

## Patrick's story

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When I was between four and five years old, I was asked by a teacher what I wanted to be when I grew up. I said "I want to be a boy." The teacher told me that I was wrong, at that time I didn't have the language to explain the feelings that I was having.

When I was around 14 years old, I learnt the language necessary to properly articulate how I felt. I chose to come out on Trans Awareness Day but at that time I was only comfortable coming out to one of my friends. The following year I came out to my school and went to see my GP seeking a referral to a gender clinic. I had to do this on my own as I hadn't come out to my parents at this stage.

The first visit to the GP was unsuccessful as my GP would not provide me with the referral that I needed.

I made a further appointment with my GP and was told that I had to tell my parents and accept a referral to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (**CAMHS**) before he would consider a referral in respect of my gender identity. At the time, I was already officially under the care of CAMHS for unrelated reasons and had not had a positive experience. When I was in Year 10, I was approached by my head of year who had been informed of the discussions I had had with my CAMHS support worker. It felt that a breach of confidentiality had occurred and I was reluctant to enter into any further discussions with the service. My support worker came to school and waited for me outside of the classroom. Eventually we ended up sitting in a room where I said nothing. I didn't meet with them again after this experience. Furthermore, I wanted to complain and was told that I couldn't and that any complaints would have to come from my parents. I wasn't comfortable sharing the content of my discussions with CAMHS with my parents but felt that CAMHS should be made aware of what had happened. I decided to phone the complaint and masqueraded as my step-mother. I received a letter apologising for the incident and assuring that it would be looked into. I never heard anything from them again. To avoid any further contact with CAMHS, I had to pretend I was "healthy". I referred myself to The Project<sup>1</sup> in Axminster who provided me with the appropriate support for my emotional wellbeing. They were amazing!

I attempted to get a referral to a gender clinic a further three times, all of which were unsuccessful. On the fourth attempt, I took someone from The Project with me and this seemed to encourage the GP to make the referral that I had been asking for numerous times. I think that this was only successful as I had another professional there supporting my request.

My referral to the Gender Identity Development Service (**GIDS**)<sup>2</sup> at the Tavistock and Portman clinic arrived the same year which was the best birthday present ever! My family were still less than supportive and I had to make my own way to my appointment in Exeter on the train, which was an extremely overwhelming experience. GIDS provided me with the support and helped me to better understand what a medical transition could look like for me, I was very clear with them

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<sup>1</sup> <http://theprojectyp.org.uk/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://gids.nhs.uk/>

about what I wanted, i.e. testosterone and top surgery (Reduction Mammoplasty), but they really helped me to be confident in my decisions. I was supported by GIDS for 1 year at which point I reached 18. GIDS only provide support to people up to the age of 18 so I was looking to be transferred to the Gender Identity Clinic (**GIC**)<sup>3</sup>.

The transition from GIDS to GIC was undertaken really well. GIDS and GIC set up a meeting with me and both of their services so that I could be involved in the handover. GIDS also shared with me any paperwork and information that they would be sending to GIC so I knew exactly what they knew about me. The difference between the two services was quite clear. I felt that GIDS was more theoretical discussions around gender identity, whereas GIC was a lot more practical. For example, I was given things to go away and do between appointments which felt like I was progressing along my journey. It was under GIC that I received the testosterone that I had wanted for such a long time. On reflection, I think the delay was a good thing as it gave me time to get ready for the massive changes in me that this would bring. However I was still unprepared for the emotional impact of effectively going through a second puberty. The GIC provided support during this time but I found that I couldn't easily get along with my assigned case worker. GIC provides a process to change support worker under these circumstances, however this is quite cumbersome. Therefore, I looked to 2BU<sup>4</sup> for support, which they continue to give me to this day. However, I am soon to be losing the support from 2BU and have my last meeting with them very soon. It concerns me that there isn't anything else to support my emotional needs once this ceases. I have asked my GP for a referral to adult mental health services but he does not feel that I am sufficiently "at risk". I have been told to seek out a private service if I am worried. I am not financially able to do this because I am saving what money I have to go to university. I am planning on moving to London to study so as to get away from Somerset. I associate many of my negative experiences over the years with Somerset, and want to get away from here to start a new life.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://gic.nhs.uk/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.2bu-somerset.co.uk/>