

Facts And Fancies About Transgender People

Some Facts

FACT : There are estimated to be about 5,000 transsexual people in the UK. The global prevalence of people who would be classified as transsexual is believed from various studies to be about 1 in 11,500 adults.

FACT : Transsexual, Transgender and Transvestite people share similar forms of discrimination, concerned with violating conventions about gender roles. That tends to be where the similarities end though. Transvestite people cross-dress on occasions for pleasure, rather than as a permanent expression of their innermost identity as people. Some authorities estimate that more than 1 in 100 men cross dress to varying degrees in the privacy of their homes or the safety of social groups.

FACT : You are almost as likely to encounter a transsexual man (transitioned from female to male) as a transsexual woman (male to female). Trans men have been particularly invisible in society, not only because they tend to “pass” very well following hormone treatment, but also because many writers in the past had tended to deny their existence or classify them as something else.

FACT : Transsexual people come from all walks of life and all levels within society – often working in responsible and well-paid positions prior to transition. Academic follow-up research shows that most transsexual people have found themselves working at one or two levels below their capability following “transition”, simply because of hostile or discriminatory conditions in employment.

FACT : Evidence from working with employers who seek help with creating affirmative policies for retaining and recruiting transsexual staff shows that there are no insurmountable “problems” in handling the transition of an existing employee. Education, planning and a positive management approach are the key success factors in eliminating workplace fears and hostility. The person with the greatest incentive to help the process to work is the transitioning employee themselves.

Some Myths

MYTH : “You can always pick them out”. In fact, most transsexual people want and succeed in being invisible, provided that people respect their privacy. The idea that transsexual women are easily picked out, with big hands etc... is an urban myth that probably arose from stereotypes in the media, and from confusing transsexual women with male cross-dressers.

MYTH : “It’s all about sex”. In fact many transsexual people have relatively celibate lives. People transition in order to express their identity as gendered people in everyday life, not to perform in a particular way in the bedroom. Following “transition”, transsexual people’s sexual orientations are as varied as everyone else’s. Many transsexual women may identify as lesbian – others as heterosexual women.

MYTH : “They are unemployable – Other staff and customers will never accept them”. In fact most transsexual people go on to have very good careers, so long as employers or co-workers don’t sabotage their efforts. There are many transsexual doctors, surgeons, airline pilots, lawyers, HR managers, salespeople, local government officials – even elected councillors.