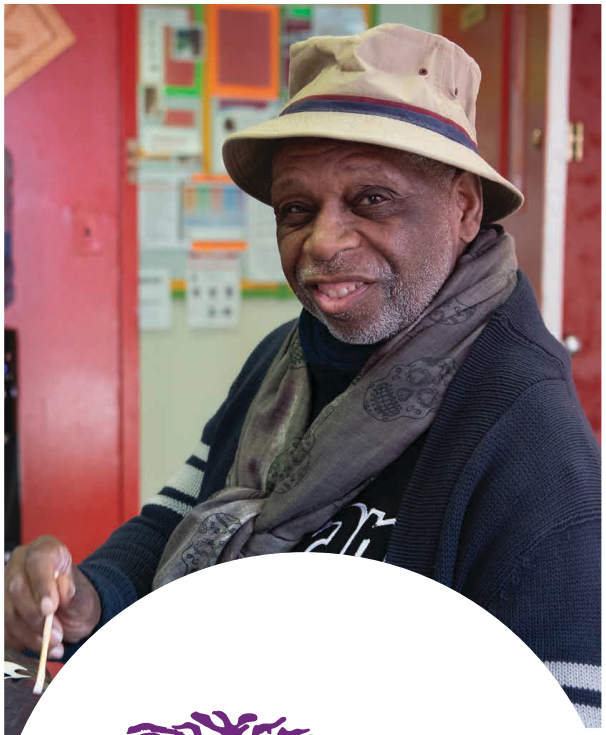

GRIOT Circle
a gathering of elders

2018 Annual Report

Serving LGBTQ Elders of Color Since 1996

Dear Friends

June 2019 will mark the end of my six-year term on the board of GRIOT Circle. For the bulk of that tenure, I served as (co)chair of this magnificent organization. It has been said that hindsight is always 20/20. Well, the year 2020 is not behind us, but is in front of us and will soon be upon us. Therefore, I would like to use this (and my last) letter on behalf of the board, in this annual 2018 report, to celebrate where we are, and where we are going.

In the past 12 months, GRIOT has enjoyed several successful fundraising initiatives – among them: Give Out Day; our 22nd Annual Celebration & Benefit; and Giving Tuesday – all of which either met or surpassed our financial benchmarks. This is reflective of the fact that our focus on creating and cultivating our relationships with our individual donors has resulted in these successful fundraising initiatives. We are proud of the fact that we are developing our staff internally. While those success stories are too numerous to delineate, we do want to give a shout-out to our very own Aundaray Guess who was promoted to be GRIOT's Deputy Director.

During this year, we were successful with several of our funding renewals. This has allowed us to continue providing free community training for HIV/AIDS prevention and education, as well as awareness around many aspects of sexual health. For example, we further developed several of our already fairly successful programs: "Joy of Intimacy" and "Still Standing: Aging Gracefully and Positively." Further, we created free community training– "LGBTQ and Aging; 101" and "Using the Strengths & Resiliency of LGBTQ Elders of Color To Create Change" – that teach allied organizations about the best practices when working with our constituencies.

GRIOT, and especially the board, is also very excited to have brought on six new board members – Eishelle Tillery, Amanda Lugg, Poojah Gehi, Andrienne Johnson, Andre Aekins, Felicia Holley, and Ann Cammett – over the past year.

And not only has the past year been great, but 2019 (and beyond) is poised to be exciting as well. For example, we are positioned to grow the GRIOT team by hiring two new staff members: the agency's first full-time development person, and a full-time Friendly Visiting Coordinator. The visiting coordinator will launch the state's first initiative that will directly strive to reduce social isolation and loneliness of NYC LGBTQ+ homebound elders. Further, we will be launching mental health services onsite. Our seniors will now have professionals who will help them meet their psychological and psychiatric needs. Combined with the work we're already doing, these initiatives will position GRIOT to offer a "one-stop-shop modality" to our members; designed to support a mind, body, and spirit approach to their human development and wellbeing.

To be clear, while the future is bright for GRIOT, we are also all-too-keenly aware of the challenges facing our broader community. Recognizing that our members, constituencies, and stakeholders simultaneously embody multiple identities, we consistently stand by and work with our partners spearheading issues around poverty, prisons, immigration, gender equity, those with varied physical abilities, and more. A just world where equality is not only a goal but a reality, motivates all of our work. The work we do as well as support can only happen through the consistent commitment of our entire GRIOT community – staff, board, members, allies, and more. To that end, we thank you for your steadfast support. Further, we welcome you to continue to combine your 20/20 vision of empowerment with ours as we journey through 2019, 2020 and beyond.

Allow me to close with what has inspired me in good 'vision' and bad: The best is (really) yet to come! Thank you and looking forward…

Juan Battle, PhD
Board Chair

Regina Shavers
Founder and former Executive Director

In 1996, Regina co-founded GRIOT Circle to combat the lack of community that she observed amongst LGBTQ elders, particularly those of color. Since then, GRIOT Circle has become "an intergenerational and culturally diverse community-based social service organization responsive to the realities of older lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, two-spirit and transgender people (LGBTST) of all colors." In 2000, Regina assumed the role of Executive Director of GRIOT.

Regina Shavers had a long history of community involvement and activism. As co-chair of District Council 37, she advocated for workers' rights and served on the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Lesbian and Gay Rights Advisory Board. She played an active role in the Campaign for Inclusive Family Policy, the citywide coalition that obtained domestic partner benefits for New York City employees, and also helped to found Pride At Work, a constituency group of the AFL-CIO that focuses on the rights and unionization of LGBT workers. The former Assistant Director of the NYC Department of Health's HIV Training Institute, Regina created and implemented curricula for HIV prevention and treatment, including education tailored for older populations. Regina continued with her HIV/AIDS facilitation as a member of the New York Association on HIV Over Fifty (NYAHOF).

Board Members

Harry Liu
Board Treasurer

Terry Boggis
Board Member

Andrienne Johnson
Board Member

Veronica Momjian-Kapnick, PhD
Fundraising Chair

Mark Fowler
Board Member

Amanda Lugg
Board Member

Eileen Rodriguez
Secretary

Pooja Gehi
Board Member

Antonio Pastrana Jr., PhD
Board Member

Andre Aekins
Board Member

Felicia Holley
Board Member

Eishelle Tillery
Board Member

Staff Members

José Albino
Executive Director

Aundaray Guess
Deputy Director

Katherine Acey
Director of Strategic Collaborations

Lisa Eddy
Program Coordinator

Alexandra Chandra
Volunteer Coordinator

Cathleen Barnwell
Administrative Assistant

Spencer Casseus
Development Coordinator

Mo Urzola
Friendly Visitor Coordinator

History

GRI.OT (/gre-ot, gre'o, gre'ot/)
A storyteller in western Africa who perpetuates the oral tradition and history of their village or family. The acronym GRIOT stands for Gay Reunion In Our Time. The two together symbolize the heart and soul of our organizational "home."

Our Story
Spearheaded by Regina Shavers, GRIOT Circle was founded in 1996 by LGBTQ elders of color in order to respond to the social and psychological fragmentation caused by ageism, racism, sexism, homophobia and poverty in the lives of LGBTQ elders of color. GRIOT Circle's mission is to provide programs and services to assist its members in removing the isolation and fear around aging in both the LGBTQ people of color communities as well as the larger community and to eliminate discrimination wherever it exists.

GRIOT was officially recognized as a nonprofit 501(c) (3) and remains the only staffed organization in the country exclusively dedicated to serving the needs of LGBTQ elders of color. GRIOT's main objective is to counteract the damaging effects of systemic discrimination by maintaining a safe space for elders and providing programs, support and social services that affirm and empower their lives and experiences.

GRIOT Circle currently serves nearly 500 members and continues to grow as we increase and expand our programs. The services are largely provided in Brooklyn, N.Y. but members commute from all neighboring boroughs. GRIOT members range in age from their mid-50's to late '80s. Over 90% of all members are from low-income households; over 65% are retired and live on fixed incomes. Based on a recent survey 90% of GRIOT members identify as being Black, African-American, or Caribbean-American, with the remaining 10% identifying as Latino/a, white, multiracial or other. While we focus on the needs of LGBT elders of color, GRIOT creates a welcoming environment for all people.

Since 1996, GRIOT Circle has provided a welcoming space, culturally sensitive services, and member-centered programming: all affirming the lives of LGBTQ elders of color.

OUR MISSION

GRIOT Circle is a community-based, multigenerational organization serving LGBTQ elders of color. Our mission is to respond to and eliminate all forms of oppression, including ageism, racism, sexism, misogyny, transphobia, homophobia, poverty, xenophobia, and their intersections. We achieve this by providing health, wellness, advocacy, and leadership activities to remove isolation and fear, build community, as well as honor racial and ethnic traditions.

OUR VISION

All LGBTQ elders of color experiencing a just and abundant quality of life.

OUR CORE VALUES

Community

An essential part of life that contributes to the building of friendship, companionship, family, support, and the celebration of our lives and survival; as well as creates avenues for collaboration with agencies and partners focused on using resources in a complementary manner.

Respect

Each person's humanity, history, traditions, experiences, and privacy is valued and encouraged.

Safety

Recognizing that there is no one "safe" space for all, GRIOT works to foster a physically and emotionally safe environment in all aspects of our programming.

Justice

Intrinsic to GRIOT's programming and advocacy with and on behalf of all of our constituencies.

Empowerment

GRIOT supports our members in living a better life through creating life-long opportunities for learning, growing, and sharing their individual life experiences.

Integrity

GRIOT is committed to honest, responsible, transparent, ethical and accountable management.

Excellence

GRIOT strives to establish a culture of accountability, growth, and excellence among staff, volunteers, and board members.

"The trans socials at GRIOT have helped me connect with my sisters in more meaningful ways. Not only have I been able to get out of the house more and give myself the exercise I need, but also laughing and enjoying life with my peers."

- Frances

Community Training

These trainings are offered free of charge to the community in order to increase their competencies on issues such as HIV/AIDS, sexual health, race, gender, and sexual orientation, among others.

LGBTQ 101: Race, Gender, & Aging

This training uses the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, age, and social-economic status to educate participants and increase their competencies when thinking about, and working with, LGBTQ elders of color. Anchoring New York City's history of oppression from the 1940's to today, this presentation includes challenges, issues, and the resiliency that LGBTQ elders of color have — and continue to face — in health, housing, employment, and other institutions. Strategies and tools are also provided in order to support, advocate, and provide quality services to LGBTQ elders of color.

The Joy of Intimacy

This workshop addresses overall sexual health among seniors. GRIOT Circle members discuss the stigma and barriers attached to aging and sex and will share information on safe sex practices, and the resources available to help prevent and treat HIV, hepatitis, and sexually transmitted diseases to support, advocate, and provide quality services to LGBTQ+ elder.

Using the Strengths & Resiliency of LGBTQ Elders of Color to Create Change

This workshop focuses on the strengths that this chronically marginalized community possesses, and the projects that were created that tap into their historic resiliency in order to cultivate them as leaders and create change. These leadership development opportunities, using a social justice and racial equality lens, allow members to create change in their lives, communities, and the LGBTQ movement.

Still Standing, Aging Gracefully & Positively

This workshop promotes education, prevention, and the importance of access to quality care as it relates to HIV/AIDS. It uses the personal stories of members of GRIOT's HIV men's support group to highlight the unique medical challenges of the disease and that the aging process uniquely presents. In addition, it destigmatizes the shame surrounding disclosure and the many barriers that exist for the elderly population and HIV testing and care.

"By visiting various agencies to talk about the complexity of aging with HIV, we've been able to support other senior centers throughout New York City by adapting strategic services to support long term survivors and educate the younger generation."
-Robert

Programs & Services

Leadership Development & Volunteer Opportunities

GRIOT Circle places a great emphasis on providing members with opportunities for growth as individuals. Leadership development and volunteer opportunities enable members to connect their sense of identity to the mission and collective identity of the organization. We assist our members in developing personal strategies for managing their roles as volunteer leaders and encourage them to participate in shaping GRIOT programs and activities.

Case Management

Members are provided with an array of supportive service interventions, advocacy, referrals, information, and assistance with benefits and entitlements. The case management division creates an individualized plan that meet the member's needs and links them to appropriate services in the community.

Congregate Meal Lunch Program

A healthy hot lunch time meal is provided on site to the members Monday through Friday. The lunch is free of charge and helps seniors prioritize their fixed income budget and meet their nutritional needs.

Health & Wellness

Our daily activities and educational opportunities are designed to build upon the skills, knowledge, and unique abilities of our members. Core psychosocial, educational, and recreational programs include the "Men over 50 HIV Support Group," "Women's Support Group," wood carving classes, book club, computer skills classes, nutrition education, health management, tai-chi, self-defense classes, cultural outings, and a myriad of other activities.

Buddy 2 Buddy Caregiver Program

The program is designed to bring LGBTQ elders of color the care, companionship, and community they seek by pairing them together in relationships of mutual respect and support. The program is open to everyone and serves as a support network that allows participants to create hybrid families to help address isolation. Buddies provide one another with an array of services and mutual support.

The provision of some of these programs and services are made possible through a strategic partnership with SAGE (Services and Advocacy for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Elders.)

2018 Highlights

2,500+ Hot Nutritious Meals Served

The senior lunch program provides a communal space for members to dine with others and helps decrease feelings of isolation.

1,200+ Health, Wellness, Educational Activities & Workshops

As reported by our members, this decreased isolation, depression and feelings of hopelessness, counteracted the effects of chronic illnesses, promoted and improved their quality of life and choices as they age with pride.

200+ Integrated & Coordinated Case Management Services

Established linkages with existing agencies and organizations which allowed members to improve their quality of life by providing them access to nutrition assistance programs, housing opportunities, medical expense reduction programs and managed health care navigation assistance.

70+ Leadership Opportunities & Volunteers

Members were afforded experiences, tools, and techniques that allow them to enhance their lives and communities.

58+ Participants in the Buddy to Buddy Program

The program is designed to bring LGBTQ elders of color the care, companionship, and community they seek by pairing them together in relationships of mutual respect and support. The program is open to everyone and serves as a support network that allows participants to create hybrid families to help address isolation.

"I love coming to GRIOT, it is a warm and friendly place. The activities are very enjoyable. You always have fun." - Silk

Financial Report

REVENUE

$583,510

- Foundations/Corporations $446,557
- Government Funding $74,728
- Rent/Interest/Misc. Income/Special Events $42,177
- Contributions $20,048

EXPENSES

$496,402

- Program Services $372,808
- Fundraising $70,570
- Management/General $53,024

NET ASSETS

$179,829

"As a board member and a member at GRIOT Circle, I have a critical role in enriching our member programs and strengthening our organizational mission. GRIOT has given me the opportunity to be a leader." - Felicia

Our Donors

We would like to thank our supporters for their strong support of LGBTQ elders of color.

Individuals

Jo Ann Acey
Katherine Acey
Michael Adams/ SAGE
Rodney Adams
Andre Aekins
José Albino
Jaquez Aldo
Zenora Ali
Susan Allee
Carol Alpert
Elias Aquino
Alan Arbel
Gabriel Arkles
Basis Austin
Barbara Balliet
Juan Battle
Joi Bell
Ballard Ben
Marco Benjamin
Robert Berg
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Paula Grant
Ramona Greene
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Henry van Ameringen Foundation
New York Community Trust
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Government

NYC Council Speaker Corey Johnson
Borough President Eric A. Adams
Council Member Laurie A. Cumbo
Council Member Carlos Menchaca

**Matching Gifts*

What's New in 2019

GRIOT Circle's portfolio of programs and services has expanded tremendously over the years. As noted in the prior page, we currently provide our members with diverse programs and services that include; health, wellness, and education classes, case management services, leadership development and volunteer opportunities, a daily lunch program, various support groups, social and cultural outings, as well as our very unique Buddy-2-Buddy Peer Caregiver Program.

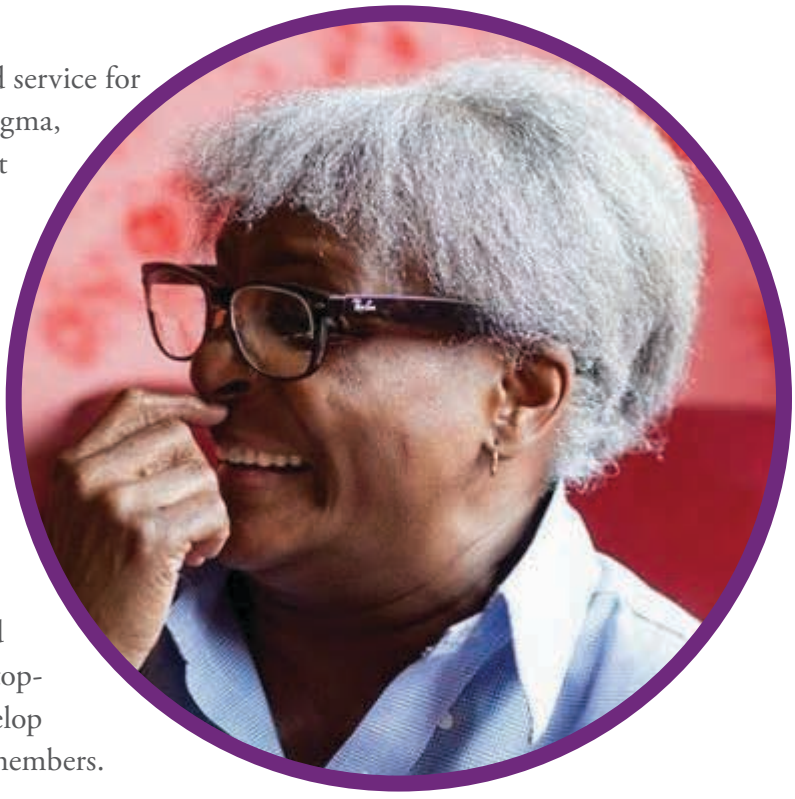
But there is still more work to be done and we are very excited about the expected growth in 2019!

Friendly Visitor Program

In 2019, through a partnership with The New York City Department for the Aging and Citymeals on Wheels, GRIOT Circle will be introducing the city's first Friendly Visiting Program that will exclusively serve LGBTQ+ homebound elders. The Friendly Visiting program pairs compassionate individuals with homebound elderly seniors in need of companionship. Volunteers will be carefully screened and trained before being matched to an elderly person with whom they share a common interest or bond. Through weekly visits to the member's home, these unique relationships quickly grow into lasting friendships.

Mental Health Services

We understand that mental health is a much-needed service for LGBTQ+, elders, and people of color. But due to stigma, shame, and/or cultural factors, it is not a service that these communities actively seek out. Knowing the importance and need for this service for our intersectional constituency, we will be extending this service on-site in 2019. Our members will be able to meet with a therapist on a weekly basis, or a psychiatrist on a monthly basis, to get their psychological needs met. This will be made possible through a partnership with SPOP (Service Program for Older People.)



GRIOT's board, staff, and members are very excited about these initiatives. We are poised to be a "one-stop-shop" comprehensive service modality that will envelop a mind, body, and spirit approach to servicing our members.

"GRIOT has made retirement a joy. I'm able to come to the space every day and enjoy being with my peers." - Chancher

GRIOT Circle members: Gheri and Sheila

"You have to act as if it were possible to radically **transform the world.** And you have to **do it all the time.**"

-Angela Davis

GRIOT CIRCLE

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For volunteer opportunities or to donate, please visit: www.griotcircle.org

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