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ENTRY LEVEL

## Helping Youths Who Struggle With Identity

By [JENNIFER S. LEE](#)

Vidari DeGuzman was a New York City teenager searching for acceptance when he first came to the [Hetrick-Martin Institute](#), a service organization for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youths. Now 24 and with reassignment surgery behind him, he is a youth worker at the institute, located in the East Village.

**Making the connection:** The Hetrick-Martin Institute really changed my life, honestly. As a youth, I went there when I had nowhere else to go to. It was a place where they accepted me for who I was, and I always thought that if I had a chance to go back and help create a safe space for someone else, I would do so. When I was a youth there, the staff were like our mothers, our fathers. As a staff member now, I find that I take these kids home with me. I look at the young people as the reason I get up every morning.

**Giving back:** I'm an educational specialist, so I run the youth advisory board, which is the highest-tiered internship that we have. It's all about, in a sense, creating activists, so essentially youth learn to advocate for themselves and their self-identified communities.

**How do you self-identify?** I am a transmasculine individual. I am a transman. It means that I was born female, but the gender I identify with is male. It took me a couple of years to decide that I wanted to medically transition. So when I was 21, I started taking hormones. And just this past year I had my surgery, my gender reassignment surgery.

**The reaction at work:** When I came back, it was really great. The staff members who knew me before took it all in stride. They never gendered me incorrectly. A lot of the youth are floored by the fact that I'm trans. So that in itself is really good, because I feel like it shows them not to assume anyone's gender.

**And the folks?** My parents have been pretty great. My mom called me her son just a few months ago. My brother called me his little brother.

**A helping hand:** A lot of the youth we serve are homeless youth who have been kicked out of their home, low-income youth who come and get pantry services not only for themselves but for their little brother. Clothes — there is a washer and dryer. They can also get hot showers. They get a hot meal there every night. We have a full-time chef on board who cooks amazing meals.

**Long-term career goal:** I think that one day I'd actually like to be nurse.

**On coming from a Filipino family full of nurses:** I feel like growing up I had such a strong resistance to being a nurse because mostly everyone was a nurse in my family. It's really important to me to have more trans people and queer people in the medical field. I think in terms of when I had my surgeries, the nurses were amazing, but needed a little bit of coaching to deal with me as a patient. Having a trans nurse helping someone recover after surgery is important.

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