



GRAI MATTERS

July 2010

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**GRAI AGM IS ON
TUESDAY 17
AUGUST 6.00
WHY NOT
NOMINATE FOR A
BOARD
POSITION??**

Welcome

Welcome to the July issue of our GRAI newsletter. Our biggest news is that we are ready to launch the findings of our one year Lotterywest social research grant investigating the attitudes and practices of aged care providers towards LGBT residents. With the fantastic work of our project officer Rita Freijah we are now the point of releasing the final report, best practice guidelines and a comprehensive literature review. These will all be available on our website www.grai.org.au from July 12. So please take a look or better still, come to the launch! (see next page for details).

GRAI operates as a member based organisation with an elected board. Our 2010 AGM is scheduled for Tuesday 17 August and will be held at the Freedom Centre in Brisbane Street starting at 6.00pm with refreshments. All members are urged to attend - the AGM is always an opportunity for a pleasant get together as well as the business of the meeting. We are also seeking a couple more board members as we have several of our members retiring. Please do not be shy about self nominating or giving me a call to discuss what is involved (0422 654244). A warm welcome awaits you from the existing board.

One of our retiring board members will be Virginia Hailes who was a community representative on behalf of the Alzheimer's Association WA. Virginia brought a great input to the board and especially was active in getting GLBTI issues on the agenda of Alzheimer's Australia in WA. Alzheimer's Australia also supported the board by providing us with a meeting place and we thank them for that. We also welcome a new board member, Brett Tizard.


We have recently done a new print run of our GRAI brochure and if any member would like some to put out at their work place, or share with friends etc, please email us (infor@grai.com) and we will get some in the mail for you

Wearing our advocacy hat, GRAI made a submission to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee for its inquiry into planning options and services for people ageing with a disability. Thanks to board member June Lowe for work on this.

As always, your board is here to listen to your suggestions and remember, GRAI is your organisation - so get involved!

*Jude Comfort
Chair*

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You're invited!

GRAI (Gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans and intersex Retirement Association Inc.) is delighted to invite you to the launch of the report 'We don't have any of those people here: Retirement accommodation and aged care issues for non-heterosexual populations' and best practice guidelines 'Accommodating older gay, bisexual, trans and intersex people'. To be launched by Ambassador for Ageing Noeline Brown, and hosted by Verity James.

Monday 12 July 2010, 5.30 - 7pm

Kingia Care Centre
5 Allen Court, Bentley, WA 6102
(map on reverse)

RSVP to Rita Freijah by 2 July 2010
 ritamon@iient.net.au
 Phone 0404 678 673

Research Launch!!

After several years of planning and hard work to obtain funding from Lotterywest followed by a year of actual research including an industry survey, a comprehensive literature review and the development of best practice guidelines, the launch date has been set for 12 July. We hope you can join us to help celebrate the completion of this important project. An email invitation was sent to all GRAI members, however, just in case you did not get this or you need a reminder, the invitation is included above. We have been very fortunate to secure the services of Noelene Brown who will launch the research findings. Noelene Brown is the first Australian Ambassador for Ageing but she probably better known for her acting credentials. Refreshments will be served and it should be a good night to catch up with other GRAI members and the research team. Please RSVP to Rita Freijah ritamon@iient.net.au

Pennies from heaven (Hypothetically... if we had \$50,000 annually, what would we spend it on?)

Thank you to GRAI member Colin Longmore who responded to the challenge of saying how he would suggest spending a hypothetical \$50,000 annual GRAI budget. Colin suggested that this should be spent on an "Advocacy Officer" and or combined with some sort of "Community Visitor" service. With the roles/duties for these positions to include something like;

Community Visitor - For those in nursing homes/care facilities, or with limited mobility (in their own home) some sort of "visiting service", like that requested by someone (elsewhere in the newsletter), taking into account that those in that situation, may (though not necessarily) have limited social contact with others from the broader LGBTI community, or the community in general and or other (biological) family or friends. This "Community Visitor" would therefore help to reduce the potential social isolation for those who request it;

Advocacy Officer - Similar to how those available for those with a physical or intellectual disability (as I understand it) some sort of "Advocate" or person acting on behalf of an individual who for whatever reason (e.g. frailty, a decline in intellectual capacity,) is in need of some sort of assistance, and not able to deal with the issue (e.g. Govt. departments, Nursing home management) themselves. Although I'm unfamiliar with the details or logistics perhaps this officer could also (I'm guessing) be authorised to manage, (with prior legal authority, e.g. Power of Attorney) manage an individual's financial affairs. (Thereby potentially reducing concerns about less understanding/empathy with an individual's situation, from a non-LGBTI advocate.)

Thanks Colin. The above sounds like a great way of spending any funds to support our community. Jude

"Hypothetically... if we had \$50,000 annually, what would we spend it on?"

Recent conference presentations

GRAI's chair Jude Comfort was fortunate to recently attend both the Health in Difference Conference and the International Federation of Ageing conferences where amongst other things she was able to present papers on the work of GRAI.

Health in Difference (HID) is the premier gay health conference in Australia and is held every couple of years. This year it was hosted by the LGBT Health Alliance in Sydney. A recent issue of Out in Perth gave a good run down of some of the major themes that were covered with comments from some of the strong team that attended from WA. The full article is at <http://www.outinperth.com/index.php/news/local/wa-representation-strong-at-national-lgbt-health-conference>. Jude participated in 'Val's Café' run by Katherine Barrett, from LaTrobe University and Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria, which involved a discussion with about 6 people who work in LGBT ageing. This was a smaller version of a regular event now held in Melbourne to allow older community members to come together for a social event and discussion time. The name honours Val's Café, an important gay community venue which operated in Melbourne 60 years ago. For more information on this regular event see http://www.also.org.au/communities/seniors/vals_cafe/vals_cafe_information_flyer. Val's Café at HID was a shortened version of this and although we did not drink coffee, we did get coffee samples to take home. One of the presentations was by developer Peter Dickson the person behind Linton Estate Australia's first GLBT gay retirement village being planned for Ballan in country Victoria - for more details on this exciting development visit <http://www.lintonestate.com.au/page.php?id=506> HID provided an opportunity to meet with researchers, practitioners and activists from Australia and beyond.

Climate for change: ageing into the future was the 10th Global International Federation of Ageing Conference recently held in Melbourne with over 600 delegates. Presentations revolved around five major themes of healthy ageing, social inclusion, climate change, resourcing change and human rights. There was a good inclusion of GLBTI papers at the concurrent session level however disappointingly not at the plenary level. The Chair of GRAI, Jude Comfort, was involved in an iteration of Val's Café - A Forum to Promote the Health and Well-being of Older Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex People. Again a range of presenters talked about their work, including Mark Hughes, Colleen Cartwright, Heather Birch, and Russell Westacott.

Jude also presented two specific papers reporting on the progress of the GRAI research project: *Responding to the Needs of Older Gays in Supported Accommodation* and *Accessing and Working with Residential Care Providers, A Methodological Approach*. Both of these papers were well received and allowed the work of GRAI to reach a wider audience. See the GRAI website for more details.

Rainbow Vision – a USA GLBT Retirement Haven

RainbowVision, the first gay retirement community in the U.S, opened in 2007. Located in arts-happy Santa Fe, New Mexico, RainbowVision's 146 condos sold out immediately. Residents have access to a cabaret, as well as yoga classes, medical facilities, and the hottest gay nightlife in the region. The SilverStarlight Lounge calendar is filled with weekly activities such as "Oh So Gay" and "Where the Boys Are" happy hours. Hailing from the generation of the Stonewall riots, the gay rights movement, and the birth of AIDS, these seniors did not take for granted either the luxury of growing old, or mainstream acceptance. RainbowVision offers both, as well as creature comforts, good design, and great food. RainbowVision's policy of inclusion applies to straight retirees as well; Dina Rubinstein, a 90-year-old straight great-grandmother, picked RainbowVision after a long search. "I can't stand the regular retirement places," she says. "They're just for old people." More information at <http://www.rainbowvisionprop.com/index.html>

Annual General Meeting – please come!!

You will be receiving the official notification of the forthcoming GRAI AGM however put the date in your diary now:

Tuesday 17 July

Freedom Centre, 93 Brisbane Street, Northbridge
6.00pm start with refreshments, meeting proper 6.30pm

Productivity Commission review of Australia's aged care arrangements – submission open

The Productivity Commission invites interested parties to register their interest in an inquiry into Australia's aged care arrangements. While GRAI and the LGBT Health Alliance are working on submissions, individuals can also make a submission. These do not have to be anything complicated and can be as short as a one pager but have to be received by 30 July 2010. For the full terms of reference go to <http://www.pc.gov.au/projects/inquiry/aged-care/terms-of-reference>. You can also read submissions that have been received to date.

The Commission aims to consult widely with older Australians, their carers, aged care providers, government agencies and other interested parties. It will develop options for further structural reform of the aged care system so it can meet the challenges facing it in coming decades. In particular, the Commission will:

- examine the social, clinical and institutional aspects of aged care in Australia, building on the substantial base of existing reviews into this sector
- address the interests of special needs groups
- develop regulatory and funding options for residential and community aged care (including the Home and Community Care program)
- examine the future workforce requirements of the aged care sector
- recommend a path for transitioning from the current regulatory arrangements to a new system that ensures continuity of care and allows the sector time to adjust
- examine whether the regulation of retirement specific living options should be aligned more closely with the rest of the aged care sector
- assess the fiscal implications of any change in aged care roles and responsibilities.

Productivity Commission
seeking input

American cousins face the same challenges: heterosexism and transphobia in aged care

□ June Lowe

American GLTB elders are engaged in a similar journey to their Australian counterparts, facing frequent discrimination from care providers, including in times and places where they are most vulnerable, such as assisted living facilities and end-of-life care.

Although attention to the issue of aging in the LGBT population is in its relative infancy, there are a number of initiatives underway aiming to provide increased support, housing, and information to LGBT people and mainstream care providers.

Housing for GLTB Elders

Some housing initiatives are now well developed. Establishing a world first, RainbowVision opened their first property in New Mexico in 2006 with a combination of independent and assisted living units, specifically for the LGBT and allied communities (see article p 3). Other housing initiatives include a complex in Hollywood, Triangle Square, with independent units for LGBT seniors and a similar development, Openhouse, in San Francisco.

While these developments are welcome, they are far from enough to meet the needs of the aging population. According to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, over 3 million LGBT people in the United States are over age 65. Michael Adams of Service and Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Elders (SAGE) notes, "there is a critical shortage of quality housing for seniors in general in this country. Also there's the additional problem of a place where we can be out and comfortable simply being who we are."

Combating discrimination

Specifically dedicated LGBT aged-care services and accommodation are undoubtedly an exciting prospect for some, however there is an urgent need to focus on re-training mainstream service providers to enable them to be GLTB-sensitive. SAGE's Long Term Care Task Force estimates that only 13 per cent of long term care facilities provide sensitivity training to employees on sexual orientation. Because of this low level of awareness, many LGBT seniors are forced back into the closet for fear of ridicule and discrimination in their care facilities. This may lead to depression, grief or loneliness. Studies into older gay men have shown that internalised homophobia and fear of discrimination also adversely affects their health choices, many not disclosing their gay identity to their physicians or being reluctant to seek health care.

Clearly much work remains to make care services safe and accessible for the aging GLTB population. Groups such as SAGE (which was started in 1978, and previously called Senior Action in a Gay Environment) and the Elder Law Project (formed about 10 years ago and part of the National Centre for Lesbian Rights) are in the forefront of the LGBT seniors' rights movement in America, and work collaboratively with mainstream organisations in the field of aging, educating professionals about the needs of gay elders. In a hopeful sign of changing attitudes, the US Administration on Aging recently awarded a modest grant to a group in Los Angeles which offers support services for LGBT over 50's. This is the first time this department has supported a GLTB specific project. With GLTB elders being more likely to be living alone and without supportive family, increasing the visibility, and meeting the needs of this vulnerable group is an urgent imperative.

References:

Delaney, Lorah, 2009, Lesbian and Gay Elders Need Support and Services: Advocates Increase Focus and Attention on Aging in the Gay Community, Suite 101

Mostade, S. Jeffrey, 2004, Components of Internalized Homophobia, Self-Disclosure of Sexual Orientation to Physician, and Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care Completion in Older Gay Men

Where will all the old queens go?

□□ June Lowe

A recent government grant will begin to address the problems of an aged-care sector that is widely perceived as homophobic.

One of the original Kings Cross drag queens, Carmen Rupe, has in her life blazed a trail for tolerance in the community, but it's hard to imagine how a she could fit into a standard nursing home. Similarly gay elder, photographer David Urquart, 71, says he would rather "swing from the ginkgo tree in the back yard" than go into a nursing home. Even GLTB elders needing support at home may feel vulnerable enough to 'de-gay' or 'de-lesbian' their homes before the health-care worker arrives. Sadly, it is unsurprising that a recent Alzheimer's Australia report has said some gay seniors might be reluctant to approach aged-care services because of past negative experiences.

The Sydney Morning Herald earlier reported that a lack of services, awareness and funding for gay seniors meant many older gays were going back into the closet or becoming scared about their options for aged care. Across the country in W.A., these concerns are echoed in the results of GRAI's recent research, which showed a comprehensive lack of understanding of the unique needs of LGBTI seniors by residential aged-care service providers.

The situation clearly needs to change, and quickly. Gerontologist Dr Jo Harrison claims that the aged-care industry is willing and ready to change, but needs policy direction and resources for training.

A new government grant aims to address the problems of an aged-care sector that is widely perceived as homophobic.

To address this need, the Federal Government last week made a \$400,000 grant to fund a training program which will be developed by ACON, in partnership with the Community Services Association of NSW and the ACT. The grant, announced on 25 June, comes from the Office for an Ageing Australia and will fund training for NSW-based residential aged-care service providers to improve their ability to work sensitively with LGBT clients. The pilot program will be run by ACON, the largest LGBT health organisation in NSW.

A number of GLTB organisations around the country have hailed this initiative as an important step in the right direction, while noting much more still needs to be done.

ACON President Mark Orr said the funding announcement was "a significant step in creating better understanding and a more inclusive aged-care environment for ageing GLBT people, including people living with HIV". The program will create, deliver and review an education program involving 12 workshops across NSW, and will also produce a resource for staff working in aged care. The program will be evaluated with a view to a wider application of the training should it prove successful.

National GLBTI human rights group, Australian Coalition for Equality (ACE) also welcomed the funding announcement, with ACE spokesperson Corey Irlam congratulating the Federal government for recognising the specific needs of older LGBTI people in aged-care, which have been ignored for too many years. Mr Irlam said he hoped that the initiative signalled an ongoing and productive relationship between the LGBTI community, Federal government and the aged-care sector.

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LGBT Health Alliance Executive Director, Gabi Rosenstreich said, “This project is significant and a really positive step in the right direction, but fact (also) highlights the need for work on a Federal policy level and for national projects.”

Noting its limitations, Ms Rosenstreich cautioned, “The sensitivity training to be provided to NSW-based residential aged-care services will make a real difference to the quality of care provided to LGBT people who enter those services. But what about the rest of Australia? And what about non-residential aged-care services?”

“The aged-care sector is gradually acknowledging the needs of LGBTI people and beginning to work in partnership with LGBTI community organisations to address their specific needs and provide genuinely inclusive services, but still have a long way to go. We need a coherent and coordinated national framework to make real progress in this area” she said.

In announcing the grant, the Minister for Housing and Member for Sydney, the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, noted that amendments to the *Aged Care Act 1997* had given same-sex couples equal legal rights regarding access to entitlements and obligations for health and ageing programs. However, she acknowledged, “While we can change the law, the greatest challenge will be in generating changes in attitude.”

It is to be hoped that the government will continue to rise to this challenge and work with the GLBT community to facilitate social inclusion and an end to discrimination in aged care.



David Urquhart, 71, is concerned about homophobic carers.

Photo: Brendan Esposito

http://images.smh.com.au/2010/06/27/1648644/David_Urquhart_420x0.jpg