

May 11, 2022

Dear Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Advisory Committee Members:

Re: Leading and Learning with Pride - A Tool Kit to Support 2SLGBTQI + Seniors (formerly Diversity our Strength)

SUMMARY

I have been made aware of situations where homophobia and neglect, in the name of religious beliefs, is happening in one of the City of Toronto 10 LTC homes and is tragically affecting the daily lives of the 2SLGBTQI + Seniors who reside in that establishment. It has also come to my attention that the 2SLGBTQI + training tool kit - "DIVERSITY OUR STRENGTH" is not being used in the City's 10 LTC homes. The tool kit was originally developed (in 2008 and "refreshed " in 2017) with input from The 519, Rainbow Health, Sherbourne Health and the Toronto Senior Pride Network, to train all staff in the City's 10 LTC homes, on how to work with and care for 2SLGBTQI + Seniors.

I ask for your support to ensure that all staff in the City's 10 LTC homes are trained using the tool kit - Leading and Learning with Pride - and the training is mandatory with an accountability mechanism to monitor the training.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Advisory Committee recommends that:

1. City Council direct the General Manager, Seniors Services and Long-Term Care to:
 - a. ensure that the "The Leading and Learning with Pride - A Tool Kit to Support 2SLGBTQI+ Seniors" is implemented in City long-term care homes;
 - b. provide mandatory 2SLGBTQI+ cultural competency training, based on the "Leading and Learning with Pride - A Tool Kit to Support 2SLGBTQI+ Seniors", to staff of the City's long-term care homes;
 - c. develop an accountability mechanism to monitor the training set out in Part b above; and
 - d. secure the necessary funds to ensure the training of all staff of the City's long-term care homes.

COMMENTS

Based on the information in the SUMMARY - It stands to reason that if this situation of homophobia and physical neglect is happening in ONE of the homes, it most likely happening in ALL of the other 9 TLC homes.

When this gap/lack of training came to my attention in 2017, (I was then Chair of the Toronto Senior Pride Network), I immediately contacted the other organizations that had contributed to the original development of the tool kit.

I also contacted Councillor Josh Matlow - who is responsible for the advocacy of Seniors Issues. Josh immediately contacted the staff responsible for the tool kit and galvanized them into action.

(The community organizations -and individual community activists - that contributed to the original development of the content of the tool kit, were told that the 2SLGBTQI+ education/training would be MANDATORY for ALL staff in ALL of the 10 long term care homes.

We were overjoyed and optimistic that our 2SLGBTQI+ Seniors would finally be getting the care and culturally appropriate services they deserved.)

Then, to our dismay, we found out that the promise of MANDATORY training had not happened.

Our community groups met with Josh and the city staff and held community consultations to REFRESH the content of the tool kit and finally get it implemented and used in the city's 10 ltc homes.

In 2017, the tool kit - DIVERSITY OUR STRENGTH - was again sent out to the city's 10 ltc homes with more promises of MANDATORY training for ALL staff.

In February 2022, I was doing a workshop for a 2SLGBTQI+ Seniors organization on how to advocate for yourself, as a queer senior, when dealing with health care systems.

One of the participants stated that they had a friend in one of the city's long term care homes and this friend, an older gay individual, was being told they would "rot in hell for being gay" and was subjected to homophobic remarks and was left in their urine and feces because the attending PSWS said it was "against my beliefs to take care of homosexuals".

I was shocked and angry when i heard about this appalling situation and the emotional and physical toll on the older gay person who was experiencing this abuse in their home.

I offered to help the friend of the participant. The participant told me her friend was "terrified of being further abused" and did not want their name to be mentioned.

The very next day, while I was co-hosting an on-line zoom gathering for 2SLGBTQI+ Seniors, one of the participants talked about being the victim of homophobic remarks and said they were a resident in one of the city's long term care homes. Those of us in attendance were ALL angry and upset by this news. The participant then told the gathering the name of the long term care home.

Much to my dismay, it was the same long term care home where the other gay resident was being tortured and subjected to homophobic abuse and physical neglect.

I immediately took action!! I have been sitting on the SS<C (Seniors Services & Long Term Care) Working Group for the city of Toronto (since September 2021) which was ironically and coincidentally REVITALIZING the very same DIVERSITY OUR STRENGTH tool kit.

I contacted the head of the Working Group and the other members and informed them of the 2 situations of homophobic abuse and neglect in the one long term care home.

We were all angry and distressed. We asked for an investigation to take place at the home in question and we asked to speak with the SSLTC Director of Long Term Care.

Many of us on the Working Group had already been expressing our lack of faith in the implementation of training using the DIVERSITY OUR STRENGTH tool kit, which was promised in 2017.

Now, in February 2022, we were finding out about 2 situations of abuse in one of the city's 10 homes.

During our meeting with the SSLTC Director of Long term Care, we found out that the implementation and MANDATORY training using DIVERSITY OUR STRENGTH had NEVER happened (as was promised in 2017).

Many actions have since been taken - in the short term - to remedy the situation of homophobic abuse and neglect at the one LTC home. The Working Group has given concrete directions to the management and staff at ALL 10 LTC homes regarding the rights of ALL seniors in their care, especially the rights of 2SLGBTQI+ Seniors under the Human Rights Code of Ontario.

The SSLTC and The 519 applied for and were successful in obtaining a \$25,000 Grant from New Horizons. This grant is being used to train 420 senior SSLTC staff and managers in the city's 10 LTC homes.

The grant money runs out in March 2023. Currently, there are no future funds from the city of Toronto to ensure the MANDATORY training for ALL the staff in the 10 LTC homes.

On May 3rd, 2022 - the Working Group met with Jennifer Dockery, the General Manager, Seniors Services and Long-Term Care (responsible for the 10 city long term care homes) and expressed our anger, frustration and disappointment related to the fact that the original tool kit was never implemented and 2SLGBTQI+ MANDATORY training had never happened.

Jennifer told us that the budget for 2022 is closed and she will be reaching out to the city for NEW funds to continue the implementation and training using the NEW tool kit - Leading and Learning with Pride - A Tool Kit to Support 2SLGBTQI+ Seniors.

The Working Group is asking for MANDATORY training for ALL staff of the city's 10 long term care homes.

We are also asking for an ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISM to monitor and evaluate the training. (Based on failed promises of the past and the resulting homophobic abuse and physical neglect of 2SLGBTQI+ Seniors who reside in the 10 homes)

AND the COMMITMENT by the city to fund the training of ALL staff in the 10 long term care homes, past March 2023.

I personally thank you for your help, caring, understanding and now your advocacy to ensure that all 2SLGBTQI+ Seniors (who currently reside in the city's 10 long term care homes) can feel safe, comfortable and protected.

WE have the power and privilege to use our seats at this table of the 2SLGBTQ Community Advisory Board to IMPROVE and SAVE their lives.

Please remember, that one day, if YOU are lucky, YOU too will be a 2SLGBTQI+ Senior, and I would like for us to ALL enjoy safe and comfortable lives.

Regards,

LeZlie lee kam

Member, Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Advisory Committee