



Photography: Getty Images

# Making a change

What is it like to be a transgender officer or member of police staff in the service? Syreeta Lund speaks exclusively to the National Trans Police Association

Walking into a grand room at the Victorian house which forms part of the police college at Sedgley Park in Manchester, a number of police officers and police staff are having their bi-monthly meeting. A man, probably in his 40s, and indistinguishable from many police officers of the same age, sits suited and booted, sporting a beard; his name is Dru, which I thought would be a short form of Andrew but actually turns out to be a shortening of the name Drusilla.

Dru Willcock is the chairman of the fairly newly-formed National Trans Police Association which came together after a meeting of minds in January 2008 during a positive action leadership programme at the police staff college in Bramshill. The students decided to form an association for trans people in the police service to gain representation in their own right and deal with issues specific to gender not necessarily sexuality. Previously they were part of the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans (LGBT) ACPO portfolio.



Dru: he has been a police officer for more than 25 years

They discuss many of the topics you would expect for such a fledgling group; how to secure funding to carry out their work, they are also in the process of organising an official launch to publicise to officers what they do. Their main aims are to ensure equality for trans men and women in the service, offer support and advice and improve relations with trans

communities and the police service. They travel around forces country-wide for their meetings and often meet with members of the trans community; a few women turn up to the Manchester meeting at lunch and speak to executive members; one lady brings in her grandchild, completely oblivious to any gender issues faced by the adults.

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There are other things you would not think of unless you had to face the issue yourself; force policy on searches – searching becomes gender specific when people are required to take off clothes.

This is a potentially difficult area for a trans officer as to search someone of the same gender as you need to have a gender reassignment certificate (GRC). Before this, some forces dealt with it by giving the officer a card that excused them from searching, the only trouble with that was that it had the potential to disclose their trans status to colleagues who may not have known.

I am intrigued to know what life has been like for the members, all in the police service, some police officers, some police staff – there is still a perception the service has a machismo image, not unlike the military.

For Dru the police service offered a real haven to begin with. Born female, he most definitely felt male. “I think I was as young as four when I would think, ‘I should have been born a boy’, I was never into Sindy and remember cutting off all her hair and making her into Action Man.”

As a teenager, Dru saw the coverage of the journalist and critically-acclaimed writer Jan Morris, formerly James Morris, who fathered five children before undergoing a sex change in 1972. She was the subject of a profoundly awkward interview with



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Robin Day where he famously asked about her sex life; much to her distain. The lack of support for trans people helped make Dru’s mind up; he would feel like a boy on the inside but look like

someone different on the outside, he would 'just get on with it'. In 1992, he, then a she, married and is still married today to the same person, a precarious position in the law as it means he cannot obtain a gender reassignment certificate without a divorce; something he nor his partner wish to do after 17 years of marriage. He is also three years from retirement and his role does not really require searches. He became a police officer in Essex 27 years ago. "Legally I am still female so I can only search females. Having met me I think you would agree that that would be inappropriate bearing in mind my appearance."

Given his background, you would not automatically think he would feel the police service would be the organisation to support him, luckily, when he finally decided to start his 'transition' physically he was in the rare position of having a colleague who was also trans, albeit a male to female officer called 'Emma' and says the support was crucial, something he hopes the organisation can replicate for others.

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And, he says, once you have come out and you truly know who you are you cannot just 'put it back in a box'.

The national organisation is still in its early stages but rather than being part of LGBT, Mike Cunningham, ACPO lead on diversity issues, supported a move for trans to become a separate issue as many trans people's issues centre on their gender not around sexuality which may not be gay, lesbian or bisexual.

### Stephenie's story

Stephenie is vice-chairman; she is tall, dark-haired and neatly presented with a smart and modest black trouser suit. She has been trans for 30 years and came into the service after her transition to work as police support in the Met as a project officer. She is also a Special Constable.



Stephenie worked as an engineer in her 20s before her change



Her journey to this point has been long and hard, a feature many trans people still have to contend with when they come out as transgender, whatever organisation they work for.

She first questioned her gender when she was five or six at school and struggled at relationships with females. But at 25 years old, working as an engineer, she married and had two boys with her then wife. She suffered from what she calls 'male rage' and admits her family also suffered. She was in and out of hospital as doctors tried to work out what was causing the extreme fluctuations in emotion which finally ended with 13-weeks of psychiatric care.

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Eventually one doctor would say she showed typical traits for a 'classic transexual' and was put on hormone replacement therapy. Within days she says she felt different and the aggressive side to her character was reversed. Her family stayed together but the trials of having to go through treatment and report regularly to a

clinic meant relationships were put under strain.

"I was from a very Christian family and when people found out what was happening, they started to break contact with us."

Stephenie now has a good relationship with her family and says they realise it was either change gender 'or be hospitalised'. She has been through one operation which did not work properly and had to be 'repaired' in 1994, having the added complications of two strokes and a heart condition, aside from being spat at in the street and targeted by gangs of youths; all too ready to judge.

She began work in the Met as Stephenie and was initially concerned she would not get in but found she has been welcomed and now works in the central modernisation team.

She says her line manager has been very supportive.

Those who make up the NTPA are a tough bunch, male or female, many of them have had to travel a hard road to get to the point they are at and now they want to make that path just a little bit easier through the support of the NTPA. They are a reminder that whatever you see on the outside, it's what you're made of inside that counts.