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Seta - LGBTI Rights in Finland**Email:** Salla-Maija.Hakola@seta.fi**Webpage:****Seta:** <http://seta.fi/in-english/>**Equal Aging project:** <http://seta.fi/yhdenvertainen-vanhuus/in-english/>**1. Name of the practice?**

The practice is called Equal Aging and it is developed by Equal Aging project. The project is coordinated by Seta - LGBTI Right in Finland and financed by Finland's Slot Machine Association (RAY).

Seta is a national non-governmental advocacy organization for LGBTI rights. Seta - LGBTI Rights in Finland aims for a society of equality and individual welfare that includes everyone, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Seta is a member of the European region Lesbian, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA-Europe).

2. Area concerned

Discrimination/Participation/ Education, training and lifelong learning

3. Type of practice

Training programme

4. Level of implementation

National (Finland)

5. Describe the practice, including a) its purpose b) why and how it was adopted c) how long it has been used/implemented; and d) its geographic scope.

Many LGBTI seniors are exposed to discrimination, bullying and in the worst case homophobic and transphobic violence. Fear of discrimination can be a barrier for LGBTI seniors to enter in the elderly care services. 1/3 (N=103) of the Finnish LGBTI people from 50 to almost 80 years old said that they chose not to use social or health care services because of the fear of being discriminated. (Jalava 2013.) International studies indicate that LGBTI seniors face health vulnerabilities, suffer mental distress and depression more often than their heterosexual or cisgender counterparts. They often live alone and do not have family members to provide care in the old age. After coming out they are often isolated from their family.

LGBTI seniors are often concerned for being treated unprofessionally. 3/4 of Finnish elderly care staff members (N=92) have not received information about issues concerning LGBTI seniors in their education (Valtonen 2012). Social and health care professionals need more information and training about issues that may affect the lives of LGBTI seniors to be able to foster their well-being, prevent social exclusion and to create an inclusive and respectful environment. Equal access to care and welfare without fear of being discriminated can only be granted if the elderly care service producers, professionals and social and health care students and teachers have enough knowledge about LGBTI aging issues and strategies to create inclusive care environment.

Seta's Equal Aging project has developed a **good practice called Equal Aging**. It includes **I Wish I Could Tell** training video and **Rainbow Senior** training session which has been developed around the video. It is produced for educational use to raise awareness of social and health care professionals, students, teachers and elderly care service producers and other service users.

The I Wish I Could Tell training video was published in January 2014. It makes LGBTI people's views on aging and elderly care visible. This 20 minutes long documentary tells the story of nine Finnish LGBTI seniors who ponder their childhood, youth and aging. The video is available on Youtube for non-commercial use. Subtitles can be found in English, German, Swedish and Finnish. **I Wish I Could Tell** video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yV2cB9FMXoA>.

The Rainbow Senior training session was developed to complement the **I Wish I Could Tell** video. The training session which lasts an hour was developed in fall 2015. Volunteers start the training by telling about their motivation to make rainbow (LGBTI) seniors visible and to foster the equal right of older people. The second part of the training session is a quiz that includes questions about LGBTI history, sexual and gender diversity. The quiz is an easy introduction to the subject and activates people to participate. After that the participants are shown the **I Wish I Could Tell** video, followed by reflective discussion about the video. The participants ponder what kind of needs LGBTI elders may have and how to create an inclusive care environment. Ideas and thoughts are shared and discussed together and the material (the video and a guidebook) will be left with the organization for future use.

The Equal Aging project recruited volunteers who were interested about the concept. First volunteers were trained to be official **Rainbow Senior** trainers in August 2015. **Rainbow Senior** training sessions have been given for different target groups: elderly care service users and professionals working in that field, social and health care students specialized in elderly care, volunteers working for The Finnish Red Cross etc.

Equal Aging practice helps professionals, students and teachers as well as other elderly care service users to reflect their prejudices and thoughts about LGBTI issues. It raises awareness about LGBTI seniors and their needs concerning aging. It is a start of a process towards inclusive and equal elderly care services.

6. Which actors are involved in the development and implementation of such practice?

Equal Aging project has a wide network that includes: elderly care service producers, universities of applied sciences, vocational education institutions, NGOs working in elderly care sector, researchers (LGBTI and aging issues) and Finnish and European LGBTI organizations. Networking and cooperation

with other civil society actors working on elderly people's rights has been instrumental for the success of the project. This cooperation is elemental for raising awareness about elderly LGBTI persons.

The network has helped the project to produce information concerning LGBTI aging, to develop training material and to promote Rainbow Senior training sessions. LGBTI seniors have been important informants since the beginning of the project. Project has also worked very closely with media. Volunteers have been promoting the subject by giving interviews.

7. Which rights of older persons does the practice promote and protect?

- Right to self-determination
- Right to health
- Non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression

8. How does the practice promote or protect such rights?

Equal Aging practice promotes LGBTI seniors who are invisible and whose voices are seldom heard in the elderly care sector. Equal Aging practice raises awareness of elderly care service producers, elderly care workers and social and health care students about the diversity of gender and sexual orientation in old age. As a result it helps professionals to understand and to support LGBTI seniors' self-determination. The practice also guides professionals to create an inclusive, non-discriminating and safe environment for LGBTI seniors. Non-discriminatory health care can contribute positively to elderly LGBTI person's overall health by making health care more accessible.

9. What groups of older persons, if any, particularly benefit from the practice?

The practice benefits people belonging to sexual minorities (Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals) and gender minorities (Trans and Intersex).

10. How has the practice been assessed and monitored?

The project collects qualitative data from the professionals and students who have participated in the training (feedback questionnaire and reflective conversations). The project also conducts a statistical follow-up on people who participated in the Rainbow Senior training sessions (age, profession, location etc.). Here is one comment from participant concerning our training:

“This training gave me many new ideas and helped me to think things from a broader perspective.”

After each Rainbow Senior training session the project collects feedback from trainers (volunteers) through reflective conversation. Volunteers are valued members of our project's steering group where they share their training experiences from the field.

11. What lesson do you believe could be learned from this practice? How would it be improved?

Equal Aging practice helps to make invisible groups visible and gives them a voice. It definitely helps to empower older LGBTI people through participation and gives them a change to deal with life-long stigmas. LGBTI seniors have skills and life experiences that are very useful in this kind of practice. The

practice can also prevent social exclusion by offering elders a platform for interaction with other LGBTI seniors.

Equal Aging practice develops the whole elderly care sector to be more inclusive instead of creating segregated services for LGBTI seniors. This practice supports service providers and professionals to see the diversity of elders (not only LGBTI perspective) and the idea of this practice can be used to foster the rights of different minority groups.

12. How could this practice be a model for other countries?

The Equal Aging practice can be used to promote equal access to social and health care system and foster social inclusion of older LGBTI people and their wellbeing in other countries.

Our Equal Aging practice includes the I Wish I Could Tell training video and the Rainbow Senior training session. These materials can be used as a model when developing practices in other countries. It is also possible to just add subtitles to the I Wish I Could Tell video in any preferred language. The video already has subtitles in English, Finnish and in Swedish. Our German partner organization translated the video in German for educational use.

The I Wish I Could Tell video can also be used as a part of basic curriculum program in social and health care educational organizations and in additional training courses for staff in elderly care.

Each country can modify the Rainbow Senior training session to fit their culture, legislation and needs. Some volunteers are needed. They can be LGBTI seniors or other volunteers regardless their age, sexual orientation or gender identity.

Equal Aging practice can be used as a start for a project in different countries. The project can help countries plan and write a project plan concerning LGBTI elders. It is also meant to encourage and enable LGBTI organizations to promote the rights of older LGBTI people.

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