



# GRAI MATTERS

GLBTI Rights in Ageing Inc

August 2013

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Vale Jose Sarria

**GRAI AGM 2013**  
**Sunday 20 October**  
**2-4pm**

Coode Street Café  
24 Coode St Mt Lawley  
[See page 3 for details](#)

### **We always welcome your contributions to GRAI Matters**

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Editor: June Lowe

## Welcome

Welcome to our August newsletter which reports on some important GRAI activities as well as more broadly on issues affecting the LGBTI aged-care agenda.

At recent special meeting of the membership, we officially agreed to a name change for our organisation. We will be retaining the GRAI acronym and logo but will now be known as **GLBTI Rights in Ageing Inc**. This was one of several changes to the current constitution put before the membership. The name change more accurately represents that GRAI has always worked broadly across ageing issues, not just in the retirement field. Feedback prior to the meeting also showed that having the word 'retirement' central to our name was putting off some potential new members. Over the next few months we will be updating the website and other publicity material to reflect the new name. The other constitutional changes were mainly administrative, including allowing Board members to remain on the Board after three terms, but in a different role (ensuring better sustainability of the Board). Thank you to those members who attended the meeting, resulting in a quorum. There are still a few small constitutional changes required following further discussion and these will be presented at the AGM.

July saw several very successful GRAI events. Our forum 'Older LGBTI people: a new milestone in recognition and care', with special speaker the new Minister for Ageing and Mental Health Jacinta Collins, attracted approximately 70 people, predominantly aged-care provider staff and management. Originally we had been expecting Minister Butler, but with a change in Cabinet positions 10 days before the scheduled forum, it became one of the first engagements of Minister Collins in her new portfolio. The event also built on our relationship with COTA (Council on the Ageing) and ACSWA (Aged-care Services WA). A more extensive article on this forum is inside.

The former Minister for Ageing and Mental Health, Mark Butler, was instrumental in ensuring the smooth passage of the Living Longer Living Better reform agenda. Importantly for GRAI, he was a strong supporter of the reforms directly affecting LGBTI people, including the development and launching of the LGBTI National Aged-care Strategy. Early discussions with Minister Collins have indicated she intends to continue this work with the LGBTI community. We welcome this commitment, especially as previously her position has not always shown understanding of LGBTI issues.

## Letter from the Chair

*Continued page 2*

## Letter from the Chair, continued

On the social front, GRAI held a film fundraiser at Cinema Paradiso, showing 'Cloudburst'. While it was a financial success for the organisation, with over 200 tickets sold, it also showed the great responsiveness of Perth's LGBTI community, and that given the right event, the community will come out. By all accounts it was a great night; I regret that I missed the fun as I was in Tasmania. I hear there was much catching up with old friends and we have certainly been asked, 'When is the next one?' Thank you for your support.

### GRAI AGM

The AGM has been scheduled for Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> of October (see details below). This is an important meeting for GRAI as we reflect on the last 12 months. We are also faced with a pressing need to recruit some new Board members as we have a number of current Board members stepping down. Please think about putting something back into the LGBTI community by nominating for a position. This is not an onerous role, but if we are to continue our successes and move more towards offering community services, we need a strong Board. Please feel free to contact an existing Board member or myself if you want to know what this involves.

### Pride 2013

November means the new look Pride Festival. GRAI aims to have some sort of entry in the daytime Pride Parade on Saturday 2 November.

So why not join us? We are seeking support and ideas on what we could do. If you have some energy to help out, please give us a call. Watch for the details so that you as a member can join in the festivities and be part of our parade entry. GRAI will also be offering another Pride event likely to be a forum/social gathering/café afternoon - details yet to be finalised. So watch the Pride program for details.

This will be my last welcome to the GRAI news, as at the next AGM I will be stepping down after six years in the role of Chair. It has been

a privilege to be the Chair in a period in which we have much to be proud of, as GRAI moved from a newly emerging organisation to a respected and nationally recognised organisation providing an important voice on LGBTI aged-care issues. During my time as Chair, there have been real advances in aged-care issues and GRAI has had a significant

part to play in this. From our research project with aged-care residential providers, and input into the Productivity Report and other submissions, to the important changes announced under the aged-care reform agenda, GRAI has been there.

I would like to acknowledge all the Board members that I have worked with over this time. There is still much work to be done but it is also time for others to move GRAI forward.

Dr Jude Comfort

GRAI Chair

INTERESTED in  
joining the GRAI  
Board?



Contact Jude for  
more info:  
0422 654 244

You are invited to join us at

**GRAI's 2013 Annual General Meeting**

**Sunday 20 October | 2pm-4pm**

**AT Coode Street Café, 24 Coode St, Mount Lawley (cnr 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue)**

The business will be quickly dispensed with, leaving plenty of time to socialise in good company and enjoy delectable food from the talented kitchen of Coode Street Cafe!

For catering purposes, kindly RSVP by 16 October to: [info@GRAI.org.au](mailto:info@GRAI.org.au)

## LGBTI Aged Care Strategy Launched in Perth by the Minister

The WA launch of the National LGBTI Ageing and Aged Care Strategy, was held on 10 July 2013, Northbridge Hotel.

Best-laid plans sometimes go awry, and just days before our scheduled WA launch of the National LGBTI Ageing and Aged-care Strategy, suddenly our arrangements were in question. Amidst Cabinet reshuffling, we no longer knew if Minister Mark Butler, whose leadership had ensured the timely production of the Strategy, would still be available.

In the event, we welcomed the new Minister for Ageing, Jacinta Collins, who (impressively) made the 3000km trip to WA, despite being newly in her position. Also speaking at the launch were the GRAI Chair, Jude Comfort, the CEO of ACSWA, Stephen Kobelke, the CEO of COTA, Ken Marsden and the Executive Director of GLCS, Sandra Norman.

In her presentation, Minister Collins stressed the importance of evidence-based research which had allowed political consensus on the need to focus attention on older GLBTI people. She also acknowledged the role of the National LGBTI Health Alliance (of which GRAI is a member) in assisting the national consultation process which led to the production of the

Strategy. Minister Collins confirmed that to ensure meaningful long-term change, the progress of the strategy would be assessed every year over a 5-year period.

Stephen Kobelke from ACSWA said that he believed the aged-care industry would welcome the changes for LGBTI inclusivity. Being accustomed to following so many guidelines, the sector can move rapidly to put policies in place once it receives a mandate to do something, he said.

However, a major obstacle to implementation is the chronic underfunding of the sector. In particular, the lack of aged-care places is at crisis point. Fitting in staff training programs, etc., would be difficult in a highly stressed workplace.

Ken Marsden of COTA gave a very dynamic and impassioned talk targeting ageism. Indeed, COTA have a very progressive stance in that regard, something that LGBTI ageing providers and advocates could emulate.

COTA (Council on the Aged) and ACSWA (Aged and Community Services WA) partnered GRAI in organising this event. We look forward to further successful collaborations in the future.

WA Launch of the National LGBTI Ageing and Aged-Care Strategy, 10 July 2013.  
Panel of speakers, L-R: Ken Marsden, COTA; Minister Jacinta Collins; Sandra Norman, GLCS;  
Jude Comfort, GRAI; and Steve Kobelke, ACSWA.



## About the National LGBTI Ageing and Aged Care Strategy

First launched in November 2012, the strategy will inform federal government departments, and guide funding priorities for the Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) to implement commitments in the *Living Longer, Living Stronger* aged care reform package, to ensure that LGBTI people will have equitable access to appropriate aged care services.

Other goals will direct resources to the aged care and LGBTI sectors to address the needs of LGBTI people.

The Strategy was developed by Steering Committee, comprising DoHA, aged care representatives and LGBTI community representatives, including the Alliance and GRAI.

The process involved 16 community consultations nationally, further demonstrating the collaborative nature of this work.

The Strategy is formulated around the 6 principles of: inclusion, empowerment, access and equity, quality and capacity building.

For a hard copy of the Strategy, contact [june\\_lowe@hotmail.com](mailto:june_lowe@hotmail.com) or access on-line at: [http://www.health.gov.au/interne-t/main/publishing.nsf/Content/44E7132570CB0438CA257AD9001432CD/\\$File/lgbti-strategy.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/interne-t/main/publishing.nsf/Content/44E7132570CB0438CA257AD9001432CD/$File/lgbti-strategy.pdf)

## CLouDBURST proves a winner

The screening of *Cloudburst* proved a hugely popular choice for GRAI's film night (19 July).

It was great to see Perth's LGBTI community out in force, overflowing the Paradiso foyer and packing a full house in the cinema.



The dominant critique of the film, for those who could suspend disbelief and go along for the (often implausible) ride, was that it was a fine romp, beautiful scenery (yes, I want to go to Canada now), and provided plenty of laughs, albeit with liberal crudity. And how terrific to have a mainstream romantic comedy with older lesbians! The acting was charming, making the characters disarming despite their improbability. They clearly had fun with the script!

Olympia Dukakis and Brenda Fricker played somewhat stereotyped butch/femme roles (my partner's main beef with this film) but their relationship was tender and convincing. Meanwhile, toy boy, Prentice, (Ryan Doucette) was the device to tell the audience how to react to the outrageous bits (awe, admiration), as well as eye candy for those that way inclined....

Part of a recent spate of movies in the 'older adults' genre, *Cloudburst* doesn't offer deep insights, but is most entertaining and may give some aged-carers pause for thought, as they re-evaluate the possibilities of older adults having the capacity for both sexuality and the outlandish. Well may they tremble!

We have noticed that the overarching theme in these 'older adult' movies is the characters' dissatisfaction with the menu of choices on offer, and their efforts to redefine these choices in various ways. We look forward to an Australian offering, to reflect OUR cultural take on ageing, and a deeper exploration of alternative ways to lead meaningful older lives.

GRAI thanks the following supporters of the *Cloudburst* film night: Greens MLC, Lyn MacLaren, Umbrella Community Services & Out in Perth

## Law Reform and social change: we've come a long way

By June Lowe

**We've come a long way in the last 2 years.**

The national roundtable, hosted in Sydney by the AIDS Council of NSW (ACON) and the National LGBTI Health Alliance in October 2011, was not, of course, a 'beginning' --- countless years of activism had built a mature and articulate LGBTI rights movement in Australia - but, for aged-care reform, it was a significant moment in LGBTI history. We debated plans to influence the political processes around LGBTI inclusiveness in aged care, the need for a Federal Government strategy on LGBTI ageing, and also our aim to secure national training for the aged-care sector. The (then) Minister for Ageing, Mark Butler, also attended and listened to the group's concerns and priorities.

Fast-track to 2013 and we have seen virtually all our agenda items put in place: a remarkable outcome. This was not as sudden as it sounds, but a happy result of all the work by LGBTI activists in Australia and around the world, laying the foundations for a society now actually puzzled by ongoing prejudice towards LGBTI people. Add to this the happy timing of a Labor government willing and able (in conjunction with the Greens) to implement aged-care law reform, and a dedicated Minister for Ageing, who really appreciated the issues facing LGBTI elders<sup>1</sup>. Finally, the imperative to address issues surrounding an ageing demographic provided the vital economic and political momentum for wholesale reform.

Thus the confluence of two streams - ageing and LGBTI - flowed together, making a serendipitous moment in history for LGBTI elders, an opportunity able to be channeled by a mature and experienced NGO movement finding willing partners in political and bureaucratic arenas.

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<sup>1</sup> Minister Butler was actively lobbied over several years by his constituent in South Australia, LGBTI activist and academic, Jo Harrison.

### Political Achievements

This latest chapter in older LGBTI rights was galvanised by the Productivity Commission's Inquiry 'Caring for Older Australians', which, after extensive national consultation, produced its report in June 2011. Its brief was a complete review of aged care in Australia, to identify how to equitably provide these services into the future. LGBTI organisations around the country (including GRAI) contributed written and verbal submissions to the Commission, and, to our gratification, the points we raised were included in the Commission's report, and ultimately were also reflected in the amendments to the *Aged Care Act (1997)* which followed in April 2012.



Reform of the *Aged Care Act (1997)* took the form of a package of 5 bills, known as *Living Longer, Living Better*, outlining a 10-year reform program in a range of areas, including funding arrangements and quality control mechanisms for aged care. Of relevance to us was the inclusion of LGBTI elders as a 'Special Needs' group; a commitment to an LGBTI Aged-care Strategy; and \$2.5m funding for LGBTI cultural training for the aged-care sector.

- The 'Special Needs' status for LGBTI in aged care challenges the 'we treat everyone the same' narrative and requires services to make special efforts to become inclusive. It also provides impetus

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## Law Reform and social change, continued

by attaching implementation funding to care providers.

- The National LGBTI Health Alliance is administering the development of the training package and its national rollout, although other states (notably Victoria) and some corporate agencies are already running their own training for aged-care service providers.

In the dying days of the last Parliament, there was a scramble to finalise a number of Bills before the Parliament was prorogued. The pressure was on: the looming election brought the prospect of change to more a conservative government, and pessimism about the fate of progressive social reform in the near future. In this hot-house environment (and amidst a Labour leadership spill) somewhat incredibly, a number of important anti-discrimination measures were passed.

### Religious exemptions ended

*The Sex Discrimination Amendment (SDA) (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Intersex Status) Bill 2013* was passed in June 2013, among other things, finally removing the religious exemption clauses in the provision of aged care. This means that faith-based organisations can no longer claim religious exemption to discriminate against LGBTI clients. Counter-arguments from the conservative side that this would erode religious freedoms did not win the day. Indeed, all the major faith-based care providers had already written submissions asserting they welcomed the proposed amendments! This is a historic legal milestone, and sets a precedent that anti-discrimination laws protecting LGBTI people can be upheld in a faith-based setting. This protection is of great importance, given that about 30% of aged-care providers in WA are run by religious organisations.

The Senate committees inquiring into this issue heard evidence that many LGBTI people fear discrimination in aged care and delay seeking assistance as they age.

The experiences of older LGBTI Victorians accessing aged care services, including cases of discrimination and homophobic attitudes from staff, were documented in the 'My People' report in 2008.

Following the passage of the SDA, there is a 12-month grace period, after which sanctions can be sought for non-compliance. However, a few agencies were very quick to react. For example, changes to the Medicare Benefits Scheme were brought in from 1 July, removing gender-specific language from 15 Medicare item billing codes (including cervical smears) which avoids trans and intersex people being misclassified on their medical records. Also, from the 1<sup>st</sup> August 2013, Federal anti-discrimination protections have been extended to include the grounds of 'sexual orientation', 'gender identity', 'intersex status' and 'marital or relationship status'. The new laws mean that LGBTI discrimination complaints can be brought to the Australian Human Rights Commission and, if necessary, to the Federal Court. This also marks a legal milestone in being the first legislation to fully include intersex status.

### Remarkable social change

We have also witnessed profound changes in social attitudes over a very short period of time. In 2010, GRAI conducted research that found that most aged-care providers had never considered that they may have LGBTI clients ('*We don't have any of those people here*', GRAI 2010), let alone understood that they should respond in any particular way to these clients. Fast forward to July 2013, and we see, in Perth, a room full of (mostly) aged-care providers, keen to hear about the LGBTI Aged-care Strategy being presented by the new Minister for Ageing, Jacinta Collins, who had prioritised the event as one the first commitments in her role.

This remarkable transformation is, as stated earlier, testimony to the collaborative efforts, and politically strategic focus, of many skilled LGBTI activists around the country, working alongside sympathetic people in party politics and departments, and also in the aged-care sector.

## Law Reform and social change, continued

This work has been supported by insightful academic research. We must also acknowledge that the ground on which we stand has been tilled by awareness-raising work over many years.

### A way to go

However, ‘the finger pointing is not the moon’, and we certainly cannot rest on our immediate laurels. It is still early days, and implementation of inclusive services has barely begun. There is cause for optimism as some LGBTI services are taking root. In Queensland, major care provider, Care Connect, has LGBTI-specific care packages; in NSW and ACT, UnitingCare Ageing have employed an LGBTI Project Officer; and in Victoria, Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria Health (GLHV) has established an accreditation scheme called ‘Rainbow Tick’. Although most efforts nationally are focused on the transformation of mainstream aged care to provide safe and welcoming services for LGBTI clients, Australia’s first independent living centre for older LGBTI adults (Linton Estate), is soon to open in Victoria.

These examples certainly give cause for optimism, as they blaze a trail for others to follow.

‘A person’s rights do not diminish with age, nor are they lesser for members of minority groups such as GLBTI people’

Hon Susan Ryan AO,  
Age Discrimination  
Commissioner, Australian  
Human Rights Commission,  
(Informa Conference 2013)

However, we must be wary of surface-level acceptance, as achieving deep behavioural change requires more than optimistic expectation and a short course in cultural competency. Although these are an excellent start, obstacles include the low wages and rapid turnover of aged-care staff, as well as residual homophobia.

Beliefs and attitudes need to change before permanent behavioural change will occur. So, in many ways, despite our achievements, our journey has just begun: work with the aged-care sector must be sustained and sustainable and progress regularly reviewed. The National LGBTI Ageing and Aged-care Strategy stipulates annual progress evaluations --- so with binding oversight, we look forward to seeing

real and incremental change being reported.

The move at a societal level, from ‘tolerance’ to widespread ‘affirmation’ (where LGBTI identity is seen as a positive value), will take more time, and we suspect that the combination of political/ agency leadership, provocative research, and tenacious on the ground activism, will again be the formula that ultimately wins the day.

## INTERNATIONAL SURVEY ON SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

An interesting PhD research project on same-sex relationships is requesting survey participants. Can you spare a few minutes to help?

**Respondents are sought** to complete a short online survey relating to the division of household labour and money-earning within their relationship.

The survey is part of a doctoral research study exploring how civil partnerships and same-sex marriage can help to challenge society and the law’s ideas about gender roles in intimate relationships. The survey is particularly aimed at people who are currently in a same-sex cohabiting relationship, but all LGBTI participants are welcomed.

Full information about the project, and the online survey, are available at:  
<https://www.survey.bris.ac.uk/bham/divisionoflabour>.

If you have questions, or would like further information, please contact the researcher, **Charlotte Bendall**, by e-mail at: [clb212@bham.ac.uk](mailto:clb212@bham.ac.uk) or by post at: Birmingham Law School, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2TT.

## Marriage bells in US and UK

Although *GRAI Matters* does not usually report on same-sex marriage, it is worth making an exception on the occasion of two recent milestones.

On June 26<sup>th</sup> 2013, American LGBT activists were on tenterhooks waiting for the Supreme Court decision on the fate of the 'Defence of Marriage Act' (DOMA) - a federal law that allowed states to refuse to recognise same-sex marriages, and making same-sex married couples ineligible to receive federal marriage benefits. The Act was finally ruled unconstitutional, alongside another ruling overturning Proposition 8, effectively restoring marriage equality in California.

The DOMA case was brought by Edie Windsor. "This is a joyous moment in our country's history, thanks in large part to Edie Windsor, who fought many hard-won battles along the way to this victory," said Michael Adams, Executive Director of SAGE. "Older lesbian and gay couples were especially hard hit by DOMA, and their health, well-being and quality of life will now be vastly improved. Congratulations to Edie... on breaking down another barrier to full equality for LGBT elders!"



The ruling means that thousands of older lesbian and gay couples will finally have equal access to federal benefits, programs and protections that provide safety and support for older Americans. See more at:

<http://www.sageusa.org/newsevents/release.cfm?ID=79#sthash.s1BMWTqH.dpuf>



Meanwhile, less than 3 weeks later, on 15 July in London, jubilant gay rights activists danced outside parliament, while some members of the House of Lords wore pink carnations as they passed a bill legalising same-sex marriage in England and Wales. Scotland passed similar

legislation last year.

Interestingly, economic arguments were at the fore in both cases. The American case highlighted access to federally-provided benefits. The British government said it hopes that legalising gay marriage will bring an overall boost to the economy, estimating that the change could bring in up to 14.4 million pounds a year for the wedding industry.

Deputy PM Nick Clegg, said the new law would ensure gay couples felt "valued". Indeed!



Gay campaigners drive a bus past the Houses of Parliament as the Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Bill gets an unopposed third reading by the House of Lords in central London on July 15, 2013.

### The marriage tally

France became the 14th country to legalise same-sex marriage in May, joining The Netherlands, Spain, Canada, South Africa, Norway, Sweden, Portugal, Iceland, Argentina, Denmark, Uruguay, Belgium, and New Zealand. NZ legislation, passed earlier, came into force 19 August 2013.

Gay couples can marry in 13 US states, as well as in the capital, Washington DC, while parts of Mexico also allow same-sex marriage.

## Are they 'home?' Experiences of Aged Care services for LGBTI people

Excerpts from a presentation given by Dorothy McRae-McMahon

Dorothy McRae-McMahon, 79, is a celebrated writer (with 18 books to her name), activist and retired Uniting Church Minister. She was the first woman Moderator of the World Council of Churches Worship Committee and came out as a lesbian in 1997, putting at risk her ordination and a number of senior international positions.



Dorothy McRae-McMahon

She describes herself as a person of 'radical faith', looking at 'who people are, rather than what they believe'.

The following article is an abridged version of a presentation she gave at the Informa LGBTI Aged-care Conference in Sydney, 13-14 July 2013.

Like most of us, I tend to mix with people who are "one of us" in their sexuality or gender identification. That sometimes gives me a false perception of the level of acceptance we have in the community at large. Then I move around a bit, especially in churches, and am reminded that there is still a significant amount of prejudice and homophobia in the wider community.

It is all too easy to have general policies in any services, perhaps especially in aged-care, without regularly checking whether they are actually being carried out. It only takes one prejudiced person in a facility to have a huge impact on the lives of the often vulnerable people in care.

--- [It] is often hard to describe and pin down what people are experiencing. The prejudiced staff person doesn't come into a room and say

"How are you today? I hate lesbians!" or refuse to properly dress or toilet a gay man.

It is usually much more subtle than that. Most of us would have experienced that subtlety in all sorts of situations and

relationships --- a cold or disapproving face or voice, small but important prejudiced attitudes and behaviours and little punishing activities behind the scenes in which we live and work.

[While we] have a level of independence and power over our own lives, we can at least usually make some choices about who we relate to, or even face into the persons concerned and challenge what they are saying or doing. [But] most of us haven't the confidence or competence to do that at that [at a later] stage in our lives. Seeing my partner died last year, I now live alone and am very conscious that I need to do some research relating to where I might go if I need aged-care, so I don't land my family and friends with that.

### A place to call 'home'

Moving into any sort of care facility is obviously a huge change in anyone's life and I have many experiences relating to that and hearing those involved saying "Please! I want to go home! Will you take me home?" I have a friend saying that to me when I visit her now and it breaks my heart, even though I know she is in a good spot. When the facility really becomes "home" for the one concerned, you know that the

## Are they 'home?', continued

culture is right and is warm, caring and accepting.

So, what is “home” for people like us? If my partner was alive and I was in care, I would want opportunities to snuggle up in bed with her. I suspect that many agencies would find that hard to deal with, most especially if we were a male gay couple. Making a place “home” involves having around you all sorts of things which remind you of those you love and of your previous real home. For us, that must include images and symbols of our partners and/or companions in life.

I guess some people may propose that we have dedicated facilities for LGBTI people. This may be a temporary solution to existing prejudice, but I would hope that it would remain temporary. We are not odd people. We are part of the ordinary diversity of human beings from the beginning of time and, in my view, our goal is to create communities which express that in every way.

### The role of story-telling

So, how would we recommend that care facilities develop a culture which is open and respectful to LGBTI people? How can we institute change?

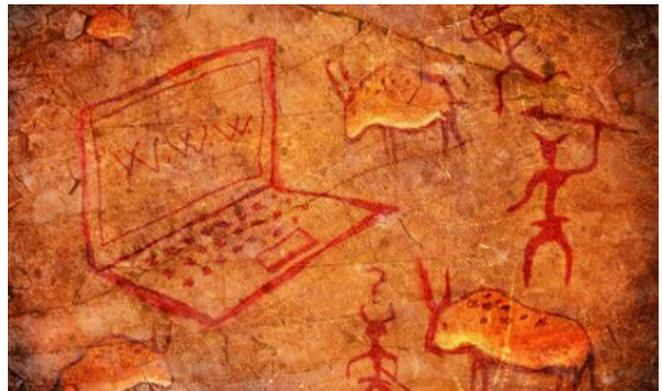
Over the years, I have had to try to do that in many church and community contexts and, in every case, I have found that the most effective way is to have those concerned meet up with LGBTI people and listen to their stories about their recognition of their sexuality and then how that has played out in life and relationships. I have no doubt that we have two sorts of opponents - those who disagree with our lifestyles and people who are phobic in their hatred of us.

Those who simply disagree can be changed, in my experience. Those who are phobic usually can't be changed. Their attitudes are really

pathological and are often connected with things deep in their own lives.

If you get staff of an agency together to listen to LGBTI people and talk with them, you can usually discern what sort of people you are dealing with on your staff. Phobic people find it hard not to reveal themselves, even if they remain largely silent during the discussion and wait until after the group has dispersed to say what they are feeling. I have usually suspected that I know what they think in their body language, even if they say nothing directly.

[Through my experiences] I --- affirm that many unexpected people can change their minds about us, if they get to know us, and that story-telling can be one of the best and gentlest ways of doing that. Also, if leaders of an agency are watching carefully the responses of their staff to such story-telling, they can usually pick the phobic people present and then face the decisions required in knowing them. In my experience, it is a much more productive way of working with the culture of a facility, than simply giving rules and lectures.



Of course, every agency needs to decide on its ground rules and make them clear to the staff at the time of employment so that it has something to point to if a staff person is found to have oppressive and discriminating attitudes later.

In all this, I am suggesting that any agency needs to have a clear set policy and then take action in inviting change in its staff and

## Are they 'home?', continued

training them to be sensitive and respectful of all those in their care. They also need to respect those who relate to the person in care, those who assess how she or he is experiencing living in the facility.

### Choosing a church-run facility

And now I want to concentrate more directly on religion and aged-care facilities.

If you look at the rules and beliefs of the various religions or churches in this country, the only one which has a firm national doctrine of acceptance of LGBTI people is the Uniting Church. In fact, the churches around the world which take that view are very likely to either be a one of the three churches which created the Uniting Church in Australia (the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches) or another union of those churches.

I can mention that the Uniting Church probably has more aged-care services than anyone else, under its department called *UnitingCare*. It recently won the Not for Profit Charity Award for "Pride in Diversity" as a LGBTI employer and carer and it has a special group to encourage LGBTI people to enter its services.

Then there are the very conservative churches like the Salvation Army, the Churches of Christ or the Pentecostal (Hillsong) type churches which would try to "heal" us of our sexuality. Baptist Churches vary in their attitudes.

The Roman Catholic Church is something else again. If you listen to its authorities, it sounds as though there is no room to move. People like us are an abomination. However, running underneath the church authorities, in my experience, there are many, many agencies and staff who give the best and most respectful care of all.

My partner spent the last 6 weeks of her life in the St Vincent's Sacred Heart Hospice. We chose that because I had done a lot of

palliative care work there, especially in the years when many gay guys were dying of HIV/AIDS and I believed it was the best hospice in Sydney. The care was impeccable, so respectful and inclusive. Ali's friends were amazed by all that was done for us both.

So, when we are looking at aged-care facilities, I certainly wouldn't rule out those belonging to the Catholic Church.

### Working for an inclusive future

Of course it would be very hard to police what goes on within each agency, even if we demanded that they be inclusive<sup>2</sup>. However, we could at least formally require them to be that if they are to receive funding, and then encourage the people who they have in their care, and the families who relate to them, to report any violation of this rule<sup>3</sup>.

In saying this, I am not suggesting any winding down of religious freedom within the religion concerned, but that those agencies using significant amounts of public funding be required to justly and inclusively serve the whole community.

Overall, I believe that we are gradually making progress. Because I am old, I can look back and see how things have changed over the many decades of my life.

People like some of us, who are safe in their work positions, or retirement, having outed ourselves some time ago, will need to be the voices for justice and compassion, alongside straight people who care about that too.

In doing this, we are part of a movement for creating a safer and more compassionate world for all people - a true community --- having lived a long time, I know that change is possible and we can be part of it.

<sup>2</sup> This paper was given before the anti-discrimination laws were passed.

<sup>3</sup> The new Gateway agency will be charged with receiving complaints.

## They Said:

**“Aged Care must be relevant to the lives of LGBTI people, not the other way around”.**

*Mark Butler MP (then) Minister of Mental Health and Ageing, Minister for Social Inclusion.*

“It’s the expectation in most aged-care facilities of the men’s afternoon sessions of playing bowls and billiards and talking about their youth and the good old days.

There is also the playful teasing of setting up the males with the ladies, or the women making a great fuss of the men in their areas. Straight old men may enjoy this, but the gay males would probably feel quite uncomfortable. It can also be difficult for LGBT to sit and reminisce openly because of fear of being judged or others having no comprehension of what they are talking about.

Imagine if an old gay man or lesbian started to discuss Mardi Gras and the fun they had. Can you imagine the need for defibrillators to be handy for those with weak hearts!”

*Shelley Argent,  
Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays*

“Given the circumstances, especially the substantial public funding of aged care in Australia, it is not in any way acceptable for an aged-care provider, including a church based provider, to discriminate against LGBTI people in need of care.

While the aged-care qualification to the *Sex Discrimination Act* is a significant improvement for older LGBTI people receiving services, the exemptions will still allow religious-based aged-care providers to discriminate against **employing** LGBTI people to deliver aged-care services. I hope these providers review those policies.

In light of our serious shortage of relevant workers, can we afford to discriminate against any capable and suitable candidate on any basis?

Demographic predictions suggest we’re going to need as many as we can get! In addition, given the diversity of people who will need to access these services, it should be considered appropriate to have diverse staff to meet diverse needs.

*Hon Susan Ryan AO, Human Rights Commissioner, at the Informa LGBTI Aged Care Conference, Sydney, July 2013.*

## Paying tribute to the work of our LGBT predecessors

Jose Julio Sarria, a historic figure in the San Francisco LGBT community, died on Monday, August 19, 2013. He was 90.

Jose Sarria helped write the story of our time with creativity, panache and ever-challenging high-visibility - from his fanciful and campy creation, *The Widow Norton*, through to his 1961 run for Board of Supervisors. Jose led in so many ways in the early, tentative days of the GLBT movement in California. In the face of a largely hostile society, he helped found some of San Francisco’s first-generation organizations, including the League for Civil Education, the Society for Individual Rights (SIR), and the Imperial Court.

Jose brought flare and panache to his life and work as an outsized personality and female impersonator at the storied *Black Cat*. But he also was a movement strategist, using his distinct talents to challenge the homophobia and bigotry of the time, and by fighting back.



Jose Julio Sarria,  
Empress I de San Francisco,  
the Widow Norton