

Working collaboratively to address the social and emotional well-being of older LGBTI people

Jan is a 77 year old lesbian who has been together with her partner Louise for 30 years. Jan had one sister who died three years ago, and has no other remaining family of origin. She considers Louise her next of kin. They have lived quite openly as a couple, and have several supportive neighbours and friends. Louise has two sons who are married, and she has five grandchildren. They have experienced a degree of sexuality-based discrimination from various services over the years including, GPs, their workplaces and legal services. This impacted their mental health at times.

Jan had a stroke five years ago and has recently found it difficult to cope at home. Initially, they accessed support from the Royal District Nursing Service and local council home help. Jan and Louise were open with visiting staff about their relationship, and found the responses varied. Some staff were fine, while others seemed awkward and excluded Louise from any decision making. After a time, it became increasingly difficult for Louise to care for Jan at home, so they agreed it would be better for Jan to enter an aged care facility. After a lot of research they found what they thought, was a suitable facility.

Louise has to catch public transport to visit Jan, so her visits are every second day, apart from special occasions such as a BBQ at the facility with Louise's family. The last few times Louise has visited Jan, she has noticed Jan has become withdrawn and quite depressed. Louise normally brings Jan her copy of 'Lesbians on the Loose' magazine that Jan likes to read. However, recently Jan has been asking Louise to take it home as she doesn't want anyone to see it. Louise has asked Jan what is wrong, and Jan explained that not many of the residents have been talking to her lately, and she feels isolated and lonely. Both Jan and Louise think that the exclusion is because they are lesbians and people feel uncomfortable with that. Jan has also told Louise that there have been some staff changes, and a couple of the new nurses are not treating her well. They are being very rude to her, and take a long time to tend to her when she calls. Jan hasn't noticed this type of behaviour from the staff who had been at the aged care facility since she started living there.

The facility has daily activities and Jan used to enjoy playing cards, bingo, yoga and watching movies. However, lately Jan doesn't want to be involved as she feels judged. Jan and Louise have always been quite affectionate, holding hands on walks, and snuggling on the couch while watching movies. Recently, when they were in Jan's room together cuddling on the couch while watching a movie, a nurse came in and told them that they shouldn't be doing that as it might upset other residents.

Louise noticed that after this incident Jan has become more depressed. Louise has spoken to the manager but feels that as she isn't seen as next of kin, her feedback has fallen on deaf ears and now she doesn't know what to do.

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