

None of the above

THE TRANSGENDER AND INTERSEX YOUTH

VISION FOR 2020

“

*IT FEELS LIKE PEOPLE THINK I'M BEING DIFFICULT AND
AM DEMANDING SPECIAL TREATMENT — BUT I JUST
WANT TO BE TREATED AS MYSELF LIKE EVERYONE ELSE.*

”

Foreword

This leaflet is an agenda in which we present those social and judicial rights that young transgender and intersex people should have in Finland by 2020. We do not propose the means for implementing these rights: the purpose of this agenda is to give a voice to the gender minorities and act as a guideline when issues relating to this group of people are discussed and decisions made.

The 'None of the Above' leaflet has its origins in a 2010 summer camp for transgender and intersex youth. During the summer camp it became clear that young transgender and intersex people still have to face a multitude of different social problems and mistreatment, even in 2010. These problems could be avoided by giving their family and friends and society advice on how to acknowledge diversity of gender. In addition to acting as a political agenda for the leaders and decision makers of our society, this leaflet is also a guide on how to behave towards young transgender and intersex people so that youth anxiety and alienation may be prevented. Transgender and intersex people are one of the groups most in need of support, and the exceptionally high suicide rate amongst them shows that there has not been a sufficient amount of it. This agenda is targeted to the young people, their family and friends, those who work with young people, and to those who are responsible for the decisions concerning the lives of these young people.

The people involved in outlining this future vision are transgender or intersex. The stories and proposed rights presented in this agenda are all based on the experiences and needs of the young people who were a part of this project. The stories have been edited so that individual people or events are unrecognizable, but they are all based on reality.

In many ways, young transgender and intersex people are in a worse position than their peers. Often they receive no support from their parents or other people close to them. This leads to the young people being forced to take on the role of educator as well as being a support group. It is also difficult to find people with the expertise necessary for understanding transgender and intersex people. We have compiled this agenda to target these problems and to make them visible.

This leaflet was a part of the 'None of the Above - young transgender and intersex people's vision for 2020' project. It has been funded by the Youth in Action program of the European Union, and in accordance with the principles of the program, the young people themselves were responsible for the planning, contents and realization of the project. Four young transgender and intersex people were involved in the core group of this project. Setä and the Transgender Support Centre also assisted with the project. It was put into action in 2010.

The project consisted of a summer camp in 2010, a follow-up meeting after the camp, and the production and distribution of this agenda. The 17 participants of the summer camp were all young transgender and intersex people, between the ages of 14 and 21 and from all over Finland. They have all contributed to the contents of this agenda. Two people who belong to our target group but who were not members of our initial project group have also helped us with taking the point of view of intersex young people into account.

Kind regards,

The work group of the 'None of the Above' project



The publication has received funding from the European Commission. Responsibility for the information and views set out in this publication lies entirely with the authors.

Key terms

This list explains some key terms related to the subject, which are used extensively in this leaflet.

Gender » A range of characteristics that are used to distinguish between males and females; the social distinction between male and female.

Sex » The biological distinction between male and female.

Diversity of gender » There are men and women whose sex corresponds to their gender, men and women whose sex does *not correspond* to their gender, and people who *do not want to be defined* as either men or women. In addition to men and women, there are people who represent other biological, social and psychological genders.

Gender identity » The gender a person self-identifies as. It may or may not correspond to the person's sex.

Gender role » A way of expressing gender that is created through social interaction and that is considered appropriate by society.

Gender dysphoria » A condition where a person identifies as belonging to another gender than that of the sex they were assigned at birth.

Sex reassignment » A group of medical procedures that change a person's physical features to match their gender identity.

Heteronormativity » A set of social norms which dictate that there are two opposite sexes who fit into certain gender roles and feel attraction towards each other. In a heteronormative world view, deviating from this "default" is seen as abnormal and undesirable.

Cisgender » A person whose gender identity and expression match what is expected of their biological sex; a person who is not transgender or intersex.

Transsexed » A person who feels that they were assigned the wrong gender at birth and needs sex reassignment to correct this problem.

Transgender » An umbrella term for people whose gender expression and gender identity differ from conventional gender roles. Transgender people may find the conventional two genders inadequate to describe them.

Trans man, trans boy, FTM (female-to-male) » A person who was assigned female at birth but identifies themselves as a man.

Trans woman, trans girl, MTF (male-to-female) » A person who was assigned male at birth but identifies themselves as a woman.

Intersex » A variety of medical conditions in which a person's sexual anatomy and/or other physical traits do not clearly match those of a male or female. There are, however, people with an ambiguous sexual anatomy who do not identify themselves as intersex.

Transvestite » A person who feels the desire to dress up as and throw themselves into the role of the opposite sex. A transvestite does not need sex reassignment.

1 The Right to Grow Up • in a Safe Environment

» *When I was sixteen, I went to a youth shelter because being at home felt so oppressive. I guess my parents think that I'll forget about this and become normal if they refuse to talk about this issue and the way I feel. The people at the shelter were pretty understanding, but when my dad came to pick me up and behaved himself, they told me to go back home. They said that I need to understand that this can be a difficult issue for people from older generations and asked me if I couldn't be a bit flexible as long as I live at home. It felt incredibly bad that they didn't understand either. As if I'd gone there because daddy wouldn't let me wear the kind of clothes I wanted to. They didn't realize that my gender dysphoria goes much deeper than that. I would've needed a grown-up to support me and to tell me that I have the right to be myself.* »

Growing up in a safe environment means that young people have the right to live without the fear of having their mental or physical safety and well-being violated. In the case of young transgender and intersex people, creating a safe environment requires taking some special considerations into account. The foundation for a safe environment for young transgender and intersex people is set by the implementation of all the rights that are presented in this agenda. In addition to these rights, a safe environment means many other things, including that a young person has a chance to receive specialist help and peer support when coming to terms with their gender identity or body identity.

Just like all other young people, young transgender and intersex people should have the right to get support for the gender they feel they belong to and their gender expression. They also have the right to receive positive feedback for their other characteristics, talents and skills.

» *At first my parents had a pretty hard time dealing with the fact that I'm not a girl but instead feel that I'm a boy. My mom went to a therapist to talk about how she felt. Nowadays I'm allowed to be myself and to buy my clothes from the boys' section. My parents are trying to get used to my boy name, but sometimes they still call me by the old name by accident. They've also talked to my teachers about what all of this means. It felt so good when my dad once said: 'It's just us guys here.'* «

Young people should have the right to good, specialised care that is given at the right time. This means that those who treat them need to have appropriate and up-to-date knowledge and skills that are based on objective understanding. It is necessary to be able to determine a young person's condition and how and when they should be given information. It is also important to make sure that the information is comprehensive enough and that the young person and their parents are able to fully understand it. For transgender people, giving care at the right time includes delaying puberty with medication and starting medical examinations at a sufficiently early time. For intersex people, it includes putting off cosmetic surgeries until the person is old enough to understand the consequences of the surgeries and to express what gender they feel they belong to.

If the parents are unable or unwilling to face their child's gender identity or gender expression, or their intersex child's unconventional body, they are unable to create a safe environment for the child to grow up in. Consequently, this should be the basis for intervention by child welfare services.

2 • The Right to Information

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I accidentally found out from a doctor that I'm intersex. He asked me about it because he thought I already knew. I felt really confused and shocked. It would've been a lot easier if my parents and I had been told about it right away when I was little. «

Transgender and intersex youth and the people close to them have the right to receive information about gender diversity. In addition to the parents, information should also be given to other relatives, friends and school staff, among others. This is necessary for helping the people around the young person support them and understand what they are experiencing. Giving information to the child and the people close to the child relieves unnecessary anxiety and helps the young person to grow into their own identity. This also helps them to cope with possible sadness caused by feelings of otherness.

”
If I'd known in middle school that what I'm experiencing has a name - being transsexed... that it's not sick and that I'm not the only person in the world who feels like this, I'm sure I wouldn't have been so anxious. They sure didn't talk about this issue in school. That sent the message that you can't talk about being transsexed because it's so strange. If we'd talked about it even a little bit, I wouldn't have thought that I'm not allowed to feel the way I feel. I was planning to kill myself before I turned 20 because I thought the rest of my life would be full of this anxiety. Now I feel like there is something to look forward to in the future, when I know that I can do something about this and live as myself. «

The diversity of gender should be visible in comprehensive school and upper secondary school teaching. A young transgender or intersex person can have trouble with putting their experience into words if the only image of gender they are shown is one where people are born as either men or women who have certain types of unchanging bodies, identities and social roles.

”
I've always liked spending time with boys and I like to do 'boy things'. Most of my friends are boys. However, I feel I'm a girl and I'd like to be a girl in other people's eyes, too. I've been wondering if I can get reassignment even if I'm not girly? Can I ever be a 'real' girl? «

Young people have the right to hear positive stories that they can identify with and that support the development of their identity. Finding people they can identify with in their environment is essential in helping a teenagers develop into well-balanced individuals.

3. The Right to Self-definition

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Thinking about this gender thing is still pretty new for me. I've always felt wrong in this body, especially because people think I'm a boy, but I don't know if I want reassignment. When I talk about this to people, they say: "Oh, so you don't want to be a boy, should I call you a woman then?" Maybe it would be easier for people to understand if I could say that I felt like a woman in a man's body, but that wouldn't be true. They don't understand that I don't want to define myself right now, and that maybe I'll never want to. “

Young transgender and intersex people must be allowed to define their gender themselves or to leave it undefined. The name and terms that a young person uses to refer to themselves should be respected without questioning them. Young people should not have to define themselves just because the adults around them cannot cope with not having definitions or accept that there are unanswered questions related to the young people's identities.

”
After I came out as a trans man, I've been told that I'm too feminine to be a man and that I can't wear jewellery and have long hair anymore when I'm a man. But loads of guys have long hair. It feels crazy that I should be a certain type of stereotypical man just because I'm a trans man. Long hair and earrings are a part of my masculinity. “

Young people should not be forced into certain gender roles. A trans boy can be feminine, too, and a trans girl can be masculine. Just like everyone else, young transgender and intersex people are not necessarily stereotypical examples of their gender. For instance, trans boys should have the right to be quiet and trans girls should be allowed to be tomboys without the people around them thinking that these traits create doubts about the gender they feel they belong to. Young people's gender expression should always be respected, no matter what terms they use to define themselves.



4. The Right to Make the Decisions Concerning Their Own Bodies

” *I’m transsexed and need reassignment, but I don’t want any kind of surgery done on my genitals. My genitals are a part of my body and my sexuality, even if they’re not typical for my gender. People seem to think that your gender depends on what you have between your legs. It would feel bad to change my body only to make other people satisfied.* “

Young transgender and intersex people must have the right to make the decisions concerning their own bodies and the things done to it. Their decisions must be supported and their own experience respected. Their identity must be taken seriously, even if they do not want any kind of surgery. What treatments they want or need does not necessarily depend on how they experience their gender.

” *I’ve known I’m a trans girl since I was a child, but I can’t do anything about it because I’m underage. It feels unfair that I have to wait many years before I can start living my own life. My body is becoming more and more masculine, and it feels awful. My beard is growing and I’m afraid that if the hormone treatment is started too late, it won’t help and I’ll have to worry for the rest of my life whether I can pass as a girl. It’s useless to tell me that I’m too young to know my gender; all the other teenagers are supposed to know it too. Would it be better, then, if I spent the rest of my life unhappy in this body? I don’t think things could feel any more wrong than this.* “

Underage people who need sex reassignment therapy must have the right to medical examinations and treatments that become significantly less effective if postponed (e.g. hormone treatments). There is no legal excuse for denying these treatments from underage people.

” *When I was born, my parents were told that I was a bit of an unusual girl and that I needed immediate surgery. There were more operations later, and I had to skip school and I had pains. As a teenager I read my medical records and found a long Latin name for my ‘illness’. When I searched it online I found out that I’m intersex. They didn’t know if I was a girl or a boy, so they just decided to make me into a girl! I’ve asked the doctor who treated me why they did the surgery and didn’t wait until I was old enough to tell which gender I was. They told me it was for my own best and that it would have been really hard on my parents if they hadn’t done the surgery. This way I could grow up as a ‘normal’ girl. I don’t even know if I’m a girl or if I want to be one! And the surgeries haven’t made me normal. They’ve only caused me pain and the loss of my erogenous feelings. I feel like my body has been mutilated because the grown-ups couldn’t deal with me being a little bit different, not normal. Couldn’t they just tell me that I’m a little different, but that there’s nothing wrong with me?* “

The practice of cosmetic, unnecessary genital surgery of intersex babies must not be continued. Young people must be able to have an influence on what kinds of treatments they receive. No one should be forced to receive treatments they do not want or need. All transgender and intersex people must have access to treatment through public health care in a reasonable amount of time. At the moment, public health care treats those who have been diagnosed as transsexed, but not those who do not define themselves simply as men or women, though their need for treatments is just as urgent.

5. Friend's and Family's Right to Support

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I'm having a hard time with my parents - they always get uncomfortable when I talk about these things. Dad has told me that I'm making mom worry and making her illness worse. I wish that they'd start to get used to this already, so that I could tell them I want and need reassignment. My family's attitude feels like a huge obstacle to the treatments which are the only way for me to be happy.“

Supporting young transgender and intersex people in working out their identity is a challenge to the person's circle of acquaintances. In addition to family, this circle includes teachers, other professionals, and friends. The support the young person gets from those close to them as a child and as a teenager has a crucial effect on how the person will do later in life. In order to be able to give the right kind of support, the person's closest circle should have the right to receive professional support, objective information, and peer support from other people in the same situation.

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I find it taxing, having to go over my feelings on my gender over and over again with my parents. They mean well, but I can't answer all their questions because I don't even know the answers myself yet, and since they can't identify with what I'm feeling, they can sometimes say hurtful things. I understand that this is hard for them, but it's hard for me, too. I feel like I'm being ungrateful if I sometimes say I don't feel up to it.“

The closest circle has the right to go over the feelings caused by the young person's work on their gender and body identity, gender expression and the unconventional body of their intersex child without the young person having to carry all the responsibility. The closest circle must have the right to get information from other sources as well, so that the young person does not have to play the role of a teacher to the adults who are supposed to support their growing up.

”
When I told my relatives I'm going to get sex reassignment, they said, 'But you're such a pretty girl!' That's the last thing I want to hear. Maybe they think I've failed as a girl and thus want to 'change' my gender. I need someone to explain to them what this is about, because they don't take me seriously, no matter how hard I try.“



6. The Right to Positive Special Treatment

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Doing sports is really hard. I haven't had any surgery yet, so I can't go to the changing room of the gender I feel I belong to, and I can't go to my biological sex's changing room because it makes me feel so awful. I have a panic disorder, so I should avoid situations that could trigger an attack. So it's no use telling me to just cope with it even if it feels a little bad. “

Equality does not always mean treating everybody in the same way. Because of people's different backgrounds, creating equality sometimes requires special treatment of some groups of people. In the case of young transgender and intersex people, the special needs concern situations in which groups of people are split based on gender or when they have to use facilities meant for men or women only, such as changing rooms. Young people must have the right to use toilet and changing facilities that are safe for them both mentally and physically. Special arrangements can include, for example, allowing the person to use the changing room or toilet facilities of the gender they feel they belong to, or arranging separate facilities for them. Forcing the young person to use the facilities of their biological sex can cause them pointless distress.

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I talked about my transition process at school and they took it really well. Even before the treatments started, people started to think of me as one of the boys. Some people tried to bully me because of this whole thing, but my friends are on my side and the teachers' good attitude made it stop before it even started. “

Taking the identity of young transgender and intersex people into consideration can include calling the person by the name they have chosen instead of using their official name, for example in roll call. It is important to acknowledge that ignoring the person's special needs is not a neutral act: it is psychological abuse. It deepens the anxiety the young person is feeling about their gender.

”
I've told people that it feels awful when they call me a girl. Some keep doing it anyway. Don't they really care at all how I feel? “

7. The Right to Sexuality

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We did talk about homosexuality in sex education at school, and transsexual people were mentioned in passing as well. But I still didn't quite understand the relationship between the two. Sexuality and gender are so often lumped in together, but they're not the same thing at all, are they? I'm a trans girl and I want to live as a woman in the future, but I only fall in love with girls. Is it possible to be a trans woman and a lesbian? All the transsexual people I've heard of have been straight.“

Transgender and intersex people can be just as average or different sexually as everybody else. This means that belonging to said group does not automatically define a person's sexual identity or behaviour. Transgender and intersex people can represent many kinds of sexual identities and express themselves sexually in various ways. All people, including the transgender and intersex youth, have the right to define their own sexual identity and acts and to express their sexuality in a way that feels right and enjoyable to them and doesn't cause mental or physical harm to others.

”
At some point, when I started to think about these things, I got scared that if I ever reveal my gender and demand that people treat me accordingly, I will never find anybody and nobody will want me. I tried to date a person who thought of me as a boy and I realized it wasn't going to work out. I decided I'd rather be alone but happy for the rest of my life than feel that I'm lying to everybody about who I am. When I started to be open about the subject, some people reacted negatively, but suddenly I found someone who understands me and loves me the way I am.“

The right to sexuality can also mean that the person in question has the right to not define themselves or their identity, and the right to not consider themselves sexual. Young people also have the right to have their sexuality viewed as a part of their rich internal life, which grows and evolves with them. Young people should not be given the idea that certain sexual behaviour or acts are better, more normal or more acceptable than others. Young people have the right to grow in an environment where they are

allowed to build their relationship with their sexuality on their own terms. The surrounding environment should avoid putting pressure on teenagers to experience or express the "normal" or "correct" kind of sexuality.

8 • The Right to Mental Health Care

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I'd never confessed to anybody that I wanted to be a girl. When I finally told my psychologist he said that everybody can get a little confused when they're young, and that after all I 'actually am' a boy. I didn't dare to speak about the subject for several years. Now I've already gone through some sex reassignment treatments and I feel better than ever, but depression is still a part of my daily life. I'm scared to seek help because I'm scared that people won't understand that I'm not anxious because I'm transsexed, but because I've had to hide it for so long. “

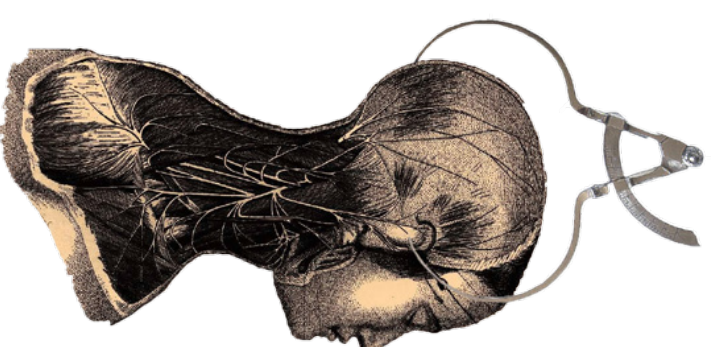
Even though gender dysphoria or various nonconforming expressions of gender aren't mental disorders in themselves, young transgender and intersex people suffer from mental problems more often than others. Their own experience of who they are conflicts with the expectations and assumptions of the world, and having to live with this constant conflict makes them more vulnerable to depression and anxiety.

Transgender and intersex children and teenagers often feel lonely or alienated because nobody seems to understand their feelings. They often learn to hide their experiences from the people close to them. The conflict between the people and the environment can also lead to social anxiety and withdrawing from social activities.

Young people have the right to mental health care services in which the importance of gender identity to general wellbeing is acknowledged. Young people's own experiences of their gender should be respected and supported, not called into question. Because gender dysphoria is not a mental disorder, diagnoses related to it should be classified as something other than mental health disorders. This would end the stigmatization of transgender and intersex people's internal experiences and would make it easier to seek help for mental disorders springing from gender dysphoria and social issues.

”
My therapist thinks that I think I'm a girl because I'm just that depressed; that I hate myself so much that I can't accept my 'true' gender. But it's the total opposite — I accepted my true gender when I realized I'm a girl. Having to argue about my gender with my therapist is just making me more depressed. “

Diagnosing gender dysphoria to determine the need for sex reassignment should be done by specialized units. A person's gender identification or expression should not be 'treated' by attempting to change how the person experiences or feels about their situation - this is psychological abuse. It will deepen the anxiety the person feels, cause them to distrust other people and hinder the forming of a good, healthy self-image.



9. The Right to Polite and Competent Service

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I've spent over a year trying to get a referral to evaluations so I could someday get treatments. The first doctor didn't know what he was supposed to do and just sent me to a sexual therapist. That time I had a print-out of a law decree stating they had no right to examine me and that they had to send me to a unit specialized in this. They told me that's not how it works and sent me to a psychiatrist. I've gone there a couple of times now and they ask me questions about my piercings, if I am a sadomasochist, and make comments about how I look like a girl. Of course I look like a girl, I haven't gotten any treatments yet! It doesn't feel nice having to listen to those kinds of comments when I'm trying to do my best to look like an average boy. “

Health care professionals should be better prepared to interact with transgender and intersex people. This could help avoid situations in which a doctor refuses to send a patient who suffers from gender dysphoria to examinations required by law and instead labels the patient as mentally ill. A doctor's attitudes towards transgender and intersex people must not affect their treatment of their patients. Young transgender and intersex people should not be placed in a worse position when it comes to health-care, and they should not have to avoid health care personnel out of fear of discrimination.

”
Once a bus driver yelled after me, saying I've got a man's ticket. In a way it feels nice to be able to pass off as a woman, but it feels bad to have a man's social security number and having to explain it in public places like that. He didn't really get it no matter how I explained and tried to show him my papers. Everybody in the bus heard him yell "well which one are you then" at me. I felt pretty ashamed and haven't really travelled by bus since then. “

Other kinds of professionals should also be more prepared to interact with young transgender and intersex people. Young people should not have to get into trouble with people working in customer service, even if their name and gender expression conflict with each other. Some examples of people a young person often has to face are store clerks, librarians, ticket inspectors, youth workers and camp counsellors.

10. The Right to a Legally Secured Life as an Equal Member of Society

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If I want to change my social security number I have to give them a certificate that says I'm infertile. This feels like eugenics to me. Aren't laws and regulations supposed to be for the people, not against them?“

In order to have equality in the legislation, the laws regarding transgender and intersex people need changes. The law on legal recognition of gender still requires transsexed people to be unable to reproduce in order to get their gender recognised. This requirement is an entirely groundless violation of human rights and needs to be removed from the law.

The Finnish Personal Data Act was changed in 2010 and now a person's transsexed status is marked in the Finnish Population Information System as a separate note. This practise is suspicious as the Population Information System is not the right place for recording medical data and there is no basis for these notes. As this information can now be seen for example in civil status certificates, it can subject transsexed people to discrimination in situations when a certificate of civil status is required.

In addition, the list of things that are sensitive information in the Personal Data Act should also include being transgender or intersex. Current legislation classifies data on things such as a person's political and religious affiliation, sex life, and belonging to a sexual minority as sensitive, but it excludes transgender and intersex people. This means that the information about people being transgender or intersex finds its way to many different parties, especially when a person is undergoing reassignment, and there are no clear guidelines for the handling or disclosure of this information. This weakens the protection of the privacy of transgender and intersex people, although they need especially effective protection of privacy in order to prevent discrimination and the spreading of sensitive information.

”
My gender hasn't been officially reassigned and I don't have permission to change my name yet, but I'd still like to wear the work clothes of the gender I feel I belong to and a name tag that has the name I'm going to have in the future. I don't know how my employer feels about transsexed people, I'm afraid of getting fired. According to the current legislation I guess I couldn't even complain about discrimination.“

The Finnish law on equality should prohibit discrimination that is based on both gender and gender expression. The current legislation is entirely open to interpretation when it comes to providing protection against discrimination for transgender and intersex people in working life and when using various services. Hate crimes targeted against transgender and intersex people should be recognised and prevented more efficiently and they should be properly dealt with.



Further information

Trasek

Trasek is a national patient organisation for transgender and intersex people and it is also a member organization of the Finnish Patient Organisation. Trasek advocates the rights of transgender and intersex people in human rights and antidiscrimination issues, as well as in political discussions and developing medical treatments.

The website has some information in English.

www.trasek.net

Transtukkipiste

Transgender Support Centre Transtukkipiste provides trans people and their family and friends with psychosocial support services. Transtukkipiste also acts as an expert in the field of diversity of gender. They offer free professional discussions and peer support.

The website is only available in Finnish.

www.transtukkipiste.fi (på finska)

SETA

Seta is a national LGBTI rights non-governmental organization that was founded in 1974. Seta aims for a Finnish society where everybody is regarded as an equal member of the society, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

www.seta.fi/en.php

Thanks

- » To the wonderful young people and councillors of the summer camp.
- » To Aukusti and the other members of the work group
- » To Seta and Transgender Support Centre Transtukkipiste; especially those who have helped us with this project.
- » Those who read and commented on this agenda in it's different stages

Translators' note

This text was translated from Finnish into English as a project for a translation class at the University of Helsinki. The translators were all second-year students of English translation, and the project was supervised by Docent Mikel Garant.

The text was a challenge for us as translators in many ways. When translating a text that deals with sensitive and important issues such as transgender and intersex people's rights and young people's health and safety, the way things are expressed can be almost as important as what actually is said. Choosing the right words and expressions and phrasing things in the right way can be essential to conveying the message of the text to the readers.

First of all, the terminology related to transgender and intersex issues is constantly evolving, and the terms that are considered appropriate can vary between different countries, organisations and even individuals. A term that one person thinks is acceptable may be seen as offensive by someone else, and the same word can have several slightly different meanings depending on who is using it. This means that we needed to consider our choices of terminology especially carefully, since we of course did not want to insult or offend anyone. We tried to find terms that would be as unambiguous as possible, in order to avoid unnecessary confusion and misunderstandings.

A particular challenge in translating between Finnish and English are the third person singular pronouns. In Finnish, there is only one third person singular pronoun, "hän", which is gender-neutral while English has two, "he" and "she", which also express gender. This means that it was difficult to convey the gender neutrality of the Finnish text into English. Obviously, we could not use the expression "he or she" or anything similar. Therefore, we opted for the use of the so-called "singular they", that is, using the word "they" as a singular pronoun. This is not an ideal solution grammatically, but we felt that it would be suitably neutral and easy to understand for most people.

It is also important to note that this text was written primarily for a Finnish context, so some of the issues discussed in the text may not be directly applicable to other countries. Things such as legislation, health care and school systems are different in different countries, as are the problems related to them.

We would like to thank Aija Salo, our contact person at Seta, for her help in patiently answering all our questions about the text and for kindly advising us about some of the terminology we were unsure of.

Elsa Lehtonen, Martta Ponto, Marika Roininen & Sofia Timonen

Layout and illustrations: Lijia Tamminen / Osuuskunta IVA



When I was born, the doctors didn't know if I was a girl or a boy, so they just decided to make me into a girl.

They told me it was for my own best and that it would have been really hard on my parents if they hadn't done the surgery. I don't even know if I'm a girl or if I want to be one!

And the surgeries haven't made me normal. I feel like my body has been mutilated because the grown-ups couldn't deal with me being a little bit different, 'not normal'.



The publication has received funding from the European Commission. Responsibility for the information and views set out in this publication lies entirely with the authors.