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|  | Speak Up – KōrerotiaTransgender journeys18 May 2022 |
| Female | This programme was first broadcast on Canterbury’s access media station Plains FM and was made with the assistance of New Zealand on Air. |
| Female | Coming up next conversations on human rights with “Speak Up” – “Kōrerotia”, here on Plains FM. |
| Sally | E ngā mana, E ngā reo, E ngā hau e whāTēnā koutou katoaNau mai ki tēnei hōtaka: “Speak Up” – “Kōrerotia”. Tune in as our guests “Speak Up”, sharing their unique and powerful experiences and opinions and may you also be inspired to “Speak Up” when the moment is right.Nau mai ki te hōtaka: “Speak Up” – “Kōrerotia”, I’m your host Sally Carlton, ko Sally Carlton ahau. Today we’re going to be talking about transgender journeys and we’ve got three guests with us today who will be talking us through their own personal experiences of being transgender. It’s estimated that between 2% and 3% of people identify as a gender that’s different to the one they were assigned at birth - so we’re talking about a minority but it’s not an insignificant minority, either. Our aim today is not to get into controversial topics but rather the guests want to share with you their personal journeys as a way, I guess, of showing that transgender is not something to be fearful of but in fact something that we should be embracing. So I’m really, really looking forward to this, all of you, and I’m really grateful to you for coming in here and being willing and courageous to talk this through. It would be really fantastic to hear from each of you a wee bit about yourselves, just a little bit of an introduction because we’ll get to know you more as we go through this kōrero, perhaps we’ll start with the person sitting on my right, so nice to see you in the studio, this is the first in person one we’ve done for a while so it does make it quite a different feeling actually. |
| Emily | Hello, my name is Emily, I use she/her pronouns and I am a 17-year-old transgender student. I transitioned two years ago or at least came out two years ago - this is, well, my second year on hormones, I suppose - and that’s really all I have to say in terms of like the basics of an introduction.  |
| Grae | Kia ora, I’m Grae, I use she/her pronouns and I am a 28-year-old transgender woman. I came out about eight years ago, no nine years ago. Nine years ago, oh my gosh! |
| Emily | Time flies. |
| Grae | Time flies but also I’ve only been on HRT for about two years as well, it’s been a journey to get here.  |
| Sally | So just a quick question there, you mentioned HRT if you could tell us what that is.  |
| Grae | HRT is hormone replacement therapy so that’s when us trans folk start to take hormones associated with the gender we are transitioning to.  |
| Emily | Testosterone or Oestrogen basically, testosterone shots if you are going from female to male and patches usually if you’re going from male to female although obviously that varies.  |
| Grae | And there’s different ways to take hormones and different quantities as well, a lot of it is all around personal choice as well and what makes us feel more comfortable in our bodies.  |
| Raghii | Thank you Grae and Emily and Sally, it’s great to be here. I am Raghiiboii Baxter, I am a trans guy, 26 years old, and I use he/him pronouns. I started transitioning about three years ago socially and I started hormones two years ago with Grae because she is my trans twin.  |
| Grae | We started HRT a week apart from each other.  |
| Raghii | Whilst flatting together.  |
| Grae | In lockdown, as well, for the first three months. |
| Raghii | Yeah so lockdown was intense for us as it was for everyone us, there was a lot of teenage hormones going on in our house.  |
| Grae | Despite the fact we’re all in our mid to late 20s, it’s quite unusual.  |
| Sally | So it’s quite interesting, we’ve got 17-year-old Emily, you guys in your mid/late 20s and yet you’ve all started the hormone treatments two years ago, so a kind of a similar… |
| Emily | That’s a weird coincidence.  |
| Raghii | Really interesting.  |
| Grae | What month did you start?  |
| Emily | I actually remember this because the exact day I started taking my testosterone blockers was the last day of 2020, it was literally New Years Eve.  |
| Raghii | Nice.  |
| Grae | Oh my god that’s fantastic, see I was the 3rd of March so I started testosterone blockers and oestrogen. I was really aiming for the 1st of March, I wanted that nice start to the month but unfortunately the doctors messed me around slightly so I took a couple of extra days.  |
| Raghii | Yes and I was the week before Grae on the 24th of February. So that was really fun, I had only just been diagnosed with gender dysphoria which is the formal diagnosis that you need to obtain before being able to start hormones and around that same time they changed the law that you now didn’t need to go and see an endocrinologist which is a person who deals with hormones, you could just get your prescribed your relative hormone therapy through your GP. Grae had been waiting for years, I mean you literally socially transitioned nine years ago and then I ended up starting hormones before you because I got a text saying hey Raghii, come in and get your testosterone and I was like yes sweet, I’m there.  |
| Grae | I started looking into the whole HRT process around early- to mid-2018 and then eventually went through my GP and then I got referred onto a psychologist to get diagnosed with gender dysphoria in 2019. But it was going to take 11 months just to see a psychiatrist just to tell me hey you’re actually a girl.  |
| Raghii | And you knew that.  |
| Grae | And I knew that.  |
| Raghii | You knew that.  |
| Grae | Because this was through the public system I ended up having to pay $600 out of pocket just to shorten the gap from waiting 11 months to two months to see a psychologist and then I had to wait another couple of months after that to see an endocrinologist. It was only sort of October 2019 that I was on the road to getting my HRT. Of course I also needed to freeze sperm which is honestly one of the most uncomfortable experiences. |
| Raghii | It’s so weird. |
| Grae | Horrible. |
| Emily | I have a very funny story around that… which can I get into? Just not to get off topic. Yeah well basically because I was not 18 and I had to go in with my mum which is already unbelievably painful, it was the worst and naturally because obviously the entire process involves you know, doing the thing which I already never like never had done before because I was always so disgusted with that area. So it took me like an hour or so to actually get the thing out and then the worst thing was when they actually got that and I had the beaker and I was like handing it over and doing the paperwork, they had to get my mum anyway to check. So I was like holding this beaker of that and I was like you know, trying to hide it from my mum because even if it’s an instant medical situation, no one wants their mum seeing that.  |
| Grae | There’s a boundary.  |
| Raghii | Yeah.  |
| Emily | My mum offered to get me a beer afterwards.  |
| Grae | Fair enough. |
| Emily | I declined, I just went home and cried.  |
| Raghii | Oh hon. I mean I don’t have much dysphoria down there fortunately but it’s just real weird to walk into a doctor’s office… like this whole medical hospital situation… |
| Emily | Just to wank.  |
| Raghii | But also the room.  |
| Emily | Oh yeah the room is weird.  |
| Raghii | Oh gosh we’re getting real off topic here.  |
| Sally | There’s no ‘on’ or ‘off’ topic.  |
| Raghii  | But yeah it’s this hospital and you just walk on through this door that the nurse offers you through and there’s just this lazy boy there and the bathroom in the next room, a TV and just a drawer full of porno mags and I’m like wow and there was the DVDs as well and I watched some of it just because I thought it was funny. Let’s go back to talking about other things now, yeah, yeah.  |
| Sally | I have a question on that though, was that something that you needed to do? Did you have to freeze the sperm as part of the process? |
| Raghii | You don’t have to. |
| Grae | No it’s a choice, you know, some people want to actually have… well I mean it would still be your own kid even if you did adoption but it would be you know, some people including like me for example wanted to actually have that stuff somewhere in case we were to have…. |
| Raghii | Genetically your own.  |
| Emily | Genetically our own yeah.  |
| Grae | Because taking HRT does make you infertile, it’s a huge decision for us to make to do this because you know, it does remove the chance of easily having biological kids but we can go through the process to freeze all that sort of stuff if we want but it isn’t necessary. I might want kids in the future so I thought well why not, I get ten years’ free storage.  |
| Sally | Getting back to the first question which was on my list which I think would be quite good to touch off just as we set the scene. Gender versus sex, talking through that difference would be quite useful I think.  |
| Grae | I have a PowerPoint on this! No I don’t have it with me but I do actually have a PowerPoint. Gender and sex…gender’s a lot more complicated than just thinking that it’s just like this you being male and me being female, it’s actually broken down into three different, like, elements: there’s gender identity, gender expression and your biological sex. Now it’s… there’s this great, like, picture thing, infographic online called the gender bread person which I often use a lot in my talks and that kind of thing, just to sort of show the idea of how these all work. Like your gender identity, it’s what is in your head, it’s how you perceive yourself, it’s how you perceive yourself and your gender and how you know that you are the gender that you are. Gender identity is all around where we talk about like transgender issues and that kind of thing, it’s all around our gender identity and how that doesn’t match up necessarily with our biological sex which our biological sex is… well I mean, in the picture it’s what’s between your legs. Biological sex isn’t even as static as male and female, you’ve got intersex as well and basically gender identity, gender expression, biological sex – they don’t exist as binaries either, it’s all a spectrum. The way I like to think about it is it’s like a colour palette, every person’s gender is a different part on the colour palette.  |
| Raghii | And those colours can change throughout time which I think is something really important for people to understand. When people refer to biological sex, they often think of male or female and I don’t enjoy that analogy because there’s so many social connotations to what that looks like. So I prefer to think of it as XX or XY and you’re either born with those two chromosomes, you know, like the pair.  |
| Grae | Funnily enough though there’s more variations than just that, as well.  |
| Raghii |  Yes, there’s XXY as well.  |
| Grae | XXY, there’s XXXY, there’s just X, there’s so many variations.  |
| Raghii | Yes that’s a good point, really good point, thanks for that, Grae. |
| Grae | And that’s when you get a whole lot of intersex characteristics as well.  |
| Raghii | Yes thank you and on that topic is understanding that as Grae mentioned, your gender is your own, it has nothing to do with the way your body is presenting itself, you know, and the way that it is constructed. And for me personally, I don’t feel any less male because I’m a trans male. I have a different experience of what that is to be a guy because I was socialised differently so I’ve seen a different perspective but it doesn’t take away from me being male and same for trans females you know. You also get trans non-binary, all of these different genders fit a different person and they get to choose the way their puzzle pieces fit together to make the whole.  |
| Grae | I always like to think there’s like seven billion different genders in the world.  |
| Raghii | Yeah exactly.  |
| Grae | A gender for every person because no two people will have exactly the same idea around what makes up their gender. The way I always talk about cisgendered people - cisgender means you associate with the gender that you were assigned at birth - the way I associate our cisgendered people around it is think about how you know that you are the gender that you are without thinking about how you walk, how you talk, what you wear, the things you enjoy. How do you know?  |
| Raghii | Or your body? Or your body? And yeah without thinking about like those physical things, you know that. So then imagine waking up without that and being told actually you’re this. You know, you still know your gender, you still know the way you want to be, the way you want to feel so yeah, having someone then tell you actually no, you should do these other things. It’s like wait no, that doesn’t… you know. |
| Grae | It messes with you a bit, to put it lightly.  |
| Raghii | What do you think, Emily? |
| Emily | Well I believe you’ve already kind of touched on the majors. Like parts of it obviously you know, it is a spectrum, it’s all opinion based. I feel like this is in itself like the big thing, I feel like if you don’t get that, you kind of just don’t get the entire community as a whole if you don’t understand the difference between biological sex and gender.  |
| Raghii | Yes and these are scientific facts you know, and that’s the thing about science, it’s proven until it disproves itself and so in order to stay up with evolution you have to evolve, you have to accept the new information that’s coming out and we are blessed to be in this age where we can access hormones, where we can be understood even slightly more. Like don’t get me wrong, there’s still a huge gap - and it’s awesome that we’re filling that gap in a way with this chat today - but there’s still these new facts are coming out to help humanity evolve.  |
| Sally | And in fact we’re talking in a western context here, but in other contexts… |
| Emily | This whole idea of there just being two genders, it’s an invention mainly invented by the Abrahamic faiths - so Judaism, Christianity and Islam - because if you go to places like India, Japan, North America, you know, pre-contact, most cultures have at least a third gender.  |
| Raghii | And if you go further back to Mayan or ancient Egyptian times, we’re talking about five genders, we’re talking about the knowledge… This isn’t a new thing.  |
| Emily | It’s kind of stamped down a little bit by religion.  |
| Grae | I think I remember reading somewhere around ancient Greeks, they actually took some kind of root which actually had oestrogen things in it so it was a form of HRT.  |
| Raghii | There was a Roman Emperor who…. |
| Grae | I believe he, like, paid a bunch of doctors in the empire to see if they could try to create a vagina.  |
| Raghii | Yeah and another Roman empress who identified as MTF which is male to female and everyone would refer to her in the incorrect pronouns and she was over it, she was like no I don’t care for this. I am not this emperor guy you make me out to be, I’m actually a beautiful empress and I’m going to be that. So this dates back quite far.  |
| Emily | Basically as long as there’s been humans, there’s been trans people.  |
| Raghii | And non-binary and intersex and cisgendered.  |
| Grae | Just on the terms on the topic of intersex people, it’s around one in one hundred people are intersex.  |
| Sally | I know, it’s not small.  |
| Grae | It’s not small but the reason that people don’t sort of see it so often is because we may not even find out that we’re intersex in our life because it could be as small as chromosomal which might not heavily impact like how your body develops. Likewise there could be other things like oestrogen insensitivity syndrome, a foetus in the womb that has the XY chromosomes but they’re actually resistant to testosterone so they actually end up… we all start out as female biologically in the womb and so they end up staying that way but they actually have testes instead of ovaries so they’re actually infertile and that kind of thing and don’t have any body hairs because body hair is apparently a testosterone thing which also just goes to show hey, we’re all a mix of both. And that’s also really cool I think with HRT is just the fact that as humans, our bodies are very malleable. We’re changing our biological sex, we’re stopping the effects of our first puberties and changing that, I think that’s really cool.  |
| Raghii | Being trans is awesome. It’s such a unique experience, I absolutely love it.  |
| Grae | But it’s also really normal like for us, this is something that is our every day, we live it. Oh yeah, you’re trans, cool, yeah well what’s for dinner? |
| Raghii | Exactly. Life goes on. Still got to do laundry.  |
| Grae | Absolutely, I still need to brush my teeth every morning and being transgender does not change that.  |
| Sally | Okay guys this seems like a fantastic spot for our first song break. Raghii, I know you’ve got a choice so what was it you wanted to play?  |
| Raghii | I would love to play my favourite song at the moment which is ‘Innerbloom’ by Rufus du Sol, enjoy.  |
|  | **MUSIC BY RUFUS DU SOL – INNERBLOOM** |
| Sally  | This is Speak Up – Kōrerotia and we’re speaking about trans journeys. We thought we might start this second segment by thinking about the pre -coming out experience. So when and where did you realise you were trans and then thinking broader than your own stories, what factors might come into play if we’re thinking about other people’s stories. What might their process be or what might delay someone’s coming out journey?  |
| Emily | Well I guess in regards to what would delay it, the main thing is your environment. Naturally if you are in an environment which isn’t accepting of trans people, even you know, just not necessarily being gender conforming it’s very difficult to actually express yourself. I feel like me in particular as a younger person, I am very lucky to have the family I have and live in the country I live in because there are places in the world and even people I know who don’t have families who would support this. |
| Grae | And that’s a really common like story, it’s just families don’t support it.  |
| Raghii | Yeah that was you know, an incredible part of my journey and I think this is something that a lot of people assume with trans people or non-binary people, anyone experiencing gender diversity is that you know from a young age. I knew from a young age but that doesn’t mean everyone knows from a young age and so for me personally it was that I tried to come out to my family, I was born in South Africa, I had an extremely Christian family and religious family and that wasn’t a go, you know, it wasn’t an option and due to it being in the ‘90s, there was still the lack of information explosion that we experience today. So it just wasn’t an option and I, you know, often as a kid was trying to express to my family that I am a boy and my body looks different to my brothers but that doesn’t change anything and you know, I think they just thought I was imaginative or something and then the last time that I tried to come out as a child, I was about 11 years old and I was extremely fearful of going through puberty which for a trans person is actually traumatic, it is extremely intense. Puberty already is intense, right? Now, to go through something you are not looking forward to in any way shape or form and it’s taking you further and further away from who you identify as, that is an extremely traumatic process. So yeah, I ended up trying to come out at 11, it didn’t happen and then ended up coming out in 2018 and yeah, for some people the pre-coming out journey and story, it can be tough and we know this, this is why it’s a controversial topic because it is tough for some people and it wouldn’t be controversial if it wasn’t, it would be easy because people would be helping create ease and flow and you know, opportunities for trans people.  |
| Grae | Yeah I feel that especially just… there’s all this idea around won’t somebody please think of the children but I think they’re not thinking of the children if they don’t allow their kids to be themselves and to transition if they need to. I knew from a young age as well, I knew that I was different, didn’t have the language for it. I grew up in a middle class family, Christchurch, that sort of thing wasn’t talked about. The most that my family knew of was that you could be gay and that was it. To be transgender was something that… well, my mum was just like… we didn’t live in a… we weren’t a religious household or anything like that but mum was really worried about if you dress as a girl you’re going to get beaten up or killed and also there’s just this whole view in the media that we’re either like tragic victims by being sex workers or we’re psychopathic killers like Silence of the Lambs. And so I grew up never hearing the word transgender or transexual or anything like that unless it was in a real negative context so I just repressed the hell out of myself because I used to… I always gravitated towards feminine things, I always loved feminine things but there was always this sense of shame or guilt for doing so. I remember being so little, like three years old - that’s actually, funnily enough, gender identity develops at about three years old, that’s how kids… that’s when they start to say I’m a boy, I’m a girl, this is who I am and they start gravitating towards the things of the genders that they associate with - and that’s how you get trans kids because we know so young. I remember about 11 as well, actually, we were getting taught sex ed at school, taught about puberty happening and that kind of thing and I remember saying to myself I can’t be a ‘real’ girl - real in quotation marks - because I didn’t know any better so I’m just going to have to try and be the best boy that I can be and then I was just really terrible at being a boy, it just didn’t work out for me in the long run.  |
| Raghii | Because you’re not one.  |
| Grae | Because I’m not one, funnily enough, shock horror, who would have thought. Yeah I ended up coming out in 2013 at about 19 years old. Out of high school - went to an all boy’s school as well, phew, fun times - and came out at 19 as non-binary, gender fluid but even then I was so scared to take on that trans label because of the stigma around it and that kind of thing. It was only as I started connecting with more people in the community and that sort of thing and coming to really take the time to reflect on myself and who I am, like finding that comfort, finding myself comfortable enough to say yes I am trans, I’ve gone through a whole period of my life where I’ve repressed it hard and denied for so long and only when I was 25 I was like actually… I’m just a trans girl, she’s just a lady. So that’s my journey.  |
| Raghii | Yeah every journey is different and as it was mentioned before we’re in a digital age and you know, the age of technology which is a huge blessing and everything is a double edged sword right. But you know, we see Tik Tok’s of kids coming out as trans now and they’re being supported so… |
| Emily | I wish I had that.  |
| Raghii | Yeah even though some people still in this day and age are not being supported, there is a new wave of support and for someone who is trans and hasn’t had the opportunity to come out, there will be a community for them when they do, you know, and that’s a huge differentiator. There are so many more communities now, so many more LGBTQIA+ communities, you know, that you will find your peers, you will find people like you.  |
| Grae | Also in school, just like the amount of queer people that I accidently ended up hanging out with at school because we were into the same things and then we all realised after school, we’re like oh we’re all gay. Oh. Oh cool.  |
| Raghii | And now in schools there are queer groups in schools, you know, that’s a change between the ‘90s and 2000 babies.  |
| Grae | How is it being in school?  |
| Emily | Oh well again I guess it really depends. I guess… Is this the part where I go into my journey now? Well I guess to a certain extent I always knew but I never really cared that much when I was kid, I always larked around or did role play as female characters, I often presented myself in a very female way with long hair, hundreds of images of me dressing up as a princess or a fairy which is kind of amusing looking back on it and you know, when I was a kid obviously I got bullied for that but I guess that’s one of the joys of the fact that I was on the spectrum, I never really like thought about it, registered it, half the time. It really wasn’t until, I guess, around the culture war era, like 2016, that I really started to understand a lot more about that stuff because I did sex ed, I learnt about that stuff and obviously because I did sex ed around that time, they did start to… even if it wasn’t a whole lot at that point, mention a bit about you know, gender.  |
| Raghii | Yeah.  |
| Emily | And obviously when they went over puberty there was this very big ‘Shit!’ moment where I was like oh no I don’t want this and then that completely… right as puberty was about to hit, that was the first time I genuinely thought I don’t want this, I want to be a girl or at least I want to be feminine. So I did try to, I guess, come out in a certain way around then but it did not go well. Lots of talk about faggot cooties and stuff like that so I did end up leaving school because of that and naturally because at that point I had gone through puberty, I had grown a lot of hair and stuff like that, felt like you know, Jeff Goldblum from The Fly, just you know my body was completely deteriorating in a way I hated and that just completely actually led to me like shutting down and not wanting to interact with people for quite a while. It really wasn’t until I started to know people at my school who were coming out as bisexual or people in the year above me who were trans or Fa’afafine that I actually thought you know what, I could actually do this and then you know, I talked to the school psych about it, I opened up to my friends about it, I talked to my mum about it, and then obviously I began transitioning and things have been going better since then. Last year there was actually quite a few big issues around it mainly in terms of like again bullying and stuff like that but although one thing which I will give the school credit for is they handled all that stuff unbelievably well which is very entertaining to think about because I go to a Catholic school which I something you wouldn’t expect.  |
| Raghii | It’s just awesome to hear that you have people and role models within your school you know, we didn’t have that. Like it was such a rarity to come across someone who was out as gay and I mean I was in South Africa at the time so that might have been even more drastic but still like, the world has changed a lot in 20 years.  |
| Grae | Yeah when I was at school I had a couple of friends who were out as gay in school which was cool, most of the people who were very outwardly queer left. Yeah.  |
| Sally | I do have one question for you guys, how was it changing your names?  |
| Grae | I haven’t actually, funnily enough. Well actually I kind of have but I haven’t because I identified as gender fluid for a few years so I decided just to use two different names for when I was presenting fem and then presenting masc. So my birth name was Graeden and as you know I go by Grae now which is funnily enough a shortened version of Graeden.  |
| Raghii | Also a very cool name.  |
| Grae | It is, it is a cool name, I like Grae as a name. Also I Googled it the other day and it popped up on the list of top girl names for babies and I’m like yes, got it.  |
| Raghii | Grae or Graeden? |
| Grae | Graeden. I was like yes, yes, yes, yes, finger clicking everywhere. At the time I felt like when I was first coming out and that sort of thing, I thought Graeden was a very boy name because I’ve grown up with it being a boy so I called myself Grace which I kind of just fell into, I also go by Gracie these days too. So I have four different names which I use which is fun but I kind of did it just so that way when I was coming out to people, people would be like oh it’s Graaaaccee… so you know, that way they would be less likely to get my wrong name but actually as I’ve gotten older, I’ve actually come to appreciate the name Grae, it’s a grey area.  |
| Emily | Okay so shall I go next? I haven’t actually had my name legally changed… |
| Grae | Oh me neither. |
| Emily | Well because I guess it’s a lot complicated because I have split parents you know, I’m originally from the UK and I don’t have New Zealand citizenship so it’s going to be a big kerfuffle and obviously not 18 yet. But in terms of like changing it on things like medical records or at school it was actually fairly simple. I actually am pretty sure I mentioned to the school like the day before the year started back the first year I went back as a girl and they immediately changed it on the role and everything on such short notice which was really cool. The story behind my name and why I picked Emily is actually fairly interesting. I guess… well first of all I already had a fairly androgenous name prior to my transition, you know it could be a boy’s name or a girl’s name, either way. However I picked Emily mainly being because when I was little and since as I mentioned I already looked quite feminine for a child, my sister always wanted a little sister and so she would you know… and because I obviously didn’t really care a whole much, she would dress me up in clothes and stuff like that, she like made me go into like the girls changing room with her because she didn’t want to go in by herself and you know, whenever she had to do something like that or whenever she talked to me like that, she’d often just called me Emily which I only recently found out was the name of a doll that she had. You know, so yeah, so that’s kind of why I picked the name which my sister was very, very chuffed about. |
| Grae | She named you.  |
| Raghii | That’s really interesting. My name is extremely unique, I am pretty sure I’m the only Raghiiboii in the world and I love it. I absolutely love it. My name is Sanskrit or has Sanskrit origins and means light beam or rainbow which is only something I found after choosing that name and yeah, I definitely went through quite a journey with my name change and I think it’s because my transition has been a transformation for me. It hasn’t just been a changing of an outward appearance, it’s really been allowing myself to express internally as well. So I was going between two names when I changed… when I… Before I chose Raghii and the name was Raghii or Kaos and Kaos….Kaos spelt K A O S was Greek and my birthname was Greek as well and I really liked the meaning of my birthname which was rebirth and I always felt like yes, one day I’m going to be reborn and so I knew that this was that moment, you know, I knew that this was that rebirth moment and yeah, Kaos I guess was just reflected by my surroundings at the time. It was you know, when I came out it was chaotic, my family were in distress about it, they didn’t know what to think. I was the rainbow sheep of the family, like literally broke down every single wall for my brothers, like they’re not going to have any issues now, you know, I have touched every single spectrum on everything. So I think that’s where Kaos was coming from was just all these chaotic feelings that I associated with my own experience but actually they were the masked experience and so once I used to… Because I can go through moments of extreme indecision, I would toy up with… I would say you know, I’m Kaos and listen to how that felt and then I’d say I’m Raghii and I could feel oh okay, yeah, that feels really nice, that feels really comfy, it feels a lot better than chaotic feelings. So you know, it was a bit of a journey but I am so stoked and I love it when people say my name.  |
| Grae | Yeah Raghii.  |
| Raghii | Yeah exactly and I love it when people say my full name.  |
| Grae | Yeah Raghiiboii.  |
| Raghii | Yeah exactly. It brings… I don’t know, it’s just such a new joyous feeling of self and yeah, there’s just something really beautiful about it. It’s like you painted your own picture and you love it and it’s like yeah, I’m about that.  |
| Grae | I also just want to sort of just make a mention around dead names and birth names and that kind of thing. Don’t call trans people by their birth names or their dead names if they don’t want… |
| Raghii | General rule of thumb. If they have told you their new name, then don’t mention it. You for example, you’ve still got your birth name and you don’t mind sort of switching between it but using Grae now right. That’s a kind of exceptional circumstance, you don’t see that everywhere.  |
| Grae | It’s rare in my case.  |
| Raghii | Yes but it’s not a very kind thing to remind… If you know someone who knows someone that’s trans and you’re like oh have you seen this person, they’re really different now you know, and you’re explaining that they’re trans, it’s really disrespectful and kind of inconsiderate to dead name them, to show pictures of their past or what they used to look like. Like, that person has gone through this entire journey to overcome that identity that was forced upon them, you know, so embrace who they are now, use their correct pronouns, talking about their name, no one needs to know what name they were born with, it doesn’t matter, it’s not going to make a difference.  |
| Grae | Exactly. |
| Raghii | Well it is going to make a huge difference to the trans person if you don’t use it.  |
| Grae | And I mean, if you do mess up with it… |
| Emily | It’s not that difficult to ask. Pretty much all trans people are going to be more hurt by you saying their dead name or the caterpillar name, that’s what my mum uses...  |
| Raghii | Nice.  |
| Emily | … yeah will be more hurt by using that than you saying I’m sorry, I can’t remember the name.  |
| Raghii | Yeah exactly and along with that is our pronouns as well. If you slip up - which is understandable, a trans person understands that, right, it’s almost bound to happen when someone comes out - correct yourself. Like that person is not… |
| Emily | Just say sorry, no harm in saying sorry.  |
| Raghii | Exactly.  |
| Grae | And on that, say sorry and then move on, don’t make a big deal of it as well. Don’t be like oh my god I’m so sorry, I know your name is this now but I just messed it up because that makes you the victim in that situation and then forces the trans person to comfort you which is not what we want here, we want that kind of respect. So if you misgender someone, be like oh he went to the shop… I mean, she went to the shop, sorry, to get some bread. Be polite and move on and respect.  |
| Raghii | And there’s so much joy in that moment of correctness. When someone takes the time to stop their sentence, say sorry and change it to the correct pronouns and the correct imaginative picture that they’re trying to create, oh it’s just yeah, it’s truly honouring, you know. You feel honoured and you feel respected as a trans person in those moments.  |
| Grae | Absolutely, absolutely.  |
| Sally | Okay we might have our next song then.  |
| Emily | Okay well I guess when I was thinking about the songs, I really tried to think back to like anything I could think of which was trans themed which I couldn’t necessarily think of. However one of my, I guess, first introductions to androgyny and one of my biggest influences when it comes to like my transness or my queerness has always been David Bowie, particularly his character Ziggy Stardust. So I had to pick my favourite song from that album, Five Years. |
|  | **MUSIC BY DAVID BOWIE – FIVE YEARS** |
| Sally  | This is Speak Up – Kōrerotia, we’re talking with Emily, Grae and Raghii about their trans journeys. This is our final segment and it’s just a question to throw out and take in whatever directions you’d like it to take but what is it like living as a trans person?  |
| Emily | Amazing.  |
| Grae | Love it, wouldn’t change a thing.  |
| Emily | I mean it depends on the trans person obviously, some people are going to have… you know, it depends on the day and your environment, as I mentioned earlier. So for example obviously if we’re going back to a personal level, so me in particular, it’s okay. My family is accepting, my school is accepting, there’s the mental health side of it which is you know… dysphoria, it can hit at any time really and there are plenty of triggers in the world which can trigger it and then obviously there’s stuff like some people are cool about it, some people are not. I’ve had plenty of experience with bullying around it and I’ve had plenty of experience of acceptance. So I guess really I personally say that it is at this point in time, a mixed bag but mostly positive.  |
| Raghii | Yeah.  |
| Grae | That’s good. |
| Emily | And obviously that’s not going into like other people’s experience. Like, I can imagine it’s probably not the best to be a trans person living in Libya or something right now.  |
| Grae | Oh god a trans person living in the United States, right. There’s so many trans bills being passed in the States, it’s horrifying. But, like, for me personally, like it’s been fantastic. Since I’ve come out, since I’ve really just embraced who I am. Like this woman the other day just told me how much more confident I’ve gotten in myself and I mean that’s also because I started oestrogen and I’m feeling more comfortable in my body and are more comfy to be my loud and proud true self. But I feel like I’ve really blossomed, like I feel like being myself, celebrating my identity and celebrating my transness has done absolute wonders for me. It’s helped with my career even which is, you know, that’s unusual, that doesn’t happen much. But you know, as trans folk in, you know, in media representation and that sort of thing, we are starting to get more recognised which of course is a double-edged sword as well just because we’re more recognised and kind of seen in the world doesn’t necessarily mean we are more respected. But for me personally, I’m respected in my job, I’m able to be myself, I work at Ara and I go around the institute and actually give talks to different departments and colleagues, staff, teachers, learners, students, everyone who wants to listen to me just around the trans experience and my experience and this kind of discussion around identity and the trans experience and it’s been so respected which has been fantastic. And I’m also a blossoming filmmaker and I’ve been funded from the New Zealand Film Commission to write and direct a short film around trans identity and they’re telling me to get on to making a feature now. Phew. |
| Emily | Paki paki.  |
| Raghii  | That’s amazing.  |
| Grae | Thank you, yeah, I never ever ever thought I would ever make anything of my life if I came out as trans and honestly it has been one of the best decisions of my life for myself, for my mental health. I wouldn’t change a thing, I’m so happy, I’m so at ease in myself these days. I feel like a full human.  |
| Raghii | Yeah that’s definitely a really good way to put it. Just being able to live and be out and go through that experience for yourself, not for anyone else. It’s a journey for yourself, you know, that decision is for yourself and it does change your world. Yes there are moments, as Emily mentioned, that are, you know, uncomfortable and there is discomfort, but there’s discomfort in life, you know, so it doesn’t matter what your journey is, there’s going to be discomfort around that and building up strength and resilience and I’m not saying that that discomfort, we should just accept it. You know, there’s discomfort and prejudice around minority groups that is unacceptable and that is changing but as a person who is a part of a lot of minority groups - I think I’m a part of, it’s between five and seven minority groups being mixed race, trans gender, ADHD, vegan, the list literally goes on - I’ve learned to accept what other people refer to as my blemishes as my greatest strengths and those traits of oneself can actually become extremely empowering. Yeah it’s just amazing, like what you mentioned, Grae, about thinking you’re going to come out and thinking that you’re going to have no life. I one hundred per cent resonate with that because I thought that. I had supressed myself so much before coming out that I couldn’t actually use my mind the way that I can now. I wasn’t that good at certain subjects in school, I was just good at… well what I felt was I was just good at drama, acting, because I felt like I was acting all the time.  |
| Grae | I was so good at drama and acting too, yeah.  |
| Raghii | And I didn’t think I had many options and when I came out I remember this moment - I think it was September 15th 2019 - and I had this like awakening moment in my mind and I was like what the heck is going on. But it was just the fact that I’d given myself the space to be. I previously thought I would never study at tertiary level because I just didn’t think I had the mind for it or the abilities, now I’m studying on a full scholarship, I have achieved things that I just never thought I would ever achieve. I equally, like you, am advocating for trans rights in Christchurch. You know, being able to stand up as a trans guy and yeah, just in the community, it’s absolutely amazing. Like yeah, the dysphoria is tricky but you go through dysphoria before you’ve transitioned. The euphoria of transitioning is what is the gift you know, that’s the gift.  |
| Grae | Gender euphoria is one of the greatest feelings I have ever experienced and I just recommended everybody to try it. Just find what give you so much joy to be who you are.  |
| Raghii | Yeah and do that thing, you know. Like sometimes I’m just going to out myself right here and now. Sometimes I am feeling myself and I’m just dancing in front of the mirror like singing a song looking at my biceps, you know, just absolutely flaunting it but it’s because why not, you know, why not let myself experience those moments of joy. This is the first time that I’m looking at myself going yes, like this is exactly how I feel on the inside and now I can see that on the outside and when you embrace that, no one can stop you.  |
| Grae | Yeah I think a big thing is like when you stop looking at the gender that everyone tells you that you are in the mirror and you start looking for the gender that you are.  |
| Raghii | Yeah exactly.  |
| Grae | Like that’s amazing.  |
| Raghii | Like you don’t need to meet society’s norms.  |
| Grae | No.  |
| Raghii | You know, you don’t need to be a typical girl or a typical guy like you can be your own version of what that is.  |
| Grae | Or non-binary.  |
| Raghii  | Or non-binary.  |
| Emily | Both. |
| Grae | Or both.  |
| Raghii | Exactly.  |
| Grae | Non-binary is not a third gender by the way, it is the other category. I just want to put that out there just because a lot of people think non-binary isn’t… you know, you’ve got male and female and non-binary. Whoa three categories, no.  |
| Emily | It’s no gender.  |
| Grae | Yeah well it’s no gender, it’s all the genders, it’s some gender.  |
| Raghii | Yeah it’s every experience is unique. Definitely for the listeners who are not out yet and who are nervous about coming out, there will be things that you’re going to have to face but there is a community out there, we want you to be a part of this community, come find us and you know, there are so many things to look forward to and your life will open up doors that you didn’t expect because you couldn’t see them before. So yeah, be brave, you can do it.  |
| Grae | Absolutely, I believe in you.  |
| Sally | What would you like to say, Emily, as we wind up?  |
| Emily | Like the people who aren’t trans, feel free to…well be nice, be accepting and put yourself out there and try to learn more about it. That’s all we really ask.  |
| Grae | When you’re in the closet, when you aren’t being your true self, it feels so daunting and so terrifying.  |
| Raghii | Yes, scary.  |
| Grae | It’s so hard to take that leap because it is something huge, it is a life-changing decision but it’s like jumping off a cliff and landing in this beautiful lagoon.  |
| Raghii | Exactly that feels like you’re jumping off a cliff to what you think is going to be the end of you but actually you’re cliff jumping into, like you said, just the most beautiful paradise. And it’s only once you land there that you know, like oh sweet and then you know again, it’s a spectrum. You’ll land there and then figure out what you want to do from there and you’ll probably change more and grow more and that’s okay.  |
| Grae | Being trans is beautiful.  |
| Sally | Thank you guys so much, I know that you were all quite confident coming in and sharing and talking but I really do want to thank you because I think it’s a big thing that you’re doing and I really hope that people who are listening to this appreciate as well, that it is a brave thing that you’ve done, not only to take that leap of faith at the start but to keep educating people around it as well. So thank you very much.  |
| Raghii | Thank you.  |
| Emily | Thank you.  |
| Raghii  | Thank you for having us.  |
| Emily | And thank you for listening.  |
| Raghii | Such an awesome experience.  |
| Grae  | Absolutely and I hope everyone has learnt a little bit here today and that it encourages us to learn more.  |
| Sally | Definitely, that’s the point isn’t it, you get a bit of a taster and then go and do some more research.  |
| Emily | Research is important, do it.  |
| Raghii | And if you’re looking for trans people to follow, follow us on Instagram, DM us.  |
| Grae | Oh yes, absolutely.  |
| Sally | And if we have enough time at the end, Grae, what song would you like to have played?  |
| Grae | I really love this trans fem artist, she’s actually just come out as well using trans fem she/her pronouns. Ezra Furman, I’d like to recommend a song called Trans Mantra. I just really dig it. |
|  | **MUSIC BY EZRA FURMAN – TRANS MANTRA** |