Transgender people

Let trans kids live true, say parents

EXCLUSIVE

SONIA KOHLBACHER

The parents of a transgender child who have let their eight-year-old publicly identify as a girl say other families should "stand up" for their children's choices and allow them to live as their true selves.

The mother says allowing her child, who was born a boy, to identify as her affirmed gender was a carefully considered decision. Her daughter had shown a strong interest in girls' clothing and toys since she was aged three and, as she grew older, was allowed to wear dresses at home.

Until last year, the parents would not let their child identify as a girl in public because they were concerned she would be the target of discrimination, and they took her from a previous school where she was bullied.

Last week, the child's participation in a school cross-country race as a girl was criticised by one parent and state Liberal MP Peter Abetz, who said it was unfair the child competed as a girl.

The Australian has chosen not to name the child or the Victorian government school she attends. The girl's mother told The Australian yesterday that people did not understand the needs of a transgender child.

"The only challenge that any family has with a transgender child is the community," she said.

"I had one man tell me just to take her in the bush and shoot her because there was no hope for her. People just do not understand. We don't do this lightly, we do this because we know it's the right thing to do."

Earlier this year, parents at the school where the girl is now enrolled were notified by the principal in a letter that she was transgender and would compete in the cross-country race against other girls. "You are receiving this letter to inform you that we have a student in Year 3 who is transgender," the letter said.

"The student was enrolled in our school last year and may be familiar to your children as a boy, but will now be recognised as a girl." The girl placed fifth in the race and is now eligible to be part of the inter-school cross-country team.

She was hurt by criticism of her participation in the race, her mother said, but the wider school community was supportive. "I let the school know that she would be coming to school one day and would be wearing a girl's uniform," she said. "They have been supportive, but they have needed to listen and look at it from a different point of view."

The mother encouraged other parents of transgender children to support their decisions. "People need to hear from other people who are going through it for all the other beautiful kids that come along because all of these kids have got so much to teach us," she said.

West Australian Equal Opportunity Commissioner Allanah Lucas congratulated the school for allowing the child to compete in the sporting event and said educational institutions had legal obligations with respect to sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination, as well as a duty of care to students.

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From Bruce to Sheila is not easy

CARLOTTA

COMMENT

I DON'T know what amazed me more about Caitlyn Jenner's arrival - her looks or how much money she'll be able to make.

Either way, I just couldn't believe how different her experience was to mine when I became a woman just three decades ago.

For one thing, Caitlyn has the support not just of her family and friends but it seems the whole world.

For me there was no help at all. It was very tough. I was even scared to tell people at Las Girls because I thought if they found out I had become a woman they'd fire me for not being a female impersonator! I mean seriously, if you can't tell a bunch of drag queens you're secretly a woman then who can you tell?

Of course it's a different generation these days. People aren't as easily shocked. Difference is more accepted. But that doesn't make it easy, especially in America where they've been very slow off the mark with the whole "tolerance" thing.

I also think it must have been much harder for Caitlyn having been an Olympian - an American hero - to turn around and say: "You know what? I'm actually a sheila." She was probably petrified.

Can you imagine someone from the suburbs in the same position coming out and doing the same thing.

Do you think they'd get the cover of Vanity Fair? I don't think they'd get the cover of New Idea.

CARLOTTA IS A TRANSGENDER PIONEER AND SYDNEY IDENTITY

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