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# Spahrkle

The Monthly Newsletter of  
The Spahr Center

**April 2019**

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## **Our newsletter gets a fun and meaningful name**



We thought it would be great to shake it up a bit with The Spahr Center's monthly newsletter. We are planning to include lengthier articles that discuss the issues facing our clients and community, and the agency's work to address them. We are also trying out a new format that makes the document easier to read. Let us know how we're doing.

We are most excited about our newsletter's new name – *Spahrkle!* Alex Diefenbach (on the right in the picture) won the "Name the Newsletter" contest at our April 22nd Open House. The judges thought his submission was perfect. It pays homage to our wonderful founder, Jane Spahr, who is herself sparkly, in addition to being brilliant and inspiring. It tells the story of what we are all about – supporting people to be at their best. And it's obviously pretty gay and fun. We hope you like it, too!

Thanks Alex! And thanks to *everyone* who entered suggestions into the contest. There were some great ones.

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## **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Aging Issues Demand Special Services and Skills**

*Nancy Flaxman, MSW, has worked with and on behalf of LGBT seniors for over 25 years and facilitates the Spahr Center LGBT Senior Discussion Group at Margaret Todd Senior Center.*

**Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender seniors grew up at a time when**

we could be put in jail or a mental institution, just for associating with same gender people. Lobotomies and electric shock were being performed to cure us. We routinely lost jobs, housing, family, friends, education, military status, and biological children when our sexual orientation and gender differences were revealed.

Most LGBT people thought they were the only ones. Growing up, there was not even a word for what we were feeling. Even the derogatory “queer” was not yet used. Boys might be called “sissy” and girls “tom boys” but that did not describe what people were feeling inside. Many of us learned what we might be when we first heard the word *homosexual*.

There was either no information available, or highly negative information. There was no one to talk with about what we were feeling. Those who disclosed feelings to a psychiatrist were often told that we just needed to meet the right man or the right woman. Many married and had children. The feelings never went away, but we did not know what we could do about it. The long term relationship that many truly longed for was not possible.

Dark, dingy, and hidden, gay bars became places where people could find others but were routinely raided by police. LGBT people could even be arrested for having a party at home with all same gender people. *“Our friends were at my house for a get together, all gay men. The windows were high up. I looked over and saw police up on a ladder looking in. They arrested all of us.”* The names of those arrested would appear in the newspaper the next day. Many people lost jobs. Alcohol was not only a social vehicle but for some became a way to cover guilt, shame, and depression.

Some were able to avoid heterosexual marriage and live in secret with a loved one. Always one had to hide. This was particularly true at work.

*“I carried a photo of a woman I never met in my wallet and told people this was my wife who died.”*

*“We were together 46 years and everyone at work thought we were sisters. When she died suddenly, I had to be at work the next day. My co-workers didn’t understand my loss and grief the way they would have if I had lost my husband.”*

*“As a gay man, I had a lesbian friend who I would take to office parties and pretend we were a date. Everyone thought we were a couple. Eventually I married because we really couldn’t get ahead at work if we weren’t married.”*

Even in such a societal environment of oppression, prejudice, fear, misinformation, and injustice, many LGBT people in Marin created an often-closeted life with a career, home, and loved partners of 50, 60, and even 70 years. Our relationships were never featured on the people page of the Marin IJ that listed engagements, marriages, and anniversaries. But our commitment to each other, our caring, and our loving were no less than that of our heterosexual peers.

Many decades before gender affirming surgery would be available, a few

transgender people managed to live as the gender they knew themselves to be, never revealing birth gender to anyone. For the many others who at most could only secretly dress in gender affirming clothes, Christine Jorgensen provided the first hope that we were not alone and that perhaps it was possible to be who we are.

When lesbian and gay characters were eventually in movies and pulp fiction, we were portrayed as sick, and the story had to end tragically for the gay or lesbian character. The woman who was led astray by the sick power of the lesbian found true love with a man, and the “real lesbian” killed herself.

*“The stories in pulp fiction were never happy. But I read them all because it was the first time that I knew there might be other women who had the same feelings I did.”*

In order to survive, LGBT people learned how to hide. Now in our 70’s, 80’s, and 90’s, we are still hiding. We are often isolated at a time in our lives when our physical, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being are dependent on connection to family, friends, community, and services. The survival strategies that were necessary for most of our lives now put our survival at risk.

LGBT seniors are isolated not only in the mainstream community but we are also isolated from an LGBT community. The world may have changed, but many LGBT seniors have no idea how to connect to other LGBT people. We may not identify with the younger and more visible “queer” community, queer being a word that carries only hurtful associations.

LGBT seniors are not accessing the services that are available for all seniors in Marin, and when we *do* access services, we often don’t really talk about our lives. All of the health, social service, and housing resources that exist to help people would not have been safe for LGBT seniors to turn to for most of our lives. In order to reach these hidden, isolated and underserved seniors, an agency must have LGBT competent staff; a welcoming agency and participant/client population; and LGBT targeted outreach, programs, and services. That is the focus of LGBT aging cultural competency training and technical assistance. The Spahr Center is now embarking on developing this much needed training throughout the County.

As we recognize the experiences of the past and the outreach that is needed to serve LGBT seniors, we should also recognize, build on, and learn from the special strengths that many LGBT people have had to develop, including ways to live without being dependent on society’s approval. Without family of origin or adult children for support, LGBT people are learning to create our own families of choice. This is a healthy model for our society, where, regardless of sexual orientation and gender, people are geographically and sometimes emotionally separated from family and the communities where they grew up.

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### **Join our Senior Discussion Groups**

The Spahr Center now offers *two* LGBT senior drop-in groups that meet

monthly; one in Northern Marin and the other in Southern Marin. The groups provide an opportunity to socialize, discuss important topics about aging as an LGBT person and plug into other community activities.

**Northern Marin** – The original group meets on the 1st Tuesday of the month from noon to 2:00 pm at The Margaret Todd Senior Center, 1560 Hill Road, Novato. This group is facilitated by Nancy Flaxman, MSW. No need to RSVP

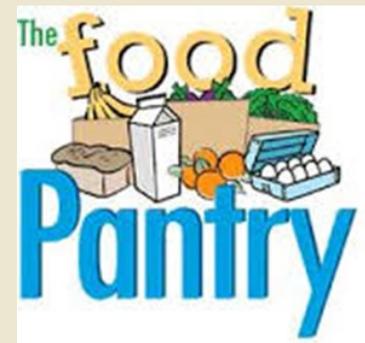
**Southern Marin** – The newest group meets on the 2nd Wednesday of the month from noon to 2:00 pm at The Corte Madera Town Center Community Room, Suite 201, Corte Madera. This group is facilitated by Gary “Buz” Hermes, MA. No need to RSVP

If have any questions or would like more information, contact Bri at [bsilva@thespahcenter.org](mailto:bsilva@thespahcenter.org) or 415-457-2487 ext. 1002

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## Pantry Update

Our pantry is open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from noon – 5pm. Please come in to visit us during those hours. If there is something you’d like us to stock in the pantry please contact Bri at [bsilva@thespahcenter.org](mailto:bsilva@thespahcenter.org)



### Cal Fresh 2019 Update

Beginning June 1, 2019, Supplemental Security Income recipients will become eligible for CALFRESH (food stamps) for the first time since 1974.

In 1974, a federal law was passed that allowed states, by increasing the State Supplemental Payment to SSI by \$10, to “cash out” and to no longer provide food stamps for SSI recipients. The \$10 increase that allowed states to “cash out” was increased over time by periodic cost of living adjustments to the State Supplemental payment that rarely kept up with the rising cost of living.

Over the last several years, thru the hard work and advocacy of community organizations and SSI recipient at the grassroots level, State Assembly Bill 1811 that was passed in June of 2018 included a repeal of the “cash out” provisions. The new legislation will allow SSI recipients to continue to receive the Federal Benefit Rate of SSI (currently 771 per month for a single individual) along with the State Supplemental Amount (currently 160.72 for a single individual) for a total of 931.72 per month. Additionally, the same individual would be eligible for monthly CALFRESH benefits.

This bill affects not only single SSI recipients but the monthly allotment of Cal Fresh in households with SSI recipients where other members are eligible for food stamps. The formula for determining the monthly amount of food stamps per individual is not clear yet, but we know that out-of-

pocket medical expenses are part of the formula, and that the “average” amount people will be eligible for is 130 per month.

I will know more in June about how this formula works. We are planning to help people enroll beginning June 1<sup>st</sup>. If you currently receive Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and SSI you are eligible now for Cal Fresh as well. For people receiving SSDI only this would be a good time to apply for CAL FRESH if you are not receiving CALFRESH benefits already. Please call to schedule an appointment (415-457-2487 ext. 1004) for the first week in June.

David Mon, Benefits Advocate  
The Spahr Center



Many thanks to all of our wonderful Give OUT Day supporters! Thanks to you we raised \$4,118! What a Cause to be **PROUD!!**

## Men's Brown Bag Lunch

"With Food, It's All Good!"

This long-running Brown Bag Lunch, first w/Spectrum (for many years), and now with The Spahr Center, offers a casual discussion group for men. Group facilitator, Will B., will be taking over for Morris, who so graciously kept this group going for the past few years.

Held on the 2nd Thursday of each month, 12noon-2pm, the combo of members bringing their personal choice of snack or lunch adds to the fun nature of guys catching up with one another, and then maybe having a broader, albeit targeted topic discussion.

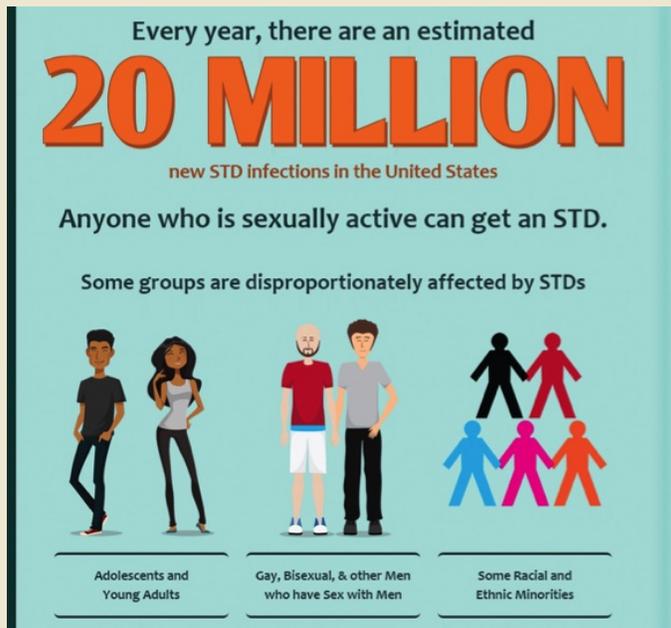
*"I look forward to acting as Facilitator for this long-running Group, starting with the May 9th Brown Bag Lunch at The Spahr Center! If this group interests you (and I hope it does!), contact me, Will B. at 415-300-7665 or email [willabo@pacbell.net](mailto:willabo@pacbell.net)" – Will B.*

## LGBTQ Senior Luncheon

Our next LGBTQ Senior (all ages welcome!) Luncheon is just a few weeks away! Join us for a wonderful lunch at The Marin Yacht Club on Wednesday, May 15<sup>th</sup> from 12pm – 3pm. Richard Rogers will be back, so come prepared to show off your moves! Please RSVP by Friday May 10<sup>th</sup>

(please advise in your RSVP if you have any dietary restrictions)

## STD Awareness Month



April is STD Awareness Month, an annual observance to raise public awareness about the impact of STDs on the lives of Americans and the importance of preventing, testing for, and treating STDs.

Did you know that 1 in 2 sexually active young people will get an STD by age 25? How about this fun fact: ***The most common symptom of a STD is no symptom at all.***

As STD rates continue to surge in Marin County, it is important to normalize routine STD testing and conversations about sexual health. Let's make sure our young people understand what these infections are and how easily they can be treated. Let's make sure that everyone who needs screening and treatment has the opportunity. What can be easier than a drop-in clinic? Marin Community Clinics offers a no appointment necessary clinic that is open to everyone in the community. Lead nurse, Isiah, runs this full service sexual health service every Monday and Thursday from 4-7PM at 3260 Kerner Blvd., San Rafael. MCC accepts most insurance plans and costs are very low if you lack insurance. April is time to raise your awareness and knowledge. Knowing more about STD's is a great first step. Taking action is how we overcome these worrisome trends.

## Making Donations to The Spahr Center

The Spahr Center is dependent upon charitable contributions to meet its mission. These contributions come from individuals, corporations, foundations and estates. Over time, more donors have decided to restrict the spending of their donations to very specific programs or services - not just at The Spahr Center, but at all non-profit organizations. Doing so is perfectly justified when donors have an interest in a very particular need or issue. Some Spahr Center donors restrict their gifts to spending on senior, youth, or senior programs. We are required to, and we DO make certain, through our accounting and annual independent audit, that we spend restricted donations for their intended purpose.

Restricted gifts are surely welcomed and appreciated by The Spahr Center. However, unrestricted donations are also needed to keep non-profit agencies like ours healthy and sustainable. Unrestricted donations

enable us to spend money to cover the cost of important programs and services not otherwise fully covered. They also help us to pay for office space and necessary operating costs not otherwise covered and upon which programs depend to happen.

In 2018, The Spahr Center spent 19 percent of its budget on administration – well within the range of the 15 to 23 percent considered acceptable. We hope you agree - that money is hardly wasted; it is critical to making programs and services possible and having the flexibility to address emerging needs of the agency as they happen.

Food for thought as you consider your gift in support of the life-saving and life-affirming programs of The Spahr Center. We're happy to answer any questions you may have. Please email Dana Van Gorder at [dvangorder@thespahrcenter.org](mailto:dvangorder@thespahrcenter.org)

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## Support Groups

The Spahr Center offers a variety of social support groups. Below is a list of the groups, with a short description. Please click any of the groups to learn more!

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### HIV Groups

- [Latino Support Group](#) - this group is for Latinos living with or affected by HIV.
- [Women's Support Group](#) - this group is for women living with or affected by HIV.
- [Long Term Survivors Group](#) - this group is for any individual who identifies as a "long-term survivor" of HIV.

### LGBTQ Groups

- [Parent Groups](#) - these groups are for parents/caregivers of gender expansive and/or questioning youth
- [Youth Drop-in Groups](#) - these groups are for any LGBTQ youth
- [Senior Discussion Groups](#) - these are facilitated discussion groups for LGBTQ identified adults of any age.
- [Men's Brown Bag Lunch](#) - this is a group of older gay men that meet for lunch/discussion

[Donate Now!](#)

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## Upcoming Outside Events

Here are some events coming up in April that are not sponsored by The Spahr Center; however, we think they might be of interest to our clients.

- 5/1 [Marin LGBTQ Social Club Gathering](#) – Social gathering

- 5/9 **Healing with Feeling** - an Attitudinal Healing Support Group
- 5/16 **LGBTQ Senior Breakfast** - at Sam's in Novato
- 5/21 **LGBTQ Senior Game Day** - at Sam's in Novato

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**Until Next Time.. Spahrkle!**

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