

LGBT Age – new service launched for older people

✘ The LGBT Centre for Health and Wellbeing is proud to announce the launch of LGBT Age, a new service aimed specifically at older lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Edinburgh and the Lothians. LGBT Age will be offering support to LGBT people over 50 in a number of ways. They will offer a programme of social opportunities, outings and events to improve social networks, a volunteer befriending scheme providing one-to-one support, an information service on a range of topics including LGBT and mainstream support and services, housing and legal matters and an advocacy service to offer individuals support in dealing with issues such as accessing health and social care services or challenging discrimination.

The new service was welcomed enthusiastically by some Scottish LGBT celebrities:

Shortly before he passed away on 17th August, The Scots Makar, Glasgow Poet Laureate and nonagenarian, Edwin Morgan, O.B.E.said:-“The most important thing now is to see things clearly, and to discuss things openly with one person or group. This is where the LGBT Age Project will be very helpful.”

Singer/songwriter, Horse MacDonald, said:-“I feel as we begin to grow older there is the opportunity to actually grow as people. In this the LGBT Centre for Health and Wellbeing and the LGBT Age service, with our gathered worldly wisdom, the experience and involvement, whether member or volunteer, will actually enrich lives and very possibly extend life spans.”

Craig Hill, Comedian and TV presenter, said:-“I think the idea of LGBT Age is inspired. Much of the elderly community in

general feels lonely with no connection to the 'real world' and can feel isolated and I think this is exacerbated if you're elderly and LGBT. Because not only do you feel that you maybe don't 'fit in' or have anything in common with your elderly compatriots but you also feel like the younger gay community has left you behind."

Research has discovered that older LGBT people have significantly diminished support networks compared to the general older population. They are more likely to live alone and be single, but are also less likely to have children or family to call upon in times of need. Many older LGBT people have concerns over housing, the level of LGBT-awareness of some care providers and access to health and support services. They may also feel isolated.

One older gay man said:-"Due to my mobility problems I had to move into sheltered housing. I don't have much contact with the other tenants. I've been to 'Tea and Chat' once but it was all old ladies, and I didn't have anything in common with them. I'm not sure they know what 'gay' means, if its not men who wear lipstick and dyed hair. It is a common idea in the age group. They don't think I'm anything because I'm disabled. They don't know that I'm gay. I don't have anything to do with them, because they could possibly be very rejecting. Befriending sounds like a good idea, especially in a sheltered housing complex. Especially for someone not so mobile it would make all the difference because of the loss of contact."

The service will work with mainstream services to raise awareness of issues affecting older LGBT people and ensure that they receive culturally appropriate and sensitive services that welcome them and meet their needs. It will also work towards addressing ageism in the LGBT community.

Shirley-Anne Somerville, SNP MSP for Lothians also welcomed the launch and said:-"I'm delighted at the launch of this new project aimed specifically at over 50s which I believe will

provide much needed support for a group that can sometimes become isolated and feel left behind.”

LGBT Age will need lots of help from the LGBT and wider communities! They need to let older LGBT people in the Lothians know about the service, and also need to recruit volunteers of any age (18+) for the befriending service. They are looking for committed and enthusiastic individuals to help bring this project to life.

You can help by getting in touch with Garry McGregor, LGBT Age Coordinator, on 0131 652 3282 or at garry@lgbthealth.org.uk More information is available on the Centre’s website at www.lgbthealth.org.uk

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