The Pink Passkey, the certificate for enhancing the social acceptance of lesbian women, gay men, bisexuals and transgenders in professional care

Introduction

To ensure that lesbian women, gay men, bisexuals and transgenders (LGBT) feel at home and safe in the elderly care, the Pink Passkey has been created. The Pink Passkey has been developed to promote LGBT friendliness in elderly care. The Pink Passkey is symbolized as a pink key that opens every door. The importance of the color pink originates in the Second World War, gay men were persecuted and 'branded' with a pink triangle on their clothing. After the war the pink triangle was adopted as a symbol of pride. The younger generations nowadays prefer the rainbow flag as a symbol of pride.

Various research results 1 show that lesbian women, gay men, bisexuals and transgenders -when they get older - have a greater risk to becoming more isolated and are more lonely than their heterosexual peers.

This is especially true for LGBT’s born before WW2. They grew up during a time when homosexuality was still a taboo, considered a sickness or even a crime. Religion and culture stood in the way of acceptance. Many LGBT elderly were continuously confronted with discrimination, exclusion and rejection.

The younger generation elderly LGBT’s also run the risk of social isolation. Usually, getting older also means more physical limitations and more dependency on others. LGBT 50+ people sometimes do not have a social network. Also, due to a lesser mobility, they find it harder to meet with their peers. For the younger generation there are plenty of facilities and chances to meet with each other, but for many older LGBT’s it is quite difficult to connect to younger ones. Both professional elderly care and welfare sector pay too little attention to the 50+ LGBT’s, thus reducing the facilities and chances for this group.

The Pink Passkey method focuses first on elderly care such as residential care centers, nursing homes and home care organisations. It also targets 50+ LGBT’s with handicaps as well as welfare institutions. COC Nederland (the foremost organisation in the Netherlands advocating the interests of LGBT people) has introduced in 2010 The Pink Passkey as a project into the Pink 50+. This is a structural cooperation between ANBO (the largest Dutch organisation advocating the interests of all their 50+ members) and COC Nederland (the foremost important organisation advocating the interests of LGBT people). These national partners describe their combined efforts as “Improving the everyday living conditions, the psychological and physiological health and the well-being of lesbian, homosexual, bisexual and transgender 50+ people by combining knowledge, experience and advocacy”.

1 Schuyf J. (1996) Old Pink, the position of lesbian and homosexual elderly in the Netherlands and van de Meerendonk B. (2003) On our way to a gay autumn
The Pink Passkey and the Tolerance Scan

Pink 50+ developed, in close cooperation with Kiwa – a certifying organisation in the field of professional care – the Pink Passkey and the Tolerance Scan®. This Tolerance Scan includes an audit by Kiwa ensuring the Pink Passkey to obtain a formal status and visibility to the outside world. Wherever the term “The Pink Passkey” is mentioned it points to the entire process, including the audit and the participation in the Tolerance Scan. The Pink Passkey focuses on enhancing the social acceptance of lesbian women, gay men, bisexuals and transgenders in professional care. (social acceptance of sexual diversity).

The Tolerance Scan measures LGBT-acceptance on five topics thus giving institutions a practical vision on their “product” and the level on which it connects to the sexual diversity within the LHBT target group. The Tolerance Scan stimulates the awareness of management and staff in professional care centers, because the criteria for LGBT-friendliness can be measured objectively.

Criteria for LGBT-friendliness:
- Respect and openness
- Guaranteeing privacy
- Attention for and training of professionals who have to deal with sexual diversity and gender identity
- Equal treatment of partners
- Accuracy in dealing with sexual diversity and gender identity

The Pink Passkey vision is: by promoting awareness of the differences between people and changing the course within the organisation structure and keep this change in policy and activities, proper care and attention can be given to LGBT elderly. This is a vulnerable group which – in view of its history – deserves openness, respect and safe old days.

The development of the Pink Passkey

It was COC Nijmegen, one of the members of COC Netherlands that handed out the first Pink Passkey back in 2008, to 6 local centers for elderly care. It was created as an encouragement. Mr. Clem Bongers and the Senior Group initiated this award and stimulated the Consortium partners to start the nationwide roll-out of the Pink Passkey. Since then the award has undergone many changes during its further development. With the addition of the Tolerance Scan during this process the Pink Passkey has become a quality tool enabling objective measuring within the professional care centers. This development has been made possible by the support of the Dutch Ministry of Healthcare and various private foundations.

The first national Pink Passkey was awarded in 2010 to De Rietvinck, one of the nursing homes of the Amstelring, an Amsterdam-based care center for the elderly. Nowadays more than 100 centers for elderly care and social welfare institutes have been awarded with the Pink Passkey. There is also a German version, based on the Dutch original, awarded to the Frankfurter Verband in Germany.
Beyond invisibility

The Pink Passkey is an integral part of the Master plan Pink 50+ titled “Beyond invisibility”. Within this Master plan there are various factors influencing the lives of LGBT 50+ people. Pink 50+ operates with an integral approach in order to enhance the acceptance of homosexuality and gender identity at a later age, at various levels and on various fields.

This means that all parties dealing with LGBT 50+ people are involved. First of all the LGBT 50+ person himself. He wishes to maintain his living conditions, being respected for the choice he made, in all safety. This means safety in the individual surroundings, within social organisations and in public areas. For them empowerment is important and the possibility to meet with their peers. LGBT 50+ people need to have an environment where sexual diversity is accepted. They emphasize the need for individual support (“to feel secure”) and support with creating their social network. Social organisations also have to create conditions whereby an adequate program for LGBT 50+ people can be implemented. Once the attention for this target group has been anchored in the policy and culture of an organisation, the risk that initiatives will vanish with a management-change has diminished substantially. Professionals must be trained to make them more open-minded towards LGBT elderly, so they know about the sensitivities and not take things for granted; and so they really understand how to approach LGBT 50+ people. Because one must be able to be who he or she is, lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, also at an older age.

The Pink Passkey in a nutshell

This method is so useful because it gives very concrete tools that are instrumental in shaping policy and practice in organisations that want to increase the awareness of sexual diversity within their care center.

The Pink Passkey Tolerance Scan and the audit that makes part of it perfectly match with the ongoing quality measuring process, which makes it recognizable for the organisation’s management and staff. The result of this intervention reaches beyond its primary goal. The right attention for LGBT 50+ people is of importance to a successful diversity policy in general. The more attention for sexual diversity the more attention for someone’s uniqueness, lifestyle, history or culture (this goes not only for LHTB’s). All minority groups will get more and better attention, all colors of diversity in the rainbow will get the attention they deserve.

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2 Master plan Pink 50+ Beyond invisibility, 2009

The Pink Passkey – according to a research called “Kleurrijke Kennis” ("Colorful knowledge") – is a strong signal to both people in the care center as well as to the outside world that living conditions in this institute are safe and tolerant regarding homosexuality. This makes it easier for clients to “come out of the closet” and increases the influx of new LGBT clients.  

The problem

Many care centers for the elderly pay very little attention to sexual diversity or gender identity. It is still a taboo for management, staff and clients. If people want professional care they want – besides good and responsible care – also that the professionals really listen to their specific wishes, their needs and their way of life. People want to be in control of their own lives meaning that they themselves want to decide what’s best for them. They want attention for what they feel, think and want. This means that professionals must work problem- and client-oriented to be able to provide custom care. This requires careful fine-tuning with clients from many different backgrounds, cultures, religions, lifestyles, habits, identities and preferences. A good and responsible professional care means that there is real attention for this diversity among clients.

Besides providing a good and responsible as well as client-oriented care, connecting to the diversity in today’s society is not optional for any organisation. It is a marketing issue with a moral load. “Diversity policy is not a target itself but a means to meet the organisation’s targets on areas such as innovation, competing and learning and its right to existence in the future. Making room for sexual diversity is not only morally legitimate but it is also a fundamental right. Sexual orientation and gender identity are basic elements of someone’s existence, they are about someone’s right to freedom and self-realization. Those rights imply someone’s freedom to determine his or her sexual orientation and gender identity and their expression, based on equality with others.”

Professionals in care pay little attention to sexual diversity. Almost 50% of the professionals think that there are no homosexual clients. This is one of the findings by the Magazine for care professionals. "The question was: Is there any attention for homosexual clients in your institution? 33 % said “No, never”. The reason being that there are hardly any homosexual clients, said 45%...Only 9 % responded that they occasionally talk about their homosexual clients. Only 13% indicated that they pay attention to their homosexual clients.” Therefore it is safe to say that lesbian women, gay men, bisexuals and transgenders do not feel at home in the professional care. This goes for daycare and homecare as well, they do not feel safe to show their real identity.

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5 Many care centers ignore gay elderly. (source: www.tvonline.nll, 2 maart 2010
Objective

The Pink Passkey’s objective is to promote the acceptance of lesbian women, gay men, bisexuals and transgenders with professional care organisations (social acceptance of sexual diversity).

Secondary targets:

- Management and staff working in professional elderly care recognize sexual diversity in professional care (“Unknown leads to unaccepted” vs “Known leads to accepted”)
- Management and staff respond adequately to signals of exclusion and bigotry (especially those of sexual orientation). Such response will improve tolerance within the care center
- The attention towards sexual diversity is not only secured in the center’s policy regarding structure, staff and education but also at the level of activities. This increases the involvement of both staff and clients
- LGBT 50+ people feel free to be open about their identity, no matter which choice they make. It is entirely up to the client to come “out of the closet” or not
- Tolerance, respect for and safety of the clients are the organisation’s basic values. The organisation shows these values to the outside world, thus being an example to others.

The Pink Passkey Tolerance Scan based on 5 topics

- Policy and organization: This topic is about vision, mission and information tools. Is there attention for a variety of services and activities tailor-made to the specific wishes of individual clients? Would a client feel safe and could he dwell freely within the accommodation? Would everybody feel safe and accepted?
- Staff policy Staff employees are crucial for a successful diversity policy. Staff policy should be related to the mission and vision that are based on sexual diversity.
- Training This topic is about consciousness and the advancement of knowledge. Do the training sessions – besides their “technical” information – contain enough attention for things like feelings, intimacy and relationships, communication skills and the standards and values of sexual diversity?
- Awareness, diversity and social-emotional safety Does the organisation offer sufficient room for discussion and how to deal with each other, prevention of discrimination and feeling “safe”? This can be done by means of briefings and team meetings. Is there an active hiring policy in view of sexual diversity and has the organisation taken precautions that support the preventing of discrimination and intimidation?
- Signaling, support and complaints This topic is about the organisation being ready to accommodate clients and staff who wish to talk about personal matters related to sexual diversity.

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