



The Gender Centre Inc. Fact Sheet  
**About the Gender Centre**  
**Founded in 1983**

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Reviewed July 1<sup>st</sup> 2008

## **Tiresias House**

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In the very early 1980's, a small band of transsexual people held weekly support meetings at the Wayside Chapel in Kings Cross, Sydney. A transgendered woman, Roberta Perkins, who had completed an honours thesis on transsexuals approached Reverend Bill Crews of the Wayside Chapel Crisis Centre to ask if he would consider the use of the chapel for a regular meeting place offering support to the transsexual girls of the Cross.

Many of the girls working the streets of Kings Cross, from Darlinghurst Road to William Street were vulnerable to assaults, robberies, rape and harassment. Other issues of concern were incidences of transgenders being evicted and discriminatory treatment by landlords and some service providers. The problem of homelessness was significant and providing transsexuals with a safe refuge was crucial. Most refuge services at the time would not cater for transsexuals.

Problems of increased dependence on prescription and illicit drugs were also an issue. Often drugs were a means of managing a multitude of issues as a transgender individual, such as limited employment opportunities, no secure housing, verbal and physical abuse, violent attacks etc. These negative experiences reduce an individual's already low self esteem.

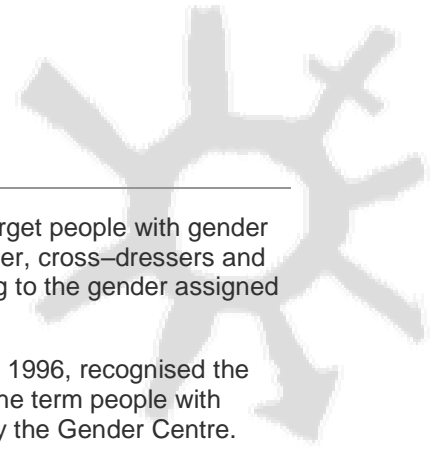
After consultation with Reverend Bill Crews and Reverend Ted Noffs together with Roberta Perkins, regular weekly support meetings for transsexuals commenced.

During this time, the media became involved in the issues of transsexuals and produced a documentary movie titled "Man into Woman". This film highlighted the plight of transgender people in Sydney, particularly the Cross. As public awareness was rising, Roberta contacted the state minister for Youth Affairs & Housing, Frank Walker M.P. (Member of Parliament)

She made a submission for funding to open a refuge for transsexuals. Frank Walker approved this plan and in 1984, Tiresias House was founded as a refuge for young transsexuals.

The premises in Petersham was approved by the Department of Main Roads, and Tiresias House was the first government funded service specifically for transgenders in Australia. It was funded entirely by the New South Wales (N.S.W.) Department of Community Services (DOCS) through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (S.A.A.P.). Two "annex" (semi-supported) houses located at Haberfield and Ashfield opened soon after.

By 1993, DOCS and the N.S.W. Department of Health entered into a joint funding agreement. This meant that Tiresias House was funded to provide services to minimise the effects of Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (H.I.V./AIDS) on the transgender community. These services included Outreach and a Community Worker position. At this time, Tiresias House was incorporated and renamed The Gender Centre Inc, to reflect the change in services and service philosophy.



## The Gender Centre Inc.

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Rather than targeting simply young transsexuals, the service began to target people with gender issues, which included people who identified as transsexual or transgender, cross-dressers and any other person who experienced issues, problems or difficulties relating to the gender assigned to them at birth.

The introduction of amendments to the N.S.W. Anti-Discrimination Act in 1996, recognised the legal existence of transgender persons. The term transgender replaced the term people with gender issues which had been used to identify the target group served by the Gender Centre.

By 1997, many links had been formed with both the public and the private sectors. Training among employers and employees began to take steps in easing transgender individuals' path to maintaining their employment during gender transition and raised the awareness of gender issues throughout society.

Today the Gender Centre remains committed to the support and well-being of transgender people, employing 9 staff and housing up to 17 residents at any one time, in 3 refuges and 6 exit houses.

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