

Horizons Foundation

# *Improving the Quality of Life of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Elders*

ALAMEDA & CONTRA COSTA COUNTIES



ACROSS CALIFORNIA, THE GROWING POPULATION OF OLDER ADULTS struggles with a host of issues, including financial worries, health care concerns and loneliness. Unfortunately, these problems are magnified in the population of older lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) residents.

A recent report found that LGBT elders tend to have more medical problems, higher poverty levels and more social isolation than straight elders. Same-sex partners are not afforded many of the resources afforded to spouses and biological family members during the aging process. In addition, LGBT elders tend to lack support from many mainstream aging programs such as senior centers and places of worship or they are afraid of the stigma and discrimination that could result from reaching out to those programs.

Many LGBT elder couples are denied the right to live together in mainstream retirement communities and continue to live on their own, even if they need access to the services offered by those communities. These elders may fear ill treatment by housing staff and choose to re-enter or stay in the closet to obtain housing. Because large numbers of this population choose to live alone, they have fewer opportunities for social interaction than their heterosexual peers.

To address this growing problem, the Horizons Foundation, a private foundation that supports the LGBT community, was chosen by the California Wellness Foundation as a partner in the creation of a program called LGBT WISE: Working to Improve Services to Elders. The program is designed to build regional capacity for providing services such as

“We have seniors in their 80s and 90s who have no family, are extremely frail and living alone with chronic conditions and mental health issues. We paired them with volunteers who organized in-home gatherings, took them grocery shopping, ate meals with them and shared hobbies. This program has made profound changes in these seniors’ lives. They have a supportive family now,”

—DAN ASHBROOK

DIRECTOR, LAVENDER SENIORS

food delivery, access to health care and emotional and social support to promote healthy aging among LGBT elders in Bay Area counties.

One successful LGBT WISE program, Lavender Seniors of the East Bay, works to improve the quality of life of older lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender residents of Alameda and Contra Costa counties through a Friendly Visitor program. This program trains volunteers to create social connections for LGBT elders which can include dinner parties, field trips, in-house visits and meals, outings to the grocery store and daily telephone calls.



Lavender Seniors has been hugely successful. Because of the support from LGBT WISE, the Friendly Visitor program was able to more than double the number of seniors served each month. From 2008 to 2009, trained volunteers made over 400 friendly visits to homebound or frail LGBT elders in their area, sent out a monthly newsletter to over 750 LGBT elders and put together over 50 social gatherings and outreach events. The elder participants have reported that the program alleviates feelings of loneliness and isolation, better enables them to be independent, keeps them connected to the LGBT community and has positive impacts on their health and well-being.

The Horizons Foundation is also helping these LGBT WISE programs build a network to learn from each other and make practical connections with mainstream elder care organizations to continue to build capacity for this work.

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THE HORIZONS FOUNDATION: *Based in the San Francisco Bay Area, Horizons Foundation serves the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community by making grants, strengthening LGBT organizations and leadership, and increasing philanthropic giving.*

FOR MORE INFORMATION,  
PLEASE VISIT:

The Horizons Foundation  
[www.horizonsfoundation.org](http://www.horizonsfoundation.org)

Lavender Seniors  
of the East Bay  
[www.lavenderseniors.org](http://www.lavenderseniors.org)