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LifePath

options for independence

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THE GOOD LIFE

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Join LifePath's Rainbow Elders Program at the Franklin County Pride Parade and Festival

By Cris Carl, Rainbow Elders Facilitator

Cris Carl

This year's theme for the ***Annual Franklin County Pride Parade & Festival***, on Saturday, June 13, is ***"Together We Rise."*** LifePath's Rainbow Elders support network has supported LGBTQIA+ older

adults in Franklin County for over 14 years by providing a network of social support. Through this network, many people have found connections and made new friends in person and via Zoom. These relationships have helped to break isolation, to lessen strain, and to encourage joy. LifePath's Rainbow Elders Steering Committee meets regularly to discuss ideas and activities to bring people together. As part of this journey, LGBTQIA+ history is often shared.

Historical Overview

The first formal gay rights organization in the U.S. was established in the 1920's. Various groups worked through the years with little headway until the Stonewall Riots, on June 28, 1969, in New York City. The Stonewall Riots became the catalyst for the gay rights movement in the U.S. and worldwide. Historically, NYC had laws that disallowed serving alcohol to homosexuals. Gay and lesbian bars were often the only places people in the LGBTQIA+ community could freely express themselves. The NYC Liquor Authority often closed bars or sent police to raid bars. Serving alcohol to homosexuals was seen as "disorderly." While those regulations were dropped in 1966, engaging in "gay" behavior was still illegal. There was also a "gender appropriate" dress code law.

The Stonewall Inn was a gay bar in Greenwich Village. The bar was raided June 28 with police arresting 13 patrons and employees while roughly ejecting the rest. Female officers took suspected patrons into the bathroom to identify their sex, arresting those who did not conform. Six days of protests and violent confrontations with police followed this event. On the one-year anniversary in 1970, thousands marched in Manhattan from The Stonewall Inn to Central Park. The official chant was "Say it loud—gay is proud." This is how the annual marches around the world adopted the use of "Pride" to identify marches, rallies, etc.

In 2016, former president Barack Obama designated the site of the riots as a National Monument overseen by the National Park Service. Obama recognized the sites' contribution to LGBTQIA+ rights. The Stonewall National Monument Visitors Center opened in 2024. In 2025, the current Administration struck any reference to the "promotion of gender ideology" from the Stonewall website and ordered the removal of the Pride flag from the monument. In April of 2026, the President reversed his decision following a lawsuit brought by city officials, The Gilbert Baker Foundation, and other advocacy groups.

During a period where the LGBTQIA+ community was gaining rights and more acceptance, Pride marches became a joyous event: a time to celebrate our ability to not only be accepted but to be open to greater

acceptance of ourselves. It is remarkably easy to learn to hate yourself when people are telling you that you are evil, going to hell, and my personal favorite: "an abomination." Right here in Greenfield I was stopped one time to sign a petition at a local grocery store, ostensibly to protect wild horses. The cover page of the petition was a ruse to get people to sign a petition to shut down rights for the LGBTQIA+ community. When I realized what was happening, I confronted the woman with the petition. Hence, being called "an abomination."

Nearly 50% of LGBTQIA+ youth consider suicide annually, which is twice the national average. Nearly half of all transgender or nonbinary youth consider suicide, with 14% attempting suicide. In a 2024 study, only one in three LGBTQIA+ youth had an affirming home and, only two out of five had what they felt was an affirming community. "Pride" has once again become more critical to caring for our LGBTQIA+ youth, community, family, and ourselves, and is literally life and death in some instances.

In 2025, the American Civil Liberties Union tracked 616 anti-LGBTQIA+ bills across the country in every state, including Massachusetts. The bills ranged from redefining the meaning of sex, school facility bans, curriculum censorship, school sports bans, healthcare funding restrictions, outing in schools, and barriers to accurate IDs; to restrictive adoption policies. In April 2026, Tennessee Governor Bill Lee signed a bill declaring June as "Nuclear Family Month."

Many have come together in the past year in unprecedented numbers for "No Kings" marches and rallies. So, I imagine there is a growing understanding regarding how important Pride is to not just the LGBTQIA+ community, but to everyone who would like to live their life in peace and not have their civil rights violated or taken away. I am proud Greenfield has designated itself to be a safe city for transgender people. I can't claim to know all that a transgender person goes through, but I can make an educated guess.

A Personal Perspective

When I was a teen in the 1960's being anything other than straight was simply not acceptable or was whispered about. So much so, that the first time I *heard* the word "lesbian" spoken out loud I was 15 years old. Sometimes I am still amazed by that simple fact. I was at a friend's house and overheard her mother telling her father, with deep derision, "She's upstairs with that *lesbian*." I wasn't completely sure what being lesbian even meant as it had never occurred to me until that moment, and my feelings towards women were normal for me. I came out at 16. Not broadly, and certainly not to my family, but in increments.

Come celebrate with us and join LifePath's Rainbow Elders at the Pride celebration this year to march, watch the parade, and/or visit LifePath's Rainbow Elders table at the festival afterwards! There will be information booths, food, merchandise, and music on the Energy Park stage.

We can rise together.

Parade participants will meet at the Greenfield Middle School starting at 11 a.m. with the parade stepping off at noon and marching to the Pride Festival in Energy Park on Miles Street.

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