

Leeds Gender Identity Service

Voice Coaching

Our voice is essential to our identity and sense of self. I believe that we can all access elements in our voice which communicate who we are.

I'm Maggi. I'm the voice teacher for transwomen & transmen at the Leeds Gender Identity Service. I've been teaching voice work for many years and specifically in the trans community for 5 years. Currently the Service offers two 8-week courses per year for transwomen, and day-long workshops for transmen.

The different needs are outlined below.

TRANSWOMEN AND VOICE...

"I feel much more confident to converse normally with a voice which sounds acceptable for a woman"

As the voice is physiologically unchanged by female hormones many transwomen identify the 'feminisation' of the voice as one of the most important areas of work during their 'transition'.

The learning on the 8-week course builds incrementally: this careful structure means that you need to be able to attend all 8 sessions in order to fully benefit.

The workshops teach the participant:

- to explore & develop the full range of their voice – including the 'higher' areas they may be unfamiliar with
- to understand what elements of the voice make it more 'feminine'/ 'masculine' and how to control these elements
- to develop awareness of how to use their breath to support their voice
- to make informed choices about how they want to use your voices
- to learn the necessary exercises which will strengthen and develop their 'feminine' voice
- how to practice outside the workshop – phone calls etc.

Previous participants report surprise at how 'feminine' their voice can be / an increased ability to control their voice – on the phone and face to face / a heightened confidence in their ability to communicate effectively as a woman / real enjoyment of the workshops / an appreciation of working alongside other transwomen.

"The best thing about these classes was finding a range in my voice I never knew I had"

TRANSMEN AND VOICE...

"The next day I noticed how much stronger my voice felt and it's still there"

Transmen who are not yet taking hormones may be uncomfortable with their (female) voice. They can learn how to access the deeper part of their vocal range and other elements of the voice which help to identify as male. Once on T the changes to the vocal folds occur much more rapidly than in a pubescent male: the body (and brain!) has to adapt to these changes

very quickly. Although testosterone thickens the vocal folds, these folds (or cords) are contained within the larynx which is not very elastic! – so the voice can become very restricted or 'creaky'. **If you experience any issue with your voice pre or post T please speak to your lead professional about possible voice work.**

In the transmen workshop we will:

- explore your experience of your voice
- explore what makes a voice sound 'male'
- discover which of these characteristics are available to you
- connect voice to breath – for more control and relaxation
- notice how physical tensions affect the voice (eg when using a binder/ bulking up) – and how to relax, freeing up the voice.
- show how to get the voice 'fit', how to extend its range & strength.
- help you to be prepared for dealing with the vocal changes caused by testosterone

“I've continued with Maggi's exercises and my voice sounds deeper and feels stronger”

The Benefits of Group Work

Although daunting, voice work in a group offers many advantages over individual work. Participants can:

- practice using their voice in a non-judgemental environment
- build confidence in themselves – and their voice!
- Increase their ability to express themselves
- feel listened to
- learn from others' work
- share this experience with others who are on the same journey

No particular level of fitness is required for the work, but you will need to come & work in comfortable loose clothes, preferably trousers, and in bare feet. Please bring a mat or blanket with you for floor & relaxation exercises.

This service is only available to service users who have progressed into the care pathway at the Leeds Gender Identity service. Should you wish to attend these sessions if you are on the care pathway please speak with your Lead professional.

I'm really looking forward to meeting & working with you.

- Maggi Stratford