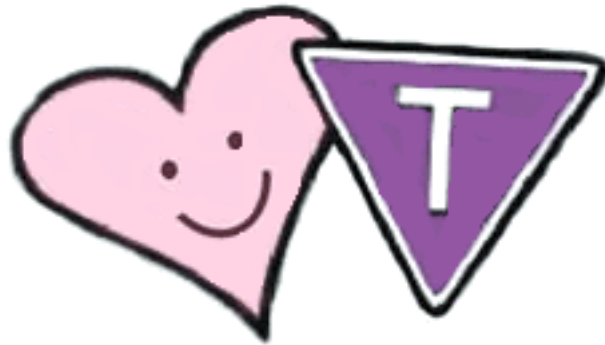


Our Trans Children



A Publication of the Transgender Special Outreach Network of Parents,
Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)

Second Edition

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WELCOME TO OUR READERS

Thank you for taking time to read this booklet, and for your interest in learning about transgenderism. Our intent is to provide an introduction to trans issues suitable for parents, family members and friends, as well as employers, counselors and anyone else interested, within or beyond PFLAG. We hope it may prove useful as well to those who are just beginning to question their own gender identity, and to assure them that there is support available in the larger community. For further information, readers are invited to explore the bibliography at the end of this booklet.

Because of the wide range of identities involved, we have chosen to use the word "transgendered" to include transsexuals (usually those who strongly desire to modify their bodies to match who they feel they really are inside), crossdressers (whose gender expression varies from their birth sex) and the many variations in between. We certainly wish to be fully respectful of everyone in the entire gender spectrum, however they may self-identify.

We particularly hope all PFLAG members will read this booklet, since PFLAG is now officially transgender inclusive, and more and more trans folks and their families are turning to us for information, understanding and support. Indeed, some of us were already active PFLAGers when our gay, lesbian or bisexual children came out to us a second time as transgendered persons. Certainly trans families need PFLAG at least as much as gay, lesbian and bisexual families, since they have fewer resources and much more complex problems.

Just as homosexuality erupted out of the closet and into mainstream consciousness in recent years, transgendered persons and issues are now attracting increasing media attention. We in PFLAG take pride in being welcoming, loving, growing persons, unafraid to walk where our commitment takes us. It is in this spirit that PFLAG's Transgender Special Outreach Network presents this booklet.

Jessica Xavier, Project Coordinator

Nancy. Sharp

Mary Boenke, T-SON Chair

- *January 1999*

Additional copies of this booklet are 3 for \$2.50 and 25 for \$12, 50 for \$23, 100 for \$45, 250 for \$110, and 500 for \$215 postpaid.

- please inquire for other quantities (phone and email listed above). Prices include postage, and are good until April 1998. To order, please make check out to Mary Boenke and mail to:

Mary Boenke

180 Bailey Blvd.

Hardy, VA 24101-3528

Some Commonly Asked Questions about Trans People

What does 'Transgendered' Mean?

A 'transgendered' person is someone whose gender identity or expression differs from conventional expectations of masculinity or femininity. *Gender Identity* is one's internal sense of being male or female, and for most people, there is no conflict between gender identity and their physical sex. However, transgendered people grow up questioning their gender identity, which differs from their physical sex.

Although transgendered people have been part of every culture and society in recorded human history, they have only recently become the focus of medical science. Many medical researchers now believe that transgenderism is rooted in complex biological factors that are fixed at birth, and thus it is not a choice but a personal dilemma.

Who are Trans People?

Trans people include pre-operative, post-operative and non-operative transsexuals, who generally feel that they were born into the wrong physical sex; crossdressers, formerly called transvestites, whose gender expression varies from their birth sex; and intersexed persons, formerly called hermaphrodites, who are born with chromosomal anomalies or ambiguous genitalia. Many intersexed people later develop a gender identity different from the sex they were arbitrarily assigned as infants. Those with unusual genitalia are often subjected to surgical "normalization" procedures from infancy to adolescence, which usually results in loss of sexual response in adulthood. The Intersexed Society of North America has labeled this practice Infant Genital Mutilation.

It's important to note that the term 'transgendered' describes several distinct but related groups of people, many of whom use a variety of other terms to self-identify. For example, many transsexuals see

themselves as a separate group, and do not want to be included under the umbrella term 'transgendered'. Many post-operative transsexuals no longer consider themselves to be transsexual. Some male-to-female non-operative transsexuals identify themselves as transgenderists. Despite this variation in terminology, most trans people will agree that their self-identification is an important personal right, which we strongly support.

What is the largest single group of Trans People?

Crossdressers are the largest group of transgendered persons. Although most crossdressers are heterosexual men, there are also gay and bisexual men, as well as lesbians, bisexual and straight women, who crossdress. Most male crossdressers are married and many have children. The vast majority live in secrecy about their transgendered status. Unlike transsexuals, they do not wish to change their physical sex.

What causes transsexualism?

It may be caused by the bathing of a fetus by opposite birth sex hormones while *in utero*, or perhaps by some spontaneous genetic mutation, which is also one of the theories of the origin of homosexuality. Transsexual persons include female-to-male (FTM) *transmen* as well as the more familiar male-to-female (MTF) *transwomen*. Due to the intensity of their gender dysphoria, they come to feel they can no longer continue living in the gender associated with their physical (birth) sex.

What is gender dysphoria?

Gender dysphoria is the overall psychological term used to describe the feelings of pain, anguish, and anxiety that arise from the mismatch between a trans person's physical sex and gender identity, and from parental and societal pressure to conform to gender norms. Almost all transgendered people suffer from gender dysphoria in varying degrees. Some transsexual persons discover at an early age that they are unable to live in the gender of their birth sex, but the majority struggle to conform, in spite of intense suffering, until their adult years. To seek relief, transsexual persons enter gender transition.

What is gender transition?

Gender transition is the period during which transsexual persons begin changing their appearances and bodies to match their internal gender identity. Because gender is so visible, transsexuals in transition MUST "out" themselves to their employers, their families, and their friends -literally everyone in their lives. While in transition, they are very vulnerable to discrimination and in dire need of support from family and friends. Hormonal therapy can take several months to many years to effect the physical changes in secondary sexual characteristics that will produce a passable appearance, and some may never pass completely.

What is the Real Life Test?

For transsexual persons seeking Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS), the Real Life Test (also called the Real-Life Experience) is a one-year minimum period during which they must be able to demonstrate to their psychotherapist their ability to live and work full-time successfully in their congruent gender. The Real Life Test is a prerequisite for sex reassignment surgery under the *Standards of Care*.

What are the *Standards of Care*?

The *Standards of Care* are a set of guidelines formulated and recently revised by the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association (HBIGDA) under which most transsexual persons obtain hormonal and surgical sex reassignment. While the *Standards of Care* minimize the chance of someone making a mistake, they have been criticized as a "gatekeeper" system. In general, a complete gender transition includes a period of psychotherapy to confirm one's true gender, the beginning of lifelong hormonal therapy, the Real Life Test, and finally, if desired, sex reassignment surgery.

What is Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS)?

SRS is the permanent surgical refashioning of sexual anatomy to resemble that of the appropriate sex. For MTF transsexuals, SRS involves the conversion of penile and scrotal tissue into female genitalia. For FTM transsexuals, it may be limited to just top surgery (breast removal) and sometimes hysterectomy, since FTM genital surgeries are not as advanced as those for MTFs. Additionally, many MTF trans people undergo various cosmetic procedures such as electrolysis to remove facial and body hair, breast augmentation, Adams Apple reduction, hair transplantation, liposuction and many types of facial surgeries.

Similarities and Differences between Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

What is the difference between gender identity and sexual orientation?

Gender identity is a person's internal sense of being a man or a woman, a boy or a girl. Sexual orientation is someone's sexual attraction to others who may be of the opposite sex, the same sex, or either sex. Like other people, transgendered people can be straight, gay, lesbian or bisexual. Generally speaking, their gender identity -- not their physical sex status -- determines their sexual orientation.

What is Gender Identity Disorder (GID)?

GID is a psychological classification found in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM)* published by the American Psychiatric Association. Although GID is the only diagnosis under which trans people may receive treatment, and therefore necessary, it also is controversial. GID has been used inappropriately and harmfully by some psychotherapists to treat *gender variant* youth, and many, if not most trans people, also believe they do not have a mental disorder.

Is Gender Identity Disorder related to sexual orientation?

Not necessarily. Many *gender variant* children and teens who exhibit gender non-conforming behaviors are diagnosed with GID, and later in life come out as gay or lesbian. Other gay men and lesbians conform to most traditional gender behaviors, with the exception of their same gender sexual relationships.

But there also seems to be some overlap between gender expression and sexual orientation. For example, some lesbians express their gender in a masculine fashion, by wearing men's clothes and their hair short. This is the area where sexual orientation and gender identity issues overlap and become blurred.

Do trans children exhibit gender variant behaviors in childhood?

Just as all children experience social pressures to conform, most youth who later become transgendered adults learn to bury their true gender preferences about dress, play and names. Thus their families may never recognize that their child is having severe difficulties.

Do gender variant children benefit from psychotherapy?

Gender variant children suffering from gender dysphoria may benefit from supportive therapy, by learning to accept themselves and to cope better with social pressures. However, since the GID diagnosis has been used to manipulate these children to become more gender conforming, in efforts to prevent the development of homosexuality or transsexualism, parents are urged to screen prospective psychotherapists carefully regarding their therapeutic goals and techniques.

Major medical professional organizations have declared that homosexuality is not an illness, and that so-called conversion or reparative therapies generally do more harm than good. This same concern now applies to gender variant children, adolescents and adults.

What common experiences do trans people share with other sexual minorities?

They are all subject to the same social pressures to conform, which can include harassment and even violence. Later in life, many transgendered people, like openly gay men, lesbians and bisexuals, must also deal with discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations. Many trans people also often confuse their internal feelings of being another gender with feelings of being gay or lesbian. It can take a long time for them to recognize and acknowledge their true identity. And, like gay men and lesbians who do not come out, many trans people must cope with a profound loneliness as members of a relatively small sexual minority.

What common experiences do the families of transgendered persons share with those of other sexual minorities?

The parents, families and friends of gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans persons all may experience the same stages of denial and grief, along with safety concerns and much confusion when a family member comes out. Since the transgendered experience is less common and more complex, with more profound changes, these parents have an even more difficult time reaching the stages of acceptance and celebration that we have come to know in PFLAG. They, too, are in need of much support and understanding.

Issues of Transgendered Youth

Psychological Issues

The powerful emotions behind gender dysphoria cause many trans children to grow up emotionally constricted and deeply ashamed of their difference. Over time, the pervasive societal stigmatization of trans people allows the low self-esteem of these children to grow into the internalized self-hatred of many transgendered adults. While gay and lesbian people, who are far more numerous, have made some tremendous strides in educating the public, trans people are still struggling to present society with more positive, accurate portrayals of who they really are.

Family Issues

Coming out as transgendered is usually difficult for everyone concerned. Consequently, many male teenagers who crossdress do so in secret, never telling their families and friends about it. As adults, most continue to keep their crossdressing private, sometimes seeking support through transgender support groups. Those who tell their families experience a variety of reactions, from loving acceptance to complete rejection.

If a male adolescent's crossdressing is discovered by his parents, it is likely to precipitate an emotional crisis for the entire family. A female-to-male's "crossdressing" may be disguised as a "tomboy" phase that a daughter stubbornly refuses to grow out of, only later causing friction within the family.

However, if a youth is intent on gender transition, major changes are in store for the entire family. Being out about one's sexual orientation is a choice for most gay sons and lesbian daughters, but rarely with those who enter gender transition, since gender is so visible.

Moreover, the changes arising from gender transition will be much more profound than just physical appearances. In a sense, when transsexual youth "come out" and tell their family, the parents are indeed "losing a daughter" and gaining a new son they never knew they had, or vice-versa. Yet the youth remains their child, usually much happier, but with a whole new set of challenges to surmount.

While an increasing number of parents are acknowledging their child's gender struggle, most trans children keep their gender issues secret until they cannot hold them back any longer. Thus their revelation takes most parents by surprise. Moms and dads of these kids then must deal not only with shock, denial, anger, grief, misplaced guilt, and shame, but also many real concerns about the safety, health, surgery, employment, and future love relationships of their child. In addition, they must learn to call their child a new name, and even more difficult, use new pronouns. Thus trans parents need tremendous support. In wondering what changes to expect, one mother found it comforting to anticipate seeing her new son look like her former daughter's twin brother.

The Risks Faced by Trans Youth

When a trans youth or adult comes out, the ability to pass in their new gender is usually limited. Hormonal therapy can take years to produce a passable appearance, especially with male-to-female trans people, and some may never pass completely. Thus those in gender transition are readily apparent to others, and they are vulnerable to intense harassment, discrimination, and even violence.

Trans youth often feel that their true gender identity is crucial to the survival of self. If their parents refuse to allow their gender transition, or if their families and friends withhold support, these youths incur the same risks faced by gay and lesbian youth with non-accepting families. Some may runaway from home and live on the streets, or they may seek to escape the pain of their lives through substance abuse. Like gay and lesbian youth, trans youth are also at higher risk for suicide.

Due to severe employment discrimination, male-to-female transgendered youth who are homeless, runaways or throwaways often work in the sex industry to survive and to pay for their hormones, electrolysis, cosmetic surgery and genital sex reassignment surgery. These youth are therefore at high risk for HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and they should be referred to understanding health care providers for testing and/or treatment. Female-to-male youth may resort to con games or other marginal means to support themselves.

Taking street hormones or taking high dose hormones without medical supervision is also commonplace, and may result in lethal complications. Hormonal sex reassignment can only be safely done under the supervision of an experienced endocrinologist following the *Standards of Care*. Some MTF trans persons who are impatient with the slow pace of hormonal sex reassignment may seek silicone injections to immediately improve their body shape, but these have proven to be a health risk later in life.

Referral for Hormonal and Surgical Sex Reassignment

Transsexual people go to extraordinary lengths to obtain relief from their gender dysphoria. The desire to modify the body to conform to one's gender identity cannot be adequately explained by someone who is transsexual, nor can it be fully understood by someone who is not. This self-perceived need becomes a determined drive, a desperate search for relief and release from that ultimate of all oppressors -- one's own body. Nor can the urgency itself be easily understood. It is a need to match one's exterior with one's interior, to achieve harmony of spirit and shape, of body and soul. It is a cry to be granted what is a given for all others: a gender identity not to be doubted nor ridiculed, but merely accepted.

Although parents may be alarmed by their teen's desire for physical transformation, they need to recognize the intensity behind it. Referral to a psychotherapist experienced in trans issues who can make a proper diagnosis is the key first step. If a diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder is made, the doctor and parents should respect and support the child's feelings of who they really are.

Trans People and the Law

Discrimination

Denial of an opportunity to make a living is the single most damaging and pervasive form of discrimination against trans people. Since changing gender is so readily apparent, trans people often

lose their jobs, are denied employment, or become under-employed regardless of their experience or education. Trans people are frequently denied housing or even evicted from their rented homes, and many more have been denied service at restaurants, stores or other public facilities. In schools, trans youth often must deal with harassment from other students with little protection from transphobic teachers and school administrators, who often react with dismay, disrespect, or disbelief.

Many health care providers refuse to treat trans people who seek modification of their bodies through endocrinology or cosmetic surgeries, and there are only a small number of surgeons in North America who perform sex reassignment surgeries. Moreover, most medical procedures related to sex reassignment are routinely excluded from nearly all health insurance plans, and thus the costs must be borne directly by the patient, with the surgeries ranging from \$5,000 to \$150,000.

Sadly, many AIDS service organizations have not regarded trans people as part of their service community, even though transgendered sex workers are at very great risk for HIV/AIDS and other sexually-transmitted diseases (STDs). Many trans persons will not seek health care due to the ridicule they must face when dealing with insensitive health care providers. There also have been cases where even emergency medical care has been withheld from transgendered persons.

Legal Protection for Trans People

In existing case law, the courts have found that transgendered people are not covered under anti-discrimination laws protecting persons on the basis of sexual orientation or sex. Trans people were specifically excluded in the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1991, and they also are not covered under the disability laws of nearly all the states that have them. Both state and federal courts have almost uniformly held that transgendered people are outside the legal definitions and protections of existing anti-discrimination laws.

Only a few jurisdictions, including the states of Minnesota (by statute), Oregon (by administrative decision) and fifteen cities and counties, offer trans people protection from discrimination. Thus most transgendered activists have viewed inclusion of protection based on gender identity in the federal Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) as absolutely critical.

Hate Crimes

Trans people are frequently subjected to verbal taunts and threats, hate mail, harassing telephone calls, vandalism, and acts of physical and sexual violence committed by the same persons who target lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. Transgendered people are frequently perceived to be homosexual simply because of their appearance, which is often that of a masculine woman or a feminine man. Because this perception is so pervasive, trans people are particularly subject to targeting by people who are homophobic. But due to police refusal to investigate, the victim's shame, and the lack of any legal requirement to report such attacks as hate crimes, acts of violence against trans people often go unreported.

Re-documentation

Obtaining legal identification for their new names and genders is often extremely difficult for trans people. While legal name changes are easily obtained in almost all states either through the courts or by common law, the rules for changing gender on identity documents vary greatly from state to state. Most states do not officially permit preoperative or non-operative transsexuals to obtain change of sex designations on their new driver's licenses. While most states will recognize a new sex status and correct birth certificates after sex reassignment surgery, a few states refuse to amend birth certificates for any reason.

School transcripts, employment records and credit histories also can be difficult to change. Instead of statutes, often there are only unwritten "policies", which are followed inconsistently, and thus trans people are sometimes left to the mercy of transphobic administrators.

A New Day is Dawning

In spite of all these complex difficulties, many more trans people are coming out, transitioning or finding new ways to live meaningful lives. More parents are learning to accept and embrace them for who they are, and to be justly proud of their exceptional honesty and courage. While many couples part when one spouse comes out, an increasing number are staying married -- resulting in legal same sex marriages! Some trans parents are raising their children, continuing their careers or finding new ones, and organizing to build a safer, saner society. The medical and counseling professions are slowly becoming more informed, more flexible and more willing to provide the necessary, specialized services. Support groups for trans persons and their families are forming in increasing numbers, and even the media are beginning to carry more positive stories.

You -- the reader -- are invited to help educate those who don't understand and to join those who are working towards the solution.

National Transgendered Organizations

The American Boyz has many local affiliates throughout the US, and provides support and information for female-to-male transgendered persons and their significant others, friends, family members and allies (SOFFAs). The American Boyz, 212A South Bridge Street, Suite 131, Elkton, MD, 21921. Phone: (410) 392-3640. Website:

www.netgsi.com/~listwrangler

Email: transman@netgsi.com.

FTM International provides support and information for female-to-male transsexuals world-wide. FTM International, 1360 Mission Street, Suite 200, San Francisco, CA 94103. Phone: (415) 553-5987. Website:

www.ftm-intl.org.

Email: TSTGMen@aol.com

Gender Education and Advocacy (GEA) is a new national organization formed from the merger of AEGIS (American Educational Gender Information Service) and It's Time, America! GEA, P.O. Box

65, Kensington, MD 20895. Phone: (301) 949-3822, voice mail box #8.

Website: www.gender.org

The Gender Political Advocacy Coalition (GenderPAC) is a political organization working for gender, affectional, and racial equality.

GenderPAC, 733 15th Street NW, 7th Floor, Washington, DC 20005.

Phone: (202) 347-3024. Website: www.gpac.org.

The International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy (ICTLEP) provides legal referrals and information regarding redocumentation, family law and other legal issues of transgendered persons. ICTLEP publishes the *Proceedings* of their previous annual conferences. ICTLEP, P.O. Box 1010, Cooperstown, NY 13326. Phone:

(607) 547-4118. Email: ICTLEPHDQ@aol.com

The International Foundation for Gender Education (IFGE) provides information, referrals and books, and publishes the quarterly magazine

Transgender. IFGE, P0 Box 229, Waltham, MA 02254-0229. Phone: (781)

899-2212. Website: www.transgender.org/tg/ifge.

Email: IFGE@world.std.com

The Intersex Society of North America (ISNA) provides information, support and advocacy for intersexed people. ISNA, P.O. Box 31791, San Francisco, CA 94131. Email: info@isna.org

The National Youth Advocacy Coalition (NYAC) focuses on advocacy, education and information for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth. NYAC, 1711 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 206, Washington, DC 20009-1139. Phone: (202) 319-7596. Email: NYouthAC@aol.com.

The Renaissance Transgender Association, with chapters and affiliates throughout the US, provides support, education and social activities for crossdressers and others. Renaissance Transgender Association, 987 Old Eagle School Rd., Suite 719, Wayne, PA USA 19087. Phone: (610)975-9119.

Email: bensalem@cpcn.com or rea@cDSPub.com.

The Society for the Second Self (Tri-Ess), with about 30 chapters around the US, focuses on the needs of heterosexual crossdressers. Tri-Ess, P.O. Box 194, Tulare, CA 93275. Email: TRISINFO@aol.com.

Transgendered Family Reading List

- Boenke, Mary, Editor**, *Trans Forming Families: Real Stories of Transgendered Loved Ones*. Imperial Beach, CA: Walter Trook Publishing, 1999. (Order from the author, 180 Bailey Blvd, Hardy, VA 24101, or via the web at: www.aiyiyi.com/transbook)
- Bornstein, Kate**, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Brown, Mildred and Rounsley, Chloe Ann**, *True Selves: Understanding Transsexualism for Family, Friends, Coworkers and Helping Professionals*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996.
- Bullough, Vernon and Bullough, Bonnie**, *Crossdressing, Sex and Gender*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993.
- Burke, Phyllis**, *Gender Shock: Exploding the Myths of Male and Female*. New York: Doubleday, 1996.
- Cameron, Loren**, *Body Alchemy: Transsexual Portraits*. San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1996.
- Ettner, Randi**, *Confessions of a Gender Defender: A Psychologist Evanston, IL: Chicago, Spectrum, 1996*.
- Feinberg, Leslie**, *Transgendered Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to RuPaul*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.
- Israel, Gianna and Tarver, Donald**, *Transgender Care: Recommended Guidelines, Practical Information, and Personal Accounts*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997.
- Just Evelyn, Mom**, *I Need To Be A Girl*, Imperial Beach, CA: Walter Trook Publishing, 1998. (Order from the author, 3707 Fifth Avenue #413, San Diego, CA 92103, 1-800-666-8158, or via the web at: www.justevelyn.com)
- Kirk, Sheila and Rothblatt, Martine**, *Medical, Legal and Workplace Issues for the Transsexual*. Watertown, MA: Together Lifeworks, 1995.
- Rudd, Peggy**, *Crossdressers and Those Who Share Their Lives*. Katy, TX: PM Publishers, 1995.
- Stuart, Kim**, *The Uninvited Dilemma: A Question of Gender*. Portland, OR: Metamorphous Press, 1983.
- Sullivan, Lou**, *Information for the Female-To-Male Cross-dresser and Transsexual*. Seattle: Ingersoll Gender Center, 1990.

PFLAG T-NET

PFLAG'S Transgender Network began at the 1995 PFLAG national convention in Indianapolis where a group of activist trans persons, parents and friends found each other. *TGS-PFLAG*, an on-line talk network focusing on trans-family issues, was formed that fall and quickly grew to include over one hundred subscribers, all educating and supporting each other. Since then, the group has organized rapidly on line.

In September 1998, one of TNET's major goals was reached when PFLAG voted to become officially transgender inclusive.

As of this printing, Transgender Coordinators (TCords) have been identified in over 170 PFLAG chapters in most states plus Canada. We are working to educate our chapters, to assure a ready welcome to trans persons and their families, and to build links with our local trans communities.

T-NET CONTACTS

Personal support and resources - Karen Gross Telephone: (216) 691-4357, email: KittenGR@aol.com

Organizational questions - Mary Boenke Telephone: (540) 890-3957, email: MaryBoenke@aol.com

To subscribe to the TGS-PFLAG listserv, send the message:

subscribe tgs-pflag (your email address) to:

listproc@youth-guard.com

or contact Maggie Heineman, list owner, at: maggie@bridges-across.org



PFLAG, T-SON'S parent organization, has active affiliates in over 400 cities in the US and many foreign countries. For a list of their chapters or publications, contact the PFLAG national office at:

PFLAG

1101 14th Street, NW, Suite 1030

Washington, DC 20005

(202) 638-4200

Email: info@pflag.org

web: www.pflag.org