



## LGBT Update March 2010

Hi Everybody,

It's another new month already and the weather forecasts that we're going to have the warmest weekend so far this year! Spring is definitely around the corner. WLEN is busy planning for the next six months and we think you will be very interested in what we are doing. First of all, we've been funded for the second year in a row through a grant from the GLBT Partnership Fund of Greater Worcester Community Foundation. This is wonderful news and gives us the opportunity to do more for aging LGBT seniors and caregivers.

The information we've received from all of you over the past year and a half has been eye opening to say the least. A few of the things we have learned are that you want to have social events; movies about important LGBT issues; meetings to learn about legal, health, education, and other pertinent information; to have a say in what happens in this country; and to be heard and understood. We have held 7 social events, 2 documentary movies, and created an LGBT Advisory Committee that has met bimonthly 3 times to address Social, Planning, Outreach, Marketing, Health Resources, and Training/Education interests; and have sent out 6 monthly Newsletters since last fall.

We are now looking at bringing information to the aging services community through an LGBT Conference. We do not have solid plans to share with you at this point but that will happen very soon. We will be calling a WLEN group meeting in the next month to ask for your input or feedback about what you would like providers to know about you as you age or, even more importantly, what they need to know about you. This will be an exciting opportunity for all of us! We need your support and interest now more than ever. For information about the next WLEN meeting or call Kathy or Ben @ ESWA 508-756-1545 (kmcgrath@eswa.org) (glabonte@eswa.org).

### Social Corner

Hello LGBT people of Worcester County,

We are continuing our Brunch-a-Month plan in March. Each month our brunch will take place somewhere in Worcester County and will have different themes, perhaps, but it will always be for LGBT adults. We're trying to form a social network for LGBTs where we can meet each other and share information about our lives and things of interest to us.

This month, we are not having a brunch so much as a lunch. It turns out that March 17th is St. Patrick's Day, giving us all something to celebrate; we're all Irish for the day. Wear something green for this one...



On Saturday March 13th, we will meet at O'Connor's (508 / 853-0789), an Irish Pub in Worcester, at 11:30 AM (note new time). I asked Brendan at O'Connor's what people do to celebrate St. Patrick's Day in Ireland - he said it might involve more drinking than eating.

Therefore, we will have a new wrinkle in our exchange program. So far we've brought re-gifts in January, Valentines in February, and in March, we can bring bottles of things to drink. These can be water, iced tea, soda, anything. We will have a period of putting out our bottles and then everyone will vote to pick the most interesting one. This time, however, the winners of the judging will take home all the bottles that we have brought. No bottles will be opened while we're at O'Connor's. And you don't have to bring anything to come and have fun.

To get to O'Connor's, come north on Route 12 (there's a bus that comes that way) until you come to

O'Connor's. If you're driving, get on Route I-190 and take exit 4, the West Boylston exit. O'Connor's is just to the right as you come off the exit.

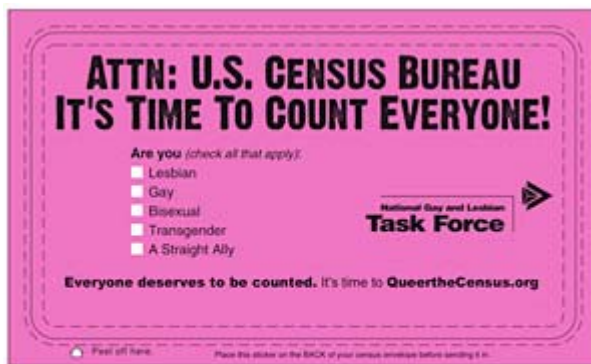
If you can't make this March get-together, please note the date of the April event. Saturday April 10th will be our PEPT\* Rally at Jumpin' Juice and Java. Stay tuned for more info coming at the beginning of April.

Marty Flint ([martygf@aol.com](mailto:martygf@aol.com))

\*PEPT = Post-Easter Pre-Taxes

## The 2010 U.S. Census

We will be receiving the 2010 US Census questionnaire in the next few months. This will afford LGBT Americans the opportunity to provide information on their same sex marriages. Same sex couples who identify as unmarried partners will continue to be counted as they have been since 1990. That was the year the census began collecting data on unmarried heterosexual couples living together. Same sex couples living together were able to make themselves known by checking the box for unmarried partners and then checking the box for their gender which revealed over 190,000 same sex couples living together in 1990 and over 600,000 in the 2000 census data. This information was not used by the government but it did open the door to statistical reports that revealed information about same sex couples such as being from every race, living in every state, and having lives that parallel those of heterosexual couples living together.



**SEAL YOUR CENSUS ENVELOPE WITH YOUR FREE QUEER THE CENSUS STICKER!**

This year's census will count same sex married couples separately from heterosexual married couples, has hired education and outreach specialists and organized volunteer committees to promote LGBT participation, and has created a study designed to test and refine methods for counting same sex relationships in the future. Unfortunately there is no way to identify LGBT individuals who are not in a partnered relationship. There aren't any questions about sexual orientation or gender identity on the census and so far there are no plans to include any in the next census in 2020. Transgender individuals can only be counted as the gender they identify with which leaves out a lot of important information. A gay man in a same sex marriage can be counted as a male

married to a male but if one of them should die before March 31st, which is the day before the census is counted, he will be counted as a single male and unable to be counted with same sex couples. His gay male identity would remain hidden from the census data. The same is true for lesbians in or out of committed, same household relationships. Bisexuals can be counted as a married or unmarried same sex or opposite sex couple in the same household but by doing this they are hidden completely.

It will take many years for specific LGBT questions to appear on the census questionnaire. There has to be a federal law generating a need for information in order to identify that any data be collected and we are far from that point right now. There are things we can do to begin the process, however, such as calling our Congressmen or women and also by attaching the pink sticker that you can get through [www.queerthecensus.org](http://www.queerthecensus.org) to the back of this year's U.S. Census. I have a few of these stickers left if you are interested and as usual you can reach me through my email: [kmcgrath@eswa.org](mailto:kmcgrath@eswa.org). Time to stand up and be counted!

## Relating to the Individual

*Ben Labonte, the WLEN peer worker at Elder Services of Worcester Area, has researched the care of LGBT elders. A series of excerpts from his report, "Principles of Care for LGBT Elders" continues.*

## Coming out

"Coming out" is the term that LGBT people use to describe the process of disclosing their sexuality or gender identity to other people. The full phrase is "coming out of the closet," the closet in this case being the place where they have locked away their deepest secrets. Coming out today is vastly different than coming out was for people who are elders now. When they came of age, homosexuality, bisexuality and transgenderism were considered both psychiatric disorders and morally wrong. Today there is an increasing acceptance, especially among younger generations, for LGBT people, including their identities and relationships, that didn't exist when current seniors were younger. Old habits are hard to shake. For those in their 60s, and especially for people over 70, being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender was something you didn't talk about openly. The people who needed to know, mostly partners and close friends, knew. Others didn't need to know. Seniors' decisions to preserve this reticence in their relationships with providers of aging services should be respected.

Besides this need for privacy that seniors sometimes feel about their sexual orientation and gender identity, the fact is that "coming out" is an extremely personal process. No one has the right to out someone except the person himself or herself. Coming out involves telling one's very personal story, which is nearly impossible to do if one does not feel safe and respected. When an LGBT senior honors someone by coming out, that act in itself does not confer permission to out her or him publicly.

Decades of fear and protecting this very intimate part of themselves from public scrutiny may keep older LGBT people from divulging their status. No one else has a right to force them "out." Nor, on the other hand, should anyone who has been out, even to a narrow group of people, be forced back into the closet because they are afraid they might be denied services because they are transgender, bisexual, lesbian or gay. Another thing that may make it difficult for someone to come out is internalized homophobia, a kind of self-censure or self-hatred that a person feels because he or she has been taught that homosexuality is wrong. Similar dynamics have affected bisexual and transgender people.

#### Action plans:

Review your agency's or organization's policies around privacy and confidentiality.

Emphasize with staff and volunteers the need to respect LGBT clients' right to tell their stories or withhold them depending on the circumstances.

### **Personalizing care**

Labeling people is never a good idea. If you need to know how a person identifies, ask the person respectfully. Open-ended questions are best. At intake or evaluation, for instance, it may sometimes be better to ask a woman who is wearing a gold band on her left ring-finger "Do you have a partner?" than to ask "What is your husband's name?" She may be widowed or divorced. She may have a common-law husband and wear the ring to deflect inquiries. She may be in a relationship with another woman. The question "Are you in a long-term relationship?" leaves room for a more nuanced response than "Are you married?" Marriage in the eyes of the state is a legal contract, and in Massachusetts does not always indicate a heterosexual couple. Relationships are personal and emotional commitments to another person and may say more about a person's life. Many elder LGBT people use the word "friend" as code for partner, so special attention should be given to the role of close friends in the care of a gay or transgender senior.

#### Action plan:

Review intake forms and procedures to determine whether a more open-ended approach to gathering personal information could improve the inclusion of all people, especially LGBT elders.

### **Fears**

Lesbians, gay men and bisexual and transgender individuals harbor many fears about growing old and needing services. Like their peers in the heterosexual population, they fear losing their personal independence and with it their sense of dignity. They worry about whether they have to remove things from their homes like pictures of partners or rainbow paraphernalia that indicate their LGBT status. Fear of discrimination creates stress, which in turn can affect a person's sense of well-being.[i] Like their elder peers, LGBT seniors fear having strangers enter their homes to deliver services. Because of traumatic experiences in their past, fear of violence or rejection may be a constant companion for some LGBT elders. Transgender people especially fear receiving personal care such as help with bathing and dressing when their bodies do not reflect the gender they project outwardly. Bisexual persons experience prejudice from both the straight and gay communities. As a result, bisexual elders "may be oppressed by or isolated from both gay and straight communities." [ii] The LGBT community is not immune from its own internal homophobia,

biphobia, and transphobia.

**Action plan:**

Provide advanced training in cultural competency for both professional and paraprofessional staff members. The training should address the fears of older persons in all segments of the LGBT community.

**Children**

Just because people are LGBT, don't presume that they don't have children. New alternatives for insemination have increased the opportunities for women not in traditional relationships to conceive and bear children. Men have the possibility of using surrogates to carry children that bear their genes. LGBT people have been approved for adoption, and many same-sex couples and single men and women have adopted domestically and abroad or fostered children from disrupted families. In many cases, LGBT people have provided safe, loving homes for unwanted children. Many of those children have severe special needs and were considered unadoptable until their LGBT parents took them in. [iii]

None of this was available when current LGBT elders were younger, but many of them do, in fact, have children from traditional marriages or relationships. Some LGBT parents have been rejected by their children, but others have been embraced upon coming out. Straight children of LGBT parents and LGBT children of straight parents can play important roles in their elderly parents' care. Just as LGBT elders should not be forced back into the closet to receive benefits, neither should LGBT children be marginalized when they assume caregivers' roles. The children's partners and friendship circle should be respected and considered as an integral part of the elder's support system.

**Action plans:**

Respect the LGBT elder's family and support network as you would a conventional family. Support LGBT caregivers through recognition of their role in the care of others and recognize their personal support networks.

**Next: HIV/AIDS and Older Americans**

[i] Massachusetts Department of Public Health. (2009) "The health of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) persons in Massachusetts: a survey of health issues comparing LGBT persons with their heterosexual and non-transgender counterparts" 22 Online at [http://www.mass.gov/Eeohhs2/docs/dph/commissioner/lgbt\\_health\\_report.pdf](http://www.mass.gov/Eeohhs2/docs/dph/commissioner/lgbt_health_report.pdf).

[ii] Keppel, BobBi. The challenges and rewards of life as an outspoken bisexual elder. (2002) OutWord 8:4 1,6. Online at [http://www.asaging.org/publications/dbase/CG/LGAIN8\\_4.Keppel.pdf](http://www.asaging.org/publications/dbase/CG/LGAIN8_4.Keppel.pdf).

[iii] An estimated 65,500 adopted children in the United States live with a gay or lesbian parent. Gay and lesbian parents are raising 4 percent of all adopted children in the U.S. <http://adoption.about.com/od/gaylesbian/f/gayparents.htm>



**National Technical Assistance Resource Center for LGBT Elders**

HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius recently announced an award totaling \$900,000 over three years to Services and Advocacy for GLBT Elders (SAGE) to establish the nation's first national resource center to assist communities across the country in their efforts to provide services and supports for older lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals.

SAGE is the nation's oldest and largest organization serving LGBT older adults. In creating the Resource Center, SAGE will forge a partnership with 10 organizations with expertise in a wide range of areas including mainstream aging, LGBT aging, culture change and competency and program evaluation. The Resource Center will engage, empower and support mainstream aging providers, LGBT providers and LGBT older adults to ensure that LGBT elders have the necessary

and culturally appropriate supports and services to successfully age in place.

The LGBT Aging Project, one of WLEN's sponsoring agencies, is among the 10 partners in the national effort. The LGBT Aging Project will contribute its expertise in LGBT cultural competency training for mainstream aging services and in LGBT caregiving to the Resource Center training and technical assistance materials. The Aging Project's Director, Lisa Krinsky, will also serve as part of the core training staff that will be deployed throughout the country.

The Resource Center has three mandates:

- \* Educate mainstream aging services organizations about the existence and special needs of LGBT elders;
- \* Sensitize LGBT organizations about the existence and special needs of older adults; and
- \* Educate LGBT individuals about the importance of planning ahead for future long-term care needs.

This project was funded in part by a grant from the GLBT Partnership Fund of Greater Worcester Community Foundation.

Kathy McGrath  
**Elder Services of Worcester**

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