changes made.

The Basics:

No requirements of having completed a sex reassignment surgery are necessary to have a name change. 16 years and over can change name with parents' consent or court order. 18 years of age can change name. -Change of name act s. 1:4(3)

Change of Legal Sex Designation

Legal sex is the designation "M" or "F" that appears on legal records and some forms of identification. There is no consistent policy across agencies regarding criteria for change of legal sex designation.*** A person must have had an irreversible sex re-assignment surgery signed off on proper documentation in order to legally change sex designation.

***Source-Social and Medical Advocacy with Transgender People and Loved Ones

Contact the Registrar General's office and request an "Application for Change of Sex Designation on Birth Registry" package. There are three forms to be filled in. You fill in the "Application for Change of Sex Designation on Birth Registry" form. The surgeon who conducted the transsexual surgery the "Medical Certificate of Transsexual Surgery". And another physician completes the "Medical Certificate to Substantiate Transsexual Surgery was Performed" form. The cost to have the change performed is C\$37. Cost of the short form (certificate) is \$C15 while the cost of the long form is C\$22.

Office of the Registrar General
P.O. Box 4600, 189 Red River Road
Thunder Bay, Ontario P7B 6L8
(800) 461-2156 or (416) 325-8305

Education about the protection of human rights and the Ontario Human Rights Code - Policy on Discrimination and Harassment because of Gender Identity

Laws govern protection of human rights within Ontario;

- ❑ The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms provides constitutional guarantees of equality and prohibits discrimination in legislation and governmental policies and practices
- ❑ The Criminal Code prohibits hate propaganda and requires that if a criminal act is motivated by hate, this must be considered as an aggravating factor by the judge in sentencing
- ❑ The Canadian Human Rights prohibits discrimination in areas of federal jurisdiction, including federal prisons, airlines, and banks. The Canadian Human Rights commission investigates and mediates complaints of discrimination according to the Act
- ❑ The Ontario Human Rights Code and the Policy on Discrimination and Harassment because of Gender Identity;

This policy statement contains the Ontario Human Rights Commission's interpretation of provisions of the Human Rights Code relating to discrimination and harassment because of sex, which includes gender identity. It is subject to decisions by Boards of Inquiry and the courts. The policy should be read in conjunction with those decisions and with the provisions of the Code. Any questions regarding this policy should be directed to the staff of the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

The Human Rights Code¹ (the "Code") states that it is public policy in Ontario to recognize the inherent dignity and worth of every person and to provide for equal rights and opportunities without discrimination. The Code aims at creating a climate of understanding and mutual respect for the dignity and worth of each person so that each person feels a part of the community and feels able to contribute to the community.

The Ontario Human Rights Commission (the "Commission") has developed policy statements and guidelines that cover many human rights issues. However, issues related to gender identity remain largely unresolved in policy, procedures, and law.

Gender identity is not an enumerated ground in the Code. However, the existing legal structure in the Code can support a progressive understanding of the ground of "sex" to include "gender identity" and protect individuals who are subject to discrimination or harassment because of gender identity. This approach toward the application of the Code has been accepted for some time and is well demonstrated by Mr. Justice McIntyre who said:

It is not, in my view, a sound approach to say that according to established rules of construction no broader meaning can be given to the Code than the narrowest interpretation of the words employed. The accepted rules of construction are flexible enough to enable the Court to recognize in the construction of a human rights code the special nature and purpose of the enactment ... and give to it an interpretation which will advance its broad purposes. Legislation of this type is of a special nature, not quite constitutional, but certainly more than the ordinary...².

The right to equal treatment without discrimination or harassment because of sex extends to all persons. The Commission has taken the policy position that this protection extends to persons because of gender identity. However, this policy focuses on persons whose gender identity diverges from their birth-assigned identity.

Complaints related to gender identity are made almost exclusively by transgenderists and transsexuals. There are, arguably, few groups in our society today who are as disadvantaged and disenfranchised as transgenderists and transsexuals.³ Fear and hatred of transgenderists and transsexuals combined with hostility toward their very existence are fundamental human rights issues.

As the organization responsible for the administration and enforcement of the Code, the Commission is in a unique position to forward the policy that the dignity and worth of every person be recognized and that equal rights and opportunities be provided without discrimination because of gender identity. Mr. Justice Sopinka once noted:

Human rights legislation is amongst the most pre-eminent category of legislation. It has been described as having a "special nature, not quite constitutional but certainly more than the ordinary..." (Ontario Human Rights Commission v. Simpsons-Sears Ltd., [1985] 2 S.C.R. 536, at p. 547). One of the reasons such legislation has been so described is that it is often the final refuge of the disadvantaged and the disenfranchised.⁴

2. Purpose of the Policy

This policy sets out the position of the Commission with respect to gender identity and is intended to help the public understand how the Code protects against discrimination and harassment because of gender identity and to assist employers and providers of services and accommodation to understand their responsibilities under the Code. The policy also can be used for educational initiatives such as the development of training materials and the revision of anti-discrimination and harassment policies so that they include gender identity.

By developing this policy the Commission is:

promoting the dignity and equality of those whose gender identity does not conform to traditional social norms;
ensuring that all people are protected by the Code;
promoting awareness of gender identity and preventing discrimination and harassment; and
dispelling stereotypes and myths that foster discrimination and harassment against individuals because of their gender identity.

3. Background

Over the last two decades, there has been a growing awareness of people whose gender identity is different from their birth-assigned genders and from social norms of "male" and "female". These people may include pre- and post-operative transsexuals, transgenderists, intersexed people, cross-dressers and others.⁵

Along with the emerging visibility of these individuals is a growing appreciation and understanding of the problems that they face in their daily lives. There are numerous community organizations, newspapers, magazines and websites dedicated to gender identity issues that have chronicled these problems, which include employment discrimination, harassment, denial of services, violence, high suicide rates, substance abuse and poverty.

This increased awareness of gender identity led the British Columbia Human Rights Commission to propose including "gender identity" as a formal ground for protection in their human rights law.⁶ However, at this time, this proposal has not been adopted. Other jurisdictions are moving toward recognition of gender identity as a protected ground in their laws. Australian discrimination laws as well as several American municipalities and states recognize transgendered people and have included the ground of gender identity or similar concepts in their human rights laws.⁷

In 1998, the Commission developed a discussion paper on gender identity. The discussion paper was based on research, community consultations and interviews with selected officials and health professionals. The paper canvassed jurisprudence, domestic and international legislation, literature, and other human rights organizations' policies. The discussion paper Toward a Commission Policy on Gender Identity was publicly released in October 1999.⁸ This policy is based on the work done to date and reflects the Commission's formal position on gender identity.

4. What is "Gender Identity"?

Gender identity is linked to an individual's intrinsic sense of self, particularly the sense of being male or female. Gender identity may or may not conform to a person's birth-assigned sex. The personal characteristics that are associated with gender identity include self-image, physical and biological appearance, expression, behaviour and conduct, as they relate to gender.

At birth, a child is assigned a gender by a health care professional based on observation of the child's genitalia. Society makes the assumption that based on this medical assessment a child will grow up to exhibit correspondingly masculine or feminine behaviours and appearances. However, this is not always the case. A person's felt identity or core identity may differ in part or in whole from their birth-assigned sex.⁹ Individuals whose birth-assigned sex does not conform to their gender identity include transsexuals, transgenderists, intersexed persons and cross-dressers.

A person's gender identity is fundamentally different from and not determinative of their sexual orientation.

5. Application of this Policy

Based on a purposive and liberal interpretation of the ground of sex, it is the Commission's position that the protection of the Code extends to all individuals who are denied equal treatment because of gender identity. The Commission will accept complaints related to gender identity on the ground of sex where it is the person's gender identity that is the reason for the discrimination. The Commission deals with complaints on a case-by-case basis regardless of which grounds are identified.

This policy applies to:

the workplace (including recruiting, application forms, interviews, promotions, and access to and receipt of employee benefits);
services, goods and facilities (private businesses, municipal governments, shops, restaurants, hospitals, correctional facilities, insurance services, etc.);
the occupancy of accommodation (including rental accommodation such as apartments, college residences, hotel/motel facilities, condominium housing, as well as commercial premises);
contracts (verbal or written agreements); and

membership in vocational associations and trade unions.

6. Discrimination

Every person has the right to equal treatment without discrimination because of sex, which includes gender identity. Discrimination because of gender identity includes distinctions such as exclusions, restrictions or preferences based on gender identity, or those that result in the impairment of the recognition of human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis. In *Andrews v. Law Society of British Columbia*,¹⁰ Mr. Justice McIntyre defined discrimination as:

... a distinction, whether intentional or not but based on grounds relating to personal characteristics of the individual or group, which has the effect of imposing burdens, obligations, or disadvantages on such individual or group not imposed upon others, or which withholds or limits access to opportunity, benefits, and advantages available to other members of society.¹¹

6.1 Direct Discrimination

A person discriminates directly when he or she treats another person unequally or differently because of his or her gender identity.

Example: An employee advised her employer that she was taking time off work to undergo sex-reassignment surgery. The employer granted the employee the time off but when the employee returned to work after the surgery, she was terminated. In this case, the tribunal considered the meaning of the protected ground of sex contained in section 10 of Québec's Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms and concluded that sex does not include just the state of a person but also the very process of transformation that is part of transsexualism.¹²

6.2 Indirect Discrimination

Discrimination can also be indirect and may occur when one person causes another to act on his or her behalf and to discriminate against a person because of his or her gender identity.

Example: A landlord advises the superintendent that she does not want any apartments rented to transsexuals. A person who is a transsexual responds to an advertisement for the apartment and is advised by the superintendent that there are no units available, even though there are units available. The landlord may also be named as a respondent in a human rights complaint because the landlord indirectly discriminated by requiring the superintendent to follow a discriminatory instruction.

6.3 Constructive Discrimination

Constructive discrimination arises when a neutral requirement, qualification or factor has an adverse impact on members of a group of persons who are identified by a prohibited ground of discrimination under the Code. Constructive discrimination results from this adverse impact. Section 11(1) of the Code provides that constructive discrimination occurs:

Where a requirement, qualification or factor exists that is not discrimination on a prohibited ground but that results in the exclusion, restriction or preference of a group of persons who are identified by a prohibited ground of discrimination and of whom the person is a member.

In such a case, the person responsible for the discrimination must establish if the rule is reasonable and bona fide and then take steps to accommodate the affected person to the point of undue hardship.

Example: A nightclub patron who is a pre-operative male to female transsexual was denied access to the women's washroom even though she was presenting herself as a woman. The nightclub's policy on the use of washrooms was that transsexuals were not permitted to use the women's washroom. She filed a human rights complaint and the tribunal found that while this policy was

neutral, it had an adverse effect on transsexuals. The tribunal concluded its decision, which was in the complainant's favor, by stating that discrimination against a transsexual constitutes discrimination because of sex.¹³

Example: The Vital Statistics Act¹⁴ requires that all birth certificates in the province identify individuals as male or female. This requirement is neutral on its face since it requires all people to be identified as male or female. However, for an individual whose gender identity does not conform to the designation on his or her birth certificate, this may have an adverse impact. The person who shows this identification or relies on it to obtain a permit or official document may be refused because the service provider observes an inconsistency between the way the person presents him/herself and the designation on the birth certificate.

6.4 Discrimination Because of Association

Persons who are subject to discrimination because of their association with a person protected under the Code may file a complaint based on section 12, which protects against discrimination because of association.

Example: A female tenant of an apartment asks for maintenance on her unit. This request is denied because the superintendent says he does not like her friend who is a cross-dresser. Although the tenant was not subjected to discrimination because of her own gender identity, she was subjected to discrimination because of her relationship with a person who is a cross-dresser.

7. Employment

Section 5(1) of the Code provides that every person has a right to equal treatment in employment without discrimination because of sex, which includes gender identity. Denying or restricting employment opportunities in hiring, training, promotion, transfers, etc. because of gender identity is a violation of the Code. This is based on the notion that individuals who are the targets of the discriminatory behaviour are being judged on stereotypes about how men and women should behave and look and not on the basis of merit.

Example: A woman working on a temporary basis is offered a full-time position as a customer-service associate by her supervisor on the condition that she wear dresses and change her hairstyle to a more feminine one. The employer believes this is necessary because the customers will not like the woman's overly masculine appearance.

Example: An employee discloses to his manager that he cross-dresses. The manager subsequently tells the employee that he will no longer qualify for promotions or further career training because customers and co-workers will be uncomfortable with him.

8. Services

Section 1 of the Code provides that every person has a right to equal treatment with respect to services, goods, and facilities, without discrimination because of sex, which includes gender identity. This includes refusal of a service or other differential treatment.

Example: A transsexual woman volunteered as a librarian at a community

organization for lesbians and also became a member of the organization. In an article that appeared in a community newspaper, she identified herself as a lesbian but not a woman. Two board members of the organization disapproved of her remarks in the newspaper article. The woman subsequently received a letter advising that her services as a librarian were no longer required and that she was no longer welcome in the organization. The woman filed a human rights complaint, and while the tribunal did not find that the individual was an employee of the organization, they did find that she was discriminated against in the provision of a service because of sex.¹⁵

Example: A municipality that provides the service of issuing proclamations must do so in a non-discriminatory manner. A transgender support group asks for a proclamation for "Transgender Pride Week" and the Mayor and City Council reject the request. The basis for the refusal is that the Mayor and City Council morally oppose the goals and activities of the group, while they routinely approve proclamations from other groups whom they support.¹⁶

Example: A restaurant owner who refuses service to a customer who is a transsexual and throws her out of the restaurant infringes the person's right to receive a service without discrimination.¹⁷

9. Accommodation (Housing)

Section 2(1) of the Code provides that every person has a right to equal treatment with respect to the occupancy of accommodation (housing) without discrimination because of sex, which includes gender identity.

Example: A student responds to an advertisement for a house that is for rent and arranges to view the house and meet with the owner. A few days later, she contacts the owner and advises him that she wishes to rent the house. At the second meeting with the owner of the house, he asks her if she is really a woman and proceeds to tell her that he does not rent to transvestites.

10. Membership in Vocational Associations

Section 6 of the Code provides that every person has a right to equal treatment with respect to membership in any trade union, trade or occupational association or self-governing profession without discrimination because of sex, which includes gender identity.

Example: A transsexual employee was involved in a dispute with her employer. The individual did not feel that her union's actions on her behalf regarding this dispute were adequate. She alleged that the union discriminated against her in its response to the incident, both initially and with respect to the events that followed the initial dispute, and in the way it responded to the employer's handling of the complaint made against her. The tribunal found that the union had treated her worse than it would have treated other union members in similar circumstances and that her status as a transsexual was a factor in her treatment. The tribunal ordered the union to cease its contravention of the human rights law and to pay her damages for lost wages and the injury it had done to her dignity, feelings and self-respect.¹⁸

11. Harassment

Harassment because of gender identity is covered by the Code under the ground of sex.

11.1 Definition of Harassment

Harassment is defined in subsection 10(1) of the Code as "engaging in a course of vexatious comment or conduct that is known or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome". This definition guides the Commission in determining what forms of behaviour are inappropriate under the Code.

The reference to comment or conduct that is known or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome establishes an objective test for harassment:

In some situations, it should be obvious that the conduct or comments will be offensive or unwelcome. Since the individual may be in a vulnerable situation, there is no requirement that the individual object to the behaviour in order for there to be a violation of the Code. It may be unrealistic to require an individual who is the target of harassment to object to the offensive treatment as a condition of being able to claim a right to be free from such treatment.

Conduct or comments, which relate to a person's gender identity may not, on their face, be offensive. However, they may still be unwelcome from the perspective of the particular individual. If the individual objects and if similar behaviour is repeated, it may constitute a violation of the Code.

Each situation that is brought to the attention of the Commission through a human rights complaint will be assessed on its own merits. However, transphobic epithets, comments ridiculing individuals because of their gender identity, or singling out an individual for humiliating or demeaning teasing or jokes related to, or because of, gender identity may be conduct, which ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome.

Examples of situations that might be considered harassment include the following:

A landlord says to a tenant, who is a member of a cross-dresser organization, "I don't know why you people don't go live with your own kind, because you sure don't belong here."

Demeaning sexual remarks, jokes or innuendo about an employee, client or customer, or tenant told to others might deny the right of those persons who are the subject of the comments to be viewed as equals.

Demeaning comments, signs, caricatures, or cartoons displayed in a service environment such as a store, restaurant, or in a workplace or rental apartment building may create a poisoned environment in violation of the Code.

The display of transphobic, derogatory or offensive pictures, graffiti or materials is humiliating and also impairs the right of those persons who are members of the targeted group to be viewed as equals. An employer, service provider or landlord who tolerates inappropriate pictures, graffiti or materials and does not take any steps to remove them may create a poisoned environment. Depending on the particular circumstances, some persons may be humiliated or may experience feelings of hurt, anger and resentment because of their gender identity.

11.2 Comments or Conduct Need Not be Explicit

Comments or conduct do not need to be explicit to infringe a person's right to equal treatment without discrimination or harassment. Where a person is singled out and treated differently because of gender identity, even where the differential treatment does not include explicit reference to gender identity, there may still be a violation of the Code.

Example: *In a warehouse, a transgendered female employee is repeatedly made the brunt of practical jokes and called a "freak" by her co-workers.*

11.3 Poisoned Environment

A single instance of harassment because of gender identity may not fall within the definition of harassment under the Code. However, there could be circumstances in which a single incident of inappropriate behaviour may be significant or substantial enough to constitute a breach of the Code by creating a poisoned environment for individuals because of their gender identity. In other words, there could be circumstances in which unequal treatment does not have to occur continually or repeatedly in order for a violation of the Code to occur.

A consequence of creating a poisoned environment is that certain individuals are subjected to terms and conditions of employment, tenancy, services, etc. that are quite different from those experienced by individuals who are not subjected to these comments or conduct. In such instances, the right to equal treatment may be violated.

Demeaning remarks, jokes or innuendo based on gender identity not only poison the environment for transgenderists and transsexuals but also affect everyone's environment.

The conduct at issue must be objectively evaluated. It must be of such a nature and degree so as to amount to a denial of equality through the creation of a poisoned environment.

12. Confidentiality of Information

Gender identity is a personal characteristic that may or may not be known to others. While most people are not concerned about others knowing their gender identity, this may not be the case for transsexuals and transgenderists.

Despite the protections set out in the Code, individuals who identify or are identified as transsexual or transgendered face the very real possibility of being subjected to overt or subtle discrimination and/or harassment. This can be particularly detrimental in the workplace.

An employer or service provider who legitimately requires and collects personal information that either directly or indirectly identifies a person's sex which may be different from his or her gender identity must ensure the maximum degree of privacy and confidentiality of the information. This applies in all situations and circumstances, including employment records and files, insurance company records, medical information, etc.

The information might be required to enable an employee or individual to claim or register for benefits, to apply for an apartment, or other purposes. All information should remain exclusively with designated personnel (such as the human resources person) in a secure filing system in order to protect the individual's confidentiality.

*Confidential information that might be collected includes:
birth certificate;
driver's license;
identification of next of kin;
identification of beneficiary for insurance purposes; and
a claim for health benefits.*

An employer or service provider who fails to properly safeguard personal information about an individual's sex or gender identity may infringe the Code. A complaint could be made where this results in a person being subject to discrimination and/or harassment because of his or her gender identity.

13. Liability of Employers for the Actions of Their Employees/Agents

13.1 Common Law: The Organic Theory of Corporate Responsibility

Generally, an employer is not liable for acts of harassment carried out by its employees unless it can be proven that it was aware of the harassment. The corporation may also be held responsible for the actions of that employee if it can be shown the employee was part of the management or "directing mind" of the organization. In such cases, the decisions and acts of the employee are so closely identified with the employer that they are treated as one and the same. In other words, the acts or omissions of supervisors, managers, etc. are considered to be the acts of the employer, giving rise to corporate responsibility.

13.2 Vicarious Liability

Under section 45 of the Code, a corporation, union, trade or occupational association will be held responsible for discrimination committed by employees or agents as though the corporation, union, trade or occupational association had committed the breaches itself. This is known as vicarious liability. The corporation, union, etc. is vicariously liable for the acts of its employees or agents. The doctrine of vicarious liability does not apply to harassment as defined in subsection 10(1)(f) of the Code. Rather, it applies to breaches of the equality rights provisions of the Code.

14. Glossary

*This glossary was developed based on the Commission's research for this policy and for the discussion paper, *Toward a Commission Policy on Gender Identity*. The glossary is intended to provide general information on the terminology related to gender identity and is not intended to be an exhaustive or authoritative guide on the subject.*

Cross-Dresser *refers to people who dress in the clothes of the opposite sex for emotional satisfaction and psychological well-being. Cross-dresser is preferred over the term 'transvestite', which is seen as a diagnostic term associated with medical identity.*

Gender *may be defined in various ways and could include any or all of the following categories: physical anatomy (or sex organs), secondary sex characteristics that develop at and after puberty, behaviour and conduct, the mind, and fashion choices.*

Intersexed *means being born with the (full or partial) sex organs of both genders, or with underdeveloped or ambiguous sex organs. About 4 per cent of all births may be intersexed to some degree. This word replaces the inappropriate term "hermaphrodite".*

Sexual orientation *is more than simply a status that an individual possesses; it is an immutable personal characteristic that forms part of an individual's core identity. Sexual orientation encompasses the range of human sexuality from gay and lesbian to bisexual and heterosexual orientations.*

Sex-reassignment surgery (SRS) *is the medical procedure by which an individual is surgically altered to create the physical appearance of the opposite sex.*

Transgendered *describes individuals who are not comfortable with, or who reject, in whole or in part, their birth-assigned gender identities. The word transgendered is generally viewed as an umbrella term that unifies people who identify as transsexual, transgenderist, intersexed, transvestite or as a cross-dresser.*

Transgenderists *self-identify and live as the opposite gender but have decided not to undergo sex reassignment surgery.*

Transition is the process of changing sex, including hormones, cross-living, and surgery. A practical minimum duration for this process is about two years, but it is not unusual for it to take longer.

Transphobia is the unrealistic or irrational fear and hatred of cross-dressers, transsexuals and transgenderists. Like all prejudices, it is based on negative stereotypes and misconceptions that are then used to justify and support hatred, discrimination, harassment, and violence toward people who are transgendered.

Transsexuals are individuals who have a strong and persistent feeling that they are living in the wrong sex. This term is normally used to describe individuals who have undergone sex-reassignment surgery. A male transsexual has a need to live as a man and a female transsexual has a need to live as a woman.

For more information about the Ontario Human Rights Commission or this policy statement, please call 1-800-387-9080 (toll free) or in Toronto (416) 326-9511 (TTY (416) 314-4535), during regular office hours from Monday to Friday. You can also visit our web site at www.ohrc.on.ca.

If You Have a Human Rights Complaint

If you have a human rights complaint, you may contact the general inquiries line at 1-800-387-9080 or in Toronto at (416) 326-9511 from Monday to Friday during office hours. A Commission staff person will tell you if your concerns are covered by the Ontario Human Rights Code (the "Code").

Commission staff will explain how the Code applies to your situation and how the complaint procedure works. Commission staff will work with you and the other party to resolve the concerns. The Commission also offers mediation services.

If you want the Commission to address your concerns, you should file a complaint within 6 months from the last incident of discrimination. This time limit is set out in section 34 of the Code. "Filing a complaint" means that you have completed the Commission's complaint form and provided all requested details. You must have signed, dated and returned the form to the Commission.

When you file a complaint, Commission staff will work with you and the person/company you have filed against, to try and resolve the complaint through mediation.

The Commission may consider not to deal with a complaint under section 34 if:
another Ontario law would be better suited to deal with the situation, such as the Labour Relations Act;

you have no reasonable basis to support a claim of discrimination, or that you have made the complaint in bad faith, or that you have already obtained a remedy somewhere else;
the matter is outside the Commission's legal authority;
you have waited longer than 6 months from the last incident of discrimination to file a complaint.

The Commission is neutral and does not take sides in the complaint. Commission staff will assist you with questions about the complaint procedure. However, if you require legal advice, please contact a lawyer.

Individual rights vs. parents' rights in a transition - Ontario

Considerations when a person makes a gender transition change without 1 or more parent/guardian support in educational settings could be seen as a "tough call". In most settings, the wishes of the individual, no matter the age should be paramount. It could be seen as an individual and family matter not an educational barrier for a young person to be who they are in a school setting with , or without parental/guardian support. In most instances, a parent/guardian would have the right to remove a minor from the educational setting if they are not comfortable with how the school is

supporting or not supporting their parental rights about how their child has decided to address themselves.

Educators and trans adolescents

Some helpful thoughts about the young person and being trans;

- ❑ *Accept them as a full-fledged member of the gender they identify as*
- ❑ *Always use the language that corresponds to their gender identity. e.g. he, she, even if their body does not seem to match yet and even when talking about their past.*
- ❑ *If you are still adjusting, it's normal to make mistakes. Don't draw attention to it by saying, "Sorry". Just correct yourself and carry on.*
- ❑ *Gender identity has nothing to do with sexual orientation. Whether they are attracted to men, women, both or neither is a totally separate thing from whether they are male or female.*
- ❑ *Don't expect the person to conform to the stereotypes of their gender. They wear whatever clothes they like and have whatever interests they have. Being masculine or feminine has nothing to do with being male or female.*
- ❑ *For almost all trans people, being transsexual is not a choice or a decision. It is a simple reality. The only "decision" is whether to accept their situation and fix it to live a healthier life.*
- ❑ *Never mention their old name and ever ask what it was. Instead of saying "back when you were Fred", say, "before you came out as a female".*
- ❑ *Don't use their name in the 3rd person as if they were the person separate from themselves, e.g. "are you dressing as Lisa now?"*
- ❑ *They are a person, a guy or a girl, a man or a woman, foremost. If you must use the word transsexual (or trans), it's better to use it as an adjective to describe a person, not as a noun onto itself, e.g. trans people, trans folk, trans guy.*
- ❑ *Use the word "transition" to describe what they are going through or went through.*
- ❑ *The changes they make to their body are not purely cosmetic, but rather reconstructive. Having a body they are comfortable with is vital to their health and their social and physical interactions with other people.*
- ❑ *Don't immediately assume that genital sexual reassignment surgery is their priority. Every transsexual person is unique and chooses different steps during their transition, based on many factors. Not everyone wants Sexual reassignment surgery.*
- ❑ *Being transsexual is a very personal matter. Treat it with respect.*
- ❑ *They are not there to shock anyone or get attention. They are not selfish. They are just a person like anyone else, and they have a right to be healthy and live in their honest gender.*
- ❑ *If they are visibly gender variant (i.e. they don't pass) and out as a transsexual, it's OK to educate others e.g. about pronouns, before meeting them in person*
- ❑ *Don't introduce them as the "transsexual student/young person". Don't ask them to explain their life story or their gender situation to others.*
- ❑ *Ask permission before taking a photo of them, or before displaying old, pre-transition pictures of them*

****Source – How to respect a Transsexual person*

Educators Intervening in Harassment;

First, stop the behaviour:

- ☐ *Cut it out!*
- ☐ *Keep your hands to yourself!*
- ☐ *That's way out of line!*
- ☐ *Stop it right now!*
- ☐ *Out of the room!*
- ☐ *Whoa, that is not OK!*
- ☐ *Leave him alone!*
- ☐ *That is unacceptable!*

Then educate;

- ☐ *That was a stereotype. Stereotypes are a kind of lie and they hurt people's feelings*
- ☐ *That was a putdown. I don't think it belongs here*
- ☐ *You may not have meant to hurt anyone, but that was a really derogatory gesture*
- ☐ *That's mean and it's sexual harassment. It could get you suspended.*
- ☐ *Do you guys know what that word means? It's a put down for a Trans person. That's like putting down people of a different race from yours or a different religion.*

It is not enough to stop the behaviour. Students may interpret a simple, "Stop it right now!" to mean that is OK to bully Sally, but not during Math. And while stopping to educate may take a moment in the short run, it will save time and energy, not to mention some youth's heart, in the long run. And that youth might not be the one who was targeted. It might be the bystander or the bully. You may be preventing a much more serious assault or a suicide down the road. It is worth the extra moment.

Do you educate on the spot or take the offender aside and educate in private?

Sometimes one is more appropriate; sometimes, the other. On the one hand, the target and the witnesses need to hear what you have to say. It can be a very valuable chance to model standing up for someone. And it can reassure them that your classroom really is a safe space. However, allowing the youth who said the slur to save face may lead to sincere regret and changed behaviour. And pursuing the issue at length in front of the target may only embarrass him or her. Use your professional judgement. The point is to support and educate all the youth.

The bottom line is....

Legally and ethically, you must do whatever is necessary to stop harassment against young people and teens based on race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, language of origin, or physical or mental abilities. Seeing you stand up against bullying will make every young person feel safer at school. Only when they feel safe, can students learn.

****Source – Safe Schools Coalition – Washington State*

Trans adolescents dealing with other kids in the school and coming out

"Coming out" refers to a process of getting comfortable with your own identity and telling other people in your life about it. In some situations there is no choice about coming out; there is something about you that doesn't fit how women or men are expected to look, act, or dress, or someone in your life finds out by reading your diary or finding you crossdressed. Many trans people talk about learning to hide any evidence of being trans because they received messages early in life that being trans was weird, freakish, deviant, or otherwise not OK. Coming out is one way to deal with the pressure of both

keeping the secret and not being able to fully express yourself. Other people deal with it by coming out in some parts of their life and not others, or by talking with friends, other trans people, or professional counselors

Some people consider being trans a private matter and don't tell others. Others find it important to come out to people who they are close to, or to be out as trans in day-to-day life. When making decisions about coming out, it's important to remember that you are under no obligation to tell anyone that you are trans. Coming out is something you do for yourself, It's OK not to be out to other people. What matters is that you are OK with the decision you have made.

Friends and family members typically go through stages of adjustment, involving shock, disbelief, fear, anger, and betrayal, sadness, and eventual acceptance (although some people are never accepting). Some people move through the initial discomfort quickly and feel pride at the courage of the trans person, but it can take a long time to reach that point.

Deciding who to come out to, what to tell them, and when to tell them is a personal decision that only you can make. You may want to ask yourself;

- ☐ *How important is it to me that this person knows about being trans?*
- ☐ *What do I want them to know, and how will I tell them?*
- ☐ *How would it be for me if they are not supportive when I come out? Do I feel strong enough in my own identity and the rest of my support system that I would be okay?*
- ☐ *Would I be safe if this person knew this about me being trans? What are the possible consequences if they are angry or upset? (e.g. Is there a risk of getting kicked out of the house, or of violence?)*
- ☐ *If this person had a negative reaction to my coming out, could it affect my ability to go to school or to keep my job?*
- ☐ *Where could I go for emergency help if I needed it? Where could I go for support?*

Coming out as trans is similar in some ways to coming out as lesbian/gay/bisexual, but the processes aren't exactly the same. Even though heterosexuals aren't always supportive of LGB people, they generally recognize and understand what it means to be LGB. In contrast, many non-trans people don't know what trans means, don't understand it, and find it confusing.

Many trans youth describe experiencing repeated discrimination, name-calling and other verbal harassment, threats or in some cases even violence. Even when there isn't blatant mistreatment, growing up trans in a world that denies the existence of trans people or suggests that it's freakish to be trans can be traumatizing. Dealing with everyone else's baggage while you're dealing with decisions about being trans is a lot to face.

Here's some helping thoughts to cope with the stress of living in a transphobic society;

- ☐ *Having a sense of humor, keeping perspective that being trans isn't the end of the world*
- ☐ *Making time to focus on other parts of who you are, not just being trans*
- ☐ *Activism- using personal experience to try to change things for the better*
- ☐ *Physically blowing off steam – weights, running etc...*
- ☐ *Having a creative outlet: art, writing, music*
- ☐ *Knowing other trans youth*
- ☐ *Having supportive friends*
- ☐ *Having a supportive cultural/faith community*
- ☐ *Peer counseling or professional counselling*

*****Source – Trans Care Youth**

Coming out Trans to your parents – they may need to know that:

- ☐ You still love them.
- ☐ You're not doing this to hurt them.
- ☐ You've had these feelings since you were _____ years old.
- ☐ You resisted coming out to yourself for _____ years.
- ☐ You really struggled with it, but it wouldn't go away; it's SUCH a compelling feeling!
- ☐ You have talked extensively with a counselor or psychotherapist, met with many other trans folks, have done some reading, and/or at this point, you believe _____ about yourself.
- ☐ If/when you change your gender presentation, you will still be the same person inside in many ways.
- ☐ You will still have much of the personality you've always had.
- ☐ You will probably still have the same sense of humor.
- ☐ You will still love music, cats, them, loud shirts, short hair, whatever, etc.
- ☐ You will still go to school, work, go to college, keep your friends.....(things that are important to them).
- ☐ You also might change in some ways - voice, hair, walk, talk, dress, etc. Be honest about what changes they should expect.
- ☐ You might look as though you were your twin brother/sister.
- ☐ You will give them all the time they need to get used to the new you. You didn't get used to the idea overnight yourself.
- ☐ You know the new name is hard! They even get the grandchildren's names mixed up sometimes ...

You realize they may go through an emotional process, too - shock, denial, bargaining, anger, guilt, sadness, acceptance. Know these symptoms and help them to recognize them.

Sometimes writing a letter to parents or family helps. Read it over, sleep on it, and ask yourself: does it say everything you want to say, and in a loving way. Then THEY get to read and reread and respond thoughtfully. There will be plenty of time to talk in person later. You might also give them something to read or suggest books for them.

***Source – Transgender Network of PFLAG

High School policies and culture

Despite the existence of general anti-harassment policies in most schools, transgender students still face widespread harassment and violence. The majority of Transgender students feel unsafe in school. Transgender youth are also reported as having a higher risk of dropping out of school. They have described their experiences as “Hell” and reported that the violence experienced in school had negatively impacted on their self-esteem, academic achievement, drug and alcohol use, and sexual health. School policies should not only explicitly address responses to instances of verbal or physical harassment, but should also address trans-specific accommodation relating to;

*-sex-segregation in bathrooms, showers, locker/change rooms, sports teams, gym classes, field trips, support/counseling groups, sex education classes, dress codes, records that include legal name and sex designation; protocols relating to preferred pronoun and name; privacy and confidentiality; inclusion of trans-positive content in school curriculum; and training and resources for school staff. ****

***Source – Social and Medical Advocacy for Transgender People and Loved Ones.

Example of harassment:

School was.... Hell. No one wanted to sit near me in the cafeteria. No one wanted to talk to me. I was treated like I had leprosy of AIDS. I was the freak kid. Kids would say, "Oh, hi, Lawrence." And I would speak back. And, "oh my God, you sound just like a girl." Guys wanted to pick fights. People would say just a whole bunch of vulgar tings to me. Every day I'd come home from school cryin'. Kids would yell from the school bus, "Faggot!" Throw stuff out of the windows. Make me hate kids, hate school, hate life."-- Lawrence, 19 year old transgender youth

In order to help protect transgender and gender non-conforming students , here are some recommendations to assist creating an explicit anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policy with enforcement, and , to help all individuals treat people respectfully and equally.

Recommendation 1: Correct Names/Pronouns – according to student self-identification

Transgender and gender non-conforming students have the right to be addressed by a name and pronoun corresponding to their gender identity. This is true regardless of whether the student has obtained a court ordered name or gender change. Intentionally addressing a student by the incorrect name or pronoun is a form of discrimination. The directive does not prohibit inadvertent slips or honest mistakes, but it does apply to an intentional and persistent refusal to respect a student's gender identity. Students who wish to use pronouns other than the masculine or the feminine (such as zhe and hir) need to be respected equally.

Recommendation 2: Gender appropriate restroom accessibility

All students have a right to safe and appropriate restroom facilities. This includes the right to use a restroom that corresponds to the student's gender identity, regardless of the student's sex assigned at birth. Requiring the student to 'prove' their gender (by requiring a doctor's letter, identity documents, etc.) is not acceptable. The student's self-identification is the sole measure of the student's gender.

Recommendation 3: More Gender Neutral Bathrooms

Where possible, schools should provide an easily accessible unisex single stall bathroom for use by any student who desires increased privacy, regardless of the underlying reason. However, use of a unisex single stall restroom should always be a matter of choice for a student. No student should be compelled to use one either as a matter of policy or due to continuing harassment in a gender appropriate facility.

Recommendation 4: Locker room accessibility

In locker rooms that involve undressing in front of others, transgender students who want to use the locker room corresponding to their gender identity must be provided an accommodation that best meets the student's needs. Such accommodations can include: (A) use of a private area within the public area (a bathroom stall with a door, an area separated by a curtain, a Phys Ed. instructor's office in the locker room), (B) a separate changing schedule in the private area (either utilizing the locker room before or after the other students), (C) use of a nearby private area (a nearby restroom, a nurse's office), (D) access to the locker room corresponding to the student's sex assigned at birth, or (E) satisfaction of Phys Ed. requirement by independent study outside of gym class (either before or after school or at a local recreational facility).

It should not be an acceptable accommodation to deny a student's opportunity for physical education either through not allowing the student to have Phys Ed. or by forcing the student to have Phys Ed. outside of the assigned class time. Requiring a transgender student to use the locker room corresponding to the student's sex assigned at birth is should be discouraged.

Recommendation 5: Sports and gym class

Generally, students should be permitted to participate in gender-segregated sports and gym class activities in accordance with the student's gender identity. In some situations, legitimate questions about fairness in athletic competitions will need to be resolved on a case-by-case basis. This exception will not, however, apply to participation in gym class where the activity is recreational instead of competitive.

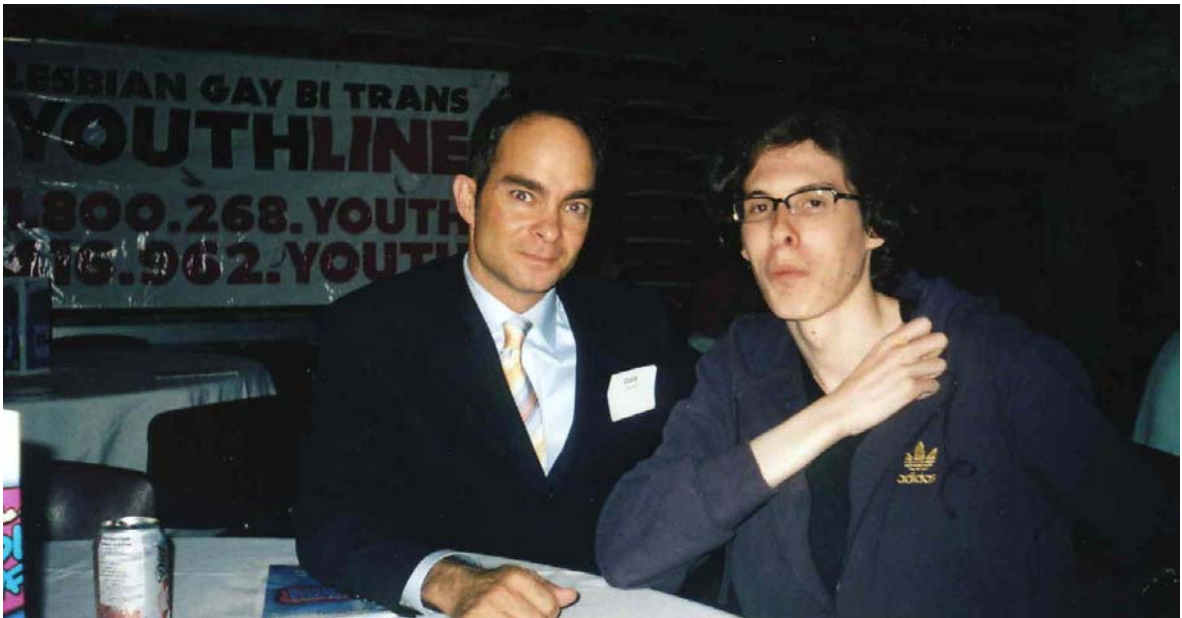
Recommendation 6: Students can dress according to their gender identity

Schools should enforce reasonable student dress codes for the purposes of maintaining a safe and orderly school environment, and ensuring that the school can fulfill its educational mission. However, school employees must respect the right of a student to dress in accordance with the student's gender identity. Further, students should not have to choose between male and female clothing. Some students are most comfortable in and most themselves in clothing that is not clearly male or female or a combination of the two.

Recommendation 7: More role models and access to accurate information

Schools should make an effort to employ transgender and gender non-conforming teachers. Schools should have books about transgender and gender non-conforming people. Schools should make sure that everyone is aware that there is a great human gender diversity that certainly includes female and male, but goes far beyond.

****Source – Transgender Law Centre*



***Dale Callender and Jade Hines at the June 2006 Youthline awards
where Jade received a personal recognition award***

'This feels very nice — it feels right'

ABOUT A GIRL | Former *Sunday Star* subject Jade, once known as Matt, talks about her new life far from home. **By Leslie Scrivener**

It's been one year since the *Sunday Star* told the story of Matt Hines, the Northern Secondary student president who started Grade 12 as a boy but ended it as a girl.

Hines decided just before Christmas in her final year of school that she wanted to live and dress as a female. Some teachers wondered why she couldn't wait until summer to make such a dramatic change. But counsellor Dale Callender argued that she'd already been waiting for years. It was Callender who smoothed the way for Hines's transition to "Jade" while educating adults and students alike about "transgender" — the term used to describe people who feel at odds with or limited by their anatomical sex.

Hines's change caused a buzz in the school, but only for a short while. For the most part Northern Secondary students turned out to be models of acceptance. Jade's mother, Anne, said the school's handling of the transition was "perfect."

When we last spoke to Hines, she was getting ready for her high school prom and writing exams. A year later, we wondered how she fared in her new

life as a girl. Things are good, it turns out. "This feels very nice — it feels right," she says.

One measure of how things have changed is that we can use her full name. Last year her parents, still uncertain how a wide audience would respond to a 6-foot, 4-inch boy dressed as a girl, asked that her last name not be used. Now the decision is hers. Hines has finished her first year at the University of Victoria, where she took film studies and English. Her residence mates thought she was gay, she said, until she explained she was transgendered.

Like most 19-year-olds Hines is tasting independence for the first time, and liking it. "I'm really enjoying being able to be on my own," she said in a phone interview. "It's done a lot of good. I like being able to make a lot of my own decisions."

The most significant was staying in Victoria instead of going home for the summer. "I was getting a bit claustrophobic and I was ready to leave Toronto — I just don't like large crowds and dense buildings. In Victoria, it's the opposite; I like the slower pace. It's a more interesting geographic area with the mountains and the ocean."



Her Toronto parents worry constantly about Jade Hines, now in Victoria after completing her first year of university there. Jade had adopted a female identity before graduating from Northern Secondary last year.



PHOTO BY DON DENISON FOR THE TORONTO STAR

ary accept Hines's transition, and has sent it to dozens of agencies in Canada and the U.S. It will be published by the Association for Childhood Education International in an anthology dealing with sexual orientation and gender diversity.

It was Callender who presented the Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Youth Line award for outstanding personal achievement to Hines last month in a ceremony at Toronto's Metro-Central YMCA. Introducing Hines, he said, "Little did people know (when they elected Matt) they were electing the first female school president at Northern."

"For her it may not have been a big deal," said Philip Wong, executive director of the peer support service Youth Line. "But the impact of what she did was incredible. When you're in the closet or struggling — someone who has come out as a trans at school and done it well, it is so inspiring."

But Hines downplays the value of her public transition. One other award recipient, who's in her 20s, said she didn't want her last name used because she still hadn't come out to her family and was afraid her father would use Google and find out about her sexual orientation.

There were more family members at Hines's table than any other award winners' that night. Though she's a bit shy, she looked out at the audience of 200 and said: "If people don't accept you for who you are, screw them." Both her grandmother were in the audience, and they were proud.

who really do get her, people who see in Jade a thoughtful and gentle soul who's been saddled with a difficulty the rest of us don't have. She doesn't have a mean bone in her body... But it's hard for me. It's extremely difficult. She's way out in Victoria and I'm afraid she's going to be killed.

"On the other hand, she has been so remarkable and we are so happy she had the independence to go out west... She's grown up."

The past year brought awards: one last month for Jade, and one earlier in the year for Dale Callender, a Delta Youth Services counsellor, who won the Krista Sepp Memorial Award for mentoring one of Ontario's top prizees for child and youth work. He wrote a manual on the process that helped Northern Secondary

house near Victoria's downtown waterfront, Jade doesn't need a car and says she walks most places.

Hines is circumspect about her housing and job search difficulties. "I don't know if it was discrimination. I'm not going to play that card. I'm doing all right. It was difficult finding a house, it's difficult finding a job, but I'm just going to keep at it."

Despite this can-do attitude, her mother still has profound worries. "As parent you just want the course of your child's life to run smoothly. As her father says, ordinary life is hard enough. We struggled with how much do we help her get what she needs. How much do we let her find out the world isn't very accepting? Or does she already know this?"

"There are people she meets

Remaining in Victoria meant finding a place to live, which wasn't easy. On the phone landlords welcomed her to look at rooms, but when she arrived, they'd tell her they were rented. Her mother flew out to help and made a few calls on her behalf. "I told one landlord that... I knew some people don't quite understand (Jade) at the beginning, but I wanted her to know that she's a great kid. We had a long conversation, and she said she'd have to talk to the other girl in the apartment, which was fair, but she never called back."

Eventually Anne Hines found a place for Jade. The landlord, who works for a Vancouver Island HIV-AIDS community support organization, is female-to-male transgender and known as Captain Snowdon. Describing her new home as a beach



Page Ten

With guidance and kindness, Matt took the longest stride a teen can take — leaving life as a boy to become a girl

When Jade was still Matt, he went into Dale Callender's cubbyhole office at Northern Secondary School to talk to the counsellor about his recurrent anxiety and panic attacks.

He seemed to have everything going for him — a 6-foot-4 member of the track team and incoming student council president. "Oh, something else," Matt suddenly announced as an aside at the end of one of their chats, "I also like to dress in women's clothes."

And so began the journey for both as Callender helped Matt become Jade in a very public gender transition in her graduating year of high school.

Last night, Callender presented Jade, now 19, with a personal achievement award from the Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Youth Line for her courage and willingness to share her story.

Written a manual

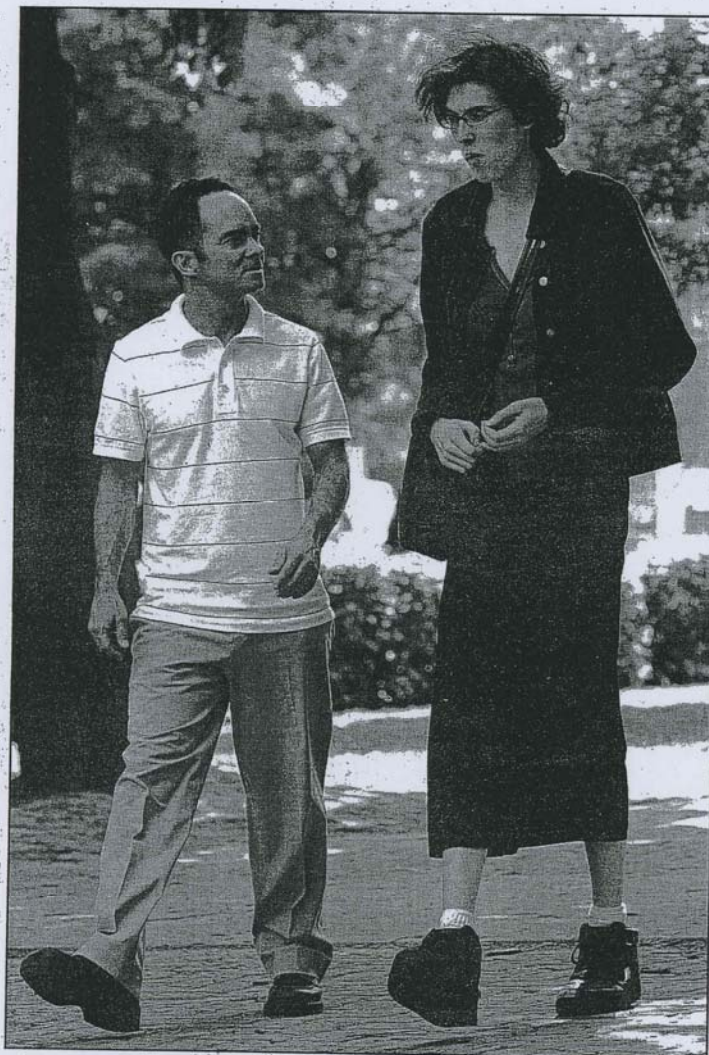
"She had so much working against her," marvels Callender, a counsellor for Delisle Youth Services who has now written a manual, *When Matt became Jade*, to help others making gender transitions in high schools.

"She was 17, she was student council president in a 2,000-student high school, it was her final year, she was already dealing with some anxiety issues. How did she do it? Most kids would have said, 'Absolutely not. I'm just going to struggle through.'"

Jade tosses off his admiration at her coming out. "I just needed to do it. Having to pretend that you're a guy eats away at you and eventually it's too much and you have to do something," she explains.

It's a few hours before the awards, and Jade, who has just completed her first year at the University of Victoria, has returned to her alma mater to reminisce about her dramatic transition in 2005. She is dressed as a woman: Long black skirt, purple blouse, purse — and black runners. "I'm 6-foot-4," she laughs about not wearing heels. "I don't need to be any taller."

She's given up the wig she wore at Northern and is trying to grow her hair long. But as to whether she may one day



CRAIG ROBERTSON/SUN

Counsellor Dale Callender walks with Jade at Northern Secondary School yesterday.

go further and have sex-reassignment surgery, Jade says she'll wait until she finishes university before she decides.

It was just before Christmas break and after several months of practical and psychological preparations — what to do if people heckle, what washroom she would use, what she could do if she felt her safety was at risk — Jade came to school for the

first time dressed as a girl.

She remembers exactly what she was wearing: The same brown cord jacket as today, a ruffled black skirt and a dark wig. "I was pretty nervous, understandably," she recalls. "But then it felt very natural and very comfortable."

High school, at the best of times, can be a torturous place for any kid who is just a

bit different. But while there were a few snickers and strange looks, the student body as a whole was remarkably accepting. "I had a lot more resistance from teachers," admits Callender.

One teacher said that he would not address her by her new name; another wanted to know if she was getting counselling as if she had a mental disorder. Many didn't un-

derstand what transgender meant and assumed, wrongly, that she was gay or a drag queen. "It's not a mental illness," he remembers explaining many times. "Jade is the soul and essence of who she is. She is a female in a male body."

Just about everyone wanted to know why she couldn't wait until after she graduated to come out as transgender.

"But she had already waited 17 years," Callender said in her defence. "Jade had a right to be who she wanted to be."

The principal sent around a letter advising staff that "Matt will be as smart and funny and nice as before, except he will be dressing differently in order to feel more comfortable" and that she didn't want to be looked on as an "exhibit."

Jade went on to perform her duties as student council president — making speeches, hosting the Grade 8 orientation visits — despite some adults who questioned whether she should be allowed to represent the school. "But I told them you can't have it both ways," Callender recalls. "You can't put her back in the closet."

Black cocktail dress

Jade's long journey was finally complete when she attended her prom in a black cocktail outfit. "I looked pretty good," she says with a smile.

A year later, and Callender's manual on their experience has been sent to every high school principal in Ontario and has had requests from as far away as England. Meanwhile, Jade continues to speak out in an effort to clear up so many misconceptions. "Your sexual identity and your gender are two completely unrelated things," Jade says. "We're just trying to be who we are. We didn't choose to be transgender. It's something we're born with and the more we try to deny it, the more stress we're under and it's not worth it."

The school bell sounds and classes are dismissed. As Jade wades confidently through the crowded hallway, no one looks askance at the tall, happy woman who passes them by.

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