

Raising Awareness About Elder Abuse In The LGBT Community – An Intergenerational Arts Initiative

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Introduction: LGBT older adults are often an invisible population, as stigma and isolation keeps them ‘stuck in the closet.’ At the same time, they may be at increased risk for some types of elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation, since research shows that they are more likely to live alone, less likely to be partnered, and less likely to have children, or if they do, to find them supportive. If LGBT individuals do experience abuse or neglect, the desire to be seen as ‘normal’ may make them even more reluctant than other older adults to report it. Our project addresses these concerns in an innovative way – an intergenerational arts project and collaboration between LGBT elders and youth.

Method: Our intergenerational team is drawn from two preexisting groups: the Queer Imaging & Riting Kollective for Elders (aka Quirk-e), an arts collective <http://www.artsandhealthproject.com/britannia--quirk-e.html>), and Youth for a Change, a group of young activists and educators (www.youth4achange.com). The two groups collaborated on an intergenerational show in 2014, and have established trust and clear ways of working together. In Phase 1 of the Project the groups came together with elder abuse/family violence researchers to create LGBT-relevant awareness raising materials. Stage 2 featured Town Hall meetings in 6 communities in British Columbia, Canada plus two “Dialogue Sessions” with individuals providing services to older adults from the two largest ethnic minorities in the province (Chinese;SAian).

Results: 3 videos and 5 poster/fact sheets were produced. The videos illustrated neglect of a transgender man in a care facility, psychological and physical abuse in a lesbian couple, and financial abuse in a gay couple. The poster/fact sheets defined the 5 main types of abuse and listed local services providing help. These tools were well received by Town Hall/Dialogue Session attendees, who included representatives of organizations providing health and social services to seniors, groups providing services to the LGBT community, persons who worked in the family violence and criminal justice sector, as well as those focused on elder abuse (n=21-57/gp), triggering active discussion and visits to our website (www.sfu.ca/lgbteol) where the videos and poster may be downloaded free of charge.

Discussion: This project demonstrated that the silos that characterize services to abused older adults, the LGBT community, minority seniors, and the general population of seniors can be bridged. The tools developed fill a gap in relevant resources for this often marginalized seniors’ sub-population.