

Final Report of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Steering Committee

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To:	Advisory Committee on Long-Term Care Homes and Services
From:	General Manager, Long-Term Care Homes and Services
Wards:	All
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SUMMARY

This report provides a summary regarding the activities and accomplishments of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Steering Committee and builds on the September 4, 2007 report to the Advisory on Long-Term Care Homes and Services.

Formed in 2006, the LGBT Steering Committee was comprised of individuals from LGBT agencies, the Ontario Association of Residents' Council, Concerned Friends and City staff and volunteers. The Committee was formed after the division became aware that many LGBT seniors did not consistently feel safe in disclosing their sexual identity or orientation to mainstream healthcare providers due to fear of discrimination. This affected their sense of personal well-being. Staff set out to remove this barrier within long-term care, working with the Committee to more fully understand needs and create a culture and model in which all residents' histories and traditions are honoured.

Building on early successes in LGBT-positive care at Fudger House, the division extended the model to Kipling Acres and True Davidson Acres and collaborated with the LGBT Steering Committee to create a "toolkit" to further guide culturally competent care. This resource guide contains resources, training plans, programs and activities to enhance understanding, sensitivity and responsiveness to LGBT issues, educate staff and to become LGBT-positive, inclusive and welcoming in care and service design. Although initially designed for Toronto's homes, the toolkit is available to other long-term care organizations in their journeys to become LGBT-positive. The toolkit was launched at Fudger House on February 6, 2009 as the final task of the Committee.

This report describes the activities, journey and outcomes of the LGBT Steering Committee in producing the LGBT-positive model and resource guide.

Financial Impact

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

In researching LGBT issues, the Long-Term Care Homes and Services Division learned that a vast majority of LGBT seniors over the age of 65 years lived most of their lives in an environment of discrimination, sometimes fearing for their own personal safety. Most LGBT seniors were already adults prior to the gay liberation movement of the 1970s and for many, it was impossible to be openly gay and feel safe. Staff also learned that there are limited LGBT-positive healthcare services available in Canada, resulting in many LGBT seniors feeling unsafe in disclosing their sexual identity or orientation to mainstream providers due to long-standing fear of discrimination. This negatively impacted healthy aging and individuals' sense of personal well-being.

Literature verified that LGBT seniors were five times less likely to use mainstream healthcare services than the general population. Although precise information about the number of older LGBT seniors in Toronto was unclear as many LGBT seniors are not out, staff applied a 5-10 percent prevalence rate to demographic data, which is considered reasonable for the Canadian population. This translated into an estimated 5,020 to 11,640 LGBT persons in Toronto aged 75-84 years and 1,813 to 3,620 persons over 85 years.

Once the Long-Term Care Homes and Services Division became aware of the disparity in service provision and individuals' sense of loss and disenfranchisement, the division sought to establish LGBT-positive and welcoming communities within our homes and services that would respond to the gap, facilitate inclusion and enhance quality of life.

The division established the goal to design a culture and care model that enhanced competence within Toronto's long-term care homes in providing LGBT-positive care for LGBT residents, partners and friends. Objectives were to: (i) create a supportive culture, where residents' histories and traditions would be honoured and preserved; (ii) review and revise processes, programs and approaches to ensure that they are LGBT-positive; (iii) create an environment that is comfortable and accepting of all persons; (iv) develop a collaborative model of care, in partnership with residents, families, community agencies and healthcare organizations; and (v) recruit LGBT volunteers to add value to the homes' communities, expand residents' friendships and create a social support network.

In October 2006, the division established the LGBT Steering Committee to guide the development of this LGBT-positive model, including awareness building, education and program design. Twenty-two individuals were invited to the initial Committee meeting and eighteen remained actively involved in the work of the Committee through to project completion. The Committee was comprised of representatives from LGBT organizations and agencies, the Ontario Association of Residents' Council, Concerned Friends and City staff and volunteers. The key deliverable of the Committee was the creation of the resource guide 'Diversity our Strength – LGBT Toolkit'.

COMMENTS

In establishing the LGBT Steering Committee, the division considered individuals and/or organizations that provided direct services to the LGBT seniors' community and/or who were supporters (allies) regarding LGBT issues. This approach allowed the division to align the anticipated work with a committed and diverse collectivity of members.

Within the first few meetings, members recognized the value of creating a resource guide or "toolkit" that focused on providing information and advice to create LGBT culturally competent care within a long-term care environment. Members recognized that in order to accurately address LGBT culturally competent care and service, the toolkit required both an overall framework to create an inclusive environment and practical tools. The Committee established work groups under the following themes: (i) welcoming environment; (ii) governance and administrative processes; (iii) human resources, staff education and volunteers; (iv) resident care and care planning; (v) leisure activities and social programs; and (vi) community engagement.

There were twelve (12) formal meetings of the LGBT Steering Committee and numerous additional meetings of the work groups, reporting back regularly to the Committee on cautions, concerns and progress in order to facilitate group decision-making. The following summarizes key milestones of the Committee:

1. Enhancement of the division's values statement related to diversity, explicitly addressing sexual orientation, gender and gender identity;
2. Enhancement of job calls and recruitment advertisements to explicitly reflect and be inclusive of diversity, including LGBT issues and service delivery;
3. Revision of forms, processes, services and programs to be more inclusive;
4. Ongoing learning from the three (3) initial participating homes (Fudger House, Kipling Acres and True Davidson Acres) in order to refine the work of the Committee; including the value of social programs (Molly Wood at Fudger House; Rainbow Theatre at Kipling Acres; True Colors at True Davidson Acres);
5. Learning from challenges and successes in volunteer recruitment and retention;
6. Provision and facilitation of expanded staff education, including training from both LGTB Steering Committee members and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (Asking the Right Questions);
7. Strong linkages with other organizations with common vision, such as Casey House and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, sharing staff education and hosting a 'Lunch and Learn' session for local community agencies;
8. Knowledge exchange through presentations at various venues, including the Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Service for Seniors (OANHSS) annual convention, the 'LTC Facility Design with Women in Mind' conference in Halifax and Nova Scotia; and meetings and consultation with organizations in other cities interested in spearheading similar initiatives;
9. Participation in the plenary panel presentation at the April 2008 conference 'Opening the Closet on Aging- Amazing Lives';
10. Participation in Pride Celebrations with the local LGBT community;

11. Development of a draft audit to monitor success in implementing, monitoring and broadening LGBT-positive outcomes at an operational level; and
12. Continued Committee education, including regular updates on Rainbow Health Ontario (a province-wide program designed to improve access and promote health of Ontario's LGBT communities).

Dr. Shari Brotman (McGill University) became aware of the work of the LGBT Steering Committee. Dr. Brotman is a respected researcher in the area of social and health service delivery for LGBT seniors in Canada. Dr. Brotman became involved in researching the process and progress of the Committee in order to document it as leading practice for the long-term-care sector. Through interviews, Dr. Brotman sought to identify and reflect upon the challenges, risks and benefits of undertaking this change-making work, explore the group processes used within the Committee, and examine personal and professional motivations in order to support the development of initiatives in other jurisdictions and environments. A summary of Dr. Brotman's work will be provided to the Advisory Committee on Long-Term Care Homes and Services in the future.

On January 30, 2009, Fudger House hosted the official launch of the LGBT Toolkit, with Councillor Kyle Rae affirming the importance of the Committee's work and Mr. Jack Harmer, describing the Committee's journey and key successes. Attendees included residents, family and friends, staff, volunteers, community service providers, community members, LGBT Steering Committee members, Dr. Brotman and team and media. The toolkit is the first known resource guide specifically focused on creating LGBT-positive care in a long-term care setting. The toolkit will be posted on the division's web site.

This quote from a partner of a newly admitted resident provides assurance that this work is making a positive impact on the lives and experiences of LGBT seniors: *"We have been made to feel very comfortable at the home. This includes me as his partner. From everyone we have encountered, we have been made to feel welcomed."*

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SIGNATURE

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