Which Box Should I Check?!

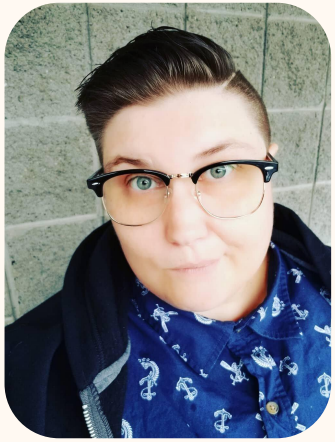
Implementing Trans-Affirming Homelessness Response Services

December 12, 2025

Nice to meet you!

Heather Duchscherer

they/them



Johnnie Shaver

he/him

Agenda

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01

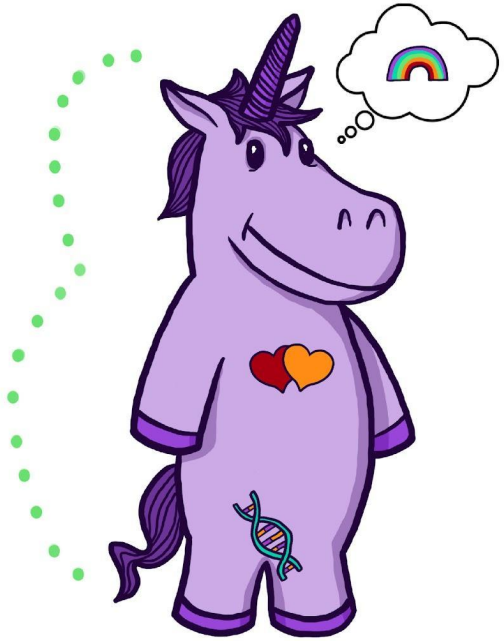
Establishing Common Language

What is gender anyway?

“Gender is the range of social, psychological, cultural, and behavioral aspects of being a man (or boy), woman (or girl), and/or another or no gender. Although gender often corresponds to sex, a transgender person may identify with a gender other than their sex assigned at birth. Most cultures use a gender binary, in which gender is divided into two categories, and people are considered part of one or the other; those who are outside these groups may fall under the umbrella term non-binary.” (Wikipedia [with our edits in pink] 12/8/2025)

The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by:
TSER
Trans Student Educational Resources



Gender Identity
- Female/Woman/Girl
- Male/Man/Boy
- Other Gender(s)

Gender Expression
- Feminine
- Masculine
- Other

Sex Assigned at Birth
Female | Male | Other/Intersex

Physically Attracted to
- Women
- Men
- Other Gender(s)

Emotionally Attracted to
- Women
- Men
- Other Gender(s)

To learn more, go to:
www.transstudent.org/gender

Design by Landyn Pan and Anna Moore

Transgender

Having a gender identity different from that typically associated with the sex a person was assigned at birth.

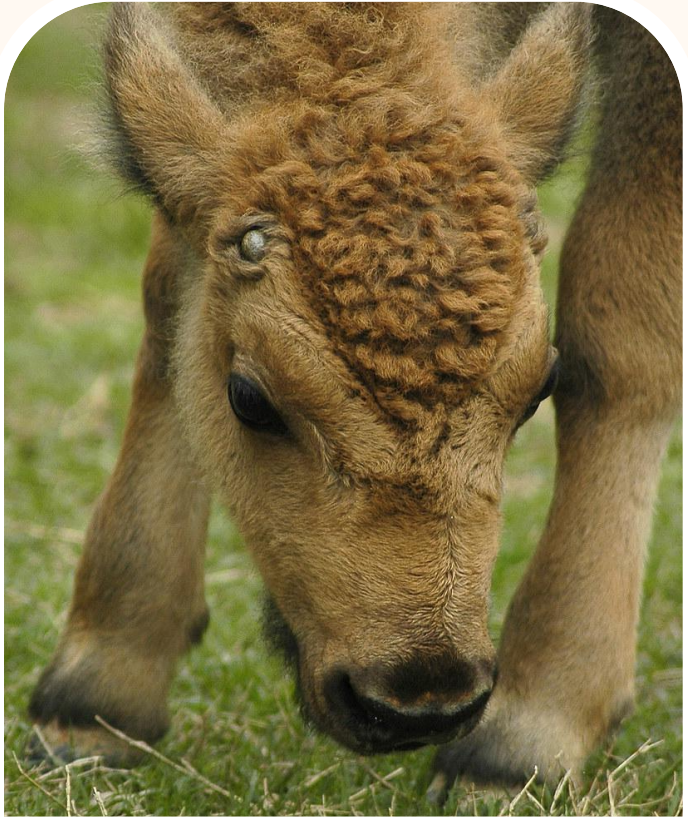
- Binary: MTF & FTM
- Non-binary: so many identities!

A note on transitioning: it's often not linear
Some trans folx change their gender expression, anatomy, names, or pronouns; others do not.

Two-Spirit (2S)

'The term Two-Spirit rose to prominence in the 1990's as a way for Indigenous members of the LGBTQ community to identify their unique experiences. Coined in Winnipeg by First Nation and Métis Elders, the term has grown in popularity over the past 30 years.' (*Métis Nation of Ontario - A Place In The Circle: Understanding and supporting Two-Spirit People, 2022*)

Keep in mind: No two tribal traditions are identical. For some, Two-Spirit may fall under the trans umbrella; for others, it may not.



Why are people suddenly calling me “cisgender”?

Cisgender just means having a gender identity that is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Only having modifiers (like trans) for marginalized groups is unnecessarily othering. Unlike “non-trans” or “normal,” “cisgender” or “cis” does not carry an inherent value judgement.

Let's talk about pronouns!

- Everybody *has* pronouns.
  - Some people's pronouns can be predicted by their gender expression; others' can't.
  - Some people use neo-pronouns.
  - Some people use multiple sets of pronouns.
  - Some people use it/its.
- What if I don't know their pronouns?
  - Ask them!
  - Model sharing pronouns.
- What if I mess up?

02

Level Setting

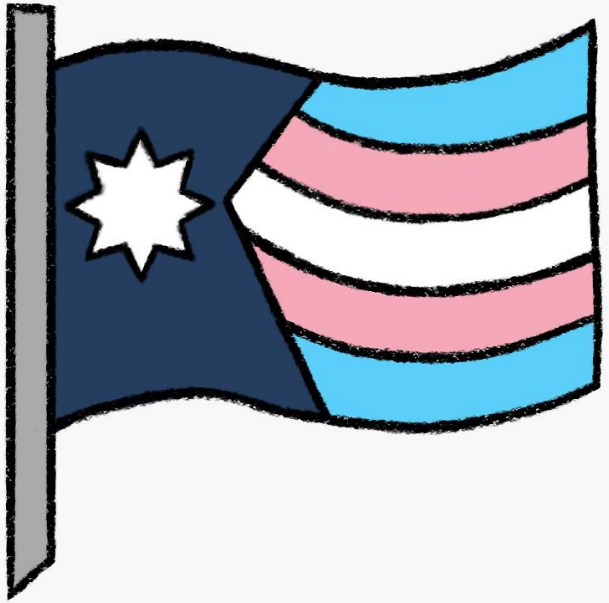
Why this is important

Experiences of trans folx

- **2022 US Trans Survey**:
  - 30% of respondents had experienced homelessness in their lifetime
  - 34% of respondents were currently experiencing poverty
- **In contrast:**
  - 14% of the general population will experience homelessness in their lifetime
  - 11% of the general population is experiencing poverty

What about in Minnesota?

Myth or Truth Edition



Myth or Truth?

Trans folx in Minnesota experience homelessness at a higher rate than does the general population.

Truth. Although trans folx make up 0.6% of the MN population, they make up 2% of people experiencing homelessness.

Takeaway: Trans folx are a small, but vulnerable, portion of the population and, to effectively end homelessness, we need to end homelessness for trans folx.

Sources: Williams Institute, 2022; Wilder Homeless Study, 2023

Myth or Truth?

Trans folx are more likely to experience unsheltered homelessness than cis folx.

Truth. Not only are trans folx more likely to have spent the night outside (23% of trans folx compared to 21% of cis men and 14% of cis women), but 39% of trans folx had been turned away from shelter compared to 33% of cis women and 32% of cis men.

Takeaway: Our shelters and housing need to be better-equipped to provide safe, trans-informed services.

Source: Wilder Homeless Study, 2023

Myth or Truth?

Most trans people experiencing homelessness are transition-age youth.

Myth. Although 26% are 18-21 and 9% are 22-24, 32% are 30-39 and 13% are 40-49. In fact, trans folx are present in every age category including 80+

Takeaway: Youth-serving projects have been doing great at serving trans folx, but ALL projects need to be responsive to the needs of trans folx across all ages.

Source: Wilder Homeless Study, 2023

Myth or Truth?

Trans homelessness is really just an issue in the Metro.

Myth. Trans representation is the same in Metro and Greater MN (2%)

Takeaway: Wherever you are in the state, you should be prepared to provide trans-responsive services. People shouldn't have to relocate just to be treated with dignity.

Source: Wilder Homeless Study, 2023

Trans folx exist whether you clock them or not

Myth or Truth?

Trans folx experiencing or at risk of homelessness are at greater risk for experiencing violence.

Truth. Half (50%) of trans folx experiencing homelessness had been attacked or assaulted while homeless (compared to 36% of cis women and 33% of cis men). Further, 62% of trans folx had stayed in an abusive situation because they didn't have other housing options (compared to 52% of cis women and 26% of cis men).

Takeaway: The danger is very real for trans folx and we need to do better.

Source: Wilder Homeless Study, 2023

Eroding Federal Protections

Fair Housing Act

- Since 2021, prohibited housing discrimination based on gender identity.
- **BUT**, as of 2025, gender identity discrimination cases are no longer being investigated.

Equal Access Rule

- Since 2016, empowered trans folx to be served in housing and shelter based on self-identified gender.
- **BUT**, as of 2025, HUD is no longer enforcing EAR.

Additionally, CoC and ESG recipients are being threatened with being defunded for promoting equity and safety for trans folx.

MN rights and protections

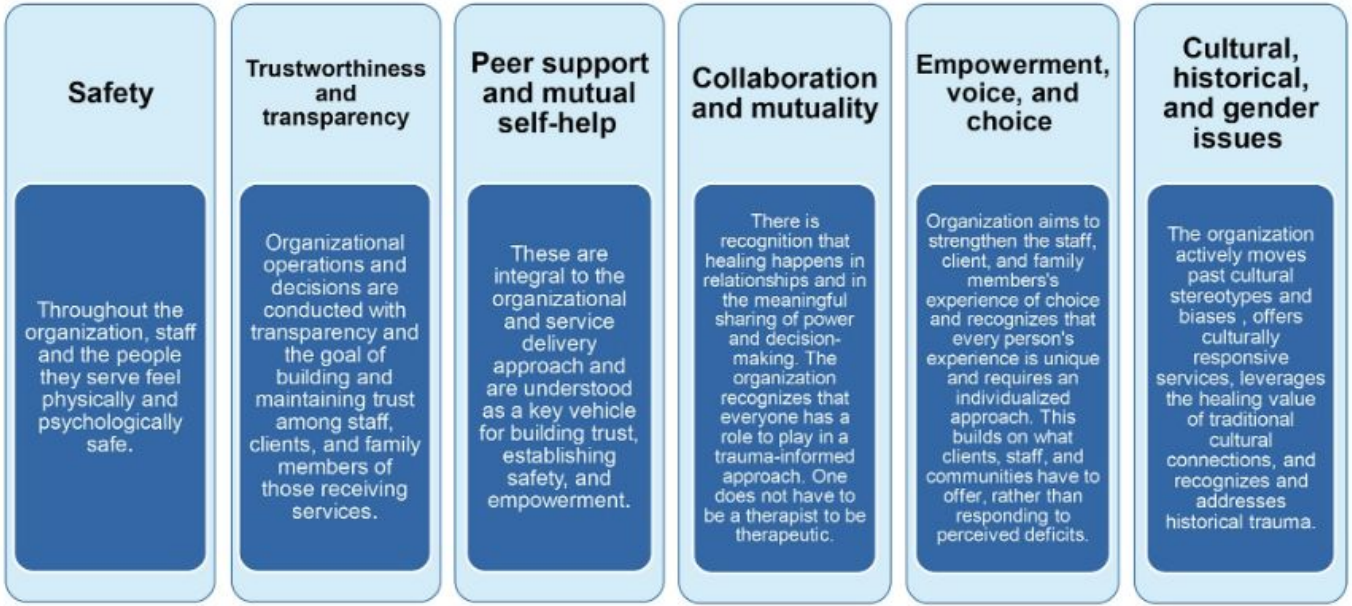
- **MN Human Rights Act**
  - Prohibits discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, public services, education, credit, and business
  - Expressly bans discrimination based on gender identity
- **MN Trans Refuge Law**
  - Ensures trans folx can access gender-affirming care
  - Protects individuals from out-of-state subpoenas or extradition

03

Best Practices for Providing Trans-Affirming Services

Guiding Principles of Trauma Informed Care

SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach, 2014 http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA14-4884/SMA14-4884.pdf



trauma informed oregon

Best Practices

Gather

Gathering and operationalizing feedback that explicitly includes trans communities, both clients and staff

Standardize

Standard forms and required paperwork utilize gender neutral language, space for pronouns, avoid phrases such as “legal” or “birth” name whenever possible

Affirm Spaces

Visual queues in service spaces signal organizational solidarity. Ex: Pride or Progress flags, affirming artwork, etc

Establish

Affinity spaces for staff with targeted and marginalized identities, including trans spaces

Cultivate & Vet

Cultivate list of ***vetted*** trans specific referral partners, connecting clients directly to culturally specific providers or services

Representation

Representation matters: Staff and clients should see their identities reflected in the board and leadership teams

04

Trans-Affirming Policies & Culture

Policies & Culture

Honor

Non-punitive accountability processes, honoring mistakes, and creating changed behaviors

Define

Create an internal definition of professionalism in order to foster transparent expectations

Affirm

Utilize affirming and equitable language in job postings/descriptions, equitable performance evaluation

Establish

Establish policies and culture that affirm LGBTQIA2S+, Black, Brown, and Native, neurodivergent, and disabled identities before doing intentional recruitment in those communities

Include

Ensure that trans folks are included in policy development, review, and evaluation

Balance

Prioritize work/life balance, allow for flexibility whenever possible
Ex: Floating holidays instead of fixed holidays

Recognizing and Addressing Unpaid Labor in Community Engagement

- Unpaid labor burden: Communities are often asked to contribute unpaid emotional and physical labor when engaging with social service systems and nonprofits.
- Shifting power: Organizations should acknowledge this labor and ensure appropriate compensation for individuals involved.
- Forms of compensation: This can vary based on the program, engagement strategy, and individual needs. Possible options include:
  - Stipends
  - Gift cards
  - Services
- Tailored approach: Each organization should develop a compensation structure that aligns with its program and the needs of those it serves.

Single-gender projects

Per HUD's Equal Access Rule, Community Planning & Development-funded single-gender projects, including shelters, MUST:

- Provide equal access to individuals according to their gender identity, and in a manner that affords equal access to their family;
- Place, serve, and accommodate individuals according to their self-identified gender identity;
- Not ask intrusive questions or require "proof" of gender identity;
- Determine eligibility without regard to actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status; and
- Establish or update policies and procedures to reflect the above.

Scenario:
Sleeping Arrangements

I run a 300-bed emergency shelter for men in an old recreation center. There are three congregate sleeping areas and one shared bathroom facility.

A client discloses his transgender status (as a transgender man) to a staff member. Do I continue to serve him along with the other clients?

What Does This Mean For Placing A Non-Binary Individual In A Project?

Providers should provide relevant information to individuals so that they understand their options.

Non-binary individuals are permitted to choose the most appropriate gender-based placement in situations when gender neutral options are not available.

Allow non-binary individuals to choose the most appropriate gender-based sleeping and bathing accommodations in a facility.

Note pronouns in files and when introducing the individual.

Inform the individual that they can request a privacy accommodation.

HMIS & Data Privacy

- FY2022 HMIS Data Standards updated gender options to be more inclusive.
  - Inclusion of culturally-specific gender identities
  - Ability to name one's own gender
  - Ability to select multiple/all applicable genders
- However, there is great potential for the data in HMIS to be misused. It's important to understand who owns participant data and who can access it.
  - What is the process for subpoenas for this data?
  - What local government agencies have access to this data?
  - Note: HUD and other federal agencies do NOT automatically have access to non-deidentified data.
- Trans participants should be fully informed and data privacy limitations and safety implications and then empowered to decide if they want their true gender identity reflected in HMIS.
  - Remember: "client chooses not to respond" is an option!
  - Participant safety is always more important than their data.

Questions & Emerging Thoughts

What happens next?

- Webinar for direct service staff
  - Coming soon!
  - Please encourage folx to attend!
- Resource documents to be emailed
- Gauging interest for an interactive office hours
  - Non-recorded opportunity to engage in collaborative problem-solving and visioning for trans-affirming programs
  - Facilitated by Heather & Johnnie

Thank you!

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