Rainbow Group

Coordinator: Pauline Bosma
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Welcome to July, we hope you are staying cool!

We had a great turnout at the Rainbow Cookout, and got to reconnect with a lot of familiar faces from last year.

The international Rainbow meeting also went great! We connected with people from Australia and the UK, and hope to have more events in the future!

Pauline was also featured in a recent article called “Connecting Through Pride”, and you can find a digital version of it online here: https://publications.ici.umn.edu/impact/38-1/connecting-through-pride



PROGRAM PROFILE

Connecting Through Pride

By Pauline Bosma (as told to Zach Rossetti)

We just celebrated the Rainbow Support Group's 20th anniversary last fall, and I've been doing so much work on that. I never thought I would be where I am now, doing all this wonderful work to support people who identify as LGBTQ+ and have an intellectual or developmental disability (IDD). Rainbow is my pride and joy, and regardless of whatever else I do in my life, I can say that Rainbow is one thing that I am proud of because we've built connections that make us a community.

When we began the group, nobody was talking about sexuality and IDD. Nobody understood, you know, "How do we approach this?" Now, here I am, speaking at different college classes and conferences, so that has made me happy. The other thing that I'm proud of is that Oscar Hughes, Nora Johnsen, and I created an online guide booklet, the *Rainbow Support Group Guidebook for LGBTQ+ and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities* (https://rainbowguidebook.com/chapters/introduction/), and it has had 65,000 people looking at it. We have at least four colleges using it in their college courses. Right now, there are eight or nine Rainbow groups in different cities and towns in Massachusetts. I've got more groups in the United States, two connections in Canada now, a connection in Australia, and I just made a connection in the United Kingdom. So, we're connecting people with disability that identify as LGBTQ+ and IDD, and we're connecting people to support each other. I'm just glad that I'm able to just be me and do what I love doing: teaching people and talking to people and educating people.

Since I was in my late 30s, I've been living on my own. I had to learn how to cook for one person, and how to budget for groceries. It hasn't been easy. My biological family disowned me because of my lifestyle, but you know, that's on them.

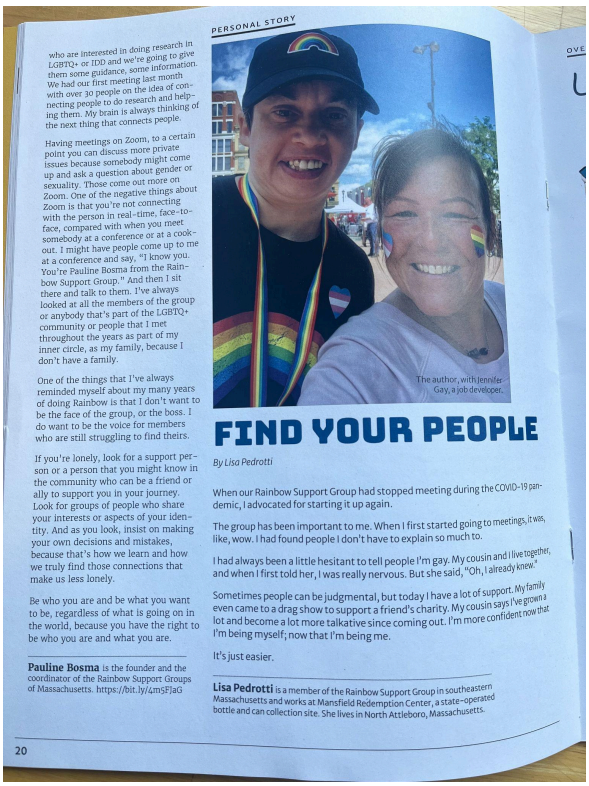
Other than that, and I've been enjoying life itself, but I still feel lonely sometimes. I like living on my own, though I wish I had somebody in my life. Right now, it's just me and my two cats, and they keep me company. I lost my bunny rabbit last summer, but I've got my two wonderful kitty cats, and they're my company and they're my babies. I just got an Alexa, and it's going to take a while to get used to hearing that voice. I'm not used to hearing somebody else's voice, you know, to remind me "You have to take your meds." It's been kind of interesting to hear that voice.

WE'VE BUILT CONNECTIONS THAT MAKE US A COMMUNITY

We have regular meetings for Rainbow on the last Thursday every month from 5:30 to 7:00 on Zoom that anybody can join. We might have people from other states joining us. We've got connections in Connecticut, New York, Rhode Island, Chicago, Dallas, California, Oregon, and there are people interested in starting a group in Pennsylvania. One group in Massachusetts goes out monthly together. They might go to a movie night, or a Pride event, or they might do something else, and the good thing is that people are connecting with each other. Usually during summer, sometimes that's the Fourth of July, I like to have a cookout where I invite all the groups from Massachusetts. We're just trying to be more open, and it gets a little bit bigger every year. I think last year, we had about 25 or 30 people show up. We encourage people to come and enjoy themselves.

I'm also involved in the Over the Rainbow Research Collective, and we're going to meet with people

Pauline Bosma founded Rainbow Support Groups of Massachusetts.



who are interested in doing research in LGBTQ+ or IDD and we're going to give them some guidance, some information. We had our first meeting last month with over 30 people on the idea of connecting people to do research and helping them. My brain is always thinking of the next thing that connects people.

Having meetings on Zoom, to a certain point you can discuss more private issues because somebody might come up and ask a question about gender or sexuality. Those come out more on Zoom. One of the negative things about Zoom is that you're not connecting with the person in real-time, face-to-face, compared with when you meet somebody at a conference or at a cookout. I might have people come up to me at a conference and say, "I know you. You're Pauline Bosma from the Rainbow Support Group." And then I sit there and talk to them. I've always looked at all the members of the group or anybody that's part of the LGBTQ+ community or people that I met throughout the years as part of my inner circle, as my family, because I don't have a family.

One of the things that I've always reminded myself about my many years of doing Rainbow is that I don't want to be the face of the group, or the boss. I do want to be the voice for members who are still struggling to find theirs.

If you're lonely, look for a support person or a person that you might know in the community who can be a friend or ally to support you in your journey. Look for groups of people who share your interests or aspects of your identity. And as you look, insist on making your own decisions and mistakes, because that's how we learn and how we truly find those connections that make us less lonely.

Be who you are and be what you want to be, regardless of what is going on in the world, because you have the right to be who you are and what you are.

Pauline Bosma is the founder and the coordinator of the Rainbow Support Groups of Massachusetts. https://bit.ly/4m5Fja5

PERSONAL STORY

The author, with Jennifer Gay, a job developer.

FIND YOUR PEOPLE

By Lisa Pedrotti

When our Rainbow Support Group had stopped meeting during the COVID-19 pandemic, I advocated for starting it up again.

The group has been important to me. When I first started going to meetings, it was, like, wow. I had found people I don't have to explain so much to.

I had always been a little hesitant to tell people I'm gay. My cousin and I live together, and when I first told her, I was really nervous. But she said, "Oh, I already knew."

Sometimes people can be judgmental, but today I have a lot of support. My family even came to a drag show to support a friend's charity. My cousin says I've grown a lot and become a lot more talkative since coming out. I'm more confident now that I'm being myself; now that I'm being me.

It's just easier.

Lisa Pedrotti is a member of the Rainbow Support Group in southeastern Massachusetts and works at Mansfield Redemption Center, a state-operated bottle and can collection site. She lives in North Attleboro, Massachusetts.

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July 29th, 2025 from 5:30pm - 7pm
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