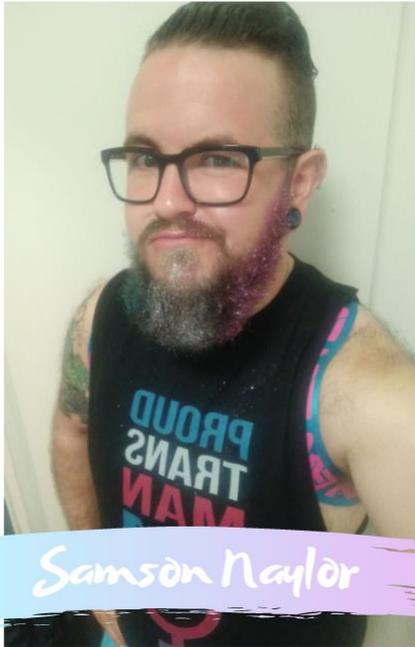


Humans of Our Community



Samson Naylor

Samson is one of the fabulous volunteers at Open Doors. Samson shared with us their journey of transitioning and advice on how to talk to respectfully ask trans people about their experience.

When did you start to realise you were different?

I'm from Melbourne and I was raised in a very open family, which was amazing. I first started thinking about my sexual and gender identity young...I was always bit of a tomboy. I wanted nothing to do with girl's clothes. For years, rejecting being a girly-girl kept coming to the forefront of my mind and I kept pushing it away. When I was about 12, I realised that I liked girls more and I thought "oh wow, maybe I like girls – that's the answer!". I came out at 17 and my family were supportive, but this niggling feeling kept coming back. It wasn't until a friend of mine pre-transition started transitioning themselves, and I realised that what they were doing was everything I wanted to do. I came out as trans at 26 and started socially transitioning and then proceeded with the medical transition. I got my first shot of hormone therapy on the 8th of July 2015, and it's been smooth sailing since.

Dysphoria is a unique and difficult part of being trans, what do you think people don't understand about it?

A cis-gendered person has probably always felt that their body matched, so it can be hard sometimes for them to imagine it not being that way. I think maybe the biggest misconceptions are that every trans person has dysphoria, and that every trans person experiences dysphoria the same way. You don't have to have dysphoria to be trans! You don't need to feel out of place. There's no 'one thing' that makes you trans. It can be a feeling that you've had for a while, or something you wake up with one day. Dysphoria means something different to every trans person.

I'm fortunate in that I don't have lower dysphoria, however I did experience it with my top. I was lucky enough to get my top surgery done in a program run through the public system, so it only cost me around \$900! The process is essentially the same, however its cheaper because it's a program to train doctors in how to perform the surgeries. It was available only for NSW residents, and I'm not sure if it's offered anymore.

Tell us about your recovery from top surgery

Recovery for me was approximately 8 weeks. I started to feel pretty good after two weeks of nothing. It wasn't in real pain, just lots of general discomfort. I think the strangest and perhaps the part that hurt was getting the drains taken out. It was a really odd feeling. You're in the post-op binder for about four weeks, which was annoying. I'd binded for three years before the surgery, so it sucked to then be back in another binder afterwards. Overall, the surgeon was happy with the placement of everything once it was healed.

How did it feel looking at yourself for the first-time post-surgery?

I thought I would feel absolutely amazing. You see the videos of people crying and they're so excited. But to me, I just felt completely normal. Like this was how it was meant to be. Since the surgery I've lost 35kg so I'm a lot happier now with my chest than I was when I first had the surgery. Now I'm in a position where I can build it back up.

What has the process of medically transitioning looked like for you so far?

I first had to go to a psychiatrist where I had assessments of my dysphoria and my life experiences – just really gauging where my head was at. I then went to an endocrinologist where we worked out what my testosterone levels were and then started hormone therapy. Monitoring your levels is so important. I then got the top surgery and continue to take testosterone.

The process is long, and everyone transitions differently. You just have to be patient and try not to compare your journey to others. Genetics have a huge play in it!

How have those around you responded to your transition?

It's been a smooth transition and my family have been really great. When I first started transitioning, I was in a same-sex relationship and she was initially really onboard with it. When things physically changed, she got scared and we parted ways. After that I had a relationship with a trans woman – we were like chalk and cheese. After that relationship ended I kind of thought "yeah, I'm a gay man". I've come out three times in my life now, my parents aren't shocked anymore.

Do you feel a responsibility to educate people on what it means to be trans?

Hate comes from unknowledgeable people. You know, it shouldn't be this way, but it is the way it is. I personally feel that as a trans person it is my responsibility to teach people. It is important to acknowledge that not all trans people feel the same way and may not feel the desire to educate others and that is ok too. The first thing I say is that for me, no question



is off limits, but please remember that other trans people have different triggers. Be careful when you ask questions. If we can make people knowledgeable, we can pass that on, and everyone can learn something new. I have had this a lot with my classmates. You know, I pass well and a lot of the time you wouldn't know unless I took my shirt off or if I told you. Once that happens people ask a lot of questions.

Do you have any general advice on how people can approach these conversations with trans people?

Let's start with pronouns. If you're unsure – just ask! A trans person is going to be a lot more humbled and happier you asked a pronoun question rather than assuming. You know, there's more than two genders. Inappropriate questions are at times unavoidable as people are curious, so please think before you ask and even if someone says they are an open book, make sure you word it the best way possible. You don't want to catch someone off guard.

What's the worst question you've been asked?

People asking about genitals! You say to people that you have what you were born with and they don't understand it and you have to keep telling them and telling them. It's probably the hardest thing when people find out you're trans. You know, there's a line? You wouldn't go up to a stranger in the street and ask them about their genitalia. You have to also be careful as well as many trans people may not like their parts being referred to by their medical name as it doesn't match with their identity and can be quite triggering.

What's been the hardest part of transitioning for you?

The hardest part for me was not having the support from my partner at the start that I thought I would have. The other hard part is that you do get sick and tired of having to educate people. You know, you tell one person, but they don't share it around, so you have to do it. It'll be nice one day when there's no shock factor. Another hard thing is navigating the gay man world as a trans man.

What advice do you have for young people who are questioning their gender or sexual identity?

Don't be afraid to speak up. I tried to hide it for a long time, and I regret doing that. If I had known what it was and had the resources to educate myself and others, I would have. It was just so different when I was young. Stop thinking that you think you have to hide a part of yourself. You're never going to be your true self and happy with yourself if you're hiding a part of you.



Interview conducted and written by James Fowler.