

Older Gay and Lesbian People: Establishing the needs

GRAI 2007

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About GRAI

GRAI (Gay Retirement Association Inc.) was established in Perth, Western Australia in August 2005 to explore the development and to advocate for, retirement and aged care services and facilities for older and ageing people of diverse sexualities and gender identities. It is a community based organisation.

Vision: *Older GLBTI will enjoy a rewarding quality of life.*

Mission: *To create a responsive and inclusive mature age environment that promotes and supports a quality life for older people of diverse sexualities and gender identities.*

Our values: *Dignity, Diversity, Respect, Well-being, Health, Self-worth, Excellence, Community and Choice.*

The objects of GRAI are:

- *To foster the creation of accessible and sustainable retirement living, aged care and community services that specifically cater for the needs of older people of diverse sexualities and gender identities;*
- *To promote a greater understanding of health issues relating to older people of diverse sexualities and gender identities;*
- *To promote the pursuit of excellence in health care, retirement and aged care services for older people of diverse sexualities and gender identities;*
- *To promote retirement and aged care services and resources that foster confidence, self worth and well being for older people of diverse sexualities and gender identities; and*
- *To raise awareness of discrimination and isolation faced by older people of diverse sexualities and gender identities in relation to provision of retirement and aged care accommodation and services.*

Acknowledgements

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Thanks to all those members of the GLBTI (gay lesbian bisexual trans intersex) community who participated in the survey and attended the focus group.

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Introduction

Shortly after GRAI was formed the group undertook a needs assessment of the GLBTI (gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans and intersex) community in Perth to help establish the direction the organisation should take. In so doing this formative research provided information on the unmet needs of GLBTI people when considering their older age and their care and accommodation needs. These are presented in this report.

1. Methodology

Both quantitative and qualitative data collection was undertaken. A paper based survey was distributed through community networks from August to October 2006. Fair Day (a large gay event held during the Pride celebratory month of October in Perth) provided the main point of survey collection.

Two focus groups were held in August 2006 with members of the GLBTI community in Perth. This allowed for themes to be further explored and provided a rich source of additional data.

Both the survey and the focus group aimed to ask members of the target group about their experiences, feelings and attitudes around issues related to the provision of housing and support in their older years.

2. Sample characteristics

There were 144 respondents to the paper based survey. Demographic data collected included:

- Sexual orientation
- Gender
- Employment status
- Age

The results are displayed below.

a) Gender:

Male	70
Female	69
Trans	4
Intersex = 1	1
Total	144

b) Age Range:

30 years or less	16
31 – 40 years	32
41- 50 years	46
51 – 55 years	11
56 - 60 years	16
61- 65 years	13
66 - 70 years	5
71 - 75 years	2
76 - 80 years	3
Total	144

c) Sexual Orientation:

Gay	66
Lesbian	56
Bisexual	1
Queer	1
Dyke	2
Same-sex attracted	2
Straight	3
Don't use labels	2
Other	2
Total	135*

* not all respondents answered all questions

3. Community Survey Results

Respondents were asked to respond to a series of eleven statements with selected responses including:

- *Strongly Agree (SA)*
- *Agree (A)*
- *Disagree (D)*
- *Strongly Disagree (SD)*

The survey also included an invitation to offer suggestions and comments for further consideration. Results from the survey questions are summarised below:

- 53 respondents indicated they were currently looking or interested in retirement accommodation/living options
- 133 - were interested in retirement options in future
- 112 - were concerned that they or someone they know may experience discrimination within the existing retirement accommodation sector/industry on the basis of sexual orientation
- 115 - felt their needs would not be met in the current environment
- 83 - felt they would be able to afford the kind of retirement or accommodation they wanted in the future
- When thinking about retirement accommodation/living:
 - 95 – agreed that a primary consideration was financial cost
 - 96 - agreed that a primary consideration was housing style
 - 91 - agreed that a primary consideration was location
 - 89 - agreed that a primary consideration was lifestyle/recreation
 - 125 - agreed that a primary consideration was acceptance/understanding of their sexuality/same-sex relationship
 - 43 – agreed they were interested in retirement accommodation/lifestyle for their parents

4. Focus Groups

Members of the GLBTI community were invited to attend a series of Focus Groups by advertising in the community press and fliers distributed at community events.

The Focus Groups were held in August at a central Perth location. Attendees at these sessions were asked a series of open-ended questions which included:

- What are key issues that you are facing that need to be addressed?
- How well do you think your needs are currently being met?
- How can GRAI become an effective advocate for the GLBTI community?
- What individual commitment are individuals prepared to make to assist GRAI to be an effective advocate?

A summary of the findings from these Focus Groups indicates the following:

- Issues including isolation and loss of partners/friends are a main and recurring concern/issue for older GLBTI people;
- Some people said they fear going into existing care/retirement facilities due to not 'fitting in';
- Some people said they feel they will always need to be 'on their guard' if they go into existing care/retirement facilities;
- There is a perception that existing aged care/retirement facilities have very homophobic attitudes;

- There was some acknowledgment that there is some change/more openness in the wider community towards accepting GLBTI people in general;
- There is a lack of family/informal care networks for older people in the GLBTI community;
- There is a perceived lack of support groups for older people in the GLBTI community;
- Some people said they want to live among non-judgmental people;
- Other said they need choices and options like everyone else in the community;
- There's a perception that existing aged care/retirement facilities lack accommodation options for GLBTI people;
- There is a perception that attitudes of staff towards GLBTI people need to be changed;
- It was seen that there is insufficient training for staff in existing aged care/retirement facilities on GLBTI issues and how to speak with and treat GLBTI people;
- Some people said they want to be part of more integrated communities not necessarily just specific GLBTI aged care facilities;
- Existing facilities must acknowledge differences and be prepared to understand and cater for the wants and needs of older GLBTI people.

5. Conclusion

Although this was a small survey that has some limitations, it provides a useful insight into the issues that concern members of the GLBTI community. What is disturbing is that there is a perception that there are many needs that community members feel will not be met by aged care service providers. This community needs assessment has provided initial results to suggest that further advocacy is required in this field.

Appendix 1 Copy of Community Survey



COMMUNITY SURVEY

GRAI is seeking to identify the needs, interests, issues and challenges for older GLBTI (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex) people considering retirement and aged care options in WA.

Please respond to the following statements. Select **ONE** point that shows the level to which you agree or disagree with each statement.

STRONGLY AGREE = SA

AGREE = A

DISAGREE = DA

STRONGLY DISAGREE = SA

	SA	A	D	SD
I am currently looking for or interested in retirement accommodation/living options				
I am interested in the options for retirement accommodation/living that I will have in the future				
I have concerns that I or someone I know may experience discrimination in existing retirement accommodation/living on the basis of sexual orientation				
I feel my needs / wants will be appropriately met within the current retirement accommodation/living options and choices				
I feel I will be able to afford the kind of retirement accommodation/living I want				
When thinking of retirement accommodation/living, my primary consideration is financial cost				
When thinking of retirement accommodation/living, my primary consideration is housing style				
When thinking of retirement accommodation/living, my primary consideration is location				
When thinking of retirement accommodation/living, my primary considerations are practical / recreational lifestyle options				
When thinking of retirement accommodation/living, my primary consideration is acceptance / understanding of my sexuality / same-sex relationship.				
I am interested in retirement accommodation/lifestyle for my parents				



GLBTI Retirement Association Incorporated

Please provide any further suggestions, comments or questions regarding retirement/aged care issues for GLBTI people or the community.

ARE YOU: Male Female Trans Other (Please specify) _____

DO YOU THINK OF YOURSELF AS BEING

Gay Lesbian Bisexual Trans Intersex Queer Dyke

Heterosexual / Straight Same-sex attracted I don't use labels

Other (please specify) _____

ARE YOU (you can tick more than one option)

Employed full time Employed Part time Unemployed A student

A pensioner/on social security Retired Other (please specify) _____

YOUR AGE RANGE

Under 30 years 31 to 40 years 41 to 50 years 51 to 55 years

56 to 60 years 61 to 65 years 66 to 70 years 71 to 75 years

76 to 80 years 81 to 85 years 86 plus years

WHERE DO YOU CURRENTLY LIVE Postcode:

Thank you for your contribution. If you would like to become a member/involved in GRAI or would like to discuss matters with us further, please provide your contact details below (print)

Name: _____ Contact phone: _____

Email: _____

www.grai.org.au

Appendix 2 Copy of media release



Media Release

Monday 8 January 2007

The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Retirement Association Inc. (GRAI) has released evidence from a preliminary research process conducted late last year.

The results of the research confirm several worrying statistics regarding the unmet needs and fears of discrimination among older and ageing GLBTI people accessing retirement and aged care services in WA.

GRAI held two focus group sessions in August and surveyed 144 people between August and October to collect initial evidence relating to the thoughts and intentions of GLBTI people regarding retirement/aged care services in the Perth community.

Survey respondents were recruited from the GRAI membership, at the 2006 Pride Fairday, via the GRAI website and at the 2006 GRAI Forum, an event held at the University Club at UWA during the Pride Festival. The data analysis phase of the survey was coordinated by the Centre for Research on Ageing at Curtin University.

GRAI Chairperson Graham Lovelock said the results are fairly reflective of similar studies undertaken over recent years in New South Wales and Victoria.

“The principle objective of the initial survey and focus groups was to establish some interim data from the Perth GLBTI community to inform the ongoing work of GRAI and provide some quantitative and qualitative data to set about establishing the specific needs of the older GLBTI people in Perth.

“On face value, the results in WA confirm the growing interest of GLBTI people in retirement and aged care issues in the Perth community as well as the need for more facilities and services to start addressing the specific needs of older and ageing GLBTI people.

“What is also clear from this research process is that existing providers need to become more aware and prepared to engage with older and ageing GLBTI people” Graham said.

“An area of interest in the Perth survey is the age breakdown of respondents, 35% of which were aged 51 and over and 65% of which were aged 50 or under.

“Given the nature of the comments expressed in the focus groups, an area of most immediate concern to us however is that one third of respondents to the survey said they are currently looking for or considering retirement options open to them.

Comments from the focus groups included statements such as:

- Some people said they fear going into existing care/retirement facilities due to not ‘fitting in’;
- Some people said they feel they will always need to be ‘on their guard’ if they go into existing care/retirement facilities;
- There is a perception that existing aged care/retirement facilities have very homophobic attitudes;
- There is a perceived lack of support groups for older people in the GLBTI community;
- Some people said they felt there is a lack of family/informal care networks for older people in the GLBTI community;

“If we extrapolate evidence from both the focus groups and the survey to the possible percentage of older people in the GLBTI community currently looking for retirement/aged care options, a significant number of people feel they could be or perhaps will be exposed to discriminatory practices” Graham explained.

- 87% of respondents said their primary consideration was acceptance/understanding of their sexuality/same-sex relationship.
- 92.5% of respondents were interested in retirement options they would have in future.
- 78% of respondents were concerned that they or someone they know may experience discrimination within the existing retirement/aged care accommodation sector/industry on the basis of sexual orientation.

The results of this interim research will form part of the 2006 - 2011 Strategic Plan which GRAI is anticipating will be available in April this year. Following the release of the Strategic Plan, a report will be written on the evidence from the research process and provided to a number of people such as Members of Parliament supportive of the GLBTI community, peak body groups in the retirement/aged care sector in WA, relevant Government Departments and other authorities in WA as evidence establishing the issues and needs of older and ageing GLBTI people.

GRAI will now develop more detailed information on the exact types of retirement accommodation and more in-depth data on ageing issues for older GLBTI people, especially in relation to health issues and trends, as part of a more detailed Social Research Study currently being negotiated in a partnership with the WA Centre for Health Promotion Research at Curtin University.

‘ends’

For further comment contact: Graham Lovelock on 0402 790 669.

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