



SAGEVets Newsletter

sage | Advocacy & Services for LGBT Elders
We refuse to be invisible®

August 2020

A Letter from the Manager

Dear SAGE Veterans and Friends:

I hope this newsletter finds you and those close to you well and safe. As we all continue to deal with the pandemic as best we can, SAGEVets has made significant adjustments to how we operate. Throughout the summer, we have built upon our virtual presence that has actually helped us reach a wider audience and raise the profile of LGBT veterans. We are profoundly grateful for continued support from our funders that allows us to continue our work and we do everything we can to improve the health and wellness of elder LGBT veterans across the State of New York.

This edition features updates on how we celebrated Pride, observed PTSD Awareness Month, got behind the BLM movement, and a special story about Larry Kramer. We also provide an update on the *Restoration of Honor Act*, which is now in full swing! Not everything was good news, and we continue to feel the impact of COVID-19. We are working with partners to make sure we are ready to assist with vulnerabilities centered on isolation, food insecurity, and mental and physical health. While the issue of isolation is something that elder LGBT adults have historically had to face, the current trend of quarantining and working remotely has allowed isolation issues to permeate the entire veteran service safety net. In response to these needs, SAGEVets and our partners have been working on reevaluating delivery of services. We continue to make referrals to remote legal counsel, tele-therapy, and health care. Legal advocacy work continued during this quarter and included a lively virtual legal session with our friends at Volunteers of Legal Service (VOLS) and this month, SAGEVets testified before both houses of the NYS Legislature for a hearing on The Impacts of COVID-19 on New York's Veterans.

As always, we are available should you have questions about the SAGEVets program or about veteran benefits and eligibility. You can reach us at (212) 741-2247 ext. 138 or email me at astewart@sageusa.org. Despite the challenges we are all facing, we are here to help each other get through this. We wish you a wonderful rest of

your summer and hope to hear from you soon. Lastly, please check out our re-vamped [SAGEVets webpage!](#)

Respectfully,
Ashton Stewart,
SAGEVets Program Manager

Benefits & Help for NYC Veterans & Families: Restoration of Honor Act and Legal Services

Talk with Senator Brad Hoylman and our panel of experts! Monday, June 22 4:30-6:00PM



SAGEVets Admin. Coordinator Arnold Lewis and Congresswoman Yvette Clarke.

Veterans Rally for Black Lives Matter

SAGEVets Program Manager Ashton Stewart and Administrative Coordinator Arnold Lewis gave remarks at the July 7 [Veterans Rally, Because Black Lives Matter!](#), organized by Black Veterans For Social Justice, Inc. ([BVSJ](#)). The rally took place in front of the Brooklyn War Memorial commemorating the 11,500 Brooklyn service members who died during WWII, and across from Juneteenth Grove, recently established by NYC Parks. The program began with a recording of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, setting the stage for a series of inspiring speeches from Congresswoman Yvette Clarke, Councilmember Robert Cornegy, Herbert Sweat, James Fitzgerald, and CEO of [BVSJ](#), Wendy McClinton. The event concluded with a very somber reading of a list of victims of law enforcement brutality, each individually followed by the ringing of a bell.

SAGEVets is profoundly moved to receive an invitation as an honoree to the upcoming *Gala on the Sea 2020*, hosted by BVSJ, Inc. Thank you for all the great work you do, BVSJ, Inc.!

Farewell, Dragon Slayer: My Time with Larry Kramer

By: John Emmett Connors, artist and SAGEVet

About seven years ago, my friend Helga, a social worker at Village Care, asked me to meet with Larry Kramer. Of course, I knew who he was — a renowned playwright, political activist, and founder of both Gay Men’s Health Crisis and ACT UP. Larry needed in-home nursing care and my training as a Navy Corpsman (medical specialist) gave me the skills that Larry needed. He was on the mend from some recent procedures and he would need in-home nursing care. I met with Larry, his husband David, and a close friend who helped me facilitate health care protocols to maintain Larry’s health. I later referred to our group as “Team Larry.” In true form, Larry’s first words to me were, “Are you here to wipe my ass?.” It’s no surprise that his last work was subtitled “The Brutality of Fact”... Larry did not mince words.

Without going through the details of Larry’s medical history, let us just say there is enough to astound any medical historian. Despite the many hospital visits, treatments, injections, infusions, ointments, patches, and dressing changes compounded with periods of unconsciousness and confusion, he always pulled himself back to his full brilliance and deep sense of humanity. Most people knew Larry as a fighter—a well-deserved recognition. I, too, knew him as a fighter, but in a different kind of fight; one in which he fought to stay alive. Of course, most of my patients wanted to live, but Larry fought to *thrive*, to have a life that was full and meaningful, on a level that will forever inspire me. He fought to have his talents, his insights, his intellect, compassion and courage to really make a difference and make a better world.



Larry Kramer and John E. Connors

I also got to see an easy-going, sweet side of Larry. Sometimes when I would let him know it was time for a particular treatment, or meds, he would say, “Okay, you’re the boss”, words that very few people ever heard from Larry. The role of caregiver requires earning trust, and that does not come overnight. In Larry’s obituary in The New York Times, Daniel Lewis wrote, “He preached not only protected sex but also the virtues of affection, commitment and stability — arguments that anticipated the values of the movement for same-sex marriage.” After a short time, I think he and I established a bond with Larry based on stability, commitment, and affection. Larry’s anger was his

fuel, his fire, and it helped him motivate others, but the body, mind, and the spirit also need a respite, especially while healing. It was my great luck to be invited into that part of Larry’s life, to gain his trust and friendship. Knowing Larry expanded both my heart and mind and made me a better artist and a better person. I will miss him.

More about author: <http://www.johnemmettconnors.com/>
<https://www.nysenate.gov/profiles/2019/brad-hoylman/john-emmett-connors>



SAGEVets Program Manager Ashton Stewart took part in a two-part program that focused on the newly passed [Restoration of Honor Act](#) (RoHA). This meaningful legislation provides an opportunity for the State of New York to restore honor to the service members who received other than honorable discharges for Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI), Military Sexual Trauma (MST), Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). We were grateful for the [NYC Veterans Alliance](#) for hosting these historic events and for inviting SAGEVets to take part in the discussion about the impacts of the RoHA, and how to apply.

We were honored to present with the original sponsors of the bill. The [first program](#) took place in June, featuring Brad Hoylman, New York State Senator, Benjamin Pomerance, NYS Division of Veterans’ Services Deputy Director for Program Development, Coco Culhane, founding attorney of the Veteran Advocacy Project (VAP), James Fitzgerald, Executive Director of the NYC Veterans Alliance, and Ashton Stewart, Program Manager of SAGEVets took place in June. The second program featured [Assemblymember Didi Barrett](#). This was an exciting way to launch this legislation. SAGEVets is proud to be a [community partner with the NYSDVS](#), helping to promote and facilitate the RoHA. Please reach out to us to learn more.

Pride in Place 2020!

Despite being unable to travel or host in-person events, SAGE was prominently visible during Pride Month. [SAGE's Pride in Place](#) campaign was launched to ensure LGBT elders had the opportunity to celebrate Pride safely. For the first time ever, SAGEVets was part of the [10th Mountain Division & Fort Drum's LGBT Pride Month Observance program](#). Ashton was invited to give a presentation about the work of SAGEVets and to help Fort Drum honor the patriotism bestowed to the U.S. military from “LGBT members, past and present, who have fought bravely to protect our nation and ensure a quality for all who call America home.” This opportunity fits well into the mission of SAGEVets that goes well beyond our legal advocacy and raises the profile of LGBT veterans. Earlier this year, SAGEVets helped Senator Brad Hoylman nominate the first transgender veteran to the New York State Senate Veterans Hall of Fame. In [Collecting & Sharing LGBTQ Veteran Stories](#), SAGEVets collaborated with the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum to address the notable gap in military museums that lack objects and stories from the LGBT veteran experience. Special guest La Wanda Mobley, Petty Officer Second Class and SAGEVet, shared her experience serving prior to and during Don't Ask Don't Tell. Mobley served in the U.S. Navy during Operation Desert Storm from 1985-1997. Following a promotion to Petty Officer First Class, she was the victim of harassment and unfortunate incidents that ultimately led to an other than honorable discharge and a diagnosis of PTSD. La Wanda is now pursuing a discharge upgrade and is a volunteer with the City of Middletown Drug Court helping veterans with their ongoing recovery from substance abuse.

Additionally, June is the month when we not only acknowledge gains made in the historic struggle of LGBT people for equal rights, it is also PTSD Awareness Month. On June 24th Ashton led a panel that featured Amanda Spray, PhD, Clinical Psychologist, Clinic Director at [The Steven A. Cohen Military Family Center](#) and John Tatarakis, Local Recovery Coordinator at the [Manhattan VA](#). The event was hosted by Joe Hunt, Director of the [Veterans Mental Health Coalition of NYC](#). The program focused on services that have been inspired by the repeal of the *Don't Ask Don't Tell* policy and how those programs intersect with LGBT liberation to help create the path to mental wellness.

Resources & Information:

- Personal Connections:
 - SAGEVets Veteran Support Group
 - Every Friday at 1:00 p.m. - Call (646) 518-9742. When prompted, enter Conference ID: 921 275 24#.
 - And you can always call SAGEVets! 212-741-2247 ext. 138
- Restoration of Honor Act:
 - <https://veterans.ny.gov/content/restoration-honor-act>
 - Call SAGEVets for more info: 212-741-2247 ext. 138
- VA:
 - COVID-19: [VA Coronavirus information –](#)
 - Call VA311 at 844-698-2311.
 - Employment: [Free training for Veterans and spouses with NPower:](#)
 - Call 212-564-7010.
- COVID -19 real-time updates: NYS Department of Health.
 - <https://covid19tracker.health.ny.gov/>
- NYS Division of Veterans' Services: Questions about NYS Veteran Services?
 - Visit <https://veterans.ny.gov/>
 - or call SAGEVets at: 212-741-2247 ext. 138

SAGE Programming

• Caregiving

Many people don't think they are caregivers, but if you are assisting your partner, spouse, friend, or neighbor with shopping, escorting to visits, laundry, household chores, cleaning, or just regularly checking in with them, you fit the description. Caregiving can be a rewarding but also challenging experience. If you are a caregiver, or if someone is helping you, SAGE can assist through its Caregiving support program. SAGE can provide counseling, individual and group support, case management, and can also pay for respite homecare, group socialization or items that might be needed like Ensure, Depends, special shoes or even an air conditioner. For more information [click this link](#) or call 212-741-2247 and ask for the Care Manager on-call. SAGE's Caregiving Program is funded through the New York City Department for the Aging.

• Veteran Support Group (VSG) – Now offered as a telephone meeting

Fridays from 2:00 pm – 3:00 pm. Please call (646) 518-9742. When prompted, enter Conference ID: 921 275 24#. The VSG is facilitated by Shawanna Boyd, Care Manager at SAGE. Join us for engaged, casual conversation.

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