Kathy Noble (top), Krissy Johnson (bottom)

■ WOMEN

Special Ks

Two inspirational trans women from Queensland have been recognised in this year's International Women's Day celebrations. And as Andrew Blythe discovers, it's a recognition that's been a long time coming.

Krissy Johnson and Kathy Noble were 'stoked' to be included in the Queensland Government's *Everyday Women, Extraordinary Lives* tribute gallery established to celebrate the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day.

While these two are no strangers to certificates and accolades – Johnson jokes that "it saves on wallpaper!" – this commendation from the Minister for Women, Karen Struthers, included a lapel pin which they were told to 'wear with pride'.

Pride plays a big part in their lives because this is the first time, among any of the international celebrations, that a trans woman has been honoured in what is arguably the most well-known recognition of women's achievements.

What makes it all the more remarkable is that it has happened in Queensland, a state that can work itself into a lather over daylight saving and the extra fading the state's curtains might endure, and which until recently offered more rights for guide dogs than transgender people!

And it has happened twice over.

Noble grins about the changing attitude. "For me, it's the fact that someone has recognised us as women. It's a huge fillip for the trans community," Noble tells *Queensland Pride*.

That recognition has been a long time coming. Both women are well known for their advocacy work – Noble proudly lists on her unofficial resume "being a pain in the arse to government!" – and count decades of crusading between them.

Noble uses her influence as a Member of the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH), while Johnson is "part of the furniture" as Secretary of the Australian Transgender Support Association of Queensland (ATSAQ).

Johnson argues that it is her attitude that has allowed her to keep advocating for so long.

"I give it straight from the hip; I can't stand political correctness," adding that she is not afraid to tell dawdling government committees to "get some balls!"

She remains passionate about getting the word out to children and young people that support is available to help nurture their developing gender identities.

"Most kids do not get access to help until they come to the attention of the mental health services – and sometimes it is too late."

She acknowledges the support she received when transitioning, particularly from her Mum and Dad, but knows first-hand that without equal rights it is impossible to live a self-determined life.

> **"I hope this recognition flows on and benefits the rest of our community. I'm happy as a woman who likes gardening and classical music – my Dad always wanted a daughter, he'd be so proud!" – Kathy Noble**

Noble's passion is most evident in her dedication of thanks to all trans women, "to those who are repeatedly abused physically, sexually and mentally . . .who are denied their rights to change their documentation, or are incarcerated in prison . . . and those who suffer from all forms of frustration, depression and legal abuse".

However, she balances her momentary solemnity with an unerring gaze from sharp eyes that lean closer to me as the espresso machine we are seated next to threatens to drown out her story, reminding me that "we need compassion and empathy to understand our many problems".

"We are not complex. It is the system that creates the complexities."

It's hard to measure the legacy these women are still creating, let alone try and define them. I could joke about them being 'elders', or in Noble's case, a 'senior citizen', but I want to leave the interview in one piece!

I opt for the easy way out and ask: how do they define themselves?

Johnson's infectious laugh crackles with obvious glee. "I'm a woman and a transgender activist. I like a beer in the afternoon and the chance to sit down with *The Bold and the Beautiful*."

"I'm quite comfortable in my shoes. However, I'm still tickled pink to be nominated, let alone recognised!"

Noble agrees.

"I hope this recognition flows on and benefits the rest of our community. I'm happy as a woman who likes gardening and classical music", adding mischievously, "my Dad always wanted a daughter, he'd be so proud!"

And what do they want to do now they have their awards?

Johnson wants to get more doctors involved in transgender health – acknowledging the vast contribution already made by people like Dr Gail Bearman – as well as publicising the current anti-discrimination legislation so it lives up to what it was designed to do.

Noble wants to keep working with the wider community to raise awareness of transgender issues, and will shortly launch her memoir *Two Lives: A Transsexual's story and fight for recognition*. She cites the words of Winston Churchill, a fellow Sagittarian, as her great motivator: "Never give in – never, never, never, never, in nothing great or small, large or petty, never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense. Never yield to force; never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy".

To get in touch with either of these women for further information about their work, contact Krissy Johnson at trans.atsa@bigpond.com and Kathy Noble at www.changelingaspects.com.