

**Summary, Vital Aging Network (VAN) Meeting, Tuesday, March 12, 2002  
Northwestern Hall, Luther Seminary, 10 a.m. to noon**

**Present**

Karen Bowen, Eileen Collard, Cathey Croghan, Carol Daly, Diana Don Carlos, Nancy Edwards, Barbara Eschle, Alice Evans, Karen Greer, Chuck Gribble, Hal Freshley, John Groth, Susan Hamerski, Jan Hively (Convenor and Recorder), Nan Just, Barbara Laporte, Mary Maher, Brian McCaffery, Marlys McPherson, Sue Meyers, Barbara Muesing, Grace Ramseyer, Pat Samples, Barbara Satin, Wayne Takeshita, Lydia Volz, Joanne Westergard, John Yoakam

**Handouts**

*GENERATIONS: An initiative addressing the needs of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender elders*, by Nancy Edwards, PhD, from "Spirit Currents", Newsletter of Spirit of the Lakes, United Church of Christ. June 2000

*Homophobia is a health hazard: What you can do*. SAGE, Senior Action in a Gay Environment. 1999.

*Transgender 101*, from "OutWord," the quarterly newsletter of the Lesbian and Gay Aging Issues Network (LGAIN), American Society on Aging. Winter 2000.

**Topic: Vital Aging among Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) Elders**

**The Story of the Generations Task Force on GLBT Aging.**

**Barbara Satin**, president of Twin Cities Generations, and the City of the Lakes Crossgender Community.

Issues of aging for GLBT are different from those of the broader group. Barbara, growing up as David, has always been transgender, but understood also that his difference, for which there were no words, was sinful, and hid it, as God's curse, through a typical St. Paul upbringing -- Catholic primary school, high school, college and the seminary. David joined the Air Force, married, and raised a family. 12 years ago, David held a corporate executive position and sat on 17 non-profit boards. Following retirement, at age 62, David's son, who is a therapist, suggested that he see a therapist who is an expert on transgender issues. Barbara realized that her difference was not a curse, simply who she was. She left her wife and the Catholic Church, where there was no place for her, and joined the Spirit of Lakes United Church of Christ, and started the City of Lakes Crossgender Community.

The experience of one of the members of the transgender community led to the founding of Twin Cities Generations. Gail suffered a stroke and went to the hospital. The hospital refused to treat Gail and would only accept Glenn, who spent considerable time recuperating in the VA Hospital. Although the MN Human Rights Act protects GLBT

rights, no one is going to fight in a critical situation where you might win the battle but lose the war.

Barbara's group began to look at GLBT issues of aging, consulting with experts including the three other presenters. Housing for GLBT elders in a campus-type facility was the first priority for the group. In 1999, the group formed Twin Cities Generations, with the purpose of supporting a satisfactory quality of life in later years.

**Research: Assessing the Needs of GLBT Old in Our Community.**

**Cathy Croghan**, researcher, geriatric nurse, and organizer for Living at Home Block Nursing projects.

As the project director for needs assessment surveys being conducted by Generations, Cathy described their first Survey 2000, for which they had 87 responses collected at the Gay Pride Festival and GLBT organization board meetings. 15% of the respondents were over the age of 60, 1/2 Gay, 1/3 Lesbian, and the remainder Bisexual and/or Transgender. 85% of the respondents did not perceive managers/staff of nursing homes or assisted living facilities to be GLBT sensitive. 95% said that they would be more inclined to use services if staff members were GLBT sensitive. The group used this information to secure a grant from the Headwaters Fund, an organization that supports grassroots social change.

Now Twin Cities Generations is conducting a survey involving a mailout to 3,000 members of 11 cooperating GLBT social and advocacy groups. So far, there has been a one-third return. The group intends to bring summarized information from the respondents to service providers, suggesting that they offer their staff GLBT sensitivity training. The information will also be used to stimulate discussion about aging in the GLBT community. The data will be published Summer 2002 and brought to a VAN meeting in August or September.

**Prospects and Directions: Education, Outreach, Social Services.**

**Nancy Edwards**, adjunct assistant professor and chair of the social work department at St. Cloud State University. Dr. Edwards also serves on the Leadership Council of the Lesbian/Gay Aging Issues Network of the American Society on Aging.

Nancy Edwards and John Yoakam have been working together on GLBT social gerontology issues for the last 10 years. Nancy is interested in how people develop an identity -- particularly a GLBT identity (Nancy came out at 45, after a career as wife and homemaker). Rebecca Voegelhaven, the pastor of Spirit of Lakes UCC, and Twin Cities Generations have been helpful in getting interested people together to talk about issues, including differences in services for GLBT users. Nancy was impressed by the work of Nancy Nystrom who has formed the "Red Dot Girls" clearinghouse in Seattle where people list "This is what I can do to help." People call the clearinghouse to meet their needs, one of which is "Who will be in my house when I need a home aide?" In that case, the helper will just go and be present during the first few sessions when a stranger is providing service. Here, Nancy and Twin Cities Generations have offered GLBT

awareness education for service providers -- "so that the nursing home staff won't freak out and bother me because I am a Lesbian." The St. Paul Church Homes, for example, provide four hours of training twice, once for administration and once for front line staff. The Dept of Human Services has welcomed presentations, as has the MN Social Service Association. In June, we will provide video conferencing through 60 sitse.

Minnesota has pulled out work into the mainstream. The oldest advocacy and education organization is Senior Action in a Gay Environment (SAGE) in New York. Needs that we all face include health benefits for partners and allowing partners to make life care decisions.

### **Policies affecting the GLBT Old.**

**John Yoakam**, assistant professor and chair of the social work department at the College of St. Benedict/St. John's University. Dr. Yoakam also serves as the chair of the Lesbian/Gay Aging Issues Network (LGAIN) of the American Society on Aging.

Policies institutionalize homophobia. During the 1990s, some states passed marriage acts that would cripple support for surviving partners. You can be named as beneficiary for pensions, insurance, etc., but the only way to receive it is through a taxable lump sum rather than ongoing income, and even that has been challenged by biological relatives. There is a psychological impact on long-term relationships when the relationship cannot be validated.

Changes are occurring in regulations, standards, etc. even though they have not been legislated. Agencies have approved LGAIN's standards within their Standards of Cultural Competency. In some cases, licensing requirements include GLBT awareness. Some service providers have made an effort to demonstrate GLBT sensitivity in their office photos, GLBT magazines and newspapers on office tables, certificate of GLBT training on the wall, etc.

The first GLBT publication was "Outing Age", at <[www.nglta.org](http://www.nglta.org)>, which was launched in 1972. The White House Conference on Aging includes Gay and Lesbian representatives and issues, after a struggle. Age Concern, in Great Britain, has published "best practice" models.

**Nancy** added some comments. Here, we are thinking about aging in a different way, as Vital Aging. Lesbians have had an easier time aging than heterosexual women, because they have already come to the center core in themselves and let go of feminine stereotypes. We hold pot lucks for "Old Lesbians Organizing for Change."

**John** commented that Gay men tend to be resilient. Often, men lose their sense of identity in their employment and have difficulty finding themselves in the transition to retirement. Gay men are automatically part of a minority group, another community separate from the workplace, and have another identity separate from that of an employee -- a protective identity. John is concerned about negative stereotypes related to older Gay men in relationships with younger men. It's not that different from older men with

younger women. John has interviewed partners with a 15-year-plus intergenerational age difference. Frequently the older man finds added vitality through the relationship.

**Barbara** commented that Transgender men, who have known who they are but have not been able to express it, can come out and express themselves in retirement, after the family has grown and the career is over. That, also, is a source of new vitality.

When asked if there were alliances between GLBT organizations and other underserved communities, the presenters said that that doesn't tend to happen. Actually, GLBT people themselves don't necessarily want to be together.

### **VAN Web Site**

Jan Hively urged outreach to encourage registration at the Vital Aging Summit scheduled for March 26. She and Grace Ramseyer are seeking Information Collectors for continuous updating of the VAN Web site, <[www.van.umn.edu](http://www.van.umn.edu)>, which will be launched at the Summit. Jan handed out a list of Web site topics, and ideas about who might provide updates for each topic. She asked the group to suggest others with the expertise and interest to become Information Collectors.

### **Next Meeting, April 9, Education Outreach**

VAN will meet again at Luther Seminary. Barbara Eschle is organizing Community Education representatives to present information about Community Education for Older Adults. Jane Cunningham is organizing a presentation on the Learning in Retirement Network. Jan Hively will bring a "talking paper" to stimulate discussion about "What's Next for the Vital Aging Network?"

Revisions needed? Call or e-mail Jan Hively, the Recorder: 612-379-4124, <[hivel001@umn.edu](mailto:hivel001@umn.edu)>