

# In My Own Words

By L.P.

In October 2009, Lambda Legal filed a discrimination complaint with the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations against the City of Philadelphia's Department of Human Services on behalf of L.P., a 17-year-old transgender girl. While in the custody of the Youth Study Center, a youth detention facility, L.P. was physically attacked and verbally abused by peers and staff for almost a year and a half. Here is her story.

I identify as a heterosexual female. When I was born they named me Q. Since I no longer identify as Q, I refer to him in the third person.

Q grew up in Philadelphia and was raised by a single mom. Since Q was little, he felt different. He liked to dress in his mom's high heels and dresses when she was not watching. When Q was about eight, he realized that he liked boys and really identified as a girl. Q began wearing his clothes in a very tight, feminine manner. Q's mom called him derogatory names like "faggot" and "he/she." She always told him that he was going to go to hell. Q's grandmother told Q that he was going to be a man and serve God as a pastor. Q's father was more accepting and told Q he loved him no matter what. But he did not live with Q.

When Q was eleven, he was placed in a boys' unit at a residential treatment facility. This was the time when I began to transition into L.P. I faced a lot of rejection. There was a boy in my school who always said he would never sit next to a faggot. These comments made me feel I wasn't wanted, like every body was playing a game while I was left out. When I took home passes from the facility and visited Q's family, Q's aunts said that I was an abomination and that I could not be around Q's cousins.

I am very grateful to my therapist and a child care worker at the residential placement who encouraged me to be who I am. Thanks to them, I had the courage to really begin the transition into L.P. I was always forced to be my own family, mother, friend and therapist when I was a child. No child should go

through that. A child should be loved for who they are.

*Despite a court's treatment order, staff at the Youth Study Center failed to respect L.P.'s gender identity by refusing basic services extended to female residents, including the ability to be referred to by female names and pronouns, to wear panties and bras and treat their hair once a month. Once L.P. was beaten so badly by another resident because of her gender identity and perceived sexual orientation that she had to have an X-ray taken of her nose.*



I had a lot of bad experiences at the Youth Study Center. One that hurt a lot was when a staff member told me he wasn't going to call me by my preferred female name until I "got my dick cut off." I felt so humiliated and degraded.

Today, I have my own apartment and I want to go to college and study political science and economics. Then I want to go to law school and be a partner at a national or worldwide law

firm. On a personal level my biggest goal is to be adopted by a loving family with two working parents and brothers and/or sisters. Please, please, you be that family. I know I will be a great addition to any family because I never had one. I have an extraordinary background because I am not part of the majority. I grew up knowing I was different and have overcome so much on my own.

If I could say something to other youth who face the type of discrimination I faced, I would tell them not to back down, to learn about

"I was always forced to be my own family, mother, friend and therapist. No child should go through that."

their rights and always report anything that happens to them. I decided to seek Lambda Legal's help and file a discrimination complaint because no one should have to go through what I went through. Youth Study Center staff members must accept youth for who they are and treat them with dignity, fairness and respect. If they don't there should be legal consequences and the city of Philadelphia should be liable. **L**