

Transition Support Course July 22nd and 23rd 2017 Glasgow



The course was provided as part of our Glasgow Trans Support Programme (GTSP), for anyone looking to explore transition options and be themselves around other trans people, in an open and safe non-judgemental space.

Staff and volunteers over the weekend were:

Katrina Mitchell (GTSP Development Worker),
Emma Cuthbertson (GTSP Volunteer)
Kelly Minio-Paluello (Glasgow Service Manager – LGBT Health & Wellbeing)
Elizabeth Riddell (Mental Health & Counselling - LGBT Health & Wellbeing)
James Morton (Manager – Scottish Trans Alliance)

Thanks also to the volunteers from the Loretto LGBT Network who volunteered on reception over the weekend.

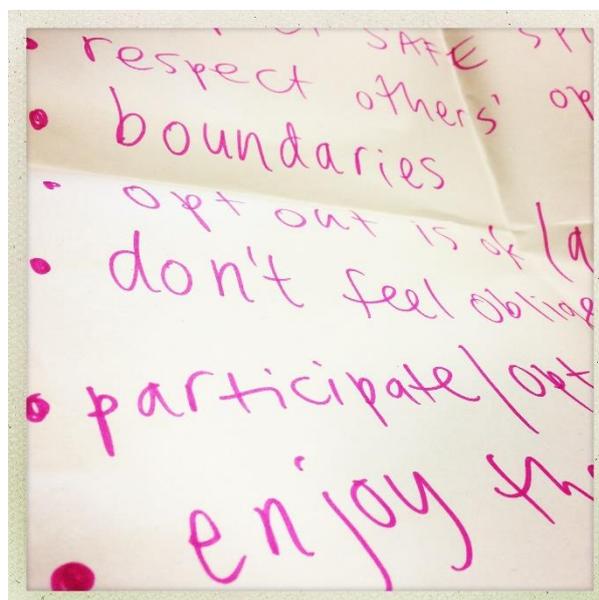
DAY 1: SATURDAY

Welcome, introductions, group agreement, safe space, hopes and fears, folders, meeting each other

Feeling Better About Me (with Elizabeth)

Lunch

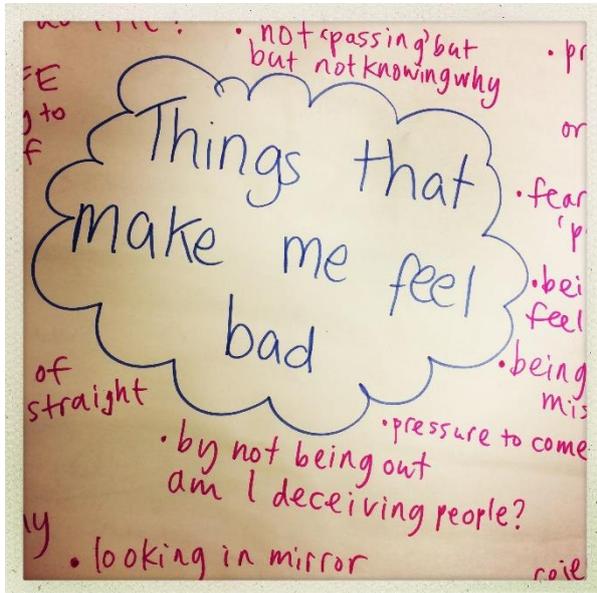
Feeling Comfortable in Myself, Confidence, Identity (with Kelly)



Feeling Better About Me

Elizabeth led this session about mental health with several discussions in small groups.

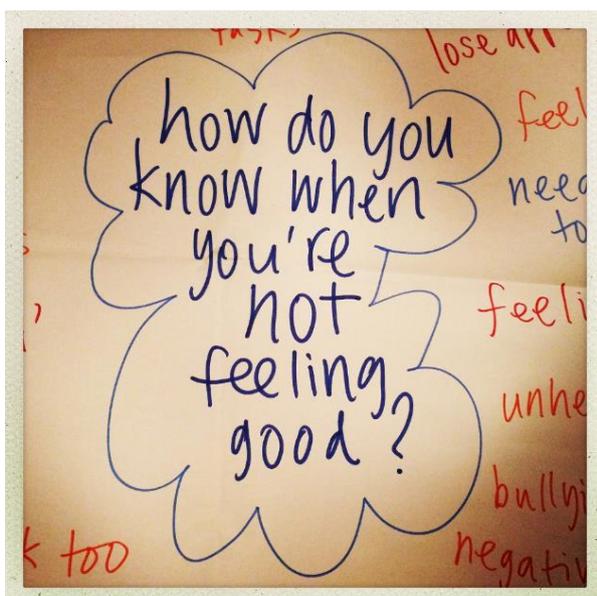
WHAT THINGS HAVE A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON MY MENTAL HEALTH?



Discrimination; no filter between brain and mouth (other people); lack of respect; where do I fit?; not 'passing' but not knowing why; pressure to 'pass' or conform; fear of not 'passing'; life, day to day stuff; being made to feel uncomfortable; being misgendered; pressure to come out; by not being out am I deceiving people?; assumptions of being cis and straight; unasked for public scrutiny; looking in mirror; hearing my voice; rejection – are they rejecting the real me?; NHS; feeling I can't express myself; isolating myself; putting others (eg family) in an awkward position; dating and 'passing' issues; making myself vulnerable.

The group then shared number of different behaviours that tell us we're not feeling so good. We discussed how recognising these behaviours and signs give us better insight into what's happening with ourselves but also ideas of how we might help ourselves feel better.

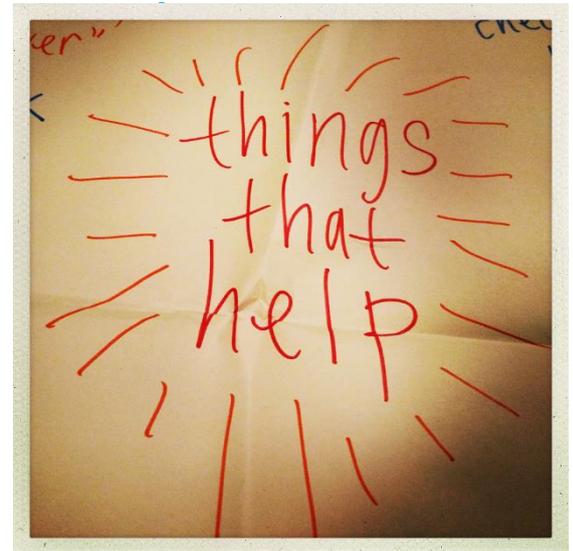
RECOGNISING IT - HOW I KNOW I'M NOT FEELING GOOD



No energy; can't focus; not sleeping; no motivation to do things I enjoy; don't feel 'baseline content' – restless / disgruntled; use reading / gaming / internet to block out; feel heavier / weighed down; how I dress; feel bored; anxiety; negative narrative; avoid; isolate self; push others away; not able to deal with things; expect things to go wrong; double bind; feeling more easily triggered / upset; assume things will fail; I see myself like my old self; thoughts become auto-pilot; increased risk-taking; drink more; stress dreams; my mind exaggerates things; assume people are laughing at me.

Feeling Better About Me – things that help!

Pets – tell them anything, great icebreaker
Friends – keep in touch
LGBT tv shows – help others understand
Non-tokenism in tv and films (non-binary character in mainstream)
Socialise even if you don't feel like it
Break your routine – have a shower, go to the cinema
Counselling
Don't beat your self up
Online community – engage as much as you want
Do something for someone else
Set realistic goals – achievable
Find my own way
List previous successes and things achieved
Take things at my pace, eg unisex clothes, makeup
Acceptance – feeling accepted
Things are getting better – look back at history
Remind myself that bad situations are usually temporary
Positive role models, including realistic ones
Be kind to yourself
Accept your flaws
Treat it as a learning experience
Positive cultural changes eg more understanding and acceptance
Do the things that scare me
Put it in context - 0.01% of all the people I encountered today
Humour
Cuddles
Exercise – being active or - a burst of adrenalin helps
Go for a walk, get some fresh air in your lungs
Appreciate small things
Being respected
Take the positives
Small treats – coffee / chocolate
Remind yourself that you deserve nice things
Learn how to fight and stand up for myself
Find survival tactics
Comfort box eg 5 senses / important things – photo, bath salts, playlist, a letter etc
Talk about things – open up to someone
Have a bath and scented candle – relax



Feeling Better About Me – things that help!

Some additional suggestions from last year's course

Affirming note for self for next day

Positive thinking with powerful words – affirmations “I am beautiful / interesting”

Get some fresh air

Big breath out and back in – extra oxygen

Compose thoughts – make a list

Stop for a moment

Ground myself

Name things

Reach out: helpline / counselling / support group

Quiet mental space

Dancing and movement (bad dancing is good!)

Place of sanctuary – sea, beach, park, somewhere quiet, nature

Check in with basic needs – do I need to eat / drink something, too hot / cold, go to loo etc

Having a response to internal bullies

Fresh / sharp smell or taste eg mint, lemon, lavender – what works for you

'Me' time

T can make temper worse – diffuse with humour

Have a safe space to calm down. Feeling safe means less stress.

Tackle something, start with something small

Listen to your favourite music, make a playlist

Coping strategies - talk with someone you trust, get support, call a friend

Keep pictures or videos of your journey, often better than looking in the mirror to see changes, progress

Take selfies when you feel good!

Feeling Comfortable in Myself, Confidence, Identity

Kelly led this session, which was about giving participants the space to think more broadly about their identity, interests, skills, passions and beliefs. Exploring aspects of your whole self can help you to understand how feelings about your gender affect these other crucial elements of your identity.

The group came up with this list to describe HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN A PERSON IS SELF-CONFIDENT?

- Comfortable in a given situation
- Can dress flamboyantly against the norms, stand out
- Knowing you can overcome anything
- Speak at a normal pace
- Take time to breathe
- Assertive
- Can do things without having to think too much
- Courage
- Head held high
- Eye contact
- Can make decisions
- Relaxed
- Speak – project voice
- Don't change themselves / try to fit in
- Open body posture
- Doesn't startle
- Dress for themselves
- Don't need to prove anything
- Speak decisively

We watched a video of a trans woman taking part in a tv panel debate about gendered language on London Underground announcements, and discussed how she came across.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yftAfjNUEz8>) We then split into small groups to explore three scenarios about confidence in different situations – public toilets, new job and a family wedding, and then we discussed some of this as a whole group.

Kelly finished the session with WHAT CAN I DO TO BE MORE CONFIDENT? WHAT STRATEGIES CAN I USE TO FEEL OR BEHAVE MORE CONFIDENTLY?

TOP TIPS FOR SELF-CONFIDENCE

Don't compare yourself to others
Breathing exercises
Wear a kilt when you can't wear a dress
Wear something for you
Be prepared to ask for help
Use nice bath products – sensory, self-care, fun
Bathbombs distract from dysphoria
Don't assume all comments are negative
Ask myself what I would do if I was feeling confident
Fake it til you make it
Pick your battles – time will tell which battles to fight
Try to keep yourself comfortable, don't force yourself
Be prepared to leave people behind
Shoulders back, chin up – think about posture
Be gentle and patient with yourself
Don't be afraid to take things slow / at your pace
Self-care is powerful – bathbombs distract from dysphoria
Magical armour - wear visible headphones / sunglasses
Don't assume you're under attack
Don't prejudge people
Smile and laugh
Be proud of yourself
Don't respond to harassment
Power dressing
Filter it out
Have mental armour
Not everyone is your enemy
Practice doing and saying things
Don't sweat the small stuff

Some tips from last year's course!

Challenge perceptions
Confronting adversity / fears – positive outcomes
Assertiveness
Sharing experiences
Confidence in your gender
Confidence in how you express your gender
Be proud of yourself
Know your rights
Remember I have a legal right to be myself and not abused
Take yourself seriously
Fake it til you make it!

DAY 2: SUNDAY

Options in Transition - looking at resources, sharing information

Lunch

Films

Trans rights and Q&A with James Morton

Social space, keeping in touch, evaluations, close

Options in Transition

This session with Katrina, Chrissy and Emma covered a lot of ground. There were lots of paper and practical resources around the room to explore, including a 'masculinising area' with an example binder, MORF binder scheme and handout, make your own, binder research, a packer, packer harness, stand-to-pee device, GIRES lower surgery guide, St Peter's Andrology information. In the 'feminising area' we had silicone and foam breast forms, a high waisted body clincher; a gaff, how to make a homemade gaff, information about tucking, GIRES lower surgery guide.

We also had areas with information about the NHS (Scottish protocol and recent update on AEARP, NGICNS guidance on the protocol including first assessment); name change (statutory notification form); trans rights – LGBT Health and Wellbeing workplace guide, STA trans justice guide, STA gender recognition reform leaflet; and other various resources from Gendered Intelligence, LGBT Youth Scotland, Stonewall, THT, Green and Black Cross. The subsequent discussion included:

The Perth gathering – open to family – recommended.

Endocrine guidelines and GMC bridging hormones (<http://www.gmc-uk.org/guidance/28851.asp>), changing GP, self-medicating, NGICNS page for professionals – refer your GP to it.

Chalmers GIC situation

Repeat prescriptions

Going private while on NHS waiting list

Oestrogen gel – pump dispensers run out with no warning, but some pharmacies will lend against prescriptions

Pharmacy 3 month injection anti-androgen T blocker administered by Practice Nurse. Can come to an arrangement with pharmacy

Sandyford drop-in – first Tuesday of the month – must have had your first assessment before accessing drop-in

Facial hair removal – getting a re-referral for more sessions after 15 – need to push for it

NHS wig provision

Name change on utility bills etc; name change on exam certificates – contact SQA. HMRC and name change.

Shoes – larger sizes from Deichmann

Body language and gender expression

Voice therapy for trans masculine people; group voice therapy pilot in NHS GG&C

Voice apps – EVA MTF (paid elements); Voice Analyst (paid); Voice Pitch Analyser (free)

Adam World Choir, Edinburgh Festival events; Non-binary Night; CN Lester book launch

Sandyford Counselling service

Pride group tickets

Social Media – Transgender Scotland facebook group; TMSA UK (Trans Masculine Support and Advice UK)

group (message Scott Grant to access); Trans Masculine Scotland secret facebook group; Chatzy – transgender talk; gaming – Gamers Against Toxic Masculinity (trans friendly group) also facebook group.

Thanks to everyone who generously shared information and experiences!

We then watched a few short videos including True Trans; My Generation (also on Snapchat); BBC Social Trans Day of Visibility.



We were delighted to welcome James Morton from STA (Scottish Trans Alliance) on Sunday afternoon. James began by talking about key legal rights, then took a question and answer session.

KEY LEGAL RIGHTS

In the Equality Act 2010, gender reassignment is a protected characteristic given wide definitions. The Act covers people who are proposing to undergo, currently undergoing or have undergone a process (or part of a process) of gender reassignment. The act makes it clear that it is not necessary for people to have any medical diagnosis or treatment to gain this protection; it is a personal process of moving away from one's birth gender to one's self-identified gender. A person remains protected, even if they decide not to proceed further with transitioning. It also protects family / friends by association. Nonbinary people are covered too.

The act is not so clear for cases when someone knows they are trans but haven't told anyone yet, or someone who is trans and has no intention of transitioning.

More at <http://www.scottishtrans.org/trans-rights/principles/equality-act-2010/>

GENDER RECOGNITION REFORM

The Scottish Government is reforming the Gender Recognition Act and will be doing a public consultation later in the year, so you can make your views heard.

HATE CRIME

The Scottish Government is currently reviewing hate crime legislation – you can read and contribute here:

<http://www.gov.scot/About/Review/Hate-Crime-Legislation>

The Offences (Aggravation by Prejudice) (Scotland) Act 2009 allows stiffer penalties to be imposed on people who commit crimes motivated by prejudice based on transgender identity. Importantly, it is the perception of the perpetrator, which is taken into account not the identity of the victim. This means that whether the victim identifies as trans or not, if the perpetrator's actions are motivated by the perception that the victim is trans then the legislation applies. More at <http://www.scottishtrans.org/trans-rights/practice/hate-crime/>

Someone being harassed or insulted is a civil offense. If they feel physically threatened in public it's a hate crime. The crime is an offence first, and the transphobic aspect is an aggravation. It's daunting to deal with, but we encourage you to report any crimes like these to the police, who've had lots of training from STA. Good to report for statistics, so that police know where there's a problem. Some of the group shared their experiences of reporting transphobic hate crimes – 'CCTV helped', 'the police were fantastic'.

Police Scotland's website has an online form to report / log hate crime - can enter details and whether you want police to follow it up, it's very flexible. The form is here: <https://www.scotland.police.uk/secureforms/hate-crime/>

To prosecute, two witnesses are needed as proof – the victim is one witness, so one more is needed. One victim plus CCTV or mobile phone footage would also count. Breach of the peace – ask others around for corroboration. There's usually CCTV on trains and buses. Film incident on your phone if possible.

Victim information services can support people at court, and you can request reporting restrictions.

Vulnerable witnesses can give evidence on video link or behind a screen on request. From experience, the perpetrator will often plead guilty the day before court. A fine imposed can be payable to the victim.

The difference between a hate incident and a hate crime is that it's called a hate incident when it's still being investigated – as police investigate, if there's enough evidence to charge, it becomes a 'potential hate crime' – then the procurator fiscal decides whether to go ahead and prosecute.

Question: Trolling, sexting and online hate crimes – police response seems inadequate

James: STA is engaging with Police Scotland on this – useful to raise if you're responding to the Hate Crimes review. You can ask the police to log an incident, so if it continues then you might want the police to pursue it. Hate crimes can be logged even if years ago. Shows you took it seriously and found it alarming.

Question: Can I get the police to protect me in my new identity

James: Yes – police have a vulnerable persons database – you can be on it if you want eg if depression, issues, record of what is helpful. Obviously not all trans people are vulnerable. Get in touch with LGBT Liaison Officer.

Question: Work issue – toxic colleague affecting friend trying to transition at work

James: Meet with HR to discuss, keep a record of what's agreed. Be constructive – keep a log of what is said when, who else heard it – keep a journal. Get legal advice if needed.

Question: New passport photo – I heard you can't wear a wig or makeup

James: Wig is allowed as long as hair is not covering your face. Subtle makeup is also ok.

Question: I can't get the title deeds changed to my new name.

James: Not sure why this is – take it to the information commissioner – will help you explore this – constitutes a violation of your privacy.

Question: Will my psychiatric condition or mental health condition impact on my transition through the gender identity clinic?

James: It's generally ok. They want you to explain yourself in a way they accept, so might delay things a bit. Write things down, send a letter in advance – they accept that. They don't hold previous mental health crises against people. If it's a significant mental health crises they want it to de-escalate before starting people on hormones or surgery.

Question: I live in supported accommodation and they're not happy with me transitioning.

James: They have to abide by the Equality Act – write to the senior manager about getting training for the staff so that no one breaks the Equality Act – they usually act on that.

Question: How do I coordinate paperwork across two countries?

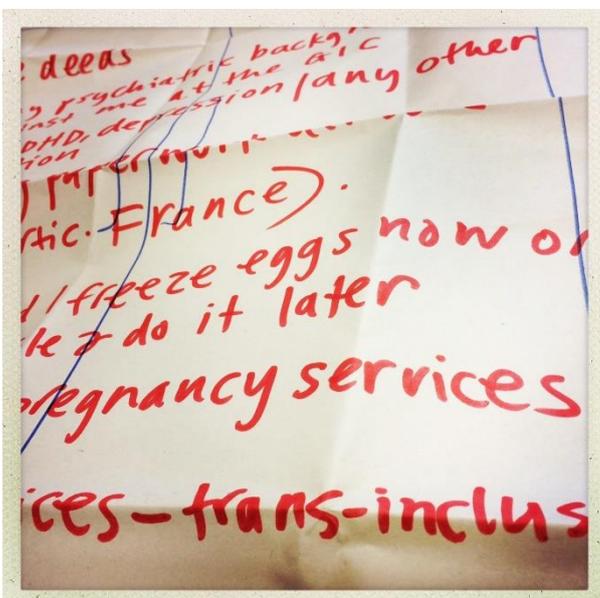
James: Rules differ – get in touch with TGEU.

Question: Deed poll or Statutory declaration of change of name?

James: Statutory declaration is free and easy to do in Scotland. Deed poll is English but generally accepted in Scotland. Print it out on posh paper if you like – cheaper than paying for a company to do this and send it to you. Do not enrol your deed poll – this creates an online link between your old and new names.

Question: Fertility – should I delay starting T and freeze my eggs now, or is it ok to start T and then freeze eggs later?

James: If you do it after starting T, you need to take high doses of oestrogen to stimulate egg production, which can affect mood etc. Discuss with GIC re your mental health. You might get a better result before starting T, but if you freeze eggs later, after not too long, it should be fine to come off T. Balance between getting T and fertility. Masculinisation doesn't stop when you come off T.



Question: How trans-inclusive are pregnancy services in Scotland?

James: Don't have much familiarity with services. At least 12 men have given birth in Scotland. Talk to your GP about which midwife might suit – or so that available midwives can get appropriate training. Health Boards must make sure there's no harassment or humiliation – they must make adjustments. STA can help with linking up with suitable training. Some research is starting on training and guidance for pregnancy services.

Question: How long does the NHS retain eggs?

James: About ten years – it becomes more difficult (not because of viability – more to do with freezer space, although viability does decrease a bit over time). You may have to pay for IVF later to use the eggs. You should get the same service as cis people but health boards have varying options / rules.

Question: Re sperm or eggs donations – what if the baby asks to get in touch – is there protection if the donor has since transitioned?

James: It's not clear – we're trying to get clarification on that.

Question: Do I need to disclose my trans status to a sexual partner?

James: There's still no clarity about whether you do or not. Previous cases say that not disclosing nullifies consent. Where is the line drawn? Only one case in Scotland – the person hadn't told anyone they were trans or changed documents. STA worked with the crown office and procurator fiscal. For your own safety in terms of potential bad reactions from people, disclose that you're trans in safe place before getting to the bedroom. If you ever have any hassle, STA knows good lawyers – get in touch.

Question: Trans panic defence – is it really a thing?

James: STA has worked a lot with the Scottish judiciary on this – they understand now that it is not a legitimate defence.

Question: Is there any disadvantage to having a Gender Recognition Certificate?

James: The convoluted application process, the £140 fee, having to get a letter from your GP (although any medical doctor can write the letter).

Question: At my second opinion appointment for surgery, I was asked questions specific to my sexuality, not my gender, and about what other people ask me to do sexually – what's that got to do with anything?

James: We're talking to the GICs about this – they say it's about finding out about all aspects of people's lives, and so they can give tailored advice, or because there's a difference between sexual fetish and being trans. GICs should reflect on these questions.

Question: Should I refuse to answer?

James: Just say that you don't understand the purpose of the question, or that you find it offensive – ask them to justify why they're asking it. So you're not refusing, but asking why they need to know. If you feel that this affects your treatment unfairly, tell STA – we can challenge. You can also complain at the time, or complain later after treatment. Complaints are taken seriously by NHS and the GICs.

Question: Can I get a reduction on the cost of getting a new passport because of name and gender change?

James: No. However an updated drivers licence is free.

Closing session and evaluations

After thanking James for such an excellent session, the group shared with each other what they had got out of the weekend course. Many thanks to all participants for their generous and supportive contributions throughout the weekend. Participants' feedback is shared below:

Before the course, we asked people to score:

- Your confidence on a scale of 1-5 (1 = not confident at all, 5 = very confident)
The average score was 2.7
- How isolated do you feel on a scale of 1-5 (1 = very isolated, 5 = not at all isolated)
The average score was 2.4
- How informed do you feel about issues relating to transition, on a scale of 1-5 (1 = not informed at all, 5 = very informed)
The average score was 3.1

After the course, we asked several questions in the evaluation:

How enjoyable was the course? (where 1 is not at all enjoyable, and 5 is very enjoyable)
82% scored the course at 5, 9% scored it at 4 and 9% scored it at 3.

As a result of being involved with the Transition Support Course, please rate yourself in the following areas:
Agree / disagree / not sure

I feel less isolated	73% agreed / 27% not sure
Generally, I feel more confident in expressing my views and needs	82% agreed / 18% not sure
I feel more informed about my options and my rights	91% agreed / 9% not sure
I have made new friendships and connections	82% agreed / 18% not sure
My self-esteem has improved	82% agreed / 18% not sure
I feel more confident about myself	82% agreed / 18% not sure
I feel more in control of my life	73% agreed / 27% not sure
I feel more able to tackle discrimination, harrasment and hate crime	82% agreed / 18% not sure
I feel more able to report and access support around hate crime	82% agreed / 18% not sure

I felt recognised! Accepted and acknowledged. I gained a lot of insight and I smiled quite a bit more than usual :)

I have gained really good information about topical issues in the world that are happening and places to go to meet other people in a safe environment

Good information regarding legal situation and recourse, options for future life plans

New perspectives and information on elements of my transition

Understanding, feeling better about me, friends

Good to meet other people at various stages and share experiences. Not a lot of new information but great to have what I thought and know confirmed

The course was very informative and had lots of great discussions and questions answered. Was lovely to meet so many new people

I have had my best weekend and gained more help

Confidence, support, knowledge. Very good and helpful, uplifting

I met some nice people and feel a little more confident.

It has made me see that I can put myself forward to learn, it has made me realise I can share with other people and to talk when I thought I could not do it.

Increased feeling of control, determined. I feel a lot stronger

Improved my outlook and eased my anxiety on certain elements of being trans

I was anxious before but it was such a safe and welcoming environment I felt more confident by the end

My outlook is more positive having met some great people

Having access to events like this is really worthwhile and the staff are all great

I really loved it! James' talk was SUPER useful and I took a TON of notes, thanks SO much xx

More self confidence - because I know I can do it. Thank you :)

