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LifePath
options for independenceEditor, Janis Merrell
GoodLife@LifePathMA.org
(413) 773-5555 x2255

THE GOOD LIFE

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PRIDE = Safety and Connection



Cris Carl

*By Cris Carl,
Rainbow Elders Group
Facilitator*

I have worn so many hats in my life that friends and co-workers have teased me quite a bit about it. I tend to have at least three jobs at a time, and now isn't

any different. Part-time, I am the facilitator for the LGBTQIA+ Rainbow Elders group for LifePath. Another hat I wear is as an equine- and canine-assisted therapist. Where the two converge is working to build a safe and connected community. When I think of PRIDE, which takes place this Saturday, June 7, in Franklin County, I can't think of a better denominator than safety and connection. In my work with horses and clients healing from neglect and trauma, learning to regulate one another in safety is a primary goal.

With current federal attacks on the LGBTQIA+ community and slashing of funding and services to elders, children, people with disabilities, and women, being able to experience safety couldn't be more crucial. Coming together as a whole community brings validation and visibility and helps us move out of fear and dissociation. Never has it been more important to not feel alone. PRIDE will begin with a parade, stepping off from the Greenfield Middle School at 12 p.m. and continuing on to Energy Park on Miles St. There will be music, food, speeches, and a variety of vendors until 4 p.m.

While there is plenty of fun involved in PRIDE, it is important to note the need for support has grown. We live in an area that is generally open and tolerant, but the LGBTQIA+ community is taking heavy hits at the federal level. The New York Times reported recently that the administration cut \$800 million in grants from the National Institutes of Health directed towards LGBTQIA+ health care. The cuts will prevent research into cancers, viruses, and gender-affirming care. No matter your age, it can be challenging to get healthcare at all these days. Add in having to reveal to constantly changing providers that you are gay, lesbian, trans, etc. and it makes healthcare more onerous.

The Supreme Court on May 6 revived Trump's ban on transgender troops. LGBTQIA+ suicide hotlines have been shut down, and Queer bars are being raided again. On May 3, Ptown, a Queer bar in Pittsburgh, PA, was raided by 20 armed state troopers during a drag show. All of the attendees were forced out into the rain and the show was shut down. These examples are heavy and hard, especially for those of us who have been working and fighting for LGBTQIA+ rights for so many years.

Last week at one of our Rainbow Elders Zoom meetings we had three lawyers from Community Legal Aid join us to provide information on their free services and answer

questions. In terms of LGBTQIA+ rights we are fortunate to live in a state that has ongoingly supported our community. The lawyers made clear that while on the federal level some of our rights are and may be challenged, the community will feel less impact as we have robust laws in our state that provide ample protection. Last year at Franklin County PRIDE we had roughly 100 people behind our banner during the PRIDE march. There was a palpable sense of joy in the air and I was delighted to note the large turnout from the overall community. I am hoping for all that again this year. It's harder to feel afraid when you are not alone.

Some may wonder about the relevance of being an elder and LGBTQIA+. Many are aware of the aging population and the impact on healthcare and services. The people who participate in Rainbow Elders range from early 50's to mid-80's. We have seen a lot in our lifetimes, have worked hard, raised families, experienced the joy of being able to get married and the legal option/protection of divorce when things don't work out. Several are veterans. There are plenty of people who think we want "special rights" and all we have ever wanted was to have the *same* rights as everyone else. Full stop. Many of our participants have significant health issues. Imagine facing bias on top of cancer. Imagine being told mental health concerns could be resolved if you learned to accept your gender.

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In fact, while there are two varieties of human, XX and XY, there are also eight other genetic varieties. For example, you can be born legally male with an X and a Y chromosome, but your body is insensitive to androgens, and you appear female. Or, you can be born legally female with two X chromosomes, but one of the X's has an SRY gene, which gives you a male body. Humanity has a wide range of genetic differences, why should those differences be legislated against?

In a May 6, 2025 New York Times article, they interviewed some of the transgender service members who are now going to be banned from service. One was Sgt. First Class Julie Becraft who did three tours in Afghanistan and was awarded the bronze star. Becraft was one of several people interviewed, along with others who are also decorated service members. Becraft said when she announced to a new squadron that she was transgender, she had a couple of surprised looks and a few murmurs of support—and that was it. Clearly this administration isn't giving enough credit to our young people and service members. But we already knew that.

So whether you are part of the LGBTQIA+ community or consider yourself an ally, I hope you will join us to march, to sing, to play, to laugh, and to participate in a beautiful gathering. Maybe you will learn something new or make a new acquaintance. I recently saw a meme that said "The word 'ally' is a verb." If you can't join us on June 7 at PRIDE, consider donating to LifePath's many programs supporting elders, including Rainbow Elders. We are all in this together.