



VNSNY LGBT Outreach and Expansion Project
Submitted to
New York Community Trust
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Summary

The Visiting Nurse Service of New York requests an implementation grant of \$125,000 from The New York Community Trust over an 18-month period in support of a new LGBT Outreach and Expansion Project designed to provide the most vulnerable seniors in New York City's LGBT community with greater access to VNSNY home- and community-based services, raise awareness of VNSNY as a safe and trusted ally of the LGBT Community, and increase outreach to self-identified and closeted seniors. Specifically, grant funds will be used to support the salary (plus fringe) of a new Project Manager who will be an experienced LGBT nurse responsible for overseeing the VNSNY LGBT program. As the lead VNSNY liaison, he/she will identify, build and maintain relationships with both LGBT-dedicated and non-LGBT organizations throughout New York City.

The proposal addresses the need to provide greater care to the more than 100,000 LGBT individuals 65 and older in the City who are, after a lifetime of discrimination, at greater risk for physical and mental illnesses; more likely to experience poverty, social isolation, depression and anxiety, chronic illnesses, poor nutrition and premature mortality; and often delay seeking care out of fear of discrimination by healthcare providers.

The project will enable VNSNY to establish best practices for providing home- and community-based care for the LGBT senior population across the City. We anticipate that at least 2,000 of the City's LGBT older adults will receive information directly about linkages to care through VNSNY outreach efforts. These efforts also will result in greater awareness among the City's community-based organization's leadership and staff about health resources available to assist LGBT seniors to successfully age in place.

1. Agency Background (mission, activities, credentials for project)

The Visiting Nurse Service of New York (VNSNY) was established in 1893 by Lillian D. Wald, the founder of public health nursing in the United States, to provide nursing care and health education to new immigrants. Today, VNSNY is the largest not-for-profit home- and community-based service provider in the U.S. and a leader in the national arena of home health care. Our organization is dedicated to providing quality home and community services to people of all ages and of all social backgrounds and economic means. We also work closely and

tirelessly with national home care associations and other national groups to develop and disseminate best practices for home- and community-based care. VNSNY's mission is to:

- Promote the health and well-being of patients and families by providing high-quality, cost-effective health care in the home and community;
- Be a leader in the development of innovative services that enable people to function as independently as possible in their community;
- Help shape healthcare policies that support beneficial home- and community-based services;
- Continue its tradition of charitable and compassionate care.

Our agency provides skilled nursing, rehabilitation therapy, social work, mental health, pediatric and hospice home health services, and paraprofessional services. We have 14,000 employees, including registered nurses, rehabilitation therapists, social workers, home health aides and clinical professionals such as physicians, nutritionists, and psychologists. Collectively, VNSNY staff members speak more than 50 languages. On any given day, we have approximately 33,000 patients in our care and over 41,800 members under our coordinated care through our health care plan, VNSNY CHOICE. Hospitals are the largest single source of referrals to VNSNY. Heart disease, diabetes, cancer and wounds are among the most frequent diagnoses of our patients.

VNSNY is distinctly qualified to carry out the proposed project. We understand that many LGBT seniors have experienced discrimination, social stigma and prejudice. We are committed to treating every patient with empathy, courtesy and respect.

VNSNY clinicians, administrative and senior staff have received special LGBT training from the LGBT senior advocacy organization SAGE (Advocacy and Services for LGBT Elders), ensuring that all of our staff are aware of and sensitive to the needs and concerns of LGBT older adults. In fact, VNSNY is the largest home-and community-based healthcare organization in the New York City metropolitan area with Platinum level LGBT cultural competency training from SAGE. In addition: We were at the forefront in providing care at the beginning and during the AIDS epidemic when few other organizations were; we have a long history and commitment to meeting the needs of the City's most vulnerable, including high-risk populations with medically and psychosocially complex patients; we have deep clinical expertise in complex and chronic care - our average patient has 4.7 diagnoses; and we have clinical expertise in transgender health, including an exclusive partnership with Mt. Sinai Hospital to work with patients undergoing gender reassignment surgery. Our clinicians also work with other hospitals and clinics in assisting LGBT community members with health care after they receive gender affirming surgery.

Perhaps most importantly in terms of the possible scope of our impact in this area, VNSNY is well positioned to effect best practices for home- and community-based care for the City's LGBT population, given our historic impact on healthcare policy and service in New York City. (We will be celebrating our 125th anniversary in 2018.) Although VNSNY is a very large and complex organization, our geographically-based structure allows us to operate at the local level, integrating services into neighborhoods across New York. This sets us apart from other agencies,

enabling our programs to establish local interdependent relationships that permit true collaborations across health and social service settings that achieve shared goals and outcomes. As a result, VNSNY will be able to support LGBT community organizations with appropriate health-focused information, linkages and services with cultural sensitivity that address the health needs of LGBT seniors and their interest in successfully aging in place.

2. Project Description: (Problem addressed)

More than 100,000 of New York City's 1.1 million residents 65 years and older are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.¹ Many LGBT older adults have more fear and tend to be more 'closeted' than younger members of the community because they have lived through greater discrimination and social stigma, and have felt more profoundly the effects of prejudice, including a history of being labeled criminals, sinners, and mentally ill.

For some, this fear and social stigma have disrupted their lives and connections with their families of origin, as well as their earnings and opportunities to save for retirement. The effects of a lifetime of discrimination, shame, and looming violence has made LGBT older adults at greater risk for physical and mental illnesses. They are more likely to experience poverty, social isolation, depression and anxiety, chronic illnesses, poor nutrition, and premature mortality; and of critical importance to this proposal is that LGBT seniors often delay seeking care out of fear of discrimination by healthcare providers. When they do seek or require health care, they take great effort to hide their sexual identity.

To address the problem, VNSNY has begun the process of consolidating, strengthening and expanding its outreach efforts to both self-identified and closeted LGBT older adults in New York City.

3. Goals and Objectives

Goals:

- To provide the most vulnerable seniors in the City's LGBT community with greater access to VNSNY home- and community-based services.
- To raise awareness of VNSNY as a safe and trusted ally of the LGBT Community
- To increase outreach to self-identified and closeted seniors

Objectives:

1. Hire LGBT Project Manager

Project Activities: A \$125,000 grant from The Trust will cover the salary (including fringe) of a Project Manager who will be an experienced LGBT nurse responsible for overseeing the VNSNY LGBT program, including:

- LGBT outreach. As the lead VNSNY liaison, he/she will identify, build and maintain relationships with both LGBT-dedicated and non-LGBT organizations listed in Objective 2
- Design of internal procedures to integrate program components;

¹ *Creating a Home for LGBT Seniors in New York City.* New York Times, July 3, 2017

- Development of realistic project outcomes;
- Development of a corps of LGBT volunteers who will provide friendly visiting to isolated or home-bound seniors, as well as coordinate volunteer education and sensitivity training efforts; and spearhead the already established VNSNY LGBT Advisory Committee;
- Coordination with VNSNY Case Managers;
- Coordination with the VNSNY Research Center to conduct an Advantage Survey in partnership with SAGE to access specific local needs of LGBT seniors in neighborhoods across the City.

2. Identify and establish community partnerships with 50 Community-based organizations, including LGBT-dedicated and LGBT allies such as senior centers, food pantries, nursing homes, assisted living, and religious community centers and NORCs; as well as community based health clinics, hospital health systems and physician practices.

Project Activities: Once a Project Manager is in place, expanded outreach will begin to community organizations that are focused on working with LGBT seniors. Concurrently, we will reach out to other senior-focused CBOs to a) promote awareness of and sensitivity to LGBT issues and b) offer links to resources for LGBT seniors in their own communities. It is our hope that this outreach will promote VNSNY as a safe and trusted ally of the LGBT population as we have come to understand that this community is very much influenced by word of mouth and may help in identifying closeted older adults.

One of the insights we have gleaned from our work with LGBT organizations to date is that a one-size-fits-all approach is not adequate. It is important to understand how each interacts with their clients. Due to the sensitivity of the LGBT population and the organizations that represent them, it is essential that the process begins by listening to the specific needs of each organization and how they approach their clients; understand their mission, goals and gaps in service; and what they believe is the best way to communicate to their clients important health information and services.

We hope to partner with as many organizations as possible on educational initiatives that can promote successful aging in place such as defined target locations for health screenings, practitioner outreach, seminars, and resource listings, as well as through the development of what we call a “safe pathway to care.” An example of this might be a presentation of how to build “My Personal Portfolio,” which is similar to an emergency “Go Kit” with personal health data that can help LGBT seniors in the future planning of their health needs.

The initial meeting only should be the first of many conversations that lead to a trusting relationship and partnership with an organization. Ongoing activities based on the gaps identified will help to drive the development of mutually agreed upon and sustained interventions that can support the LGBT community and establish VNSNY as a resource to their clients and a “safe space” for LGBT seniors.

Additionally, we hope that our collaborations with like-minded CBOs will help us gain insight into how best to promote a caregiver safety net that will allow frail LGBT seniors to age in place.

The AdvantAge Survey described below will also provide us with some understanding of a community's interest in and available resources to offer support.

3. Initiate an AdvantAge Survey in partnership with SAGE

Project Activities: The AdvantAge Initiative team at the VNSNY Center for Home Care Policy and Research (CHCPR) will collaborate with SAGE on a project that will help the organization identify the needs of older LGBT seniors, assess how aging-friendly the communities in which they live are, and develop solutions to meet the identified needs of seniors who are served by SAGE now and in the future.

The AdvantAge Initiative team has worked with organizations nationwide to help them make their communities more aging friendly. Many have used the Advantage Initiative survey and process to understand older adults' perceptions of and experiences in their communities; identify barriers to aging in place; and plan for action to address these barriers. National and local surveys of older adults in the U.S. have overwhelmingly shown that older adults would like to stay in their homes and communities as they grow older. Older adults, in fact, are the least likely segment of the population to move. Most stay put in their communities for a variety of reasons, including the desire to be near loved ones, financial considerations, and attachment to their neighborhoods, homes, and friends and neighbors.

But are the communities where older adults live able to support them as they grow older? Throughout the country, most communities were not designed specifically for an older population that wants to "age in place." For example, in some communities where the main means of transportation is the automobile, older adults may become isolated when they can no longer drive. Available affordable housing may be limited and inappropriate for older adults. Ready access to needed services may be problematic because older don't know about the services, they do not have transportation to access them, or the services may not exist in the areas where they live.

With 1.1 million adults aged 65+ in New York City, and 100,000 of those LGBT, and these numbers expected to grow in the next 10 to 20 years, SAGE, like other organizations throughout the nation, has realized that they need to make their communities more aging friendly to accommodate these changing demographics. The AdvantAge Initiative team will:

- Work with SAGE to develop a consumer survey questionnaire designed specifically for older LGBT adults and conduct the survey in five New York City neighborhoods where SAGE operates senior centers
- Analyze the survey data and help SAGE staff understand the findings; identify and prioritize issues; translate the data into action steps that SAGE and partners could consider taking to make the neighborhoods better places to live; and develop a report that SAGE can share with their constituents and other community stakeholders.
- Provide ongoing technical assistance during the survey process as well as afterward, when SAGE is ready to develop a work plan to make the neighborhoods more aging friendly.

4. Establish Corps of LGBT peer volunteers for Friendly Visiting program

Project Activities: VNSNY currently has an LGBT Advisory Committee made up of approximately 80 VNSNY staff that has remained dormant because of limited resources. The Project Manager will have the opportunity to harness the commitment and enthusiasm of this group and transform it into an active corps of LGBT volunteers who will be an essential component of our outreach to frail, homebound, and older adults who remain “hidden.”

4. Population served:

Our project is focused on LGBT Seniors who are vulnerable, closeted and self-identified, who require information and linkage to care. Given the difficulty of identifying closeted LGBT seniors, we will approach outreach in phases, targeting “out” seniors with identified LGBT-committed referrers in the first six months of the project. It is our hope that upon completion of the six-month AdvantAge Survey described above, we will learn more about how to identify and approach closeted seniors.

As the general population ages, the more than 100,000 LGBT individuals 65 and older in the City will increase. This population is ethnically diverse and more educated than the general population and live in all five boroughs, with some neighborhood concentration in Manhattan’s West Village, East Village, Chelsea, Hell’s Kitchen, Hudson Heights/Inwood and Harlem.² In Brooklyn, concentrations have been identified in Williamsburg, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Bushwick and Fort Greene; and in Queens, Jackson Heights, Astoria and Forest Hills.³

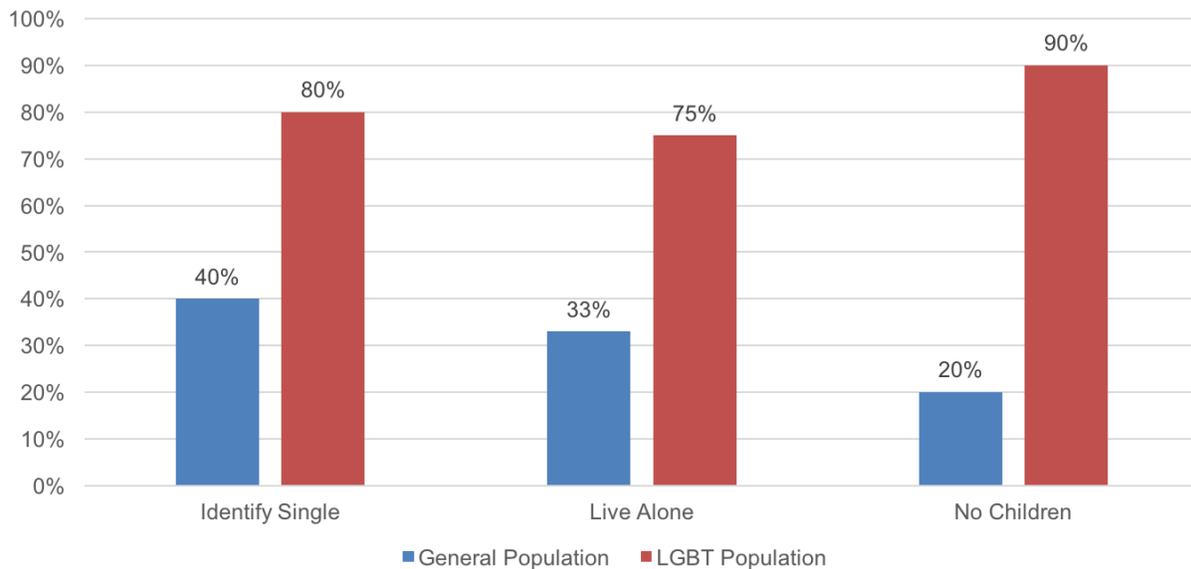
As discussed in the project description section of this proposal, the effects of a lifetime of discrimination has put LGBT older adults at greater risk for physical and mental illnesses, and they are more likely to experience poverty, social isolation, depression and anxiety, chronic illnesses, poor nutrition and premature mortality. As the chart below indicates, many lack any family support, exacerbating their sense of isolation.⁴

² Source: Market Size Estimates from SAGE

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

Many LGBT Older Adults Lack Family Support Systems



Not surprisingly, LGBT seniors respond more favorably to organizations and providers who openly identify as LGBT-friendly and are very much influenced by word of mouth via endorsements, recommendations and referrals from social/advocacy groups.

5. Marketing Plan

The VNSNY Marketing Department's overall objectives include positioning our organization as the preferred provider of home healthcare programs and services among LGBT older adults throughout the VNSNY service areas in New York City and to position VNSNY as the go to source for home-and community-based care by LGBT influencers and referral sources.

VNSNY will continue its sponsorships of LGBT events such as the Pride Parade and SAGE's SHE event celebrating women; brand frontline staff through badge identification that includes the rainbow flag; develop brochures specifically geared to geriatric patients, behavior health issues and hospice to be distributed through both referrer and community-based partnerships; alter existing marketing materials on social media, our website, newsletters and video for LGBT inclusion and incorporation of SAGE credentialing.

Marketing has identified high priority community partners that offer broad geographic opportunities to increase visibility such as The Center (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center), God's Love We Deliver, Griot Circle and GMHC, as well as high potential citywide health referral sources with specific training and/or resources dedicated to the LGBT community such as Mount Sinai Systems, New York Presbyterian Hospital, NYC Health and Hospitals and NYU Langone. A preliminary list of physician referrals is also in development.

6. Expected Outcomes:

- VNSNY will establish best practices for providing home- and community-based care for the City's LGBT population
- At least 2,000 of the City's 100,000 LGBT older adults will receive information directly about linkages to care through VNSNY outreach efforts
- CBO staff from across the City will become more familiar with health resources available to assist LGBT seniors in successfully aging in place

7. Plan for measuring project results

At this writing, we have no way of identifying and tracking LGBT older adult referrals since neither VNSNY clinical nor intake staff will request information on sexual orientation. Our new Project Manager will work with colleagues and CBO leadership to determine a sensitive and respectful means of tracking LGBT seniors who come to us for care.

We will consider this project successful if we have achieved our objectives to have an experienced LGBT nurse in place, have developed relationships with the many organizations that serve the LGBT community as well as those who have the potential to serve it, have the AdvantAge Survey up and running, and have taken advantage of opportunities for successful collaboration with City organizations on health and social determinants of health that are of concern to LGBT older adults.

Conclusion

VNSNY has nearly 125 years as a safe harbor for all New Yorkers in need no matter what their financial circumstances, race, ethnic background, religious affiliation, immigration status or sexual orientation. We have been, and continue to be, a force in shaping healthcare policies in New York City that support best practices in home- and community-based services.

While we have been serving the LGBT community since the early days of the AIDS crisis, it has become clear that way too many LGBT older adults do not receive adequate health care. We want to change that and hope The Trust will assist us in strengthening and expanding our outreach to some of the most vulnerable older adults in the City, as well as to the many organizations in the healthcare industry that can better serve them.