

LGBT Update September 2010

Hi Everyone,

We hope you are enjoying some of these long, hot, summer days! WLEN has been spending the last month or two getting ready for Opening Doors, the LGBT Aging Conference that we are putting on in September. We have been looking into getting some of the people who are involved in aging services together to share information and learn about LGBT older adults and their needs. It made sense to create a conference where we could do this. It's also time for all of us to gather together once again like we did when we first formed WLEN. Watch for the email inviting you to the next "big" meeting sometime in October. So much work has been done in the past year and we would like to share the details with all of you. In the meantime we hope to see you at Pride, the Opening Doors Conference, or at one of our Socials. Details for each can be found in this newsletter.

LGBT Aging Conference

The Worcester LGBT Elder Network (WLEN) is hosting "Opening Doors: an LGBT Aging Conference" on September 15, 2010 from 12:30-4:30 at the Hoagland-Pincus Center in Shrewsbury, MA. This conference is for Social Workers, Nurses and Agencies, and Nursing Home Administrators to introduce the growing LGBT older adult population. The featured workshops include 'Gay in Adult Day', 'HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care in the Older LGBT Population in MA', 'Making a Mainstream Aging Services Provider LGBT Friendly', and 'Aging Transgender Patients and Barriers to Care'. Space is limited and on a first come/first served basis.

For details and registration information, [click here!](#)

You can reach Kathy McGrath at kmcgrath@eswa.org and Ben Labonte at glabonte@eswa.org for more information. We will be offering CEU's for SW's, RN's, and NH Administrators and have begun the application process to obtain them.

Calendar of Events

Sunday, September 5:

Monthly social for LGBT people over 50 at 86 Winter American Bistro, located at 65 Water Street, Worcester. Yes, we know that it's the Labor Day weekend. Those of us who got together in August looked at our calendars and realized that we had nothing to do that



Sunday, so we decided to keep the date on the first Sunday of the month. The owners of 86 Winter have graciously given WLEN use of their function room from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. so we can meet and socialize. Participants can order as much or as little as they want from the "86" menu. Go to their web site, <http://www.86winter.com/>, for directions and menu selections.

Wednesday, September 15:

WLEN is sponsoring "Opening Doors: An LGBT Aging Conference" from 12:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Hoagland-Pincus Conference Center, 222 Maple Avenue, Shrewsbury. The program is aimed at social workers, community nurses and long-term care administrators. Cost is \$30. CEUs will be offered. Attendance is limited to 125, on a first-come, first-served basis. For more information, email wlen@eswa.org, or call (508) 756-1545 and ask for Kathy McGrath or Ben Labonte.

Saturday, September 18:

Worcester Pride on Water Street, 12:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Come visit the WLEN table, sponsored by Elder Services of Worcester Area during the afternoon business expo. Show the world how proud you are to be an older members of the LGBT community.

Older Adults and Suicide

Much attention has been given lately to adolescent suicide rates, especially among LGBT youth, who are "four times as likely to attempt suicide as their heterosexual peers."^[i] Much less attention has been given to suicide among older adults. In 2005, 151 people over the age of 50 took their own lives in Massachusetts alone. Another 745 people in the same age group ended up in the hospital from attempted suicide.^[ii] "Elders account for one-fifth of all suicides but only 12% of the population. White males over age 85 are at the highest risk and complete suicide almost six times the national average. ... Elder suicide may be under-reported 40% or more."^[iii]

Research on the rate and causes of suicide specifically among LGBT seniors is sketchy or doesn't exist. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the rate of suicide among gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender seniors may be higher than among the general population.^[iv]

Anxiety and depression are among the chief causes of suicide and attempted suicide among older adults, according to Karen J. Calkins, a psychotherapist with Community Healthlink. Especially when there are no other serious mental health complications, anxiety and depression is eminently treatable, said Karen, who also consults at Elder Services of Worcester Area.

According to "Older Adults: Depression and Suicide Facts (Fact Sheet)," published online by the National Institute of Mental Health, the problem most older people experience initially is not major, clinical depression, but sub syndrome depression associated with the growing inability to function. This form of depression "is a widely under-recognized and undertreated medical illness. Studies show that older adults who die by suicide - up to 75 percent - visited a physician within a month before death." Many health professionals consider persistent depression "an acceptable response to other serious illnesses and the social and financial hardships that often accompany aging." To compound this dilemma, many older people share that belief.^[v]

In addition to the stressors experienced by all older Americans, LGBT elders carry

mental and emotional baggage all their own. They may have endured years of prejudice by a heterosexist society. Many of them have been rejected by their families of origin and live an isolated existence. Unlike straight elders, when LGBT people lose a life partner, there often are none of the rituals, such as funerals and family gatherings, to help ease the burden.

How can you recognize the signs of suicidal behavior? The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline lists these warning signs:

- Threatening to hurt or kill oneself or talking about wanting to hurt or kill oneself
- Looking for ways to kill oneself by seeking access to firearms, available pills, or other means
- Talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide when these actions are out of the ordinary for the person
- Feeling hopeless
- Feeling rage or uncontrolled anger or seeking revenge
- Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities - seemingly without thinking
- Feeling trapped - like there's no way out
- Increasing alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from friends, family, and society
- Feeling anxious, agitated, or unable to sleep or sleeping all the time
- Experiencing dramatic mood changes
- Seeing no reason for living or having no sense of purpose in life[vi]

Where can you turn when you are worried that you or someone you care for may be contemplating suicide? Samaritans of Boston runs several 24-hour suicide crisis hotlines. The toll-free number for adults is 877-875-HOPE (4673). In addition, the Framingham office of Samaritans, which covers the Worcester area, has a 24/7 hotline at 508-875-4500. The number for the hotline run by National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is 800-273-TALK (8255). Early intervention is the best road to preventing suicide.

[i] Adams, Celene. "A cry for help: GLBT suicide," San Diego CA: Gay and lesbian times (issue 1038): Nov. 15, 2007. Online at <http://www.gaylesbianimes.com/?id=10953>, Accessed Aug. 4, 2010.

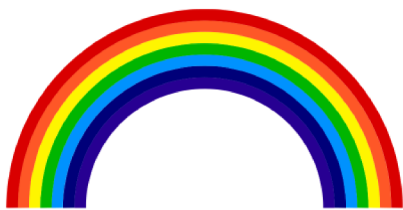
[ii] "Massachusetts suicide prevention fact sheet: suicides, 1999-2005," Suicide Prevention Resource Center, http://www.sprc.org/stateinformation/PDF/statedatasheets/ma_datasheet.pdf. Accessed Aug. 4, 2010.

[iii] Salvatore, Tony. "An elder suicide primer: an introduction to late life tragedy." The Suicide Paradigm. (<http://lifeguard.tripod.com/elder.html>) Accessed Aug. 4, 2010.

[iv] Adams, 5.

[v] National Institute of Mental Health. "Older adults: depression and suicide facts: fact sheet." <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/older-adults-depression-and-suicide-facts-fact-sheet/index.shtml>. Accessed Aug. 4, 2010.

[vi] <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/GetHelp/SuicideWarningSigns.aspx>. Accessed Aug. 4, 2010.



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