

What's in a name

The Northfield Municipal ID had a promise; a campaign promise. It would work for all groups and communities in our city, including the transgender community.

The ID's started being implemented in June 2018 and people were excited about the cards being delivered to people. What very few know is that, during the design of the card itself, which maintained the goal of making it work for transgender community members, we failed. The conversations were scattered over time. It was conveyed to a group of us, transgender folks and allies, that the software did not allow for changes and that the card was going to go out into the world without really working for transgender people. We were told that all should be fine nonetheless.

All is not fine because the name that transgender people use is often not their legal name. It is also not their "preferred name." It is, simply, their name.

This is a core challenge for an ID card. The name on it is a representation of a person, an entryway into a world, an introduction. For transgender people whose names are different from the ones printed on their birth certificates and not yet legally changed, an ID card can become a burden, a trigger, a cause of despair and it can be dangerous. People who present as female do not want to carry a card with a male name and vice versa. This is why our Municipal ID card still doesn't work for transgender people. The offer right now is legal name and preferred name. For transgender community members having both names side by side will clearly not work.

Changing a name legally is a costly and lengthy process that young people are not, most often, able to do. Since the Municipal ID in Northfield allows for a third gender, it works for some people but not for transgender people. No matter how they represent their gender, the name issue has prevented them from accessing the card that was supposed to be equitable and welcoming of everybody.

Exploring solutions is difficult without compromising the goodness of the entire program and yet there are solutions to be found. The "dead" or official name could be listed as initials. Used names should not be listed as "preferred name" but simply just as "name." See the sample below. Using initials, although not perfect, would help tremendously.

Colleges and schools everywhere are moving to help their transgender students by allowing them to display in the schools documents, records, emails and IDs the name they use instead of their legal names. Our Municipal ID could do the same, and our school district should also do the same, as recommended by the Minnesota Department of Education in their Tool Kit for Transgender Students. Both St. Olaf and Carleton are already on that path to accommodate the name people use.

Here is how it could be:

