This issue: AGM roundup, Right to Belong update, PrideFEST GRAI style, interfaith breakfast, latest research, conference updates and much more.
Letter from the Chair

What a huge year this has been for GRAI! We started by celebrating our tenth anniversary at Loton Park in February, and reflecting with some pride at how much has changed in the intervening decade to raise the visibility and rights of LGBTI elders. The law reform of 2012-13 and subsequent training has rendered the aged care sector quite unrecognisable from our early research in 2010, when so many survey respondents said ‘We don’t have any of those people here’!

2015 has been defined by a solid calendar of social and educational events: our training project, ‘Right To Belong’, powered on, bringing the LGBTI inclusivity message to aged care providers with 18 more full-day workshops in Perth and country regions. We also spoke at numerous conferences and other fora to raise the issue of LGBTI elders to wider audiences. Reports on the Health in Difference and Val’s Cafe conferences appear later in this newsletter (see page 8 and 10).

Working in our community is always rewarding – organising events to help strengthen our community connections is as critical as it is fun – and this year our small group of volunteer board members and others worked exceptionally hard, bringing you a memorable evening at UWA with former Australian Chief Justice, Michael Kirby; a workshop, Planning for your Future, with the Office of the Public Advocate; and an impressive engagement with PrideFEST (see page 16). Lesbians Who Lunch has enjoyed a successful debut year, meeting monthly at different cafes or picnic spots, enjoying the company and seeing our networks expand. In November over fifty older women gathered to watch the documentary, The Love Part of This – (see report page 16).

GRAI has also maintained our working relationship with the Federal Government through involvement in the Working Group guiding the implementation of the National LGBTI Ageing and Aged Care Strategy. Changes in government meant that this working group was reconvened this year under the auspices of the Department of Social Services and has recently returned to the Department of Health. I have attended three meetings, two in Canberra and one via video link, keeping Western Australian needs on the map and also advocating for a focus on LGBTI-inclusive palliative care services.

Finally, an important milestone in GRAI’s history was our move into our new office in Southcare’s premises in May 2015, and having use of the Southcare hall for community activities has been an added boon. In addition to training workshops and meetings, the hall has been used to celebrate our office warming, and a couple of special events with Lesbians who Lunch, including meeting with author Mag Merrilees and our recent film screening. Remember, we remain open to your suggestions about other events/activities you may like to hold here. Huge thanks, as always, to Southcare CEO, Nicky Howe and the Southcare team for supporting our work.

I wish you all a very fine festive season and, although it’s is traditional to wish you all a New Year filled with new and exciting adventures, I would add a wish to see the fruits of our past efforts ripen and long held dreams become achievable.

See you in 2016!

June Lowe, Chair
Right to Belong Training Program - Update

The West Australian arm of this important national training program aimed at increasing LGBTI inclusive practice in the Australian aged care sector is being rolled out by GRAI. By the end of November 2015 we have delivered a total of 31 sessions with a further 10 confirmed bookings. At the present time, we have only 3 sessions left to offer under the current funding round, and we expect these will be delivered by the end of May 2016. So if your organisation would like to access the last of these free, day-long sessions, act soon and contact training@grai.org.au

At this stage although the LGBTI Health Alliance is endeavouring to see funding extended for this project the Government is yet to make its decision.

Training sessions have been conducted with a wide range of aged care service providers in residential care. This has included to some of the big players such as Baptistcare down to some of the smaller players such as the RSL. We have also delivered sessions in regional areas including Northam, York, Kellerberrin and Busselton. Our recent visit to Busselton provided an opportunity to do some media work which resulted in a good story in the Busselton-Dunsborough Times. The sessions continue to evaluate well with participants learning more about LGBTI issues and starting to think about what needs to change in their own organisations.

Delivering LGBTI inclusivity training has been an exciting journey for trainers and participants alike. Participants often start the morning wondering what we are going to talk about all day, but often end up saying things like “It was a real eye opener”, “I had no idea”, and expressing strong commitments to put into practice what they have learned. It is also a learning process for trainers, as almost every session offers ‘training gold’ in terms of personal stories shared. So thanks to everyone who has been involved, including members of our trusty Project Management Group.

One of our trainers, Genevieve Major and her partner are having a baby in January, and we wish them well for this exciting adventure. We will miss Genevieve’s professional and engaging training style and we look forward to welcoming her back when she is ready.

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Interdenominational Breakfast with Rev Olivia MacLeod (Baptcare Vic): Resolutions, Faith, LGBTI people and inclusive aged care

By Jude Comfort

In early October a unique breakfast session was held targeting particularly service providers from faith based organisations. Approximately 35 people had the opportunity to hear Reverend Olivia MacLeod who discussed what Baptcare Victoria had achieved by adopting an LGBTI policy. Reverend MacLeod is the Manager Mission Development at Baptcare Victoria and it was her initiative working with a policy group that drove the work. While it was not all plain sailing and Rev MacLeod had to do some behind the scenes work to bring management along, the result is a well written document that supports the policy: ‘Aged Care for All’ Series 2015 - Safe, inclusive and person-centred care for LGBTI seniors. Ann Zubrick, member of the Project Management Group for Right to Belong, facilitated this event. A full copy of the policy document is found at: http://www.baptcare.org.au/advocacy/Advocacy/Documents/BaptcareLGBTISeniors_WEB.pdf

LGBTI Inclusivity reaps rewards

In August 2015, Victorian aged care provider Lifeview Residential Care, received top recognition by Leading Age Services (LASA) as Victoria Large Provider of the Year. Key factors for winning this accolade were Lifeview’s partnership with Alzheimer’s Australia and also their industry leading LGBTI inclusion and development program. (More details, see page 8 Health in Difference report).

Meanwhile, in Western Australia, Hall & Priory Tuohy Aged Care and Nursing Home in Midland received a 2015 Better Practice Award in the Special Needs category for their work in supporting a transgender resident. In receiving the award, Tuohy acknowledged their training with GRAI as having been helpful in giving guidance, and the management and staff quickly identified pathways to support her psycho-social health, creating a supportive and inclusive environment within the home and negotiating protective strategies with her family. (more details Val's Cafe, 2nd National LGBTI Ageing and Aged Care Conference, page 11).
First Rainbow Ticks for LGBTI inclusivity in aged care

Two Eastern states aged care providers have this month been formally accredited Rainbow Tick status: Hepburn Health Service country Victoria, + Uniting Care NSW/ACT.

Brian Dunn, Manager of Health Promoting Service at Hepburn Health, said, ‘Although LGBTI consumers have the same right to access safe and high quality services as everyone else, not all service providers are able to understand or respond well to the needs of the LGBTI community.

‘A major part of the accreditation process was the provision of specialist training and education for our staff along with updating our standards and procedures including admission processes,’ he explained.

Jules Sappho is a former theatre nurse and a member of the Hepburn Health LGBTI Advisory Committee who experienced prejudice within a healthcare setting based on her sexual orientation.

‘Achieving Rainbow Tick speaks volumes to the clients, staff, visitors and the community as a whole. It clearly states that Hepburn Health values diversity and welcomes everyone. When I see the Pride flag stickers on the front door, I feel safe to be open about who I am and my family life,’ says Ms Sappho.

‘Having the Rainbow Tick will encourage LGBTI seniors to seek healthcare at Hepburn Health with the confidence that they can be open and honest. It will encourage connection – between their loved ones and staff, and perhaps ease the transition into full-time care.’

Achieving Rainbow Tick status is not easy: it is a gold-standard process that may take a couple of years. It demonstrates a great deal of commitment to LGBTI inclusivity, a serious approach to training all staff and management, re-evaluating policies and procedures, establishing links with the wider LGBTI community and building an environment which can confidently claim to be culturally safe and welcoming for LGBTI clients, family members and staff.

GRAI congratulates Hepburn Health and Uniting Care NSW/ACT on achieving Rainbow Tick status and looks forward to the first providers in Western Australia to join their ranks!

Tokyo Wards Issue Inaugural Partnership Certificates for same-sex-couples

By Leonie Stickland

On 5 November, 2015, two Japanese Lesbian activists, Hiroko Masuhara and Koyuki Higashi, became the first same-sex couple in Japan to be granted a partnership certificate from the metropolitan Tokyo ward where they reside. Since then, a number of other couples have followed suit. Two inner Tokyo wards, Shibuya and Shinjuku, had passed ordinances in March this year to allow the issue of such certificates, available to same-sex couples living together, but their actual issue began on 5 November.

The municipal recognition is mainly symbolic in that does not equate to legal marriage, although Higashi and Masuhara themselves had made international news when they held Tokyo Disney Resort’s first same-sex wedding ceremony and reception on 1 March, 2013. That year, the pair also co-published two books, one a pictorial narrative: Lesbian Married Life, and another springing from their hopes to have children together: To You, From Your Two Mums. Higashi and Masuhara have also opened an office in Tokyo, ‘Trois Couleurs,’ to coordinate activism which includes speaking engagements, corporate training, seminars and an online salon (Trois Couleurs 2015). GRAI Board member Leonie Stickland attended an impressive public talk entitled ‘I wonder what LGBT means?’ given by Higashi in Tokyo in July 2015.

According to a CNN report, to be eligible for the new certification, couples must be aged at least twenty, be citizens of the municipality concerned, and ‘fill out a notarized document promising to protect each other and live together with trust and love’ (Ripley 2015). As in other countries around the world, same-sex couples in Japan often have problems being acknowledged as full partners in such matters as hospital visits and decision-making when one partner is ill, or renting accommodation together; and although the partnership certificate is not legally binding, it does represent ‘significant administrative support for sexual minorities struggling to preserve their identity’ (Asahi Shimbun 2015).

In spite of these heartening steps, few other Japanese authorities have been wholly supportive of the measures. When the Tokyo ordinances were proposed, strong opposition was voiced by Japan’s conservative ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), led by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The party’s view reportedly was that such a move would ‘undermine the foundations of society’ (BBC 2015). Similarly, in June this year, when the city council in Takarazuka—a largely residential city near Osaka with just under 233,900 people which enjoys close ties to Melville in Western Australia—was considering a policy aimed at supporting sexual minorities, a 44-year-old male councillor made critical statements in Question Time,
including one ostensibly from at least one citizen:
‘In the case where an ordinance [supporting LGBT] were established by Takarazuka City, what would we do if lots of homosexuals gathered [here], and it became a centre for HIV infection?’ Upon objections from other council members, he withdrew this mention of HIV, with an apology to the effect that his words ‘could have given the erroneous impression that there is a close connection between homosexuals and HIV’ (Kobe Shimbun 2015). Part of the councillor’s statement was formally deleted from the council record as of the following council meeting on 29 June.

In early September, the female President of the council, Kayoko Ishikura, published a petition demanding a formal apology be made by the councillor concerned at the September session of the Takarazuka City Council, as well as calling for the council to ‘engage positively in self-enlightenment in order to deepen [its] understanding in regard to the issues of people infected with HIV and of sexual minorities’ (Ishikura 2015). It was subsequently announced on 30 November that Takarazuka City would aim to launch a system of officially recognising same-sex couples living in the municipality as ‘partners’ from next June. The city will then be the first example of such partnership certification outside Tokyo when it comes into operation.

Misguided and discriminatory opinions as those of the LDP and the Takarazuka councillor need to be remediated by education, outreach and advocacy, and so GRAI applauds the work of Masuhara and Higashi (herself a graduate of a world-renowned musical theatre company based in Takarazuka), and those enlightened members of local governments such as Mayor Nakagawa who are beginning to champion LGBTI rights.

References:


Trois Couleurs, 2015. Available at http://www.3couleurs.co.jp/#/english/c1081.

Right to Belong – Mark II

Next year we are expanding our training program to deliver a five-session model, aimed to support organisational change and ensure LGBTI inclusivity is securely embedded in service providers’ policies and practices. The first series will be delivered under the auspices of Richmond Wellbeing. For expressions of interest in the series following, please go to the GRAI website http://www.grai.org.au/training or for further information contact June Lowe chair@grai.org.au

Right to Belong training group at recent Busselton Baptistcare training. Trainer Jude Comfort top right. You guessed it, yes the day before Melbourne Cup
Health in Difference Conference, Canberra 13 – 15 July 2015

Report June Lowe - Chair of GRAI

If conferences resonate with the wider political and social worlds outside their workshop walls, then you generally have a recipe for success. Certainly the context for Health in Difference 2015 was perfect in this regard. With equal marriage being the hot topic of Canberra debate that week, many HiD conference delegates arrived through a rainbow-lit airport, and the collective impact of some 300 LGBTI activists made its mark in an already receptive Canberra city.

From this promising foundation the conference launched with enthusiasm and goodwill. The depth of topics and talent were testimony to the maturity of LGBTI research and activism in Australia and to have four full program streams scheduled for three days was a fine achievement for the organisers.

Despite many interesting offerings in other rooms, GRAI loyalties had me sticking close to the LGBTI Ageing and Aged Care stream. The high quality and variety of presentations was impressive, showcasing latest research, along with inspiring collaborative projects between the LGBTI community and the aged care sector.

Dr Catherine Barrett (La Trobe University) gave a thought-provoking presentation exploring the two versions of life-stories often exposed in research interviews. Typically, opening conversation were quite positive, ‘tip of the iceberg’ interpretations, whereas what followed, the ‘thick narrative’, often revealed quite serious forms of homophobic abuse. Catherine’s analysis explored this apparent disconnect between what people say and their lived experiences. Seemingly disjunctive, the narrative gap actually points to an important survival strategy for older LGBTI people, their need for a minimisation of their harmful experiences and the imperative not to make waves.

Looking ahead, we heard a timely warning from Liam Leonard (La Trobe University) to move beyond the ‘stigmatised identity’ of LGBTI elders in our work of awareness raising, to promote positive values for older LGBTI people so that their needs will still be met when the discrimination narrative becomes less applicable. (This fits well with a positive ageing agenda: combating the twin spectres of ageism and homophobia challenges us to sell older LGBTI fabulousness more creatively).

Both Catherine and Liam noted the pressure on older LGBT people not to cause offence, which potentially restricts expression of gender identity or sexual orientation, leading to a compartmentalising of public and private ways of being. Coupled with historical experiences of discrimination, this element heightens the imperative for service providers to embrace the onus of responsibility in taking an affirmative stance to achieve LGBTI inclusivity.

Attending Health in Difference was a very motivating experience. It was particularly encouraging to hear of the achievements of several aged care providers who have dedicated serious attention towards LGBTI inclusivity within their organisations.

Robin Burton, from the ACH Group in South Australia, described their 3-year project ‘Free To Be’ which started in 2103. A classic thermometer measures their progress on in-house staff training: to date, over half of their 1,200 staff have received training, funded by an ACSIHAG Grant (they aim for 100%). Other milestones include an LGBTI champions program to provide support and advice on LGBTI topics to other staff; and a policy for managing homophobic residents with a step by step management process. They also have produced a suite of resources including a celebrative diversity brochure as part of the welcome pack given to new residents and an information pack for staff inductions, including a pocket-size inclusive language guide. Community collaboration has been critical to the development of LGBTI cultural understandings within the ACH Group, and the service now feels confident to engage with the community in the 2015 Feast Festival (Adelaide’s equivalent of Pride).

Helen Povall of Lifeview, Melbourne, also identified community engagement as a key element in their inclusivity journey. They began with a Diversity Plan and used peer support and community networking as core strategies, working with residents and volunteers to develop
a reference group to guide their activities, which include monthly discussions on LGBTI diversity and cultural safety. Lifeview’s four facilities this year celebrated IDAHOT Day (International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia) with a range of creative activities. Residents painted rainbows and made hand prints with personal pledges, decorated cup cakes with rainbows, while others watched the film, The Birdcage.

Celebrating diversity also pays dividends beyond the intrinsic benefits of creating safe spaces valuing all involved: this year Lifeview received a Victorian State award for excellence as 2015/2016 Large Provider of the Year, in part for their LGBTI inclusion initiatives. Ultimately, Lifeview plan to take their commitment to a whole new level, with plans on the drawing board to build an LGBTI facility in Prahran, Melbourne. (Featured in GRAI Matters, Spring 2015).

Four years ago, UnitingCare Ageing NSW embarked on a journey of LGBTI inclusivity, working with ACON’s ‘Pride in Diversity’ workplace program. Steve Teulan, Director of UnitingCare Ageing, and Vicki Coumbe of ACON spoke about this large-scale collaboration, in which, so far, 800 staff members have completed a one-day training program.

UnitingCare’s progress has been measured using the Australian Workplace Equity Index (AWEI), an annual survey which benchmarks LGBTI workplaces: UnitingCare has moved from an AWEI score of zero in 2001 to a remarkable 120 in 2015. In May this year, UnitingCare was recognised by ACON as one of Australia’s ‘Top 20’ employers for LGBTI people.

As UnitingCare Ageing is the single largest provider of aged care services in New South Wales and the ACT, their leadership in providing a welcoming place for LGBTI clients, staff and families exerts a strong influence in the aged care industry in Australia. Their journey is also a great showcase for the benefits of collaboration between the aged care sector and the LGBTI NGO sector and community.

The importance of community partnerships was a theme that ran through the conference’s Aged Care and Ageing stream. Presentations on Palliative Care, Community Visitors Scheme, and Carers all underscored the importance of close working relationships to build trust, understanding and ongoing motivation to break down pervasive hetero-normative organisational cultures.

Sustainable social change

Such cooperative ventures have been the hallmark of the LGBTI inclusivity agenda in ageing and the aged care environment, with significant gains having been made in a few short years. The enthusiasm and the spirit of generosity behind these many projects bodes well for a future where LGBTI elders don’t feel a need to retreat to the closet, but are visible, welcomed and free to be their whole selves, wherever they are.

In Australia, we have done exceptionally well at integrating research on older LGBTI people with on-the-ground programs – and in gaining political traction, translating this into policy reforms for the rights and wellbeing for this cohort. However, social change is uneven and fickle, and to achieve permanent attitudinal shifts will require sustained effort and interest. Building on our community/aged care ‘coalitions of concern’ will be essential to maintain the motivation and momentum to keep this movement alive.

Congratulations to the National LGBTI Health Alliance on a very successful conference, and its ongoing role in advancing these essential relationships.

La Trobe University’s Department of Sexuality and Ageing – aka Val’s Café – hosted this important conference in Melbourne following from its inaugural, highly successful conference last year. This is an unusual conference in that it cleaves to the philosophy of ‘nothing about us without us’ and has demonstrated the incredible power of hearing older LGBTI people speak for themselves.

It is a moving experience to hear first-hand stories of severe deprivations of liberty and see the human heart in action as these amazing elders shared their capacity for resilience and determination to lead rich lives despite the overwhelming odds of a whole society pitched against them.

This conference achieved its laudable aims of representation, with 36% of speakers being LGBTI elders, all of whom left an indelible impression on their audience. It is impossible to do justice to these narratives (you had to be there) but following are a few highlights.

Noel Tovey, born in 1934, is now celebrated in the arts world as an acclaimed dancer, choreographer and artistic director of the indigenous welcoming ceremony of the Sydney 2000 Olympics. However, growing up in the ‘slums of Carlton’, poverty, deprivation and abuse marked his early life, and he learned to live on his wits and theatrical imagination. As a seventeen-year-old he was convicted of ‘the abominable crime of buggery’ and jailed in Melbourne’s Pentridge prison. In addition to the sentence, his name was widely slandered in the media, so that former friends and family feared associating with him on his release. Fortunately he was able to acquire a passport in a different name (Tovey) and escaped to England where he worked in classical dance and theatre, his considerable talent overcoming racial discrimination. Noel tells his life story with grace and humour and we were honoured to hear him tell it. Setting the scene for the conference, he said he would ‘never have thought I would see the day’ when a group like this would celebrate our community. This was an oft repeated sentiment over the next two days.

Ted Setnikar was born in Slovenia in 1948. He tells the compelling story of his mother, killed by a lightning strike and his father selling him into servitude when he was just 4 years old. A childhood of cruelty ensued and he finally ran away, aged ten, initially living in the forest. Several turns of better fortune finally led 17 year-old Ted to migrate Australia. In Australia, he found to his surprise that being gay was illegal. ‘Things were politically very bad in Slovenia at that time’ he said, ‘but at least no-one cared if you were gay’. It was recommended he visit a psychologist, who asked if he had a problem with being gay. ‘No’ he replied. ‘Then what do you want me to do?’ the doctor asked. Ted responded, ‘Can you cure the Australians?’

Two lesbian couples presented their stories of living with dementia. Anne Tudor and Edie Mayhew introduced a beautiful film, made with Catherine Barrett, Edie, One Day In The Life of a Lesbian With Younger Onset Dementia. Edie was 59 when diagnosed with Alzheimer’s dementia in 2010. She and her partner of 30 years Anne are active advocates and educators, aiming to improve services and understanding for people with early onset dementia and their carers. A similar commitment to improving the lives of others is embodied in the work of Lynda Henderson and Veda Meneghetti who make numerous presentations to conferences, workshops and community fora. Lynda presented Veda’s story, including film clips of Veda in her earlier life as a singer/songwriter. Despite her powers of speech now being seriously impaired, Veda rocked the audience, joyously miming and dancing along with her music. Her last composition, ‘Don’t Call’ was written by Veda in 2010 shortly after her diagnosis. A song of
acceptance and resignation, you can hear it on:
https://www.facebook.com/
YoungOnsetDementiaSupportGroup/
posts/915096988571750

Western Australia

There were three offerings from Western Australia, Geoff Davies, myself and Jayne Cummings from Tuohy. Geoff Davies spoke on the importance of constructed families, roundly challenging the image of a lonely older gay man. Geoff told his life story of living and teaching in Hong Kong and adopting the son of his housekeeper, a form of adoption by a benefactor that was not uncommon in Chinese families at this time. A dedicated teacher of Chinese language in Australia (for which he was awarded the Order of Australia) Geoff now enjoys an extended Chinese family of children and grandchildren as well as rich exchanges with an expansive network of others whom he has mentored over the years.

Special thanks to Greens’ Senator Rachel Siewert for generously sponsoring Geoff’s attendance at this conference.

GRAI Chair, June Lowe’s presentation, ‘Collaborating your socks off’, was a light hearted view on the serious topic of the necessity for collaboration to sustain long term interest in LGBTI inclusivity. She says she has witnessed ‘premature complacency’ in organisations whose self-image is of inclusivity, but in fact have actually made very few changes. She fears that ‘collective social amnesia’ will set in once equal marriage is achieved and the perception that there is ‘no longer a problem’ could inhibit future advances. June sees collaborative partnerships with researchers, NGO networks, law makers, aged care sector and community groups as an insurance policy against closing political doors, giving us flexibility in approach as well as keeping us inspired to maintain the social change movement.

Jayne Cummings from Tuohy Nursing Home in Midland presented an important case study of a resident admitted into their home as a male, who began asking to be addressed with a female name and to wear women’s clothing. Despite opposition from the resident’s family, Jayne insisted that being ‘client centred’ meant addressing the resident’s needs, not those of her family. Tuohy took a gradual step by step approach, following the resident’s lead. Requests to present as a woman increased in frequency, and the staff facilitated this with a full length mirror, clothing and wigs. A male friend in the facility was the first co-resident to be introduced to her in her new presentation and, after gaining his support, she was introduced to the other residents as a woman, with no apparent adverse reactions. The most striking aspect of this story is the radical improvement in the well-being of the resident, who is now a much more confident, happier person. After several months, and following some mediation and education, the family is also slowly becoming reconciled to the change.

Val’s Café: Launching Operation LOLA

For anyone interested in LGBTI elders’ issues, the Val’s Café website is always well worth a visit. New resources include:

* Operation LOLA – Linking Older LGBTI people and their Allies is an exciting research project recently launched by Val’s Café in conjunction with COTA.
* LGBTI Carers and the Carers of LGBTI older people Report (with Carers Australia)
* Aged Care How2 Report
* "We are still gay", a narrative resource exploring the experiences and needs of LGBT Australians with dementia (with Alzheimer’s Australia)

These and other valuable resources can be found on: http://www.valscafe.org.au/
Dr Catherine Barrett – onwards and upwards

Dr Catherine Barrett, founder of Val’s Cafe and dynamic leader of this great research team, is leaving La Trobe University at the end of this year. Catherine’s work has had a huge influence on the lives of older LGBTI people as she has pursued the cause of raising their visibility and understanding of their needs. Ever creative, generous and fun to work with, Catherine has been a great mentor and support for us at GRAI and we not only wish her well in her new endeavours, but also look forward to working with her on other exciting projects in the future!

The Aged Care Complaints Commissioner

By Jude Comfort

Board Member Jude Comfort represented GRAI at a recent meeting with the new Aged Care Complaints Commissioner, Rae Lamb, who outlined changes to her role that will take place from 1 January 2016. This follows changes as announced in the 2015 budget which will result in an independent Aged Care Complaints Commissioner to deal with complaints about the care and services provided to people receiving Australian Government subsidised aged care.

At the core of the change is to separate complaints handling from the Department of Social Service’s policy and funding roles. It will also increase the independence of handling complaints as the Commissioner is an independent statutory office holder. She is appointed by the Minister and independent of the Department and will be titled the Aged Care Complaints Commissioner.

These changes follow recommendations made in the 2009 Walton Review, and the Productivity Commission’s 2011 Report ‘Caring for Older Australians’. It is hoped they will contribute to older Australians having more confidence in a complaints mechanism. It is a fundamental right of older Australians to feel safe and receive care appropriate to their needs when receiving aged care. A more robust complaints mechanism is one strategy to help achieve this. In 2013-14, there were 11,803 contacts with the Aged Care Complaints Scheme.

The Commissioner said changes would result in:

- National consistency of complaints handling
- Greater visibility of complaints handling process
- Flexibility in the handling and resolution of complaints
- Greater transparency e.g. through having to produce a dedicated annual report
- Provision for an education function i.e. to be proactive and direct this under part of quality improvement.

Policy and compliance functions will remain with the Department of Social Services while accreditation will remain with the Australian Aged Care Quality Agency.

Dr Comfort raised the issue of the unique needs of LGBTI elders and a request to ensure that evaluation and data collection was able to report on this group. The Commissioner will be back in Perth in 2016 and GRAI offered time to meet with her.

For more detail: http://www.agedcarecommissioner.gov.au/about/commissioner/

Living Proud’s Group Inclusivity Project

Living Proud (formerly GLCS) recently initiated a Group Inclusivity Project. This project builds on the recommendations of previous research, ‘Safe Space Scoping Project in WA’, and aims to increase the inclusivity and accessibility of LGBTI community groups and services and to increase their capacity to be resilient, diverse and successful.

The Group Inclusivity Project will go through three stages: initial consultation with groups and wider community members; feedback and further consultation with groups and then provision of direct support. In December, the project will be launching its initial ‘perceptions survey’. You are warmly invited to take part in this survey, the link is www.surveymonkey.com/r/inclusivegroups

For further information about this Project, or how Living Proud could partner with and assist your organisation, contact Lorna Graham-Geraghty, on 08 9420 7202, or training@livingproud.org.au
Annual General Meeting – reflecting on a big year for GRAI

Boldly advertised as ‘not boring’, GRAI’s AGM on the 31 October 2015 lived up to its promise and moved briskly through the necessary business at hand. For the first time in GRAI’s history, nominations for Board members exceeded the number of positions available, and ballot papers were distributed.

The GRAI Board is now composed of the following members – re-elected in 2015: June Lowe, Sue McLeod, Brett Tizard and Conrad Liveris, joining those members who were not up for re-election this year, Wendy Bennett, David Nicholson, Helen Makeham and Jude Comfort. Subsequent to the AGM, the Board accepted the nominations of Jay Shaw and Leonie Stickland as Community Representatives.

About 20 GRAI members attended the AGM which was held at Southcare. This was a time to reflect on the previous 12 months as well as attend to some standard business items such as the Treasurer’s report and the election of new board members. Chair June Lowe gave a comprehensive report on the many and varied achievements of GRAI over the preceding 12 months. Highlights from her report include:

Gaining a dedicated GRAI office - This Financial Year saw GRAI move into our new office co-located with Southcare Manning. This is a hugely significant step forward for us, and we warmly thank Southcare their generosity and for making us so welcome.

‘Right to Belong’ - GRAI is responsible for delivering the WA component of the national LGBTI awareness training in the aged care sector. This began in May 2014 and is a major focus of our activities which continues to attract very positive evaluations and results.

Val’s Cafe (La Trobe University) - In January 2014, GRAI signed an MOU with Val’s Cafe (part of the Sexual Health and Ageing Program at La Trobe University) to audit their training program, the Aged Care How2. We aim to deliver the same program in Western Australia in 2016.

Participation in the First National LGBTI Ageing and Aged Care Conference; 28 – 29 November 2014, three Board members (June Lowe, Jude Comfort and Wendy Bennett) also attended, organised by Val’s Cafe, with both June and Jude delivering papers to the conference. GRAI was also a collaborative partner in organising the Second National LGBTI Ageing and Aged Care Conference (Melbourne, Sept 2015).

Education and Awareness Raising activities - GRAI enjoyed many great networking events and continues to build relationships with organisations and individuals in many areas. Our work has featured collaborations with Advocare, The Women’s Council, Alzheimer’s Australia and Val’s Café, and we have received support from LASA, Southcare and UWA. Highlights include two trips to WA by Dr Catherine Barrett (in July/August and September 2014) and an extraordinary evening at UWA with renowned former High Court Judge, The Hon Michael Kirby, in March 2015. These events attracted excellent media attention and provided valuable opportunities for awareness-raising about issues facing older LGBTI people. There were also many more formal and informal education opportunities over the year.

Social events – supporting the older LGBTI community – This is a growing area of work of GRAI and included events for Catherine Barrett and Justice Michael Kirby (see above). Lesbians Who Lunch – a GRAI initiative started in November 2014 that has gone from strength to strength. We also held a 10th Anniversary Celebration, an office warming, and engaged with PrideFEST and Fairday.

Newsletter and social media – the GRAI newsletter and Facebook presence provides a valuable resource for both our members and to raise LGBTI aged care issues with the broader community.

Good governance including financial management (books audited, more robust accounting system set up)

We invite you to look at our Annual Report (coming to the website soon), we think you will be impressed. However, this level of activity will be difficult to sustain on a largely pro bono basis, and we will be concentrating on gaining a more sustainable financial footing in the year ahead. We are particularly glad to welcome GRAI Treasurer Sue MacLeod, who, with her background in corporate finance, brings a whole new skill-set to our team.

Lastly, and importantly, AGMs are also a social opportunity for members to meet and play an important role in our organisation. So thank you to our members who showed their support and gave their most welcome input: and, as usual, we enjoyed each others’ company!
Community Guardianship Program turns ten
By Helen Makeham

The Community Guardianship Program was established by the Office of the Public Advocate in 2005, and has just celebrated its tenth anniversary.

This program is run by the Office of the Public Advocate, and volunteers are first matched with an adult with a decision-making disability, starting friendships which can lead to the volunteer being formally appointed as guardian for the person. This means that they may make lifestyle, health care and accommodation decisions on behalf of someone who cannot make these decisions for themselves.

Public Advocate Pauline Bagdonavicius says that volunteer community guardians are justifiably proud of their valuable contribution to the community. “Community guardians join the program because they have a genuine commitment to protecting and promoting the rights of adults with a decision-making disability. Many of the volunteers have worked in one of the helping professions in the health, aged care or disability sectors. Comprehensive training and ongoing support is provided, and when the volunteers get together for a social event or a training session they experience a great sense of camaraderie,” Pauline said.

If you are interested in finding out more about the Community Guardianship Program, or in becoming a volunteer, please see the website www.publicadvocate.wa.gov.au

Free Service Available for Seniors
By Wendy Bennett

Many delights await you in your retirement years. From fun, fitness, and recreation to being pampered and living the life you have always dreamed of. Whilst we gracefully age, we become older and frailer and doing everyday chores such as cleaning and mowing the lawn become more difficult.

Needing a little help is common for older people to continue living independently at home and Home and Community Care is here to help you. Support workers take on the responsibility of looking after you and maintaining your home, leaving you more time to do the things you enjoy.

However, the standard of service you receive may not be what you were expecting. Perhaps a support worker is never on time, scheduled visits are cancelled without notice or you are receiving a different support worker each time. If you need help to resolve these issue or have made a complaint and not had the outcome you wanted, Advocare can assist.

Advocare is a not for profit organisation providing free, professional advocacy services for older people who would like to access services, have an issue with the services they are receiving, or need any extra support to stay independent at home. Advocates will inform you of your rights, listen to your concerns and help you to find a resolution.

Call Advocare for a confidential free chat on 08 9479 7566 or visit the website www.advocare.org.au
Gay in the Goldfields: Embracing age and acceptance

24 September, 2015 ABC

Jane Waterton is a Leonora-based author of new book. It's set in a lesbian-only retirement community and she hopes her fiction might one day become a reality.

Although she lives in the small town of Leonora, Jane will have her first book published in November by German based Ylva Publishing. It's called, *Times of Our Lives*, and is set in an exclusively lesbian retirement community.

"It's about three couples in a place called OWL's Haven, OWL's in an acronym for older, wiser, lesbians," explains Jane.

About 16 years ago Jane says she and her partner Pip were at a birthday lunch. As the drinks started to flow, so too did the ideas, characters and storylines that would become the foundations for her book.

"We started talking about getting old in the lesbian community and the fact that there are very few, or at that time I don't think there were any lesbian retirement homes, and wouldn't it be wonderful if we all ended up in one."

"As we drank more the stories became more outlandish about having scooter races and all the mischief that we could get up to," she says.

"It's just about how these women interact; it's about the joy in growing older, it's about friendship, it's about love, it's about never being too old to fall in love, never being too old to have fun and never being too old to take a chance." says Jane.

"I think sometimes society sees women in their 70s and 80s, and think they've had their life, and what this book is saying is, they've had part of their life, but they haven't had all of their life.

"There's still a lot of life in a lot of people and this is book that celebrates that,"

Finding acceptance and challenging the stereotype of regional Australia

The small town of Leonora in the northern goldfields of Western Australia is probably not where you'd expect to find a lesbian author, but it's where Jane and Pip have called home for almost eight years.

"One of the reasons we were cautious about moving into Leonora was that we didn't know how were going to be accepted.

"We have been embraced with open arms; we don't hide it, we were very clear that from the minute we arrived that we were a couple; nobody battered an eyelid.

"One of the things I love about Leonora and about the Goldfields is that, everybody's here for a reason; everybody here has a story. Jane says that in contrast to a city like Canberra, where she lived previously. In Leonora there isn't a focus on who are you, what are your political affiliations, where have you come from.

"It's just acceptance, it's acceptance at face value and it's one of the things about this region that I love."

*Adapted from:* [http://www.abc.net.au/local/photos/2015/09/24/4319041.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/local/photos/2015/09/24/4319041.htm)

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*Leonora based author of Times of our Lives taking a moment to herself in historic town of Gwalia. (Audience Submitted: Colleen O'Reilly)*
GRAI shines in PrideFEST events

November was a crazy-busy month for GRAI’s PrideFEST team, comprised of some GRAI Board members and some community members, and also in a fruitful collaboration with Prime Timers – thanks guys – who pulled together GRAI’s involvement in the Community Breakfast (7 November); Film night (10 November); Sundowner (20 November); and an awesome float in the Pride Parade (21 November). And as if this wasn’t enough exhaustion, we also presented the screening of The Love Part of This (28 November)!

Film night – this was a one-off opportunity to see the extraordinary CABARET on the big screen. The Back Lot Studios did full justice to this classy classic of the early 70s – fabulous routines set to a backdrop of menace (in 1931 the rising threat of Nazi-ism) – it really captures the human need to party hard in the face of madness. Liza Minnelli as Sally Bowles, star of Berlin’s Kit Kat Club and the Emcee, Joel Grey, give powerful and entrancing performances – made even more memorable on the top quality screen. Our only regret: that more people didn’t see it with us!

Sundowner – what’s not to like about a sunset at the Urban Orchard with old friends and new, wine, canapés by our famous caterer, Ros Mansfield, and great entertainment by Perth artist Axe Addison? Axe wooed us with her own brand of cool, and then, following our Cabaret theme, drag artist Manuoa amazed us with the hottest impersonation of both Joel Grey and Liza Minnelli that you are ever likely to encounter! Serious thanks to our artists, generous sponsors University of WA and Toni Tamburri (Devine Cellars), and also to all our supporters, who in addition to having a great time, helped make this a fundraising success.

Pride Parade – Following the Pride theme, ‘Silver City’, GRAI member Susanne Schoen (Hadlow) modeled a Perth skyline (with artistic license) which framed our revelers on the silver-festooned truck. A further twenty or so GRAI/Prime Timers dance-mob followed behind, continuing our Cabaret style, costumed in silver sequin waistcoats and top-hats. Costume-making and float building are extremely labour-intensive exercises, and warmest appreciation to all who were involved – too numerous to mention – and special thanks to LASA (Leading Aged Services Australia) who sponsored our float.

The Love Part of This – With a great turnout, over 50 older lesbians gathered at the Southcare hall for this special screening of Lya Guerra’s documentary, The Love Part of This, a deeply sensitive account of a long relationship between two women which left no-one unmoved. Portrayals of older lesbian lives are rare and precious, and although these are American women, their story clearly resonated with our Perth audience. Then there was ample time and space for important catch-ups – and, as women came well-armed with afternoon tea provisions, the treat-laden trestle tables also needed some serious attention.

The Love Part of This

This beautiful documentary tells the story of two Graces. In the early 1970s, Grace Schrafft and Grace Moceri were young wives and mothers. Their lives were turned upside down when they unexpectedly fell in love. Compelled by these feelings, they left behind their husbands and society’s expectations, with two infant children in tow.

Grace and Grace made a life together for almost 40 years, and were married in 2004. During filming, life takes an unexpected turn that changes everything. The Love Part of This is a heartbreaking, funny and extremely moving document of life and love in our times.

Our film afternoon was a very successful event, which again demonstrates the important place that GRAI has in providing appropriate social gatherings for older lesbians.

For more on this movie: http://www.thelovepartofthis.com/ or https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gYZlzl81vDl
Thank you to our sponsors and partners for our PrideFEST events.
My First Pride Parade with GRAI

By Sue McLeod

The first time my children attended the Pride Parade with me was in 2005. It was still held in October back then, and as I recall it was a chilly evening with light drizzle. We parked near the Cultural Centre and watched from the corner of James and William Streets. There were some spectacular drag queens that year, a favourite with all three of us.

We had two spare seats in my car so I asked my kids to invite a friend each to come with us, and I had expected that we might be oversubscribed. Not to be - the thing that stays with me about that night was Georgia’s outrage that none of her friends were 'allowed' to come with us, not because it was 8pm at night, nor because it was in Northbridge, but because it was pro-gay. I was very proud of my then 10 and 12 year old children vehemently criticising the narrow mindedness of people who were so anti Pride.

Roll forward 10 years and there we were, side by side, all dressed up and ready to rock our way through Northbridge as part of the GRAI float. Along the way we went to more Pride Parades, made more and more friends from interesting and alternative places, and the desire to participate in the Parade grew a little every year. After having a wonderful time at last year’s GRAI Sundowner I was inspired to get involved. Since then I have become the treasurer (and I actually really enjoy this), helped to organise this year’s Sundowner, sewed costumes, attended two sparkling events at Parliament House, and generally had a very busy but wonderful November.

So “We’re off!” came the call at 8 o’clock on Parade night. At that point it all became a bit surreal (was this really happening??? Yes it was!). And off we went - walking, dancing, laughing, waving, smiling, at the amazing crowd, and best of all doing the VIP wiggle with a wonderful bunch of truly inspiring people. Thank you GRAI!

*Photo: Sue in full swing during the parade. She choreographed the GRAI contingent!*
New research papers

The following new research papers have been added to the GRAI website:

Mark Hughes, ‘Loneliness and social support among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people aged 50 and over’, Ageing and Society, FirstView Article, August 2015, pp 1 - 21, DOI: 10.1017/S0144686X1500080X, Published online: 16 July 2015.

This article examines the experience of loneliness and social support among LGBTI people aged 50 and over, living in New South Wales, and explores their interest in accessing social and health-promoting activities. The activities that were most preferred among all respondents were fitness groups, walking groups, swimming and meditation. The findings indicate scope for local organisations to develop targeted initiatives based on those indicated as most preferred in this study.


This article reports on older lesbians and bisexual women’s access to publicly funded home care in Ontario, following Canadian health reforms which have effectively moved much care provision from institutions to private homes and communities. Analysis in this study shows that older lesbians and bisexual women experience barriers to accessing needed care and have a lack of additional supports with which to supplement publicly funded home care. This study demonstrates how chronic illness and sexual minority status can further exacerbate the consequences of rationing public care.

Sue Westwood, ‘We see it as being heterosexualised, being put into a care home’: gender, sexuality and housing/care preferences among older LGB individuals in the UK’, Health and Social Care in the Community (2015).

This paper reports on the lack of choice in ‘sheltered housing’ [UK term for supported housing] and residential/nursing care provision for older LGB people in the UK. It analyses responses from interviews with 60 older LGB people, focusing on their concerns about mainstream accommodation and care. Key concerns raised were lack of visibility, risky visibility, unequal openness and compulsory co-occupation of care spaces. A greater proportion of older LGB women expressed a wish for gender- and/or sexuality-specific care provision compared with men. Westwood considers the social policy and human rights implications of these findings.

Steven Piatczanyn, ”We Were in a Partnership That Wasn't Recognised by Anyone Else”: Examining the Effects of Male Gay Partner Bereavement, Masculinity, and Identity’, Men and Masculinities 1-25, 2015.

Older widowers are faced with two competing challenges that impact on their identity. They are expected to grieve in a socially acceptable manner, while at the same time conform to hegemonic masculine identity. This paper looks at whether gay widowers face the same challenges and whether there are additional challenges as gay men, following the loss of their partners. It concludes that gay men need to negotiate complex intersections of grieving, masculinity and being gay. As a grievingwidower, they are responding both to the expectations of the gay community and also to those of the wider social context.

And for some special listening . . .

Aged care Insite, Podcast 29 September, 2015. GRAI Chair, June Lowe spoke on the need for specific actions by the aged care sector to achieve LGBTI inclusivity. To hear this podcast, visit http://www.agedcareinsite.com.au/2015/09/aged-care-not-supporting-lgbti-seniors-baptcare/
GRAI was established in 2005 in response to fears within the LGBTI community that, as they grew older, they would have to ‘return to the closet’ if they required services from mainstream care providers.

GRAI works to improve the quality of life for older LGBTI people, focusing on both social inclusion within the community, and also the provision of care services. We aim to create a safe and inclusive mature-age environment for all people of diverse sexualities and gender identities.

GRAI works with government agencies, with the aged care sector and in the community to provide visibility and a voice for LGBTI elders.

- Through research and advocacy we have already achieved law reform to outlaw discrimination of older LGBTI people.
- We deliver training to the aged care sector to achieve responsive and welcoming aged care services.
- We hold community events to build better community supports and friendships within the LGBTI community.

We network nationally and internationally with groups and individuals interested in issues of LGBTI ageing, and welcome collaborative partnerships and new members.

We are a member-based organisation and the support of our members is vital to our work. To find out more about the organisation and how to join, visit our website [www.grai.org.au](http://www.grai.org.au)

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**Contact Us**

Do you have any news that we should share? Contact the Editor:

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