

## **“What You Can Do!”**

### **Social Service and Health Care Providers Can:**

- Learn about, and be aware of, societal and familial homophobia.
- Become familiar with the problems of elder gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people (GLBT).
- Be proactive in helping elder GLBT people understand and get the legal protection needed to ensure self-determination and the integrity of their relationships.
- Take extra steps to assist elder GLBT people in getting the medical care and services they need and deserve.
- Advocate for inclusive policies securing equal treatment and respect for GLBT clients.
- Initiate in-service trainings to educate staff on the needs of elder GLBT individuals.
- Become aware of GLBT resources in your community including: attorneys, health care providers, clergy, therapists, friendly visitors, funeral directors, hotlines and GLBT senior organizations.
- Provide links to the GLBT community through professional and non-professional gay-oriented services.
- Create a program of services that specifically addresses the needs of GLBT clients.
- Create an affirming environment for all individuals.
- Understand and abide by your professional code of ethics.

## **Taking an Anti-Heterosexist Stance Proactive and Preventive Measures**

- Agree to examine and refrain from the presumptions of heterosexuality.
- Be inclusive of diverse perspectives.
- Assume that in any group, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) people are present.
- Let it be known that you welcome the contributions of persons of all sexual orientations, preferences, choices and identities.
- Interrupt anti-gay or anti-lesbian comments, jokes or stereotypic pronouncements on the part of peers, colleagues, clients or residents.
- Use the term gay or lesbian when referring to persons who self-identify as such.
- Refrain from using the word ‘homosexual’ to describe the communities of gays and lesbians.
- Learn what you can about GLBT cultures - - they do exist.
- Do not become distracted if people accuse you of being gay or lesbian because you have taken a stand against anti-GLBT beliefs and practices.
- Respect a GLBT person’s decision to come out or to be private about their sexual identity – **GUARANTEE CONFIDENTIALITY.**
- Be cautious about identifying GLBT persons to others (including other GLBT people) unless you have their permission – **CONFIDENTIALITY IS MOST IMPORTANT** (we don’t all know each other).
- Refrain from speculating about a person’s sexual orientation.
- Be able to make appropriate referrals for services, resources, community-based organizations, etc., within your professional expertise.
- If your sexual practice is heterosexual, understand your privilege and the ways in which heterosexuality is rewarded in this culture.

*Adapted from: Clarke, C. (1995). "Being Pro-Gay and Pro-Lesbian in Straight Institutions." In Lesbians of Color: Social and Human Services. Hilda Hidalgo, (Ed.), Binghamton, NY: Harrington Park Press. p.98-99.*

## Taking A Sensitive History

### **The first step in creating a safe environment is the physical atmosphere:**

- Place literature in the waiting room that is gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender (GLBT) sensitive and inclusive.
- Hang pictures on your office walls or in exam rooms depicting positive images of GLBT people.
- Your intake form should use inclusive language for GLBT people (i.e., married, single, domestic partner/significant other)

### **In addition to a safe physical environment...**

- Make non-judgmental statements.
- Help the client feel at ease. Use a relaxed calm voice. Be conscious of your body language. Make eye contact.
- Do not look surprised at answers, know your own biases, and familiarize yourself with a diversity of sexual behaviors and practices.
- Be respectful by addressing a transgender client by the name and pronoun he or she uses, regardless of their biology or legal identification.
- Act professional: whether you accept the client's sexual orientation or not, be sure to have a good referral if you are not comfortable working with the client yourself.
- If you do not know the gender of your client's significant other, use gender-neutral pronouns or open-ended language until you find out.
- Invite open conversation; let the client give you information at his or her own pace.
- Use language similar to that of the client.
- Ask questions in a non-judgmental manner.

### **Ask About Relationships:**

- Are you involved in a significant relationship currently, or have you been in the past?
- Tell me about your living situation. Who shares the household with you?
- Tell me about the people who are important to you? Where do you get your support?
- Are your relationships satisfying, or are there any concerns that you would like to discuss?

### **Taking a Sexual History**

Depending on the purpose of the visit, or your role, and the presenting problem, you may need a more detailed sexual history. It is often helpful to preface these sensitive questions with an explanation about their importance in providing appropriate care, and to reassure your client about confidentiality.

### **Ask about behavior:**

- Are you sexually active?
- Have your sexual partners in the past been men, women or both?
- Do you have any need to discuss birth control (Even though you're 89?)
- What does "safer sex" mean for you?
- Are there any questions or concerns about your sexual activities that you would like to discuss?

OVER→

**When your clients come out to you, some additional questions that you can explore with them include:**

- How do you feel about your sexual orientation?
- How do you feel about your gender identity?
- How long have you known this about yourself? (When did you come out to yourself?)
- Who have you told and what kind of responses have you received?
- Is there anything about your sexual orientation that you would like to discuss?
- Is there anything about your gender identity that you would like to discuss?

Let your client know that there are many GLBT community resources that you are able to give them.

## Supportive Environment Assessment

Think about your agency or organization, or take a walk around your facility with a heightened awareness. Respond to the following questions that reflect either your opinion or represent what is publicly visible.

Check the appropriate response for each of the following items:

1. My agency/organization is GLBT friendly.  
True\_\_\_\_\_ False\_\_\_\_\_ Unsure\_\_\_\_\_
2. We display items reflective of diversity (e.g., art, posters, religious icons, holiday decorations and magazines).  
True\_\_\_\_\_ False\_\_\_\_\_ Unsure\_\_\_\_\_
3. Participants/Clients are encouraged to express individuality and diversity.  
True\_\_\_\_\_ False\_\_\_\_\_ Unsure\_\_\_\_\_
4. Our agency's affirmative action statement for staff and clients includes a statement of nondiscrimination based on sexual orientation and identity.  
True\_\_\_\_\_ False\_\_\_\_\_ Unsure\_\_\_\_\_
5. Our agency has an anti-harassment policy that specifically forbids homophobic or heterosexist comments or harassment.  
True\_\_\_\_\_ False\_\_\_\_\_ Unsure\_\_\_\_\_
6. My agency's publicity materials are welcoming to GLBT people (i.e., pictures of same sex couples are displayed).  
True\_\_\_\_\_ False\_\_\_\_\_ Unsure\_\_\_\_\_
7. There are, or have been, openly GLBT staff at this facility.  
True\_\_\_\_\_ False\_\_\_\_\_ Unsure\_\_\_\_\_
8. There are prominently displayed materials (e.g., books, pamphlets, signs, photos, and posters) that are GLBT affirmative.  
True\_\_\_\_\_ False\_\_\_\_\_ Unsure\_\_\_\_\_
9. GLBT residents would find my agency a warm and supportive place to be in, or receive service from.  
True\_\_\_\_\_ False\_\_\_\_\_ Unsure\_\_\_\_\_
10. There are, or have been openly GLBT people on participant advisory committees or boards.  
True\_\_\_\_\_ False\_\_\_\_\_ Unsure\_\_\_\_\_
11. My long-term care facility (if relevant) supports the right to privacy for same-sex couples. True\_\_\_\_\_ False\_\_\_\_\_ Unsure\_\_\_\_\_
12. Any information about lesbian and gay issues would not be defaced in our facility.  
True\_\_\_\_\_ False\_\_\_\_\_ Unsure\_\_\_\_\_

13. If I were an openly GLBT administrator, staff member or participant/client in my agency, I would feel safe and supported enough to be open about who I am.  
True\_\_\_\_\_ False\_\_\_\_\_ Unsure\_\_\_\_\_
14. I would feel comfortable speaking in support of GLBT issues in my agency.  
True\_\_\_\_\_ False\_\_\_\_\_ Unsure\_\_\_\_\_
15. The partner of a GLBT participant/client is treated with the same respect as a heterosexual spouse when visiting the agency or participating in a client's plan of care.  
True\_\_\_\_\_ False\_\_\_\_\_ Unsure\_\_\_\_\_

*Adapted from material developed by Doreen D. Corrado, CSW-R & Barbara Munstein, CSW; Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN).*

# Resources - Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Elders in the Community

## ORGANIZATIONS

**Family Caregiver Alliance** <http://www.caregiver.org> (Click on "Groups"; select "LGBT Caregiver Discussion Group") FCA's LGBT Caring Community Support Group connects you with others facing the day-to-day challenges of caregiving. If you're assisting someone with Alzheimer's, stroke, Parkinson's, traumatic brain injury or other chronic health problems, or a person over 60, you can get support from the convenience of home.

**GLBT Generations** [info@glbtgenerations.org](mailto:info@glbtgenerations.org); Tel: 651-229-3136 Member-based organization working to raise visibility of GLBT elders in Minnesota.

**Human Rights Campaign** <http://www.hrc.org> See the issues section of this web site. Entire text of "The cost of marriage inequality to gay, lesbian and bisexual seniors," can be accessed here.

**Lambda Legal** <http://www.lambdalegal.com> Lambda Legal is a national organization committed to achieving full recognition of the civil rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, the transgendered, and people with HIV or AIDS through impact litigation, education, and public policy work.

**Lesbian/Gay Aging Issues Network of the Am. Soc. of Aging:** <http://www.asaging.org/networks/index.cfm?cg=LGAIN> LGAIN seeks to foster professional development, multidisciplinary research and wide-ranging dialogue on LGBT issues in the field of aging through publications, conferences, and cosponsored events. LGAIN welcomes the participation of all concerned individuals regardless of age, sexual orientation or gender identity. Check out "Recommended Resources" and "Web Guide."

**National Association of LGBT Community Centers** <http://www.lgbtcenters.org> The 150 community centers across the country can be a primary point of contact for people coming out, seeking LGBT health services, community information and referrals. Search the directory to find a center near your community.

**National Center for Lesbian Rights** <http://www.nclrights.org> NCLR is a national legal resource center with a primary commitment to advancing the rights and safety of lesbians and their families through a program of litigation, public policy advocacy, free legal advice and counseling, and public education. In addition, NCLR provides representation and resources to gay men, and bisexual and transgender individuals on key issues that also significantly advance lesbian rights. Check out the Elder Law Project at this website.

**National Gay and Lesbian Task Force** <http://www.nglftf.org/pi/aging.html> Search "Reports and Research" to see "Outing Age: Public Policy Issues Affecting Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Elders" - November 9, 2000 *By Sean Cahill and Ken South and Jane Spade.*

**Old Lesbians Organizing for Change** <http://www.oloc.org/> OLOC provides old lesbians with the chance to meet like-minded women in our common struggle to confront ageism, to share mutual interests, and to experience the joy and warmth of playing and working together.

**Prime Timers** <http://www.primetimersww.org/> The purpose of our organization is to provide mature gay and bisexual men, and their admirers, with opportunities to come together in a supportive atmosphere to enjoy social, educational, and recreational activities.

**Senior Action in a Gay Environment** <http://www.sageusa.org/> (includes index to other organizations serving the glbt old population) SAGE, or Senior Action in a Gay Environment, was founded in 1977 and is the nation's oldest and largest social service and advocacy organization dedicated to LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) seniors. SAGE offers social services, programs and community-building to LGBT seniors in and around New York City and provides education and advocacy on LGBT aging issues nationwide.

**Transgender Aging Network** <http://www.forge-forward.org> (Click on TAN (Transgender Aging Network)) The Transgender Aging Network (TAN) exists to improve the lives of current and future trans/SOFFA (significant others, friends, family and allies) elders.

## TRAINING MATERIALS

**Project Visibility** [www.projectvisibility.org](http://www.projectvisibility.org) An awareness and sensitivity training manual for service providers of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender elders. Produced by the Boulder County Aging Services Division, P.O. Box 471 Boulder, CO 80306

**Understanding and Caring for Lesbian and Gay Older Adults** [www.cje.net](http://www.cje.net) Frontline worker sensitivity training system. Produced by the Center for Applied Gerontology, Council for Jewish Elderly, Education and Training Division, 3003 West Touhy Avenue, Chicago, IL 60645