

Honoring Rainbow Elders' Lived Experience for Pride Month



*Craig Cullinane,
Rainbow
Elders Group
Facilitator*

There are times when it is particularly important to give our attention to LGBTQ+ Pride. Right now, with the brazen increase in anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric in the news and in the culture, remembering the inherent value and the tremendous gifts LGBTQ+ people offer the world is essential. We have always been here. We have been a part of every culture and community since humans gathered around fires. And we are still here.

During the twice monthly Rainbow Elders Zoom gatherings, there has been an uptick in expressions of concern about the recent surges of hate speech and legislation aimed at restricting the rights of LGBTQ+ folx. LifePath's Rainbow Elders program has been going strong for over 10 years now, and it is an important resource and support network for our aging population. It is particularly interesting to remember that so much has changed in the advancement of LGBTQ+ rights and conditions in just one generation. The Rainbow Elders can look back on their lives and see the expansions and contractions of cultural acceptance and repression. It is wise to

honor their lived experience.

Franklin County Pride is this Saturday, June 10, in Greenfield. There is such a fantastic, kaleidoscopic array of people who gather and march each year. Trans folk, lesbians, queer folk, gay men, and bisexual people of all ages, races, ethnicities, and expressions come together to celebrate their authenticity, desire, and love. And in the midst of the current cultural contraction around LGBTQ+ rights and freedoms, it is even more important to celebrate and be seen. Slogans of bygone times like "We will not go back" and "Silence equals death" are as relevant now as they ever were.

My first Pride event was the March on Washington in 1993 for LGBTQ+ rights. Hundreds of thousands of people

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gathered in Washington, D.C. to celebrate our lives and to demand equal treatment by the government. I was 23 at the time

and I was overwhelmed and inspired by the sheer number of people there. I had felt so alone for my whole life. Being a part of such a massive display of Queer people touched me deeply. I felt like I had come home to my community. I felt like I belonged—probably for the first time in my life.

The Rainbow Elders gatherings are so important because that experience of being cut off or lonely can increase as we age. The need for community and connection is just as strong, if not stronger. Older LGBTQ+ people can often feel invisible and unseen. So I have a gentle challenge for you: When you see a Rainbow Elder at the Pride March on June 10, invite them into a conversation. Perhaps ask them, "What have you witnessed in the course of your life around LGBTQ+ rights?" Or ask, "What concerns do you have about the current political climate?" In cultures before our time, the wisdom of elders was deeply respected and sought after. Let's revive that wise tradition! Perhaps they can offer some insight about how to navigate these challenging times. Perhaps they can offer hope, or strategies, or perspective.

Community Members Are Invited to an Age- and Dementia-Friendly Conversation



*Lynne Feldman,
Director of
Community Services*

LifePath, together with its partner Franklin Regional Council of Governments, is leading an initiative towards helping our area become more age- and dementia-friendly. Community members are invited to an in-person conversation and information session about the Age- and Dementia-Friendly Project Thursday, June 22, from 2 to 4 PM, with a resource fair beforehand from 1:30-2 PM, hosted by Greenfield Community College at their Cohn Family Dining Commons, One College Drive, Greenfield, MA. The event is free and refreshments will be served.

Presenters will give an overview of the regional project and role of the steering committee, followed by specifics on the efforts of the community-member-led workgroups that reviewed the results of last year's needs assessment. Their summaries of the major issues our area faces have been organized into 4 areas that make a community livable for people of all ages:

1. **Housing and outdoor spaces:** This means having places outside and buildings that everyone can easily use, and homes that are appropriate for older people to live in. Examples are sidewalks and benches in good condition, houses with ramps or elevators, and making sure there are enough homes that older people can afford.

2. **Communication, information, and**

social and civic participation: This means making sure that everyone has the opportunity to access the information and resources they need. It might involve learning how to use technology, or making sure information about community events and services is widely shared. It also means ensuring people have opportunities to be part of the community, including places where individuals can go to meet others, and jobs and volunteer roles available for individuals who want them. We also want to ensure all people are treated with respect and feel a sense of belonging.

3. **Community support and health services:** This is about making sure we all have access to good healthcare and support when we need it. It could mean having healthcare facilities that are easy to get to, or services that help people at home.

4. **Transportation:** This is about having ways for people to get around that are affordable and easy. It could mean having buses, safe roads, and paths for walking and biking.

Attendees will also hear from individuals involved in their town-specific age- and dementia-friendly projects. The three-o'clock hour will be dedicated to hearing from event attendees on their ideas and solutions that may work best for our area. This input will help us craft an action plan and work towards implementation of the changes needed for our community to become more age- and dementia-friendly. Registration is helpful but not required. To register visit <https://tinyurl.com/hywj6m7w> or call 413-773-5555, x2255.

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