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Happy and Healthy: New Options for LGBT Senior Living

by Winnie McCroy
EDGE Editor
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Earlier this month, the New York chapter of SAGE -- Services and Advocacy for GLBT Elders -- announced the development of New York City's first senior housing, with services designed specifically for the LGBT community. Their Ingersoll Senior Residences and Crotona Senior Residences will together provide nearly 230 units of housing, as well as comprehensive, culturally competent services to older LGBT adults. It's all part of a movement that's sweeping the nation.

"LGBT older people face a housing crisis. These groundbreaking developments are an important step toward combating that crisis in New York City by providing not only affordable and welcoming housing, but also on-site services pioneered through SAGE's network of LGBT senior centers," said Michael Adams, Chief Executive Officer of SAGE.

The Ingersoll complex, located in Ft. Greene, Brooklyn, will feature 145 units, making it the nation's largest LGBT-welcoming elder housing development in the nation. But it's far from the only one. The NYC units were built on precedents of LGBT-inclusive senior housing in California, Philadelphia and Chicago.

These residences are made possible through partnerships with local government and developmental partners. SAGE launched a National LGBT Elder Housing Initiative in 2015, in response to evidence of widespread discrimination against LGBT people in senior housing. When paired with services, these residences keep LGBTs from being forced back into the closet as they age.



Ingersoll in Fort Greene, Brooklyn.

A New Lease on LGBT Life

LGBT elder housing is a national issue, as illustrated by President Barack Obama's Pride Month Proclamation that, "LGBT individuals deserve to know their country stands beside them. That is why my Administration is striving to better understand the needs of LGBT adults and to provide affordable, welcoming, and supportive housing to aging LGBT Americans."

While all LGBT senior housing projects aim to meet residents' needs, those affiliated with SAGE feature an in-house senior center with programs for health and wellness, social programming, cultural programming, opportunities for education (i.e. language classes), faith-related programs, and activism.

In Philadelphia, the John C. Anderson Senior Affordable Apartments opened in March 2014, financed for \$19.5 million

by federal, state and city funds. This SAGE-affiliated program of the William Way LGBT Community Center is a boon to LGBT and straight residents alike. As one woman told reporter Mark Segal, "Now I can talk openly about my gay son" -- something discouraged at her previous senior residence.

Around the same time, Chicago's Center on Halsted partnered with SAGE and the Heartland Alliance to

construct Town Hall, 79 units of LGBT-friendly senior housing connected to a historic town-hall police station renovated to provide community space for the residents of the building, the new home of Center on Halsted Senior Programs.

Through a Supportive Housing grant from the state of Illinois, this project offers intensive case management services to assist residents with increasing their financial stability, providing referrals to improve their health and well-being, and remaining connected to the larger community.

Both the Philadelphia and Chicago projects are Congregant Dining Locations, funded by the federal government to address hunger in seniors. Meals are provided to anyone, regardless of age or sexual orientation.

California is also on the forefront of LGBT senior housing. The first-ever project of this sort -- Triangle Square -- was built in Los Angeles, featuring 104 units of subsidized housing, with 35 percent reserved for people with HIV. It's operated by the LA LGBT Center, which is currently working on building the Anita May Rosenstein Campus, an intergenerational LGBT youth and senior housing project, with 100 units for seniors and 100 for youth.

And in San Francisco, Openhouse has been working for 13 years to help LGBT seniors age with dignity and grace. They secured financing from the city to build 109 senior apartments at 55 Laguna Street, the site of the former University of California extension campus. Similar housing projects are in development in San Diego, Sacramento, and Houston.

The bulk of these projects are based on a lottery process, with additional applicants put on a waitlist. They have age and income restrictions, varying by municipality, and welcome non-LGBT residents.

For example, in Minneapolis, Spirit on the Lake features LGBT senior affordable housing. But as this area has a lot of Somalian refugees, these non-LGBT immigrants are learning to live in harmony with LGBT seniors.

According to SAGE's Director of National Field Initiatives Serena Worthington, LGBT seniors enjoy this, because, "So many people have lived in diverse housing, they appreciate this mix more. These LGBT senior projects are a very specific option for affordable housing that's fairly structured, but there are also market rate places, and those with a higher level of care. So ideally the LGBT community will have these options."

Even if we build more LGBT senior residences, said Worthington, there remains a need for a larger infrastructure to serve the country's estimated three million LGBT seniors.

"SAGE and other groups continue to work on policy solutions to make sure the infrastructure of *all* housing projects is welcoming, so if you go to any housing project, you will not be discriminated against," said Worthington.

For a complete list of LGBT elder resources across the country, visit www.lgbtagingcenter.org.

Winnie McCroy is the Women on the EDGE Editor, HIV/Health Editor, and Assistant Entertainment Editor for EDGE Media Network, handling all women's news, HIV health stories and theater reviews throughout the U.S. She has contributed to other publications, including The Village Voice, Gay City News, Chelsea Now and The Advocate, and lives in Brooklyn, New York.

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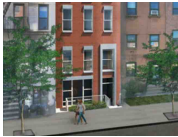
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