



## **Coming together to prepare: what it means to create a legal ID change paperwork clinic**

by Sossity Chiricuzio, PQ Monthly

*December, 2016*

Queer/Trans folks are walking a post election landscape that is scary for myriad and intersecting reasons, including medical needs, safety, and identity. Changing name and gender markers is a complicated maze; hard to navigate even when you have resources and time. Multiple local organizations, care providers, and community members came together (thanks in large part to the organization skills of Neola Hayes) to offer a free legal ID change paperwork clinic. Forms were printed for free by Morel Ink, the Q Center donated their space, and everyone involved volunteered their time and labor.

Paperwork and questions are not the only barriers, either—the fees required for all these changes can also be prohibitive, which is where TAP (Trans Assistance Project) came in. A permanent fund, replenished through donations and grants, that exists to finance legal/ID changes and healthcare for trans folks in need. They worked with each person in need, assessing what fees would be involved, and writing them a check to cover those costs. Almost \$2300 was dispersed to many of the 200 people who were helped in that 4 hour clinic, causing the staff at the Multnomah County Courthouse to have to start stacking notices by day.

**PQ:** *What inspired you to be a part of the ID Clinic, and what was your role?*

**Jess Guerriero, OHSU Transgender Health Program:** We've seen an increase in anxiety and questions surrounding trans experiences in general. I was a navigator and DMV form signer, and being part of

the clinic was a direct way to help reduce barriers to help people reduce anxiety and increase feelings of safety.

**Joe LeBlanc, Communications Manager at Camp Fire Columbia:** I was inspired by the great number of trans folks and allies collectively coming together to help trans people in need to get resources to change their identity documents. I was a navigator at the clinic, helping to connect people with good information, dispel some of their misconceptions and worst case fears, and also make sure they had the forms necessary.

**Dr. Eowyn Rieke, MD MPH:** As a health care provider I work with transgender and gender non conforming people and am familiar with the enormous barriers to care in our system. This was a chance to help people leap over some of those barriers to get the documentation they need. I am frightened for my trans\* friends and patients and want to do whatever I can to help them feel safe and be safe. I

**Miriam Gwilt, local activist and artist:** To be honest, I wasn't planning on being at the ID clinic. I had recently been attacked at a bus stop and didn't want to be around more than a handful of people at a time. I'd agreed to do some phone banking for TAP, but they had too much help. Scout told me that she needed help tabling at the ID clinic instead, so that's where I went. I was seeking a way to impact my community by offering what energy I could to edify and support those around me.

**PQ:** *What was your impression of how the evening went, and who was served?*

**Dr. Angela Carter, ND, Founder of The Equi Institute:** The event was very busy and fast paced, but we managed to get everyone through with documents in hand. Many in attendance did not have primary care or mental health providers, which caused a great barrier to them having correct legal documents. The difference between an M and an F on a license can mean life or death to a transgender person; a correct marker can help to prevent harassment and discrimination, and affirms gender identity.

**TAP:** We can honestly say that it was quite a pivotal moment for us. To be able to see such a turnout from the Portland community redefined the meaning of hope. Seeing the stress flee from each individual, knowing they would not have to participate in a grating and often dehumanizing process, is the beating heart of what this project is all about. To sum it up: we were moved.

**Joe LeBlanc:** The event was super well run, packed with lots of people in need, and well organized. People were there to advocate for their trans children. Doctors were signing letters to help patients to better advocate for themselves. Community was there looking out for each other like we do in times of great stress and fear. I felt so proud to be a part of a team pitching in to get things done however we could.

**PQ:** *What would you tell someone who was interested in helping make something like this happen in*

*their own community?*

**Dr. Angela Carter:** A clinic like this can be organized with just a few providers and volunteers and very little resources, but it can make such a difference for so many. I welcome clinicians and interested activists to contact me ([dr.angela@equi-institute.org](mailto:dr.angela@equi-institute.org)) in order to learn more about how we put the clinic together.

**Jess Guerriero:** I'd say make sure everyone is prepared with accurate information and don't be afraid to make an ask of community professionals/local resources.

**TAP:** Reach out to your local LGBTQIA+ resource and any neighboring communities, however remote. Reserve your energy for the long term, only use what is in your capacity for the immediate. Work in groups, never alone. Remind your straight and cis friends what it means to be an ally, and stress the importance of contributing their privileges and resources. Love each other, each and every day.

**Miriam Gwilt:** Contact folks doing the work. Don't try to reinvent the wheel. Believe in the possibility of people doing something kind because they see you and your struggle and want to help in ways that offer you agency and validation. Show up in every way you can because that is really needed right now. Remember it isn't just about you, but that you matter and there is a place for you to show up.

**Dr. Lucy Reeve, ND:** This whole night came about because people in the community felt the urgency and the panic and used that to create something to help fix the problems. Every single person there volunteered their time and was happy to do so. People want to help, people want to be involved, it just takes someone who can organize and delegate to get it together.

**PQ:** *Can you tell us how TAP started, who it is meant to serve specifically, and what your next steps are? How can people best support your efforts?*

**TAP:** We started as a direct response to the election of Donald Trump. Scout Wolfcave, our founder, released Google doc's on Facebook entitled, "Donor/Recipient Project." The idea was that trans folks and donors could be matched based on the needs stated in these applications. This quickly got the attention of Nina Chaubal and Greta Martela from Trans Lifeline, our now co-founders, and TAP began to blossom overnight. Our purpose is to allow trans folks to access basic medical care, to help them in the navigation of complex bureaucratic systems, and to afford them a baseline standard of living that we all deserve, through both financial and advocacy-based support.

Behind the scenes, we are working to create and train a team of support advocates that will work directly with each recipient in our system. Volunteers are also working to create our database of legal and medical professionals/resources so we can better determine funds and criteria needed to expedite paperwork at future ID Clinics, and who we can safely pair with on a national level. We've

accomplished a great deal in less than two months then we ever could imagine, and we anticipate this pace on until Trump's inauguration.

We are asking our community to help us get the word out about TAP on whatever social media outlets you can. Those who wish to donate or volunteer, please visit: transassistance.org. We have raised over \$15k in little over three weeks. It's stellar, but it's not enough to cover the amount that TAP needs to fund our recipients thus far. For those of you who need assistance: fill out a request form on our website and we will be in contact with you soon! Many thanks to all of those who have helped us so far, we are so grateful to the Portland community and their hard work.

***Sossity Chiricuzio is a writer and columnist based out of Portland, Oregon. She is a regular contributor for PQ Monthly and focuses on social justice, communication, community, and changing the world. You can follow her adventures online @sossitywrites and find more at [sossitywrites.com](http://sossitywrites.com).***