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**Age-friendly New York City Community Forum Notes
LGBT Community Center
Speaker of the City Council Christine Quinn
March 20, 2008**

Approximate number of attendees: 40

Outdoor spaces

- In Jackson Heights, Queens park benches were removed from around post office (zip 11372) because homeless people were sleeping there. Instead of police simply clearing the benches, they were removed altogether and seniors are now forced to sit on dirty post office steps if at all
- Streets are unbelievably dirty in the city

Respect and social inclusion

- LGBT seniors are an unaccepted minority
- Social isolation and a lack of available caregivers are major problems for this population in NYC, as LGBT seniors often have fewer children who could act as caregivers and they often do not feel welcome at mainstream service providers and therefore underutilize the services they need
- Need to focus on what's general versus what's specific to the LGBT community
- Why don't LGBT seniors have more spaces to themselves such as senior centers?
- One older gentleman said of his senior center, "Instead of gay people always going to a straight place, straight people should come to a gay place sometimes."
- Need to open up a dialogue about sexuality in the older generation; Greenwich House (a senior center in Greenwich Village) could be a

- model in terms of its welcoming environment and information exchange between straight and gay seniors
- Homophobia is frightening and there is a need for change; it is widespread among the older population overall
 - LGBT seniors need their own space in every local community so they don't have to travel so far
 - Ageism exists in the LGBT community and self-examination is need within the community to confront this problem
 - The transgender community is especially isolated because they do not even utilize the few services now targeting the LGBT community and are often missed in outreach

Housing

- Many LGBT seniors are left vulnerable when their partners die as current laws hinder the transfer of inheritance and the continuation of shared housing arrangements; changes are needed
- Need for more affordable housing, perhaps senior supportive housing/Section 202 for the LGBT community (although this is legally complicated)
- Need to explore how the Sexual Orientation Non-Discrimination Act (SONDA) relates to specific housing for public accommodation
- One gentleman now in a walk-up apartment said he can now work but feels he will need to move upon retirement even though he doesn't want to. He will need something more affordable that is either on a lower floor or has an elevator because of his increasing health problems and issues of affordability.

Health and community services

- Senior center budget cuts are of urgent concern
- Need for more NORCs; SAGE has a unique NORC model that is not geographically based but instead works to meet the needs of LGBT seniors across the city
- Seniors need more self-empowerment in health matters/guidance in how to care for ourselves
- Need to create a network of LGBT professionals in the aging field
- Organizations should receive guidance in how to create a welcoming environment for LGBT seniors, including: having gay-friendly magazines in wait rooms, posted signs saying the organization does not discriminate on the basis of age, race, sexual orientation, etc.

- Most seniors centers are not gay-friendly and don't focus on the special needs of LGBT seniors; the modernization process might be good for this as providers should re-evaluate their services to make them better and show how they will cater to the LGBT community
- Most service programming geared toward the LGBT community focuses on HIV or similar social issues, but LGBT seniors have many other interests as well
- Need to engage with faith communities; many gay-friendly religious institutions are geographically located in the West Village but members come from all over the city because there is a lack of such resources in their communities; there is a need to bridge this divide and link faith communities with social service providers (esp. those who can provide transportation services); Riverside Church is gay-friendly and a model for others
- A provider said they have done sensitivity training for care workers and senior center staff in the city with good results, but that such training is not well funded and ought to be expanded; peer training is also needed for non-LGBT seniors
- Several service providers are struggling with how to reach and better serve LGBT seniors; they want to do it but lack the structure or capacity to do that now and are in dire need of help
- Staff training in how to be welcome and serve LGBT seniors is needed by home health aides
- Aging LGBT veterans need help. A representative from American Vets for Equal Rights presented various issues including the high rate of post-traumatic stress disorder prevalent among this population and lower rates of employment; LGBT vets are especially in need of help as other Vet groups and advocacy orgs are often not as accepting or welcoming
- The Vintage Pride program is a good LGBT intergenerational model that needs to be expanded
- Rainbow Heights Club has a pilot model that trains care providers in how to best serve LGBT seniors with mental illness; the model includes
 - greater inclusion of older people in decision-making
 - training for service providers in meeting the needs of LGBT seniors

Civic engagement and Employment

- Need for more life-long learning opportunities; perhaps by matching people up to go do one-time cultural events together
- If no longer employed it's easy to fall into isolation so additional attention must be paid to retired LGBT seniors

Communication and Information

- More outreach must be done to get the word out about the new SAGE program site in Harlem, as many people did not know about it
- More work is needed to reach transgender elders and assure their voices are heard in this process
- Need to train service providers in how to do comprehensive outreach and support those ongoing efforts

Transportation

- More transportation options are needed to local VA hospitals
- Need more transportation options to take LGBT seniors to and from the health and community services that are most welcoming/specifically targeted to LGBT seniors because they are often not in local communities
- Issues with Access-a-Ride:
 - new rules limit the ability of some seniors to travel in their boroughs (this rule seems to be tied to Access-a-Ride's evaluation of each individual's physical functioning)
 - not timely, many people miss appointments because bus drivers didn't get them there on time (in some cases appointments have to be rescheduled for six months later)
- Seniors with disabilities are often uncomfortable on mass transit
- Training is needed for mass transit drivers