



LGBT Update February 2010

Hi Everyone,

I hope that January was a good month for you! Before we know it Spring will be here (Not that you could tell by the sub-zero weather outside today!). Right now, WLEN is busy working on ways to get our information out there to those who might not know about us yet. One of our three sponsor agencies, Central Massachusetts Agency on Aging (CMAA), has a web page with space for WLEN to create our own web page. It will be part of CMAA's host site which is under www.seniorconnection.org and it can be accessed through the menu located along the left side of each CMAA web page. We will continue to put our upcoming events on their Announcement page and a link will be placed on our web page to go to our calendar. Other links will be available on our page to sign up for WLEN's newsletter and to access various LGBT aging sites. We will be asking for feedback from you at some point so look for that link in the near future, too!

Social Corner

Brunch-a-Month!

A Valentine's Day Social! Saturday, February 13th @ Jumpin' Juice 'n' Java

Invitations will be sent out soon with all of the details for this event. For more information contact Marty Flint @ martygf@aol.com.



Can You Help?

WLEN has been having once a month brunch/socials for the past several months and we have mostly women showing up for them. Kudos to our loyal brunch/social crowd!!! We do get the occasional straggler from our other groups at one event or another but we aren't getting the amount of diversity we want to see at our socials. We would like to either open the socials up to include a more diverse group or offer other socials in the same vein for other LGBT interested people to come. What would entice you to come to a brunch or coffee hour or lunch? We could offer different kinds of food, a variety of themes, a choice of settings, but if no one shows up what else can we do?

Recently, The Men of Northampton held a social and over 150 guests (all men) showed up. Why aren't we able to do the same here in Worcester? It does seem as though Worcester struggles to get things off the ground for some reason. I can't make sense of it, can you? We have such a large group of LGBT people here, we have a very interested group according to the answers we've gotten to our many questions, and we have several places to hold the socials. What's missing? We would love to hear from you about all of this. You can email Kathy McGrath kmcgrath@eswa.org or Ben Labonte glabonte@eswa.org with questions, comments, ideas, or concerns. We are also including a short survey and we would greatly appreciate it if you could take the time to fill it out.



Worcester has so much that remains, for the most part, untapped by the aging LGBT population. We have arts, recreation, dining (both fine and fun), museums, hospitals (that are involved in ground breaking research), and many other "happenings" that are too good to ignore. So why drive 45+ miles in any direction to find peers with the same interests when you could easily find them here? Through the past 10, 20, or more years there have been many attempts to create LGBT communities in this area but they kept fizzling out. What went wrong? Can we change things here? People say they are ready

to meet in this area but...where are they?

We have had wonderful WLEN meetings with anywhere from 10 to 25 participants in the past year. Most of our crowd is from the "before 60" side and is very interested in planning for the future. This is awesome and we are very pleased with the turnout. How do we entice the "60-plus" side into coming to a meeting? What can we say or do to get them there? That's one of our goals for this year, to get in touch with 60+ LGBT seniors. Any ideas? Do you have any friends, family, neighbors, etc who are LGBT's over 60? Let's make this a unified effort. Help us to spread the word about WLEN so that together we can play a part in making LGBT senior's lives more connected.

Survey

Please [click here](#) to take a brief survey

"Barriers to Service"

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.

Discrimination

LGBT elders have experienced more discrimination and exclusion in their lifetimes than younger members of the community, not only because they have lived longer, but because discrimination was more virulent in their youth than it is now. Older gays have lost jobs, suffered harassment, and experienced violence in their lives. Transgender people continue to be murdered at a rate of more than one a month simply for being transgender.[i]

The root causes of discrimination against gay men and lesbians are homophobia and heterosexism. Homophobia is the fear or hatred of anything involving homosexual behavior or relationships. It can express itself in physical violence and verbal abuse or smoldering hostility. Heterosexism is more subtle. It is the belief that heterosexuality is normative and that any deviation from heterosexual behavior is inferior. Heterosexism carries with it a heavy component of privilege that sees heterosexual advantages in society as justified.[ii] Ageism, the rampant discrimination against older people in both LGBT culture and the wider society, also takes its toll on seniors. For these reasons, many older LGBT people are hesitant, or even afraid, to reveal their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.

Action plan:

Examine your agency's culture for evidence of overt or implied homophobia or heterosexism and set policy goals to eliminate discrimination against LGBT elders.

Gender roles

The way society recreates gender roles from generation to generation has evolved over centuries. Young men who grew their hair long in the 1960s disturbed their seniors who saw long hair as a mark of femininity. In the 19th century a woman wearing trousers was considered scandalous. Today we chuckle at such narrow views of masculinity and femininity, while failing to recognize how rigidly we ourselves continue to define gendered behavior. Gay men, lesbians, bisexual and transgender people are united by the single fact that they all defy gender roles: the "LGB" part of the community by whom they love or are attracted to, the "T" portion by how they perceive their own gender in relationship to their biological sex at birth.

What may be easy to accept intellectually may be difficult to live with. Effeminate men and masculine women defy gender norms and may ruffle the complacency of more conventional folks with whom they live or socialize. Such external displays of gender behavior may or may not indicate a person's internal sexual orientation or gender identity. In the same way, being gay or transgender is not limited to people who break visible gender stereotypes. Many gay men look and act as most people expect men to look and act. Feminine lesbians are as common as butch (masculine-looking or -acting) lesbians. Some transsexuals "pass" as their self-identified gender, and some don't pass as well. Many transgender people defy the binary gender system itself and position themselves between the two extremes or outside the continuum altogether. None of these external signs confer sexual orientation or gender identity. The ultimate arbiter of a person's sexual orientation or gender identity is the person herself or himself.

Action plan:

Practitioners should examine their preconceptions about how gender is embodied and how relationships are formed with an eye to substituting a more open-ended and welcoming attitude when approaching clients who may be lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

Stereotypes

Stereotypes of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people abound, just as they do for ethnic groups and other subcultures. The way a person dresses or acts often follows cultural gender norms. Those who deviate from those stereotypical norms deserve as much support and respect as social service providers can muster. It cannot be stated too forcefully that this respect requires that there is no place in social service agencies or long-term care facilities for gay bashing or slurs against a person's perceived gender identity or its expression. While some younger members of the GLBT community have reclaimed the word "queer," older people often find the word demeaning and threatening. Other words like "faggot," "dyke" and "tranny" should be prohibited from staff speech and strongly discouraged in the speech of other elders, whether at a communal meal site, a senior center or a long-term facility. Words are important, and they can be very hurtful. Homophobic, bi-phobic or trans-phobic remarks or attitudes make an agency unwelcoming to the LGBT community. Hate speech of any kind should not be tolerated.

Action plan:

Reinforce your agency's policy against hate speech or acts through formal and informal training. Add specific mentions of sexual orientation and gender identity or expression to your non-discrimination policies in mission statements and plans of service. Advertise these documents publicly so that staff and clients are clear about the institution's intentions.

Next month: Relating to the individual

[i] <http://www.transgenderdor.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/transgender-death-statistics-2009.doc>

[ii] Soulforce, a religious- and civil-rights organization, defines heterosexism as "the presumption that others are heterosexual and that opposite sex attractions and relationships are preferable and superior to those of the same sex. Heterosexism has been encoded into nearly every major social, religious, cultural, and economic institution in our society and it leads directly to discrimination and the harmful efforts by some health care providers and religious groups to change or repress the sexual orientation of those under their care." At <http://www.soulforce.org/anti-heterosexism-conference>.

What's New?

WLEN's Advisory Committee's are still working on their individual specialty areas.

The Social Committee is chaired by Marty Flint who has done an amazing job setting up at least one social each month. In January there was a "Re-gifting and Yankee Swap Social" held on Saturday 1/16/10 @ 10:30 am at Jumpin' Juice 'n' Java. About 13 people went to this event and everyone states that they had a great time. Marty's socials are all a lot of fun! There will be another one on 2/13/10 to celebrate Valentine's Day. Look for the invitations in the next week or so!

The Resource Committee is chaired by Mike West and assisted by Peggy Kocoras for those times when Mike is unable to come. Peggy was at the Advisory Committee Meeting this past Tuesday afternoon. Mike is busy polling people about what they would like to see on a questionnaire for providers looking to be put into the Resource Guide. Peggy has been gathering other forms of resource such as periodicals, web addresses, books, etc. for people to access.

The Training Committee is chaired by AJ Leto who has 4 or 5 people working on this committee. AJ is looking at training opportunities for current issues such as legal, medical, and other professional needs that arise for LGBT seniors and their supports. Kathy and Ben are also working with the Training Committee to develop an LGBT Training for Aging Service Providers as well as Transgender Training to offer to the same local providers.

The Outreach and Marketing Committee is being co-chaired by Kathy McGrath and Ben Labonte. A web page for WLEN is in the process of being created and will be hosted through www.seniorconnections.org, Central Massachusetts Agency on Aging's website. We're hoping to see it up and running in the near future. Also, look for WLEN's upcoming events on the senior

connections announcement page. Other possibilities we are looking into joining are Facebook, Blogger, and other social networking sites. We will still continue producing WLEN's monthly newsletter. We'll keep you informed as things progress.

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

[Join Our Mailing List!](#)

[Forward email](#)

✉ **SafeUnsubscribe®**

This email was sent to agrigorov@eswa.org by kmcgrath@eswa.org.
[Update Profile/Email Address](#) | Instant removal with [SafeUnsubscribe™](#) | [Privacy Policy](#).

Email Marketing by



Elder Services of Worcester | 411 Chandler Street | Worcester | MA | 01602