



*Activism and Advocacy Against Ageism*

Dear Friend,

Welcome to Gray Panthers NYC. You are joining a historic tradition that dates back to the early 1970s, when Maggie Kuhn stood up for the right of all people not to be subjected to discrimination because of their age.

2016 was an exciting year for us. Here are just some of the highlights:

- Winner of the 2016 Annual Maggie Kuhn Award, presented at the Yale Club by Presbyterian Social Services
- Hosted a forum of noted speakers at the Bronx Count Courthouse, Personal Stories to Policy: Improving the lives of care recipients and their helpers – Family Caregivers and those Paid for Service
- A letter from GPNYC to NYS Comptroller Thomas Di Napoli spurred an audit of NYS nursing home violations, the results of which received wide coverage in the media, including an appearance of GPNYC President Jack Kupferman on Fox News.
- Presented Ageism: Why It Matters, with Yale Alumni Non Profit Alliance, featuring noted speakers Ashton Applewhite & Becca Levy, at St Peter's Church in Manhattan
- Hosted a roundtable discussion with the US Department of Labor, "Caregivers in the Workplace: Barriers and Solutions to Helping Older Women Achieve Greater Economic Security"
- The creation of a Legal Services Directory for older New Yorkers
- An updated Wikipedia entry to reflect more current developments
- A happy hour social/membership event at Studio Kraut Bohemian Bar & Kitchen in Chelsea

Thank you again, I look forward to meeting and working with you.

Sincerely

Jack Kupferman, President

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***Vision Statement:*** *The Gray Panthers envisions a world where the old and the young have much to contribute to make our society more just and humane, and in which each reinforces the other in goals, strategy, and action.*



*Action & Advocacy Against Ageism*

When Maggie Kuhn founded the Gray Panthers in 1970, she was vigorously resisting age-related forced retirement, attracting many similarly concerned older people to the cause. It wasn't long before Gray Panthers expanded their activism and advocacy to focus on more issues, including cuts to Medicare and Social Security and protesting the Viet Nam War, the latter bringing many enthusiastic young people into the organization.

Now, in 2017, it is increasingly evident that the world needs the passion and intergenerational cooperation of Gray Panthers to continue confronting ageism and fighting for human rights, justice, and peace for people of all ages. They advocate for inter-generational housing, single-payer healthcare, climate control, environmental sustainability, and peace between nations. Their influence has gone beyond the United States, where several chapters flourish and respond to today's critical issues. It has a strong presence at the United Nations and is one of the most active American non-governmental organizations advocating for a binding resolution on the rights of older persons worldwide. Gray Panthers has been a leader in advocating for a Convention to Protect the Human Rights of Older Persons; ensuring that the concerns of older persons are an integral part of the world changing Sustainable Development Goals; and assuring that the rights of older women are specifically identified and supported by CEDAW, (Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women).

Recent and current efforts against ageism by Gray Panthers NYC include having spurred an audit of nursing home violations; a campaign for greater safety in transportation and street traffic patterns; working with the U.S. Department of Labor to encourage greater support of family caregivers; and leading a public forum on improving the lot of all stakeholders in the home health care arena. Gray Panthers is a founding member of the Stakeholder Group on Ageing at the United Nations.

Gray Panthers' mission statement, **Action and Advocacy Against Ageism**, underscores our belief that, "What is good for older people is good for everyone!"

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### **OUR PRIORITIES**

*Gray Panthers NYC deems the current threat to Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid to be a matter of urgency. We commit to initiating and/or supporting whatever actions necessary to defend against the diminution or elimination of essential services designed to keep older persons living with independence and out of poverty. Gray Panthers is further committed to improving existing benefits so future generations and all who are aging may be similarly assured. - GPNYC Statement of Urgency, 2017*

Our initiatives also include:

- Improving the quality of paid care and family caregiving
- Ageism & Long Term Care -Treating the person and not the age
- Global Initiatives: Sustainable Development Goals; Global Convention for the Human Right of Older Persons; WHO initiatives on Health and Ageing
- NYC Transportation – Ensuring the upcoming changes in the 14<sup>th</sup> Street corridor is a reconstruction template of accessibility for all
- Creating opportunities for Intergenerational advocacy to combat ageism
- Advocating for safe, affordable housing for older persons

### **AREAS OF VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY –**

- Organizational/Structural Development to expand Gray Panthers membership
- Strategy & Policy (brainstorming; research; position papers; newsletters)
- Fund Raising – Strengthen funds needed for a secure Gray Panthers presence
- Membership – Build active, talented & committed pool of members & activists
- Visibility – Media, promotion, communications

### **WAYS YOU CAN HELP**

- Attend meetings & serve on committees
- Make phone calls to politicians and potential donors
- Develop and implement strategies
- Participate in activist fairs, distribute information; sign up new members
- Help coordinate forums, programs, exhibit booths, and fundraisers
- Represent GP at marches and rallies
- Contribute your talents & skills (design, writing, media contacts, publicity)
- Make a donation to Gray Panthers NYC to defray expenses

## THE GRAY PANTHERS MOVEMENT<sup>1</sup>

The Gray Panther movement was initiated in 1970 when Maggie Kuhn and five of her colleagues experienced forced retirement and looked for new ways to address social issues which had concerned them throughout their careers.

Today the Gray Panthers can best be described simply as a rapidly growing network of people old and young drawn together by deeply felt concerns for human liberation and social change. The old and young live outside the mainstream of society. Agism – discrimination against persons on the basis of chronological age – deprives both groups of power and influence. The Gray Panthers believe that the old and the young have much to contribute to make our society more just and humane, and that each needs to reinforce the other in goals, strategy, and action.

The Gray Panthers are distinguished by several special characteristics which are summarized as follows:

1. Their actions are based on a movement instead of an organization. Individuals Gray Panthers and Gray Panther groups are not identified by way of formal membership in a highly-structured national organization – but by common and active support of Gray Panthers ideas and projects. There are no membership dues. Thus, a Gray Panther is a person who, either alone or with others, actively promotes the interaction of young and old people and the maximum involvement of all ages in areas of social and political life. In addition, most local Gray Panthers groups focus upon issues which are of mutual concern to old and young in their respective communities.
2. The movement is based on a struggle against agism – a societal illness which the Gray Panthers contend is as serious and as pervasive as racism and sexism. Agism permeates our Western culture and institutions. It takes many obvious forms (e.g. places of employment which have fixed and arbitrary retirement rules or places which will not hire people for certain special positions because they are considered too old or too young). It also takes very subtle forms (e.g. causing people to feel complimented when they are told that they do not look or act their age.) The root cause of many forms of unjust treatment is agist values and

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<sup>1</sup> Historical note: This document was written and released in 1974, and has not been updated. Certain materials mentioned may not be relevant or available at the current time.

attributes. It is these attitudes and values that the Gray Panthers are determined to identify and change.

3. The Gray Panthers is a coalition of age and youth. Powerlessness and alienation from society affect young as well as old in ways which can be destructive but which have great potential for creative action. Both groups have only to gain when they combine their energies to form a new power base from which to challenge the forces that oppress them. Older and younger persons also have much to gain from interaction with one another, in a society which makes such opportunities increasingly rare. Through interaction the young benefit from the experience and wisdom of the old and begin to view “aging” not as a problem to be avoided until age 65, but as an experience to be integrated into the total life span.
4. The Gray Panthers are militant. They are militant because they challenge (in non-violent ways) rather than passively accept stereotype of aging (weakness, despair, hostility). These stereotypes are damaging to the lives of people because they become self-fulfilling prophecies. The Gray Panthers also challenge rather than submit to institutions which oppress people by way of agist policies. Many of the institutions and organizations which purport to serve people are afflicted with a deep, insidious paternalism offering little or no voice to the recipients in the governance and planning of their programs.
5. The Gray Panthers are concerned with action for change rather than service. They recognize the need for and the value of services but also recognize that many services accommodate themselves to systems which need to be challenged. The Gray Panthers are radical in that they favor basic changes in systems which are not meeting the needs of people. (e.g. the solution to the problem of nursing homes is, in part, the creation of alternative life styles for older persons.)

Nationally, the Gray Panthers operate out of a small office in the corner of Tabernacle Church in West Philadelphia. From that office a small staff and group of volunteers attempt to maintain a center of information and communications for the entire network. The main organ of communication within the network is the newsletter, The Network.

Since its beginning the Gray Panthers have received financial support almost entirely from small contributions from interested individuals as well as relatively small contributions from church groups. A recent small grant from the Urban Coalition in Philadelphia provided the money for hiring the present staff. The Philadelphia People’s Fund (a low-budget fund-raising organization for radical social change groups) provides a small grant for office operations.

In December 1973 the Retired Professional Action Group (supported by Ralph Nader's Public Citizen, Inc.) merged its activities with those of the Gray Panthers. The files of that group were moved to Philadelphia and coordinator of RPAG joined the staff of Gray Panthers. The two groups are united in their common goals of utilizing the wasted and often disregarded talents of older persons, providing opportunities for older and younger persons to work together and working on issues in a manner which reflects broad public interests instead of narrow self-interests. Mr. Nader now partially funds the Gray Panthers. A second year of funding in November 1974 is contingent upon matching funds from other sources, including private donations.

Within the Gray Panthers movement, policies and decisions affecting the national movement are developed by a national steering committee composed of 20 older and younger people. They meet together approximately every six weeks, usually in Philadelphia. Within the structure of the steering committee, the Gray Panthers strive to maintain the goals of shared or multiple leadership.

The Gray Panthers national office is bringing together materials that may be of interest to people who are, or want to be, involved in social action and the movement against agism. Currently available by mail, upon request, are:

Organizing Manual – Increasing numbers of people are writing to us to ask for help in organizing new Gray Panthers networks. In response to these request some Gray Panthers have develop a preliminary copy of an organizing manual. Cost \$1.00 per copy. Also anyone interested in organizing can receive from the national office a list of names of other persons in his/her area who have expressed interest in joining the Gray Panthers movement.

Newsletter – This is produced several times a year. There is no charge for it, but readers are encouraged to contribute towards the cost of producing and mailing it.

A Basic Bibliography – covering selections pertaining to agism, political action, the positive aspects of aging, important statistics and facts, organizations for social change and social action, and personal and small group growth and development. Cost \$0.25.

An article on the history of the Gray Panthers Movement - \$0.25.

An article on "Liberation from Agism" by Maggie Kuhn, published in Enquiry, Sept.-Nov. 1971. \$0.25

Gray Panthers buttons are available at a cost of \$1.00 each.

Gray Panthers film – Color; 16 mm; 25 min. - \$25.00 rental.

Miscellaneous promotional materials: 1-10 copies, free; over 10 copies - \$0.05 each item.

The charges for these materials are minimal to cover printing and postage.

Requests for these items as well as requests for other information about the Gray Panthers should be directed to: The Gray Panthers, 3700 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA, 19104. Telephone: 215/382-6644.

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