



Spotlight on LGBT seniors

The first international conference on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender seniors

On July 25, 2016 a memorable event took place. At the University of Amsterdam (UvA) the first international conference on LGBT seniors (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender seniors) in the care sector took place, during which speakers of several countries shared their best practices in the field of ‘pink’ (LGBT) elderly and care.

After a lunch ‘with a view’ at the restaurant of the UvA and a musical welcome performed by Irene Hemelaar and Paul Tijink (Duo “Wilde Orchidee”), the conference opened with a message from the State Secretary of Health, Welfare and Sport Martin van Rijn, sharing his delight about the attention for LGBT seniors during Europride 2016, as 6% of seniors is pink (LGBT). Following this, presenter Vivian Boelen announced the first speaker of the plenary session of the day, Manon Linschoten (Pink 50+ and Care, COC NL).



In her speech on ***the past, present and future of the Pink Passkey*** Manon Linschoten underscored the importance of awareness and social acceptance of sexual diversity in the care sector. The Pink Passkey is a certificate for professional care organisations - like residential care institutions, nursing homes and home care organisations. By means of the tolerance scan, a certifying process in cooperation with KIWA, the Pink Passkey ensures that LGBT people feel safe and at home in elderly care. The Pink Passkey reaches beyond its primary goal as attention for sexual diversity leads not only to LGBT-friendliness, but also to a successful diversity policy in general, with attention for the uniqueness of the clients considering history, lifestyle and culture. The Pink Passkey also targets the care for LGBT’s with disabilities, as well as social care institutions and LGBT-friendliness in hospitals. Based on the Pink Passkey, a tolerance scan for diversity in general and ethnic diversity in particular will be designed in the future.

In the Netherlands more than 100 care organisations have been awarded with the Pink Passkey and there is also a German version of the Pink Passkey, the “Regenbogenschlüssel”, based on the Dutch original. Going forward, the Pink Passkey aims to go international; it will be adapted for use in other countries in Europe and beyond.

The complete presentation “Past, present and future of the Pink Passkey” is available [here](#), as well as the [article](#) on the Pink Passkey.

The second speaker in the plenary session was Anthony Smith (Age UK). In his speech ***LGBT Ageing: research into practice***, Antony Smith emphasised the importance of understanding and learning from ageing experiences of LGBT’s. Research exposes fundamental concerns attached to ageing and care for LGBT seniors. Since someone’s identity is not only determined by gender, geography, educational issues, but also by social environment, history and lifestyle, and thus sexual diversity, all of these factors are preminent for someone’s wellbeing. Broader understanding on LGBT ageing experiences brings up that acceptance, validation and a sense of belonging are not always evident for LGBT seniors, as family and peers don’t offer the same practical network, care and attention. This is due to a lack of possibilities to meet their peers, absence of children or a (family) network. Research increasingly refers to the “myth of one LGBT community”. Not to undermine the sense of community of LGBT’s but pointing out the need for a more nuanced understanding of differences, requiring more recognition and further exploration. Moreover, geography matters, as social networks



are important and LGBT people tend to live more dispersed and less centred on neighbourhood. Ageing at home or 'buying their way out of straight-care' through using private commercial care is not always a solution. Cooperation with public bodies, third sector organisations and private initiatives is important for innovation in creating new services; besides the attention for LGBT-friendly nursing homes, it is important to make care services at home LGBT-affirming too.

Summarising: sexual orientation and gender identity are important but other sources of social identity and inequality remain crucial too. There is much more to find out on the needs and aspirations of LGBT seniors.

Taking into account that those people who use the care are the best to (help) produce the right care, understanding about LGBT ageing experiences is vital! For more information on the research Anthony is addressing to in his presentation, please see the journal "Quality in Ageing and Older Adults" [here](#).

After a cup of coffee or tea combined with network talks it was time for the "theme table sessions". At nine different theme tables the visitors got acquainted with the best practices and the latest developments in the field of LGBT seniors and care in several countries. Below is a short abstract on the interactive sub-sessions presented by keynote speakers from the Netherlands, United Kingdom, Finland, Moldavia and Germany.

1. ***From telephone helpline to nursing homes with the Pink Passkey, development story***

Frederic Lauscher – Director of the Board of the Frankfurter Verband, Germany

Peter Gehweiler - Unit Manager for volunteer engagement and travels for seniors, Frankfurter Verband



The Frankfurter Verband operates a telephone hotline, a meeting place for LGBT's and two Pink Passkey nursing homes. In his presentation Frederic Lauscher tells how the visit from a group of gay men in 2006 aroused the awareness for the situation of gay seniors, leading to making the Frankfurter Verband a LGBTI-friendly institution. With a symposium on elderly homosexuals in need of care in nursing homes in 2013, the 'rainbow care initiative' was established. At this theme table the different steps, taken to reach the actual standard of LGBT-friendliness, are shown. Besides cultural activities, training of staff and volunteers, the Pink Passkey and the associated tolerance scan (developed by Pink 50+ in cooperation with KIWA in the Netherlands) was translated and adapted to German conditions. Two nursing homes of the Frankfurter Verband have obtained the 'Regenbogenschlüssel', the German equivalent of the Pink Passkey certificate.

On the question whether all staff accepted the 'Regenbogenschlüssel'-conditions, Frederic Lauscher responded that nowadays the certificate makes the organisation popular to work for. Attention for diversity in general became high on the agenda of the organisation (the certificate is a useful instrument for other diversity topics) and most of the staff is not originally German. There is no assessment necessary to enter the LGBT-friendly nursing homes (entering a nursing home is regulated by the German Government), but, as 'the LGBT-friendly policy' is presented as an 'in house rule', new inhabitants conform to the policy or simply do not want to move to the nursing home. Correction by the staff on discrimination matters is seldom necessary but never avoided. As the majority of the care institutions in Germany is catholic or protestant, nationwide enrolment of the Regenbogenschlüssel takes time. Politicians from other countries come to visit and show interest, which helps to 'promote' the Regenbogenschlüssel.

For the entire presentation look [here](#) and the article "Rainbow Care Initiative" [here](#)

2. **Raising awareness on diversity, training for care professionals**

Outi Tjurin – Projectmanager with SETA Equal Ageing II, Finland.



Equal Ageing, a project by Seta (a national human rights organisation in



Finland with 24 member organisations), has put sexual diversity on the agenda of elderly care in

Finland. The equal ageing project aims to improve the well-being and acceptance of senior LGBT's by developing effective training for elderly care professionals, volunteers and students. In her presentation Outi Tjurin showed

the primary goals of Equal Ageing: building a network of volunteers who give training on sexual diversity amongst elderly, creating a network of different care organisations and initiating a peer support group for LGBT seniors. She concluded her presentation by showing a couple of minutes of an eloquent film (developed and used for training purposes) on LGBT seniors. Answering the question if there is attention for transgenders, Outi Tjurin points out that amongst the volunteers there is a transsexual (lady, 73 years old) and the training for volunteers contains life stories of LGBT elderly and the understanding of transgenders is also included.

For the presentation of Outi Tjurin please look [here](#).

3. **Building choices; housing for older LGBT people**

A presentation of Tina Wathern (Older LGBT National Housing Network coordinator of Stonewall Housing), in her absence hosted by Anthony Smith, United Kingdom.



Stonewall Housing is currently working on UK's first charter mark for LGBT seniors. Some people, including housing and care providers, may assume that prejudice and discrimination have disappeared with the introduction of the Equality Act and other legislation. But this is not the case, although the situation may have improved since.

Stonewall Housing is working with housing providers on the development of a range of housing options in order to maximise the choice of housing available to older LGBT people. They encourage housing and care providers to develop good practices and greater understanding for the LGBT community. Advice and support is provided to individuals and groups who want to work together to create their own housing and support solutions. Furthermore Stonewall Housing engages in building links to share a resource pool to bring together all the learning and experiences of older LGBT housing. Anthony Smith emphasises that the mind-set is important; it is the right attitude and approach that make LGBT seniors feel at home and accepted. For more information on Stonewall Housing please look [here](#).

4. **Opportunities for cooperation with local government**

Els Meijssen – Senior Advisor at Movisie

Josee Rothuizen – independent consultant over 30 years active in LGBT policy in several organizations.



This theme table was about the connection between interest organisations and municipalities and how interest organisations and municipalities can reinforce each other by cooperating. In the Netherlands there are 44 municipalities working closely together with local interest organisations on LGBT issues. Els Meijssen explained as to how Movisie (a Dutch knowledge institute in the field of social issues) works together with these municipalities and interest organisations by

counselling in the field of designing and implementing local LGBT policies. The lobby –before the start of elections- to include LGBT issues in the election programme of political parties is important. A municipality has several instruments to implement LGBT policies, such as including LGBT issues in

other policies, communication about LGBT issues (through website, leaflets, official forms and training of counter staff) and providing information at schools and education centres. Moreover, including LGBT issues in criteria for assignment to third parties (e.g. elderly care) improves the acceptance of sexual diversity and prevents exclusion and discrimination.

In Amsterdam, for example, Mokum Pink is active. This is a platform, representing various organisations (in the field of health care and social care and LGBT interest-groups) looking after the interests of LGBT's in care and social care. Josee Rothuizen explained as to how Mokum Pink aims to improve the wellbeing of LGBT's in care, social care and housing. This is done by signalling and sharing problems in the field and exchanging information with interest organisations and relevant third parties, such as elderly homes, social care and care institutions and the Municipality of Amsterdam.

For more information on this theme table please look [here](#).

5. **Research on housing and care for LGBT seniors**

Dr. Ralf Lottmann - Researcher at Alice Salomon University, Berlin

A presentation on the housing project "Lebensort Vielfalt" (LoV) in Berlin and GLESA a study after homosexual lifestyles and self-determination in old age, started following the foundation of LoV. In

his presentation, Dr. Ralf Lottmann started with a short historical overview on the position and facts of LGBT's in Germany, moving on to Lebensort Vielfalt (LoV) (opened in 2012), with 24 apartments for young and older gay men and women and 8 places (with nursing care) for older gay men with dementia/health problems. Dr. Lottmann explained that in Germany, the 'Schwulenberatung' looks after the interests of gay men; unfortunately there is no cooperation or connection with lesbian and transgender groups in Germany and no real organisation looking after the interests of these groups. The GLESA research is based on interviews with tenants and experts of LoV. Interviews with experts of similar projects in Germany, the Netherlands and the US are still to be analysed. The results of the research show the importance of acceptance and visibility of



LGBT's and the need for LGBT seniors to preserve their identity and lifestyle when growing old and becoming in need of care. Avoiding loneliness, finding a shelter for discrimination, living in an area of acceptance, feeling at home and ageing together with peers are reasons given for entering the Lebensort Vielfalt. For the full presentation of Dr. Ralf Lottmann please look [here](#).



6. **The power of a network of ambassadors**

Dr. Martin Moerings - Ambassador for Pink 50+ in the Netherlands)

As a part of the masterplan "Beyond Invisibility", a product of Pink 50+ (a structural cooperation between ANBO and COC Netherlands) there is a network of more than 80 volunteers in the Netherlands, spread throughout the country. These volunteers, trained by professionals, work as ambassadors to improve the life situation, health and wellbeing of LGBT seniors. They help with the organisation of special events (e.g. Pink Saturday, holding a stand at the 50+ Fair), setting up peer groups and providing information on (the acceptance of) sexual diversity. In addition, the ambassadors contact



health care institutions (such as nursing homes, care organisations) to help them become LGBT-friendly and draw their attention to the Pink Passkey certificate. Dr. Martin Moerings explained about his experiences of working as a Pink 50+ ambassador and answers questions on the spot. For the presentation of Dr. Martin Moerings about the Pink 50+ ambassadors look [here](#).



7. **The impact of sharing life stories**

Eveline van de Putte - Writer, Photographer and Trainer and cofounder of the Empowerment Foundation



As the author of “Stormachtig Stil” (“Roaring Silence”), a book on life stories of elderly LGBT people, Eveline van de Putte interviewed 27 elderly LGBT men and women and chronicled their life stories. These memories in her book are the basis for the “Tour d’Amour”; a trip around

the country having dialogue sessions in professional care and social care institutions, libraries and universities. Eveline van de Putte emphasises the importance of real life stories. The experiences of those at the beginning of the struggle for the right to ‘be yourself’, without exclusion and discrimination, lead to understanding and creates acceptance and tolerance towards LGBT seniors. Read more about Eveline van de Putte, her work and her book ‘Roaring Silence’ [here](#).



8. **Let’s get started: practical instruments for Care Institutions**

Herman Boers – Independent Trainer and Consultant

Richard Schouten – Project Manager Pink Passkey at nursing home De Eshoeve, the Netherlands



Practical instruments for concrete interventions are as important as vision and policy for acceptance and awareness of sexual diversity. In this presentation an abstract is given of practical tools on how to start the discussion on sexual diversity and more specifically on gender diversity of LGBT seniors. Various interventions, instruments and activities are described, all for practical use at the work floor. Dutch and international handouts/checklists and books (like “Gay and Gray: Welcoming LGBT

Elders in Long Term-Care”, “General Practice Care for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People”, “Testimonials of Pink Elderly”), online education, training tools (for addressing sexual diversity) and webinars, games and tips for meeting activities are listed in this presentation. For more practical tips in the field of tangible intervention (Dutch and international) you can find [here](#).

9. **Support groups for elderly gay men: a unique experience in the post-Soviet space.**

Alexei Marcicov – chairman of GENDER-DOC-M information centre, Moldavia

Alexei Marcicov is not only the founder of the organisation GENDERDOC-M (an information centre on programmes and projects for LGBT’s), he is also the chief editor of the magazine “Zerkalo” (“The Mirror”) the information source for LGBT people in Moldova.

Besides he is the head of the only support group of elderly gay men in the post-Soviet space. Alexei Marcicov explained, supported by an interpreter, as to how the support group for elderly gay men was established in 2002, when the constant threat under which gay people lived during Soviet times, diminished. Earlier homosexuality was considered a crime, to be treated as a disease and the LGBT people were intimidated and troubled by neighbours and the police.



Nowadays LGBT people have the opportunity to meet freely and openly (and can count on police protection when necessary). The group has about 50 members and since 2013 they meet once a month in the office of GENDERDOC-M, reminding the threat in the past but still ‘being alive and becoming interested in living’.

Alexei is the organizer of the first Gay Pride in Moldavia. In response to questions from the audience, he tells that it was a 'simple gay pride' with banners saying "proud, without fear", where some same-sex couples 'married for one day'. There was very little media exposure. Though there was a lot of police present, the police did not interfere.



Alexei Marcicov admits that the position of LGBT's in his country is still more difficult than in a lot of Western-European countries. The standard of living in Moldavia is lower than in Western-European countries, and not only for LGBT elderly, but a lot of progress is made. It is possible for same sex couples to live together (depending on the neighbourhood they live in) but registered partnership (let alone marriage!) for same-sex couples is not possible. Also, gay couples are not allowed to adopt children. But this will change, according to Alexei Marcicov. He emphasised that, though enhancement in the field of LGBT emancipation in his country is still very necessary, he is proud of the progress and little steps-made. Equality for LGBT people is nearby. He said he was pleased to be present at this international Conference on LGBT seniors being part of the Euro pride 2016.

At 15.30 hours, it was time for a concluding plenary session, to share the most significant first impressions of the day. Vivian Boelen welcomed the attendants once more at the lecture hall of UvA and gave the floor to Tanja Ineke (chairman of the Board of Directors of COC Netherlands) and Amin Michel (Inclusion4Diversity Consulting).



First of all, Tanja Ineke and Amin Michel commented on the uniqueness and the inspiring atmosphere of this first international conference on LGBT seniors.



The overall impression was that in (long-term) care, especially for LGBT seniors but also for other minority groups, empathy, acceptance, tolerance and respect are vital. Furthermore it has become apparent that it is important to promote acceptance and tolerance towards LGBT seniors broader and on different levels. We should address not only staff and professionals, but also inhabitants and volunteers, not only in residential care institutions and nursing homes but also in home care organisations, housing institutions and in care for LGBT's with disabilities as well as in social care institutions and hospitals.

From Moldavia we learned that progress can go by small steps with enormous impact. Working in small groups can avoid in-crowd competition and maybe we have to talk less about intolerance and more about acceptance and inclusion!



Following this, attention is pointed to David Clayton, an American homosexual currently living in Ireland. After his retirement and in need of care, his experiences of exclusion, discrimination, bureaucracy and failing systems in his birth country, led him to emigrate. However, his search to find a place with proper care where he can feel at home in his old days is not yet ended. He is now looking for a way to come and live in the Netherlands in a Pink Passkey residence. David's attendance, sharing his story here with us, proves that we are not there yet!

Finally, Eveline van de Putte, author of the book “Roaring Silence” was asked to the stage, to tell about the book she is writing on transgenders, collecting life stories of transgender people, a group often not fully understood. The book is financed with crowd funding. The attendants can buy a symbolic share in the book for € 5.00.



Vivian Boelen concluded this day by thanking Manon Linschoten and Margo Niestadt for organising this first international conference on LGBT seniors and care, and the speakers and the attendants for their contribution.



The day is closed with network drinks. The attendants had the opportunity to fill in a response card, giving their opinion on two questions. The cards were to be attached to a 'response line', leaving the organisation with valuable opinions and suggestions!

