

Gay and Gray

Part 2: the Vermont Story

BY KENDRA HENSON-STROUD

Where will Vermonters go when they're old and gay? As the population of baby boomers rapidly approaches senior status, the need for senior housing and retirement communities is growing along with it. While the need is evident, how and where the aging queer population will fit into this picture is not so clear.

Are retirement communities and nursing homes ready to embrace us as we age? Will they be sensitive to who we are, where we've been and what we need? Will their staffs be prepared to care for us as couples without prejudice or discrimination? What will they do if other residents express discomfort at

being around us?

Vermonters may be familiar with the Cathedral Square Corporation, which manages properties for seniors in Burlington, Colchester, Jericho, Richmond, Waitsfield, Waterbury, and Williston. According to Rich Icklan, Cathedral Square's Communications Director, staff working with residents of these properties are not required to attend any type of diversity or in-service training covering issues of a diverse population.

However, the CSC website states, "CSC services are available to all on an equal opportunity, nondiscriminatory basis." Being able to get into affordable senior housing without being discriminated against is certainly a right, but do these communities foster safety

and freedom if you are queer?

Charlotte Cassidy manages Addison House, a Middlebury community care home (no skilled nursing care) for up to 16 seniors. She declared that diversity issues "have never come up in our facility." She said that there have never been any "out" gays or lesbians that she has known of at Addison House.

According to Cassidy, the only in-service trainings for staff focus on physical and mental health issues such as dementia and Alzheimers. The management does not provide diversity training to any staff. Addison House does allow couples to share rooms. When asked if they would allow gay and lesbian couples to share rooms, the response was "I don't see why not."

Wake Robin, a "life care" community in Shelburne has a non-discrimination clause that includes sexual orientation in its brochures. All inquiries into Wake Robin receive this information. According to Joyce Reddy-Bradbee of Wake Robin, nondiscrimination is emphasized in their staff orientation, and some of the management staff have attended workshops focused on gay and

lesbian issues.

Reddy-Bradbee added, "We have single gay residents. We welcome gay and lesbian people on our wait list and have had open conversations with prospective residents about being gay and living in a predominately heterosexual community." Het couples at Wake Robin may share rooms, and gay and lesbian couples would be entitled to the same option.

When asked if resident activities are strictly hetero-centric, Reddy-Bradbee said that dances are resident-run and that singles attend. "Women dance with women due to a shortage of men, but nothing here is strictly planned for couples only."

Some members of Vermont's Crones group - women, mostly lesbians, over 50 - have had conversations about what it would be like to have a lesbian senior community in order to care for each other. According to Crones founder Alverta Perkins, these conversations happen often, "but nothing is actually in the works." Perkins noted that many times senior members of our community don't have children to assist with caregiving or

housing arrangements, so they have to go it alone.


Another member of the Crones who currently lives in subsidized housing said that she does not feel comfortable being out in her housing community. "It's not something I want my neighbors down the hall to know about me."

The need for safe, affordable, queer-friendly senior housing will undoubtedly raise these issues and conversations time and time again. Senior housing developers around the state are going to have to look to the future to develop housing communities that foster true independence and safety for diverse populations. The need is real and the housing landscape of Vermont is going to have to make some changes in order to accommodate its queer citizens.

We're here, we're queer, we'll need a place to live! ▼

Kendra Henson-Stroud wrote about gay and lesbian-oriented senior housing outside Vermont in the September issue. She's 30-something and lives in Burlington.

a child
a challenge
a chance




Becky, 11 years old.
Becky loves absolutely everything about cooking -from planning the menus, to preparing and cooking the food, to cleaning up the mess in the kitchen afterwards.

Dwayne, 11 years old.
Dwayne has a seemingly unlimited amount of energy; he enjoys bicycling, four-wheeling, snowmobiling, sledding, baseball, skiing, archery, and swimming.

Becky, Dwayne, and other children like them are waiting in foster care for families to adopt them. Imagine what it would feel like to give one of them a safe home, a loving family, and a chance for a new life.

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