

Non-profit Duet supports LGBTQ+ family caregivers

Michelle Talsma Everson

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Although there are many resources in the Valley available for family caregivers — the people who provide unpaid care for a loved one — it's challenging to find support specifically for family caregivers who are members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Because of this, local non-profit Duet: Partners In Health & Aging will be hosting a free ongoing support group specifically for members of the LGBTQ+ community beginning June 6.

"Many LGBTQ+ family caregivers may have issues separately from those discussed in a regular support group and they may feel more confident speaking openly in an environment of fellow LGBTQ+ community members," said George Burson, caregiver services coordinator for Duet and facilitator for the new support group. "Community Church of Hope is a space created specifically with the LGBTQ+ community in mind, so support group attendees may feel more at home there."

"The LGBTQ+ community is growing and aging. Community Church of Hope is committed to partnering with Duet in their work to support those who care for our aging population," said Patrick Stout, pastor at Community Church of Hope. "Our location and facility will provide an open, safe environment for the facilitators and caregivers to share and learn how to assist our loved ones."

According to the Family Caregiver Alliance, some issues that specifically impact older LGBTQ+ family caregivers are: how "chosen family" (versus your family of origin) responsibilities may impact caregiving, employer issues, finding supportive health-care and service providers, experiencing mistreatment or discrimination, maintaining a sense of community and maintaining their own well-being.

Many of these same issues are faced among all family caregivers, but may prove particularly challenging for LGBTQ+ caregivers.

"Many LGBTQ+ folks may have no

children, so caregiving for an aging relative almost automatically falls on them," Burson echoes. "They also, like other caregivers, may be caregiving for a spouse or child or other loved one. This is a general support group, not disease specific, so we want to support all LGBTQ+ family caregivers.

"The idea for a support group specifically for LGBTQ+ family caregivers has been in the works for at least two years. Now everything seems to be falling in place, and myself being a member of the LGBTQ+ community is helpful to make this the right time to launch the group."

David Samora, Burson's spouse and partner of nearly 30 years, is highly involved with Duet and advocating for the rights of the elderly.

"I am 60 years old, and I'm looking at our future and we see what happens in the care of elders in our community. ... There is no way a single person can do this on their own," he said. "I'm talking about paperwork, contacts, calling and making appointments and arriving to appointments. In the past years, we have witnessed no consideration for the elderly. It is important that they need to be respected and cared for with dignity. It is very important for the LGBT community to have a program like this. I have heard and witnessed many people in situations. They are caring for a loved one or a parent. They do not know where to turn or that there is even assistance out there.

"This new support group for LGBTQ+ family caregivers is a no-pressure opportunity to speak and share your experience with a group of people who understand."

To learn more about Duet and its other offerings for family caregivers, visit duetaz.org/family-caregiver.

Details: 2-3:30 p.m. on the first and third Thursday of every month starting June 6. Free. Community Church of Hope, 4124 N. Sixth Drive, Phoenix. Contact George at Duet: 602-274-5022, ext. 139, or burson@duetaz.org.

Michelle Talsma Everson is a public relations coordinator for Duet.

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