

# Gina Mather

By Yorick Smaal

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Gina Mather has been the president of the Australian Transgender Support Association (ATSA) for over 15 years. Her vociferous activism for social justice and equality has its roots in her work with Queensland Rail, which she joined in 1967. Gina quickly became entrenched in the union movement and soon afterwards became the secretary of the Australian Railways Union. During her time with the railways, Gina spent a considerable period of time in regional parts of Queensland, advocating for workers' rights. While her activities earned her the ire of the authorities — the police tapped her phone and the then premier, Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, threatened to remove her as secretary of the union — she persevered undeterred.

Gina 'came out' while living in Rockhampton in 1987 after watching a current affairs program featuring a transgender airline pilot. 'Of course there were no gays or lesbians in Rockhampton at that time,' she recalls ironically. In those early days, it was very difficult to see a psychiatrist and no one readily discussed, or knew much about, Gender Identity Disorder (GID).

Gina came to her current position at ATSA in 1992 and was also instrumental in forming the Brisbane Gender Clinic, which was established in December 1994. While many of the doctors Gina approached to help at the clinic literally slammed the door in her face, she somehow managed to bring together the necessary team of about 12 medical specialists, some of whom remain affiliated with the clinic to this day.

She has assisted many transgenders to change their names. Before the name change reforms of 2003, in which she was heavily involved, the process required an appearance in the Supreme Court, which for many was a nerve-racking experience. Gina was happy to provide assistance and support for the cost of a carton of beer — payment significantly cheaper than the alternative legal fees many could not afford. Today, name changes for post-operative transgenders can be dealt with through the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages. Gina has been a tireless campaigner and educator on GID, teaching induction courses, advising government departments and addressing university students. She is still actively involved in anti-discrimination cases.

## Acknowledgment

This piece is based on an interview conducted by Yorick Smaal with Gina Mather, 27 August 2007.



**Gina Mather**