



Seniors' Resources

by Teresa Theophano

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Aging can be a challenging enough experience for mainstream populations, but older members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community face the additional difficulty of locating culturally competent services.

Fortunately, as the aging population has grown, more organizations have emerged that are dedicated to providing much-needed services and information, along with socialization and activism opportunities, to glbtq senior citizens. These groups can help provide a sense of safety and empowerment for sexual minority elders--something not always present in mainstream seniors' organizations.

SAGE

The largest and best known of glbtq senior organizations is Services and Advocacy for GLBT Elders (SAGE, formerly the acronym for Senior Action in a Gay Environment). Since 1977, SAGE has addressed the needs of glbtq older adults in all five boroughs of New York City through its drop-in center in the West Village and a comprehensive array of services and activities.

These services and activities include educational and recreational events, case management and counseling, HIV prevention outreach, lesbian-specific projects, advocacy for glbtq seniors in long-term care facilities, supportive housing initiative efforts, and sensitivity training. SAGE partners with other New York City agencies to provide services to people in the Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn, and Staten Island.

But SAGE's work is not limited to New York City. SAGE-Net, an international network of affiliates who share a common mission, was founded by SAGE to share information and services worldwide. SAGE-Net affiliates are located in several states throughout the U.S., including Florida, Nebraska, upstate New York, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin, as well as in Canada and Germany.

Informational and Online Resources

Several organizations, such as the Gay and Lesbian Association of Retiring Persons, Inc. (GLARP), provide informational and educational resources for glbtq elders. GLARP, a non-profit based in Los Angeles, is dedicated to developing and operating glbtq-friendly retirement communities and to promote education about aging. Some of the retirement communities GLARP lists on its website, such as Palms of Manasota in Sarasota, Florida; RainbowVisions in Santa Fe, New Mexico; and The Resort on Carefree Boulevard in Fort Myers, Florida have been in operation for several years, and further developments are planned in other cities, including Boston, San Francisco, and Los Angeles.

In addition to its development work, GLARP also seeks to enhance the aging experience of glbtq people via education on senior issues relevant to the queer community.

Based in New York City and closely aligned with SAGE, Pride Senior Network is another non-profit serving

glbtq elders. PSN is an advocacy and educational organization, established in 1995. It publishes a quarterly newspaper for the older glbtq community as well as a comprehensive online directory of queer and queer-friendly service providers. It also coordinates training and advocacy efforts.

Though geared toward professionals in the field of aging, the Lesbian and Gay Aging Issues Network (LGAIN) can provide useful information to elders themselves too. LGAIN is a constituency group of the American Society on Aging, a membership association of professionals. LGAIN membership facilitates access to web resources, including a member directory, a regularly published newsletter on glbtq aging, networking opportunities, and conferences.

The Transgender Aging Network (TAN) is a critical resource for older members of the trans community, along with their allies. As a part of For Ourselves: Reworking Gender Expression (FORGE), a national support, advocacy, and educational organization, TAN promotes awareness of trans aging issues, advocates for policy changes, and helps transgender elders and their allies exchange ideas and information via an online support group. It has issued numerous publications and offers occasional training sessions and workshops.

Political and Advocacy Groups

Several groups for glbtq elders are centered around activism and hands-on advocacy. For example, the Aging Initiative, a project of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, advocates for and with seniors on the state and federal level, and strives to raise consciousness about aging within both mainstream society and glbtq communities.

In 2000, NGLTF issued a public policy report entitled *Outing Age: Public Policy Issues Affecting Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Elders*, and in cooperation with LGAIN, it has worked to compile research on glbtq elders. The Aging Initiative is also involved in training and networking activities, as well as publishing and distributing information about this population.

Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC) is a national organization for lesbians aged sixty and up. Its regional chapters meet to explore opportunities for older lesbians to work together in the fight against ageism, and its steering committee meets semi-annually to assist both old and new chapters. OLOC conducts workshops, publishes a quarterly newsletter, distributes its own educational handbook on confronting ageism, and holds semi-regular national gatherings.

Legal advocacy is crucial for glbtq seniors, and programs such as The National Center for Lesbian Rights' Elder Law Project provide free legal clinics and forums for glbtq elders, along with educational presentations and publications. The Elder Law Project also works to assess the needs of glbtq older people, advocates for anti-discrimination measures, and collaborates with other community and mainstream elder service providers.

Although Lambda Legal Defense, Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders, and the National Lesbian and Gay Law Association do not have specific elder law programs in place, all can be of help with glbtq seniors' legal issues. In 2000, Lambda Legal, in collaboration with SAGE, published a particularly salient guide entitled "When You're Gay and Gray: Planning Ahead and Fighting Discrimination." It stresses the importance of legal provisions such as powers of attorney, health care proxies, and living wills for older glbtq adults.

Social services and Socialization

Social groups such as Prime Timers, an international organization intended for "mature" gay and bisexual men and those who admire them, provide much-needed networking and socialization opportunities for older glbtq adults. With a total of over fifty chapters meeting throughout North America, Europe, and Australia, Prime Timers is probably the most visible organization of this kind.

Another group, Golden Threads, issues a quarterly contact publication that serves as an international pen-pal network for lesbians. Though it is open to women of all ages, it was specifically founded to allay the isolation that lesbians over the age of fifty may experience. Golden Threads also hosts an annual celebration in Provincetown, Massachusetts each summer, featuring several days of entertainment, music, and other social activities.

Numerous local organizations provide similar social activities and networking. These include Griot Circle in Brooklyn; Lavender Seniors of the East Bay in San Leandro, California; Gay and Lesbian Elders Active in Minnesota (GLEAM) in Minneapolis; Rainbow Train in Seattle; the Gray Pride Interagency Task Force on Gay and Lesbian Aging in Cleveland; and many more.

These are, of course, only a sampling of the organizations available for glbtq elders. In addition, some organizations serving the general population of seniors have also integrated glbtq-specific programs into their menu of services. As the older population continues to expand, programs directed at glbtq seniors will likely continue to proliferate.

Bibliography

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SAGE web site: www.sageusa.org.

About the Author

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