Trans-aware library services: inspiring frontline staff

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Outline

• Trans-aware library services
  – trans identities: the basics
  – being a trans library user

• Inspiring frontline staff
  – sharing my expertise at Leeds Beckett
  – what made this possible
  – how frontline staff can inspire others
  – points for reflection

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Trans identities: the basics

"Sex" refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women.

"Gender" refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women.

World Health Organisation (apps.who.int/gender/whatisgender/en/)
Trans identities: the basics

• We are **assigned** male or female at birth – not “born male” or “born female”

• These are **binary genders**: we are generally taught that someone can only be one or the other

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Trans identities: the basics

The Gender Unicorn

Gender Identity
- Female / Woman / Girl
- Male / Man / Boy
- Other Gender(s)

Gender Expression
- Feminine
- Masculine
- Other

Sex Assigned at Birth
- Female
- Male
- Other / Intersex

Physically Attracted to
- Women
- Men
- Other Gender(s)

Emotionally Attracted to
- Women
- Men
- Other Gender(s)
Being a trans library user

• Interpersonal interactions
  – describing customers in the third person: use gender-neutral language
  – avoid ‘Ladies and gentlemen’
  – manage initial reactions: build confidence and familiarity
Being a trans library user

• Updating personal details: where do we hold data that relates to a customer’s gender?
  – think beyond name and gender
  – title: do you offer gender-neutral options (Mx)?
  – notes on borrower records/old documents

• Think **widely and comprehensively** to protect confidentiality

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Signals of inclusion

• Gender-neutral toilets
• Inclusive documentation, policies, forms etc. (‘they’ rather than ‘he/she’)
• Include all letters of LGBT
• Normalise pronoun requests

T-shirt courtesy of Action for Trans Health: http://www.ebay.co.uk/ usr/act4transhealth

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Sharing my expertise at Leeds Beckett

• “How can I support you?”
• Contributed to trans policy
• Delivered training sessions
• Asked for advice on trans-inclusive event management
• Spoke at CSGUK conference and made contacts

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What made this possible?

• Consistently asking new staff for advice
• Seeing the whole person
• Being receptive to offers
• Flexibility and trust: making time for activities outside of core responsibilities

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Why inspire frontline staff?

• Make staff feel empowered/valued
• They can inspire others:
  – realistic, concrete suggestions
  – speaking from experience
• Bridge gap between frontline staff and other colleagues
Points for reflection

• What untapped expertise might your frontline staff members have?
  – different user groups
  – different work environments

• How can you create an environment where they are **willing** and **able** to use that expertise?

• How might you use what you’ve learned today to support your trans customers?
Questions?