

Interviews: Part 1

These interviews were carried out with young trans and nonbinary people and their parents and carers during the Mermaids weekend residentials.

Trans Girl with Identical Twin Brother

How old are you?

Trans girl: I'm seven. We're [*looking at her brother*] twins.

Are you identical twins?

Both: Yes.

Let's talk about superpowers. If your sister had a superpower, what would it be?

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Brother: I think it would be telekinesis and heat breath and freeze breath.

What does telekinesis mean?

Brother: It means you can move things around.

If you were going to move something around with the power that your brother says you have, what would you move around?

Trans girl: The furniture.

Would you change the furniture in this room?

Trans girl: Yes, I would put that chair over here [*she indicates to the chair her grandma is sitting in behind her*]. I would put it so that I could see her. But I think she is happy where she is.

Do you want to move it?

Trans girl: No, I think she is happy where she is.

If you could give your brother a superpower, what would it be?

Trans girl: Superspeed.

What good things would you do with your superpower or superspeed?

Trans girl: I'd make people dizzy.

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Is that a good thing? I'm not sure I'd like being dizzy.

Brother: I would speed up buildings and I could catch my sister as she's the faster runner. She's got lots of medals at home for running races.

How many medals have you got?

Trans girl: I've got three already. By the time I'm twenty, I'll have sixteen medals for running.

I think that my superpower is being trans. Why do you think that I might think that?

Trans girl: Because you are trans and it means that you can be whoever you want to be.

Is it a good thing to be able to be whoever you want or need to be?

Trans girl: Yes. Being trans is my second superpower.

How do you think your trans superpower has helped your classmates?

Trans girl: Because now they can be who they want to be and not be someone they don't want to be. Instead of feeling sad because they can't be who they want to be, they can now be who they want to be and be happy.

What's most important do you think: being happy or being as fast as a cheetah?

Trans girl: Being happy.

Where are you happiest in the world? I'm happiest in my house in Spain because I get to see my dogs. When they first see me, they wag their tails so hard that I think they might fly off! That's when I'm at my happiest. Where and when are you happiest?

Trans girl: At school with my brother.

Is he the best brother ever?

Trans girl: Yes.

When are you happiest [to brother]?

Brother: When my sister is around me.

If you had to pick a few words to describe your sister, what words would you pick?

Brother: Intelligent, clever, very brave. She faced her fears.

When you started on your journey, what were your biggest fears [to the trans girl]?

Trans girl: That people were going to laugh at me.

Did anyone laugh at you?

Trans girl: No.

GENDER EXPLORERS

That's because you're brilliant and frankly a superhero. How did having your brother with you help with that fear about people laughing?

Trans girl: If people ever bullied me, he'd stand up for me.

Brother: It was quite scary for me when my sister first went into school as herself. I had to be brave. I was scared that people might bully her or just laugh. It happened a little bit at first, but I stood up for her.

Are you proud of your sister?

Brother: Yes, very. But I'll get prouder of her if she gets more medals for running.

So, when she's got sixteen medals, you'll be really proud?

Brother: No, only when she's got ninety-nine medals.

How would you describe yourself now [to the trans girl]?

Trans girl: I'm happy, caring and I think I'm quite popular.

Have you got any idea what you want to be when you grow up?

Trans girl: A fashion designer.

What kind of clothes do you want to design?

Trans girl: Wedding dresses.

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When I was a teacher, there was a small group of children in my class who told me that I'd be happy if I got married, so they designed me wedding dresses and the dresses got bigger and bigger and bigger. It was a little like Juno and the Giant Peach.

What do you want to be when you grow up [to the brother]?

Brother: I want to be a pharmacist.

Who has really helped you on your journey [to the trans girl]?

Trans girl: My brother has helped me the most.

So, having a brother who stands by you and helps you has been important?

Trans girl: Yes.

If you were going to give any advice to somebody else starting out on a journey like yours, what might it be?

Trans girl: Be brave and don't let anyone bully you. And try to be whoever you want to be. Ignore the bully and walk away and tell the teacher.

Thank you, both of you, you are brilliant.

Twins' Mother

Can we think back to that first day when your daughter went into school as her authentic self... What were your feelings as a parent?

GENDER EXPLORERS

Mum: It was more me worrying about her. It wasn't about my feelings. I was worried about the reception that she and her brother would receive – if there would be any bullying or ostracising, that kind of thing. But I felt quite secure in that I'd done quite a bit of groundwork first, so I'd been into school, explained the situation. The teachers were fantastic and were onboard and wanted to do anything to support me my way, which I was adamant about – it needed to be my way.

What did your way look like? If someone was reading this and thinking, 'This is exactly what's happening in my life and I need to make sure this is done properly, my way', what might your way mean in relation to other people?

Mum: So, my way is about personalising it for your child. You know your child more than anybody else, so it must be about them. They, the school, might have a perception of how they are going to deal with it, how they might handle it, which might not fall in with what might suit the personality of the child. Because my child was so young at the time – five – I knew that the children might not get the concept, so I took some children-friendly books into school which could be read with the class as stories, which they were. The school were good in that by the first day that she went in as herself in her proper girl's school uniform, her name labels had been changed on her peg and schoolbooks, and the register had also been changed. The children had been told in simple, age-appropriate terms that some children don't feel like what's in their head matches their body, and it was explained to them that for my child this was the case. The simplicity

of the explanation meant that her peers just accepted it and moved on.

More important was picking her and her brother up from school that day. Both myself and my husband picked them up and took them to school that first day. We needed her to know – and her brother – that we were there for them both; it was such an important day, a milestone. The teacher took us to one side and said that it was like having a completely different child in the room. She used to isolate herself all day in the dressing-up corner. But now she was answering questions and being confident enough to run around outside, she was playing with everybody. Some of the boys who used to pick on her because she'd be in the dressing-up corner in a dress stopped bothering her.

People sometimes make this whole process so complicated. If you could give some simple advice to other people, what might it be?

Mum: Embrace it. Embrace it even if you're frightened of it. It's the only way to control that fear.

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Trans Girl

First, can you tell me how old you are and what pronouns I should use?

Trans girl: I'm eleven and 'she' and 'her'.

Are you in the last year of primary school?

Trans girl: Yes, I'm in Year 6.

What's your favourite thing about being at school?

Trans girl: I have no idea; I just like being there.

Do you have a favourite lesson?

Trans girl: Art is my favourite lesson. My favourite thing to sketch is people.

Are you good at drawing people?

Trans girl: Not exactly.

Have you ever drawn a self-portrait?

Trans girl: I've tried.

Did you put it on the wall?

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Trans girl: No, it didn't look good, I drew my nose over here [*points to her cheek*]. It looked a bit like a Picasso.

Can you remember back to the first time you went into school as yourself?

Trans girl: Well, it was last year, and a royal wedding was happening. I went into school in a black-and-white dress. It had flowers on it. The school knew I was going to. I felt happy.

Did you have any fears at all?

Trans girl: I felt happy, but I had some fears. I was happy because I was going in as me. At home I had always been me, dressed as me.

When you walked into school on the day of the royal wedding, how did you feel inside – being able to be yourself?

Trans girl: It just felt normal. It felt like it was the way it always should have been.

After that first day, did you stay as the real you in school?

Trans girl: No, because I didn't have the right uniform, so I kept going in like before. I got a dress and then on the following Monday I went in as me. It just felt completely normal to me.

So, if you were going to give anyone in your situation any advice, what would you say?

GENDER EXPLORERS

Trans girl: Be yourself and don't let what other people say bother you that much, otherwise it will put you back.

Does it ever hurt if people say anything nasty to you? If people say anything horrible to me about being trans I ignore them because being who I am makes me feel strong and beautiful.

Trans girl: When people are being horrible to me it's because they don't understand. I ignore them but I wish I could change the world. I get to be myself and be happy now.

When you grow up and start working, do you know what you might want to do?

Trans girl: Sort of. I want to save animals.

Do you think that being trans will hold you back in any way?

Trans girl: No, I think it pushes me forward.

If you could say anything to the world about being trans, what might it be?

Trans girl: That they are happier being themselves and that it's selfish making us wait until we are older to be ourselves.

Why is it selfish?

Trans girl: Because they are saying that we can't make decisions until we are older, but I'm happy now.

I don't think I've spoken to anyone who puts it as beautifully and simply as you. Thank you for a lovely interview.

Trans girl: You're welcome.

Trans Girl's Parents

Listening to your daughter talk about going into school that first day, she talks about it feeling normal. What was it like for both of you?

Mum: It was quite emotional, but the school have been fantastic with us. We went to pick her up, but the only thing she was worried about were her shoes hurting her. She got the dates and days slightly wrong. She went in as herself a couple of weeks after the royal wedding day.

Dad: It was after that half term.

Mum: Yes. There were a couple of weeks when she dressed as herself at home and playing outside. We thought she'd go in as herself in the following September, but in the half term she said she was ready. We were like, 'Fair dos, she's ready.' Over the half term we went out shopping to replace her uniform and then realised that we had much more to change that would remind her and her classmates of her previous time – her pencil case and other stuff. Much more than you think to make sure she would be comfortable.

But the difference in her was massive. She'd been such an angry little child. She suffered from such rages, didn't she?

GENDER EXPLORERS

Dad: She did.

Now?

Mum: We get occasional strops but nothing like before.

Dad: The rage is still there, but there are big spaces in-between – like months.

What made it easiest: her being so matter-of-fact or the school being supportive?

Mum: We were lucky that the school were really supportive, but we were lucky that we had some information from Mermaids that we could go into school with. We felt forewarned and went in with our backs up, ready, but we didn't need to. Thankfully. When she told us we thought, 'Okay.' The school said they weren't surprised – it made sense. The difference in her happiness is huge. The in-your-face anger has disappeared.

How has that impacted on your family? What does it mean to have a happy trans kid?

Dad: It's like a weight off our shoulders to have that anger explained. The anger was directed at everybody.

Mum: And over nothing. It would literally appear out of nowhere. It's just gone. She said she just feels normal now. She's happy for people to talk. There was a girl at school who

made some comments. The school dealt with it, but she said, 'It's not her fault, she doesn't understand.'

Dad: She's so laid back with it, she'll talk with anyone.

How do you as parents get support? Do you need support?

Dad: We haven't really. I'm not sure we needed it. I don't think we've needed it. It's been a breeze really.

Mum: She's so much happier. We had an angry little confused boy and we now have a happy, vibrant and confident daughter. We couldn't ask for anything more. She's happy, our home is happy, it's perfect.

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