

sage

Advocacy &
Services for
LGBT Elders

We refuse to be invisible

SAGE: Advocacy, Community, and Resources For LGBT Elders

by Sossity Chiricuzio, PQ Monthly

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Aging in this country is becoming increasingly dangerous. Dwindling resources and ever growing generation gaps play a part for everyone, but the fact of the matter is that being LGBT* in this country is still very much a risk. The possibilities of losing jobs, family, housing, or even our lives are very real, and if you add increasing medical needs and fixed income, you could find yourself having to resort to secrecy to access resources and services like many of our elders do.

One organization working to bridge those gaps and grow community around addressing those needs is SAGE Metro Portland, a program of Friendly House, which is the only non-profit in Oregon that provides a full range of community services and programming specifically for LGBT older adults, including Friendly Visiting, social and recreational activities, support groups, Options Counseling, Case Management, community trainings, advocacy, and resource development. They work to enhance the lives of older gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community members through education, advocacy, outreach and resource development.

Max Micozzi, Program Coordinator, and several SAGE volunteers told me more about the work they do.

PQ: The Gay and Grey Expo is coming up fast—tell me more about what it is, what it has to offer, and who the target audience is?

Ruth Szilagy and Glen Ulmer, SAGE volunteers: The Gay & Grey Expo is SAGE Metro Portland's biennial event which highlights issues important to the senior LGBT community in Oregon. It's an opportunity to gather information and speak with vendors who have products and services for seniors and are LGBT- friendly. In addition, attendees can learn something at workshops designed just for LGBT seniors.

The 2016 Expo theme is "Home Is Where the Heart Is". We're focusing on housing - a hot topic for everyone these days. Although most attendees will be LGBT seniors, younger family members helping LGBT parents plan for their housing needs will benefit, as will younger LGBT people wanting to ensure that their straight parents won't be ostracized by other residents at a housing facility for having LGBT offspring.

We have eight workshops planned with multiple panelists--including professionals, consumers, non-profit representatives, housing advocates and SAGE volunteers--speaking about their experiences in various types of housing. Attendees can learn more about aging in place, choosing long-term care facilities, staying connected and active, and navigating the affordable housing process. They may even discover some ideas they hadn't considered before, like home-sharing or moving into a manufactured home.

Finally this is great time to learn about SAGE, the organization sponsoring the Expo. Throughout the year, SAGE sponsors educational and social programs, runs a Friendly Visiting program where volunteers visit LGBT elders who need companionship or perhaps help with an errand, and advocates on behalf of LGBT elders locally and statewide.

The expo is Saturday, October 1, from 10am-3pm (\$7 entry, lunch included) at Friendly House, a non-profit neighborhood center and social service agency. Friendly House is located at 1737 NW 26th Ave at the intersection of Thurman St. and NW 26th Ave, on the #15 and #77 bus lines, and is fully

accessible. Find more info online at: gayandgreypdx.org.

***PQ:** I'm very excited about the Storycatchers Project. Whose stories will be featured, and what happens after they are caught?*

Emily Pittman Newberry, Performance Poet: Story Catchers is a project of the Geezer Gallery through the RACC Arts Equity program, and SAGE is a major partner with The Geezer Gallery and the Story Catcher project. Everyone has life stories. Now is the time to capture yours! I will facilitate the workshop and teach writing techniques, and you can learn collage and layout techniques from renowned cartoonist Rupert Kinnard, former art director of Just Out magazine, Out/Look magazine and creator of Cathartic Comics.

LGBTQ elders are a gift to this world, and your stories can be that gift. This guided 13 week program is for LGBTQ adults 60 years and older. No writing or artistic talent is required, you'll learn new techniques in creative writing and artistic embellishment. Instructions and all materials are provided, and there will be an opportunity for some work to be exhibited at Artists Repertory Theater for those willing to share.

The next series of classes will begin Tuesday, Oct. 4th from 1-3pm at Ainsworth United Church of Christ. For more information email: register@catchlgbtqstories.com or call Emily Newberry at 503-729-6844.

***PQ:** Health care is often fraught for elders, and for folks in the LBGT community, creating a patient population that is often vulnerable and silenced. I hear that SAGE is working on trainings for health care providers and staff?*

Max Micozzi, SAGE Program Coordinator: The LGBT older adults population is growing by leaps and bounds. Those born in the early part of the twentieth century experienced prejudices and discrimination and persevered through secrecy at home, work and in their communities. They are resilient and have paved the way for many of us today, but are often very apprehensive to receive services and medical care due to their experience of historical prejudices.

They also know that those serving older adults in medical care and/or LTC environments, in senior centers and living communities, are not always accepting; in fact their care is often compromised. The outcome is waiting until a crisis arises and relying on professionals to provide services or going back into the closet for fear of retribution or substandard care if they do come out. This happens at their most vulnerable after all they have survived.

sageCARE is a national training model in which certified trainers go into medical and senior service settings to train executive and management staff on why it is important to understand our aging LGBT population, and include these practices in their day to day operations. Training topics include:

- Culture, strengths, needs, and challenges of LGBT older adults
- A history about why LGBT older adults are less likely to access health and social services
- Best practices for making LGBT older adults feel welcomed and included.

Find out more about what SAGE has to offer online:

- lgbtagingcenter.org/
- diverseelders.org/
- friendlyhouseinc.org/programs/gay-and-grey/
- gayandgreypdx.org/

*I chose to use the same acronym in this interview that SAGE does because the word 'queer' was used for many decades as a slur and attack, and is still very fraught with memories of violence and oppression for many elders in our community, and people that SAGE serves. That said, elders who identify as queer are welcome at SAGE, and at their events.

Sossity Chiricuzio is a writer and columnist based out of Portland, Oregon. She is a regular contributor for PQ Monthly and focuses on social justice, communication, community, and changing the world. You can follow her adventures online @sossitywrites and find more at sossitywrites.com.