



A SOBERING NUMBER

TransActive offers options for trans kids and their parents that can improve health and save lives.

The number of transgender kids, or rather, children with gender expression not conforming to society's "set rules," is said to number 3,200 in the Portland area. That's a pretty big number of kids having to deal with very adult issues — something even adult trans people have difficulty dealing with.

Throw in bullying, social peer pressure, and clueless parents into the mix and it is not surprising that by the time they are teens, 80 percent of those who think their bodies don't match their minds gender-wise consider suicide. A sobering number.

No parent can possibly be expected to deal with their child's gender expression or gender identity questions on their own. Likewise, educators, social workers and caseworkers are not always ahead of the curve on all things transgender either.

The key to suicide prevention according to Portland's TransActive, one of the few transgender youth nonprofit organizations in the country, is reaching the kids before puberty. The group's Executive Director, Jenn Burleton, says they exist primarily to improve the quality of life of transgender and gender nonconforming children. She says parents sometimes can notice a potential trans child as early as 18 months.

TransActive offers options and steps for kids and their parents that not only ease the struggle, but gets the kids off the, sadly, well-trodden path that leads to a second sobering number; over 40 percent of all transgender people attempt suicide.

"TransActive provides a comprehensive array of in-house counseling, case management and medical referral services, educational workshops, training and professional speakers, child and family advocacy and support to transgender and gender non-conforming children and youth, their families, allies, community organizations and helping professionals," their website says.

I'm seeing their weekly group meetings of transgender kids as one of the highlights of the programs offered. Just knowing there are other trans kids like them out there having the exact same struggles is a huge self esteem boost. They will come to realize the "problem" isn't them at all, but rather society's ignorance.

TransActive also has similar group meetings for parents, siblings and others at a loss for what to do. Counseling is offered to help them make the adjustments needed to support their child's or sibling's gender expression. The training and workshop programs for those in the community working with trans people are invaluable as well.

Burleton has spoken out about the consequences for children who are bullied and are victims of prejudice. Kids have rights, she says, and mentions the Oregon Safe Schools Act, which says every child in the state can express their gender however they want.

TransActive is currently reaching 70 families, leaving some 3,100 Portland area kids possibly without much guidance. Hopefully, Portlanders with trans kids will take advantage of the wealth of resources we have for them in our own backyard. §

transactiveonline.org



Executive Director Jenn Burleton Photo by Ho race Long

In Transit is written by Courtney O'Donnell for *Just Out*. Courtney is a Transgender actress, advocate, and writer, including being a regular contributor to The Huffington Post. She is also the star of the film 'Lexie Cannes'. Reach her at Courtney@JustOut.com.