



In the coming months, THIS will be launched in communities across Virginia! Be on the look out for another THIS newsletter and information about the survey.

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Transgender Health

What's THIS About?

The Transgender Health Information Survey

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Some of the persistent labels that get stuck to transgender people are that we are "invisible" or that we are "underground". The lack of information about us creates the impression that there are too few of us to be considered a "population" meriting attention from public health and social service agencies. This dearth of data about us has all sorts of serious consequences for our health care. It can make receiving trans health services, like hormonal therapy, very difficult to obtain. Even a doctor's visit can be a daunting challenge for us. As most of us well know, finding a knowledgeable doctor willing to treat us respectfully is very difficult.

In HIV/AIDS, this impression continues to dissuade the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (the CDC) from creating surveillance categories separate from Men who have Sex with Men (MSM). No surveillance means no numbers, and no numbers means no CDC-funded prevention programs specifically targeting us.

Hence the need for *data* about who we are, what type of health care we are currently

receiving (or need and are not receiving), what type of health risks we are facing, what insurance we have and what it covers, and answers to many other questions regarding our health status. The transgender movement is making great strides on the legislative and legal fronts, and about 25% of us now live in jurisdictions in the US with legal protection from discrimination based upon gender identity and expression (but not, unfortunately, in Virginia - yet). However, we are much further behind in health care, thus the need for data.

Taking a public health perspective, trans people *are* a population that can and must be studied, but to do so has required overcoming a lot of challenges. Many of us lead marginalized existences, living on the streets and lacking fixed addresses. Still others live in stealth, mindful of protecting our privacy and unwilling to disclose our identities. But the stakes are high. Data from studies conducted in a dozen U.S. cities show that we face disproportionate risks in sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), substance

abuse, depression and suicidal ideation. We also face multiple barriers to getting health care. Along with discrimination and violence, these risk factors force far too many of us to live hobbesian existences - lives that are "nasty, poor, brutish and short". In order for public health officials to meet our unmet needs for services, we need to give them what they need to plan accordingly - *data*.

In 1995, my trans advocacy work lead me to participate in a broad coalition in the District of Columbia working to hold the DC Fire Department accountable for its negligence in the tragic death of Tyra Hunter. Working beside transwomen of color like Earline Budd, Dee Curry, and others, I learned their struggle was much more difficult than my own, due to the multiply aggregating oppressions of race, class and gender. Some officials in the DC Government were sympathetic to their plight, but they needed facts and figures before intervention services could be funded. Fortunately, we managed to

obtain a small amount of funding for what became the first quantitative analysis of the health and housing concerns of the transgender population of DC - *The Washington DC Transgender Needs Assessment*. The data from this survey continue to improve the lives of many transgender Washingtonians.

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The Virginia Transgender Taskforce NEEDS YOU!

Come join us at the next meeting of the Transgender Taskforce on August 25th from 1-3 at Virginia Commonwealth University, Survey and Evaluation Research Laboratory

We encourage all transgender individuals from across the Commonwealth to participate!

If you would like to become a member of the Transgender Task Force, please call Ted Heck at (804) 864-8012 or e-mail:

Ted.Heck@vdh.Virginia.gov

Transgender Clinic At Fan Free FTM Support Group

When Fan Free Clinic (FFC) opened their Transgender Clinic last summer (August 2005), they had limited expectations for the Female-To-Male (FTM) turnout. Once the clinic got going however, they were surprised to find that they had quite a few FTMs coming for services. During the screening process, it was discovered that some of these folks had little in the way of support systems. Clinic staff had wanted all along to make the program as holistic as possible, and decided that since the interest and the need was there, they should try to find people who could facilitate such a group.

It was at this point that I received a call from FFC. As a member of the Transgender Taskforce, I was already familiar with FFC's new program, and as an FTM with a background in psychology, case management, group facilitation, and organizing in the transgender community, I am very familiar with the issues involved in running a group for this population. I was excited to hear that the folks at Fan Free Clinic wanted to host a support group for

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Now it's Virginia's turn, thanks to the efforts of the Virginia Department of Health, the Virginia HIV Community Planning Committee, and the Survey and Evaluation Research Laboratory of Virginia Commonwealth University. The *Virginia Transgender Health Initiative* affords an opportunity for all transgender Virginians to voice concerns about their health status and health care by participating in *THIS* - the Transgender Health Information Survey, to be launched soon. You can do *THIS* by either completing a mail-in paper questionnaire, or online via a webpage. The more transgender residents of Virginia participate, the better the picture we get about trans health care. Any Virginia resident who trans identifies is wel-

come to take the survey. FTMs, as well as honored to be asked to help in facilitating. I met with clinic staff and Gray, the other FTM who would be facilitating, in early November to coordinate details and to get on the same page as far as expectations for the group. Gray had attempted to start a similar group several years before. His efforts had come to naught at the time, at least partly because of the invisibility of FTMs in a medium-sized city, which had no prior infrastructure to support them.

In our meeting with the clinic staff, one thing that I wanted to clarify was that the group would be for *anyone* identifying on the FTM spectrum, whether or not they wanted to transition physically. Gray wanted to make sure that the group would be specifically for FTMs, because the traditionally smaller number of FTMs means that they often are overshadowed by MTFs (Male-To-Female Transpersons) in mixed groups. With those issues settled, we decided to meet on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month from 6:30 to 8:50 pm.

Our first meeting was on November 24, 2004 and was very successful, with

10 people attending. We decided to call our group "Richmond Transformers: Providing support and fellowship for those on the FTM spectrum". So far, topics have included dealing with the holidays, coming out to friends and relatives, dating issues, and the effects of hormones, among other things. Upcoming groups will include discussions around passing, relationships, legal issues, transitioning at work, and body image. Gray is even talking with a surgeon (one specializing in FTM genital surgery) who has expressed interest in coming to talk to our group. The total number of FTMs who have attended so far is 17, along with 5 "significant/supportive others" who have attended the two "Bring an S.O." groups we've had so far. In addition to meeting for support, we have also had a number of social activities including meeting for pool at Babe's, getting together for games at one member's house, and a very successful yard sale recently. We are looking forward to having our attendance continue to grow as people refer friends and clients through word of mouth and venues such as this newsletter. Anyone with questions about the group should call the Fan Free Clinic at (804) 358-6343.

-Ted H.

Contact Information

If you have any questions about how to join the Transgender Taskforce or about how you can participate in *THIS* survey, please contact Ted Heck at (804) 864-8012 or e-mail Ted.Heck@vdh.virginia.gov

-Jessica