

The Inclusion Delusion  
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Accessibility to events is an issue that we must continually remind event planners about, and not just in our GLBTIQ community. GLBTI organizations have it together, for most events, to have sign language interpreters present for those of us who are deaf and hard of hearing. It was, however, a long time coming. Change is like that. And there is still a lot to be done to improve accessibility for persons with a mobility disability..

It's easy to point fingers and tell organizers it's their responsibility to make sure events are accessible (it is!). It's a good faith effort to offer to work together to make sure accessibility happens. Rainbow Seniors has been making the effort to educate event planners about accessibility for those members of the disability community with mobility needs.

Last year at the community picnic, one of our members who uses a cane had to walk from the main park road all the way to the pavilion where local organizations had info tables. Our vehicle was not allowed into the park despite the handicapped parking sticker. This particular Rainbow Senior had signed up to work at our info table and needed to get to it! The exertion of the long and bumpy walk over the grass left him unable to enjoy the day because of the intense pain walking that distance had caused him.

I understand that the donors who contribute large sums of money for the picnic get the accessible parking spaces, "VIP parking" as it's called, but there are people who legitimately need to park closer to the activity areas. Finding a closer parking space was easier this year, and we were allowed to drive into the parking lot used by the big donors. where accessible parking was available early on. Volunteers were more sensitive to the need to find closer parking. Although the spaces filled quickly, we were not hassled about parking on the grass.

I'm sad to say that the Community Business Forum of Rochester gets a thumb's down from Rainbow Seniors for inaccessible cultural events following the pride parade. Manhattan Square Park was only accessible on the ground level to individuals with a mobility disability. Hey, the food is up there on the second level! I'm hungry! People with mobility disabilities eat too! And what about missing out on information from local groups who had tables set up on the second level?

And then this year, the event was at the Highland Bowl. We were told that there was accessible parking behind the bowl. Hello!?! Accessible parking doesn't mean a thing if the area where the event is held is inaccessible. Did planners think folks with mobility disabilities would stay close to the stage and just watch activities on the hill? People with wheelchairs, scooters, canes, or walkers would not have been able to access any of the festivities, food, and drink on the hill because, guess what, they couldn't navigate the steep slope. Even though the event turned out to be a wash, Rainbow Seniors folks sure weren't welcomed to participate.

Some event planners do get it though. Take the Gay Sculpture Dedication event, for example. Not only was there accessible parking, but the planners actually set up chairs in the shade with "Reserved for Seniors" ribbons saving those rows. I could have wept with joy! Imagine—seniors were actually WELCOMED to attend this awesome event!

The ImageArt planners get it now too. One year the art show was on the third floor of the Visual Studies Workshop, oh-oh. One of the artists (she won second prize, in fact!) is a senior who has a terrible time with stairs, and there was no elevator. Some of her friends were unable to attend because they couldn't make it up the stairs. Last year the show was at an accessible location, and we applaud this effort! This year the event will also be accessible.

We need to look at accessibility as a community and make changes so that *all* events are accessible to everyone. If they're not, then believe it or not, the event shouldn't happen. Either we all can get in or none of us can. It's that simple. And, it's the law.

On a lighter note, RSWNY recently celebrated the end of our second year of existence, Happy Birthday to us! We're made up of GLBTIQ individuals ranging in age from 32 to 89. We've been successfully building a caring community within the group where those younger and more able reach out to those senior seniors and/or seniors with disabilities. Anyone can join us as a member or a come as a guest to see what this caring community is all about. Sign language interpreters are always available.

We've got a Yoga class on Tuesdays, and our monthly potlucks on the third Sunday of the month at 4 p.m., 1<sup>st</sup> Universalist Church, 150 S. Clinton. There's Euchre Club and a weekly swim, occasional get togethers for dinner or breakfast, lots of camaraderie. Our annual picnic is on Sunday, August 21 at noon, Sycamore Shelter at Ellison Park. Everyone is welcome.

Check our Web site, [www.rainbowseniorswny.org](http://www.rainbowseniorswny.org) or give us a call at 585.442.6369. We'd love to have you join us!