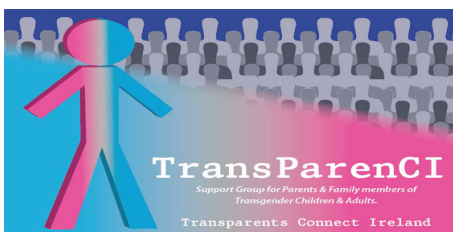


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# GETTING YOUR HOUSE SORTED

A weekend of workshops for parents and family members of trans people in Ireland



Transgender  
Equality  
Network  
Ireland

## Getting Your House Sorted

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Also to my own children and family who suffered in silence due to the ignorance, fear, negative societal attitudes and total lack of service and knowledge of transgender issues.

- Vanessa Lacey  
Health and Education Officer at TENI.  
July 2013

## Abstract

It is impossible to predict the number of transgender (herein trans) people in Ireland, however estimations suggest that as many as 4,500<sup>1</sup> people in Ireland could either be trans or have some form of gender variance. If these estimations are correct, then it is likely that those numbers could be multiplied by twenty, to predict how many people connected to that person might be affected in some way, directly or indirectly.

TransParenCI is a peer support group developed by TENI (Transgender Equality Network Ireland). In November 2011, the organisation applied and were successful in gaining funding to run a series of workshops for family members of trans people.

These workshops were built into a model of a weekend retreat to enable trans people and their families to develop better coping skills and to address some of the challenges trans people face. The design and objectives are similar to that of a number of workshops carried out in the UK entitled *Family Matters*<sup>2</sup>, however some changes were made to the methodology. This brief report has both quantitative and qualitative data, enabling the reader to gain some insight into the experiences and the outcomes of the weekend retreat and workshops.

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<sup>1</sup> GIRES (2011). The Number of Gender Variant People in the UK - Update 2011: <http://www.gires.org.uk/assets/Research-Assets/Prevalence2011.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Reed, T. (2005). Family Matters. GIRES: UK. Accessed at: <http://www.gires.org.uk/assets/family-matters.pdf>

## Explanation of Key Terms Used

**Cisgender:** A non-trans person (i.e. a person whose gender identity and gender expression is aligned with the sex assigned at birth).

**Coming out:** The process of accepting and telling others about one's gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation. Many trans people will 'come out' as a different gender to the sex assigned at birth and may begin a social or physical transition (see definition of 'Transition').

**Gender Identity:** Refers to a person's deeply-felt identification as male, female, or some other gender. This may or may not correspond to the sex they were assigned at birth.

**Gender Expression:** The external manifestation of a person's gender identity. Gender can be expressed through mannerisms, grooming, physical characteristics, social interactions and speech patterns.

**Sexual Orientation:** Refers to a person's physical, emotional or romantic attraction to another person. Sexual orientation is distinct from sex, gender identity and gender expression. Transgender people may identify as lesbian, gay, heterosexual, bisexual, pansexual, queer or asexual (see definition of 'Transgender').

**Transgender:** A person whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex assigned to them at birth. This term can include diverse gender identities such as: transsexual, transgender, crossdresser, drag performer, androgynous, genderqueer, gender variant or differently gendered people.

**Trans or trans\*:** Commonly used shorthand for transgender.

**Transphobia:** The fear, dislike or hatred of people who are trans or are perceived to challenge conventional gender categories or 'norms' of male or female. Transphobia can result in individual and institutional discrimination, prejudice and violence against trans or gender variant people.

**Transition:** A process through which some transgender people begin to live as the gender with which they identify, rather than the one assigned at birth. Transition might include social, physical or legal changes such as coming out to family, friends, co-workers and others; changing one's appearance; changing one's name, pronoun and sex designation on legal documents (e.g. driving licence or passport); and medical intervention (e.g. through hormones or surgery).

## Background Information

Estimating the number of trans people in society is very difficult as epidemiological studies are rarely conducted, and efforts to achieve realistic estimates are fraught with difficulties. Existing epidemiological studies on Gender Identity Disorder (GID) in children, adolescents and adults are very limited, and no firm conclusion about prevalence or incidence can be made. The figures reported range from 1:11,900 to 1:45,000 for male-to-female individuals (MtF) and 1:30,400 to 1:200,000 for female-to-male (FtM) individuals. Further studies suggest that these figures significantly underestimate the numbers of trans people by relying only on data of people who have pursued gender reassignment surgery, which many trans people do not (or cannot) access. Some scholars such as Olyslager and Conway (2007) have suggested that the prevalence is indeed much higher, depending on the methodology used in the research.<sup>3</sup>

As the recognition of trans people has increased, the rates of trans children seeking services at treatment centers in the UK has risen six-fold.<sup>4</sup> There are strong indications that a number of children and families travel to the UK each year from Ireland for advice, diagnosis and treatment although the exact figures are unavailable. Anecdotal evidence suggests that presentations for care in Ireland are also increasing to both adult, child and adolescent mental health services.

There is a dearth of data in the Irish context in relation to the numbers of trans people accessing services. An article in the Irish Medical Journal on GID described the patient population of all new referrals to the Endocrine Service in St. Columcille's Hospital and St. Vincent's University Hospital. The article recorded that between 2000-2004, 52 referrals of individuals diagnosed with GID were received to their endocrine service for consideration for hormonal treatment.<sup>5</sup> Of the 52 patients, 45 were male-to-female (MTF) and 7 were female-to-male (FTM). The article concludes that the scale of referrals confirms that GID exists in the Irish population to a significant degree. Furthermore the rates of people accessing hormone treatment in Loughlinstown in 2013 has trebled since 2006. According to recent figures there are 160 people accessing services in Loughlinstown.

It must be noted that the numbers yielded by studies such as these can be considered minimum estimates at best. These estimations do not take into account that treatments offered in a particular clinical setting might not be perceived as affordable, useful, or acceptable by many trans people. By only counting people who present at clinics for a specific type of

treatment, an unspecified number of trans individuals are overlooked and remain invisible.

Families in particular are often overlooked in the process of transition, with many family members disassociating from the trans family member. Research suggests that family members go through a number of stages in dealing with this issue, including anger, betrayal, bargaining, depression, acceptance and denial, these stages can vary and some may be skipped.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore with little or no understanding or awareness around trans issues and the stigma sometimes attached to this section of human diversity, families often break ties with the trans person. As suggested by Zamboni, D. (2006), "cognitively, families need to mourn and reconcile changes to the family identity. Therapists can help families to validate emotions, increase social support and provide accurate information on transgenderism".<sup>7</sup>

Taking this into account, family support can be essential to a positive outcome for all involved. TransParenCI's main objective is to break the silence around transitioning by offering support and giving a voice to parents and families of trans children and loved ones. It aims to begin the process of developing a nationwide network of parents and families; to identify the current situation in Ireland; to discuss practicalities and to develop a strategic plan. Furthermore families consist of fathers, mothers, siblings, children, partners, uncles, aunts, grandparents and other relations, which is often not taken into account when addressing the needs of the families involved. The following methodology, results and discussion explains how TransParenCI and TENI aimed to address these issues in a holistic approach.

3 Olyslager, F., & Conway L. (2007). "On the Calculation of the Prevalence of Transsexualism". Paper presented at the WPATH 20th International Symposium, Chicago, Illinois, September 5-8, 2007. Submitted for publication in the International Journal of Transgenderism (IJT).

4 Men's Health Forum, (2008). "The Gender and Access to Health Services Study". Department of Health. London.

5 De Gascun, C., Kelly, J., Salter, N., Lucey, J., & O'Shea, D. (2006). Gender Identity Disorder. Irish Medical Journal, 99(5): 146-148.

6 Emerson, S., & Rosenfeld, C. (1996). "Stages of adjustment in family members of transgender individuals". Journal of Psychotherapy, 7:1-12.

7 Zamboni, B.D., (2006). Therapeutic considerations in working with the family, friends, and partners of transgendered individuals. The Family Journal, 14, 174-179.

## Rationale for Study

Trans awareness and support has either been limited or non-existent in Ireland, however since their establishment in 2006 TENI has tried to address as many of these issues as possible, with the limited resources available to them. There has been and continues to be a lack of support for trans or gender variant young people in Ireland. The little support available besides TENI includes BeLonGTo Youth services on a National level, specifically IndividualiTy, which is a support and social group for young trans people. IndividualiTy's meetings are held in Dublin once a month. The regional LGBT youth groups throughout the country which are supported by BeLonGTo have a small but growing number of young people accessing their services. The facilitators of these regional services have all received training on trans issues and inclusivity as part of their overall LGBT facilitation training.

Parents of trans or gender variant young people however have extremely limited means of support. Besides TransParenCI, the main resource for parents is a LGBT parents group, Loving Our Out Kids (LOOK), which hold their meetings in the BeLonGTo offices in Parliament Street in Dublin City Centre. However there are numerous differences and challenges faced by lesbian, gay or bisexual people and their parents when compared to those of trans and gender variant young people and their parents. A one size fits all model fails to address the different challenges faced by trans young people and their families.

When discussing gender identity issues, in contrast to sexual orientation, there are a host of issues that must be acknowledged, for example lack of awareness of trans specific issues such as: medicalisation, diagnoses with mental conditions, hormone treatments, surgeries, visibility, changes in identity, changes in documentation, etc. TENI and parents of trans children seeking help recognised the necessity for a support group specifically for parents and family members of trans young people. This group came together initially in November 2011 and were subsequently named TransParenCI. This group held their meetings monthly in a hotel in Carlow town with funding from TENI. The numbers of attendees seeking support doubled in the following fourteen months.

*Getting Your House Sorted* was created between TENI and TransParenCI. The report was part funded by CFI (Community Funding Ireland) and LGBT Parents South East and sOUTH also contributed monetarily. Further funding came from the parents themselves who contributed significantly to the residential weekend. The need for this report came from the feedback from attendees and facilitators present, including the organiser and author of this report, Vanessa Lacey, Health and Education Officer at TENI.

The aim of this report is to inform and build on similar research carried out worldwide. The detailed observations and statistics from attendees will hopefully raise awareness and knowledge to enable other trans organisations to utilise and build on this model.

The objectives of this residential weekend were:

1. Assisting the family to come to terms with the new situation.
2. Encouraging families to explore and share their feelings.
3. Providing appropriate medical and social information about the process of transitioning.
4. Helping both the trans individuals and their families to gain insight into each other's experiences and points of view.
5. Providing families with a safe and relaxing environment to explore and develop trusting bonds with other members.



## Methodology

### Participants

Thirty-six participants attended. This was broken down into the following:

Mothers	13
Fathers	8
Siblings	5
Child of a trans person	1
Trans identified people	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>

### Design

A hotel was booked for a weekend in February 2013, organisers ensured the hotel was a trans inclusive space and that the staff were aware of the vulnerability of those attending. Most participants arrived on Friday afternoon/evening. However some families arrived on the following morning.

The first scheduled event was a presentation on Friday evening. This equipped families with brief historical information on trans history and experiences, background information regarding TransParenCI and the schedule for the following days. There was also some introductory information shared regarding trans families, including issues that they may face and current research and resources combatting perceived negative aspects of having a trans person in the family unit.

Following the presentation, the families enjoyed a social evening where they could meet other families attending the weekend in a less formal structure. In certain cases, this was the first time some of the attendees spoke to others in similar familial situations and this was carefully facilitated. Many workshops were scheduled for the weekend, therefore the importance of the families mixing and feeling at ease with one another was paramount to the success of the event.

On Saturday morning following breakfast, four workshops ran concurrently and were all facilitated by mental health professionals:

1. Mothers' Group – Facilitated by Dr Lisa Brinkmann.
2. Fathers' Group – Facilitated by Dr James Kelly.
3. Trans Parents' Group – Dr Maria Cullen and Rachel Moore.
4. Sibling and Children of Trans Parents' Group – Suzanne Walsh.

The organiser of the event was at all times present and available should anyone feel uncomfortable or if there were any issues that needed addressing. Post lunch three groups running concurrently started at 1.15pm and continued until 3.15pm. An information

session with some of the facilitators followed. This was organised to provide some of the necessary information required for a successful transition. This session was due to run for ninety minutes, however, the timeline was reduced due to fatigue from some of the participants. The workshops and information session ended at 5pm on Saturday evening.

That evening a meal for all the participants and facilitators was organised for 8.30pm, during which the organiser was approached by some of the young trans people and asked could she organise a room to play some music. The organiser facilitated this and most of the family members attended an impromptu music session. This was an important social event as it enabled all the attendees to mix and talk about their experiences further, while in a relaxed and safe environment.

On Sunday morning, after breakfast a debrief session took place. This was a space where attendees and facilitators could share their experiences about the weekend and offer suggestions for future retreats. Evaluation forms were filled out and collected. The event ended at 11am on Sunday 3rd of February.

### Timeframe

An application was made to CFI for funding in July 2012 for the amount of €5,000 which was the maximum grant allowed on this scheme. In October 2012 we were contacted by CFI to say TransParenCI had been allocated the maximum amount of funding.

The planning of the event began on that date in October 2012. The event took place on the 1st- 3rd of February. This report was written up and sent to relevant agencies, including CFI and TENI before August 2013.

## Weekend Activities & Organisation

### Organisation of Event

This event was organized by TENI's Health and Education Officer, Vanessa Lacey. Vanessa has been involved in the formation and sustainability of this group since it began, over fourteen months ago. The evaluation found that the majority of families found the overall organisation of the event to be excellent (88%). The remaining attendees found that the organisation was very good (12%). One father suggested that the schedule could have been adjusted after the morning session and that the morning sessions could have continued for at least another hour, with maybe a coffee break in the middle of this session. This illustrates how engaging the morning sessions were. Another attendee felt that they, "ran on time" and had "realistic timing for workshops".

### Event Facilitators

The evaluation found that participants thought that the facilitators were either excellent (82%) or very good (18%). This speaks to the calibre of facilitators who were carefully chosen for the weekend.

*"Encouraged debate and conversation."*

- Father of a trans person

*"Rachel & Maria, were all smiles and very welcoming and Suzanne is a warm person & made a very safe environment."* - Trans person

Although overwhelmingly positive one person noted that:

*"Dr Kelly spoke a lot at the start of the Fathers' Group (morning). Could have achieved more in afternoon session, I felt."* - Father of a trans person

### Venue

The evaluation found that 82% of attendees felt that the venue was excellent, with a further 11.8% stating it was very good. Only 5.9% of people thought that the venue was acceptable. One attendee had reservations about the staffs' lack of sensitivity regarding trans issues. But the main critique was in relation to the location:

*"Only distance from home stopped me say, excellent."* - Father of a trans person

But most comments suggested that the location met the needs of the families:

*"Very good, suitable to our needs."*

- Mother of a trans person

*"I really liked the location as it was quiet, so there was no cars flying by. Also it is the first time I got to talk about my story, so I feel really good. I had a lovely weekend."*

- Child of a trans person

### Presentation (Friday evening)

TENI's Health and Education Officer Vanessa Lacey delivered the presentation on Friday evening, with 78% of the participants in attendance and seven family members arriving either later or on Saturday morning. The attendees present, suggested that the presentation was either excellent (74%) or very good (22%). One of the trans young people stated, "I knew a lot of the information already". However a father commented that the presentation had "good background info leading to the event". The agenda<sup>8</sup> and evaluation forms for the weekend were also first circulated at this event.

*"To the point and very informative- set the scene beautifully."* - Father of a trans person

## Saturday Morning Workshops

### Fathers' Group Workshop

Saturday morning workshops started promptly after breakfast at 10am, with four workshops running concurrently. The Fathers' Group was facilitated by Dr James Kelly and seven evaluation forms were returned. The evaluation found that 70% suggested it was excellent with 30% stating that it was very good.

*"The process and outcome was good. Facilitator pulled it off with good listening."*

- Father of a trans person

*"Good chance to talk openly with other fathers."*

- Father of a trans person

### Mothers' Group Workshop

The Mothers' Group was facilitated by Dr Lisa Brinkmann and eleven evaluation forms were returned. Six mothers agreed that the workshop was excellent, four thought it was very good and one thought it was good. Some of the comments from this group were in relation to how the group might be better facilitated and structured, with one mother noting that, "possibly [the] group [was] too large, [with] not enough structure to [the] meeting". Another mother mentioned they "would have liked the facilitator to take a more active role". Some other suggestions focused on dividing the groups, for example mothers that have children that are further on in their journey in one group, while those that are just beginning the process might gain more from a separate group.

*"We needed longer as a group to thoroughly discuss issues."* - Mother of a trans person

### The Siblings and Children of Trans Parents' Workshop

The Siblings and Children of Trans Parents' Workshop was facilitated by Suzanne Walsh. There were five people at this workshop, all the feedback forms were received, in which 100% of people agreed that the workshop was excellent. Some of the comments

<sup>8</sup> An Information Sheet and Agenda can be found in the Appendices Section, marked Appendix 1 and 2.

included describing the session as “really fun” and one participant stated that they “really enjoyed it, the icebreakers really loosened and opened us up”.

### Trans Young Persons' Group

Finally the Trans Young Persons' Workshop was attended by nine people, with eight people having returned evaluation forms. Feedback from the survey found that of those received, seven people stated that this workshop was excellent and one thought it was very good.

Although many participants spoke about enjoying the workshop, one participant flagged that as they transitioned later, they felt insecure in a group where most had transitioned much earlier and were out to their family and friends:

*“I felt like I was the only one here who didn't know I was trans at age three or so, and isn't fully out or transitioned at all, so I got really sad and insecure. But that's my problem and nothing to do with this really, just that it got brought up in the second workshop. I really liked it though.”*

- Trans young person

The above comment suggests that proper care and attention should be given to meet the needs of all trans identities going forward and individual counselling sessions programmed in during the weekend to meet individual needs, might be beneficial in future retreats.

### Saturday Afternoon Workshop

The Saturday afternoon sessions seemed to dip slightly in relation to satisfaction levels. However 73% still found the workshops either excellent or very good, however a drop from 94% in satisfaction rates is significant and some of the comments below clarify the factors behind this drop in figures. The afternoon workshops consisted of three groups, running concurrently. Dr James Kelly, Rachel Moore and Maria Cullen facilitated the Parents' Group, consisting of the mothers and fathers of trans people. Dr Lisa Brinkmann facilitated the Siblings and Children of Trans People workshop in which the same five people from the morning attended. Suzanne Walsh was the facilitator of the Trans Young People's Group, which again included the same nine people from the morning session with Maria Cullen and Rachel Moore.

In relation to the Parents' Workshop with Diamond Therapy, eighteen evaluation forms were received, this included seven fathers and eleven mothers. Six respondents stated it was excellent, five very good, five good and two stated it was below par. Some of the comments from the parents included:

*“Didn't really see the relevance of session, thought time could be spent on other issues.”*

*“Interesting, but could have led to something more concrete.”*

*“Morning could have been longer and this shorter.”*

*“Not keen on exploring and labelling ourselves based on personality classifications.”*

*“Did not fit my needs, I felt it should have been more audience targeted.”*

### Information Session (Saturday Afternoon)

Thirty evaluation forms were received from the Information Question and Answer session at 3pm. The evaluation found that 65% of people thought this session was either excellent or very good. However there must be a concern about the 35.5% of people that did not find this session a benefit.

Nine trans people attended the session and returned evaluation forms, but only one thought this session was excellent. This is something that should be addressed when planning further retreats. Five participants still felt that it was very good and three people felt it was good. One respondent noted that “it seemed more like plans and opinions than information or questions & answers”.

The Siblings and Children of Trans Parents' Group had a low attendance, with only three people attending. Of those present, it would seem that this particular session was a disappointment. Two people stated that it was below par, the other stated that it was inadequate to their needs. Further comments include feedback on facilitation and stated that, “parents had too many questions and others were left out”. Another participant added that they “would have liked more info on medical pathways, felt people were getting ahead and lost focus on sorting out our houses”.

However the Fathers' Group had a different perspective on this session, of the seven evaluation forms that were returned, two thought it was excellent, three stated that it was very good, one said it was good. The other father stated they had, “too much”, and were “too tired”. Of the other three comments received, it would suggest that this group of fathers were much more satisfied than the above groups:

*“Good debate about future direction.”*

*“The Q&A session was of more benefit than workshop.”*

There was a total of twelve forms returned from the Mothers' Group and feedback illustrates that the majority of the Mothers' Group found this session of benefit and emphasised the important discussions that arose. Six mothers stated it was excellent, two found it very good, two thought it was good, however one found it below par, stating that, “it would have helped if information about transition had been prepared, rather than a panel waiting for questions”. Another stated that it “needed a key note speaker or lecturer”.

## Evaluation Results

### Objectives of the Residential Weekend

1. Assisting the family to come to terms with the new situation.
2. Encouraging families to explore and share their feelings.
3. Providing appropriate medical and social information about the process of transitioning.
4. Helping both the trans individuals and their families to gain insight into each other's experiences and points of view.
5. Providing families with a safe and relaxing environment to explore and develop trusting bonds with other members.

### Were these Objectives Achieved?

#### 1. Assisting the family to come to terms with the new situation.

The feedback would suggest a resounding yes to this objective, however there was feedback in relation to how this might continue to improve.

*"Yes it certainly started a lot of discussion."*

- Mother of trans person

*"Yes, was a clear outcome from the weekend."*

- Mother of trans person

#### 2. Encouraging families to explore and share their feelings.

The feedback would suggest that this objective was also met, with all participants stating "yes".

*"Very definitely, as a family we did a lot of sharing over the weekend."*

- Mother of trans person

*"Yes, we were able to chat in our own room before dinner, about issues that had been explored."*

- Mother of trans person

*"Yes, we had open frank discussions from time to time."*

- Father of trans person

#### 3. Providing appropriate medical and social information about the process of transitioning.

The feedback from this objective would suggest that the issue was not adequately covered. It would seem that the information session went off topic at points and some of the medical questions were not addressed properly. There was a resounding call for more information in the comments.

*"More information needed, clear and current practices."*

- Father of trans person

*"I think that there could have been a group for people who are just starting the journey, to explain where to start with the school, what blockers are etc. A lot of people already knew, but a lot of what was being talked about was totally new to me. Though it was good that all the professionals and other parents were around for the weekend and were all very approachable and friendly."*

- Mother of trans person

*"Yes, although listening to some parents, they found some of the information was put too bluntly. I myself find that some things can't be put out any different."*

- Trans person

#### 4. Helping both the trans individuals and their families to gain insight into each other's experiences and points of view.

Feedback from this objective elicited mixed responses from the different groups. For example the Siblings and Children of Trans People Group and the Trans Persons' Group seemed to be in agreement that this objective was met, however one respondent disagreed.

*"Very much so, was able to get more perspective from hearing other stories."*

- Sibling of trans person

*"Was very good but should set up a group for siblings."*

- Trans person

*"Very nice to speak to other trans persons."*

- Trans person

The Fathers and Mothers groups were very mixed, nearly 50/50 in agreement, with some suggestions for the future.

*"No, maybe a session where the parents and trans people could interact in a neutral venue, away from the home situation."*

- Father of trans person

*"I think more facilitated space for families was needed to achieve this."*

- Mother of trans person

*"Children did not speak to the adults, so no."*

- Mother of trans person

There was also some comments that suggested that some parents thought that this objective was met:

*"Yes, it is good to hear other families stories."*

- Mother of trans person



## 5. Providing families with a safe and relaxing environment to explore and develop trusting bonds with other members.

The feedback from this objective was significantly positive, with just one comment stating that the person did not have other family members present to achieve this objective.

*“Being able to relax in comfortable surroundings without prejudice was a bonus.”*

- Mother of a trans person

## Reflections on Objectives

The vast majority of respondents stated that they would change nothing in relation to the objectives. However the comments also strongly show that participants were interested in more medical matters being discussed, practical information about transition pathways and surgeries, role play and practical help on difficult conversations. There were a number of comments, including some from facilitators, which suggested clearer objectives should be considered when designing similar events. Below are some of the comments and suggestions that will be carefully analysed in regard to structuring and planning future residential weekends:

*“I don’t feel we finished any workshop with an outcome that I can benefit from. More a counselling session at times than a workshop. Coming away with a sense of low achievement.”*

- Mother of a trans person

*“I know it’s different when everyone is at a different stage, but felt that the morning session had an awful lot of negative stories in it. I felt there could have been more structure. However we as a family got an awful lot from this weekend and would definitely do it again.”* - Mother of a trans person

*“As a sibling of a trans person, it would have been great to also mix with the other trans people at the event, not just the other siblings and children of trans people.”* - Sibling of a trans person

*“Maybe if we could have come together (parents, siblings, trans) to talk about the issues raised in individual groups, to find out where other people are coming from, why they behave in certain ways etc. But led by the professionals, facilitators.”*

- Sibling of a trans person

*“More medical talk at the medical talk!”*

- Sibling of a trans person

*“I really enjoyed the weekend and meeting others in my situation. I would just have liked to get more information on the medical pathways my brother would be taking, so to make it clear in my mind what is ahead of us and him. That way I could come to understand what role I will need to play to support*

*him as he transitioned. But overall I enjoyed the weekend, and it was lovely to finally put faces and voices, as well as stories, to the names I’ve been hearing about from my parents.”*

- Sibling of a trans person

*“There should be a meeting for siblings and children of trans people once every four months.”*

- Sibling of a trans person

## Overview of the Weekend

In the evaluation forms provided attendees were asked what they gained from the weekend. Friends, confidence, knowledge, space, relaxation, support, strong bonds, insight into others situations, links, better understanding, not as isolated, different journeys, connections, were just some of the themes that resonated through all the comments as illustrated below:

*“Got to meet more trans guys and talk to one who has already had surgery and gave advice & time to younger guys.”* - Trans person

*“Contact with other siblings in my situation and advice on how to handle different situations in the future.”* - Sibling of trans person

*“A new perspective, as I got to see how other siblings had been coping and feeling.”*

- Sibling of trans person

*“The whole family individually and together had space to talk and discuss issues.”*

- Mother of trans person

*“Confidence, friends & relaxation. I know now that I am not alone.”* - Trans person

*“Some further insight into what may lay ahead for my trans child.”*

- Father of trans person

## Services Currently Available

Participants of *Getting Your House Sorted* were also invited to comment on the services and supports currently available to trans people and their families. Respondents were asked if in their opinion they felt that the public health service adequately addresses the needs of the trans community. The majority of respondents (70%) said no, while only a small minority (6%) said yes. The remaining participants stated they didn't know (18%) with some who did not complete the questionnaire (6%).

The majority of respondents acknowledge that although some minimal supports are in place, far greater services are needed to respond to the growing demand of the trans community:

*"Some public health services (Prof O'Shea in Loughlinstown) are making positive efforts. Other services do not in my opinion."*

- Father of a trans person

*"No, but they seem to have made a start."*

- Father of a trans person

Other participants noted what they felt was a complete lack of knowledge and awareness of healthcare professionals:

*"No. Too little. Reactive not proactive."*

- Father of a trans person

*"No, I never hear much about it from public health service, I only ever hear about it from our LGBT society in college."* - Sibling of a trans person

*"No, they treated me for years like it was a phase I'd grow out of...AS IF!"* - Trans person

*"Absolutely not! Lack of knowledge. Although once I hit the James Kelly/Prof O'Shea stage - Yes, the care was very good."* - Mother of a trans person

*"No, it is difficult to find out information about services and everyone's experience appears different."* - Mother of a trans person

As well as health service providers, respondents were also asked to comment on the supports offered to the trans community by other LGBT organisations. When asked if participants felt that other LGBT organisations (excluding TransParenCI and TENI) met their needs, 38% said no, 29% didn't know, 7% did not complete this question and only 27% said yes. There were various reasons given for this. Siblings, for example, stated they felt very isolated by LGBT groups and that there was no space or support there for them. For most siblings the weekend retreat was the first support service they had accessed.

*"Not enough support for siblings."*

- Sibling of a trans person

*"There's no youth group for siblings or children of transgender people."* - Sibling of a trans person

Parents also emphasised the lack of inclusion, in their experience of trans issues being addressed and supported in LGBT organisations:

*"No, feel very much that they are only interested in gay and lesbian issues."*

- Mother of a trans person

*"Not much support for parents."*

- Mother of a trans person

*"Only involved with TENI who have been wonderful, in particular Vanessa, would not be where we are today without her."* - Mother of a trans person

## Future Events

Attendees were also asked if they would attend a similar event in the future. The evaluation forms strongly indicated that the vast majority of attendees would attend another event of this kind. One parent commented however that they no longer felt the need to return to the group but offered their support in the future if needed. This comment is important to TransParenCI as a group going forward, as it illustrates that even though parents and family members may not feel the need to return to the group, they will be available to connect with new parents and family members in the future. It also shows that the group members can feel comfortable moving forward from the support group setting but also remaining available to act as a resource for other parents if needed.

One respondent noted that this weekend was not specifically geared for young people or under 18s. A possible suggestion going forward is that as the group grows in size, workshops can be broken down to be more age appropriate. All respondents emphasised the need for future events such as this residential weekend:

*"I'd just like to say thank you. It was a very well organised event with brilliant facilitators and activities. Honestly I wouldn't have minded to stay another day or two and take part in more workshops. I got to know people who are going through the same thing and form bonds with these people. It was an EXTREMELY beneficial weekend, I'm so glad I came. I think the only thing left to say is PLEASE organise another one if possible in the next few months, maybe summer? I realise there isn't much funding (if any). But after the success of this weekend, I think many would be willing to save up and help pay for the next one, I know I certainly would."* - Trans person

*"An exceptionally, immensely, exceedingly, remarkable positive experience. I truly believe that my house is sorted, that my HOME is sorted."*

- Trans person

*“I sincerely hope this weekend is held again. It takes away a lot of isolation. Parents and siblings can share with other parents and siblings, taking away fear.”*

- Trans person

Participants also commented on how beneficial it was to have participants from Northern Ireland in attendance:

*“The involvement of the Northern Ireland organisation was a very good idea and would love to see more collaboration between the two.”* - Trans person

*“This has been an amazing weekend. Vanessa did a brilliant job of making everyone feel welcome and included. Having members from the North of Ireland was extra special. We need to do this on a regular basis. I would like us to make it cost neutral to all and perhaps a cheaper venue that we can take over completely, would work better. Having said my piece and included some criticism, I have to say I don’t think we could have done any better than we did! We are incredible and Vanessa is an inspiration.”*

- Father of a trans person

Overall participants continuously referenced the benefit of meeting other people in similar familial situations and how much it meant to be able to discuss and share experiences and ask questions in a safe environment:

*“Enjoyed very much this weekend, meeting people in the same situation as myself. Glad of an opportunity to discuss all issues pertaining to it in a safe place.”*

- Mother of a trans person

*“A great weekend and very beneficial. We are still on a long journey but it has helped us discuss more and realise how other families are coping and living their lives too.”* - Mother of a trans person

*“Just want to thank Vanessa for this weekend, did me good to talk and meet with other parents, and have more info to help me to help my trans daughter and my other children and family.”*

- Mother of a trans person

## Feedback from Facilitators

The residential weekend was facilitated by carefully chosen experts with a wealth of experience from varying backgrounds. Facilitators were asked to self-evaluate their workshops and the weekend as a whole. This section looks at their feedback and suggestions for future events.

### Diamond Therapy:

**Dr James Kelly - Clinical Psychologist**

**Maria Cullen - Child and Adolescent Counsellor**

**Rachel Moore - Speech and Language Therapist**

### Feedback and Recommendations from TransParenCI Residential Weekend, Mullingar:

Overall we felt that this was a wonderful weekend that was very beneficial to the families in attendance and a good opportunity for professionals with a special interest in trans health to meet and work together. As a first time event, this weekend served many important purposes, not least of which was to provide a safe and welcoming environment in which trans families could communicate with each other and with health professionals, in groups and individually. Families were given an opportunity to address trans specific and other family dynamic issues, while enjoying a rare and enjoyable weekend away. We agree that a family weekend is an ideal forum for the various and specific issues facing trans families (parents, siblings and trans youth) to be addressed, as it allows for some distance to be placed between these and the other stresses of daily life that they may be facing.

A second important purpose served by this pilot weekend was to highlight areas that can be built on or added to at future similar events. The following summarises our recommendations:

**Identifying goals:** By their very nature, families are diverse. Individual families have their own needs and even within families, members have variable and legitimate needs. We recommend that the next trans family weekend identify these needs and that facilitators collaborate in advance to ensure that these needs are met in an effective and measurable way. For example, if a goal is to learn about the care pathways for trans youth, then a specific session with appropriate take-home materials can be facilitated. If a goal is to learn about the precise nature of gender identity problems, that can be facilitated in another group.

We know that not all attendees have the same needs, so a variety of seminars might be offered and attendees can sign up in advance for the seminars/group sessions that they feel will help them. It might be an idea to run information-heavy sessions in the morning time and more discussion based/supportive sessions in the afternoon. This will also lead to an added benefit of reducing group sizes so that all participants get a chance to have their voices heard and have their own specific issues addressed.

**Structuring youth groups:** Given the variability of ages and stages of attendees, trans youth group sessions could be more effective if they are smaller, with less variation in ages. In order to allow facilitators of trans youth groups to prepare for these sessions in more detail, an opportunity to communicate with parents, either directly or indirectly, regarding their child's specific challenges and needs, would be beneficial. Again, collaboration of facilitators well in advance of the weekend will facilitate better continuity and ensure that everyone is delivering the same message and working towards achieving the same goals.

#### **Dr. Lisa Brinkmann – Clinical Psychologist**

In my role as a Clinical Psychologist and Gender Specialist I carried out two workshops at the TransParenCI conference in Mullingar, February 1st-3rd, 2013. The first workshop was a morning session with mothers of trans children and the second was an afternoon workshop for siblings and children of trans people.

The workshop for mothers was attended by fourteen mothers. Some were at the conference on their own, some attended together with their partner/husband. Some were there with their trans child, some without.

I started the morning session with an introduction round, asking each mother to give us their names, where they travelled from and what they expected/hoped/wished from the workshop.

As this was the first time ever a large group of mothers sat in a room together to talk about their trans children, their questions around it and their experiences with it, I gave this introduction round all the space it needed without limiting it to a timeframe. The introduction round lead naturally into an open discussion and I decided to guide and facilitate the open discussion rather than returning to my planned structure, as it seemed so much more needed and wanted by the mothers.

The introduction round brought to light quite significantly, that the mothers had a lot in common (similar worries and fears about their child, a feeling of a lack of understanding and support from people and institutions around them, own difficulties with gender concepts, etc.) but that they also had very individual stories and different experiences as well and were at different "levels" on their journey.

There were mothers who only recently found out that their child was trans and there were mothers whose children already had fully transitioned. There were mothers that reported about difficulties along the way but all in all regarded their "journey" as positive and there were mothers who were in great emotional distress about difficulties and challenges they themselves, their family and their trans child were experiencing.

Sharing these different experiences and hearing each other's stories was of great importance (and benefit) to the mothers. Often, mothers whose children were further in their "journey" had a lot of advice for the mothers that were "new" to this topic.

Main topics of the open discussion were frustration and despair about the lack of professional support, "not knowing what to do or where to turn to", difficulties with intolerance within their own (mostly broader) family and the environment, difficulties with the school system and worries/lack of available information about medical procedures and treatments.

Towards the end of the workshop I asked the mothers if they would also like to talk about and share how they personally were feeling. Until then, most of the stories centered around their child and how he or she was feeling and what he or she was going through. Their own well-being or state of mind was seldom discussed.

A few mothers shared their own story and how they were feeling which was very appreciated by the others. Some mothers in the group admitted that they were not able to start talking about themselves. They stated that they are "just about holding it together" to be able to be there for their child. If they dared to start thinking or talking about themselves, they were scared that "the floodgates would open" and they might "break down" completely.

The workshop ended with the participants clearly addressing a need for further meetings like this. The mothers were interested in further group meetings for emotional support, but also wished for clear and structured information in form of talks on certain topics.

The second workshop for siblings and relatives of trans people was attended by five young people, ranging between 8 and 21 years of age.

The five participants came from three families. There were two sibling pairs who had a trans sibling and one person with a trans parent. The group was therefore very diverse regarding age and family set up.

Because of this and the very small size of the group, I decided (again) to let go of my planned structure and just to work with the wishes and needs of the participants.

In turn, all participants shared their story and talked about their relationship to their trans family member. They then in turn talked about how they themselves felt, what difficulties and challenges they were dealing with and their role in the family.



It came to light, that they, the family members, often had issues, difficulties and a need for support too, which often seemed to be overlooked or overshadowed by the attention the trans person in the family was receiving.

As part of the workshop, all participants wrote a letter to a person in their family. Some chose their trans family member and some chose to address their parents.

The instruction was to open-heartedly and honestly write a letter to the person of their choice about what they (maybe have always) wanted to let them know. The participants could choose themselves if they would actually “send off” the letter or if they just wanted to keep it for themselves. In the final discussion round, some stated that they would give the letter to the person they wrote it to. Some were undecided. Both workshops, but especially the workshop for the siblings/relatives clearly brought to my attention that being trans does not only affect the trans person, but also his or her family and each family member in different ways. There is a need for more and specific information, but also a need for emotional support and opportunities to share experiences, stories and questions with people in a similar situation.

While the trans people often receive this support, the family members lack such opportunities.

This conference was the first opportunity of this kind. In the future, similar and maybe even more tailored conferences/workshops/talks are needed to help trans people but also their families in Ireland.

In addition the conference was fantastic and I was truly touched and amazed by these wonderful families and parents. As a therapist I do get to know some families like that, but unfortunately I also get to know families that would never attend such a conference. Never would show their love and support for a trans family member, full stop. It is great to see and to know that they exist and are out there. And for that reason, it is important that they get all the support and assistance they need.

#### Some thoughts on the conference:

- There is clearly a need for emotional support for specific groups (mothers/fathers/couples/siblings/children) to address the issues, challenges and struggles they are faced with as well.
- Many participants clearly wished for more specific information in form of talks/lectures. The group at the conference was very mixed, there were people whose family member had already fully transitioned, and others were just at the beginning of their “journey”. Maybe it could be good to have specific information talks that cover the

“basics” and others that cover legal matters and the different treatment options and possibilities (and how to avail of them).

- Families that were “further” in their journey were looking for more emotional support and wanting to talk about emotional things where as families at the “beginning” of their journey mostly were still needing (and craving) information.
- The siblings/relatives group needs more attention and if possible, might need division into a siblings and a children’s group.
- I know that you guys (and especially you Vanessa) are already doing your best, but I also think that these kind of conferences need to be publicised even more so that more parents or family members can be reached, especially the “critical” ones.

#### Suzanne Walsh – Counsellor/Psychotherapist

In my role as a Counsellor/Psychotherapist I facilitated two workshops at the TransParenCI Conference in Mullingar, on February 1st – 3rd, 2013. The first workshop was held in the morning and was attended by the siblings and relatives of trans young people. The second session in the afternoon was attended by the trans young people themselves.

The morning workshop was attended by five young people aged between 11 and 21, all of whom attended the conference with their parents and some of whom also attended with their trans siblings. There were two sibling pairs and the child of a trans parent.

I began with introductions and some brief warm up games to enable the young people to feel comfortable with each other. The remainder of the workshop was conducted through the use of art materials. The participants were invited to tell their story, their experience of being the sibling/child of a trans person. Initially they worked alone with the art materials telling their story through drawing and painting or through the use of modelling clays. This enabled them to have time and space to think about their individual journeys within their families and to record their experience in a vivid and creative but safe way.

The participants engaged fully with the exercise and were incredibly open and honest. They brought their work back to the group and were invited to share with the group as much or as little as they felt comfortable with. The depth of sharing was astounding, especially with a group of young people who had never met before. There was also a great outpouring of emotion from them as they shared their experiences.

The young people welcomed a non-judgemental space where they could be seen and heard where they could share openly and confidentially. The themes that emerged included, all stages of their experience from initial shock and confusion towards a journey of understanding. They talked about fear, confusion, family upheaval, difficult family dynamics, being isolated at times and feeling left out, their “coming out” process and the difficulties around this - particularly regarding their relationships with friends and people in the wider community. All of the young people were extremely supportive of their trans relative but felt that they needed their own independent support structures and would welcome a support group or other opportunities like this weekend to talk with others in similar circumstances. It was clear also from the feedback that there is a need for support structures for children of trans parents as this experience has its own unique difficulties.

The afternoon workshop was attended by eight young people aged between 12 and 21 all of whom attended the conference with their parents and some of whom also attended with their siblings. I was aware that the group had already met in an earlier morning session and therefore I began the workshop with warm up games that got the group moving around in a way that was fun and allowed them to work together as a team. We then sat in a circle and after brief introductions I again invited the group to tell their stories using the art materials provided. We then returned to the circle and participants were invited to share as much or little of their stories as they wished to share. The level of sharing was phenomenal. The young people talked about their positive and negative experiences on their individual journeys to becoming themselves.

It was a very emotive session as they shared their fears, stresses, struggles, anger, isolation and loss etc. It was evident from their sharing that they have a deep inner sense of whom they are inside and it was heart-warming to hear how they are being supported by their parents and siblings on their journey to becoming themselves.

In Ireland we are at last now hearing the voices of the young trans people. I felt privileged to be invited to be part of the TransParenCI Conference it was a heart-warming and spirit lifting experience. The level of support of parents for their trans children and for each other was palpable. The support the trans young people offered to each other was inspiring and was on a par with the support offered to them by their siblings.

The overriding themes that emerged from working with the young trans people and their relatives centred on foundations of acceptance, understanding, love and support. It is clear from working with the young people that within every family there has been great difficulties including isolation, loss and grief, confusion, anger and

ongoing daily struggles when engaging with the wider community. These challenges are ongoing and families need to be supported throughout.

When someone in a family identifies as trans within a family it changes the family’s world on many different levels as each family member must then engage in their own journey towards understanding and face the challenge of change. As described by one child in the Relatives of Trans People’s Group (when a family member identified as trans): “It was like a meteor that crashed into my world and changed everything.”

It is clear that a range of appropriate support services with appropriately trained personnel needs to be put in place not only for the trans person but for all their family members, parents, partners, siblings and children. Awareness, knowledge and understanding about trans people in Ireland is beginning to grow and it is important for the trans community, the wider community and the professional community to work together to nurture and care for each other as we move towards a more positive future for trans people and their families.

## Conclusion & Recommendations

This weekend was modelled on the work carried out in the UK by GIRES and especially Terry Reed, and her article *Family Matters* was used as a guideline in designing this event in Mullingar. This was the first event of its kind, which supported trans families in Ireland. Feedback from the residential weekend would certainly indicate how extremely successful it was. All respondents emphasised the need for events such as this. The evaluation found that this residential weekend of workshops has been significant in reducing some of the anxiety and perceived stress for all involved.

CFI played an instrumental part in this work being carried out, their maximum funding grant of €5,000 made this project viable. Furthermore the additional funding from TENI, sOUTH and LGBT Parents South East insured there was not a shortfall. The parents themselves were hugely responsible for making this weekend a success, physically, financially and emotionally. By parents challenging attitudes in relation to trans issues, they are changing some of the negative stereotypes on a daily basis. There can be no doubt that this organisation can go from strength to strength, especially with on-going support from TENI, however other agencies need to support TENI to enable them to continue supporting families.

Feedback from the evaluation in terms of organisation (venue, workshops, information provided etc.) were extremely high. The Bloomfield Hotel in Mullingar was seen as an easily accessible, serene location, relaxing and the staff were accommodating.

The organiser, Vanessa Lacey, TENI's Health and Education Officer received hugely positive comments. She spent considerable time designing and organising this event and feedback found Vanessa was very successful in producing a best practice weekend retreat for families with trans parents, children and siblings.

The presentation delivered by Vanessa on Friday evening, was particularly positive. This included information used in relation to TENI's awareness and training of professionals and from Terry Reed's *Family Matters*. Information was provided to guide the attendees on the agenda for the weekend and this was deemed beneficial by all. Financial breakdown of cost and projected contributions to meet these costs was also relayed to the attendees.

Following the presentation on Friday evening, most of the group moved into the bar and were joined by some of the facilitators, this gathering gave ample opportunity for all to discuss some of the issues and bond as a group. This was an important part of the weekend, universality was partly achieved by this action, and it also allowed the participants to meet some of the mental health professionals that they have attended in the past and to chat in a relaxed environment.

Feedback from the Saturday morning workshops found that they were either perceived as excellent or very good. However there were suggestions by some of the mothers in regard to the structure and planning of the group. Another point that was expressed was some of the parents were at different parts of their 'journey' and that in future events this could be facilitated more. This point was taken on board and due consideration will be given before organising similar events. The Siblings and Children of Trans People Workshops had extremely positive feedback and it clearly showed the need and importance of siblings to have their experiences listened to. The evaluation illustrated that often siblings and children of trans people can feel forgotten and their needs put aside whilst attention is felt to be focused on the trans person. This can have a negative effect on the family unit in the long term, if a holistic family approach to the issues facing the family as a whole is not addressed.

Furthermore, in some cases there is peer support for trans people, young trans people, parents of trans people, however siblings and children of trans people, and not to forget spouses and partners, are also often overlooked. This point was also made by some of the facilitators who made recommendations that should address the needs of this marginalised group within a marginalised group. Overall the morning would have to be deemed a success given the high scoring results, some changes to the structure of workshops should certainly address the comments and suggestions for further workshops going forward.

Certainly looking at the data for the afternoon workshops things seemed to change, satisfaction results were still very high, however there was a drop in these rates. It would seem that maybe the morning sessions should have continued after lunch or been extended in the morning. Fatigue could also have had an effect, due to a very busy schedule from Friday evening. It was quite an adventurous inventory and certainly for future events of this kind the schedule, timing, and content of workshops need to be scrutinised to maximise satisfaction and to reduce frustration. This report will guide future workshops of this kind.

In addition, the information session was deemed a success, with high rates of satisfaction, however these rates dropped significantly as the day developed. There would seem to be a number of factors involved in the decrease of satisfaction rates and these are documented in the results section. Going forward these comments and suggestions as well as the data need to be thoroughly looked at to develop future events of this kind.

All participants and facilitators attended the evening meal in Bloomfield Hotel, again this gave an ideal opportunity for family members to mix and discuss the events of the day, challenges experienced, and hopes going forward etc. Following the meal,

some of the young people contacted the organiser regarding a free room to play some music. The organiser contacted the hotel staff, they obliged immediately and an impromptu performance took place, which involved parents, siblings, young trans people and facilitators. This was an amazing event, which combined everything that the organisers and facilitators were attempting to achieve in this weekend. A thoroughly enjoyable event with so much talent and fun, the inclusion of the facilitators was quite unique to this event.

On Sunday morning after breakfast, all the participants and facilitators attended the scheduled debrief, the verbal feedback was extremely positive. The nature of this debrief was to identify if any of the attendees experienced or was still experiencing any difficulties in relation to the workshops content. Nobody seemed to experience any of these effects, there was however one parent during and after the Saturday morning workshop that was experiencing some difficulties due to the discussion of medical transitional matters these issues seemed to be resolved somewhat at this point.

*Getting Your House Sorted* could only be deemed an enormous success. This was the first event of this kind in Ireland and it gave parents, siblings, children of, and trans people themselves a long overdue opportunity to address some of the challenges that they experience on an on-going basis. The weekend in general was well organised, the venue was ideal, the facilitators were experienced and worked well with the attendees. Most of the objectives were met (results section), others will need some detailing and changing before the next event. Many valuable comments and suggestions were gratefully received and will be carefully considered in due course. Finally, many houses are far from being sorted, however this was the first event of its kind in Ireland, based on a model *Family Matters* that Terry Reed (2005) developed in the UK. However as Dr Brinkmann noted, there are many more families out there in need of similar support that for various reasons are unable to reach out:

*“The conference was fantastic and I was truly touched and amazed by these wonderful families and parents. As a therapist I do get to know some families like that, but unfortunately I also get to know families that would never attend such a conference.”*

However there are many family members and parents in Ireland who are not part of this network and may never be, mainly for reasons of shame, embarrassment, fear, negative attitudes and stereotypes. We need to educate and eradicate these issues, allowing parents and family members to support their loved ones unconditionally. There is no doubt that this weekend of workshops was a success, however going forward much more resources needs to be available to address the needs of this community. This is a community that has been stigmatised, hidden and under-researched.

Trans people have had to face a significant lack of awareness and acceptance from not only society in general but most importantly legislators, health care providers, general practitioners, social care workers, educators and mental health workers, to name but a few.

The final word is left to Terry Reed, who alongside her husband Bernard, has changed the landscape for trans people and their families throughout the UK if not the world:

*“The discomfort of both trans people and their families is seriously aggravated by the rigidity of a society that still fails to recognise the wide diversity of natural development in human beings. If ever there was a situation which needed to be addressed holistically, this is it.”* (Reed, T. 2005)

## Key Recommendations

1. Continued support for families of trans people through TENI.
2. Engagement of service providers through TENI and TransParenCI.
3. A specific group for siblings and children of trans people is imperative. Further research into the needs of this population should be carried out and due services provided.
4. There should be a meeting of siblings and children of trans people, at least once every three months. This group may develop into separate entities over time, as numbers grow. However until the numbers develop, this group should stay together.
5. Monthly meetings of TransParenCI should continue, organised by TENI in the short to medium term.
6. Similar events to that of *Getting Your House Sorted* should be organised at least every six months. TransParenCI in collaboration with TENI should develop these workshops further and organise same.

**NB: The above recommendations are subject to TENI receiving specific funding. TENI have been supporting TransParenCI through financial means and resources, including staff, and hope to provide ongoing support going forward.**



## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Information Sheet

**Getting Your House Sorted:** Workshops for family members of children, siblings and parents who are experiencing gender identity issues.

**Date:** 1st-3rd February.

**Venue:** The Bloomfield Hotel, Mullingar, Co Westmeath.

**Arrival time:** Before 7pm, Friday 1st February.

**Departure time:** After 11pm, Sunday 3rd February.

**Criteria:** Must be a member of TransParenCI or be invited by this group.

**Description:** A series of workshops focusing on themes that were discussed within the support group TransParenCI in October 2012. These workshops will be made up of parents, siblings and children of people experiencing gender identity issues or identifying as transgender.

**Venue:** Relaxed 4\* Hotel in County Westmeath with leisure centre and swimming pool. The Hotel is situated just outside Mullingar beside a lake and surrounded by gardens.

**Cost:** Bed and Breakfast, lunch on Saturday, 4 course evening meal on Saturday evening and access to swimming pool and leisure centre is included. Unfortunately we need a suggested donation of half the cost e.g. 2 Adults B&B, 2 evening meals is €218, suggested donation is €109 euro. This is not a requirement but a suggestion, any excess funds will go towards opening an account for TransParenCI. Workshops and light refreshments are also free of charge.

**Professionals involved:** Suzanne Walsh (Counsellor/Psychotherapist, has worked extensively with groups and young people), Dr James Kelly, Maria Cullen & Rachael Moore from Diamond Therapy (Clinical Psychologist, Gender Specialists, Lecturer), Vanessa Lacey (Health and Education Officer TENI, Facilitator of TransParenCI, counselling experience & BA Psy, works extensively with transgender community), Dr Lisa Brinkmann (Clinical Psychologist, Gender Specialist).

\*A small donation towards the running costs of TransParenCI is encouraged.

**Aim of this weekend:** We plan to run a series of workshops aimed at helping families support their loved ones through the process of change, and maintaining and improving family relationships as far as possible by.

- Assisting the family to come to terms with the new situation.
- Encouraging families to explore and share their feelings.
- Providing appropriate medical and social information about the process of transitioning.
- Helping both the trans individuals and their families to gain insight into each other's experiences and points of view.
- Providing families with a safe and relaxing environment to explore and develop trusting bonds with other members.

On Sunday morning, post debrief session (subject to change) there may be additional local activities organised concurrently. These will include a game of paintball and beauty therapy sessions. Unfortunately we cannot cover the costs of these activities, however if you need some financial assistance, please contact Vanessa@teni.ie or 0851477166 and we can come to some arrangement.

## Appendix 2: Agenda

### Proposed Agenda (Subject to change)

#### Friday 1st Feb:

- 6pm** Arrival (you can arrive before this time and check in, check in time is 2pm)  
**7.30-9.30pm** Presentation of weekend (Vanessa), followed by discussion

#### Saturday 2nd February:

- 10am-Noon** Four concurrent workshops:  
Siblings and Children of People Experiencing Gender Identity Issues (GII) or Identifying as Transgender (IAT) (Suzanne Walsh)  
Mothers of Children with GII/IAT (Dr Lisa Brinkmann)  
Fathers of Children with GII (Dr James Kelly)  
Trans Young Persons' Workshop (Rachael Moore, Maria Cullen, Diamond Therapy)
- 12pm** Lunch (soup and sandwiches)
- 1-3pm** Three concurrent workshops:  
Parents (Dr James Kelly)  
Trans Young People (Suzanne Walsh)  
Siblings and Children of Trans People (Dr Lisa Brinkmann )
- 3pm** Tea and Coffee break
- 3.30-5pm** Question and Answer session
- 5pm** Finish workshops
- 8pm** Evening meal (Bloomfield Hotel)

#### Sunday 3rd February:

- 10.30am:** Debriefing session and finish
- 11.30am** Leisure activities and finish

**\*All workshops have been developed by each facilitator with direction from Vanessa Lacey. The information provided to the facilitators was influenced by the TransParenCI workshop in Carlow in October 2012. Any further information contact: [Vanessa@teni.ie](mailto:Vanessa@teni.ie) or 0851477166.**

**NB: I WOULD URGE ALL PARTICIPANTS TO PLEASE COMPLETE YOUR EVALUATION FORMS. All these forms will be analysed and the data will provide the information needed to design further workshops. Please provide us with the information regarding the groups that you participated in. These forms are confidential and your identity will remain anonymous.**

*“An exceptionally, immensely, exceedingly, remarkable and positive experience. I truly believe that my house is sorted, that my home is sorted.”* - **Trans person**

