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# Gimme Shelter

No protection from trans discrimination

by Jacob Anderson-Minshall

Queer community leaders were stunned last month when the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI) determined that there was substantial evidence that the domestic violence shelter Bradley-Angle House discriminated against bi-gendered client Lee (Lisa) Iacuzzi.

"It's kind of surprising," admits Jonathan Weedman, Sexual Minority Youth Resource Center's outgoing executive director. "Bradley-Angle...was the only queer-specific resource [for domestic violence survivors] I even knew of."

The first battered women's shelter on the West Coast, Bradley-Angle House was founded in 1975, when domestic violence was barely acknowledged and far from understood. In the three decades since, the shelter has become a vital community resource. Recently awarded a million-dollar grant to expand its work, Bradley-Angle offers short-term emergency shelter, longer-term housing for women, a 24-hour crisis line and support groups for youth, lesbians and African-American women.

According to last month's BOLI "Notice of Substantial Evidence Determination," executive director Karla McFarland acknowledged that Bradley-Angle House referred transgender survivors elsewhere. BOLI's investigator also established that the shelter "has a policy which requires its residents to identify as female while staying at the shelter, regardless of the resident's actual gender identity."

"Having a policy that says you must identify as this gender...is akin to saying no disabled people allowed...no black people allowed," says Matthew Ellis of Kell, Alterman & Runstein, the law firm that represents Iacuzzi in an associated civil suit. Ellis adds that Bradley-Angle housed Iacuzzi in a utility closet on a separate floor from the other residents. "I think that was [them] being sensitive about the gender issue."

Iacuzzi, who was born female-bodied, identifies as bi-gendered and says s/he has no interest in altering his/her body, wonders: "I don't have any hormones, I don't have any surgery, so what's the

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Internet sites from GayPDX.com to Multnomah County's General Services for Domestic Violence Victims/Survivors Web page list Bradley-Angle as the place to go if you are lesbian or transgender and need services.

How does a progressive, queer-friendly shelter like Bradley-Angle lose a decision on alleged gender discrimination? Complicating issues may exist, but they're hard to determine, because no one—not even the shelter's sexual and gender minorities outreach program coordinator—is willing to discuss the situation or the agency's gender policies.

Iacuzzi was also surprised by the win but adds, "Bradley-Angle House has admitted, publicly—in fact this is their argument...that they are justified [because] they're a women's-only organization."

While Bradley-Angle offers support services for transgender domestic violence survivors, it won't provide shelter. "I can go to a support group and get a caseworker," acknowledges Iacuzzi, "but I can't get housing, which is probably the biggest need when somebody's experiencing domestic violence."

Tyler Smith, Outside In's trans clinic coordinator, contends: "There was very recently a trans woman seeking shelter that had a lot of difficulty finding a place that would accept her. She was working with case managers who were desperately trying to find a place for her and ran into brick wall after brick wall."

problem? Why can't I be with the other women? I think it's...the fear of masculinity. Just because someone is male or male-ish, they're stereotyped to be violent, aggressive, threatening, crazy."

The Trans Communities Shelter Access Project of the 519 Community Centre in Toronto insists, "These two choices are not acceptable: facing risks at a men's shelter, or hiding their identities at a women's shelter."

Weedman agrees. "I don't think it's ever healthy to ask anybody to identify as any way other than how they really do identify," he said.

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's 2003 publication *Transitioning Our Shelters: A Guide to Making Homeless Shelters Safe for Transgender People* notes, "Not only are transgender people frequently asked to endure the emotional injury of being classified as the gender with which they do not identify, but many shelters are physically unsafe for transgender people."

The guide argues that someone like Iacuzzi, who has a female body, would face substantial risk of physical, verbal and sexual assault in men's spaces. In fact, the NGLTF reports, "There have been incidents of gang rape toward FtMs in men's shelters."

Iacuzzi says Bradley-Angle's position was twisted: "Your gender is male and you're in a female body; therefore, I'm respecting you by acknowledging your male gender."



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