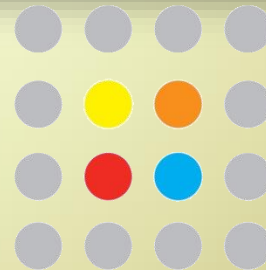# Area Agency on Aging

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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.

Why a training on LGBT elders?

- 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

Long-time couple, Kathy and Carmah

- 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

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.
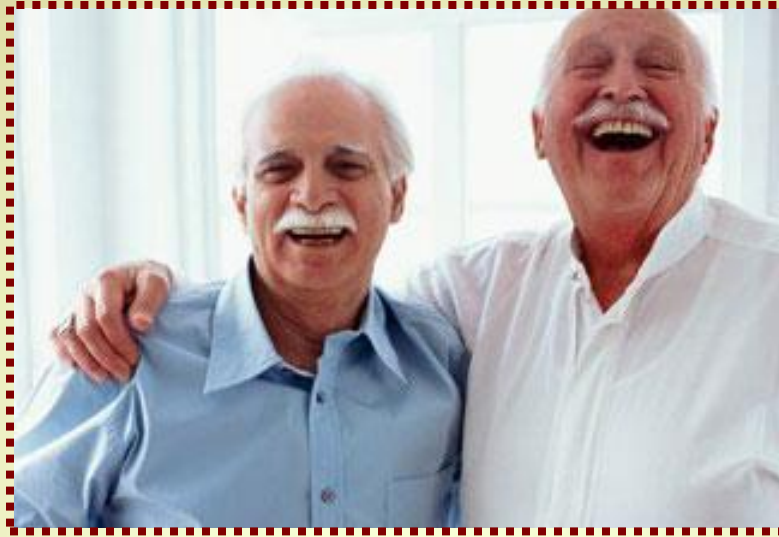
How to be a LGBT Ally

Create inclusive infrastructure.

- Assume that in <u>any</u> 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.

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How to be a LGBT Ally

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

- Shari Wilkins
GLBT Community Center of Colorado
303 – 733-7743, ext. 122
swilkins@glbtcolorado.org
www.glbtcolorado.org

- Jennifer Solms, MSW
Ombudsman
Denver Regional Council of Governments
Area Agency on Aging
303 – 480-6796
jsolms@drcog.org

- Project Visibility - www.projectvisibility.org