Area Agency on Aging

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the center
Advancing LGBT Colorado
Advocating for LGBT Long-Term Care Consumers: Resources for Long-Term Care Ombudsmen

Jennifer Solms, MSW
Ombudsman
Denver Regional Council of Governments
What is Project Visibility?

- Project Visibility is a cultural competency training program created by Boulder County Aging Services to educate and sensitize service providers about issues facing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) elders.

- The training is comprised of a moving film that showcases the lives of lesbian, gay, and transgender elders, a Power Point presentation, and discussion of the steps service providers can take to provide good service for the LGBT elder community.
There is increasing evidence that LGBT elders in our community are uncertain where to turn and what to do if they need care or support services. They are concerned with the level of sensitivity and awareness on the part of staff at facilities, businesses and agencies. Williams Institute (UCLA) estimates 4.1% of Americans identify as GLB, which means approximately 1.5 million GLB’s are over 65 years old. By 2030, estimates are closer to 3 million.
Unique Challenges for GLBT Elders

- Effects of stigma – past and present
- Reliance on informal “families of choice” who lack legal and social recognition
- Unequal treatment under laws and programs for older adults

Elver, living in a group home
LGBT Elder Concerns

- Increased isolation (75% live alone & 90% do not have children)
- Increased depression
- Unnecessary/premature institutionalization (often cannot identify who would provide care to them if they grew ill)
- Neglect/self neglect (more likely to need formal caregiving systems, but reluctant to access them)
- Often invisible to service providers and policy makers
- Ageism in GLBT community

Long-time couple, Kathy and Carmah
LGBT Elder Strengths

- Share a common culture
- Self Reliant
- Create own support network
- Have developed coping skills in dealing with a hostile environment

Anna, living in an assisted living home
Providing Competent Services

Involves:

The ability to listen, respond and provide polite and considerate care to all residents regardless of personal feelings, beliefs or values about their character or behaviors.
How to be a LGBT Ally

Create a safe and welcoming environment

- Explicitly welcome LGBT people to your place of service.
- Use appropriate terms (gay, lesbian, bi).
- Ask transgender people what term and pronoun they prefer and use these in all situations.
- Refrain from speculating about a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity.
How to be a LGBT Ally

Create inclusive infrastructure.

- Assume that in any group, LGBT people are present.
- If your sexual orientation is heterosexual, understand your privilege and the ways it is rewarded in this culture.
- Learn about the LGBT cultures that exist around you.
- Find ways to make LGBT culture visible in your organization.
- Be able to make appropriate referrals for services, resources, products, and organizations.
Communicate Effectively

- Do not take offense or be distracted if people accuse you of being gay or lesbian for taking a stand.
- Interrupt anti-LGBT comments, jokes, or stereotypic pronouncements by peers, colleagues, clients, residents.
- Be cautious about identifying LGBT persons to others (including other LGBTs) without permission.
- Respect a LGBT person’s decision to “come out” or not
- Listen without judgment.
“They always say time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself.”

-Andy Warhol
For More Information

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- Project Visibility - www.projectvisibility.org