

**H**ave you ever had to change information on your state identification card or driver's license? It requires filling out a few documents, paying the fees and sometimes going before a judge, but beyond that, no big deal, right?

Well, it becomes a very big deal for low-income or homeless trans youth. It's a step many in the trans segment of our community put off, sometimes for years after they acknowledge the difference between their core identity and the gender shown on their birth certificates.

The roadblocks to changing that simple little "M" or "F" can be nightmarish and intimidating, especially if you're a young person whose interactions with the state have been anything but upbeat. A new program sponsored by people who care promises to change all that and to create a friendlier, more accessible atmosphere for those who need its services.

The ID Project operates through Outside In, where several staff members, some without remuneration, assist low-income and homeless youth in walking through the steps of identification changes. It's Time, Oregon! executive director Lori Buckwalter donated \$2,500 to a special fund to spearhead the program.

The trans activist received the money through the Community Health Partnership, which presented her with its Public Health Genius Award in October. (Buckwalter also received one of three community service awards from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force at the closing plenary session of the recent Creating Change conference.)

Powell's Books and the office of sex reassignment surgeon Toby Meltzer made additional donations for the project. A total of \$7,000 got it up and running.

Depending on whether a name change is

## IDENTITY CRISIS

**Project helps low-income and homeless youth through the transition process** by Patricia L. MacAodha



Lori Buckwalter (center, receiving the Creating Change Community Service Award from Lorri L. Jean and Sarah Jacobsen on Nov. 10) is the driving force behind the ID Project

involved, the total process can cost from about \$20 to almost \$100. A legal name change requires filling out papers through the Division of Vital Records, paying an \$89 fee and appearing before a judge. Once the name change is accomplished, the cost of the identification card/driver's license change is cheaper, about \$20, but the process is

more complicated when gender is involved.

"Changing sex designation through the DMV requires a letter of referral from a therapist on the DMV's list of 'approved' therapists," counselor Reid Vanderburgh says. "Without that letter, the DMV will not change the sex designation at all."

This has been one of the main barriers for trans youth, especially those who are homeless. They normally can't afford to visit therapists, and without knowledge of the process or access to a therapist on the list, they can't complete the ID change. Vanderburgh, who is on the list, is vital to the young people who are seeking this identification change.

"The project offers staff counseling and support for completing the administrative processes," Buckwalter says. The program pays all associated administrative fees and "encourages youth to be good self-advocates in asserting their rights to equal treatment."

Buckwalter adds that the project "stands at the cutting edge of civil rights for trans people in this country." Outside In staff members and one bene-

ficiary of the program told *Just Out* why this is so.

"It isn't being done anywhere else. For example, in Hawaii a person who self-IDs as the sex not marked on a birth certificate must complete sexual reassignment surgery," says Ann Hinds, Outside In risk education specialist. "In Oregon we only need a letter from an approved mental health clinician to qualify for changing the gender designation on an ID card."

Vanderburgh agrees. "It makes perfect sense that validation of one's chosen name and gender identity is a key component and a first step toward becoming one's true self." He cites existing attitudes that could make "our little program seem trivial and almost irrelevant," but "client response has proven we're right to consider it so important."

The response of Aaron Link, the first person to complete the project, bears Vanderburgh out. "I've been through it myself," he says. "The technical process of ID change isn't too difficult in Oregon—we are one of the most progressive states in the nation in terms of trans rights."

Link lists two primary obstacles in making the ID change as being "cost and the requirement that a mental health professional approve the change.... The level of discrimination and ridicule trans people face is so high," he says, "that many of us are afraid to visit doctors and counselors."

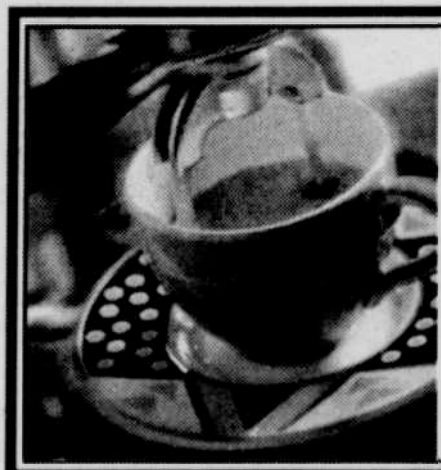
The ID Project appears to be a small but significant step away from that fear and a forward movement toward self-esteem and core identity recognition for our trans youth. **J**

For more information about the ID PROJECT contact Maria Bonacci at 503-535-3820 or [maria@outsidein.org](mailto:maria@outsidein.org).

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