

The National Resource Center on LGBT Aging is committed to working with and supporting advocates around the country. This fall, we interviewed Cynthia Rangoon Grant, an ally working in Connecticut, to learn more about her work and her advice for other advocates trying to make a positive change.



Where do you work and what is your role in your organization?

I work in the Department on Aging in the State of Connecticut. I have been lucky to have worked in a program capacity in the field of aging for over 26 years, and have had the opportunity to design and shape many programs for older adults over the years.

How did you become involved in LGBT aging issues?

I was raised in a very socially conscious household and individual empowerment has always been a critical focus for me. My daughter is majoring in Sociology and Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies in college and her work in and out of the classroom has educated me a great deal on the topic. In addition, I have friends in the LGBT community who are aging and deserve the same access to services that the heteronormative community already enjoys.

What do you see as the most pressing needs in your community?

The most pervasive need is that of acceptance. My major criticism of most service systems is that they categorize people and by doing so, assume that people's needs can be prescriptively addressed by matching their status with a specific set of eligibility criteria. Individuals in the LGBT community, as well as older adults, are a sum of their life experiences, and truly addressing their needs requires evaluating them as whole people, not just gender binaries. Isolation is a critical concern for aging LGBT adults whose families of choice may be diminishing.

We need to ensure that providers are welcoming to all older adults who are seeking services. It is difficult enough to make decisions regarding medical care and long term planning without having to worry about selecting an accepting provider.

What successes have you had?

I was designated as our first LGBT Liaison in the State for our Department last spring. Our staff at the Department on Aging has participated in a training conducted by the NRC, and our website has an information page on LGBT resources as well as a Safe Space logo. We have partnered with AIDS CT to offer two events on LGBT and Aging and AIDS Awareness as well as presenting to the Resident Service Coordinator Association on Older Adults and Safe Sex. I am also on the Diversity and Inclusion Committee of the CT Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association, and last year the topic of LGBT issues was included for the first time in the Chapter's annual Education Conference. In the upcoming year, we will be offering a panel discussing the report *Stories from the Field* and LGBT elders in nursing facilities and their rights, and I am hoping to finally secure some training events at senior centers.

Do you have advice for other's working in LGBT aging?

Patience, persistence and a willingness to collaborate.

Thank you Cynthia for your work and dedication!