



# Diversity, Equity & INCLUSION



**By Dr. Nancy Koury King**  
President, Senior Options

*This article is the second in a series on Diversity & Inclusion.*

*In this article, I talk with LeadingAge’s Kevin Bradley, and Charmain Preiss, with Brandermill Woods.*

## LeadingAge and Brandermill Woods: LGBTQ Inclusion

**Being a part of LeadingAge most of my career, I have been impressed with how it has built and enhanced its education, advocacy, research, and messaging around inclusion for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) staff and residents.**

I interviewed **Kevin Bradley**, associate director of online learning, to understand how our national association began and sustains this initiative. In addition to his formal job duties, Kevin is LeadingAge’s liaison with the 100-member LGBTQ Network and works with members and outside organizations to develop educational resources on this topic.

According to Kevin, the impetus for LeadingAge’s commitment to LGBTQ inclusion was based on three things: person directedness, building community, and intersectionality. “LeadingAge has been galvanizing the field to break out of the “institutional” model of service delivery for a long time. Shifting to a person-directed perspective and thinking about what a staff person, elder, or family member – what does that individual need?” he says. “That piece – person directedness – grounds all of our work. And I would say especially on LGBTQ inclusion because you can’t focus on that without recognizing that each individual is unique.”

Kevin also shared that the idea of building a community is central to the LGBTQ inclusion work. “It’s about building community as we move out of the hospitality model and into creating settings where the elder, their ideas, and the staff’s ideas are shared. That is central.”





**Kevin Bradley**  
Associate Director Online Learning  
LeadingAge

The third driver for LGBTQ inclusion is intersectionality. Also referred to as cultural competence or being culturally responsive, intersectionality recognizes all the layers that make up each of us. No one is defined by just one identity. **We need to understand how a person's race, ability, social-economic class, gender, where they live, what they're doing, and how they are being treated is essential for creating inclusive organizations.**

While these three pieces are the core of what built the LGBTQ inclusion work, Kevin shared changes in the broader environment that fueled this initiative. Don't Ask Don't Tell was repealed in 2011. Marriage equality was gaining momentum. At the same time, members were encouraging LeadingAge to do more around LGBTQ issues.

One main activity that the organization has supported is the member-driven Inclusion celebration at the Annual Meeting. The first Inclusion event was hosted in 2006 by a group of members at an LGBTQ museum in San Francisco. "We were in a city that has a vast LGBTQ history, and they wanted to share that story with LeadingAge." While the event grows in attendance and visibility every year, Kevin says LeadingAge recognizes that the purpose is to share a message of inclusion that members can take back to their organizations. "It's not just a party," he explains. "We don't want to feed into the stereotype that it's all one big parade. There is a message of inclusion and allyship."

LeadingAge has also strengthened its educational offerings on LGBTQ issues. **For 20 years, LeadingAge has been creating continuing education sessions at its conferences that focus on LGBTQ issues.** Building on educational sessions, LeadingAge hosted the "LGBTQ Campground" in a very public space and a place for business – its expo hall. "It was important to us to make it beyond a session or two," he says. "We hosted it in a public space where people could talk."

While members were generally supportive, Kevin notes that some are hesitant to attend these sessions. He shared that one member several years ago was afraid to go to an LGBTQ educational session because he was worried that his organization might conclude he was gay. "That kind of fear..." Kevin laments. "We have a lot of work to do."

## Safe Space

Another initiative of LeadingAge is the LGBTQ

Member Community, a way for members to connect and a safe space for people to share. "We have had such great engagement from members that it gave us permission to do even more," says Kevin. "When we have over 100 members of our LGBTQ Network, this is not something to push aside."

### *What is Allyship?*

Allyship is the practice of emphasizing social justice, inclusion, and human rights by members of an ingroup, to advance the interests of an oppressed or marginalized outgroup. Allyship is part of the anti-oppression or anti-racist conversation, which puts into use social justice theories and ideals.

## Leadership

Kevin emphasized the importance of leadership supporting LGBTQ! inclusion, noting that former CEO **Larry Minnix** and current CEO **Katie Smith Sloan** have always been strong supporters and attend LGBTQ Network meetings. "It's a priority for LeadingAge to be inclusive. It has always been."

## What is SAGE?

The world's largest and oldest organization dedicated to improving the lives of LGBT older people, and the Human Rights Campaign Foundation (HRCF), the educational arm of the nation's largest civil rights organization working to achieve equality for LGBT people, are joining forces to address these issues by launching the Long-Term Care Equality Index (LEI) to promote equitable and inclusive care for LGBT older people in residential long-term care communities.

<https://sageusa.care>

## What is LEI?

An assessment tool that will encourage and help residential long-term care communities to adopt policies and best practices that provide culturally competent and responsive care to LGBT older adults. More than just an assessment, the LEI will provide resources and technical assistance to bring these policies and practices to life.

<https://thelei.org>



**What's next on the horizon?** Soon LeadingAge members will hear more about the Long-Term Care Equality Index (LEI). The LEI is a tool for residential settings and nursing homes to assess where they are on their cultural competencies journey. This effort is a joint venture of the Human Rights Campaign and Services & Advocacy for GLBT Elders (SAGE). LeadingAge's LTSS Center at UMass Boston was involved early on developing the indexing tool and made recommendations for how to get buy-in from aging services providers. Additionally, **Yasemin Washington**, LeadingAge's Vice President of Member Engagement, and several LeadingAge members serve on the LEI's Advisory Group. And, under Katie's leadership, LeadingAge signed on as a national sponsor.

**So, what about leaders who want to start the conversation in their organizations but don't know how?** Kevin encourages being open. "When you are the most vulnerable is the time you need to listen," he says. He also suggests reaching out to local LGBTQ groups in your area and tapping into organizations like SAGE, Training to Serve, and others for staff training. LeadingAge has also made resources available to its members on the [LeadingAge Learning Hub](#), including education on how members can be more LGBTQ inclusive and will continue to advocate at the national level for equitable and inclusive policies.

Kevin leaves us with an important reminder: "Working toward inclusion requires all of us to stay present to the moment and keep thinking about ways we can continue to learn, grow, and continue to transform the field."

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*Kevin Bradley is the associate director of online education for LeadingAge, where he has worked since 2007. In addition to fulfilling this role, Kevin serves and the liaison with the LGBTQ Member Community and many outside community organizations that serve LGBTQ people. Kevin has a bachelor's degree from Penn State in Political Science and a master's degree in Organizational Development and Knowledge Management from George Mason University. Kevin can be contacted at [KBradley@leadingage.org](mailto:KBradley@leadingage.org)*

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## Brandermill Woods SAGECare Credentialing and Beyond

**Charmain Preiss**  
Executive Director  
Brandermill Woods

At Kevin’s recommendation, I spoke with Charmaine Preiss, the executive director of Brandermill Woods, a life plan community in Midlothian, Virginia. Brandermill Woods has undertaken an organization-wide LGBTQ inclusion effort.

Brandermill Woods recently became credentialed by SAGECare, the oldest and largest LGBTQ aging services provider in the country. SAGECare training and credentialing help an organization’s staff better understand the unique needs of LGBTQ older adults.

It also tells the consumer that the organization is LGBTQ friendly, welcoming, and inclusive. Charmaine shared that there have been people turned away from retirement living because they were gay. **LGBTQ people are looking for businesses that are gay friendly and welcoming.** The SAGE credentials signal the market that Brandermill Woods commits to welcoming and caring for LGBTQ people. And their marketing team has been trained to reinforce this.

The organization achieved the gold level of credentialing. The SAGECare credentialing at the “gold” level involved one hour of LGBTQ cultural competency training for 60% of the employees and four hours of training for 60% of the administration/management staff. Only one level, platinum, is higher, and Charmaine says that it is in their sights.

She also reports that the team was overwhelmingly positive about the training and faced no resistance. “We did the training on-site. That got everyone excited,” Charmaine says. Even I learned things, and I thought I was pretty in touch.”

The community’s approach is that they treat everyone the same. **“Our strategy is that when we have a resident that identifies as LGBTQ, we need to understand where they’re coming from.** Charmaine recounts that they got started on SAGECare credentialing because some residents asked them to. The residents had a personal interest in helping their community become more LGBTQ friendly... they had gay children. They wanted their adult children to be able to visit without fear or worry.

**What’s next for Brandermill Woods?** Charmaine wants to make more effort to show the market that they are inclusive and welcoming, saying that the organization’s new brochure will reflect that. And the focus will go beyond LGBTQ inclusion to also spotlight racial diversity and sensitivity.

## Advice

“To make LGBTQ

inclusion work, you have to have your management team buy-in first. You have to have the excitement and enthusiasm of your leadership team.

We are going to make people feel as comfortable as they can and be able to be themselves. When others understand that concept, we don’t have any issues with discrimination. Because we aren’t going to tolerate it.”

*Charmaine Preiss serves as Executive Director of Brandermill Woods, where she leads and directs the overall operations and facilities, including The Haven, The Chesterfield, and The Holly Inn. She oversees 260-plus staff and focuses on maintaining excellent care for residents and their families. She has spent more than 26 years in management, accounting, and finance; 22 of those years in the healthcare industry, and 17 of them at Brandermill Woods. Charmaine is a member of the LeadingAge LGBTQ Member Community. With a gay son and brother, she is personally a champion for LGBTQ rights and has served as the chair of PFLAG. She studied accounting at William Carey University. Charmaine can be contacted at [cpreiss@brandermillwoods.com](mailto:cpreiss@brandermillwoods.com)*



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