

CASE STATEMENT

37 Years Caring for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community

Established in 1978 as a safe and affirming place for lesbian and gay Houstonians to receive counseling, **the Montrose Center** has emerged as one of the nation's leading full-service LGBT centers. Although counseling remains at the heart of what we do, services have expanded to meet the changing needs of our diverse community. These services include substance abuse treatment, support and advocacy for LGBT survivors of violent crimes, care and assistance for people with HIV/AIDS, free community wellness programs and activities, and programs for our community's most vulnerable and isolated—youth and seniors. We also serve as a “hub” of the LGBT community and a gathering place for dozens of organizations.

The Montrose Center's vision of a healthier society marked by permanent, positive changes in attitudes and behaviors toward LGBT persons drives the Center's mission to *empower our community to enjoy healthier and more fulfilling lives.*

SPRY: Seniors Preparing for Rainbow Years

The needs of the city's growing LGBT elder population launched a key program at the Montrose Center—Seniors Preparing for Rainbow Years (SPRY). Jack's ordeal was the inspiration for SPRY, which provides peer support and counseling to address the loneliness, isolation and physical, mental and emotional challenges that come with aging and being LGBT. Case managers advocate for and link seniors to affirming care and resources. The Montrose Diner, SPRY's senior drop-in center, offers a range of social activities and free lunches to seniors and caregivers three days each week.

SPRY restores a sense of community and purpose for many LGBT seniors who feel cut off and excluded in a youth-focused culture.

Jack: Our Inspiration for SPRY

Jack was never one to hide the fact that he was gay, but it became a secret again once he reached his 80s and his health began declining. Also secret were his living conditions—he had no air conditioning and had become physically and mentally unable to keep up his home. Jack remembered when people said if you were gay, you probably had AIDS. He remembered when paramedics refused to treat gay men, and when mortuaries refused funeral services. These painful memories kept Jack from asking for help from senior care providers. When Jack's depression and dementia got bad enough, he reluctantly agreed to allow a staff member from the Montrose Center into his home. Helping Jack led to the birth of the SPRY program.

Affordable Housing: From Problem to Crisis

One in eight LGB adults and one in four transgender adults in the U.S. say they have experienced housing discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity.¹

Housing is one of the greatest financial challenges, and correspondingly one of the greatest worries, for this invisible and highly vulnerable population. The vast majority of LGBT-affirming neighborhoods, businesses, churches, and service organizations remain centrally located to Montrose and the surrounding areas. However, the lack of affordable housing in Montrose has pushed many LGBT low-income seniors to seek more affordable, yet less community-centric, areas.

LGBT seniors want an affordable community to call home, one where “we can hold hands in public without fear of discrimination,” where reminiscing about memories of happier times nets knowing smiles, where Jack has the comfort of caregivers and where Ralph could have remembered his departed with photos by his bed.

There are at least 1.5 million people age 65 and older who identify as LGBT in the U.S. today²—a number that is expected to double over the next two decades as Baby Boomers retire. Plans to address the affordable housing needs of aging Houstonians must include an understanding of and responsiveness to the needs of a growing segment of that demographic, LGBT seniors. Unless we act now, those needs will go unmet.

Remembering Ralph

Ralph lived with the love of his life Harry, from 1995 until Harry's death in 2000. Deep in grief, Ralph stopped socializing until an LGBT-affirming church offered him a job and a renewed purpose as minister. When Ralph retired at the age of 84, he was in need of skilled nursing care. Due to his financial situation, a facility in the outskirts of Houston was his only option. Ralph was forced to leave behind the home he had shared with Harry, as well as keepsakes and photos that he feared might “out” him to his new neighbors and caretakers. After 60 years of being “out and proud,” Ralph was back in the closet. Ultimately, friends became aware of his circumstances and, because of his long-term ministry work Ralph was placed in a Montrose hospice. Had it not been for the hospice, the community he so faithfully served may not have learned of Ralph's passing.

*54% of SPRY participants live on less than \$1,250 per month.
Affordable housing is their #1 concern.*

Marriage inequality adds to the burden for LGBT seniors. Being cut off from Social Security survivor benefits, pensions and health insurance creates a lifelong income gap for hardworking LGBT individuals who, as they mature, are more vulnerable to financial hardship, declining health and lack of familial support. LGBT elders are two times more likely to age alone and four times less likely to have assistance from families of origin.³ Adding to this isolation, many LGBT seniors feel invisible to the younger segment of their own communities.

Today's LGBT seniors are the generation that fought the hardest for equality under extreme circumstances. Their effort to improve our world has cost them their jobs and the support of their families. Many LGBT older adults are haunted by the memory of violent threats and physical harm for coming out in an era when their lives were criminalized and devalued. For some, abuse, arrest, institutionalization, reparative therapy and even shock treatment were the price for their bravery.

Our Solution

The Montrose Center is committed to the development of an LGBT-affirming, affordable, senior-housing community. This project will serve as the cornerstone of the comprehensive approach to support the most at-risk LGBT seniors—individuals and couples whose limited financial resources force them to choose between housing, food or medications. These are choices that could result in chronic or terminal illness, debilitating depression, or homelessness.

Our vision is that LGBT elders will be able to age in place with dignity and pride in a stable, safe and affirming community, with access to specialized services and support, including:

Primary medical care	Counseling & peer support	Advocacy & service linkage
Job resources & skills training	Congregate meals	Wellness & fitness programs
Social & recreational opportunities	Educational programs	Shuttle service

*This LGBT-focused housing community will be the first of its kind
in the southern United States.*

Thanks to the visionary leadership of Mayor Annise Parker, this project has been designated as a 2015 City of Houston priority.

The Montrose Center recognizes the opportunity to engage in key collaborations to increase the quality of life for LGBT and allied seniors. One such partner is Legacy Community Health Services, which will deliver geriatric primary care services at an on-site clinic to residents and seniors in the surrounding neighborhood. Other potential culturally competent community partners will include affordable, home-health and skilled-nursing providers, volunteer companion/visitor organizations, and groups that engage residents in purposeful activities from fitness to community gardening.

The potential impact for LGBT seniors includes reduced social isolation, increased independence, improved mental health outcomes and a decrease in health disparities. The Montrose Center will track outcomes starting with the first resident and set expectations around collaborations to ensure a holistic and healthy support system for seniors.

The complex will feature 115 one- and two-bedroom, independent-living apartments at **50-60% of the market rental rate** for low- to moderate-income seniors, with rents adjusted based on annual income. The Center and partners have engaged LGBT seniors in focus groups to determine the features and amenities that are important to them, such as:

Angela & Ellen

Together for more than 35 years and now in their 60s, Angela and Ellen spend their days reflecting on fond memories of the life they've shared, but are fearful of what the future has in store. They are disabled, living on disability checks and a monthly food subsidy of only \$500. Their home is in deplorable condition and located far from the LGBT community they once felt connected to, but it's all they can afford. Their current living situation leaves them isolated from friends and much needed social and medical services. Worse, Angela and Ellen live each day painfully aware of the fact that if something happens to either of them, it will leave the other homeless and alone.

Full disabled accessibility

Multiple activity rooms

Outdoor recreational space

Secured entry

Library & lounge area

Computer facility

Dining & assembly hall

Laundry facilities

Fitness facility

Approximately nine percent of units will be designated to residents living with HIV/AIDS.

The proposed complex will be centrally located in the Third Ward, less than 3 miles from the Texas Medical Center and 1.3 miles from the Montrose Center on two existing Metro bus routes and the prospective light rail University/Blue Line as part of Houston's Urban Transit Corridor planning. The proposed site is located at 2222 Cleburne, pending a generous donation from the Midtown Redevelopment Authority, whose leadership is committed to maintaining affordable housing.

The **Houston Housing and Community Development Department** is a key partner, and the Center has submitted a proposal for TIRZ funding for the project. The Montrose Center has partnered with Houston-based **Covenant Capital**, a nonprofit developer with a proven track record of developing similar senior housing projects throughout the Houston area.

In addition to rent income, low-income tax credits and resident subsidies issued by U.S. Housing and Urban Development will help to complete and sustain the project over the long term. These tax credits will be issued to the Montrose Center and then sold to private investors via the establishment of a limited partnership which allocates the return on tax credit investments to the investor, and provides cash flow to the Montrose Center for the development of the project.

Capital Campaign: 'There's No Place Like Home'

The project cost is estimated at approximately \$23.6 million with 23% committed from public funding and 30% through low-income tax credits. The Montrose Center will embark on the '**There's No Place Like Home**' capital campaign with a goal to raise **\$6.5 million** through the generosity of individuals, foundations, and corporations over the next three years to complete the project.

Campaign Objectives:

1. **Design and build** an LGBT-affirming, affordable housing development and geriatric primary care clinic in the Third Ward (within 1.5 miles of the Montrose Center).
2. **Consolidate** SPRY (senior) programming for clients, residents and visitors, enabling the main campus to expand programming for youth, offer additional community meeting space and house more LGBT and allied nonprofit organizations.
3. **Expand** existing SPRY programming to include job placement and skills training, social and recreational services, and expanded group meals and community-facilitated peer interaction.

	Private Funding	Public Funding	Tax Credits	Financing	TOTAL
Design & Build	\$4,728,579	\$2,250,000	\$7,005,183	\$4,575,721	\$18,559,483
Land (In-kind)	-	\$3,265,000	-	-	\$3,265,000
Furnishings & Equipment	\$350,000	-	-	-	\$350,000
Operating Reserve	\$671,421	-	-	-	\$671,421
Programs & Services	\$750,000	-	-	-	\$750,000
TOTAL	\$6,500,000	\$5,515,000	\$7,005,183	\$4,575,721	\$23,595,904

*Honorary Chairs for the Capital Campaign are Mayor Annise Parker
and State Representative Garnet Coleman.*

The capital campaign has been generously anchored by a \$150,000 gift from **The Hollyfield Foundation** and by early private gifts from the Montrose Center's Board, Endowment Board, and former board members. The land, valued at \$3,265,000, is a proposed, in-kind contribution to the Montrose Center from the **Midtown Redevelopment Authority**.

LGBT Community's Greatest Generation

When Tom Brokaw coined the phrase the "Greatest Generation," he was chronicling the lives of those born in the 20s who survived a massive economic upheaval and World Wars. LGBT elders are among our greatest, having survived the closet, thrived outside its confines and forged a path to equality in military service, marriage and protection from discrimination. This project presents a unique opportunity for the LGBT community and its allies to come together in a remarkable collaboration to honor and support these generational heroes.

With your support, the Montrose Center will ensure that LGBT elders can age in a safe and affirming environment with dignity, independence and a sense of community.

Caring for LGBT seniors is not exclusively an LGBT issue; it's a human issue.

¹ SAGE (n.d.). Discrimination. [Web page]. Retrieved from <http://www.sageusa.org/issues/general.cfm>

² SAGE (n.d.). Discrimination. [Web page]. Retrieved from <http://www.sageusa.org/issues/general.cfm>

³ SAGE (n.d.). Discrimination. [Web page]. Retrieved from <http://www.sageusa.org/issues/isolation.cfm>