

FOURTH EDITION

PROMISING PRACTICES IN ADOPTION AND FOSTER CARE

A Comprehensive Guide to Policies and Practices That Welcome, Affirm and Support Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Foster and Adoptive Parents



HUMAN
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FOUNDATION

A Publication of the HRC Foundation's All Children—All Families Initiative

**all children
all families**

Finding permanent families for children by promoting fairness for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender foster and adoptive parents.

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From the Advisory Council

Dear Colleagues,

We are delighted that you are taking the time to read the All Children – All Families Promising Practices guide and begin the important process of improving your practice with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) foster and adoptive parents. While some in the child welfare profession may still question whether to place children and youth with LGBT parents, we believe that debate is over. With 30 years of social science research, the support of leading child welfare organizations and thousands of real success stories to draw from, we know that LGBT parents are equally nurturing, strong and committed and are an important and valuable resource for children and youth.

With the astounding number of children and youth in foster care, it is our responsibility to remove all barriers that stand in the way of finding permanent families. We share and support your commitment to ensuring that all qualified prospective families who wish to open their homes and hearts to children and youth have the opportunity to do so, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Since launching All Children – All Families in 2007, we have celebrated many successes, including the distribution of more than 4,000 *Promising Practices* guides to agencies and professionals across the country, strong partnerships with national child welfare organizations, and a steadily increasing number of participating agencies. Each year our certified trainers deliver innovative professional training for thousands of foster care and adoption professionals, including recent trainings for over 500 staff of New Jersey’s Department of Youth and Family Services. By reading this guide, you are adding to this success. We encourage you to utilize all of the tools and resources available through All Children – All Families and to strive for earning the Seal of Recognition, which is the best contemporary measure of excellence in serving LGBT families.

This guide is designed to help you assess your agency policies and to measure your current level of skill and competencies in all areas of practice with prospective or current LGBT parents. It provides a logical framework for creating an organization that is truly welcoming, affirming and supportive of LGBT families. We realize that some of the promising practices outlined in the guide are easier than others to implement depending on the size and scope of your organization, your location and your past work with this community. Whether you make rapid changes or advance slowly, we support your decision to participate in All Children – All Families, and we welcome you to reach out to us as you proceed.

Sincerely,

Ellen Kahn, HRC Family Project director, and
All Children – All Families National Advisory Council (for list of members, see Appendix E)



Introduction

Why Is This Important?

The numbers of youth moving into and out of substitute care varies from year to year. In 2010, there were approximately 408,000 children in foster care; 107,000 of them were waiting to be adopted.¹ While the optimal goal for these young people is reunification with their parents or relatives, that is not always possible. Adoption by loving, permanent families is a better choice for them than institutional care, group homes and overcrowded foster homes. All potential parents for these children should be welcomed and affirmed.

At the same time, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people are becoming parents at increasing numbers across the country, often through adoption. (See table on right.) Many more would like to become parents — an estimated 2 million lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people are interested in adopting.²

Research shows, however, that less than one-fifth of adoption agencies attempt to recruit adoptive parents from the lesbian and gay community.³ Even in states where it is legal for LGBT people to adopt children and youth from the foster care system, many LGBT people believe agencies will not welcome them, or they fear that they will be treated as second-class applicants when seeking to adopt.

This is especially true for transgender people, about whom there is widespread confusion and misinformation. Transgender people face high levels of discrimination, especially regarding their ability to be effective parents.

LGBT Adoption: The Numbers

- An estimated 19.4 percent of same-sex couples identified in Census 2010 have a child living in the home with them.⁴
- Approximately 65,500 adopted children and youth are being raised by lesbian or gay parents, accounting for more than 4 percent of all adopted children in the United States.⁵
- Approximately 14,100 children and youth in foster care are being cared for by lesbian or gay parents, accounting for about 3 percent of children in foster care in the United States.⁶
- More than 50 percent of lesbian and gay parents adopted children from the child welfare system.⁷
- In the 2000 U.S. Census, nearly 10 percent of the same-sex couples raising children had an adopted child. By 2009, the comparable figure had nearly doubled to 19 percent.⁸

Agencies may be explicit in their anti-LGBT policy or philosophy, or they may subtly discourage applicants by their lack of cultural competence with LGBT adults, misperceptions about the LGBT community or by a failure to reflect LGBT inclusiveness in their materials, applications, website and other recruitment tools.

During National Adoption Month in 2011, President Barack Obama said, “With so many chil-

dren waiting for loving homes, it is important to ensure that all qualified caregivers are given the opportunity to serve as adoptive parents, regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, or marital status.”⁹ Earlier in the year, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children & Families issued an Information Memorandum on LGBTQ youth in foster care, which stated, “LGBT parents should be considered among the available options...to provide timely and safe placement of children in need of foster or adoptive homes.”¹⁰

“While we’re having this debate on policy, the reality is changing on the ground every day,” explains Adam Pertman, executive director of the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute.

More agencies around the country are viewing LGBT parents as beneficial resources for waiting children — they’re opening their doors, accepting applications and placing children and youth with LGBT families. A study by the institute found that adoptions by lesbians and gay men are occurring regularly and in notable numbers.¹¹ Sixty percent of responding agencies reported that they accept applications from LGBT prospective parents and 40 percent said they place children with those families.

“The best ethical practice places the interests of the child first and foremost,” Pertman says. “Ethical practice guides us to include all credible, competent people, not to exclude applicants based on adult fears and beliefs. We need to expand resources for children. LGBT parents are valuable resources.”

In a separate report, the institute said “with over 100,000 children continuing to linger in

foster care, despite being legally freed for adoption, every effort must be made to find timely and permanent placements for them. ... To maximize the number of suitable, vetted, trained and available families for the children who need them, all adults – regardless of gender, race, marital status, income level and/or sexual orientation – should be given the same opportunity to apply and be assessed for adoptive parenthood, using the same standards and guidelines.”¹²

The report recommended that agencies:

- Advocate to remove legal and cultural barriers for LGBT adoption.
- Foster positive leadership and values among adoption professionals.
- Develop recruitment and promotional strategies that demonstrate a desire to include LGBT clients.
- Provide appropriate pre- and post-adoption preparation and support for LGBT clients.
- Provide pre-adoption preparation and support for birth families.
- Support research on LGBT adoption and parenting.

The Human Rights Campaign Foundation’s All Children – All Families initiative gives agencies the tools and resources necessary to take these actions to achieve cultural competency in working with LGBT families, both adoptive and foster. LGBT families are an underutilized and valuable resource for waiting children and youth. Agencies that seek, welcome, support and affirm these families improve the chances for children in their care to find loving, permanent homes.

All Children – All Families

Launched in 2007 by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation's Family Project, All Children – All Families (ACAF) seeks to expand the number of qualified, loving families for waiting children and youth by:

- Promoting policies that welcome LGBT prospective parents through improved cultural competence by adoption and foster care agencies (public and private)
- Educating and engaging the LGBT community in opportunities for foster and adoptive parenting

The Promising Practices guide is the cornerstone of All Children – All Families. The guide outlines 10 key benchmarks of LGBT cultural competence and provides the framework for agencies that want to become fully welcoming and affirming of LGBT prospective parents.

Once an agency has achieved each of the 10 benchmarks outlined in this guide, it will earn the All Children – All Families Seal of Recognition. Agencies that receive the seal can use it as an education and marketing tool for recruiting more families. While we encourage all foster care and adoption organizations to utilize the All Children – All Families tools and resources, only licensed, accredited agencies, both public and private, and adoption exchanges are invited to formally participate in All Children – All Families and earn the Seal of Recognition.

Private organizations and small public agencies may decide to pursue the seal for the entire organization. Large public agencies may instead focus their work within the division(s) responsible for adoption and foster care and not those related to other child and family services. Some public agency leaders may decide that their jurisdiction is not yet ready to pursue achieve-

ment of the All Children – All Families Seal of Recognition, but they may still find value in the guide and make some changes to improve the actual experience of LGBT prospective families and waiting children and youth.

Participating in All Children – All Families

Participating in All Children – All Families offers an agency the unique opportunity to explore and evaluate, in depth, the degree to which it currently addresses the needs and concerns of LGBT adoptive and foster families. It also allows an agency to monitor the progress made over time toward achieving the highest possible practice standards. By understanding and improving your agency's cultural competence in working with LGBT-headed families, you will enhance your ability to match waiting children with qualified, loving families.

We ask that a senior executive (such as an agency director, division leader or senior manager) or a work group authorized by such leaders participate on behalf of an agency.

This guide will help you prepare for the potential challenges that may emerge as you engage in this important work. These challenges can manifest in various ways: employees who are resistant to working with LGBT prospective parents, donors who threaten to withhold contributions, local lawmakers who prefer that you do not publicly welcome LGBT prospective parents, or social workers from placing agencies who refuse to work with your pool of applicants. All of these challenges are surmountable, and within this guide you will find real stories from your colleagues around the country who faced similar challenges but ultimately succeeded in creating a truly welcoming environment for all families. By reading through this guide step by step, you can begin to identify where you might face your greatest challenges, how to involve your allies,

and what tools, resources and strategies will be most helpful to you along the way.

The first official step to participating in All Children – All Families is completing the Agency Self-Assessment (Appendix C). Upon submission, agencies will be added to the list of All Children – All Families participants. We recommend that you complete the self-assessment as you review this guide. The assessment is completed online, allowing agencies to complete it at their own pace. Agencies receive a report outlining how many of the 10 benchmarks of LGBT cultural competence they have met. At that time, an ACAF staff member will analyze the self-assessment and provide the agency with one hour of individualized technical assistance — including a plan for the agency to improve its practice.

In addition to the technical assistance from an All Children – All Families staff member, agencies may need the additional assistance of staff training. The initiative has developed a comprehensive four-part staff training curriculum that can be tailored to the needs of individual agencies. The curriculum is highlighted throughout the guide and described in detail in the Staff Training section.

The guide includes numerous examples of ways you may work to make improvements in your agency and achieve each of the 10 benchmarks of LGBT cultural competency. Public agency leaders from Alameda County (California), Los Angeles County, New Jersey and New York City recommend using an advisory committee, work group or task force to lead an effort to change policies and procedures related to LGBT prospective parents. They say this will help ensure

that an agency's culture is fully invested in creating a welcoming environment. In some jurisdictions, a pre-existing task force may want to tackle this issue, such as a group dedicated to improving service to LGBT youth in care or one focused on improving an agency's cultural competence or addressing process improvements. In other locations, a new advisory group might be needed. In either case, a task force can help maintain energy and momentum even as individual administrators leave an agency.

While there is no formal timeline for earning the Seal of Recognition, we highly recommend that agencies complete the Agency Self-Assessment within three months. Once the initial assessment is complete, agencies can decide upon a realistic timeline and build this into your routine policy, practice review and training and program development process to set a goal for achieving the benchmarks defined in the guide. We expect that it will take a solid year (12 months) for some agencies to assess, plan and implement the promising practices outlined in the guide. It may take longer, depending on the decision-making process in your organization, whether you are a private or public organization and what other pressures you may have with regard to accreditation and audits. Some of the benchmarks may be achieved with relative ease — for example, rewriting a policy or adding new photos to your website and brochures. The more substantive changes, however, will take longer to achieve and may be harder to measure.

Once an agency has earned the Seal of Recognition, it will engage in a biannual review process to ensure that agencies continue to use welcoming practices and advance in new areas.

Tools & Resources

In addition to the Promising Practices guide and Agency Self-Assessment, All Children – All Families has developed the following resources:

Agency Staff Attitudes Survey

This survey is a tool to help agencies generate an accurate measure of the staff members' readiness to work with the LGBT community. Smaller agencies may be able to gauge the skills, knowledge and comfort of staff without this survey, but larger agencies may need to use a survey like this before completing their Agency Self-Assessment.

Training Curriculum

This four-part training program can be customized for the needs of individual agencies. The content and competencies addressed in this training are linked to the benchmarks outlined in this guide and specifically meet the requirements of Benchmark 5.

- Module 1: Basic LGBT Competency for Foster Care and Adoption Agencies. Intended for all staff members. 3 hours.
- Module 2: Foundations of Effective Practice with LGBT Parents. Intended for all staff members. 3 hours.
- Module 3: Rolling Out the Welcome Mat – Establishing Agency Communications, Spaces & Recruitment Practices That Embrace LGBT Families. Intended for managers, staff responsible for recruitment/training/licensing and those who interact with prospective parents early in the process. 4 hours.
- Module 4: Conducting Home Assessments and Child Matching with LGBT Parents. Intended for staff members involved in family assessment or child placement. 4.5 hours.

Media/Recruitment Campaign

Based on their recruitment and outreach capacity, agencies that achieve the Seal of Recognition may have opportunities to participate in a targeted recruitment campaign developed by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation and Raise A Child, an All Children – All Families partner. These elements include ad images and outreach materials.

Agencies may also partner with the Human Rights Campaign Foundation on offering "Adoption 101" workshops for LGBT community members in their local area.

For more information, see Targeted Media Campaign (page 51).

Outreach

The project sponsors plenary sessions, workshops and symposia at key conferences in the field that bring together child welfare and adoption professionals. It also produces news articles, podcasts and webcasts that feature LGBT foster and adoptive parents.

All Children – All Families Successes

Since its launch in 2007, All Children – All Families has assisted many adoption and foster care agencies in becoming truly welcoming to the LGBT community. At the time of this publication, 26 agencies have earned the All Children – All Families Seal of Recognition. Another 30 agencies have completed their self-assessment and are working to review and improve their practices. The next pages highlight some of the initiative’s recent successes.

Agencies That Have Achieved the All Children – All Families Seal of Recognition		
Adopt A Special Kid (AASK)	Oakland	CA
Adoption Resources & Counseling Inc.	Kennesaw	GA
Adoption Resources of Wisconsin	Milwaukee	WI
Adoptions From The Heart	Wynnewood	PA
Adoptions Together	Silver Spring	MD
Alameda County Social Services Agency	Oakland	CA
Choice Network	Columbus	OH
Connecting Hearts Adoption Services (Florida)	Windmere	FL
Devereux Arizona – Maricopa	Pima & Cochise Counties	AZ
Family Builders	Oakland & San Francisco	CA
Family Focus Adoption Services	Little Neck	NY
Forever Families Through Adoption Inc.	Rye Brook	NY
Hands Across The Water	Ann Arbor	MI
Independent Adoption Center	Pleasant Hill	CA
Institute of Professional Practice	Woodbridge	CT
Little City Foundation	Chicago	IL
Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services	Pasadena	CA
McKinley Children's Center	San Dimas	CA
Midwest Foster Care and Adoption Association (MFCAA)	Independence	MO
National Adoption Center	Philadelphia	PA
New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services	Trenton	NJ
New York Council on Adoptable Children	New York	NY
Penny Lane Centers	North Hills	CA
Project Patchwork Inc.	St. Petersburg	FL
Southern California Foster Family and Adoption Agency	Los Angeles	CA
The Village Family Services	North Hollywood	CA

Recent Highlights



MFCAA Hosts Training for Multiple Agencies and Earns the Seal

The Midwest Foster Care and Adoption Association earned the seal in August 2011, becoming the first such recipient in the state of Missouri. Earlier in the year, the association's executive director, Lori Ross, organized an All Children – All Families training for 70 child welfare professionals from multiple public and private agencies in the Kansas City area."

North American Council on Adoptable Children Honors All Children – All Families with Award

For its work expanding the pool of highly qualified families for children in need of a loving and forever home, the All Children – All Families initiative received the NACAC Corporate Award for Special Achievement in Adoption in August 2011. It was the first time NACAC had awarded an LGBT-specific organization or program for work in the child welfare field.

Federal Agency Leader Praises All Children – All Families Initiative

Bryan Samuels, commissioner of the Administration for Children, Youth and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, participated in a National Adoption Month celebration in November 2011 at the HRC offices in Washington, D.C., along with leaders of welcoming foster and adoption agencies.

Alameda County Is Second County Agency to Earn the Seal

In November 2011, Alameda County’s Department of Child and Family Services, which encompasses Oakland, Calif., became the second public agency in country to receive the seal. The seal was presented to the LGBT working group at Alameda County who worked for three years to achieve the 10 benchmarks that are the standard for LGBT inclusive, culturally competent policies and practices.

New Jersey Is the First Public State Agency in the Nation to Be Awarded the Seal

In November 2011, the New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services became the first public state agency to achieve the 10 benchmarks and earn the All Children – All Families Seal of Recognition. The agency began its effort to earn the seal in 2008 and it culminated with a training of about 600 staff members over a one-week period.

Devereux Arizona Is First Agency in Arizona to Earn the Seal




In January 2012, Devereux Arizona was awarded the All Children – All Families Seal of Recognition making it the first agency in the state of Arizona to receive the seal.

Reading This Guide

This guide illustrates promising practices used by adoption and foster care agencies and adoption exchanges that are welcoming and affirming of LGBT-headed households. Practices encompass two areas:

1. **Leadership and Management** — including policies and practices related to governance, human resources, evaluation, client rights and staff training.
2. **Adoption and Foster Care Services** — including recruitment of adoptive and foster families, organizational atmosphere, homestudy practice, placement, adoption finalization and post-permanency support for families.

The practices are highlighted throughout the text and are also noted where they are directly linked to assessment questions and/or benchmarks. For each practice, we have included a guiding principle in addition to stories from the field, tips and samples that illustrate the practice in action. These were derived primarily from interviews with and materials from more than 40 adoption experts — including agency and organization leaders and staff members, social work educators and researchers, adoptive and foster parents and independent consultants in the field. These principles are compiled in Appendix A. The guide also features additional resources and information, including a bibliography, review of state laws on LGBT parenting and research on LGBT parenting.

Symbol Key	
	Promising Practices Guiding Principle
	Benchmark Note
	Agency Self-Assessment Note

A Note on Scope of Guide: The guide intersperses practices related to public and private agencies with *emphasis on those that are integral to the adoption process*. If you are working exclusively with foster families or in an organization that does not specifically focus on adoption, we encourage you to consider the promising practices that are applicable within your particular organization. This guide focuses on issues relating to adoption practices involving *domestic adoption* of waiting children and youth. All Children – All Families does not address international adoption specifically.

New in the 4th Edition

This fourth edition of the guide includes new content, as well as several revised sections:

- Additional interviews with foster and adoptive parents about their experiences.
- A new section on assessing relationship quality v. legal status, as marriage laws change.
- A new section on sexual orientation, race and culture.
- Stories from the field by many new public and private agencies, including several new agencies that have earned the Seal of Recognition .
- Detailed description of the curriculum for the four-part ACAF training. Specific components of the training modules are also highlighted in relevant sections throughout the guide.
- Updates to sections regarding research and laws.
- Revisions to the Agency Self-Assessment.

Note: Comments included in this guide were gathered during interviews conducted in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2011 and 2012. Some organizational affiliations may have changed since earlier interviews. Additionally, some agencies may have improved the policies or practices discussed in earlier interviews.

Benchmarks of LGBT Cultural Competency

The HRC Foundation will provide the All Children – All Families Seal of Recognition to agencies that achieve these 10 benchmarks.* Once you earn the seal, you can choose to proudly display it on your website, on your office door or in printed materials.

10 Benchmarks of LGBT Cultural Competency

1. The agency's client non-discrimination statement includes "sexual orientation."
2. The agency's client non-discrimination statement includes "gender identity" and "gender expression."
3. The agency's employment non-discrimination statement includes "sexual orientation."
4. The agency's employment non-discrimination statement includes "gender identity."
5. All agency employees receive the training required to work effectively and competently with LGBT clients.
6. The agency proactively educates and advocates for LGBT-inclusive and affirming practices among its organizational partners, collaborators and contractors.
7. All agency-controlled forms and internal documents use inclusive language (e.g., "partner" instead of "spouse" or "parent 1" and "parent 2" rather than "mother" and "father").
8. All external communications (website, printed materials and recruitment activities) explicitly reflect the agency's commitment to working with LGBT individuals and families.
9. The agency includes standardized LGBT-specific language, examples and exercises in all family training and education activities (MAPP, PRIDE, etc.).
10. The agency has had placements/finalized adoptions with several LGBT foster or adoptive parents and/or has provided foster/adoption services to LGBT families within the past year.

* An amended version of these benchmarks is available for agencies that do not provide placement services. See www.hrc.org/acaf-benchmarks for more information.

Agency Leaders on Achieving the Seal



"The Seal of Recognition says something to the community of LGBT people, that they have an agency – in the middle of the country, in a state that is very red – they have friends and allies here who want to help them grow their families and who believe they are valuable resources to kids in the foster care system."

- **Lori Ross, executive director of the Midwest Foster Care and Adoption Association**

"I thought earning the seal would make us better and expand our cultural competence. We had already developed a niche in our community working with the LGBT population, but earning the seal helped us further that mission and intention....Although the seal is about the foster care program, now throughout our other programs we've incorporated so many things we learned and continue to learn. We've increased our links within the LGBT community, in terms of involvement with various coalitions and advocacy groups."

- **Paul Davis, director of Community-Based Services, Devereux Arizona**

"Our success in the last number of years in increasing resource families is through recruiting more LGBT families. Go to an adoption day in New Jersey, and you can see the results. Despite obstacles, we moved forward, were persistent and earned the seal. In a way, it's a first step because we want to continue our efforts – to make our recruitment efforts more sophisticated and to do even better work."

- **Colette Tobias, administrator, New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services, Department of Children and Families**

"Our assistant agency director plans to frame several large posters displaying the Seal of Recognition and put them in every department office, at the elevator/entryways, to be viewed when people first walk into our buildings. There's a strong sense of pride within our social service agency and our department."

- **Fredi Juni, child welfare supervisor, Alameda County Social Services Agency, Gateways to Permanence Division**



Leadership and Management

Leadership and Management Guiding Principle

The organization’s leadership and management team reflects a commitment to finding and supporting all families qualified to care for children and youth — including those families headed by LGBT adults. To that end, the team welcomes LGBT people as members of the governing board or executive leadership, as staff members and as clients. The team supports efforts to gather feedback and implement training and other efforts to improve performance.

Governance

Governance Guiding Principle

The organization’s approach to governance — in policy, practice and leadership — welcomes and supports LGBT adults as potential adoptive and foster parents. The organization reflects this approach through its governing body, its mission or values statement, its client non-discrimination policy and its executive leadership.

Governing Body

The organization’s board or governing body supports qualified LGBT adults as adoptive and foster parents. The board understands the needs and strengths of the LGBT community, educates the public about the agency’s inclusive approach and is an advocate for qualified LGBT parents.

The board or governing body includes members who are openly LGBT and/or members who are involved in, supportive of or representative of LGBT communities. In public agencies, all bodies that have oversight or regulatory responsibility — such as city or state departments of social services and elected boards, councils or legislatures — must similarly support an inclusive approach to working with all qualified parents.

Stories from the Field

Boards of directors of private child placement agencies and adoption exchanges establish an organization’s mission and purpose and ensure that agency programs and services are properly aligned. Additionally, they support and assess the performance of the executive director. Given these responsibilities, boards of directors have an important role in establishing and supporting an organizational culture that welcomes and affirms LGBT adoptive and foster parents.

Executive directors of welcoming private agencies often emphasize the need to have the board of directors fully support an organization's inclusive approach to LGBT-headed families. Many directors describe the deep knowledge of their board members on issues related to LGBT parenting and the consistent and active support they have received from their boards, even during challenging situations.

"The diversity of people [on a board of directors] creates a diversity of thought," says Colleen Ellingson, chief executive officer of Adoption Resources of Wisconsin. "We educate our board about the population of children who need families and about the families that come forward. We've done trainings with our board to inform them about the LGBT community as an emerging group of families that is coming forward and doing an incredible job with really tough kids."

Given the ongoing public debate on LGBT parenting and the potential for anti-LGBT criticism, boards must have full knowledge of the agency's policies and practices in working with LGBT adoptive or foster parents.

Janice Goldwater, executive director of Adoptions Together (with locations in Maryland, the District of Columbia and Virginia), describes the need for an informed and supportive board of directors:

"We began to see a huge increase in our domestic adoption program for gay and lesbian clients coming in to adopt. When babies are born, interim families keep kids until they are placed with their permanent families. We had a group of interim-care families who provided fabulous care to the children. Four of our seven families got together and said they were uncomfortable with the same-sex couples who were adopting, even though the birth parents had chosen these adoptive parents with full awareness. They quoted from anti-gay organi-

zations and the Bible, saying these placements weren't in the best interest of the children. We replied, sending them material from the American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association and other professional organizations. We then had an in-service training with the families, led by an agency staff person who is raising her child with her [female] partner, to talk about life in a family with two moms.

"The four-interim care families disapproved of the training and interaction with the lesbian mother. The families, who receive payment for their care, said they would donate that payment back if the agency placed the children in their care with heterosexual families, but would keep the payment if the agency placed the children with gay- or lesbian-headed families.

"That's when our board got involved. The board supported our approach and required that the interim-care families treat everyone the same," Goldwater says. "This was four out of the seven families we had at the time — we didn't want a mass exodus, but we couldn't tolerate demeaning behavior of other human beings. All four families did leave. And the agency lost some money, because the husband in one of the families works at a bank that had been a major donor in the past and then no longer gave.

"The board needed to know about all of that. And we took a principled approach that affected the bottom line. The board was fully supportive and didn't miss a beat."

The agency soon recruited new interim-care families who were able to work with all potential adoptive parents, including LGBT-headed families. "It was a brief bump in the road," Goldwater says, "but today, Adoptions Together is a growing and thriving agency with a large group of wonderful resource families."

Jill Jacobs, chief executive officer of Family Builders (which serves nine counties in the San Francisco Bay area), echoes that belief. She says it is important to get support from all stakeholders in an agency, including the board of directors, so they understand that a policy that welcomes all qualified parents helps the children and youth served by the agency.

According to Jacobs, the board also needs this information so it can fully understand the community an agency is serving. Ideally, any member of a committed board — whether LGBT or not — will be an advocate for LGBT prospective parents. In her agency, it was a straight board member who raised important policy questions about LGBT-headed families when the agency was considering collaboration with a religious organization that works in the field.

Jacobs also believes it is best for boards to be informed directly, rather than indirectly through unexpected means. “I did not want my board to learn about anything [at the agency] by an article in the *San Francisco Chronicle*,” Jacobs says.

Beth Brindo, formerly of Bellefaire JCB in Cleveland, describes how her agency’s leadership responded in a child-centered manner to seek qualified foster and adoptive homes for waiting children and youth from the public child welfare system. They began by reviewing policies and working on best practice models that were more welcoming of openly LGBT clients.

“We perform international adoptions, along with many other services,” Brindo says. “Several years ago, a colleague and I were talking about the large number of single women who were adopting. She then learned from a friend that one of her clients was gay. We hadn’t realized. We started thinking — if we’re already working with all these families, is there a better way to prepare them for adoption or foster care?” As international adoption has become more restrictive, she says, they looked at the agency’s

other adoption programs. “Our executive director got involved immediately, assuring that the agency’s board of directors would be aware of the service expansion to this group of families.”

The executive director gave board members research on the issue, including the arguments for and against placement with LGBT parents. The board of directors discussed and considered the issue, Brindo says, then affirmed that LGBT families be considered as a foster and adoption placement resource for children and youth.

When Devereux Arizona was working to earn the Seal of Recognition, leadership in the national headquarters’ office offered full support while also exploring potential ramifications. These included the political environment and relationships with existing faith-based partner agencies. Paul Davis, director of community-based services, says this process led to positive, open communication with full support from the top.

Family Focus Adoption Services, based in Little Neck, N.Y., “has been welcoming to anyone who wants to adopt special-needs kids from the day we opened” 24 years ago, according to Maris Blechner, the agency’s executive director. “The board has always been aware and bought in [to the agency’s approach].” Blechner recalls that in two decades, just one board member has left the organization because she was uncomfortable with the agency’s practice of placing children with LGBT-headed families.

That long-term knowledge and support has recently proven essential. In late 2006, Blechner decided to launch a campaign to conduct adoptive parent recruitment specifically targeting the LGBT community. (See the section on *Recruitment of Adoptive and Foster Families* for more details.) When she made the decision, she says, “I went to the board and said, ‘I can’t do this without your support.’” And she got it.

Leaders of welcoming agencies also tend to have members of their boards of directors who are openly LGBT.

Goldwater of Adoptions Together says that her agency's board has for years reflected the mix of families served by the agency. "Because the LGBT community has always been welcome at Adoptions Together," Goldwater explains, "we've always had at least one or more board members who are representative of the LGBT community."

Jacobs of Family Builders recommends that boards specifically recruit LGBT people to serve on the board and be affirming and welcoming of such members. "Over 50 percent of our families are LGBT, and our board needs to reflect the families we serve," she says.

Tips

- Lead the agency through a change in its mission statement or addition of a specific policy of non-discrimination. Such a process requires discussion, understanding, decisions and a publicly stated commitment that informs prospective and future board members of the agency's intentions.
- Create opportunities for the board of directors to meet families served by the agency to enhance its connection to the agency's work. Southern California Foster Family and Adoption Agency hosted a board dinner featuring one of its client families, which happened to be a gay male couple who adopted transracially. "The board fell in love with the family," says Robyn Harrod, director of adoptions. Informal gatherings can deepen understanding and commitment.
- Approach each board member individually about a new initiative or policy, especially if you anticipate resistance. Ken Mullner, executive director of the National Adoption Center, advises, "Make sure you have

allies on the board who will be in your corner... Also have training programs for board members, and make sure they meet LGBT parents through those programs."

- Consider potential candidates for the board of directors from among your existing client population of LGBT adoptive parents who maintain a connection to your agency.

✓ Mission or Values Statement

The mission or values statement highlights the organization's commitment to recruit and retain all qualified adults to serve as adoptive and foster parents, including LGBT adults. These statements specifically reference LGBT adults or same-sex couples, include the terms "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" or "family structure" and/or include a broad commitment to working with all qualified families.


Stories from the Field

An organization's mission or values statement publicly reflects and communicates its philosophical commitment. Many LGBT people mistakenly believe that the law prohibits them from adopting or foster parenting. Even if they know the law does not bar them, prospective parents may still believe that individual agencies are not welcoming to them. LGBT prospective parents often look at an agency's mission statement, values statement or non-discrimination policy to learn whether the agency is welcoming to LGBT-headed families.

"I think agencies do need to include a specific list, such as 'race, color, creed, class, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity' [in their mission statements or non-discrimination policies]," says Gary Mallon, professor and executive director of the National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning at the Hunter College School of Social Work. "In many states, it's perfectly legal to dis-

criminate based on sexual orientation and gender identity. So if it's not specifically listed, I think most people who are LGBT will assume they are not welcome."

Public agencies have an opportunity to make their adoption and foster care placement approach clear through development of a policy statement. Fredi Juni, child welfare supervisor with Alameda County (Calif.) Social Services Agency, Gateways to Permanence Division, has been working with the Model Standards Project — a joint effort by Legal Services for Children and the National Center for Lesbian Rights — to improve care for LGBTQ youth. Because Alameda County is serving as a pilot site for that effort, Juni has led a workgroup that has developed a policy statement that will outline the agency's welcoming approach to LGBTQ youth in care. The policy also covers agency employees and resource families, including adoptive and foster families.

 **Assessment Q1 in Governance and Human Resources Management addresses this topic.**

Tip

- When making a public commitment to welcoming LGBT prospective parents through changes in a mission statement, non-discrimination policy or other affirmative policies, Beth Brindo encourages agencies to “find champions in your community. Reach out to them, so if you need them to back you up and support your work, they’ll be there.”

Samples

Alameda County Social Services Agency, Department of Children and Family Services
“LGBTQ Policy”

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) children and youth, or those perceived to be LGBTQ, are entitled to the same care, support, and protections that are

provided to all children and youth served by the Department of Children and Family Services. This policy is in keeping with the Department of Children and Family Services’ commitment to the safety, permanence, and well-being of the children and youth we serve. DCFS is committed to treating all children and youth with respect, valuing and affirming differences, and preventing harassment or discrimination of any kind.

Sexual orientation, gender expression, and gender identity must be affirmed, respected, and considered in all decisions regarding placement, care, manner of treatment and benefits received. Safety concerns must be considered when evaluating the placement needs of LGBTQ children and youth. LGBTQ children and youth are entitled to support for their positive expression and development of their identities, in the same manner as their peers. Anti-LGBTQ violence, the use of slurs, jokes, name-calling or other forms of real or perceived verbal, nonverbal, or emotional harassment based on sexual orientation or gender identity is prohibited.

This policy pertains not only to the care and treatment of the children and youth we serve, but also refers to care and treatment of the Department’s diverse workforce, the families we serve, and the work we do with our community partners. In particular, all families, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender expression, or gender identity must be equally valued as a resource for the children and youth that we serve. We affirmatively welcome and support LGBT headed families to foster and adopt Alameda County children and youth. We are committed to train all of our staff to be culturally competent in working with these families.

Employees, resource families, care providers, and community members who provide services to children and youth will be treated

with respect. Differences will be affirmed and harassment prevented and addressed. Discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender expression and gender identification will not be tolerated.

State of California, Health and Human Services Agency, Department of Social Services

“All County Information Notice I-81-10,” issued on Oct. 20th, 2010
www.dss.cahwnet.gov/lettersnotices/entres/getinfo/acin/2010/I-81_10.pdf

The notice provides “public and private child welfare, adoption agencies and probation department’s information on resources available to improve services to LGBTQ youth, their caregivers and LGBT prospective foster and adoptive parents.”

Family Builders

“Mission Statement” and “Welcome to Family Builders”

Family Builders is predicated on the belief that every child has the right to grow up in a permanent, nurturing family regardless of that child’s age, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, medical, physical or emotional condition. Family Builders educates the community about the needs of waiting children, advocates on their behalf, and places children with permanent, secure families through adoption and other forms of permanence.

Family Builders welcomes traditional families, single-parent families, both men and women,

gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender families, transracial and multiracial families and all other families as prospective adoptive parents. Family Builders is committed to serving all families equally with dignity and respect.

Family Builders does not discriminate on the basis of the fact or perception of a person’s race, creed, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, age, height, weight, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, domestic partner status, marital status, veteran status, medical status or disability or Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome or HIV status.

“Gay & Lesbian Adoption”
www.familybuilders.org/adopt

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) families are valuable resources for the many children who are in the foster care system and who are waiting for a family to adopt them. LGBT families often bring particular strengths to meet many of the special needs that children from the foster care system have. ... The process of adopting a waiting child is an intrusive and emotional undertaking, so if you are considering adoption, you will want to know that your agency is committed to you and will be supportive throughout the process — and beyond. At Family Builders, we take pride in the fact that almost half of the families we work with are LGBT families.

Southern California Foster Family and Adoption Agency

“About Us/What We Do”

www.scffaa.org

We welcome all capable families regardless of age, sex, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical characteristics, marital or domestic partnership status, medical or disability status.

Mission and Values Statements Food for Thought: Good Intentions

Family to Family Adoptions, a domestic adoption agency in Austin, Texas, has always welcomed gay and lesbian adoptive parents. Its executive director and founder, Maxine Seiler, explains that she “made sure that when I founded Family to Family that our policies were inclusive.”

On the agency’s website, Seiler’s biography emphasizes this commitment: “By founding Family to Family I wanted to broaden access to adoption to more families through a cost-effective program based on good social work values of tolerance, understanding and inclusiveness.”

The agency described its mission in this way:

“Our MISSION is to broaden access to adoption for those who wish to expand their family through adoption without regard to religion, income or lifestyle. Eligibility requirements for adoption as practiced by many agencies have become prohibitively restrictive for families who should be able to adopt. Fam2Fam is more flexible in our criteria and can more often meet the needs of qualified prospective parents.”

The agency’s mission statement intends to welcome gay and lesbian adoptive parents through its reference to “lifestyle.” However, for many LGBT people, that term does not feel welcoming because it suggests that orientation is chosen and changeable.

When HRC contacted the agency to discuss its mission, Seiler engaged in a discussion that led to a change in its mission statement: “Our MISSION is to broaden access to adoption for those who wish to expand their family through adoption without regard to religion, income or family structure.” The agency chose this term because it can welcome single adults as well as LGBT people.

“I have always been an advocate for the gay and lesbian community,” Seiler says, “but I plead guilty to not knowing all the preferred words to describe this community. We welcome the gay and lesbian community to our agency, yet until we participated in the All Children – All Families survey, we didn’t realize that one word could really send the wrong signal to people we really want to include.”

✓ **Client Non-Discrimination Policy, FAQ and Other Policy Statements**

The organization has a policy that prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity or expression in working with clients. Like the mission or values statements, these policies specifically reference LGBT adults or same-sex couples and include the terms “sexual orientation,” “gender identity” and “gender expression.”

B *Client non-discrimination policies inclusive of both “sexual orientation” and “gender identity or gender expression” are required to achieve benchmarks 1 and 2 in the Benchmarks of LGBT Cultural Competency.*

Stories from the Field

Beth Brindo, former adoption supervisor at Bellefaire JCB in Cleveland, explains, “We added sexual orientation and gender to our non-discrimination policy. Our position has always been that we are a child welfare organization, seeking safe and healthy homes and resources for children. This isn’t an LGBT issue for us — it’s about finding good resources for kids. I understand this is affirmative for LGBT families, but our focus is on child welfare. In our view, this is a long-overlooked population. Our goals were selfish — we needed more good parenting resources.”

Brindo says she knows of agencies that, while open to working with LGBT-headed families, “they all, without exception, have a ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ policy. They fail to include LGBT topics in their diversity training for their agency. I wonder about families’ sense of validity, their sense of safety and sense of fear, if they believe an agency is saying, ‘We’ll work with you, but don’t tell me things I don’t want to know — because I won’t know what will happen.’”

Karey Scheyd, a recruitment specialist and former deputy director of parent recruitment for

New York City’s Administration for Children’s Services, says a clear non-discrimination policy is key.

“A lot of agencies have ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ policies,” she says. “If we’re trying to create healthy, functioning families, it’s not healthy for families to keep this secret at the agency. And you won’t have a successful staff training at an agency if you don’t have a specific policy that says, ‘This is our belief, this is our policy.’ Getting it in writing, making it available and being firm about it is important,” she says.

Scheyd also notes that the best way to recruit a family that is likely to last for a child is to recruit from within that child’s network, including extended family and everyone who has come into that child’s life. Child welfare professionals across the country are giving increased recognition to the method of life-cycle recruitment to identify foster care and adoption resources for children and youth who need them. “If a child has an aunt who is a lesbian, agencies need policies in place to make sure they don’t rule her out as a resource because of her sexual orientation,” Scheyd says.

For public agencies in city or county governments, Scheyd says, a memo from the commissioner or head of the family services agency is the mechanism for communicating important agency policies.

Elizabeth Gross, former supervisory social worker in the recruitment unit with the District of Columbia’s Child and Family Services Administration, emphasizes the role a non-discrimination policy can play in recruitment. “We’ve always had a non-discrimination policy that includes sexual orientation,” she says. “Our best recruitment source is word of mouth. The agency has been known as one that doesn’t discriminate, because of the policy, and we’re a jurisdiction in which both parents can adopt. People know that gay and lesbian people have

adopted successfully. That helps recruit other families.”

The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) in the county of Los Angeles also has a client non-discrimination policy that includes sexual orientation and gender identity and gender expression. Diane Wagner, DCFS division chief of the Adoptions and Permanency Resources Division, describes an experience of a gay male couple in Los Angeles County who contacted private and public agencies in their quest to adopt a waiting child.

“In their initial contact with a DCFS representative, the couple was assured that DCFS works with LGBT families, that DCFS policies — which support state laws — prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and that they would be treated fairly,” Wagner says. “As they started the process, they found themselves pleasantly surprised by the diversity of presenters and other attendees at trainings. They said they felt supported by the social worker who completed their homestudy and felt welcomed when they later attended a DCFS adoption fair. After having a child placed with them, they said they also had positive experiences with their child’s social worker. Now, several years after having their adoption finalized, the couple told us they appreciate that DCFS policies and practices are driven by a desire to place children with good parents and we don’t exclude good potential parents based on sexual orientation.”

Non-Discrimination and Private Contractors

Many large public agencies use private contractors to deliver some or most of their adoption and foster care services. These contractors provide services that range from recruitment and conducting home studies to operating group homes for foster youth and matching children with resource families for foster care and adoption. Contracts between the public agencies and these private vendors set service delivery re-

quirements. Changes in public agency policy or procedure need to be reflected in the work of these private contractors to be meaningful for resource families and waiting children.

The ease of altering or amending contracts varies by jurisdiction. Some jurisdictions may have short-term contracts, while others may review and renew contracts only every 10 years. Some contracts include clauses that require contractors to abide by any new policies and procedures enacted by the public agency, while other contracts are more limited in scope.

Leaders in public agencies that use private contractors to deliver services speak about the challenges of ensuring that all contractors abide by non-discrimination policies for LGBT prospective parents and have procedures that reflect that commitment, from recruitment through long-term support after placement or adoption finalization.

“It’s tricky,” says Rudy Estrada, former LGBTQ coordinator for New York City’s Administration for Children’s Services. “There are different approaches and the contracts should allow for creativity and diversity of practice. In the large public child welfare agency context, where services are often contracted out, I recommend being specific in the contract language about the basic expectation to effectively work with LGBT youth and families. But we don’t want to create a system that is focused on using contracts to enforce a specific approach. At Children’s Services, we updated our non-discrimination policy in June 2008 to explicitly include prospective foster and adoptive parents in its coverage, and it clearly states that it applies to provider agencies as well.” Estrada says that while public agency contracts should set a basic standard for private contractors, contractors should still consider developing their own policies that go beyond those standards. “So there is an ability for even large public agencies to continue to develop policies in this area that clarify expecta-


tions, and we should be reinforcing those expectations [through regular communication with contractors], not just every 10 years when we renew contracts.”

In Los Angeles County, the Department of Children and Family Services conducts cooperative placements with private agencies, but public agency employees are assigned to review the homestudies and ensure that they meet the agency’s quality standards. Diane Wagner, DCFS division chief of the Adoptions and Permanency Resources Division, believes using “discussion rather than a hammer” will work best for her agency. “We need to go to the Adoption Consortium of L.A. County agencies and talk about All Children – All Families and what we’re doing to get the word out among private agencies. I’d like to encourage the discussion to get started among peers, rather than mandating it from the agency. And we’re thrilled to have support from the L.A. Gay and Lesbian Center, which has offered to conduct training for agencies in the consortium.”

Another agency leader highlights possible opportunities for some public agencies. Colette Tobias, Office of Resource Families administrator in the New Jersey Department of Children and Families’ Division of Youth and Family Services, says that her agency is moving toward a system of performance-based contracting. During this transition, the agency has a new opportunity to encourage best practices and model policies. “We’re in a better place than ever to encourage agencies to do what we need them to do,” she says. John Levesque, an independent child welfare consultant, echoes those thoughts. “Some states almost exclusively contract out. They can expand their services by using contractors, but they also have oversight responsibilities with those private agencies. The state needs to decide what they want from those private contracted agencies, through performance-based contracting with providers, in terms of

quality and quantity. They need to tighten their internal state communication between the staff that oversees the funding of these contracts and the staff that oversee the outcomes achieved for children and youth.”

Although Alameda County does not contract out its adoption services per se, the public agency does refer to and work cooperatively with private providers. Fredi Juni, child welfare supervisor for the county’s Social Services Agency, Gateways to Permanence Division, notes that the county recently adopted a new policy regarding LGBT youth and resource families. “We have the ability to say, ‘This is our policy, this is our expectation.’ We sent a cover letter with that policy to our partners, written by our director. That reinforces expectations, even if we do not have a structured contract with providers.”

 *Assessment Q2-4 in Governance and Human Resources Management address this topic.*

Samples

The Home for Little Wanderers

“Adoption by GLBT Families”

www.thehome.org/site/PageServer?pagename=adoption_GLBT_families

The Home for Little Wanderers welcomes gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) couples and individuals, regardless of marital status, to be considered as foster and adoptive parents. We recognize and value the unique strengths that GLBT people bring to the process of parenting. We are aware that historically GLBT adults have not always felt welcome to adopt and foster youth; The Home seeks to eliminate systemic barriers while supporting GLBT people in the process of building families.

When it comes to choosing a social service agency, potential parents have many options and The Home for Little Wanderers is proud that our mission and commitment to improv-

ing sensitivity and expertise in working with GLBT families has led to many successful placements over the decades.

New York City Administration for Children’s Services

Non-discrimination policy for youth and families provided by the agency, dated June 20, 2008

“Children’s Services’ policy is not to discriminate based on an individual’s actual or perceived race, color, creed, age, national origin, alienage, citizenship status, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, marital status or partnership status, ethnicity or religion.

“...As professionals working to serve all children, as well as prospective foster or adoptive parents, Children’s Services must provide our youth and families with safe, healthy, and non-discriminatory environments in which to grow and thrive. To achieve this, Children’s Services must be sensitive to the reality that children and families and our prospective foster or adoptive applicants are from diverse cultures and backgrounds.

“...Children’s Services and its provider agency partners must work together to make best efforts that all youth receiving services and prospective foster or adoptive applicants are not subject to discrimination of any kind, including harassment, taunting, excessive teasing, verbal abuse, threats or acts of violence. Children’s Services and provider agency staff are required to investigate incidents that implicate Children’s Services and provider agency staff and report all such incidents to their appropriate supervisor.”

Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services

“Frequently Asked Questions”

Q: Do I have to be married to adopt?

A: No. Single, married, partnered, divorced, widowed or legally separated adults can adopt – regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression.

✓ Executive Leadership

The organization’s executive director is a champion of the organization’s inclusive mission and commitment to working with LGBT adults as adoptive and foster parents while working with the governing body, creating an organizational culture, managing daily operations of the agency and supporting and supervising staff.

B *The executive leadership described below is required for an agency to achieve benchmark 6 in the Benchmarks of LGBT Cultural Competency. Agency leaders should proactively educate and advocate for LGBT-inclusive practice within their own organization, and also among organizational partners, collaborators and contractors.*

Stories from the Field

Leadership in Private Agencies

Executive directors of private adoption agencies and adoption exchanges set the tone for their organizational cultures through working on policy issues with the governing board, hiring and supervising staff, issuing directives, identifying training needs and conducting public and internal communications. Many organizations are quite small, with the executive director having hands-on responsibility for much of the agency’s work. To reflect an organization’s commitment to welcoming all qualified parents, directors should model this inclusive approach in all they do.

Lisa Funaro, executive director of the Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange Inc. (MARE), launched an internal process to examine how the exchange is currently working with LGBT prospective parents and how it can improve.

Funaro created a staff committee that identified three activities for the exchange to enhance its practice: 1) review and revise policies, forms and outreach materials to ensure they are inclusive; 2) deliver comprehensive training to its own staff and to other agencies in the adoption community; and 3) conduct active, intentional recruitment in the LGBT community. While the agency has been working with LGBT families for years, Funaro wanted to ensure that policies and trainings were properly in place — at her exchange and the other agencies she works with — before launching a recruitment campaign.

According to Eleni Carr, senior director of integrated community services at The Home for Little Wanderers in Massachusetts, agency staff members noticed several years ago that many LGBT families had adopted “some of the most difficult-to-place children — they were more willing to accept these kids and, anecdotally, they did really well with these kids.” Noting that success, Carr says the agency thought, “We’re doing something right, let’s keep going.” The agency then opened the only group home in the state — and the third in the country — for LGBT youth. Carr says the CEO and vice president at the time were committed to the group home and were supported by the board of directors.

“Executive leadership is very important if your agency is going to take this step,” Carr says. “LGBT issues can be controversial, and you can get polarized positions. Leaders need to be pretty passionate about it, because if there is a backlash, you have to be able to withstand it.”

Dennis Patrick understands the difference executive leadership can make. After he and his partner decided several years ago that they wanted to become foster parents, they met staff at an agency in Michigan and directly asked if the agency would work with them as a gay couple. The staff assured them that their sexual orientation would not be a barrier to becoming foster parents through the agency. After he and

his partner went through most of the multiple steps involved in becoming foster parents, the agency informed them it would not place any children with them.

The staff members believed it was acceptable to license same-sex couples, Patrick explains, but the executive director, when she learned about their application, insisted it was not permitted. Apparently, the director had not explicitly addressed the issue with her staff until she learned of Patrick’s application. The agency was religiously based, and the director said such an application was against the beliefs of the religion. Patrick and his partner chose another agency.

A social worker at another agency, who asked not to be identified, describes the confusion she and her colleagues face about placement policies at the agency, where the executive director is not supportive of LGBT-headed families. The agency is affiliated with two churches with differing views on adoption by LGBT-headed families. Ten years ago, the licensing rules in the state changed to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation, and the agency instituted a policy of non-discrimination for its potential adoptive parents. The frontline staff members have applied that approach to their work with prospective parents. “We believe that anyone who loves our children and can meet their needs is great for our kids. We assess all families for their strengths and weaknesses, and we match them with children who have similar interests and whose needs can be well met in the home.”

However, the state rules changed again, according to this social worker, allowing faith-based agencies to use discriminatory practices. While the frontline staff and some board members support placing children with all qualified families, the executive director does not. “I am concerned that a mandate to change our practice will come,” the social worker says. “This, to the detriment of many waiting children.”

Adoption Resources of Wisconsin earned the seal even while the state had entered a challenging political climate. “You’re not successful in a state unless you have strong relationships with agencies who respect the quality of your work,” says CEO Colleen Ellingson. “When you do that, they’ll respond to your abilities and strengths. If you build strong relationships regardless of political changes, you can do the work.”

Robyn Harrod, director of adoptions for the Southern California Foster Family and Adoption Agency, a private agency, says the support of the agency’s CEO and president has been instrumental in creating a welcoming agency.

“Our CEO is wonderful and open to anything that will help us find more qualified families for our kids,” she says. “I’ve always been involved with the L.A. Gay and Lesbian Community Center, I’m gay, I have a child and my partner did a second-parent adoption. It was a natural thing, through my connections with the center, to conduct outreach there and welcome non-traditional families. If our CEO wasn’t open to that, it would have been a problem.”

Leaders also have an opportunity to discuss and emphasize the agency’s values and policies to multiple audiences. Adoption Resources of Wisconsin (ARW) successfully sought funding during the George W. Bush administration for a program through the federal Healthy Marriage Initiative that targeted married heterosexual couples.

When the agency announced the grant award in its widely distributed newsletter, CEO Colleen Ellingson says she received many e-mails from disappointed families who wondered what the grant meant for the agency’s inclusive approach. “We have a close relationship with our families,” Ellingson says. “I included in the next newsletter a public apology to 17,000 families.” She assured all families that the agency continued to

work with LGBT families. “We’ve always been inclusive – it’s always been part of our culture,” Ellingson says. She used the discussion about the grant to re-emphasize the organization’s history and ongoing commitment to welcoming LGBT families.

When that federal grant ended, ARW revised the curriculum it developed to make it inclusive of LGBT populations. They added research and book lists, and revised all language. “We worked with the LGBT community center, walking through several segments of the curriculum to get their feedback,” Ellingson says.

Leadership in Public Agencies

Similarly, the executive leadership of public child and family agencies can significantly affect the culture and practices of their agencies. Even in jurisdictions with public policies that support placements with qualified LGBT adults, leadership matters, according to Fredi Juni, child welfare supervisor with the Alameda County (Calif.) Social Services Agency, Gateways to Permanence Division.

“Alameda County has supported LGBT adoption for several years,” she says. “I’ve worked in the adoption program for 19 years. Even in the Bay Area, I’ve seen that having an advocate at the leadership/management level has made quite a difference. If you don’t have an advocate at that level, you may have many welcoming case workers but will still find that some of the major changes just have to come at the senior management level.”

John Levesque is an independent child welfare consultant and formerly ran the adoption program for the state of Maine. He emphasizes the need for top-level support.

“There’s still a lot of anxiety at public agencies,” he says. “There’s not a lot of written policy to specifically support those placements with LGBT families. You need to start with the leadership

and management team to find out their values and beliefs. You need to then look at the research and educate them about ‘the facts’ of LGBT families. And then you need to hear directly from the successful LGBT families — especially older youth who may not have been adopted otherwise.” In this way, frontline staff will know they have the full support of their agency.

The state of Maine had already been placing children with LGBT adults for 30 years, Levesque says, when he headed Maine’s adoption program. The policies talked only about capacity to parent, not type of parent. As part of a broader change initiative and with the support of the management team, Levesque and other foster care and adoption staff “went through the entire policy from beginning to end and removed any language that would be seen as not supportive of placements with LGBT families.” Maine’s Department of Health and Human Services changed its references from “mother and father” to “parent 1 and parent 2” on all the forms and worked to get the management and staff on board.

“To get staff buy-in, they needed to feel like they had some significant input and understood why every change was made,” Levesque says. “As the adoption program manager, I led a workgroup with the adoption and foster care licensing supervisors and adoptive/foster families, and together we worked on the policies and then sent them back to management. People were supportive across the board on the policy change.”

“I really think public agencies should take a leadership role and earn the seal,” says Diane Wagner, Division Chief of Adoption and Permanency Resources, L.A. County Department of Children and Family Services. “They have the jurisdiction over the kids. It’s nice that private agencies are getting the seal, but it sets the tone if the public agencies have done that – it says

that they’re opening the doors and everyone can come forward.”

To encourage and support public agencies, the All Children – All Families initiative hosts a bi-monthly conference call with public agency leaders who are pursuing the seal. Wagner participates in those calls. “I’m willing to talk with any agency going through it,” Wagner says. “We can share resources, non-discrimination statements, and other policies. Why reinvent the wheel?”

Tips

- In jurisdictions with positive and proactive laws related to fairness for LGBT citizens, public agencies can sometimes easily adapt their institutional policies to be more welcoming.
- In jurisdictions that do not address the issue directly, some public agency leaders recommend researching state regulations on service delivery to find incentives for welcoming policies. For example, New Jersey has extensive, positive state law and rulings. It bans employment discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity or expression, allows civil unions between same-sex couples, allows joint adoption by same-sex couples, and allows second-parent adoption. Colette Tobias, of the New Jersey Department of Children and Families, was pleased to learn that the term “gender identity” is included, a policy that offers her institutional support as she advocates other policy changes.

Likewise, Rudy Estrada of New York recommends researching the state regulatory code related to human or social services to find language to support proactive policies. “There are frequently social service laws or regulations that not only prohibit discrimination but also address things like taunting and teasing” or regulations that

talk about harm to children in care, says Estrada. For example, New York State Social Service regulations prohibit any act by an agency “...that would be detrimental to any child in care or families (language or gestures that cause emotional harm or may have a discriminatory effect).”

- National Adoption Center (NAC) Executive Director Ken Mullner recommends seeking foundation and other support as leaders launch efforts to enhance services or improve practices. The NAC conducted a feasibility study in its region to identify underserved groups of families and found that LGBT families still faced barriers in the adoption process. The center then conducted focus groups and an online survey to learn what services would benefit these families in the adoption process. Families requested a family/agency matching service, in which families enter criteria and find agencies most likely to fit their needs. The center is working with a developer to create an online matching system. Great ideas flowed from the feasibility study, says Mullner, “but you need money to implement them.”
- Janice Goldwater of Adoptions Together recommends that agency leaders who want to conduct the self-assessment in this guide share the work with a team. She and her staff conducted the self-assessment, identified work needed to improve policies and earn the seal, then divided that effort into smaller pieces and created a timeline to complete it.
- Jill Jacobs of Family Builders has a related idea. “For leaders who find it overwhelming, team up with somebody — perhaps at another agency or a person who is further along in the process than you are. Buddy up and learn how they got through things. See how you can adapt what they did for your own agency.”

- Paul Davis, director of community-based services at Devereux Arizona, says that agencies in conservative political climates that might worry about pursuing the seal may consider “just quietly doing the work. Instead of bad things, good things will likely happen: people will come to you, you’ll have more families. Then, when you want to take the plunge and earn the seal, and if you meet political resistance, you can point to the positive outcomes that have already happened, and indicate that the repercussions people may fear haven’t come to pass. This may help the decision to proceed.”

Human Resources Management

Human Resources Management Guiding Principle

The organization’s human resources policies and practices create a welcoming environment for all employees and help recruit and retain qualified LGBT employees.

Employment Non-Discrimination Policy

The organization’s personnel policy explicitly prohibits employment discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity to create a work environment that is supportive of productivity, stability and diversity of staff.


B *Employment non-discrimination policies inclusive of both “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” are required to achieve benchmarks 3 and 4 in the Benchmarks of LGBT Cultural Competency.*

Stories from the Field

Eleni Carr of The Home for Little Wanderers in Massachusetts says the decision to work with LGBT communities “becomes a value that an agency must embrace in many venues. Her agency adopted its partnership benefits and

employment non-discrimination policy when it merged with another agency that already had such policies. “The agency said, ‘Let’s do what’s right.’ It meant whether some families would have health insurance,” she says.

Written non-discrimination policies are the foundation for establishing inclusive workplaces. They guarantee equal treatment and opportunity in hiring, promotions and compensation, and they inform prospective employees about the agency’s values.

 **Assessment Q5-7 in Governance and Human Resource Management address this topic.**

Samples

County of Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services

“Non-Discrimination Policy”

All Employees are protected and may file a discrimination complaint if they perceive that they have been discriminated against based on race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, physical disability, mental disability, medical condition, marital status, gender identity, age (persons at least 40 years old), sex (including pregnancy and conduct of a sexual nature), sexual orientation, denial of reasonable accommodation, and Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA).

National Adoption Center

“Equal Employment Opportunity Policy”

The Center promotes equal opportunity for all employees and applicants. In doing so, we comply with local, state, and federal laws and regulations to ensure an equal employment opportunity for everyone.

We don’t discriminate in employment opportunities or practices on the basis of race, ancestry, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, age, disability, citizenship, military service

obligation, veteran status or any other basis protected by federal, state or local laws. Our policies and personnel practices are intended to ensure that all of us are treated equally with regard to recruiting, hiring, and advancement, and our decisions on employment are made to further the principle of equal employment opportunities for employees.

Openly LGBT Staff

As the organization reassesses its work force needs, it will strive to have its employees demographically reflect all the clients served, including LGBT people.

Stories from the Field

Work in the field of adoption and foster parenting touches on intimate and sensitive topics: Many waiting children and youth have experienced abuse or neglect and prospective adoptive or foster parents are facing some of the most important decisions in their lives. The staff members of these agencies often create close and enduring relationships with their clients.

For these reasons, the staff should reflect the diverse communities served by the agency. Having openly LGBT staff members will signal to LGBT prospective parents that they are welcomed and affirmed; it will also ensure that the agency hears the opinions of LGBT people when making decisions or conducting its work.

(Note: All agency staff members should be able to work with all prospective parents; see the next section for details.)

Janice Goldwater of Adoptions Together says the agency has always had an inclusive approach in hiring and has several openly gay staff members and contract employees. The agency seeks to have staff members who are representative of the communities it serves.

Colby Berger, formerly of The Home for Little Wanderers, urges agencies to “hire LGBT staff

Openly LGBT in the Workplace

A survey conducted by Harris Interactive on behalf of Out & Equal Workplace Advocates shows that LGBT employees are increasingly open at work about being LGBT.

- In 2008, only 22 percent of LGBT individuals surveyed agreed strongly or somewhat that it would be very difficult for an employee to be openly LGBT in their workplace. This is down from 31 percent in 2002.
- In 2008, 36 percent of lesbian and gay employees are closeted at work compared to: 44 percent in 2007.

who are out and actively recruit and support LGBT employees and recognize the gifts they can bring to the clients they serve.” She also thinks it is important “to have agency-wide discussions about how LGBT employees can appropriately come out to clients.”

In the field, Berger says, some clinicians may say it is inappropriate for LGBT staff to come out to clients and might argue that it is a boundary issue. “But there is often a double standard around this boundary. Clients tend to know which members of our staff are married in heterosexual relationships, and straight staff are able to reference their partners and kids, whereas the LGBT staff are expected to remain silent and invisible. LGBT employees can be out to clients and simultaneously maintain appropriate boundaries just as heterosexual staff can.” Berger believes agencies should set clear and consistent policies that apply equally to LGBT and non-LGBT employees.

✓ Recruitment and Selection

As the organization recruits and hires employees, it will ensure that all employees have

the necessary skills to work with all clients and stakeholders, including the LGBT community. The organization will inform potential employees about its commitment to working with LGBT adoptive and foster parents; the agency will question candidates about their experience and comfort level in working with LGBT parents.

Stories from the Field

Staff members of welcoming agencies must support the organization’s philosophy and have the skills, comfort and competence to work with all of the agency’s clients.

Jill Jacobs of Family Builders says her agency asks all job applicants how they feel about single parents, LGBT families and transracial adoptions. Clinical staff should be able to talk about their experiences working with all families.

Janice Goldwater of Adoptions Together says the agency explores a job applicant’s ability to work well with all of the agency’s clients and to support its institutional values. “People have to be comfortable, it can’t just be lip service,” she says.

Goldwater believes most job applicants already understand her agency’s approach to adoption before speaking with her or colleagues. “The Internet is a powerful way to illustrate who you are,” she says. One applicant sought work at Adoptions Together because she came from an agency that was not inclusive; it was the job applicant who grilled the agency on its policies in working with nontraditional families. “We talked a lot about how we handle families and our approach and philosophy.”

Elizabeth Gross, formerly of the D.C. Child and Family Services Agency, says two human resources attributes of the agency help improve its ability to recruit families. First, it has a stable work force with several longtime employees working on the recruitment team. The lack of turnover helps the agency focus on its recruit

Food for Thought: Workplace Climate

After a full day of ACAF training for a public child welfare agency, Ellen Kahn, HRC Family Project director, was packing up her materials when an agency staff member approached her and spoke very quietly. “She shared that she had worked at this agency for over 20 years and has never felt safe coming out as a lesbian,” explains Kahn. “She gave examples of anti-gay comments she has heard from her colleagues, including one who said ‘anybody who places children with those people will go to hell.’ To make matters worse, she and her partner have fostered several children and youth over the years including many with significant health problems, and they have not been recognized as a couple and as a capable, loving, lesbian-headed family. This was particularly shocking to me given that the jurisdiction has some of the best laws in the country with regard to the LGBT community—marriage, comprehensive non-discrimination and joint adoption—yet the insular agency climate is still very homophobic. The fact that this highly valuable and dedicated employee needs to be ‘closeted’ suggests that it’s not going to be safe for clients, youth and other staff members to be out and to advocate effectively for inclusion.”

ment efforts. When it does hire new employees, she says, the agency asks applicants about their comfort in working with diverse families, including transracial families and those headed by LGBT parents. In seeking employees to do recruitment, the agency informs candidates that they might need to work at LGBT pride events and asks about their comfort with that work.

The Southern California Foster Family and Adoption Agency similarly probes job applicants about their experiences and abilities in serving

diverse adoptive families, including single people and same-sex couples.

Bellefaire JCB incorporates discussion about attitudes toward LGBT families when interviewing any potential staff member in the adoption department. “Our organization doesn’t discriminate,” Beth Brindo says. “It would be an expectation of their job that they be able to work with all families. Our commitment is to the families and kids, and we need social workers who can work with diverse families.”

Tips

- Jill Jacobs of Family Builders recommends that agencies seek real answers and experiences from applicants. To a clinical staff applicant, for example, she might say, “Tell me about your experience working with gay families.” Listen for the candidate’s ability to offer substantive and meaningful answers.
- “When recruiting for any staff positions, include your inclusive non-discrimination language in the ads, on your website, and anywhere you post your employment opportunities,” says Ann McCabe, former program director of the National Adoption Center.

Sample

Adoptions Together

“Staff Member Code of Ethics,” provided by the agency:

I, _____, a member of the staff of Adoptions Together Inc., affirm that in the course of my employment: I will not discriminate against or refuse professional services to anyone on the basis of race, color, creed, age, gender, religion, nationality, sexual orientation or gender identity.

Evaluation and Feedback

Evaluation and Feedback Guiding Principle

In its commitment to high performance and quality services, the organization puts in place systems to capture information about the sexual orientation and gender identity of its service recipients so that it can identify its clients and potential clients, analyze changes in the demographic profile of its clients and learn about the satisfaction, retention, placement and disruption rates related to LGBT foster and adoptive parents. The organization will analyze data related to LGBT clients and potential clients, communicate those results to relevant stakeholders and create and implement plans to improve service delivery and client outcomes wherever needed.

✓ Gathering and Using Data

The organization will gather and use data about sexual orientation and gender identity of clients for performance and quality improvement purposes.

Nearly all foster care and adoption service providers collect and routinely analyze data for the purposes of reporting outcomes to funders and community stakeholders and for tracking progress toward the agency's strategic goals and priorities. While certain demographic information is required in data collection, e.g. race/ethnicity, marital status or gender, in the vast majority of data collection tools and systems there is no requirement or capacity to indicate that a prospective foster/adoptive parent is a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender individual or part of a same-sex couple. As a result, there is very little accurate tracking and reporting regarding recruitment, licensing, placement and longer-term outcomes with LGBT resource families, and many agencies rely solely on anecdotal "data." For agencies to establish a baseline measure and monitor the quality and quantity

of work over time with LGBT clients, innovative approaches to collecting this information will be required.

Ideally, data collection begins at the first contact, whether it's a phone call in response to a recruitment ad or an email that comes through your website. By "counting" LGBT inquiries early on, you can identify which of your outreach activities or public relations approaches are effective with the LGBT audience, and you can track the retention of those families as they move through the process.

Consider data collection in any and all of these program areas and processes that apply for your agency:

- Recruitment/Outreach Activities (on-site and off-site)
- Intake Call
- Orientation Meetings
- Application Forms
- Homestudy Forms
- (Past/Present) Client Consumer Surveys

It can be daunting for many agencies to imagine modifying or updating their computer software or making significant changes to their internal, well-established manual data collection protocols. There are relatively simple and low or no cost approaches to creating a data collection system that captures information about LGBT clients and families. For example, you can create an Excel spreadsheet to use as a supplement to your current data collection tools, which can capture information on sexual orientation and gender identity of applicants and clients.

Stories from the Field

Family Builders knows it has a high percentage of families headed by LGBT people. "In the process of doing a comprehensive homestudy, you learn the sexual orientation and gender identity of your families. Therefore, these are easy data to collect," says Jill Jacobs.

Family Builders captures information about family structure during intake and comprehensive homestudies. Barbara Turan, the agency's associate director, explains that "information about prospective adoptive parents is entered into the agency's client database in the very beginning of the process, when we first have face-to-face contact with a family."

The agency's client database includes a "family type" field and uses labels to identify specific family structures. For example, the agency uses MM for two male heads of household, FF for two female heads of households, SMG for single male gay household and SMH for single male heterosexual household.

The agency includes an open-ended category for gender identity on intake forms.

"If you want to evaluate recruitment and outreach, you want this information in your database so you can track it," says Jacobs. "After you do a splashy media campaign, you can learn – Who called? Who came to orientation? Who completed a homestudy? Who got certified? Who had a child placed with them?"

While information about sexual orientation or gender identity may not be known until a homestudy is completed, having information about sexual orientation and gender identity allows the agency to retrospectively look at what worked for recruiting LGBT resource families, and retaining them.

Family Builders uses this information for multiple internal purposes, Turan says, including making reports to its board of directors, writing grant proposals and monitoring trends among clients.

"One of the trends we were able to identify is that among our single adoptive moms, about half are heterosexuals and half are lesbians, but among our single adoptive dads, the vast majority are gay," Turan says. "This can help us both


in terms of targeting recruitment efforts to engage single heterosexual men who might be interested in adoption and to ensure that our supportive services are addressing the needs of single gay dads. We can also use our data to assess how many people go all the way through the process to finalization and whether there are any differences among straight versus gay families."

The Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange recently overhauled its massive database. "The system gathers data about inquiries, it registers families, it includes information about the children," says Executive Director Lisa Funaro. "Now it includes clear demographic information about all callers, families and kids. We can say how many gay and lesbian couples we have that are registered and looking for kids under age 12. We never had any way of tracking this information before because we never asked the questions. ...And it's an important piece of the work we do. We're training staff to ask these questions; then we'll have the data to see if we're doing a good job."

The National Adoption Center is implementing an automatic tracking system as part of its effort to improve its services and collect evidence about the agencies to which it refers families. "If an LGBT family has a bad experience with an agency, they might not call anyone to complain, because they just think that's the way it is," says Gloria Hochman, director of communications. "We want that to change."

"If LGBT families provide us with information about agencies, it benefits everybody," says Christine Jacobs, program director at the center. "Families will be more informed about specific agencies and we'll be more informed [as we make referrals]. We're aware, anecdotally, of welcoming agencies — but we'd like evidence. Which are working well with LGBT families? Which give a strong welcome, and not just acceptance, when a family does a homestudy with

them?” The center hopes that agencies will want to improve their reputation and ranking.

 *Assessment questions 1-2 in Evaluation and Feedback address this topic.*

Tips

- “Agencies that place all kinds of children could use the data to look at ‘types’ of children placed with heterosexual couples, gay couples, singles, etc., to determine if there is more willingness among certain populations to have more challenging children placed with them,” says Barbara Turan of Family Builders.
- “Be sure your clients know that your agency collects information from all clients including sexual orientation and gender identity. Also make sure that this information isn’t collected based on a staff person’s assumptions or perceptions, but rather by voluntary reporting on the part of the clients,” says Ann McCabe, former program director of the National Adoption Center.
- Agencies that collect sexual orientation and gender identity information along with the dates resource families complete their home study, had a child placed with them and attained a finalized adoption are in a much better position to discover any unnecessary patterns of placement refusals or delays that may be taking place within the agency.

Protecting Data/Privacy Issues

The organization will protect data from disclosure beyond that which is necessary for child placement. The limitations of protection of private information should be fully understood by the prospective adoptive family.

Stories from the Field

The adoption and foster care processes generally involve multiple organizations accessing and sharing personal information about prospective parents, most of which is included in the home-study materials. Sharing this information is a best and necessary practice and creates limits to the confidentiality of information gathered during the process.

“Once the information is shared with another agency, our agency no longer has complete control over the confidentiality of the family’s LGBT status or any other personal or demographic information,” Turan explains. “The agencies representing children who need to be placed will have access to this information, and in many cases the profiles of the prospective adoptive parents are made widely available to other agencies in order to enhance matching opportunities.”

“I think agency staff members need to be very clear about the reality of information sharing and be sure that their clients are very clear about this, too,” she says. “If a prospective LGBT parent can’t agree to this level of information sharing, they probably won’t be able to tolerate the process. In psychological best practices terms, we believe openness is essential to ensuring the best environment for children. It is important for parents to model self-acceptance and honesty, particularly for children who may feel their own sense of stigma because they have been in foster care. Within private agencies, particularly those who are placing infants via private adoption, they may be able to limit the disclosure of information to a smaller audience, but that is certainly not the case with placement of children who are in the care of the child welfare system.”

“Agencies should inform prospective parents about the process and how information is shared,” Turan recommends. “We can’t go to

great lengths to protect client information, because printed copies of the homestudies go out to other agencies and profiles of the couple or individual are usually placed on a secured website that can be accessed by many child welfare agencies.”

Client Rights

Client Rights Guiding Principle

The organization will at all times respect the rights and dignity of all clients, including LGBT clients, and will ensure a welcoming and informed experience for these clients.

✓ Protection of Rights and Ethical Obligations

The organization informs all clients of their rights and responsibilities and gives all clients, including LGBT clients, sufficient information so that they can make informed decisions about using the agency’s services.

Stories from the Field

Organizational leaders should ensure that all staff members understand the agency’s inclusive approach and can accurately describe and reflect this philosophy to their clients. Agencies that say they welcome all families should welcome all families. If an agency opposes placing children and youth with any LGBT-headed family, regardless of a family’s qualifications, the agency and all its staff members should communicate this to all clients. If an agency accepts applications from LGBT families but knows that actual placements are limited or delayed, it should similarly communicate this to its clients.

Toni Oliver, formerly of ROOTS Inc., says that some LGBT individuals and couples have asked her directly whether it made sense for them to begin the process and what the likelihood was of their being able to adopt. She says the agency described the entire process to these clients and

assures them that no one at ROOTS would judge their ability to parent based solely on their sexual orientation. However, she also told them that other agencies or individuals involved in the process may feel differently and, as a result, refuse to place children with them, and in some cases state law may prevent them from adopting. “We’ll remain your advocates,” Oliver told the clients, “but you may face those situations.”

As described earlier, Dennis Patrick and his partner decided they wanted to become foster parents and approached an agency, informing staff at the initial meeting that they were a couple and intended to foster together. The couple then went through the multiple steps involved in becoming foster parents and were preparing for the homestudy when the agency’s executive director told them the agency would not place any children with them. The agency clearly failed its ethical obligation to offer sufficient information to prospective clients.

✓ Grievance Procedures

The organization’s grievance procedure for clients functions appropriately as a mechanism for LGBT clients, potential clients and other stakeholders to express and resolve grievances.

Stories from the Field

Ann McCabe, former program director of the National Adoption Center, reports that calls come into the center from LGBT prospective parents about agencies that say they are open to all families but do not actually welcome them in practice. Families are not inclined to file any grievance for fear that this may further hamper their chances to get through an already complicated adoption process.

Agency staff members “are people making a decision about the placement of a child you want to become a parent to,” McCabe explains. “This is a historic problem in adoption. You don’t ask

questions because that could be seen as a judgment. You need these people. It's a vulnerability that parents are feeling, especially if they're infertile or in the LGBT community. ... Clients rarely use the grievance process. They typically drop out of the process or find another agency. Or, they may buckle under, stay in the process with them, feeling uncomfortable the whole time."

Dennis Patrick didn't use the grievance process at the first agency to protest the unethical treatment he and his partner received. "We just wanted to become foster parents," he explains. "We decided we could do it more quickly by switching to another agency that was more welcoming than by fighting that first agency. And I didn't think there was any chance of change."

Agencies that intend to welcome LGBT clients should review their grievance procedures and ensure that they function properly as a way for clients to express and resolve problems. Even high-performing agencies may engage in practices that unintentionally alienate qualified families — the grievance process is an important avenue to improve organizational practice.

? *Assessment question 6 in Evaluation and Feedback addresses this topic.*

Tips

- Be explicit with LGBT clients regarding your established grievance process and encourage them to share any concerns or issues that arise, particularly because that can help your agency identify and address discriminatory or insensitive treatment by staff or volunteers.
- If possible, identify a staff person to serve as an ombudsman or liaison to the LGBT community and have that person routinely "check in" with LGBT clients to monitor their experience.

Staff Training

Staff Training Guiding Principle

Because proper training is a key element in the creation of a competent staff, the organization will fully incorporate competencies related to LGBT clients in its staff training. Training will build and enhance core competencies so that the agency is known as one that not only welcomes LGBT adoptive and foster parents but in fact embraces and affirms them.

B *All staff must receive appropriate training to work effectively and competently with LGBT clients for an agency to achieve benchmark 5 in the Benchmarks of LGBT Cultural Competency.*

✓ Training Approach

The organization's training program offers all incoming and current staff the information and skills they need to provide culturally competent services to LGBT adoptive and foster parents.

Stories from the Field

Gary Mallon of the Hunter School of Social Work says he is surprised to be working so long on this topic in the field of child welfare and to still encounter social workers "who say the most ignorant, homophobic things and they think they are really hip on this issue."

Mallon says that many social workers in the field not only are unskilled in working with LGBT families but are not even comfortable talking about LGBT issues. "There is basic language you need to be able to say comfortably: 'lesbian,' 'coming out.' These are basic terms people need to be able to speak and be comfortable with. I've had some staff say 'transvestite' when the correct term is 'transgender person.' It's essential that they have the ability to say these words comfortably."

Since the first edition of this guide was released in 2007, agencies have frequently requested training assistance and referrals from the All Children – All Families initiative. To meet that need, the initiative has developed a four-part training curriculum that can be tailored to meet the specific needs of an individual agency.

The initial sessions are intended for all staff members, while the later sessions are designed for staff members and managers responsible for delivering specific services (see All Children – All Families Training Curriculum).

“In some places in the country, an agency can partner with other local organizations or they can work with other agencies to piece together a training,” says Karey Scheyd, a foster care and adoption consultant who helped develop the curriculum. “But this knowledge base isn’t available everywhere.”

“We have a wealth of knowledge on the All Children – All Families Advisory Council,” Scheyd explains. “It was an opportunity to put together a training we think can fill the needs of agencies, but also a curriculum that would define what we think is the gold standard for a comprehensive training. If people want to create the equivalent for themselves, they can see what they’re trying to match.”

The training series is customizable. “We realize that every agency will be different — in what it’s done before, what it’s facing today, and what it ultimately needs,” Scheyd says. “Not every agency provides the same services or has the same resources, or has the same ability to pull large groups of people together at once for training. Many factors affect an agency’s ability to offer training. We created this curriculum in modules so agencies could have the most flexibility on how to offer it to staff.”

Scheyd acknowledges that agency leaders frequently are told that “they need to be trained in this and then in that, and there’s some new

trend they need to stay on top of. We’re very sensitive to that. But this is not a trend. I believe that competency in dealing with this community will become fundamental to the practice of child welfare. It’s not extra or frivolous.”

The National Adoption Center sought the All Children – All Families training for all staff before it launched a new LGBT outreach initiative and as it was working to earn the seal. “We welcomed the opportunity to revisit our policies to make sure that they were inclusive and used sensitive and correct language,” says Christine Jacobs of the center. “We gained knowledge about state laws concerning adoption and foster care for members of the LGBT community. We already used best practices in our written forms for families, and we also used images and stories in our materials and on our website.”

“We had made contacts in the region within the LGBT community, but the training helped us to formulate the plan for a new recruitment outreach,” says Jacobs. “We felt more confident that we were prepared to speak with the community members.”

“There was an honest sharing of information and a non-judgmental attitude from the trainers, which helped to put the staff at ease,” she says. “Some staff came with more information and background than others, but all were accepted and welcomed to share their thoughts and feelings.”

To achieve the benchmarks and earn the seal, the Midwest Foster Care and Adoption Association (MFCAA) worked with All Children – All Families trainers to develop a meaningful professional development experience for their staff members, but also the larger community. “My staff already knew my expectations,” says Executive Director Lori Ross, “although they could use the training to help them think of new things. But I wanted to help these families interact with the larger community beyond our

agency – with those who will place children in their homes and decide if they are an appropriate resource for kids.” She reached out to the state agency and the leader of a private child placing agency in the Kansas City area and asked for their commitment to send staff members to the training. About 70 staff members attended the very successful training.

Toni Oliver, formerly of ROOTS Inc., says she sought the training for her agency to share what she was learning through her involvement on the All Children – All Families Advisory Council.

Oliver identified the following as key lessons from the training: “Understanding various presentations of gender identity, understanding appropriate LGBT terminology and definitions, identification of one’s own biases, and identification of how and when they were developed and the impact of those biases.”

Oliver says the training improved the agency’s competency and skills “tremendously.” After the training, the agency added gender identity to its non-discrimination policy statement, revised its application to incorporate “applicant 1” and “applicant 2” sections and requested its web designer to include photos of two moms and two dads when the website is upgraded. Oliver says the training also “informed subject areas to include in the homestudy interview and written narrative.”

“All agencies and programs that are interested in becoming more welcoming to existing and prospective LGBT foster and adoptive parents should seriously consider this training for personal and organizational competency and to identify areas of needed improvement,” Oliver says.

Hillside Children’s Center’s Adoption Services has long been welcoming of LGBT individuals and couples. However, the agency had not integrated that philosophy or communicated that welcoming attitude and practice throughout the

entire agency, says Lisa D. Maynard, director of adoptions.

“Our investment in training staff and the implementation of the *promising practices* developed by All Children – All Families has helped us to increase Hillside’s cultural competency,” Maynard says. “A direct result has been an increase of our pool of adoptive parents ready and willing to adopt U.S. waiting children.”

Lilliput Children’s Services, which serves Northern California, conducts in-house staff training on an as-needed basis because the agency has many long-term staff members and little turnover. When turnover occurs, the agency provides the training (which lasts between one-and-a-half to three hours) to all new staff, says Donna Ibbotson, a trainer and licensed clinical social worker formerly of Lilliput Children’s Services.

The training builds skills so staff can work competently with LGBT prospective parents from recruitment through adoption finalization. It debunks myths about children raised by LGBT parents, discusses current research on these families and issues that LGBT parents face, and highlights issues to address in homestudy interviews that might otherwise be overlooked (see section on Homestudy/Family Assessment Practice for more information).

The training offers appropriate terminology to use, and discourages staff from automatically asking clients about husbands and wives. Staff members learn about local LGBT resources and where to refer LGBT clients for legal services.

Ibbotson encourages social workers in the trainings “to check in with their personal biases and beliefs and [learn] how to keep those in check or how to get counseling or consultation.” The training usually prompts many questions and productive discussions, she says.

Bellefaire JCB hired a trainer to deliver a multi-day training on LGBT cultural competence to

case managers, social workers and any other staff who have contact with clients. The trainer led several half-day seminars with staff in the foster care and adoption division. According to Beth Brindo, the trainer made participants feel comfortable “asking about anything they ever wanted to know but were afraid to ask.” The training addressed myths and featured an adult who grew up in an LGBT-headed family.

Brindo notes that initially the training was comprehensive on gay and lesbian issues and later added bisexual and transgender topics. The organization — which has more than 500 staff members and offers multiple services, including school programs and residential care — also delivers annual training on working with LGBT populations to all staff.

Gary Mallon urges that supervisors, agency administrators and all top-line staff participate fully in these trainings. “Some of these executives, administrators and supervisors can’t say the words ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian,’” Mallon says. “How will they be able to support their staff or their families? Leaders need to attend if they say an agency is committed to this work. That’s part of the work, too.”

Many large public agencies have limitations on what training they can require of all line staff. Alameda County Social Services Agency provided mandatory training to all managers, and has offered several rounds of voluntary training to increase the opportunities for line staff to receive training throughout the year. To reach more staff, Child Welfare Supervisor Fredi Juni says the agency is getting creative, offering learning opportunities through combined unit meetings with facilitated discussions.

The Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE) is conducting comprehensive training as one component in its three-part effort to enhance its services to LGBT families — after conducting a review of all policies and pro-

cedures and before launching an active recruitment campaign.


“We created a three-part training curriculum,” says Executive Director Lisa Funaro. The first session was a four-hour in-service training for staff only, focused on sensitivity, organizational culture and values. It was mandatory for all staff. The second training is another half-day session for staff, with a focus on services. “We’ll evaluate our role with LGBT families as it relates to MARE services. A board member representative will attend that training — the chair of the program committee,” Funaro says. The exchange hopes to then create a plan for how to involve other partners in the adoption community (including the state’s Department of Children and Families) in a third training session.

Denise Goodman is an independent trainer and consultant who also trains agencies nationwide through the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Family to Family initiative on foster care. She began conducting agency trainings on LGBT families in Ohio more than 15 years ago after a state Supreme Court ruling let stand an adoption by a gay man. After interviewing families and agency staff and conducting research, she created a curriculum that has evolved into a one-day training on LGBT families and a one-day training on LGBT youth in care. Much of the training focuses on the homestudy process.

“I recognize the fact that many people in the field have not had any formalized education on LGBT issues,” she says. “I have a Ph.D. and a master’s in social work, and I didn’t have a single class that addressed this.”

“LGB competence doesn’t necessarily mean T competence,” says foster parent Elijah Nealy. “If an agency wants to reach out to trans parents, do some homework on trans competence first. Sometimes agencies dive into recruiting without doing their own homework first. Check your language, look at your vocabulary.” Nealy notes

that even among agencies with welcoming leadership, “I don’t trust that all the staff members there know what it means that I’m a transgender man. If agencies are going to do outreach, do that training first.” (See Resources section for article “The Transgender Community and Adoption and Foster Care” for more.)

 *Assessment questions 1-2 in Staff Training Approach address this topic.*

Tips

- Embed content related to LGBT prospective parents into your existing staff training — add case examples of such parents; add handouts related to LGBT families.
 - Ensure trainers are competent and experienced in working with LGBT families.
 - Require all staff — not just social workers — to receive some training in culturally competent treatment of LGBT families. Include licensing and placement staff in all intensive trainings; administrative and other staff should have skills to welcome all clients and treat them with dignity;
- agency leaders and supervisors should model cultural competency and be prepared to support and guide their staff’s developing competencies.
- Al Toney, a diversity trainer and consultant, recommends that any training address transgender issues directly and somewhat separately, so that the unique circumstances of transgender adults and youth do not get lost in a general discussion of sexual orientation.
 - Diane Wagner recommends that agencies contact a local LGBT community center to find out if it offers relevant trainings. She also recommends that agencies augment such training with an experienced and competent social worker, from within the agency or from a collaborating organization. “Where the center could train generally, they couldn’t train in conducting a homestudy or in adoptive placement issues,” she says.

Story of a Seal Earning: New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services, Department of Children and Families



New Jersey is the first in the country to have its statewide public agency earn the Seal of Recognition. The Department of Children and Families in the Division of Youth and Family Services began its work to earn the seal soon after it learned of the All Children – All Families initiative in 2008.

“I was very excited about it, and shared the information with my staff and administrators,” says Colette Tobias, now the administrator for the Division of Youth and Family Services.

A committee focused on LGBT youth issues was working on reform within the agency and served as a resource to complete the agency self-assessment. With support from top leadership, the committee signed the Pledge of Commitment in a ceremony and launched its effort to achieve the benchmarks.

“The Pledge was a tangible way to show our commitment,” says Tobias. “It sparked excitement.”

Tobias says they were pleasantly surprised at the level of inclusiveness already evident in forms and trainings. They needed to make some changes to the Structured Analysis Family Evaluation (SAFE) template for homestudies and some changes to applications. They learned that their best trainers were already incorporating LGBT youth and family issues into the Parent Resources for Information, Development and Education (PRIDE) training, so the agency made system-wide enhancements based on their own best trainers and with assistance from All Children – All Families.

They also made changes to their recruitment materials, which did not include many photos of families. “We did some research and learned that photos of families rather than just children are more effective, so we added photos of all kinds of families, including a family with gay dads,” Tobias says. “Our staff went out and took the pictures.”

“Our biggest accomplishment was the training,” says Tobias. During one week in October 2011, the agency trained more than 600 staff members and resource families.

“We had a really overwhelming response – it was so well received,” Tobias explains. “We were lucky to be able to have it and it reinforced the good work our staff is already doing. I don’t think I’ve ever gotten such good comments back as I did for this training. It was amazing.”

The training began with leadership, then moved on to area directors and local office managers.

✓ Competencies

Training covering the core competencies below will increase the ability of an organization's staff members to understand LGBT clients and will include issues of cultural identity, family formation and development, family law and more.

The training should ensure that participants will:

- Be aware of their own beliefs, values and assumptions in relation to LGBT people, and will recognize how their interaction with LGBT people affects their ability to fulfill their professional roles.
- Be comfortable with appropriate terminology relating to the LGBT community, and will understand the concepts of coming out, heterosexism/homophobia and gender identity or gender expression.
- Have accurate information about LGBT people and be able to distinguish common myths and stereotypes from facts.
- Be knowledgeable about how to interact with LGBT individuals in an affirming, welcoming manner.
- Be knowledgeable about laws relating to LGBT adoption and foster placements in relevant jurisdictions.
- Develop empathy toward LGBT parents and will understand the value of LGBT families in serving children and youth in the foster care system.
- Have accurate information about LGBT parents and their children — predicated on evidenced-based research — and therefore will be able to distinguish common myths and stereotypes from facts.
- Know concrete steps they can take to create affirming environments for LGBT foster and adoptive parents.
- Feel prepared to adapt their parent recruitment practices to be more inclusive of LGBT families.
- Understand the value of actively engaging their local LGBT community as partners in finding and providing qualified, loving foster and adoptive homes for children who need them.
- Develop comfort and competency in assessing LGBT prospective parents, utilizing criteria that are warranted, appropriate and grounded in a solid understanding of the realities and experiences affecting LGBT families.
- Develop strategies for eliminating bias against LGBT parents in the child-matching process, and will identify ways to support LGBT families while they search and are selected for the right children to join their family.
- Feel confident in their abilities to present LGBT parents to children in a strengths-based and age-appropriate manner, and to help children manage any questions and challenges that arise from being a part of an LGBT family.
- Understand the challenges that LGBT adoptive families may encounter at various stages of their family life.
- Explore the intersection of LGBT issues and other issues facing adoptive families.
- Learn how to be allies for LGBT families as they interact with birth families, other foster/adoptive families, schools and service providers related to the children placed in their homes.
- Be knowledgeable about the resources, tools and skills needed to support LGBT families throughout their case and post-adoption.

? *Assessment Q1-2 in Staff Training Approach address this topic.*

All Children – All Families Training Curriculum

The training component of the All Children – All Families initiative is Benchmark 5 in the 10 Benchmarks of LGBT Cultural Competency. There are four training modules in Benchmark 5. Each module provides an interactive and dynamic training appropriate for a full spectrum of adult learners.

Module 1

Basic LGBT Competence for Foster Care and Adoption Agencies

Purpose: Module 1 introduces child welfare professionals to accurate and current information about gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals. Agencies that wish to build an effective and affirming practice with LGBT clients must achieve, at the very least, basic competency with the community. Module 1 covers the fundamental terminology, facts and concepts that agency staff must know to build an informed and sensitive practice.

Length: 3.5 hours. **Intended Audience:** All staff members. **Prerequisites:** None.

Module 2

Foundations of Effective Practice with LGBT Parents

Purpose: The second session in the training series builds upon basic knowledge of the LGBT community and develops a specialized understanding of LGBT-headed families. Participants learn about LGBT family demographics and research, their legal landscape and what makes them similar to and unique from non-LGBT families. Module 2 includes firsthand accounts of LGBT parents and their children.

Length: 3.5 hours. **Intended Audience:** All staff members. **Prerequisites:** Module 1 (or equivalent).

Module 3

Rolling Out the Welcome Mat – Establishing Agency Communications, Spaces and Recruitment Practices That Embrace LGBT Families

Purpose: Module 3 covers the steps all agencies need to take in order to create welcoming environments for LGBT prospective foster and adoptive parents. Professionals use the knowledge they acquired in Modules 1 and 2 to thoroughly examine the messages they convey to potential and current LGBT clients – through agency communications, policies, literature and behavior. Trainers offer concrete suggestions on how to be more welcoming to LGBT applicants while providing extra attention for agencies in development of parent recruitment strategies.

Length: 4 hours. **Intended Audience:** Managers, staff responsible for parent recruitment, training or licensing, marketing/outreach or any others who interact with LGBT parents at early stages of the process. **Prerequisites:** Module 1 and Module 2 (or equivalents).

Module 4

Conducting Home Assessments and Child Matching with LGBT Parents

Purpose: Module 4 covers what many describe as the most challenging aspect of working with prospective LGBT parents. Participants have a chance to explore their own feelings and readiness to evaluate and certify LGBT parents. Trainers provide specific practice suggestions for how to conduct non-biased, LGBT-competent home assessments. This session concludes with navigating challenges and pitfalls in the process of matching LGBT parents with children. Trainers encourage participants to confront the ways in which personal beliefs, societal attitudes and discriminatory policies impede successful work with LGBT foster and adoptive clients.

Length: 5 hours. **Intended Audience:** Staff members who are involved with any aspect of family assessment or child placement. **Prerequisites:** Module 1 and Module 2 (or equivalents).

Module 5

Understanding and Supporting LGBTQ Youth

Purpose: In Module 5, participants learn a wide array of important aspects of LGBTQ youth, including developmental trajectories, typical and atypical behaviors, the importance of both the coming out process and others' reactions to coming out, understanding/addressing risk factors, supporting transgender youth across the gender spectrum, legal rights, promoting healthy spiritual development and identifying the key factors to help youth thrive! While highly interactive, this training also provides the latest, and strongest empirical research on LGBTQ youth.

Length: 7.5-8 hours. **Intended Audience:** Staff members who occasionally or regularly interact with young people in care, including any youth whose sexual orientation, gender identity and/or gender expression make them more vulnerable while in care. **Prerequisite:** Module 1 (or equivalent).

To Learn More About All Children – All Families Training Curriculum:

Contact Dr. A. Chris Downs, Training Manager, All Children – All Families
202-251-5075 | cdowns@downsconsultinggroup.com
www.downsconsultinggroup.com



Adoption and Foster Care Services

Adoption and Foster Care Services Guiding Principle

The organization will deliver all services in a manner that is thoughtful and inclusive of LGBT prospective and current adoptive and foster parents. Services will affirm and support the abilities of LGBT-headed families.

The following pages include discussion of promising practices in recruitment of adoptive and foster families, organizational atmosphere, homestudy/family assessment, placement, adoption finalization and post-permanency support.

Recruitment of Adoptive and Foster Families

Recruitment Guiding Principle

The organization's program to recruit adoptive and foster parents actively identifies, communicates with and recruits from multiple LGBT communities to ensure a sufficient number of qualified and appropriate families for children and youth awaiting adoption or foster homes. The agency will work in partnership with LGBT institutions to maximize its ability to connect with these prospective parents.

The sections below describe several approaches to active recruitment of LGBT prospective families. The All Children – All Families training curriculum's Module 3 addresses parent recruitment strategies.

Intentional Outreach

The organization will specifically target multiple LGBT communities in all of its efforts to reach and recruit prospective parents.

Stories from the Field

Family Focus Adoption Services had worked with LGBT adoptive parents for years, before launching a three-year targeted recruitment campaign to reach more LGBT prospective parents.

"I did have an 'ah-ha' moment," Maris Blechner says. "I thought, 'We have these specific, great families [who were LGBT], there must be others, and nobody else has gone after them — I can get them first!'

"We've always been open and welcoming to any family that wants to adopt the kids we have," Blechner explains. "But I realized that two of the most difficult kids we ever placed were placed with a gay male couple, and we also placed other really challenging kids with two women."

“I realized that being inclusive was not enough; being welcoming was not enough. So I launched this new campaign.” Blechner was unable to secure any corporate donations for the campaign, so she raised money from supportive LGBT families. She hired a part-time staff person to lead the effort — a lesbian adoptive mother who knows the LGBT community well. Blechner also recruited an advisory board of LGBT leaders to guide the campaign.

“For me, the biggest change was the opening up of places to look, looking at friends in the gay community, affinity groups like Rainbow Families, professional associations,” she says. “My first step was to assemble a database of people who need to know we exist as an agency. Next, I’ll have a meeting in the LGBT community center, contact all these groups and get them to bring their people to a meeting. It’s a learning experience, just like it would be for any other new campaign.”

Blechner also describes the little changes the agency made when it decided to recruit more actively from the LGBT community.

“One staff member recommended that if we’re going to do community events, we need some sort of rainbow ‘something,’” she says. “We bought rainbow pens. It was his contention that people will see rainbow pens, and it will have meaning to [LGBT] people. It’s like everything else — you learn from the people who know.”

Blechner’s goal for the campaign was to place 10 older children within a year with LGBT families. Over the course of the three-year effort, Blechner hoped “the gay community of New York state would know that if they want to adopt, we’re the agency for their families.

“This is a country that believes very strongly in the blood tie,” Blechner adds. “Anyone who works in adoption has to be passionate, patient and always looking for more ways to recruit families.”

Numerous opportunities exist for targeted outreach to the LGBT community, often through methods agencies use to reach other prospective parents. Agencies can add and incorporate LGBT audiences into current outreach plans to welcome all families. If an agency generally attends some public cultural events, it can add events with LGBT audiences, such as LGBT pride festivals. Ann McCabe says that at a Philadelphia PrideFest, she and other staff from the National Adoption Center answered hundreds of questions and generated active interest in an adoption orientation session from 40 people.

“So many people there didn’t know that LGBT people could adopt,” McCabe says. “It was especially useful to talk with the older gay community members, to explain that they could still become parents. For that generation of LGBT people, they didn’t think they could become parents. We talked about adopting a 13-year-old, with no diapers. Those kids are who we’re really advocating for. They still need a family.”

Al Toney is a father and licensed foster parent who has worked for years leading and assisting social service organizations in Massachusetts. He has worked with several agencies to recruit LGBT adults and allies to provide foster homes for LGBT youth who were homeless or living in unsafe circumstances.

Massachusetts had for a time banned LGBT people from fostering youth. When the ban was lifted, Toney says, confusion about the policy remained — social workers in the agencies did not understand the new policy, and gay and lesbian people did not know they could serve as a resource to these youth.

Toney and his colleagues developed a training curriculum for staff of social service agencies, produced outreach materials targeting the LGBT community and then went to work recruiting resource families.

“We went to LGBT events, mostly in Boston. We placed ads in LGBT newspapers, we posted information on LGBT websites,” he says. “The recruitment efforts were very successful. We identified 13 homes with 19 adults who we put through the foster family training program.”

While it is common for about 25 percent of prospective foster parents to drop out of the program as they progress, Toney says, few of the LGBT prospective parents recruited through the targeted campaign dropped out.

“We also found that folks that came in tended to have higher education levels, and these resource families came from more economically stable backgrounds than the statewide average,” Toney says.

Dennis Patrick, an adoptive and foster parent in Michigan, says the agency he has worked with is very supportive but does not conduct intentional outreach to the LGBT community, which he believes is a lost opportunity.

“There are so many LGBT adults who are interested in becoming parents right now,” he says. “I don’t think they consider foster parenting as an option. Agencies could do a better job of reaching out to that community — they could get more qualified foster parents. Have a table or a booth at pride events, and have LGBT foster or adoptive parents staff the table with the agency.”

Colby Berger, formerly of The Home for Little Wanderers in Massachusetts, says the agency has conducted several targeted recruiting activities. “We see LGBT adoptive and foster parents as an untapped resource,” she says. The agency held information sessions featuring a panel of

Recruitment Food for Thought: Before Launching A Recruitment Effort

Bill Bettencourt, senior associate of the Child Welfare Program at the Center for the Study of Social Policy, stresses that agencies must be prepared to deliver on their end after recruiting. If an organization partners with an LGBT organization that works effectively to recruit targeted resource families, then the agency must ensure that it will reply in a timely way, lead applicants through the training and licensing process and match them appropriately with children and youth to be placed in their homes.

“If the agencies don’t connect [this recruitment work] with placement, then it’s the same old, same old,” Bettencourt says. “If you recruit LGBT folks and you screw it up, your ability to do so in the future is compromised.”

“You can’t recruit LGBT people and then not be ready,” Karey Scheyd says. “It’s not always possible to have all your ducks in a row before you start something, but you don’t want to do the opposite. You can’t start a recruitment effort before some basic things are in place. We wondered, ‘What if we recruit all these people who contact an agency and the person who answers the phone or opens the door isn’t welcoming?’”

“In foster parent recruitment, word of mouth is by far the No. 1 recruitment strategy,” Scheyd says. “With that in mind, what would the experience be of a person coming into the foster or adoptive parenting process in your agency? Agencies should follow that process along. Have your LGBT partner organization look with you at the process, step by step, not just through the certification process, but even after becoming a foster or adoptive parent. It’s not easy to do. Agencies are understaffed and under-resourced.”

Because of this concern, the network with which Scheyd works delayed recruitment for a year while it coordinated staff training on LGBT cultural competency for several hundred of the thousands of employees at various agencies serving New York City. Eventually, the city’s Administration of Children’s Services took on that training effort.

LGBT adoptive and foster parents. The agency advertised the sessions in LGBT newspapers and on LGBT Listservs and websites, as well as in daily newspapers and event calendars. “We packed the room,” Berger says. “Many people who attended said they didn’t know they were allowed to be foster parents, and they said it was so refreshing to be actively welcomed by an agency. We told those who attended, ‘We think folks like you would be terrific adoptive and foster parents — please bring all of yourself.’ Panelists also explained that the background check and comprehensive homestudy process can be grueling — but it’s done for all applicants,” not just LGBT prospective parents.

The Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE) will launch an active recruitment campaign after it completes its internal training process and delivers some form of training to other adoption organizations with which it works. “I want to make sure the Department of Children and Families is part of our active recruitment campaign,” says Lisa Funaro of MARE. “We can’t do it by ourselves — then we’ll just have frustrated families” who enter the system but hit barriers in other agencies.

Brianne Asumendi is the family developer for Casey Family Programs in Boise, Idaho, which has licensed gay and lesbian foster parents in the past but currently has no licensed LGBT foster parents. The agency has just one family that it thinks would be a safe and appropriate home for gay youth, so Asumendi and her colleagues are actively recruiting from the LGBT community. They recruited at an LGBT pride event, but that didn’t generate any inquiries, Asumendi says. Instead, they plan to attend smaller and more targeted gatherings of LGBT adults, such as their recent presentation to a gay men’s support group. She believes many LGBT adults are not aware that they are welcome as foster parents, so part of her recruitment efforts is in general education about foster parenting.

Asumendi is already thinking about the next step — supporting and retaining LGBT foster parents in a conservative community. “My biggest concern is when we do recruit LGBT foster parents, I want to make sure it’s a safe environment and they feel supported. A lot of foster parents get their support from each other,” she says. “If we have just one LGBT family, I worry they won’t have peer-to-peer support. So I’d like to have a bigger pool” of LGBT parents. At the same time, the program is shifting its recruitment to be more child-focused, “looking at the network of adults in each child’s life to see who might be a good match,” including LGBT adults in the child’s network.

Tips

- “Do the work internally before you recruit externally—don’t jump the gun. Many agencies make the mistake of recruiting from the LGBT community before they have implemented welcoming policies and practices. This can backfire and leave the LGBT community feeling misled and mistrusting in the future, meaning fewer families in your pool,” says Ann McCabe.
- Review your current recruitment plan and activities; ensure that your agency is reaching one or several LGBT audiences through each method. If your agency is not, add new activities and materials that will reach those prospective parents.
- Al Toney recommends that foster care agencies include mentoring programs as a service, which helps youth and can expand the number of families available for recruitment.

“We met many LGBT adults and non-LGBT parents, too, who couldn’t open their homes in a permanent way, but wanted to be a resource to LGBT youth,” Toney says. “The mentoring program is like an LGBT ‘big brother/big sister’ program, filling a needed gap in services. It provides a res-

pite for existing foster homes and offers a safe and healthy venue for LGBT youth to build relationships, which can transform into long-term supportive services as the youth transition out into adulthood.” These families, in turn, may become foster families themselves.

- Toney also recommends targeted outreach within the LGBT community, reaching out to families of color and those who will foster or adopt transgender children and youth. “There is a lack of education among LGB folks about transgender issues. I’ve been really surprised,” he says. “I see a lot of trans kids of color, and although we say ‘LGBT’ inclusively, their issues and needs are different, and they often get lumped in and lost in training and recruitment.”
- Recruitment specialist Karey Scheyd encourages agencies to focus on small, in-person recruitment presentations, where people can hear real stories. “Having a real gay parent who has done this, in front of you, makes it easier to conceptualize yourself being a foster parent,” she says. “I think it’s so much more effective to do face-to-face recruitment, using people who have lived it to tell their own stories. I ran a speakers’ bureau of teens and adults to talk about teen adoption. People would walk out of the room saying, ‘I’m going to consider a teen now. This totally opened my mind.’ Teens can recruit families for teens.”
- All Children – All Families Training Module 3, called “Rolling Out the Welcome Mat,” offers numerous tips on recruitment.

Samples

Family Builders

www.adoptionsf.org.

In collaboration with the City and County of San Francisco Human Services Agency, launched a public service campaign featuring posters that encourage all types of families to consider adopting a waiting child.

Partnerships with the LGBT Community

The organization will collaborate with LGBT community leaders and/or organizations to ensure that its recruitment efforts are culturally appropriate and effective.

Stories from the Field

Karey Scheyd, former deputy director of parent recruitment at New York City’s Administration for Children’s Services, says forming partnerships with community groups is the most important action any agency — public or private — can take to recruit effectively from the LGBT community.

“Adoption and foster care officials do not have a history of being welcoming to the LGBT community,” Scheyd says. Because of this history, she says, LGBT people are often skeptical of recruitment pitches from agencies.

“A partnership with a community organization makes recruitment so much easier,” she says. She encourages agencies to “go hand in hand” with a community group that the LGBT community “already knows and trusts.”

Prior to working for the city agency, Scheyd worked for a now-defunct private foster care agency. While there, she collaborated with Terry Boggis, then director of Center Kids, a program of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community Center in New York City. Together with a few other organizations and LGBT community leaders, they created the New York City Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Foster

Care Coalition, dedicated to increasing the pool of available LGBT foster families in the city.

They held recruitment events at the center, offering a safe and familiar place for LGBT prospective parents to ask questions and discuss concerns. The coalition also met at the center, which had an ancillary benefit, according to Scheyd.

“A lot of people who come forward to get involved in this are already comfortable with the community, but not all are,” she says. “Some are outside their comfort zone. Having them come to a queer space is really important in helping them get comfortable, get familiar with the right language, get used to being around a lot of gay people.”

“Relationship building is what makes recruitment work,” she says. “Heavy hitters in recruitment point to this, and I agree. A partnership with the LGBT center is organization-to-organization relationship building. There’s also person-to-person relationship building between individual applicants and everyone at an agency, from the receptionist to the home finder — everyone.”

The coalition created a recruitment brochure targeting LGBT prospective foster parents and is now designing an outreach plan. Its work will begin with individualized meetings with key LGBT groups and will feature a mini-road show, including foster and adoptive parents, kids of those parents, LGBT kids in care and agency staff.

Both the Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE) and Adoption Resources of Wisconsin (ARW) have conducted adoption information sessions at local LGBT community centers. ARW conducted “All About Adoption Night” at a local center, and included information about surrogacy and foster parenting to address many types of family building. MARE collaborated with Colby Berger, formerly of The

Home for Little Wanderers, to conduct four information sessions over two years in a neighborhood with many LGBT families. The events were crowded, with 40 to 50 people attending each session. “They were very successful,” says Lisa Funaro of MARE, “but we realized there wasn’t support to get all those families through the process.” MARE is engaged in a comprehensive training effort to overcome barriers for those families.

Bill Bettencourt, senior associate of the Child Welfare Program at the Center for the Study of Social Policy, says one important lesson he and colleagues are learning through their program is that “social workers aren’t recruiters. In many ways, they rely on media outreach, glossy brochures, that sort of stuff,” he says. “But those aren’t necessarily the most effective ways to reach the resource families that are in such need.”

Instead of those efforts, Bettencourt believes good recruitment depends on two things: partnerships with relevant organizations and happy current foster parents who can recruit new foster families. “You don’t have to spend all your money on brochures, TV ads and billboards,” Bettencourt explains. “These are useful, but we’ve found places that are spending money on those things and not getting families. We ask, ‘Who do you want to recruit? What partnerships do you have?’ If none, make some. Engage key community partners and discuss what might be an effective strategy for reaching out to the families you’re trying to reach.

“When sites do that, when they really sit down and talk to folks that know a neighborhood or a community, they really come up with some creative ideas,” he says. “They’ll get word-of-mouth out in the community.”

Story of a Seal Earner: National Adoption Center



The following comes from Christine Jacobs, program director of the National Adoption Center:

In 2009 the National Adoption Center received the Seal of Recognition. The center has a rich history of working with members of the LGBT community. In fact, one of the first children for whom we helped create a family was placed with a lesbian in West Virginia. Since that time, the center has continued to work with gay men and lesbians interested in adopting children from the foster care system.

The center's LGBT Initiative looks to expand the pool of potential permanent families in the LGBT community and develop competent services for LGBT prospective families. One of the programs, the LGBT Adoption Café, has met with overwhelming success and interest from the community. The LGBT Adoption Café is an educational resource fair at which LGBT individuals interested in adoption can receive an orientation to the adoption process; hear from a robust panel of speakers, including LGBT individuals and couples who have adopted; interact with gay-friendly adoption agencies; and address questions.

During one of the Cafés this past year, Elaine – one of the panelists – said that she and her partner were uncertain whether they should pursue adoption until they heard from a young woman who had aged out of the foster care system without ever having found a family. The young woman said she would have welcomed parents of the same sex, but instead, she was forced to fend for herself without the love of a family.

"When I heard that, I knew we had to adopt," Elaine said. She and her partner are now the proud parents of a 12-year-old son.

In fiscal year 2011-2012 we held two Cafes that saw a total attendance of more than one hundred prospective parents. The evaluations from the participants have been overwhelmingly positive and 80% of the respondents indicated that they would be more likely to consider adoption after having attended the Café.

Another strategy the Center is implementing targets LGBT Affinity groups within the corporate sector by providing LGBT adoption orientations in local workplaces. The Center is inviting local companies to host an LGBT adoption brown bag lunch, which will include a brief overview of the adoption process, discussion with an LGBT parent who has adopted, and a period for questions. Participants will be provided with information on local LGBT-friendly adoption agencies and other resources.

The Center is proud to have received the 2011 Nonprofit of the Year HEROES award by the Delaware Valley Legacy Fund – which seeks to expand philanthropy and grantmaking for the LGBT community – because of its work in promoting adoption for LGBT families.

Meanwhile, retaining current foster parents is equally important. The reason most foster parents do not stay, according to Bettencourt, is because agencies do not support them once they have been recruited. Foster families have children and youth placed with them, but then struggle to receive simple assistance. This battle with bureaucratic obstacles wears out a family, Bettencourt says. These unhappy, unsupported foster families cannot help recruit other potential resource families.

 *Assessment Q1-3 in Recruitment address this topic.*

Tips

- Host forums with LGBT partner organizations where recently recruited families can complete many steps of the process at once. Some Family to Family sites call these “Taking Care of Business Day,” where attendees receive an orientation, complete their paperwork and get their fingerprints taken.
- Seek input from the LGBT community as you launch an outreach effort. “We knew we needed to get LGBT families on board for feedback, as advisers and to connect us with resources,” says National Adoption Center’s Christine Jacobs. The center recommends that agencies create advisory boards or task forces that include LGBT families and community leaders. “They can advise you, connect you with more organizations, broaden your reach and connect you with more people,” Jacobs says.

Targeted Media Campaign

Like Bill Bettencourt, Karey Scheyd believes large-scale media campaigns have limited value in general recruitment of families. They may, however, play a unique role in efforts to reach LGBT adults.

“There is a value, but agencies need to have realistic expectations of what that value is,” she says. “They are good for raising public awareness, and they will get the phone to ring. But what makes recruitment happen is what happens after the phone rings — how quickly you meet with them, how they’re treated, everything else.

“With that said, I think it could work quite well for the LGBT community. This is a community that is generally unaware that they are welcome as adoptive and foster parents. I think it could be successful — put ads in LGBT publications or elsewhere for a large-scale education campaign. It could be a useful backdrop for an on-the-ground, face-to-face effort.”

Michelle Chalmers of The Homecoming Project, a Minnesota Department of Human Services project in conjunction with the Minnesota Adoption Resource Network, tells a story that illustrates the unique role that media outreach may play.

“We had a big shocker a few years ago after an article profiled a teenager,” she says. “He’s a teenage boy in a residential treatment program on Christmas Eve. In one of the very last sentences of this long story, he says, ‘I’d take a single-parent family, a same-sex couple,’ etc. We had 70 calls from that story, and more than half of them were LGBT folks! Folks were shocked there were teenagers in the system who wanted families, who’d consider LGBT parents ... and they were surprised that LGBT people could adopt! The folks who were calling were brand-new resources that we wouldn’t have reached otherwise. Many have ended up with placements.”

If your organization already conducts a media outreach effort, make sure it specifically welcomes LGBT prospective parents, says Gary Mallon, professor and executive director of the National Resource Center for Family-Centered

Practice and Permanency Planning at the Hunter College School of Social Work. “I was in New Mexico doing a training, and they asked me, ‘How can we do this better?’ Then I was in my hotel room, and I saw an ad from the state seeking foster parents. The ad in no way conveyed to me that as a gay person or couple you’d be welcome to be foster parents, even though they said it was their intention to be welcoming. It should have said, ‘You and your partner can apply.’ As a gay person, there are key words I’m listening for — if they’re not there, I’m going to assume I’m not welcome.”

Many agencies may be committed to this work but may not have the financial resources or connections to reach out to their local LGBT community. All Children – All Families collaborates with agencies providing templates for recruitment materials — such as ads and brochures — that they can use as part of a targeted media campaign.

Organizational Atmosphere: Who Is Welcome Here?

Organizational Atmosphere Guiding Principle

In all ways that the organization communicates with its prospective and current clients, it will be inclusive and supportive of LGBT-headed families. All images, language, materials and events will include and affirm such families, so that LGBT prospective parents will know they are welcome at the agency.

Stories from the Field

In the context of ongoing societal discrimination and a specific history of bias against LGBT adults as adoptive and foster parents, LGBT prospective parents often enter the process unsure of how child welfare agencies will receive them. They review each interaction for signals of welcome or bias. In a study of lesbian adoptive parents, Abbie Goldberg found that many women

had experiences with agencies “that left them feeling suspicious and uncomfortable, but they were not sure if their difficulties (unreturned phone calls, rude treatment by social workers, being ignored at trainings) were indeed the result of discrimination.” They did not have evidence that discrimination was the cause, and they were “hesitant to question the person or organization with decision-making authority, leaving them feeling frustrated and relatively powerless.”¹³

Jill Jacobs of Family Builders believes agency leaders need to look at everything the agency does through the eyes of someone who is LGBT — from the bottom of the agency to the top. They should review every piece of paper, every form and every training manual. She says if LGBT people are not included specifically, they will feel excluded.

Lisa Funaro of Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange echoes that approach. “I think agencies need to be very explicit and direct that they are recruiting and open to all families. I think it has to be very straightforward — they need to spell out what ‘all families’ means. You can’t be wishy-washy about it. I’ve learned that if you don’t use the words, ‘We are looking for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender families for all children,’ they will think it doesn’t include them. Don’t assume people already know that they would be considered for a child. If you’re going to do child-specific recruitment, you need to be specific.”

Organizational leaders have a unique role to play in scanning current practices and leading change. Below are some ideas for concrete and visible ways an agency can demonstrate its welcoming and affirming approach.

The All Children – All Families training curriculum addresses these ideas in Module 3.

Story of a Seal Earner: Family Builders (Serving Nine Counties in the San Francisco Bay Area)



Family Builders has been working with LGBT individuals and couples for years. Many promising practices outlined in this guide are modeled on the welcoming approach of Family Builders. Still, the agency found value in completing the self-assessment in this guide.

“Our website was old and I realized it wasn’t particularly welcoming to LGBT folks,” says Executive Director Jill Jacobs. Completing the assessment “helped me refocus on our practice,” Jacobs says. “It made me ask, ‘Are we good enough?’” Jacobs also found the consultative sessions with the All Children – All Families initiative to be “really helpful and valuable.”

“Having that outside perspective was really helpful,” she says. “In addition to us looking at our practice, it was helpful to have somebody on the outside looking in, the way that families do. I found that process, which was not done in a critical way, to be helpful and informative.”

Jacobs recommends that agency leaders go through the guide and look at the agency from the perspective of an outsider. Consider conducting a focus group of families, and explore their perceptions of the agency from top to bottom — even how a receptionist answers the phone.

When planning an effort to improve policies and practices with LGBT prospective parents, Jacobs thinks using a cultural competence framework is a helpful approach. “Almost every adoption agency has dealt with the issue of cultural competence. Much of what we do around race and ethnicity are applicable to this work,” she says.

Jacobs describes the day when Family Builders earned the All Children – All Families seal as a special event. Ellen Kahn, director of HRC’s Family Project, presented the seal, with Family Builders staff and board members present. A lunch with staff followed. “The staff felt a real sense of pride,” Jacobs says. “Receiving the seal was affirming of who we are as an organization. It was really empowering to the staff to have an outside organization with the credibility of HRC acknowledge their work.”

For agencies that are new at this work, Jacobs says they may be concerned about staff resistance but they may also find staff members who feel validated by it. “It might be the gay social worker or the 60-year-old social worker with a lesbian daughter or gay nephew you didn’t know about,” she says. She urges agencies that think they are already fully competent to keep an open mind. “People who think they couldn’t possibly have a bias — that closes the door,” she says.

✓ Physical Space

The organization will ensure that its waiting room and other physical spaces include visual and other materials that are inclusive of all prospective parents.

Stories from the Field

“After you recruit them and then they walk through the door, what do they see?” asks Donna Ibbotson, formerly of Lilliput Children’s Services. “How do you welcome them? What does your waiting room look like? What magazines do you have? Do you have *And Baby* magazine and *The Advocate*? If so, LGBT people will feel welcome. Or do you only have *Christian Quarterly*? What is the message? How does it feel and look?”

“Agencies should create an LGBT-affirming culture, starting right in the waiting room,” says Gary Mallon. “It may be filled with artwork of African American and Latino kids to communicate that it’s a diverse organization and this is who is served. But then there is nothing that is specifically LGBT-affirming among the pictures of parents. What about a portrait of two men with three children? That’s the message you want to convey. As a gay person, I’m scanning that environment for safety, for a welcome mat. If I don’t see it, I’ll assume we’re not welcome.”

The reception area near the front entrance at Adoption Resources of Wisconsin previously featured only photos of waiting children. Now, the area includes family pictures, to represent many types of family diversity and structures. “It’s another way to welcome people,” says Colleen Ellingson.

? *Assessment Q1 in Agency Environment addresses this topic.*

Tip

- Review artwork, books and magazines that prospective clients will be viewing while in

your waiting room. Do they specifically reflect LGBT-headed families?

✓ Marketing/Outreach Materials (Website, Brochures, Newsletters)

All visual and written materials representing the agency’s work will reflect and specifically address LGBT-headed families.

B *All external documents must explicitly reflect the agency’s commitment to working with LGBT individuals and families, as described below, for an agency to achieve benchmark 8 in the Benchmarks of LGBT Cultural Competency.*

Stories from the Field

Many LGBT prospective parents are likely to conduct initial research to learn whether an organization might welcome them as adoptive or foster parents. In a study of lesbian adoptive parents conducted by Abbie Goldberg, many women said they specifically sought LGBT-friendly agencies. To locate these agencies, some of the women reviewed agencies’ websites “to determine whether or not the agencies worked with same-sex couples, and they read the agencies’ mission statements for religious and/or conservative undertones.” They looked for images of same-sex couples and explicit statements of openness to LGBT families.¹⁴ Family Builders features its inclusive mission statement on its website’s main page (see www.familybuilders.org). This page also includes a menu option, “Gay and Lesbian Adoption,” which welcomes prospective parents and describes its program..

The websites of some agencies may be outdated, accidentally sending the wrong signals to web visitors. “When we were filling out the [All Children – All Families Agency Self-] assessment, we looked at our website and realized we needed to add more information about inclusiveness,” says Colleen Ellingson of Adoption Resources of Wisconsin. “It might be missing,

especially when you've been doing it all along and your website is old."

In conjunction with its three-year campaign to recruit more LGBT-headed families, Family Focus Adoption Services revamped its general information brochure. The front of the brochure asks, "Did you realize that single people can adopt? That more mature people can adopt? That same-sex couples can adopt?" According to Executive Director Maris Blechner, she continues to meet "even sophisticated LGBT people who are surprised to learn they could adopt."

Wherever families are featured in newsletters, says Janice Goldwater of Adoptions Together, LGBT-headed families appear. Photos of same-sex couples appear in family collages; the first names of couples are included in the regular column "Homecomings," which lists families who have welcomed children into their home in recent months.

Elijah Nealy, a foster parent and transgender man, works with an agency that "has a high degree of LGB competence and presence, but is still in the early stages of trans competence and presence." Still, he says the agency demonstrates its commitment by inserting the voices of transgender prospective parents in materials that are not only targeted to the LGBT community. "They host a weekly radio show and public access TV show and recently interviewed me for 15 minutes about my experience in the parent preparation class," Nealy says. "That is not an LGBT show, and it has trans visibility."

Of course, agencies that earn the Seal of Recognition are encouraged to use the seal and describe it in their marketing materials – and not just those targeting LGBT prospective parents.

"We're adding the seal to all our foster parent recruitment materials," says Yvette Jackson, director of Operations at Devereux Arizona. "We're also including the seal on our banners and other marketing materials as we revise and

update them. We're being very intentional about promoting All Children - All Families, raising it at association meetings and elsewhere."

? *Assessment Q3 in Agency Environment addresses this topic.*

Tips

- LGBT related material, policy statements and pictures should be accessible on the agency website within one or two clicks from the homepage. "The 'About Us' section is a good place to include a specific mention of the agency's openness to LGBT families. Or consider adding a clear statement about serving LGBT families in your 'Frequently Asked Questions' section," suggests Ann McCabe, former program director of the National Adoption Center.
- If your agency intends to welcome LGBT parents, the agency's website should specifically reflect that intention. An organization's word-of-mouth reputation matters greatly among prospective parents considering adoption or foster parenting.
- Those parents will also use technology to answer many questions with a quick click.
- Ask your LGBT clients who have already adopted or foster parented through your agency, "What should we do? How should we do this work?" Specifically, ask if they would prefer targeted brochures or LGBT-focused seminars.
- The Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange conducted a review of all its forms and materials, which it found to be a simple and useful exercise. Staff found a brochure with a logo that contained two silhouettes representing an adoptive couple; one of the silhouettes seemed to be wearing a skirt. "So it looked like this was representing a heterosexual couple," says Lisa Funaro. "We took the skirt off the logo. It's small, but it's important."

- All Children – All Families Training Module 3, called “Rolling Out the Welcome Mat” offers numerous tips on marketing.

Samples

Amara Parenting and Adoption Services

Family Connections newsletter, Spring/Summer 2007

www.amaraparenting.org

The newsletter features a story and a photo of a gay male couple who adopted a gay teenage boy, 25 years after they first adopted a son from the same agency.

The Home for Little Wanderers

“Success Stories”

www.thehome.org

The agency features a story on the main page of its website about a single gay father and his adopted 10-year-old son.

Independent Adoption Center

“Gay and Lesbian Families”

www.adoptionhelp.org/gay_lesbian_adoption

The site includes a welcome page for LGBT parents, with links to letters from LGBT adoptive parents:

We are glad you are considering the Independent Adoption Center to help you in your search to become a family. The IAC has a long and proud tradition of working with gay and lesbian families in their quest to adopt, and every year our numbers grow stronger.

The National Adoption Center

“The Facts about LGBT Adoption”

www.adopt.org

The center includes information about its welcoming approach and new initiatives to connect LGBT prospective parents with welcoming agencies in the Delaware Valley.

✓ Initial Phone Contact

Because prospective parents often have their first interaction with an organization by phone, agencies will ensure that all staff members who are responsible for answering calls are competent in welcoming all families.

Stories from the Field

During her time with Bellefaire JCB, Beth Brindo handled incoming calls by following the agency’s guidelines: To signal clearly that the agency is welcoming, she makes sure to ask whether a caller has a partner or is married. “We have a responsibility to make sure the agency is sensitive to our client’s inquiry when entering a program. If we find out that families are not totally disclosing, we need to take responsibility for how we may have contributed to that secrecy. Have they been afraid of judgment or discrimination?”

Robyn Harrod of Southern California Foster Family and Adoption Agency likes to talk with all prospective clients before they even come in. “By the time they come to orientation, I’ve spoken to them numerous times,” she says. During those conversations, she makes sure that LGBT callers know they are welcome.

Many times only one partner in a couple will contact an agency, says Donna Ibbotson formerly of Lilliput Children’s Services. “So it matters whether you ask if they have a partner or you just say, ‘What does your husband do?’”

✓ Introductory Seminars/Orientation Sessions

The featured panelists and spoken and written content of introductory sessions will reflect LGBT-headed families among other adoptive or foster families. Facilitators for such sessions will be able to create a safe and welcoming environment for all families. They will be prepared for questions from LGBT-

headed families as well as skilled in responding to those participants who may have strong biases against such families.

Stories from the Field

Having organizational professionals overtly express their support is often perceived as very helpful, according to Abbie Goldberg, who is leading a Transition to Adoptive Parenthood project. One foster-to-adopt woman participating in the project reported that after an initial meeting she and her partner had with an agency, the agency worker later sought out the women to share information about a local gay and lesbian foster family support group. This act made the women feel more welcome.

Many agencies commonly include LGBT adop-

tive parents when they gather panelists for introductory seminars held at community events or with other organizations. Dennis Patrick, a foster and adoptive parent in Michigan, is a frequent panelist for general recruitment events sponsored by his agency. He recently participated in a panel co-sponsored with the VFW at a public library in an effort to recruit more foster parents. "They throw us in there with other foster parents they have invited to speak," Patrick says. Dan McNeil, an adoptive parent in Washington, D.C., says the D.C. Child and Family Services Administration frequently invited him to participate on panels after he finalized adoptions with his children.

Janice Goldwater of Adoptions Together takes a similar approach and included a lesbian adop-

Sample Script for Intake Call

Staff member: Hello, this is L.A. County's adoption department, how can I help you?

Caller: Hi, I saw a poster the other day and wanted to learn more about adoption.

Staff member: That's great; we'd love to tell you more about our services. Let me share with you what we like every applicant to know: We welcome all families into this process and look forward to offering you a positive experience. As policy, we want you to know that our non-discrimination policy states ... (After they hear your policy, they might be more open to share with you where they saw that poster...this will help during any campaign, too.)

Caller: That's great to know ... How can I learn more about the process?

Staff member: We actually have an orientation meeting coming up in two weeks, would you like to attend?

Caller: I would ... can you send me some information?

Staff member: I can tell you now and register you for the meeting.

Caller: Great.

Staff member: The meeting is on (date/time/place). Can you tell me your name and contact information? Will you be coming to the meeting alone, or with your partner or spouse?

Caller: I will be coming with my partner.

Staff member: Would you mind, giving me his/her name for our registration process? ... Before we end, I am wondering if you can recall where you saw the recruitment poster, and if anything in particular caught your attention.

**This is where caller may share that the poster was in the gay community center, or that it featured a two-mom family.*

Caller: Thanks, will I see you at the meeting? You've been very helpful.

Staff member: I won't be there, but you can ask any of our social workers any questions, and they will be happy to assist you. Is there anything else I can help you with today? Has this call been helpful in getting the information you needed? Good luck in your process ... we look forward to helping in the future.

tive parent on a panel at a recent community adoption expo. “We bring a panel of people who will be good spokespeople on the issue to the audience. We think about the competing needs and interests of what we’re doing,” she says.

Dan McNeil says the initial information meeting he attended through the D.C. Child and Family Services Administration was overwhelming and not particularly welcoming. “There were hundreds of people, and there was a strange vibe,” he says. “I don’t know if they did that well. It was such a large group. If I didn’t know other LGBT people had adopted through D.C., I might not have thought we could based on that session.” The one positive signal came through an introductory video about children and youth in different foster care situations. The video included images of LGBT-headed foster families.

Ann McCabe, formerly program director of the National Adoption Center, wondered how to ensure that interested LGBT adults do not get lost or face hostility at the initial orientation. After generating interest among 40 LGBT-headed families at a recruitment event at LGBT pride in Philadelphia, McCabe thought, “Why don’t we get together with a local LGBT-friendly agency, send a letter to the 40 families and do an orientation for them?” But she wondered, “Do you do a segregated orientation? Is that what it will take to make sure these families are well-received, or do you do a better job with all families, building in cultural sensitivity to the way you conduct business?”

Several agencies have worked to ensure that local Heart Gallery exhibits — which feature photographs of waiting children to raise community awareness of the needs of children and youth living in foster care — are inclusive of LGBT-headed families and reach them as an audience. “We included photos of families, not just children,” says Fredi Juni of Alameda County (Calif.) Social Services Agency, Gateways to Permanence Division, who also serves as co-chair of

the Bay Area Heart Gallery. “They were mostly adoptive families, with a little vignette describing how they came to adopt. Of the 21 families featured, six were gay or lesbian families.” The resource guide distributed at the exhibit also includes pictures of same-sex couples, with a reference to being welcoming to all different families (see www.bayareaheartgallery.com).

The Homecoming Project at the Minnesota Adoption Resource Network works to increase adoption of waiting teens in state guardianship through methods that encourage full youth participation in the recruitment process. As the project’s coordinator, Michelle Chalmers gets to know many of the 80 teens the project has served, many of whom participate on orientation or training panels for prospective parents. Chalmers says that often an LGBT prospective parent will ask whether the youth would be willing to have LGBT parents. “And the kids will say, ‘Whatever! Do you have a dog?’” she says, laughing. “That’s not to say that we haven’t had kids say no to LGBT parents, but we’ve also had kids say no to single parents or parents in the city or parents not in the city.” She thinks it’s a useful discussion during orientation and training sessions.

Paperwork/Forms

All paperwork required of clients will feature inclusive language that reflects all potential applicants.

B *All agency-controlled forms and internal documents must use inclusive language described below for an agency to achieve benchmark 7 in the Benchmarks of LGBT Cultural Competency.*

Stories from the Field

At the simplest level, applications and forms should not divide applicants into the categories of “mother” and “father.” The paperwork of many agencies in this guide, including Adoptions Together, Alameda County Social Services Agen-

cy (Department of Children and Family Services), Family Builders and HOPE Adoption & Family Services, instead refer to “applicant 1” and “applicant 2” or “parent 1” and “parent 2.”

“We changed all our paperwork,” says Fredi Juni of Alameda County. “Everything — the foster family applications, homestudy materials, adoption finalization paperwork — is not gender-specific. Taking ‘mother/father’ off the forms wasn’t difficult for us. I was advocating for it, and we had management that was supportive. I just went to my computer and revised the forms. We’ve also advocated for the state to change its birth certificate to reflect ‘parent 1’ and ‘parent 2.’”

Even when paperwork is inclusive of gay and lesbian prospective parents, it may still not reflect transgender parents. “Everything that was supposed to be LGBT-inclusive was really just LG-inclusive,” says licensed foster parent Cris Benjamin, who is a transgender man waiting for placement. “Anytime agency staff asked us for documentation, they assumed what types of paperwork we would have. For example, they assumed we’d have a domestic partnership, rather than a marriage license. Ask instead of assuming,” recommends Benjamin.

? *Assessment Q2 in Agency Environment addresses this topic.*

Tips

- If you work in an organization (including many public agencies) where changes to forms and paperwork do take a long time, use verbal communication to acknowledge the limits of the form. Tell applicants that they can cross out “mother” and “father” and insert “applicant 1” and “applicant 2,” for example. Then train everyone in your organization to do so.
- All Children – All Families Training Module 3, called “Rolling Out the Welcome Mat”

offers numerous tips on materials and communication.

Samples

Adoptions Together

“Domestic Infant Adoption Application”
www.adoptionstogether.org

“Domestic School Age & Older Children Application”
www.adoptionstogether.org

“Homestudy Only Application”
www.adoptionstogether.org

Family Builders

“Application Form for Foster Adoptive Parents”
www.hrc.org/acaf

✓ Parent Preparation Training

The parent preparation training delivered by or required by the agency will include LGBT-headed families as examples throughout the training, just as it includes examples of other types of prospective families, such as single parents or transracial families. Exercises and language will be inclusive and all trainers will be skilled in creating a safe and affirming atmosphere for LGBT prospective parents.

B *Agencies should include standardized LGBT-specific language, examples and exercises, as described below, for an agency to achieve benchmark 9 in the Benchmarks of LGBT Cultural Competency.*

Stories from the Field

The parent preparation training at Adoptions Together addresses all of the issues, says Executive Director Janice Goldwater, and is inclusive in its approach. Because of the agency’s welcoming reputation, most trainings will include one or several LGBT-headed families. “Recently, we had three same-sex couples and one heterosexual couple in the training,” she says. “We had to make sure that the heterosexual couple’s

needs were met.” Good facilitation ensures that all participants will be able to participate fully and honestly in the parent preparation training. For the agency’s 27-hour training to adopt out of foster care, “we always try to make sure there’s more than one same-sex couple in the room. We weave in information that is specific. We do the same on transracial families and single-parent adoption.”

After Dennis Patrick and his partner were rejected as foster parents by their first agency well into the process, two actions by their new agency confirmed that it was truly welcoming to LGBT parents. The executive director put them in contact with another same-sex couple that the agency had successfully licensed, and one of the trainers during the parent preparation training came out to Patrick and his partner during a break in the training. “It made us believe that the agency was accepting,” he says.

According to Al Toney, the Massachusetts Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (MAPP) training curriculum did not directly address LGBT youth. “I worked with one 16-year-old youth who was adopted as an infant. He started questioning his sexuality and went to a gay youth group. His parents, who were very religious, found out, sent him to a prayer group and punished him. He still went to the gay youth group, so his adoptive family of 16 years sent him back” to the state’s social services agency. The state’s Department of Social Services and UMass Center for Adoption Research are reviewing and revising that curriculum. Toney says it will include culturally specific components for LGBT youth and adults.

Dan McNeil, an adoptive parent in Washington, D.C., says that all interested parents attend the same parent preparation session in D.C., whether interested in foster parenting, kinship care or adopting. “Out of the 10 families in our group, there were three gay and lesbian families,” he says. “I know D.C. doesn’t allow discrimination,

and in the year we finalized, the District placed more than 200 kids with LGBT families. I wouldn’t have thought to ask whether other LGBT families would be in our group, but it helped to not be the only family in there, to have multiple LGBT family perspectives.”

McNeil also notes that the training is strongly influenced by whoever is leading the class. “If the trainer had a negative or hostile attitude, it would be difficult to stay in the class,” he says. All of the exercises and handouts in the MAPP training D.C. uses referred to “mom” and “dad.” However, the D.C. Child and Family Services Agency training leaders verbally altered the directions to include all families in the room. “I give them credit — our trainers really set the stage, gave the typical ground rules, but they were also very direct about differences and respect. They said, ‘We come from Maryland, Virginia and D.C. Economically, we’re diverse; racially, we’re diverse; religiously, we’re diverse; and we’re all here because we want to provide homes to kids.’ At the first class, we went around and introduced ourselves. One man and his wife introduced themselves and said that God had blessed them so much and they wanted to pass that blessing on to others, with the support of their pastor. The man then made some comment that he might not agree with what other people think in the training. That’s where the social worker said directly, ‘We don’t all have to think alike here, but we all have to be respectful of each other.’” McNeil says all families stayed in the training together, and he felt comfortable talking openly about his family.

The location of a parent preparation class can also influence the atmosphere. Foster parent Elijah Nealy is working with an agency that held its parent preparation classes at a local LGBT community center. Many of the prospective parents were LGBT, and Nealy was among three transgender-identified prospective parents.

This differed from his experience in a parent preparation class at another agency. “That one was heterosexist,” he says. “The standard curriculum was not LGBT-inclusive, and there was no LGBT visibility. They said they were open and willing to work with me,” but the agency’s materials and activities were not actively inclusive.

Nealy says, “This is something agencies can be doing — think about the curriculum that they use to train foster parents. Is there any acknowledgement that transgender parents might exist? Does the curriculum only talk about a husband and wife?”

 *Assessment Q4 in Staff Training Approach addresses this topic.*

Tips

- The common parent preparation programs are Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (MAPP) and Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Education (PRIDE). See www.cwla.org. Neither fully incorporates LGBT-headed families into the curriculum and exercises. If your agency uses one of these approaches, you can easily alter the language and exercises to include all families.
- If specific LGBT content is not formally included in training for families, consider organizing an LGBT foster/adoptive parent panel to be included in the training presentations.
- If you outsource the parent training, ensure that the trainers have a policy of inclusion.

Homestudy/Family Assessment

Homestudy/Family Assessment Guiding Principle

The organization will honor the integrity of every prospective family and apply assessment criteria evenly. Agency staff responsible

for performing homestudies will exhibit cultural competence at all times in talking with and writing about LGBT-headed families. They are comfortable in using appropriate language, know about legal and policy-related decisions that have an impact on same-sex couples and gender non-conforming individuals in relevant jurisdictions and are able to access support resources for LGBT families (see section on Staff Training).

Exchanges and other organizations that do not perform assessments themselves will be able to refer families to others who are able to conduct the assessment activities described above. They will also be skilled in reviewing completed family assessments to assure that they have been conducted competently.

The sections below describe several topics to consider when conducting a homestudy with an LGBT prospective family. Because many in the field describe family assessments as the most challenging aspect of working with an unfamiliar parent population, the All Children – All Families training curriculum focuses on homestudies in Module 4.

Unique Issues with LGBT Families

With a commitment to discovering the special strengths and challenges of every family, agencies will conduct their homestudies of LGBT-headed families with a commitment to equality of treatment and the knowledge of the few areas that may warrant special attention.

Stories from the Field

“There’s no real way to say how to do a homestudy — it varies from state to state, county to county,” says Gary Mallon of the Hunter College School of Social Work. “People from county X do not accept the homestudy from county Y.

“So when people say, ‘Can you teach us what we need to do [for LGBT homestudies]? Teach us the magic,’ I say, ‘There is no magic.’ It’s mostly just like any other homestudy,” he says. “But some things are unique. For example, a social worker wouldn’t ask a straight couple, ‘When did you first come out as straight?’ But it is important to ask gay and lesbian people where they are in their own coming out process.”

Mallon notes, however, that many social workers he trains will focus, instead, on issues that do not merit special attention, such as pornography or specific sexual behaviors.

“Porn?” he asks. “As if straight people don’t have porn! And would a social worker ask a straight couple about porn?” Mallon addressed this topic in-depth in a child welfare journal article, excerpted here, with permission:

The assessment processes for lesbians and gay men who are prospective foster or adoptive parents can become skewed if the assessing worker is either over-focusing on sexuality or totally ignoring it. Sexual orientation cannot be ignored in the assessment process, because an individual’s sexuality is an aspect of who they are as a total person and will have an impact on their life as a parent. What needs to be established early on in the assessment is the applicant’s ability to constructively manage homophobia or heterosexism in their own lives.

There has been a move from the model that has treated gay and lesbian applicants as being the same as their heterosexual counterparts, to acknowledging the different experiences that being a gay or lesbian parent brings to fostering and adoption.¹⁵

Denise Goodman, an independent trainer and consultant, agrees. “There is not a whole lot of difference. There is a foundation of issues we should be asking any applicant, and then we

should add questions based on the individual circumstances. Just like we might ask a prospective single parent how they might fit dating and relationships into their lives,” there are a few things to address with LGBT parents.

Jill Jacobs of Family Builders suggests that in the group orientation and training process, agencies should explain to all of the families in the room (not just LGBT people) what to expect from the process, particularly aspects that may raise concerns among prospective parents, such as questions about their relationship history and sexual relationships. That way, participants will know that the process and questions are applied to all people.

Most adoption exchanges do not conduct homestudies themselves, but do refer families to agencies and individuals that then conduct the assessment. Exchanges that welcome LGBT families emphasize their responsibility to know which agencies and individual workers in the region are the most experienced in conducting assessments for LGBT prospective parents.

For years, Adoption Resources of Wisconsin (ARW) has surveyed agencies in the region to understand their policies and practices in working with LGBT families. “It’s not only that we know the policy,” says Colleen Ellingson of ARW, “it’s that we also know specific workers that are more open to the LGBT community. They may even be at religious-based organizations that you might not think would work with gay couples.” Ellingson also highlights the special role exchanges can play in preparing LGBT prospective parents for the homestudy process. “We tell all our families that there is no such thing as a perfect family and that all families have struggles. We want them to be able to talk about their coping skills and capacity to handle challenges. These can be strengths,” she says. She reminds all families that family assessments “are intrusive by nature” and that families need to be honest and prepared for hard questions.

The Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange similarly has a list of agencies and professionals that they know to be welcoming of LGBT families, based on the experiences of families and staff. MARE staff members also share this information during weekly staff meetings.

The National Adoption Center plans to automatically gather feedback from families about their experiences with area agencies, including their thoughts about the homestudy process. The center hopes that data will improve its ability to refer LGBT families to the most competent agencies.

“The person who did our homestudy had never dealt with anyone trans before,” says licensed and waiting foster parent Cris Benjamin. “But they were good. They consulted another person [at the agency]. She hadn’t done a trans homestudy either, but she is part of the LGBT community. Our worker let her read it, to make sure the terminology was right. And our worker let us read it and apologized in advance if they used the wrong terms. It was great — everything was appropriate. And they asked about our comfort in terms of disclosure. There were no extra prying questions, which was one of my concerns.”

Mallon and others identify several unique areas that may warrant special attention in homestudies conducted for LGBT-headed families. These include people’s experience of their LGBT identity; how confident they feel in relation to their sexual orientation and gender identity and the integration of their LGBT identity; the role of other adult members of the household; partnerships and relationships; motivation for adoption or foster parenting; and the ability to value difference. The following is a brief exploration of those areas.

Coming Out/Identity and Extended Family Acceptance

Organizational leaders and staff members agree on the need to discuss coming out and extended family acceptance directly and in depth.

“We spend more time on family acceptance,” says Robyn Harrod of the Southern California Foster Family and Adoption Agency. “And if they don’t have an accepting family, how will they work that into having a child and not have that negative energy transcend down to the child? One man we worked with had very right-wing conservative parents, and he hadn’t had any contact with them for three years. He was in the process of adopting two little boys, and his mom wanted to be a grandma and she had tried to make contact. But there was no change in how she views him and his partner. It wasn’t even an option for this couple. They knew they did not want their boys to have a grandmother who was not accepting and supportive of their family.”

Beth Brindo says that Bellafaire JCB has worked with some prospective parents who were not out with their own families. “We had some applicants who weren’t out that didn’t go forward. We discussed where they were with their identities and if they were confident enough to invite a child into their home.

“I think you need to be out, to be affirmative and planful,” she says. “Your kids are going to out you. You need to take charge and not rely on your child, because then it could be a crisis. I’d like to hear other opinions on this.

“When you’re working with a family that’s not out with anyone, that could be problematic,” she says. “But I can see working with families that have lesser degrees of outness in a work setting, but are out in their support systems. Sometimes families don’t feel they need to talk about it in professional circles. But parents must have a good support system, and that could be a challenge if you’re not out.”

Denise Goodman recommends that homestudy staff members ask applicants where they are in their coming out process — and be knowledgeable of the process itself. “If you just came out yesterday, you should not come in tomorrow to adopt,” she says. “But that’s the same if you were just divorced” or experienced any other major life event. She also encourages asking prospective parents about their level of support from their families and their support network within and outside the LGBT community.

Michelle Chalmers, project coordinator of the Minnesota Adoption Resource Network’s Homecoming Project, notes that staff has to be well-trained so that these discussions can be useful and not just used as automatic barriers to placements. She knows of a gay male couple who had been together for 15 years and was frustrated by the limited understanding of the coming out process exhibited by the social worker assigned to conduct their homestudy. “The social worker was asking about relationships with extended family,” Chalmers explains. “One of the men said he wasn’t officially out to his family, in that he never said the words, but he told her, ‘They have a picture of us on the mantle, they know we’ve been living together for 15 years and they know we are adopting a child together.’ The worker was directly and indirectly saying that this way of managing the coming out process was somehow pathological. The social worker repeatedly asked him about honesty and disclosure, very concerned that he ‘was not out to his family.’

“I think folks find all kinds of ways to make their lives work. But we have trouble finding a common language. The social worker asked him, ‘What if the kid sits down at Thanksgiving dinner and says, ‘These two are gay?’ Well, probably, given how the extended family deals with things, someone would probably say, ‘Oh ... pass the butter, please.’ This is a family that doesn’t talk about certain things and they’ve made it

work. Many families do that about many issues. Clearly the man is ‘out’ to his family, even if it doesn’t look the way the social worker thinks it should.”

A competent homestudy process should be beneficial to the prospective parents, says foster parent Elijah Nealy. “There’s a piece for LGBT folks, especially if you’re thinking of parenting for the first time, that parenting means that you have to be out and confront being out in ways that you don’t need to without parenting. If agencies are doing their jobs, they’re helping LGBT people think about that up front.” Social workers need to help prospective parents think about being out at their 7-year-old’s elementary school or dealing with a teenager’s friends, Nealy says.

Ideally, prospective parents who are transgender have considered different scenarios — some of which may be more related to parenting in general as a transgender person than being the parent to a foster or adoptive child, Nealy notes. Social workers can help ensure that parents are prepared, without erecting barriers.

Erica Moltz of Adoptions Together says that “new social workers have to be comfortable asking questions about coming out, and if a person was married before — what happened and how did it go. Those are difficult questions to ask.”

Donna Ibbotson, formerly of Lilliput Children’s Services, addresses this in her trainings for social workers. “They need to understand the coming-out process. Sometimes these questions aren’t asked [during the homestudy], and it’s really important.”

In a chapter for clinicians for a book on adoption, Michael Colberg addresses the differences between secrecy and privacy and the role that each may play in LGBT-headed families.

He writes:

There is an important difference between the related concepts of privacy and secrecy ... Parents can pay a price when they do not feel able to be open and honest about who they are. Children do, too. It may be hard for a child to understand why, if their family is completely acceptable, they need to keep the fact that they have two same-sex parents a secret. If they are asked to keep this secret without understanding why, it is likely that they will feel that there is some part of their family that is "not OK." Secrecy engenders shame. The need for secrecy is something thrust upon a person by a situation. ... Privacy, on the other hand, is something that everyone has a right to. Each person should have the right to decide, in each moment, how much to share and how much to keep private. Looked at this way, the difference between secrecy and privacy depends upon who is in charge of setting the boundary. The need for secrecy is dictated by the perception that there will be danger were the truth to be shared openly. Privacy, on the other hand, is a right that can be exercised by a person in response to the desire to create comfort by establishing a boundary between themselves and others. It is very empowering to be able to set a boundary that is respected.¹⁶

Motivation

Gary Mallon says:

Parenting for most LGBT families is a choice — while it is often not a choice in the non-LGBT world. This may mean that an LGBT parent may be more motivated and deliberate as they embark on deciding to parent. For LGBT people, questions relating to motivation are very relevant for discussion, because creating families by birth may not have been an option. Fostering and adoption is often their first choice.¹⁷

Beth Brindo says motivation is an important discussion with all families. "What motivates someone to apply? Lots of things, many of them very valid. But some motivations aren't so positive; for example, a heterosexual, lesbian or gay couple who believes a child will stabilize their relationship."

Brindo describes one same-sex couple whose unspoken motivation was to be validated as a family by the larger community, which they interpreted as meaning that they should have a child. "The adoption disrupted early in the placement. We learned that this family was still exploring their identity as a same-sex family," she says. "They were hypersensitive about their same-sex status, and things didn't go well. Their personal journey and growth and sense of validity as a family are a unique part of the assessment that I want to expand knowledge on when working with foster and adoptive parents."

Valuing Difference/Dealing with Discrimination

Mallon writes:

Most lesbians and gay men have experienced discrimination. Most can, therefore, understand the impact on children and youth who have experienced discrimination and being different.¹⁸

Erica Moltz of Adoptions Together echoes that thought. "As parents, they'll have insight to deal with issues of discrimination," she says. "In my experience, they are more apt to be sensitive to discrimination. We look to see if they can have a dialogue with each other and if they're thoughtful about how this would affect their child."

This resilience and ability to navigate discrimination is important in two ways. First, it speaks to the ability of these parents to help their children find mechanisms to deal with the homophobia or transphobia the family will face collectively and the child will face individually. Additionally, in Moltz's experience at the agency LGBT fami-

lies adopt transracially more often than non-LGBT families. Those families will need both resilience to deal with the discrimination that they and their children will face as a transracial family and the ability to value difference to ensure their children are raised in a culturally competent manner.

Denise Goodman also believes social workers should ask about the applicants' abilities to cope with homophobia and/or transphobia, issues surrounding their own safety and any discrimination their children may face.

Nathan Monell, formerly of Foster Care Alumni of America, emphasizes a unique strength exhibited by many LGBT-headed families. Because many LGBT people have experienced being outside of or estranged from their families of origin, they can understand and support children separated from their biological families. "There is often a high degree of empathy for being unwanted or different," Monell says. "This is a strength these families can use in adopting or fostering older children."

"I've met many amazing LGBT parents that are welcoming of kids with special needs," said a transgender adoptive parent who chose to remain anonymous. "We're used to dealing with our own differences and learning how to stand up for ourselves – we can do that for our kids. If you've been through challenges, you might be more on the ball for your kids. We bring a lot to our parenting."

Relationships and Partnerships

Mallon writes:

There is some debate about whether social workers should ask applicants about their sexual relationships, and if they do ask, what should be done with this knowledge? I would argue that questions about sexual relationships should be part of the assessment for all couples. Sexual expression is a form of com-

munication and intimacy. How one feels about themselves physically and sexually is likely to have profound implications for the development of children in our care. How children feel about themselves physically and sexually will also have implications for how they relate to others and society. This is all part of developing a good enough sense of self, and helping this development is one of the major tasks for prospective parents. Parents will meet with challenges in dealing with their adolescents' sexuality, and they have a responsibility to help young people think about the nature of sexuality and relationships and provide them with information about sexuality.¹⁹

Karey Scheyd, former deputy director of parent recruitment at New York City's Administration for Children's Services, says that in the homestudy process for agencies in New York City, "It is reasonable to discuss dating and relationships" with prospective parents. "Those questions can feel very loaded to the gay applicant. A homestudy writer will also look around the house, look in the closets and ask questions about sleeping arrangements, bedrooms. People should know what's expected and what's normal" for all applicants.

In her trainings about conducting homestudies, Donna Ibbotson says she has "developed specific questions that I think they need to ask in homestudies for individuals and for couples." She asks homestudy writers, "What do you need to know? What do you not need to ask?" For example, she says, "people may feel awkward asking about the sexual part of [an LGBT couple's] relationship, even though they may ask it of non-LGBT couples. We talk [in the training] about how to discuss this without feeling uncomfortable or making the family feel uncomfortable."

On the issue of sex and relationships, Denise Goodman reminds homestudy workers to ask only what you might ask of all families.

Other Issues

Same-sex couples face different legal issues than straight married couples. Without the ability to marry in the majority of states, same-sex couples frequently must complete numerous legal documents or additional legal steps to protect their families — such as second-parent adoptions, living trusts, medical and financial powers of attorney and other documents. Access to health insurance and appropriate medical care is a major family consideration. These documents, even if they all are in hand, offer more fragile protections than marriage does, and that may have significant ongoing impact on an LGBT family.

Transgender prospective parents may face paperwork issues that are different than those of LGB applicants. Foster parent Elijah Nealy thinks that the agency he works with conducted the homestudy competently. However, he says, “I wasn’t thrilled that I had to do a security clearance that required me to list my former name. I’d rather not do that. So for a trans person who is post-transition and thinks they have the luxury of not coming out — they’ll have to. It’s a different dynamic than non-trans LGB people might face.”

? *Assessment Q2-3 in Staff Training Approach address this topic.*

Tips

- When issues come up for the children, it’s important to figure out what is really going on for them — is it having LGBT parents, being adopted, being in a transracial family or just regular child development issues? Robyn Harrod of Southern California Foster Family and Adoption Agency says, “I do a workshop on transracial adoption, and there are so many layers to explore. It’s like peeling an onion. Parents need to be patient and flexible and, at times, parenting beliefs are challenged.”

Food for Thought: *Are you married?* Relationship Quality vs. Legal Status

Agencies that have experience working with LGBT families have methods for learning about and assessing the quality of a relationship, its stability and the commitment between partners. Legal marriage for same-sex couples was not an option for many years. But with the shifting legal terrain — with same-sex marriage in seven states and the District of Columbia, civil union and enhanced domestic partnership rights in some jurisdictions — the legal status of same-sex relationships are more varied.

Agency leaders recommend an approach that looks at these two topics separately.

Established practices used to assess the quality of relationships should continue to be a primary approach in homestudies with same-sex couples. Additionally, agencies need to know whether legal marriage is an option for same-sex couples in their state and keep accurate records about the legal status of relationships. But because these laws are changing and relatively new, a marriage license or a marriage’s longevity are not meaningful indicators of the quality of the relationship.

If legal marriage is available, agencies should discuss with prospective parents whether they are already married, plan to marry or do not plan to marry — and to understand their reasons.

“Same-sex marriage was permitted and then undone in California; in most states, same-sex partners still can’t marry,” says Jill Jacobs, executive director of Family Builders in the San Francisco Bay Area. “And even when it is legal in a state, many LGBT people won’t get married until everyone can or until it is recognized federally — there are many reasons a couple might not pursue legal marriage, unrelated to the quality of their relationship.”

“We look more at the quality of the relationship, because marriage is new and emerging for LGBT people,” says Janice Goldwater with Adoptions Together. With changes in the law in D.C. and Maryland “now we can begin to have conversations about marriage and the choices around it — not the length of time; but why they might marry or why not.”

- Consider having homestudy visits conducted by social workers who have also led the cohort of applicants through a parent preparation class as they do in Washington, D.C. “She asked us about our support network, financial resources and challenges we’ve faced in our own lives,” says adoptive father Dan McNeil about his homestudy worker and trainer. “We already knew [the social worker] by then. It was like having a friend over.”
- Denise Goodman recommends that homestudy workers use the *Mallon Child Welfare Journal* article as a guide and apply the model from the chapter “Conducting the Family Assessment” in the second volume of *A Field Guide to Child Welfare*, written by Judith Rycus and Ronald Hughes and published by CWLA Press in 1998.
- Beth Brindo urges agencies not to view all homestudies as the same and to look closely at the structure of the family support system. “I just spoke to an agency that works with a lot of gay and lesbian families, and the social worker said she treats gay and lesbian families just like they treat any other family. While we do in many ways — there are more similarities than differences — there are unique differences. I hope they’re not saying they don’t recognize some of the nuances, some of the barriers that will be presented and some of the special preparations they should make. A family may be mis-served unless they have strong support network outside the agency.”
- Jody Marksamer of the National Center for Lesbian Rights says agencies should understand that LGBT-headed families may have a different experience with the homestudy, placement or finalization process as compared to non-LGBT-headed families — and they should communicate these potential differences to their clients. “Some LGBT couples may face additional homestudy expenses or a more intrusive analysis of their relationship and family,” Marksamer says. “[Heterosexual] married couples may not have to show that they share expenses or otherwise jump through hoops like these to prove they would be good adoptive parents.”
- Licensed foster parent Cris Benjamin encourages social workers who conduct homestudies with transgender prospective parents not to focus on that single issue. “Sometimes, people can focus on it and sensationalize it, rather than thinking of you as another human being trying to build your family and help kids in care,” Benjamin says. “Don’t get stuck on that.”
- Social worker and family therapist Arlene Istar Lev encourages agencies to consider the experiences and comfort of transgender people. “Transgender people applying to adopt have probably done a lot of soul searching already regarding both their gender identity and how this will impact their children. We should start with that assumption — that they have already thought a lot about this. Still, they may be very resistant to the process of being evaluated due to their experiences dealing with ‘gatekeeping’ in the medical community (in order to receive medical treatments, transgender people must be evaluated — a very similar process to a homestudy). They are likely to be scared of being rejected, and consequently hyper-vigilant and nervous, scared or resistant. I don’t think this is an easy interview process; the question is how to put them at ease, and make them feel comfortable.”

✓ Conducting and Writing the Homestudy

Agencies will be familiar with the laws in all relevant jurisdictions regarding adoption and foster parenting by LGBT individuals and same-sex couples. They will use that knowledge in their discussions with applicants and their decisions regarding approaches to conducting and writing the homestudy. To ensure accurate assessments of a family's strengths and challenges and in the interest of children and youth to be placed with these families, agencies will, whenever possible, conduct homestudies of same-sex couples as a family rather than a single individual, even in those areas where only one partner in a couple can adopt or foster parent. It is also important for agencies to be familiar with gender case law about transgender issues and custody decisions.

Stories from the Field

As discussed previously, laws vary from state to state concerning whether both partners in a same-sex couple may adopt a child. Because of these legal differences, as well as what is common practice in a given area, approaches may vary in conducting the homestudy.

In Ohio, unmarried people cannot adopt together. Instead, "a single parent has to adopt," says Beth Brindo, former adoption supervisor at Bellefaire JCB. "On our application — and this is our agency's procedure — we ask the family to fill out the application as a couple. If they are applying as a couple, we want to do the assessment as a couple, not as a housemate. So for the application and homestudy, we assess the family as a family, as a 100 percent shareholder in responsibility as parents and adoptive parents. We look at finances, medical issues, everything that we look at in a two-parent household. We ask, 'What are your plans for raising a child? Will one of you be a full-time caregiver? Who has insurance benefits for an adopted child?'

That's a logical way to go for an assessment. The one with health insurance for a child shouldn't quit their job and be the full-time caregiver."

In her training work, Denise Goodman talks with participants about the different models of writing homestudies, depending on the laws of the state and the benefits and limitations of each. Goodman worked with a lesbian couple who insisted they were "just roommates" because they were so afraid that being out as a couple would result in not getting a placement. In her work in Ohio, she advocates the approach used by Bellefaire JCB: applying to foster or adopt as a couple, even though only one person will be the adopter when it goes to court. She emphasizes the importance of helping the couple explore on what basis they will decide who will be the adopter (finances, insurance issues, race/class issues, etc.) to ensure they agree on the decision and that it does not suggest any problematic power dynamics within the partnership.

If social workers are "doing a homestudy with a single woman who is a lesbian but chooses not to discuss that as a single woman," says Gary Mallon, "they might explore sexuality with her, but most social workers don't explore sexuality. She could pass through, but my feeling is — what if that person says, 'I'm a single lesbian, I date women, and I will date women as a parent'? Then it's an issue. Do you say she's a single Caucasian lesbian who isn't dating anyone at the moment? Then you need to talk about how will she disclose this to the child, how will it affect her relationships in the community, with schools, with medical providers?

"I understand why some people might still be undercover, but once you have a kid, the covers get pulled off," Mallon says. "For everybody's safety, it's good to pull the covers off."

Shari Levine, executive director of Open Adoption & Family Services, describes how the agen-

cy approached a homestudy for a couple that included a transgender partner:

We were contacted by a transgender prospective adoptive father and his wife several years ago. They attended our pre-adopt seminar and then shared their story with us during their application and intake appointment. They had been best friends throughout college and then one partner, who had always identified as male, underwent surgery. Our open adoption philosophy was very appealing to them because it reflected their values of openness and honesty. After proceeding with their intake appointment and homestudy process, they seemed like great candidates for our program. We explained that they would need to discuss their story openly in an addendum to their autobiographies, which would be shared with the birth parents. In our process, the birth parents receive the homestudy, the autobiographies and a photo collage for any adoptive family they are considering. They eloquently described their experience in the addendum and were chosen right away by a birth mom. They've enjoyed a wonderful open adoption relationship.

One adoptive parent has adopted two children through Alameda County Social Services Agency. While adopting his first child several years ago, he went through the assessment process as a female, which is how he presented himself at the time. He now identifies as a transgender male. According to Fredi Juni, the agency did not conduct a completely new homestudy or require extensive documentation from therapists. It did, however, revise all paperwork to reflect his gender identity.

Tips

- In writing the homestudy, Denise Goodman recommends social workers try to

beat readers/users to the punch — anticipate their questions and concerns. “But even when an agency does everything right, it can face a homophobic or transphobic judge who interprets the law in his or her own way,” she says. “You have to be prepared to take that on.”

- Erica Moltz echoes that thought. “Not all social workers [of other agencies] will be open to LGBT parents, even where it is permitted. As an agency, we don’t have a lot of control over that. We try to nurture relationships with social workers we know are open to LGBT parents. A lot of it comes down to the individual social worker, his or her supervisor and the judge.”
- Donna Ibbotson urges social workers to think about how to present the families in the homestudy, to focus on the advantages of that particular family. “You’re presenting this family to a giant social welfare system. There will be some people in the system who personally disapprove of LGBT people. How do you prepare your family for being rejected? Sometimes it will be for being a same-sex couple. There will be multiple disappointments. Social workers need to prepare them and still advocate for those families, but without burning bridges in the system.”
- “You don’t have to reinvent the wheel,” says Colette Tobias administrator for the Division of Youth and Family Services of New Jersey. Many states like New Jersey use the SAFE Home Study process, which now includes an All Children – All Families tool for use with LGBT families. It’s available at: www.safehomestudy.org.
- The All Children – All Families training curriculum focuses on homestudies in Module 4.

Homestudy Questions for Use with LGBT Prospective Foster/Adoptive Parents (Single and Couples)

These questions were developed for use in the All Children—All Families Training (Module 4) by Diane Wagner, Denise Goodman, Arlene Istar Lev, and Beth Brindo, and many are adapted from *Lesbian and Gay Foster and Adoptive Parents* by Gary Mallon (2006, The Child Welfare League of America). The rationale following each question is intended to help social workers better understand the importance and relevance of each of these questions in the broader context of the homestudy/family assessment process.

1. *When did you first realize you were L/G/B/T, and when did you begin telling others?*

This question will give you insight into the applicants' early stages of the coming out process, and what impact that process had on the applicants, as well as those he may have come out to (e.g., parents, siblings, close friends, etc.). The applicant does not need to be out in all aspects of his/her life, but being out to some people who serve as a support system is essential. Applicant should be at a stage of self-acceptance and integration regarding his/her sexual orientation/gender identity.

2. *Are you out in the community? At work? With your family? With friends and neighbors?*

This question will allow you to explore with the applicants to what degree and in which parts of their lives they are out, which will give you insight into the following areas:

- Does the applicant have an adequate support system?
- To what degree does the applicant have pride?
- How does the applicant manage homophobia/transphobia or discrimination?

3. *How have homophobia/transphobia/heterosexism affected your life and how have you dealt with this? Are there ways in which being LGBT have helped prepare you for parenthood? What are the coping mechanisms you have used to face discrimination/rejection (if applicable)?*

**Can you share an experience of homophobia/transphobia/heterosexism and how you dealt with it?*

These questions will give you further insight into the applicant's coming out process, and in particular, how challenges faced within the process were dealt with. It will give you knowledge of the applicant's coping mechanisms and strengths, which can carry over into how they will cope with the challenges of being a parent, including how they will facilitate their children's coping mechanisms. It will provide you with information as to how the applicant deals with "world views" that may not be a positive reflection of who he/she is, which is not unlike what adoptees sometimes experience as a consequence of adoption being part of who they are.

**It can be helpful to ask an applicant to share a specific life experience that illustrates how they reacted--it can be an indicator of how they will deal with future incidents, giving us a "track record" of their behavior in the face of a challenge.*

4. *How would you describe the overall quality of your closest relationships in terms of emotional intimacy, openness and honesty, support, tolerance and acceptance, etc?. Have you ever had to negotiate homophobia/transphobia/heterosexism in those relationships (i.e. siblings, parents, ex-spouse)?*

This question will allow you to gain an understanding of the degree to which homophobia/transphobia/heterosexism exists within the applicant's significant relationships. This will be an important factor as these dynamics will also affect the child(ren) being adopted. It will be important to explore how the applicant might mitigate any negative dynamics that the children may experience from their family's present relationships.

5. What has been the attitude of your extended family to your partner? Have they been inclusive and welcoming? Is your family supportive of you (and your partner) adopting a child? If not, what will be your system of support in raising a child?

As with all families, because extended family members will be part of the adoptive family's life, it's important to know how supportive the extended family members are of the applicant/couple, and what role they will have in the LGBT adoptive family. If family members are not supportive, are there other sources of support, and how will the adoptive parents mitigate any negative dynamics that the children may experience from their extended family members?

6. How much research have you done in relation to attitudes of local schools, pediatricians, neighbors, faith communities, youth organizations, etc. to LGBT families? What were your findings?

This question will give you an indication of how proactive the applicants are in terms of understanding their status as an LGBT family and what experiences (negative and positive) or unique needs they might have. This will also give you insight as to what mechanism the applicant may be implementing to meet all of the needs of the child(ren). This is an opportunity to direct the applicants to local resources.

7. How will you help your children if they experience prejudice because of your sexual orientation?

Prejudice is an experience that most people, including children, will go through. Discussing with applicants how they will help their children as they experience prejudice is important in that we need to assure as much as possible that parents are ready to meet this need. This question is equally as important as asking how applicants will help their child(ren) understand their experience and identity as an adoptee.

8. It is not uncommon for children to "out" their parents. In the past, have you ever been "outed" by someone? How did you handle it? How did you react?

This question will help you explore with the applicants how ready they may be to address their status as an LGBT adoptive family. It will also give you some insight as to what plan the applicants may have in terms of addressing with their children their status as an LGBT adoptive family, and navigating the line between privacy and secrecy.

9. Have you considered other options as pathways to parenthood?

Many lesbians and some gay men may have faced infertility. In addition to exploring whether there is loss/grief related to fertility challenges, we want to make sure that an applicant's decision to adopt has been reached via education, rational processing and informed decision-making mechanisms.

10. Are you open to adopting a child of the opposite gender as yours (for example, lesbian couples adopting a son)? If so, are there close, trusted adults of that gender who can be available as added support?

This question is intended to explore the wide range of caring adults who will be a part of the child's community as they grow up. This is not to suggest that two moms or two dads can't provide what their child needs, but to point out that there are stages in a child's life when he or she will seek out a male or female adult for a specific need. For example, a male with two moms might want or need to talk to an adult male about the changes his body experiences during puberty; a son with two dads might want to talk to a woman about certain aspects of dating, etc. Male applicants will have the opportunity to consider female support people for their daughter, and female applicants will have the opportunity to consider male support people for their son. This question is essentially the same as when we ask a white couple who is exploring transracial adoption to think about the people in their community who are African-American/Latino, and how they will provide contact with adults who share their child's heritage.

Homestudy Questions for Use Specifically with Transgender Prospective Foster/Adoptive Parents

1. How would you like to be addressed?

Asking this question will communicate a great deal of respect for your client's identity as a transgender person, and will afford you the opportunity to make sure you are addressing your client as he/she wishes to be addressed.

2. Where along the gender spectrum would you identify yourself?

3. Where are you in the process of legally changing your identity?

Asking this question will help you understand and be prepared for any complexities regarding paperwork required for the home study, e.g., whether birth certificate and Social Security card "match" the applicant's current name and gender.

4. Are you "out" to others as a trans person?

This question will give you insight into the applicants' coming out process, and what impact that process had on the applicants, as well as those they may have come out to (e.g., parents, siblings, close friends, employer, etc.). It will also help you explore what kind of support system the family has and from whom.

5. Are you planning any surgeries? If so, what will you do about childcare during the recovery period?

This will help you further explore the applicants' support system and whether or not that support system would be able to meet the needs of the family in this situation. Because a thorough medical history is part of the home study application process, issues related to any medical aspects of gender transition (hormones, surgery) will be addressed.

6. How will you explain gender issues to your children? How do you anticipate telling your children that you are transgender?

These questions will help you explore with the applicants how prepared they may be to address gender issues and their identity as a transgender person(s) and transgender adoptive family. As with the topic of adoption, we want to make sure that the applicants have a plan for addressing the various parts of who they are as a family in a proactive manner, as opposed to waiting until the children ask, or some event occurs.

7. How do you think being transgender will impact your children?

This question will help you explore with the applicants not only how they believe their children will be affected by being part of a transgender family, but more importantly, what mechanism the applicant may implement to meet the needs of the child(ren) in this particular area.

Placement

Placement Guiding Principle

Through its advocacy, communication and support systems, the agency will support LGBT families waiting for child placements, just as they support all families. The agency will prepare families for the likely waiting period and potential obstacles to placements, offering support and advocacy whenever appropriate.

B *To achieve benchmark 10 in the Benchmarks of LGBT Cultural Competency, an agency must have had placements/finalized adoptions with several LGBT foster or adoptive parents and/or provided foster/adoption services to LGBT families within the past year.*

The sections below describe several topics to consider during the process of matching LGBT prospective families with children and youth awaiting families. The All Children – All Families training curriculum focuses on matching in Module 4.

Stories from the Field

Staff members at agencies that work with LGBT families all emphasize the importance of communication. Waiting for placements is a difficult time and rarely proceeds as expected. Wait times for infants are, on average, one and a half years, and birth parents get to decide the placement. If families are seeking older waiting children, their foster families or families of origin may interfere in the placements or need time to become more accepting of an LGBT family. Older children also have a say in where they are placed. Social workers need to communicate these issues to their client families, advocate for their clients and help educate or open minds wherever possible.

While he and his partner waited for a placement, Dan McNeil found support in the D.C.

Child and Family Services Administration. He says, “You might need to work [to get support], but the resources were there. So much of our experience was based on individuals, and we happened to find a good set of people. It would be nicer if it was institutionalized.” McNeil notes that he knows some social workers at the agency are LGBT-friendly, some are hostile and many fall somewhere in between. If anyone has a bad experience with a social worker who is unsupportive, the agency allows prospective parents to work with someone else.

Elizabeth Gross, formerly a recruiter for the D.C. agency, says that Washington, D.C., is one of the few jurisdictions where families have a support social worker who helps them navigate the system. “We’ll see a lot of benefits come from that,” she says.

Adoptions Together has support groups for LGBT waiting parents, depending on the needs of their clients.

Beth Brindo is always scoping the landscape just ahead of her clients for obstacles that might appear during the waiting and matching period. “As a provider delivering service and looking to work in new communities, I want to know about the court in that area, about the other agencies. I go ahead of my families because I don’t want families to have any surprises.”

Donna Ibbotson serves as an advocate for families who have been certified by a county as an adoptive family for children in foster care but who have not received a placement or feel poorly treated. She helps families navigate the system, including identifying the best counties in which to finalize an adoption, if families have options.

Food for Thought: Working with Latino Families

Maria Quintanilla, executive director of the Latino Family Institute, which serves Los Angeles and Orange counties in California, describes the need to be “mindful of the layers of cultural competence” when working with LGBT Latino families.

“The same issues that affect all Latino families apply to LGBT Latinos, but what is different?” she asks. “If you understand the important role that family plays in Latino culture and the emphasis and high value placed on family connections, that will help you assess whether the client’s family of origin is supportive and close or whether the family has distanced themselves from their LGBT family member. My own experience tells me that when LGBT Latinos become foster or adoptive parents, it brings the family closer together, especially the extended family, because having children and growing our extended family is a value that we share.

Quintanilla urges agencies to look at how LGBT issues fit into the Latino culture or any other non-majority culture and to understand both the basic cultural issues and the particular “flavor” of the life experience of an LGBT person of that cultural background.

She says the level of acculturation will influence the comfort levels and values regarding LGBT issues. That may also be determined, somewhat, by what motivated the family to come to the United States — to escape persecution, poverty or oppression in their country of origin or to pursue economic opportunities or for a combination of reasons. Tolerance for difference and ability to accept an LGBT family member can depend on many of these variables and should be explored as part of a homestudy process that includes assessment of family and community support.

“What’s most important at this junction is how LGBT Latino foster or adoptive parents plan to integrate their new roles as parents into the context of their extended families and community,” she says. “For instance, acculturated family members may be more accepting than the ‘traditional’ relatives.

“Our experience is that over time, relatives embrace the families because of the high Latino value placed on children. In cases where this is not possible, families are known to be very resourceful in creating new extended families and networks that are supportive to them and their children.”

Ann McCabe says that after the homestudy, the child welfare system is filled with “multiple layers of inadequacy and families may get discouraged without the help of an agency like the National Adoption Center that is not in charge of placement but works to provide information, guidance and advocacy throughout the entire adoption process.”

“Adoption exchanges have a unique role — we’re neutral,” says Christine Jacobs of the National Adoption Center. “We’re not pushing families in or pushing them out. We’re a neutral setting where they can be honest. We’re not in a position to assess — that’s not our role. Instead, our role is to support and guide them. If an agency comes back with a question about a family, our role is to help the family respond to those questions.”

Gloria Hochman of the center agreed. “This is the special role of adoption exchanges: to support families while they wait and to work with agencies to improve their practice.”

The Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE) launched a new program to better serve families through the process, especially while waiting for placement. The director of the new Family Support Services program can develop ongoing relationships with waiting families. “She’s an advocate, and can take the time to answer the scary questions” that families may have while waiting, says Lisa Funaro. If an LGBT waiting parent has concerns about potential barriers because of sexual orientation or gender identity, the Family Support Services program director is available for support and problem-solving.

Colleen Ellingson of Adoption Resources of Wisconsin (ARW) describes a similar role for that exchange. “We develop enough of a relationship with families that they think of us as their friends. They call because they’re frustrated, or if they think an agency doesn’t want them,” she says. “We help them understand the process, including the hiccups along the way.” ARW also has a large resource library and conducts about 10 hours of training a week for families, offering waiting families multiple opportunities to get answers to their questions.

Karey Scheyd says that for the LGBT waiting parent, “it’s hard for people to tease out” why obstacles occur or if the process takes longer than anticipated. “They might wonder, ‘Is this the reality for any foster or adoptive parent, or is it because of my sexual orientation?’ Agencies can help applicants understand that their experience as an LGBT client is not different than others, and explain the challenges.”

Jason Cook and Michael Troynel, who have adopted seven children through the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, say that in the early stages, they wondered whether an attorney representing their oldest son was biased against them and creating delays. They learned that the delays were unrelated to their sexual orientation and the attorney became a great champion for them.

While they were strong advocates for themselves and their children, they describe court processes in which they did not have a voice, and lengthier waits than they initially expected. “It’s such an overwhelming experience, I think every family or single person going through this should have a mentor to guide them through the process,” says Jason Cook. “And not just a social worker, but an adoption advocate. We received that support through the Pop Luck Club (for gay fathers in L.A.).”

Tips

- Agencies should communicate clearly with LGBT waiting parents so they know exactly how the process works, including any reasons for potential delays. Beth Brindo notes that waiting for a placement feels like a roller coaster of emotions for all families. Some same-sex couples may have questions about whether delays are happening because of their sexual orientation.
- Agencies can encourage or host groups and other communication among LGBT waiting families, so the families can discuss concerns and provide support during the waiting period.

Waiting Children: Addressing Worker Bias

Agencies will ensure that their own staff members are well trained and competent in working with LGBT families. They will also create strategies to navigate relationships with other agencies whose staff members may exhibit bias against placing children and youth with LGBT families, regardless of the appropriateness of the match for waiting children.

Stories from the Field

As program director at the National Adoption Center, Ann McCabe worked with leaders of one particular state Division of Youth and Family Services who have been supportive of more formalized recruitment of families from the LGBT community. “Verbally, they are all saying they want these families,” McCabe says. “But when you get into the system and you have direct-line staff who have their own biases or religious views, you may bump up against barriers that the leaders at the top may not realize are impacting a family’s experience.” McCabe knows many stories of LGBT families who say their homestudy was done relatively easily, but the wait during the matching process “may take forever.” She knows some families who have left

the process of waiting for a domestic adoption and instead pursued international adoptions.

“Everyone has their own perception of what’s a perfect match,” McCabe says. Often, there are legitimate reasons a social worker might pursue certain family structures; other times, bias is the reason.

The National Adoption Center, which writes profiles for the Adopt US Kids program, has navigated potential bias in those profiles. Exchanges and other organizations use profiles to describe waiting children and youth to potential families. “We always were aware you could include the social worker’s bias in the bio. They might write, ‘A two-parent family is preferred’ for a child,” says Christine Jacobs. “But it’s better to include the child’s needs, such as saying, ‘A family that provides structure and can bring the child to medical appointments is preferred.’ We think it’s important to make it specific to the child.” In this way, potential families are not excluded and the child’s needs remains paramount. “We try to be careful with our profiles,” says Gloria Hochman of the center. “As an exchange, we can encourage agencies to be as neutral as we are” in describing the best families for each child.

Lisa Funaro at MARE describes a similar situation. “We’ve also begun to see the biases of some workers,” she says. “We might see a worker who always says, ‘This child would do best with a mom and dad.’ But often the worker didn’t really address the issue with the child. We need to help some workers talk to kids about what they want — and how to talk to them about something they might not know anything about, like what it might be like to live with two moms.”

Michelle Chalmers, project coordinator of the Minnesota Adoption Resources Network’s Homecoming Project, sees both ends of the competence spectrum. “Bias among profession-

als is exquisite — they’re either great or so ridiculous it’s beyond words,” she says. “For example, I know one young man who is about to emancipate next month. We had a match that was perfect, it was dreamy, we got all the way to giving the kid pictures and letters from the dad, but the group home where he lived at the time said they’d do anything to keep him from ‘living with a homosexual.’ They sabotaged it so much that the kid wouldn’t even meet with the dad. The parents at the group home had no intention of providing permanency for the young man, and after a short time, he was moved from that home. He never got a permanent family, and he’s about to emancipate out.”

In another case, Chalmers says a guardian *ad litem* listed to one of her staff members all the reasons he would not support a placement with a gay man, including “some crazy statistic” about gay men’s life expectancy. “He said, ‘Don’t even bring me any gay families for this kid.’” This kind of bias is a daily challenge and one for which there is no accountability, Chalmers says.

In her work in New York state, Maris Blechner says her agency has not encountered any strong resistance from other agencies to placing children and youth with LGBT families. “Sometimes they’re reluctant, but once they meet a family, that goes away.”

“Sure, people may have their own biases, but people have learned to keep their personal mouths shut,” she says. “Agencies are realizing there are many different kinds of families and many different people make really good parents.”

Sari Grant, recruitment administrator for the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, Adoption and Permanency Resources Division, says, “If we find a family that we think is a great match for a child, the last thing we want is for staff to be a barrier —

because workers have issues they haven't dealt with or don't feel comfortable talking to kids about the opportunity to have a great family just because the family is LGBT."

"We've found that LGBT families are frequently more open to seek out resources, are often more understanding of kids going through certain issues and more tolerant of some of the acting out and other behavior. We want to acknowledge LGBT families as an excellent resource, and to impart that to the social workers, foster families, and kids."

Tips

- Bill Bettencourt, a consultant with the Anne E. Casey Foundation, urges agencies, especially large public agencies, to develop good data tracking systems. The system should be either web-based or a software system for administrators and supervisors to generate reports. The system should be able to answer any questions about placements. For example, an agency might say, "We recruited 45 LGBT homes and only 10 are getting placements. Why is that?" According to Bettencourt, "Sometimes, placement workers just place with the larger agencies they know, because it's easier, and they don't place with new, individual homes because it takes more time. But if you have a better database system, it makes it easier for the placement worker." It also makes it easier for supervisors to monitor patterns that might indicate bias or workload challenges.
- To address worker bias, some agencies ensure that no individual has sole authority to authorize or oppose a placement. Instead, they use an inclusive committee process to review placements.
- The All Children – All Families training curriculum focuses on matching and placement in Module 4.

✓ Waiting Children: Placing Older Youth

Agencies will fully disclose family structure to older youth who are involved in placement decisions. They will use a strengths-based approach in presenting this information and offer age-appropriate information about LGBT families to youth while also respecting older youths' decisions.

Stories from the Field

Michelle Chalmers thinks many LGBT people may be uniquely suited to adopt adolescents. "I think LGBT folks see the social justice angle of adolescent adoption, and I think that's why we're seeing a disproportionate number of LGBT people adopting older youth. We understand created families, and we get being a group that is left out. We may know a number of people who were booted out of their families or are able to imagine being booted out of our own.

"The kids have really surprised me. I've seen some really thoughtful reactions," she says. "I worked with one 16-year-old kid for whom we seemed to have found a good match. The prospective dad also happens to be the biological birth mother of an 18-year-old. After the three of us met together the first time and the prospective dad had a chance to explain the fact that he is transsexual, the teen didn't fully get it, of course, but he asked a lot of questions on the drive home. He began talking about estrogen and testosterone and how we all have both. And he talked about how the guy must have had a hard life. 'It kind of makes me like him more,' he said. Then he hit his hand on the dashboard and said, 'Damn, Michelle, you got me a mom and dad all in one!' It was awesome. That man is not an activist. He was simply in the wrong body, he fixed it, he's been a man for 10 years, and now he's marrying a woman. But we all knew that this was a big part of the dad's history and who he is and that any teen adopted into the home had to know the whole story." Chalmers says

the man had a lot to risk in the disclosure — harassment had forced him to move in the past. They worked together with the youth “to understand times that are appropriate and, conversely, not appropriate to talk about the fact that the dad is transsexual. It’s not something you discuss with everyone.”

Agencies can advocate for the special qualities that their families may have for caring for older youth. Because placement decisions are about finding a family for the youth, and not a youth for the family, older youth themselves will have opinions and a voice in the placement decisions.

Foster parent Dennis Patrick felt welcomed by the second foster care agency he and his partner worked with, but he believes the agency did a disservice to youth and his family in one key area. “Our agency doesn’t know how to explain [LGBT families] to kids,” he says. “Very often, they don’t explain it at all. They’ll say, ‘Dennis is a professor, and Tom teaches high school.’ The kids arrive, and they don’t know who we are to each other. We have to educate them. Now [before a placement] we ask the agency if the kids know. Coming out adds a layer of complexity to everything that’s happening” when a youth moves into a family’s home. “And they could be very homophobic, and then our family wouldn’t be the best placement for those children, which would lead to disruption.”

In her trainings, Denise Goodman emphasizes considerations of the child’s best interest. When discussing placements, she often asks participants to identify a type of child that should not be placed with a same-sex couple. “They’ll name different kids, like one who was sexually abused by his father. And I’ll say, ‘So you’ll place him with a heterosexually married couple, which is the same place where he was abused?’” They name other scenarios, all of which they dismiss after further discussions. “Then we’ll usually get to this one: an older kid who is ragingly homophobic and his family is ragingly homophobic.

Yes, that’s probably not a good placement, for the child or the waiting family, which is going to be a resource to other children. That’s why you have to talk with older kids about these issues.”

Richard and Ken Buley-Neumar were warned by staff members at more than one agency that teenage boys would not want to be placed in a two-dad family. When, by chance, a teen was available after the couple was certified, the youth’s social worker said the teen was open to meeting the couple if they wouldn’t get “kissy” in front of him. The couple could live with that and met the youth, and learned that his more important concern was the stability of their relationship. He had previously been adopted by a single mom with a boyfriend who left, and then the adoption disrupted.

“Children want parents who will commit to loving them forever, unconditionally,” Richard Buley-Neumar says. Richard is now a transition specialist at Family Focus Adoption, adoptive father of two through foster care, and currently in the process of a third adoption. “The All Children – All Families training emphasizes this: Workers need to understand and support this strength in families – it is the honesty, openness and commitment the children respond to.”

Ann McCabe remembers a case of child-specific recruitment the National Adoption Center was conducting for a teenage girl. “We had to bring up to her what her preferred family structure might be. We asked if she would consider a two-parent lesbian family, or two gay dads or a single gay or lesbian parent. In her case, she said she had enough issues and didn’t want to take that on.” For many youth, she says, it may be an automatic reaction in an anti-LGBT culture, and it might be worth probing a bit before accepting and supporting an immediate negative response. “You need to think about how to talk to the kids that are old enough to understand. ‘Look, they’re a great family, they go on good vacations, here’s their house, and oh, by the

way, it's two moms.' Kids waiting for a permanent family lose out when a social worker with his or her own anti-LGBT biases does not consider all qualified families who could be a resource for kids in care."

"The most effective way to work with social workers is one-on-one," says Lisa Funaro of the Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange. "And we have to give our staff the words and self-confidence to probe with workers what the issues may be. We may want to say, 'Matthew has been registered with us for four years. Have you talked to this child about what it would be like to not have any family? Can you talk to this child about what they need?' Then we need to take an approach of talking about family constellations. Some of these kids have been in group care so long that they don't know what living in a family is like. We want to figure out how best to help workers approach subjects like placement with an LGBT family."

Foster parent Elijah Nealy notes that some agencies may be skilled in talking with youth about gay and lesbian prospective parents but still don't address transgender parents. He has attended meet and greet events in New York — where waiting teenagers and licensed prospective parents have a chance to meet one another — and has sometimes felt vulnerable after coming out as a transgender man. "The young people are amazingly open and don't care," he says, but they have little information about what that means.

Nealy also wonders about who should first disclose to a youth that a specific prospective parent is transgender — the social worker or the prospective parent, or both together — and how that disclosure should occur. "I felt comfortable with the lesbian social worker I was working with, who came out for me," Nealy says. "In some ways, I would rather have done that myself but felt mostly comfortable with her." If it had been a different worker, Nealy

says he would have been concerned about how that worker might have discussed it.

Tips

- Christine Jacobs of the National Adoption Center recommends that agencies consider sponsoring "match parties," where waiting families, waiting children and youth, and their social workers can all meet each other. "I think there should be more access generally for approved families to have in-person interaction with children and social workers, rather than shuffling paper," Jacobs says. "We provide the introductions of families to the social workers, and children and youth. Then they can all see if there's a match. You can read a profile on a family, but it's so much more helpful to meet a family."
- Rob Woronoff, former director of the Family Builders' Putting Pride into Practice Project, recommends an exercise called "Unpacking the 'No'" in Module 4 of the All Children – All Families training, which builds skills for talking with children and youth about all families.

Waiting Children: Placements to and from Foster Families

In their own practice, organizations will work to educate their foster families about the strengths of all client families and will work to minimize the ability of individual foster families to interfere with appropriate permanent placements with LGBT families. Agencies will also support qualified LGBT foster families in challenges by birth families.

Stories from the Field

Parents with their children in the foster care system may challenge the placement of their children with qualified LGBT foster families. Dennis Patrick and his partner have experienced this twice. "We've had two families upset that their

sons were placed with a gay couple, and our agency defended and supported us each time,” he says. “In the first case, the parents asked for their kids to be removed, and they weren’t willing to be educated on the topic. Our agency stood by us. In the other case, a parent had her attorney request an emergency hearing to have her son taken out of our home. Our agency was at the hearing and spoke up in our defense. They said, ‘Dennis and Tom are some of our best foster parents, and your son is lucky to be placed with them.’ The judge agreed it was in the best interest of the child not to be moved.”

Foster families themselves may become the obstacle when agencies are considering a permanent placement with an LGBT adoptive family.

“Foster families — God bless them — they’re doing incredibly hard work,” says Michelle Chalmers. “But they make or break a placement, whether or not they’re willing to adopt. The power is disproportionate.” She says the anti-LGBT bias of some foster parents and guardians *ad litem* can interfere with finding permanent families for the youth they are serving.

“It’s sometimes a challenge working with foster parents caring for children who are going to be adopted and are not supportive of the transition to LGBT families,” says Fredi Juni of the Alameda County Social Services Agency in California. “We created a new form that describes our non-discrimination policy, explains that we’re welcoming to all families. We let the foster family know, in writing, that the agency has the responsibility and authority to select an adoptive family. The decision lies with us. It’s a tool for social workers to have that conversation. It’s not a legal document. It doesn’t always prevent problems, but it’s very useful for public agencies.”

Adoptive parent Richard Buley-Neumar, a transition specialist with Family Focus Adoption, tells a story of a child in a foster home who was

matched with a gay couple whom he initially connected with but subsequently disparaged in words that did not seem to be his own.

“We suspected the foster mother was trying to poison the placement because of her own prejudices. She came to a meeting and confirmed that she had expressed her disapproving opinions to the boy. We petitioned the county for his immediate removal from that home. They agreed, and the adoption placement went forward. He had not one issue with the family once he was out of the foster home.”

Sample

Alameda County Social Services Agency
 “Information Regarding Adoptive Planning”
www.hrc.org/acaf

Tip

- Preparation trainings for foster families should address cultural competence in caring for LGBT children and youth as well as working with a diverse community of resource families who may serve as foster or adoptive families to children in care. Foster families should be well prepared to help children in their care transition to all other qualified families identified by the agency, including LGBT adoptive and foster families.

Infant Adoption: Working with Birth Families

Organizations that work in infant adoption will offer information and support to birth families so they may be informed about LGBT families for placement.

Stories from the Field

Bellefaire JCB includes LGBT families along with other prospective families for birth mothers to consider. Beth Brindo says, “Some birth mothers will say, ‘I really like Mike and Tom.’ I had the

Food for Thought: International Adoption

Beth Brindo, previously of Bellefaire JCB, says the agency followed its core values of honesty and transparency in all its work, which has led it to be a leader in open adoptions and to embrace LGBT-headed families directly and not through a “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” approach. The agency applied these values similarly in its work in international adoptions, which now limits its ability to work with LGBT adults. “Most countries do not permit a single parent who is gay or lesbian,” Brindo says. “If a family applied to us and wanted to adopt in China, and if I had to overtly lie, I wouldn’t do it. I know other agencies do that, but to be consistent with our message of honesty and transparency, we were not going to lie.” Brindo also worried about the impact beyond individual families when media stories feature LGBT adoptive families with children from countries that ban such adoptions. “We try to build trust with foreign countries and deceiving them about families will not build rapport. As a child welfare professional, I want to advocate for families, but not at the risk of ruining a whole program and harming an opportunity to find homes for lots of kids if a country shuts down its adoption program.”

wildest adoption experience that flew in the face of every possible barrier. An African-American woman in her late 20s chose a two-dad Caucasian family for her infant. They were in the delivery room with her. I had an ‘ah-ha’ moment. It blew away any expectations that I had.”

Other agency leaders tell similar stories of an increasing number of birth mothers choosing LGBT families.

“We worked with a woman in her 20s who narrowed down her choice to a lesbian couple and


a heterosexual couple,” says Janice Goldwater of Adoptions Together. “After interviewing both, she made the adoption plan with the lesbian couple. I asked her about her decision-making process to learn what she really liked about them. Her [own mother] said that the girl would do best with a mother and a father, and [that] how you get along with your father is how you’ll get along with men. But the birth mother was drawn to [the lesbian couple’s] decision-making process, which was similar to hers. She wanted to find the most thoughtful family she could, and she didn’t discriminate when making that choice. She wanted a sophisticated, urban, traveling, highly educated, politically liberal family. From those qualities, she looked at the two families and then made her decision. It’s interesting how times are changing.”

Erica Moltz, also of Adoptions Together, says some birth mothers have preferences not to place with LGBT couples. “That’s hard. We ask why, but we want them to feel empowered,” she says, so the agency doesn’t press the conversation. The agency treats this discussion the same as when a birth mother may say she does not want a family that is of a certain race, religion or age or a single parent or parents with any medical issues. “It’s always a dance,” Moltz says of conversations to ensure that birth mothers feel respected. “LGBT status isn’t treated any differently than those other issues.”

On the other hand, sometimes a birth mother will actively want LGBT families. “Some birth mothers might think two men are less challenging to their relationship with their child as a mother,” she says. “Or, some feel they’ve been burned by men and might seek two women as adoptive parents. It doesn’t happen often, but sometimes.”

Open Adoption & Family Services “increasingly gets birth parents who only want an LGBT family,” says Shari Levine. “Kids in their 20s who are choosing adoption are so much more accepting

of different types of people,” she says. “They’ve grown up with ‘Ellen’ and ‘Will and Grace.’ Their comfort level is high. They have friends or relatives who are LGBT. Only 1 percent of unwed pregnant women choose adoption, so they’re nonconformists by definition. LGBT couples can relate to this because they know what it’s like to be vilified.

 *Assessment Q1-6 in Placement, Finalization and Adoption Support Services address this topic.*

Adoption Finalization

Adoption Finalization Guiding Principle

Through its knowledge of the law and thoughtful, competent approach to all earlier steps in the adoption process, the organization will lead its LGBT clients through successful and appropriate finalization processes.

Stories from the Field

Preparing for a smooth finalization is necessary in adoptions by LGBT families because of legal obstacles to the formation of these families. Agencies need to consider issues of birth certificates, the federal Adoption Assistance Program, the court process, supportive judges, health insurance and attorneys who are familiar with legal arrangements to provide the maximum security for LGBT families (through guardianship, second-parent adoption or other documents).


The homestudy process should include discussions and decisions on all these items. As finalization approaches, agencies should prepare their LGBT clients for any unique issues they may face.

Some states do allow couples to go through the homestudy and legal finalization process together as a couple. When they complete that process, they are both the legal parents of the

child. Many states do not allow a same-sex couple to finalize in that way.

“In Ohio, the law does not allow unmarried people to adopt together,” says Beth Brindo. “When we finalize, only one can be the legal adoptive parent. Then the parents can take on other legal protections, including guardianship, wills and custody agreements.”

In Washington, D.C., same-sex couples can adopt as a couple. There, attorneys who conduct second-parent adoptions have spent years educating the courts on LGBT families, and it is often reflected in the court’s supportive actions. Adoptive father Dan McNeil says he had a very positive experience with his judge in the finalization process. “She was happy we had come forward because the kids were in jeopardy of being separated,” he says. “The court paid for some psychological testing we needed, and they told us how to tap into that.”

 *Assessment Q6 in Placement, Finalization and Adoption Support Services addresses this topic.*

Tip

- Jody Marksamer of the National Center for Lesbian Rights says agencies should have knowledge of the relevant laws and judges in their jurisdictions. For example, agencies should know whether some judges may make finalization more difficult for LGBT-headed families, regardless of the law. “It’s good practice for agencies to know if any of the judges their adoptive families may end up in front of hold bias against LGBT people. The same is true for all other professionals involved in the adoption process,” Marksamer says.

Food for Thought: Retaining Foster Parents

Agencies can apply many of the post-permanency service ideas described in this section to LGBT foster families as well as adoptive families. Here are a few ideas to support — and retain — LGBT-headed foster families specifically.

Bill Bettencourt recommends ongoing education or training for foster parents after children and youth are placed with them. The sessions can focus on specific behaviors or parenting techniques, topics that are not fully helpful until you have a child or youth in your home. “That’s been effective in retaining foster parents,” says Bettencourt.

Bettencourt believes well-designed respite care can retain and sustain foster families. He recommends that foster families build a network of foster parents who live near each other to create informal social connections, with formally scheduled respite. LGBT foster families may create their own networks, he says. He refers to this as “thoughtful respite.” In this way, “a foster parent can say, ‘the third Thursday of every month is my day, and I can plan for it.’ That helps manage life and can get you through rough times, rather than waiting until you can’t wait any longer.” In the latter case, which he calls “crisis respite,” agencies tell families to call if they need help, and the agencies will arrange coverage assistance. “By then, the foster parent thinks, ‘I’m at wit’s end. I’ll call someone and maybe I’ll get a break.’ That’s nice, but it’s not an effective strategy.”

Bettencourt points to a model of thoughtful respite in Seattle. The Mockingbird Family Model, currently being pilot tested and evaluated, groups together four to six foster families in a neighborhood who provide a social support network to each other and the children in their care. One licensed family in the neighborhood network agrees not to take a placement, but instead serves a special role in the circle of families: to be the home where they socialize, go for trainings, connect with siblings and other services and go for respite. Bettencourt thinks this might be a useful model for LGBT foster families in the future. See www.mockingbirdsociety.org/the-mockingbird-family-model/.

“We recommend that agencies look at dedicated support positions, so that a person is available 24/7 to help foster families,” he says. “We’ve found that most people will call at reasonable hours unless it’s a crisis, so it’s not over-utilized off-hours. This can help the agency overall, because these workers can help case workers, who have too much to do.”

Post-Permanency Support to Sustain Families

Post-Permanency Support Guiding Principle

Through its own work or by connecting families with external services, the organization will support, counsel and nurture LGBT-headed adoptive and foster families into the future.

The sections that follow describe ways that agencies can offer longer-term support to LGBT families.

✓ Placement Is Just the Beginning: A Commitment to the Future

With a deep understanding of the unique developmental paths of adoptive, foster and LGBT families, the organization will support clients in their preparation for the future.

Stories from the Field

Michael Colberg, an educator, counselor and psychotherapist who conducts pre- and post-adoption consultations, says that many prospective adoptive parents focus all their attention on getting a child and becoming a parent, a period of time that ends as the adoption actually begins. He believes many adoption agencies reinforce this mindset rather than helping clients focus on what it will mean to have a child through adoption and be an adoptive parent, a time that lasts the rest of their lives. Without providing post-permanency support for the challenges that adoptive families are sure to face, he says, agencies do a disservice to the families they help create. Being an LGBT-headed family adds a layer of diversity and complexity to the issues an adoptive family necessarily will face.

“The difference is between building the space station and building the space station and supplying it with enough food and oxygen to support life,” he explains. “Both of them are

floating out there in space, but one environment isn't supportive of the people living in the ship. They need more than just the structure to flourish."

Adoptive families that don't plan for and have support for what comes after placement and finalization are like the space station without food. The structure is there, but they may not have all the support they need to flourish.


"The adoption begins once the family has been formed," Colberg says. "We should give LGBT parents the tools they need" to support their adopted children and families into the future.

Janice Goldwater of Adoptions Together agrees. "Adoption itself brings up different issues than children raised in birth families," she says. "There are different dynamics. Raising children is hard, and then you add all these variables. Parents need a lot of information, education and support to raise healthy children. It's important for adoption organizations to be committed to post-permanency support for the family. It's easy to live happily ever after with a baby. But how do we give kids the tools they need to manage what's going on around them? Love is often not enough."

Adoptive and foster parent Elijah Nealy echoes that thought, especially in placements involving older children. Nealy had experience as a parent with his former partner's children as they became teenagers and young adults. But when the couple took in a homeless teenager 15 years ago outside the foster care system, he realized he needed different skills and support to be a good parent. "I had parented teenagers," Nealy says, "but foster parenting a teenager who had experienced this much trauma and dislocation was different. I didn't have any agency support, or support of parents who had been through a similar experience."

Nealy is again serving as a foster parent — this time through an agency. "I realize now how im-

portant the post-placement support is, from the agency and from the connections with others going through the same process," he says. He's also in the process of adopting his now-adult child.

 *Assessment Q7 in Placement, Finalization and Adoption Support Services addresses this topic.*

Tip

- Michael Colberg recommends that parents educate themselves about adoption and about what is normal, developmentally, for a family formed through adoption. When a child is moved out of and away from one family and into another family, that move has meaning over the life span of the adopted child and family. He also encourages families to find mentors — other adoptive parents who have been doing it longer and have insight to share. Agencies can help their clients do this work and make these connections.

Educational Seminars

Agencies that offer seminars for adoptive and foster families should ensure that seminars address the additional layers of diversity and the developmental path of LGBT-headed families.

Stories from the Field

Many agencies offer workshops and other educational seminars to assist their families into the future. Topics often address issues unique to certain types of families or family structures, including transracial and single-parent families.

Adoptions Together sponsors educational seminars as part of its commitment to primary prevention. "The more information we give, the more thoughtful [prospective parents] will be, the better choices they'll make," says Janice Goldwater. The agency hosts a training program for LGBT parents and prospective parents fea-

turing an adult daughter and her dad, who is gay, to talk about issues for children growing up with LGBT parents.

“It’s so easy to think that things are not going to be a big deal,” she says. “The truth is it is a big deal sometimes. She’ll talk about what was helpful and what was hard.” As children age, the questions they raise get progressively harder. “Effective parents know that the more equipped they are to deal with the issues they will face with their children, the more successful they’ll be.” As the number of LGBT adoptive parents increases, the agency continues to identify the post-permanency support needs of their clients and the larger community and provides new educational seminars in response.

✓ Support Groups

Agencies that offer support groups for adoptive and foster families should ensure that they address the additional layers of diversity and the development path of LGBT-headed families. If agencies do not themselves sponsor such groups, social workers will be familiar with external support resources available for LGBT-headed adoptive and foster families.

Stories from the Field

A common post-permanency support service offered by many agencies is a support group for adoptive and foster parents and families. Agencies that welcome LGBT parents may sponsor or help create support groups targeted at LGBT parents or may work to include LGBT parenting issues into the larger support group for all families. These social networking groups may occur in person or online.

Michelle Chalmers says her agency tries “to connect families with each other.” She notes that her program has been surprised to discover that most of the families adopting teens through The Homecoming Project seem to be “either fundamentalist Christian or LGBT — oh, and at

least one who is both. We have support groups [that are open to everyone], and in one there is a Christian woman who happens to be in a group with a bunch of lesbians. She says in the past year she’s been shocked to see where much of her support is coming from — the lesbians. It’s doing interesting things in educating others about the community. She’s seen some incredible commitment to kids from these families. It’s not the purpose of the support group, but it’s really changed her.”

Jill Jacobs of Family Builders says the agency “has a unique group for LGBT families, who have asked for such a group. They say they have unique challenges and experiences as parents and want a place where they can share those experiences. We create groups to meet the needs of families. It’s the longest consistently running group in the agency.”

Adoptive father Dan McNeil did not feel welcome in the parenting support groups recommended by the D.C. Child and Family Services Agency. “Most took place in churches and felt very churchy,” he says. “I remember not feeling interested enough in attending.” Instead, McNeil relied on the knowledge and referrals of the social worker who had worked with McNeil’s adoptive children. The social worker “is the one who really put us in touch with two or three other gay families where she had placed kids. She helped us connect with our network and was very supportive. Once the placement was set up, our social worker visited less and less, but [the kids’ social worker] took a more prominent role. To this day, we still call her. She takes care of people. She’ll put us in touch with anyone we need. She put us in touch with therapists. She told us we could get a voucher for summer camps. She told us about Medicaid. She makes sure we have everything we need to support the kids as they grow.”

Michael Colberg notes that some families “do not go back to their adoption agency if they feel

as though they are in crisis and/or need help. Families are often not taught that living as a family formed through adoption is in some important ways different than living as a biologically formed family. Their children's needs will be different, and the developmental tasks that they will face as they grow will be different." When challenges arise, parents may feel that they have failed and will not want to seek help from the agency that helped form their family. For that reason, agencies need to know about and share external resources available for adoptive families in general and LGBT adoptive families in particular.

Sample

The New York City Administration for Children's Services offers a monthly support group for LGBT adoptive, foster and kinship parents, along with its regional community groups. www.nyc.gov/html/acs/html/support_families/circle_of_support.shtml

✓ Family Counseling and Mental Health Services

Because adoptive families will need changing services as their children age, the organization will provide access to family counseling or mental health services or refer clients to external services. It will ensure that those who deliver these services are competent in dealing with the specific developmental paths of LGBT-headed adoptive and foster families.

Stories from the Field

Adoptions Together offers post-permanency support through its educational seminars and support groups, and also through counseling. According to Janice Goldwater, this support specifically includes counselors who are familiar with LGBT issues in addition to adoptive family issues.

The Southern California Foster Family and Adoption Agency also delivers mental health services to its clients. "It's a child-centered approach, and family therapy is available for any issues that may come up around being an LGBT adoptive or foster family," says Robyn Harrod.

Psychotherapist Michael Colberg believes all adoptive families benefit from having post-permanency support available. He says many of the same-sex custody battles in the news are preventable with competent and appropriate counseling and support. He has written a book chapter for clinicians working with LGBT adoptive parents. In it, he writes:

*Clinicians who work with LGBT-parented adoptive families need to understand both adoption and LGBT developmental norms so that they can look at these families in a more individualistic and unbiased way — reducing both positive and negative distortions. ... Identify the strengths and the challenges present for members of LGBT-parented adoptive families. What role does diversity play in the lives of LGBT-parented adoptive families? How can clinicians help arrange these families' strengths to best meet the challenges that they face?*²⁰

For all adults, becoming parents creates shifts in relationships with friends and extended families. Because LGBT parenting is a relatively new phenomenon in the 40-plus-year history of the LGBT "movement," LGBT parents may experience losses in their previous friendship networks as they transition into parenthood. Having children may also require that they come out more than they had become accustomed to. Some LGBT people are estranged from their families of origin. When not estranged, their extended families may experience stress because of the renewed level of "coming out" required of them now that children are in the family. All these changes may require additional support or counseling, Colberg writes.

Jill Jacobs of Family Builders says that agencies should understand that estrangement from families of origin is common among LGBT adults, who have built extensive networks of friends and families of choice.²¹

Maria Quintanilla of the Latino Family Institute knows of a Latino couple who adopted a child and began to plan the child's baptism. "Before they became parents," she says, "they were 'under the radar' as a gay couple in their church, which was also their extended family's church. When it became clear that they were a gay couple who adopted a child, the leadership of this particular church decided against performing the baptism. Over time, the couple was able to find a welcoming Catholic church, but they had to resolve feelings of being rejected and hurt by the faith community that had been their home for many years." Agencies should understand and prepare support for the potential post-permanency challenges that face LGBT-headed families.

Working with Schools

In all its post-permanency services, the organization will help its families navigate schools regarding issues that arise for children and youth in foster care or who are adopted, including issues that arise because the children are in an LGBT family.

Stories from the Field

Most people do not understand adoption as a lifelong process, says Michael Colberg. Many professionals — including teachers — who in-

teract with adoptive children are unfamiliar with their unique developmental path.

This lack of understanding of adoption has "tended to place the emphasis in LGBT adoptive parenting on parents' LGBT status," he says. "I advise my clients that during the primary and middle school years they might want to go in to meet with their children's teachers at the start of each school year to explain where their child, as an adopted person, could be expected to be developmentally. Adoptive parents need to help schools begin to understand that children who are adopted face additional developmental challenges that affect the rate at which they mature."²²

Agencies' support groups and family counseling services should pay special attention to supporting LGBT adoptive parents in their interactions with their children's schools.

Tip

- Michael Colberg recommends that parents develop a community of parents "who are actively trying to become better parents." He and his partner started a group at his daughter's school that continued through her graduation from high school. "The kids felt cared for and respected. They like themselves and each other. We would really sit down and hash things out." Agencies can encourage their clients to consider developing that community.



Resources

Glossary of Terms

The LGBT community is as diverse as the general population and includes people who are liberal and conservative, urban and rural, white, black, Latino, Asian, rich and poor, “closeted” and “out” and everything in between. This diversity means that not all LGBT people will use the same terms to define themselves or their families, and not all will have the same comfort level with certain words or labels. This glossary, however, provides a good overview of some of the terms commonly used by and familiar to LGBT people.

Biphobia

Biphobia is the fear of bisexuals, often based on inaccurate stereotypes, including associations with infidelity, promiscuity and transmission of sexually transmitted diseases.

Biological Sex

Biological sex refers to the classification of people as male or female. Biological sex is determined by our chromosomes (XX for females; XY for males) our hormones (estrogen/progesterone for females, testosterone for males) and our internal and external genitalia (vulva, clitoris, vagina for females; penis and testicles for males).

Bisexual

A bisexual person is physically, romantically, emotionally and/or relationally attracted to both men and women, though not necessarily simultaneously; a bisexual person may not be equally attracted to both sexes.

Butch

Butch is a term commonly used to refer to masculinity displayed by a female but may also refer to masculinity displayed by a male. Butch is sometimes used as a derogatory term for lesbians but is also claimed as an affirmative identity label.

Closeted

Closeted is an adjective used to describe a person who is not open about his or her sexual orientation.

Coming Out

Coming out is the process in which a person first acknowledges, accepts and appreciates his or her sexual orientation or gender identity and begins to self-disclose to others.

Cross-Dresser

A cross-dresser is a person who occasionally wears clothes and/or makeup and accessories traditionally associated with people of a different gender. Cross-dressers are usually comfortable with the sex they were assigned at birth and do not wish to change it.

Cultural Competence

Cultural competence is the ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures. Culturally competent

RESOURCES

organizations should have a defined set of values and principles and demonstrate behaviors, attitudes, policies and structures that enable them to work effectively cross-culturally.

Dyke

Dyke is a derogatory term for a lesbian. Some lesbians have reclaimed this word and use it as a positive term, but it is still considered offensive when used by the general population.

Fag(got)

Faggot (or “fag”) is a derogatory term for a gay man. Some gay men have reclaimed this word and use it as a positive term, but it is still considered offensive when used by the general population.

Female-to-Male (FTM) Transsexual

See “**Transgender Man.**”

Gay

Gay is an adjective used to describe a person whose enduring physical, romantic, emotional and/or relational attractions are to people of the same sex.

Gender Expression

Gender expression refers to all of a person’s external characteristics and behaviors — such as dress, grooming, mannerisms, speech patterns and social interactions — that are socially identified with a particular gender. Social or cultural norms can vary widely and some characteristics that may be accepted as masculine, feminine or neutral in one culture may not be assessed similarly in another. Typically, transgender people seek to make their gender expression match their gender identity, rather than their sex assigned at birth. Gender expression is not necessarily an indication of sexual orientation.

Gender Identity

Gender identity refers to a person’s innate, deeply felt psychological sense of gender, which may or may not correspond to the person’s assigned sex at birth.

Gender Role

Gender role is the set of roles and behaviors assigned to females and males by society. Our culture recognizes two basic gender roles: masculine (having the qualities attributed to males) and feminine (having the qualities attributed to females).

Genderqueer

Genderqueer is a term people use to describe their own nonstandard gender identity or is used by those who do not identify as entirely male or entirely female.

GLBT

GLBT is an acronym for “gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender.” See “**LGBT.**”

Heterosexism

Heterosexism is the attitude that heterosexuality is the only valid sexual orientation. Heterosexism often takes the form of ignoring lesbians, gay men and bisexuals. For example: a feature on numerous Valentine’s Day couples that omits same-sex couples.

Heterosexual

Heterosexual is the adjective used to describe people whose enduring physical, romantic, emotional and/or spiritual attractions are to people of the opposite sex. Also: straight.

Homophobia

Homophobia is a fear, hatred of or discomfort with people who love and are sexually attracted to members of the same sex.

Homosexual

The term “homosexual” is an outdated clinical term considered derogatory and offensive by many gay people. “Gay” and “lesbian” are more commonly accepted terms to describe people who are attracted to members of the same sex. See “**Gay**” and “**Lesbian**.”

Internalized Homophobia

Internalized homophobia refers to the self-identification of societal stereotypes by lesbian, gay and bisexual people, causing them to dislike and resent their sexual orientation.

Lesbian

Lesbian refers to a woman whose enduring physical, romantic, emotional and/or relational attractions are to other women.

LGBT

LGBT is an acronym for “lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.” See also “**GLBT**.”

Lifestyle

The term “lifestyle” is inaccurately used to refer to the sexual orientation of lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Avoid using this term. As there is no one heterosexual or straight lifestyle, there is no one lesbian, gay, bisexual lifestyle.

Living Openly

Living openly refers to a state in which LGBT people are open with others about being LGBT how and when they choose to be.

Male-to-Female (MTF) Transsexual

See “**Transgender Woman**.”

Outing

Outing refers to the act of exposing someone’s sexual orientation or gender identity as being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender to others, when that person is not open about it.

Passing

Passing is a term used by transgender people to mean that they are seen as the gender with which they self-identify. For example, a transgender man (assigned female sex at birth) who most people see as a man.

Queer

Queer describes all people who are not heterosexual or who do not conform to rigid notions of gender and sexuality. For many LGBT people this word has a negative connotation; however, some are comfortable using it.

Questioning

Questioning refers to people who are uncertain as to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Same-Gender Loving

Some prefer to use “same-gender loving” instead of “lesbian” or “gay” to express attraction to and love of people of the same gender.

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation is an enduring physical, romantic, emotional and/or relational attraction to another person; may be a same-sex orientation, different-sex orientation or bisexual orientation.

Sexual Preference

Sexual preference is sometimes used to mean the same thing as “sexual orientation.” Many lesbian, gay and bisexual people find this term to be offensive because it implies that their sexual orientation is a choice.

Straight Ally

A straight ally is a heterosexual person who supports and honors sexual diversity, acts accordingly to challenge homophobic remarks and behaviors, and explores and understands these forms of bias within him- or herself. Also: straight supporter.

Transgender

Transgender is used as an umbrella term for people who experience and/or express their gender differently from what others might expect based on the sex they were assigned at birth. This includes people who are transsexual, cross-dressers or otherwise gender non-conforming. Transgender people may identify as trans man or female-to-male (FTM), trans woman or male-to-female (MTF), genderqueer, bi-gender, androgynous or gender variant.

Transphobia

Transphobia is a fear and hatred of, or discomfort with, people whose gender identity or gender expression does not conform to cultural gender norms.

Transsexual

Transsexual is a term referring to transgender persons who change their physical and/or legal sex to better conform to their internal sense of gender identity. The term can also be used to describe transgender people who, without undergoing medical treatment, identify and live their lives full-time as a member of the gender opposite that which conforms to their sex assigned at birth. See “**Transgender.**”

Transgender Man (or trans man)

A transgender man is a person who was assigned a female sex at birth but who identifies as a man. “Trans man” is an identity label sometimes adopted by female-to-male transgender people to signify that they are men while still affirming their gender history. See also “**Transgender.**”

Transgender Woman (or trans woman)

A transgender woman is a person who was assigned a male sex at birth but who identifies as a woman. “Trans woman” is an identity label sometimes adopted by male-to-female transgender people to signify that they are women while still affirming their gender history. See also “**Transgender.**”

Review of LGBT Parenting Laws

Contributing author: Leslie Cooper, senior staff attorney, ACLU Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and AIDS Project

Eligibility of LGBT People to Be Considered to Adopt or Foster a Child

Most states do not have laws or formal policies that address the eligibility of lesbians and gay men to adopt or serve as foster parents, and none discuss transgender prospective adoptive or foster parents. Instead, child welfare professionals — including caseworkers at public and private adoption and foster parenting agencies — and judges make placement decisions based on their assessment of the best interest of each child.

Just a few states have prohibitions against adoption or fostering by gay people or couples.

- **Mississippi** law provides that “adoption by couples of the same gender is prohibited.”
- **Nebraska** Department of Health and Human Services policy prohibits fostering by i) persons who identify as “homosexual,” and ii) unrelated, unmarried adults residing together (regardless of gender).
- **Utah** law disqualifies from adoption and fostering individuals who are cohabiting outside of a marriage that is valid and recognized under state law. This applies to both same-sex and different-sex couples.

In addition, **Arizona** passed a law in 2011 that does not bar gay people from adopting but makes it more difficult by giving a preference to a “married man and woman.”

In recent years, courts have struck down anti-gay restrictions in Florida and Arkansas. Florida’s notorious law that banned all lesbians and gay men from adopting children, whether single or coupled, was struck down by a Florida appellate court in 2010 after more than 30 years on the books. The court declared the exclusion unconstitutional, concluding that more than two decades of scientific research shows that the adoption ban served no child welfare purpose. In Arkansas, the state’s high court rejected two separate restrictions on gay parents. In 2006, it invalidated a policy barring “homosexuals” from becoming foster parents, finding that the exclusion had no rational connection to the health, safety or welfare of children. The response to that ruling was a ballot initiative barring adoption and fostering by individuals who cohabit outside of a marriage recognized under state law. The measure passed by a majority of Arkansas voters in 2008 but was held unconstitutional and struck down by the Arkansas Supreme Court in 2011.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, a number of states have statutes, regulations or case law that make clear that an individual’s sexual orientation or same-sex relationship is *not* a basis for exclusion from adopting or fostering.

- The following states have statutes or regulations that expressly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation in adoption and/or fostering: **California** (adoption and fostering), **Maryland** (adoption), **Massachusetts** (adoption and fostering), **Nevada** (adoption), **New Jersey** (adoption and fostering), **New York** (adoption), **Oregon** (fostering), and **Wisconsin** (fostering).
- In addition, it is clear that sexual orientation is not a basis for exclusion from consideration as an adoptive parent in states that have appellate court decisions permitting lesbians and gay men to petition to adopt their partner’s children (“second parent adoption”) or adopt jointly with a partner.

RESOURCES

Those states are **California, Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Vermont** and **Washington, D.C.**

- It is also clear that sexual orientation is not a bar to adoption in states where same-sex couples can marry (**Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Vermont** and **Washington, D.C.***) or enter into civil unions or domestic partnerships that provide all or most of the rights and obligations of marriage under state law (**California, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Nevada, New Jersey, Oregon, Rhode Island** and **Washington**). This is because joint adoption and step-parent adoptions are among the rights of married couples and those in civil unions and domestic partnerships.

How lesbians and gay men seeking to adopt or foster are treated in the rest of the states — and how transgender prospective adoptive foster parents are treated in all states — is up to local child welfare authorities and judges and may vary from county to county, caseworker to caseworker or judge to judge.

Where the law is silent or supportive, agencies have the opportunity — and obligation — to ensure that all qualified families are available as resources to waiting children.

Agencies are free to, and should, treat LGBT applicants the same as everyone else — they should subject them to the rigorous individualized evaluation process to determine their suitability to parent and whether they are able to meet the needs of a particular child. As a Florida appellate court has recognized, discriminatory treatment of lesbian and gay prospective adoptive parents is unconstitutional.

This is true for state agencies as well as private agencies — whether secular or religiously affiliated — that contract with states to place dependent children. When a state contracts out to private agencies the state responsibility of placing wards of the state with foster or adoptive parents, those agencies must make those placements based on child welfare criteria. They may not deny a child a placement with the family that is best suited to meet the child's needs because the agency has a religious objection to the applicant's sexual orientation or marital status (or any other characteristic unrelated to children's well-being). That would not only deprive children in care of appropriate placements but would also violate the constitutional mandate of separation of church and state.

Adoption by Both Partners in a Same-Sex Couple

For same-sex couples seeking to adopt a child together, in many states only one member of the couple can be the child's legally recognized adoptive parent. This leaves children vulnerable in the event the legal parent dies or becomes incapacitated or the couple separates. The lack of a legal relationship with one parent also deprives the children of significant resources that they may be entitled to, such as that parent's employee health benefits or government entitlements such as Social Security.

As discussed above, joint or second-parent adoption is permitted statewide regardless of marital or domestic partner/civil union status as a result of appellate court case law in the following states: **California, Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Vermont** and **Washington, D.C.** In addition, **Colorado, Connecticut** and **Montana** have statutes allowing second-parent adoption.

* Maryland and Washington passed marriage equality laws in 2012 but opponents are seeking to put each of these laws up to a referendum in the November 2012 election. If they are put on the ballot, they will not take effect unless and until upheld by the voters.

Joint or second-parent adoptions are available statewide only to couples who are married or have a civil union or domestic partnership in the following states: **Delaware, Hawaii, Iowa, Nevada, New Hampshire, Oregon, Rhode Island** and **Washington**.

In contrast, appellate courts in **Kentucky, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio,** and **Wisconsin** have interpreted their state adoption laws to prohibit joint or second-parent adoption for unmarried couples.

In the remaining states where there is no statute or appellate case law addressing joint or second-parent adoptions by same-sex couples or marriage or civil union/domestic partnership, whether such adoptions are available may vary county to county or judge to judge. In some of these states, the issue may make its way up to an appellate court, which would settle the question one way or the other statewide.

For different-sex couples where one partner is transgender, even in states that lack progressive laws for same-sex couples, they may be able to marry and, thus, establish parental rights for both partners by jointly adopting as a married couple or doing a step-parent adoption. However, the validity of such marriages varies from state to state and the law is not settled in most states. Appellate courts in **Florida, Illinois, Kansas** and **Texas** have held that for purpose of marriage, an individual's assigned sex at birth is his or her legal sex for life, and thus have invalidated marriages of different-sex couples where one partner is transgender, deeming them same-sex marriages.

In jurisdictions where same-sex couples or transgender parents are unable to establish both partners' parental rights through adoption, local family lawyers who serve the LGBT community may know of ways to obtain some forms of legal protections of the family relationships.

To work effectively with LGBT prospective adoptive or foster parents, agencies need to be familiar with the legal landscape and the policies of the state child welfare departments in the jurisdictions in which they work, which may not be uniform throughout the state. They should be aware of any legal or policy barriers to placement related to an individual's sexual orientation or cohabiting relationship. They should know if same-sex couples can adopt jointly as a couple and, if not, whether second-parent adoption is available to secure both partners' parental rights. And they may need to ascertain whether there are legal impediments to transgender people marrying and, thus, adopting as a married couple.

(For a more in-depth review of laws, legal issues for LGBT families and a glossary of legal terms, visit the All Children – All Families website at www.hrc.org/acf.)

Review of Research on LGBT Parenting

Scott Ryan, associate dean and associate professor at Florida State University and director of the Institute for Social Work Research, offers the following summary of current research regarding parenting in general by lesbian and gay adults and adoptive parenting in particular. Ryan is also a senior fellow at the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute.

Current Research on Lesbian and Gay Parenting

In reviewing the literature, one can see that no credible scientific evidence exists that demonstrates that lesbian mothers or gay fathers organize their home differently or are unfit parents or that their children develop differently from those in heterosexual homes.²³ In fact, the parent's sexual orientation does not matter as much as the love, caring and maturity of the adults and their effort to help the children become self-reliant and self-assured.²⁴

There have been several reviews of the existing literature on lesbian and gay parents.²⁵ While some differences regarding child outcomes have been noted across studies, none has found that children are at heightened risk for harm or experience adverse outcomes when compared to other children.

Crowl, Ahn and Baker (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of 16 studies examining differences in developmental outcomes for children raised by same-sex and opposite-sex parents. They found no significant difference in outcomes for children of same-sex couples in psychological adjustment, cognitive development, gender role behavior or parent-child relationship.

Lastly, all note limitations within the body of research; however, these limitations are not unique to this topic. In fact, when responding to critics who attempted to assert that by virtue of these limitations the studies are worthless, Stacey and Biblarz (2001) noted that, "[one] would have to dismiss virtually the entire discipline of psychology" (as cited in Meezan and Rauch).²⁶

Current Research on Lesbian and Gay Adoptive Parenting

The majority of the existing empirical research exploring lesbian and gay families has been cross-sectional design studies that utilized non-random, purposive sampling techniques that yield responses from largely white and middle-class respondents. This is also true of the relatively few studies focusing on lesbian and gay adoptive families — with a review of the literature yielding only a handful of empirical studies that specifically explore the experiences and well-being of adoptive families headed by a gay or lesbian parent.

Bennett explored the parental perceptions of attachment in 15 lesbian couples who had adopted internationally.²⁷ In this qualitative study, 30 mothers were interviewed to obtain information surrounding the parenting bonds, time with the child and various household issues. The findings indicate that the children developed bonds with both adoptive mothers.

Ryan and Cash used the largest sample of gay- or lesbian-headed adoptive families to date, with 183 families collected via a combination of purposive and snowball sampling methods.²⁸ For those in a coupled relationship (91.7 percent), they had been in said relationship for an average of 11 years. Virtually all couples wanted to be legally recognized as such — with most not having the opportunity to do so due to restrictive laws in their geographic area.

Lastly, a recent study conducted by Leung, Erich and Kanenberg compares family functioning in gay/lesbian and heterosexual adoptive

families.²⁹ The study found no negative effects for children adopted by gay or lesbian parents. In fact, families headed by gay or lesbian parents with older children, non-sibling group adoptions and children with more pre-adoption foster care placements experienced higher levels of family functioning. At least two of these aspects — older child and more foster placements — are commonly associated with higher levels of post-adoption difficulty. The authors conclude that gay/lesbian-headed families show promise as resources for children, particularly older children. They assert that the results support that adoption agencies should place a child in an adoptive family as early as possible, regardless of the parent’s sexual orientation.

The few studies and reports available specifically on children who are raised by transsexual parents have not shown negative effects for the children (Ettner, 2000;³⁰ Green, 1978;³¹ Green, 1998).³² There are significant numbers of children growing up in homes with a transgender or transsexual parent. In one study, approximately 30 percent of the population that sought services for gender issues were parents (Valentine, 1998).³³

As shown, success in adoption is not related to family form (be they single parent, two-parent, transracial/cultural or other family structures); rather, success in adoption depends on the balance of resources and stressors assisting or impacting any family.³⁴

Other Research Resources

The American Psychological Association maintains a publication that includes a comprehensive summary of research findings on lesbian mothers, gay fathers and their children; an annotated bibliography of the literature cited in the summary; and additional related policy and position statements. See www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/parenting-full.pdf.

Professional Opinion

The nation’s leading children’s health, children’s welfare and mental health organizations have issued statements declaring that a parent’s sexual orientation is irrelevant to his or her ability to raise a child. Read their professional opinions.

- American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (1999)
- American Academy of Family Physicians (2002)
- American Academy of Pediatrics (2002)
- American Medical Association (2004)
- American Psychiatric Association (1997 and 2002)
- American Psychoanalytic Association (2002)
- American Psychological Association (1976 and 2004)
- Child Welfare League of America (1988)
- National Adoption Center (1998)
- National Association of Social Workers (2002)
- North American Council on Adoptable Children (1998)
- Voice for Adoption (2006)

Madelyn Freundlich, a leader in the child welfare field, notes that a solid body of research consistently shows that same-sex parents are equivalent to heterosexual parents in their ability to care for children and provide them with loving families. Nonetheless, claims continue to be made that children do best with or need both a mother and a father.

“There is no empirical support for assertions that placing children with a gay or lesbian parent is harmful to children or that lesbian and gay parents cannot provide children with the love, care and support that they need,” says Freundlich.

Research shows that children in foster care and children who leave foster care for adoption face

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a range of medical, psychological and development risks as a result of the abuse and neglect that brought them into care and as a result of separation and repeated losses. Studies further show that these vulnerable children are best served within families who understand their needs and are committed to ensuring that they are loved and nurtured and that they receive services that will promote their physical, emotional and developmental well-being.

“It is critical that we act on research that documents the strengths of lesbian and gay parents in meeting the needs of children,” Freundlich says. “Our obligation as child welfare professionals is to ensure that our policies and practices are broadly inclusive of all families, including lesbian and gay families, who can provide the vulnerable children in our care with what they need most of all — caring families who are committed to meeting their needs.”

The Transgender Community and Adoption and Foster Care

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Understanding the Transgender Experience

Many social workers and other professionals who feel comfortable working with and knowing lesbian and gay people find themselves confused and challenged when first meeting a transgender person. It may seem that transgender and transsexual people have appeared “out of nowhere,” and are suddenly the focus of national media attention. In reality, gender-variant people have always existed throughout human history across all nations and ethnic groups. Like lesbian and gay people in past decades, transgender people have begun to come out in larger numbers over the last few decades and are now insisting on their civil rights, seeking to be accepted as just another part of the social fabric of our diverse culture.

Not so long ago, lesbian and gay people were also invisible in society, living secretive lives, often battling shame and hiding their most cherished relationships from family, friends and work environments. Although it may appear that all lesbian, gay and bisexual people have come out, there are many who still remain closeted. Transgender people are far more visible than they once were; however, transgender people are only at the beginning of their liberation movement, and it is likely that society will see increasingly diverse forms of gender expression and identity in the decades to come. This movement for transgender rights defies previous views of cross-gender expression as a mental health problem, and views diverse gender expressions — like same-sex sexuality — as a normative, healthy human potentiality.

In the 1990s, gender-variant people developed the word transgender as an umbrella term to describe cross-gender experience. Included under this umbrella are male-to-female (MTF)

transsexuals (referred to as trans women) and female-to-male (FTM) transsexuals (trans men), as well cross-dressers, androgynes, gender-queer, and those who identify as mixed-gender. There is a growing fluidity of gender expression that recognizes a broad spectrum of ways to inhabit one’s gender. Some would go so far as to include all people who exhibit some cross-gender behavior such as gay and heterosexual males who express themselves in stereotypically feminine ways, lesbian and heterosexual females who are masculine, as well as those with physical intersex conditions. This does not mean, however, that all people who exhibit cross-gender expression would use the term transgender to describe themselves or want to be categorized as belonging to the transgender community. For example, a subset of transsexual women resists the term transgender, believing that transsexualism is markedly different from other cross-gender behavior and they do not want to be classified within this larger group. In general, transgender and transsexual people prefer to be identified simply as men or women and seek to express their gender in a way that is congruent with their gender identity. The only way to really know how people identify in terms of their gender expression is to ask them.

The subject of the transgender experience is one that produces an array of reactions. Many people find themselves uncomfortable dealing with the idea of transsexualism and gender re-assignment surgery. Beyond being the subject of painful and humiliating treatment in the media and popular culture, transgender and transsexual people are often the victims of bias-related violence, rejection from family and friends, and

discrimination in housing and employment. Even people who do not harbor negative feelings about gender variance often do not understand the intense, emotional journey that transgender people travel in order to simply present themselves publicly in an authentic manner.

The Transgender Community and Adoption

The experience of gender variance and the experience of adoption have certain things in common. They are both acts of “crossing-over”: for transgender people, they are crossing over the socially accepted rules about the immutability of sex, and for adoptive families, they are crossing over the socially accepted boundaries of biological family lines. Indeed, people who have experienced adoption as well as those who have experienced a gender transition are often accused as not being “authentic.” Adoptees are asked about their “real” families, and transgender people are asked about their “real” sex. Transgender people and adoptees (especially those in transracially adoptive families) may be familiar with the feeling of being conspicuously different and having people challenge their identity and sometimes their very existence. Both gender variance and the formation of families through adoption have long cultural histories on all continents. Both have been socially misunderstood and the focus of legal battles and the vagaries of changing societal mores.

Gender non-conformity, like adoption, is an opportunity for honest dialogue and direct communication. They are both social and psychological experiences that intersect with legal and identity issues. If there is anything we’ve learned in the adoption community, it’s that secrets and lies are damaging to the soul. There are some children who adapt to adoption with ease, and others who struggle. Likewise, some older children and youth may have stronger feelings or more questions about being placed with a transgender parent than others, and for

others it will be entirely comfortable. Finding the best fit for a child is always the work of adoption social workers; gender issues are just one more piece of that puzzle.

Specific Issues in Working with Transgender, Transsexual or Gender Non-Conforming People

Building families outside of traditional norms takes courage and requires support. The child welfare professional should be able to offer “a safe space” for gender non-conforming people to engage in thoughtful discussion of adoption issues.

Generally speaking, most people who are gender non-conforming or who self-disclose a transsexual history have lived their whole lives with some pain regarding the social implications of their gender identity. Like the majority of potential adoptive parents, they have not come to an adoption agency casually, but rather they have likely spent months or years considering what it would mean for them to become parents. They have thought long and hard about how to build a family, about issues related to adoptive families, and about specific issues regarding their gender expression and how that might have an affect on both their parenting and how they are perceived by an adoption agency. They may be skeptical that they will be treated courteously by agency staff and nervous that being transgender will exclude them from being able to form a family. The very first task is to make the individual or couple feel comfortable in your agency and to convey to them that they will be treated with respect and compassion.

It is essential that you always speak to people using the pronoun and name that reflect their manner and appearance. If you are unclear about a person’s gender identity and the person’s name or clothing does not clarify the situation, it is OK simply to ask them, “How would you like me to refer to you?” People generally

will respect the question. If they challenge you (“I’m not sure what you mean.”), you can risk being more direct: “Would you prefer me to refer to you using female or male pronouns?” Although this can be awkward, if prospective parents are not able to cope with these questions from a social worker, they are most likely not ready to have productive conversations about gender identity with their children.

It is essential to respect each person’s gender presentation, regardless of how they appear. Sometimes, a trans woman (i.e., one who was assigned a male sex at birth but who identifies as a woman) may have a more masculine physical appearance because her body was virilized in puberty. Hormones and surgery (particularly facial feminization surgeries) can help in physical transition; however, there may be limitations to eliminating all masculine features.

Trans men (people assigned a female sex at birth but who identify as men) commonly pass with greater ease. Once testosterone virilizes the body by lowering the voice and increasing facial hair, “passing” becomes more easily accomplished. Sometimes when trans men disclose, people are surprised to learn their gender history.

Some trans people may struggle emotionally with the impact of not passing easily and compensate by doing all they can to appear gender-normative. This can involve utilizing traditionally gendered clothing, accessories or mannerisms. For other trans people, passing is not a major focus of concern. Regardless of whether or not a person is recognizably transgender, all transgender people should be referred to using the pronoun and name that reflects their gender expression. There are situations where you may unknowingly make an error (i.e., on the telephone where a trans woman’s voice may be deeper than is common). All you need to do is apologize, and consistently use the proper pronoun in the future. The majority of transgender

people have managed these situations numerous times and are skilled and adept at managing awkward social encounters. They are likely, however, to be paying careful attention to how well the agency understands and addresses their circumstances.

While some transgender people will not present with any ambiguity regarding gender, there are other transgender people who appear to be more gender ambiguous; for example, natal females who, through clothing and hairstyles, mannerisms and perhaps preferred names have a more masculine appearance. Some may be comfortable being female, and not identify as transgender, but yet appear more masculine than other females. Some of these females may openly identify as “butch.” Masculine-appearing females may be lesbian-identified; some may have more feminine-appearing partners, but others may be involved with men or other butches. Remember that sexual orientation and gender identity are each separate parts of one’s overall identity. The only way to know what someone’s gender expression means to them is to ask them.

Transgender people may seek out adoption services at many stages of their transition process. Some may not have begun the process at all, appearing as a heterosexual or lesbian or gay couple without any particular gender ambiguity. They may reveal their intentions to transition at a later stage in life, or they may purposely conceal this information for fear that it will prevent them from becoming adoptive parents.

Other transgender people may be in the process of transition. In the earlier stages of transition, one’s gender can sometimes appear more ambiguous than it will later in the process. This can be an awkward stage for some people; for example, if they have not completed electrolysis or if their masculinized voice is still cracking. This is called “transition” for a reason. Be very gentle with people in this process, and honor

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them for risking a homestudy evaluation during this time.

For other people, their transition process may be a historical event, something that took place in the past. They may pass with ease, and in some cases may resent being asked to discuss these details of their past. Explain to them that history is important because knowing about their legal and medical status is part of any homestudy process, and also because it gives the social worker information about how they cope with stress — and parenting is, no doubt, stressful!

Legal status is salient, in part because laws differ from state to state, and sometimes locality to locality. In some places, transsexuals must have completed the sex reassignment process in order to change their birth certificate or driver's license to reflect their correct "sex" status. Some people who have transitioned decades before may still be unable to change their documentation because they haven't met the requirements for their jurisdiction. The various medical interventions involved in transition are very expensive and typically not covered by health insurance, so many trans men and women are not able to afford it. This is especially true for trans men, many of whom choose to forego genital surgeries, which are extremely expensive and not necessarily a perfected procedure. Others may be unable to undergo such invasive procedures for reasons relating to their own health. Many transgender people therefore have ambiguous or conflicting legal documentation.

As important as it is to have accurate information about people's legal and social identity, there are some questions that are best not to ask directly, for they are generally considered inappropriate or rude. Of course, decisions about what and how to ask must be guided by the nature of the relationship with the prospective parents and their willingness to share this

process with the worker. Before asking challenging questions, workers should carefully assess their own reasons for asking. If they are simply "curious," it is generally better to not ask.

Workers should always be guided by what is appropriate to ask, what they truly *need* to know, and what is on a "need-to-know-only" basis. Generally speaking, it is best to avoid asking questions like, "Have you had the surgery yet?" or "When do you plan on having the surgery?" There is social fascination with transsexual surgeries but, in reality, the medical procedures are only a small part of the overall transition process for many trans people and, in some ways, the least important and the most personal.

There are questions, however, that you can ask. For example:

- Where are you in the process of legally changing your identity?
- Can you share with me what it has been like publicly changing your gender identity? How has this transition affected relationships with family, friends, co-workers?
- Has it been difficult to complete all the legal paperwork for your gender transition?
- Are you receiving any medical treatment related to your gender identity?
- Are you satisfied at this point with the process and results of your transition?

There are also very specific issues to address regarding gender identity and parenting. The most common assumption made about all LGBT-headed families is that the children will become confused about their own sexuality and gender identity. There is, however, no evidence at all that would support these fears. The research on lesbian-headed families clearly demonstrated that the mother's sexual orientation does not have an affect on the child's later sexual identity. Research on gay, bisexual and transgender-headed families is still in the early stages, but the evidence to date does not show any

particular problems for children reared in homes with a transgender parent.³⁵

Many transgender people have had children before their transition and have proven themselves to be effective and skilled parents. In one study, approximately 30 percent of the population that sought services for gender identity issues was parents.³⁶ In recent years, it has become an important part of the transition process to inquire about fertility issues and intentions regarding future parenting but historically, it was assumed that people would not want to parent post-transition. The option to reproduce is no longer available for many post-operative transsexuals. It should be part of the homestudy assessment when working with transgender people to ask if they have other children and if they are biological parents. Although it may seem odd to ask a man if he has ever birthed a child, many trans men have, both pre-transition and, in some cases, post-transition (since, as was discussed above, some trans men choose to retain their female reproductive organs). Questions of fertility loss should be examined with transgender people as with any other prospective parents.

Children in need of foster care and adoption already face many social and psychological challenges. The question of whether a placement in a home with a transgender or gender non-conforming parent might increase the number of obstacles they face, and psychosocial complications are often levied at transgender people seeking to adopt. This is perhaps a fair question, but it is based largely on assumptions about transgender people that are not accurate. First of all, most transgender people seeking adoption have resolved their gender identity struggles and live satisfying and well-adjusted lives. Additionally, like other “minority” people (i.e., people of color, people living with disabilities), transgender people may have been targets of bigotry or have adapted to environmental barriers,

but these realities should never preclude them from being parents; indeed, we might see their ability to overcome life challenges as a strength and an advantage providing them with resilience and courage.

Having a gender-variant parent does not harm children, and transgender people should be evaluated on the same criteria as any other person seeking to adopt. The only difference in the assessment process would be questions specifically addressing how they would discuss the gender and transition issues with their children. These questions are not about prying into the details of gender identity as much as evaluating their ability to discuss these issues in a manner that is developmentally appropriate. Children can absorb different levels of information at different ages, so the information provided to a 5-year-old should be developmentally appropriate and will be very different from what is discussed with a child in puberty or a young adult. Of course, the nature and personality of the individual child, as well as the child’s own particular life struggles, should be taken into consideration. There is no doubt that having a “different kind of family” can be challenging for children, but just like issues that have an affect on transracially adoptive families, it can be managed with competence.

Despite the fact that the children of transgender parents are no more likely to struggle with their gender identity than any other children, it is a common concern for many people, including some transgender people themselves. It is important to assess how transgender parents might be thinking about these issues. Perhaps some transgender people seeking to adopt will minimize the issues (“It’s no big deal. Why does the child need to know?”), while others exaggerate their importance (“I plan to tell them details of my surgery, so they really understand.”). Some transgender people may not feel comfortable talking about gender and sexuality issues

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(like many parents), and therefore will not be prepared to deal with the level of interest a child may express. Gender transitions are likely to instill curiosity for most children, and confusion for some. It is unlikely, however, to have an affect on their own gender identity, unless they are already struggling with those issues. A parent who has successfully negotiated transition might be a perfect choice for a child who is dealing with gender identity issues.

Some questions to ask a transgender prospective parent include:

- How do you think being transgender might have an affect on your children?
- How have you thought about explaining gender identity issues to your children?
- Have you learned things from your gender transition experience that will help you as a parent?

- What do you think is the relationship between sexual orientation and gender identity?
- How will you feel if you have a child who struggles with gender identity?

Questions about children's gender exploration should be a routine part of all homestudies, not just for those parents who are transgender. Do not assume that individuals with a transgender identity will be more focused on the gender identity and gender expression of their own children than any other parents might be.

Most child welfare professionals are ignorant about and sometimes prejudiced toward transgender people like with any population that is not familiar to you or with whom you have no firsthand experience, the first step is to get information and become better prepared as a professional to work objectively and effectively with the transgender community.

Transracial Adoption: Intersections of Sexual Orientation, Race and Culture

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The practice of transracial adoption is largely the adoption of African American children and youth by white parents. Early research on these adoptions has predominately been conducted on families adopting children as infants. While these studies found that the children “did not have more psychological or social maladjustment problems,” the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute’s report on “Finding Families for African American Children” found these studies to be somewhat problematic in that they were usually small samples and many did not include comparison groups of children adopted by parents of the same race. In the same report, the institute found that while there is little research on children transracially adopted from foster care, the ones that do exist found satisfaction on the part of the parents and a higher rate of problems with the children.

Preparing prospective families to meet the unique needs and experiences of the children they wish to adopt is considered sound adoption practice. However, when it comes to race and culture, families and their agencies often take a “color blind” approach and minimize the significance of race and the impact of racism on their children specifically, and in society in general. The institute also noted research in which Brooks and Barth (1999), in their study of different racial/ethnic groups of transracial adoptees, found that African Americans – particularly males – experienced the highest level of discrimination. Further, they noted that studies of transracially adopted adolescents and young adults have found that perceived discrimination is significantly associated with behavior problems and psychological distress (Cederblad, et al., 1999; Feigelman, 2000). While these may be

difficult discussions, it is critically important that adoptive parents, regardless of race, develop a level of comfort in having courageous conversations about race. It is impossible for African American children to escape instances of prejudice, discrimination and even profiling based solely on their race and perceptions of what that means to others. This is more commonly referred to as “the talk” and should be undertaken just as “the talk” on sex and sexuality should be routinely held.

In what may be the largest research study on the subject, “Beyond Culture Camp,” the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute sheds light on the affect of transracial adoption in ways that no other study has done. While the population studied compares experiences and outcomes of adults who are Korean born transracial adoptees and U.S. Caucasian “in race” adopted adults, the issues pertaining to race and culture are applicable to all children of color who are transracially adopted. Its findings and recommendations provide parents and professionals with an excellent opportunity to gain an understanding of the experiences and feelings of children who have been transracially and transculturally adopted, and offers strategies for helping transracial adoptees develop a positive racial/cultural identity. To that end, major findings worth noting are that 1) race/ethnicity is an increasingly significant aspect of identity for those adopted across color and culture; 2) coping with discrimination is an important aspect of coming to terms with racial/ethnic identity for adoptees of color and 3) positive racial/ethnic identity development is most effectively facilitated by “lived” experiences such as travel to the native

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country, racially diverse schools and role models from the same race/ethnicity.

Parents adopting transracially can easily create environments that increase opportunities for positive racial identity development. Some helpful strategies include assuring the child is not racially isolated by selecting racially diverse neighborhoods, schools and extracurricular and religious activities; ensuring that the parents as well as the children interact regularly with multiracial friends; including magazines, artwork and literature in the home that are by and about people of the child's racial group; and recognizing, acknowledging and addressing instances of discrimination, prejudice and profiling.

Sometimes LGBT adoptive parents seek out transracial adoption because they feel their personal experience with discrimination makes them better suited for transracial adoption. While that may be valid, transracial adoptive families that understand and accept the volatility of race relations in America are far better equipped to deal with the experiences their children and their family will encounter and will

become much stronger and resilient in developing coping skills that support them as individuals and a family unit. On the other hand, families who minimize and deny the affect of race in the lives of their children and their families are less likely to be effective in helping their children address their feelings and experiences with their racial identity and sense of self-esteem and are more likely to encounter problems.

Finally, the agency has an important role to be proactive in helping families prepare for transracial adoption, thereby increasing the likelihood of satisfaction and success with the placement and providing or referring families to ongoing post-adoption support resources as they encounter situations over the life of their adoption that could be helped by third party intervention.

For more information see:

- www.adoptioninstitute.org/research/2008_05_mepa.php
- www.adoptioninstitute.org/research/2009_11_culture_camp.php

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Appendices

Appendix A: Guiding Principles

1. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and Management Guiding Principle: The organization’s leadership and management team reflects a commitment to finding and supporting all families qualified to care for children and youth — including those families headed by LGBT adults. To that end, the team welcomes LGBT people as members of the governing board or executive leadership, as staff members and as clients. The team supports efforts to gather feedback and implement training and other efforts to improve performance.

a. Governance

Governance Guiding Principle: The organization’s approach to governance — in policy, practice and leadership — welcomes and supports LGBT adults as potential adoptive and foster parents. The organization reflects this approach through its governing body, its mission or values statement, its client non-discrimination policy and its executive leadership.

- i. **Governing Body.** The organization’s board or governing body supports qualified LGBT adults as adoptive and foster parents. The board understands the needs and strengths of the LGBT community, educates the public about the agency’s inclusive approach and is an advocate for qualified LGBT parents.

The board or governing body includes members who are openly LGBT and/or members who are involved in, supportive of or representative of LGBT communities. In public agencies, all bodies that have oversight or regulatory responsibility — such as city or state departments of social services and elected boards, councils or legislatures — must similarly support an inclusive approach to working with all qualified parents.

- ii. **Mission or Values Statement.** The mission or values statement highlights the organization’s commitment to recruit and retain all qualified adults to serve as adoptive and foster parents, including LGBT adults. These statements specifically reference LGBT adults or same-sex couples, include the terms “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” or “family structure” and/or include a broad commitment to working with all qualified families.

- iii. **Client Non-Discrimination Policy, FAQ and Other Policy Statements.** The organization has a policy that prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity or expression in working with clients. Like the mission or values statements, these policies specifically reference LGBT adults or same-sex couples; include the terms “sexual orientation,” “gender identity” and “gender expression.”
 - iv. **Executive Leadership.** The organization’s executive director is a champion of the organization’s inclusive mission and commitment to working with LGBT adults as adoptive and foster parents while working with the governing body, creating an organizational culture, managing daily operations of the agency and supporting and supervising staff.
- b. **Human Resources Management**
- Human Resources Management Guiding Principle: The organization’s human resources policies and practices create a welcoming environment for all employees and help recruit and retain qualified LGBT employees.
- i. **Employment Non-Discrimination Policy.** The organization’s personnel policy explicitly prohibits employment discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity to create a work environment that is supportive of productivity, stability and diversity of staff.
 - ii. **Openly LGBT Staff.** As the organization reassesses its work force needs, it will strive to have its employees demographically reflect all the clients served, including LGBT people.
 - iii. **Recruitment and Selection.** As the organization recruits and hires employees, it will ensure that all employees have the necessary skills to work with all clients and stakeholders, including the LGBT community. The organization will inform potential employees about its commitment to working with LGBT adoptive and foster parents; the agency will question candidates about their experience and comfort level in working with LGBT parents.
- c. **Evaluation and Feedback**
- Evaluation and Feedback Guiding Principle: In its commitment to high performance and quality services, the organization puts in place systems to capture information about the sexual orientation and/or gender identity of its service recipients so that it can identify its clients and potential clients, analyze changes in the demographic profile of its clients and learn about the satisfaction, retention, placement and disruption rates related to LGBT foster and adoptive parents. The organization will analyze data related to LGBT clients and potential clients, communicate those results to relevant stakeholders and create and implement plans to improve service delivery and client outcomes wherever needed.
- i. **Gathering and Using Data.** The organization will gather and use data about sexual orientation and gender identity of clients for performance and quality improvement purposes.

- ii. **Protecting Data/Privacy Issues.** The organization will protect data from disclosure beyond that which is necessary for child placement. The limitations of protection of private information should be fully understood by the prospective adoptive family.

d. **Client Rights**

Client Rights Guiding Principle: The organization will at all times respect the rights and dignity of all clients, including LGBT clients, and will ensure a welcoming and informed experience for these clients.

- i. **Protection of Rights and Ethical Obligations.** The organization informs all clients of their rights and responsibilities and gives all clients, including LGBT clients, sufficient information so that they can make informed decisions about using the agency's services.
- ii. **Grievance Procedures.** The organization's grievance procedure for clients functions appropriately as a mechanism for LGBT clients, potential clients and other stakeholders to express and resolve grievances.

e. **Staff Training**

Staff Training Guiding Principle: Because proper training is a key element in the creation of a competent staff, the organization will fully incorporate competencies related to LGBT clients in its staff training systems. Training will build and enhance core competencies so that the agency is known as one that not only welcomes LGBT adoptive and foster parents but in fact embraces and affirms them.

- i. **Training Approach.** The organization's training program offers all incoming and current staff the information and skills they need to provide culturally competent services to LGBT adoptive and foster parents.
- ii. **Competencies.** Training covering the core competencies below will increase the ability of an organization's staff members to understand LGBT clients and will include issues of cultural identity, family formation and development, family law and more.

2. **ADOPTION AND FOSTER CARE SERVICES**

Adoption and Foster Care Services Guiding Principle: The organization will deliver all services in a manner that is thoughtful and inclusive of LGBT prospective and current adoptive and foster parents. Services will affirm and support the abilities of LGBT-headed families.

a. **Recruitment of Adoptive and Foster Families**

Recruitment Guiding Principle: The organization's program to recruit adoptive and foster parents actively identifies, communicates with and recruits from multiple LGBT communities to ensure a sufficient number of qualified and appropriate families for children and youth awaiting adoption or foster homes. The agency will work in partnership with LGBT institutions to maximize its ability to connect with these prospective parents.

- i. **Intentional Outreach.** The organization will specifically target multiple LGBT communities in all of its efforts to reach and recruit prospective parents.
 - ii. **Partnerships with the LGBT Community.** The organization will collaborate with LGBT community leaders and/or organizations to ensure that its recruitment efforts are culturally appropriate and effective.
 - b. **Organizational Atmosphere: Who Is Welcome Here?**
Organizational Atmosphere Guiding Principle: In all ways that the organization communicates with its prospective and current clients, it will be inclusive and supportive of LGBT-headed families. All images, language, materials and events will include and affirm such families, so that LGBT prospective parents will know they are welcome at the agency.
 - i. **Physical Space.** The organization will ensure that its waiting room and other physical spaces include visual and other materials that are inclusive of all prospective parents.
 - ii. **Marketing/Outreach Materials (Website, Brochures, Newsletters).** All visual and written materials representing the agency's work will reflect and specifically address LGBT-headed families.
 - iii. **Initial Phone Contact.** Because prospective parents often have their first interaction with an organization by phone, agencies will ensure that all staff members who are responsible for answering calls are competent in welcoming all families.
 - iv. **Introductory Seminars/Orientation Sessions.** The featured panelists and spoken and written content of introductory sessions will reflect LGBT-headed families among other adoptive or foster families. Facilitators for such sessions will be able to create a safe and welcoming environment for all families. They will be prepared for questions from LGBT-headed families as well as skilled in responding to those participants who may have strong biases against such families.
 - v. **Paperwork/Forms.** All paperwork required of clients will feature inclusive language that reflects all potential applicants.
 - vi. **Parent Preparation Training.** The parent preparation training delivered by or required by the agency will include LGBT-headed families as examples throughout the training, just as it includes examples of other types of prospective families, such as single parents or transracial families. Exercises and language will be inclusive and all trainers will be skilled in creating a safe and affirming atmosphere for LGBT prospective parents.
 - c. **Homestudy/Family Assessment Practice**
Homestudy/Family Assessment Guiding Principle: The organization will honor the integrity of every prospective family and apply assessment criteria evenly. Agency staff responsible for performing homestudies will exhibit cultural competence at all times in

talking with and writing about LGBT-headed families. They are comfortable in using appropriate language, know about legal issues and policy-related decisions that have an impact on same-sex couples and gender non-conforming individuals in relevant jurisdictions, and are able to access support resources for LGBT families (see section on Staff Training).

Exchanges and other organizations that do not perform assessments themselves will be able to refer families to others who are able to conduct the assessment activities described above. They will also be skilled in reviewing completed family assessments to assure they have been conducted competently.

- i. **Unique Issues with LGBT Families.** With a commitment to discovering the special strengths and challenges of every family, agencies will conduct their homestudies of LGBT-headed families with a commitment to equality of treatment and the knowledge of the few areas that may warrant special attention.
- ii. **Approach to Conducting and Writing the Homestudy.** Agencies will be familiar with the laws in all relevant jurisdictions regarding adoption and foster parenting by LGBT individuals and same-sex couples. They will use that knowledge in their discussions with applicants and their decisions regarding approaches to conducting and writing the homestudy. To ensure accurate assessments of a family's strengths and challenges and in the interest of children and youth to be placed with these families, agencies will, whenever possible, conduct homestudies of same-sex couples as a family rather than a single individual, even in those areas where only one partner in a couple can adopt or foster parent. It is also important for agencies to be familiar with gender case law about transgender issues and custody decisions.

d. **Placement**

Placement Guiding Principle: Through its advocacy, communication and support systems, the agency will support LGBT families waiting for child placements just as they support all families. The agency will prepare families for the likely waiting period and potential obstacles to placements, offering support and advocacy whenever appropriate.

- i. **Support for Waiting Families.** Organizational services will actively support LGBT waiting parents who have completed all pre-placement steps but have not yet received an adoptive or foster placement. The agency will maintain honest and open communication with waiting parents, many of whom have questions or concerns about the likelihood of placements. Due to societal discrimination, LGBT waiting parents may need additional assurance and support during this period. Ensure that all efforts to match children and youth with waiting parents, including exchange postings and family albums, present the strengths of LGBT waiting families.
- ii. **Waiting Children: Addressing Worker Bias.** Agencies will ensure that their own staff members are well trained and competent in working with LGBT families.

They will also create strategies to navigate relationships with other agencies whose staff members may exhibit bias against placing children and youth with LGBT families, regardless of the appropriateness of the match for waiting children.

- iii. **Waiting Children: Placing Older Youth.** Agencies will fully disclose family structure to older youth who are involved in placement decisions. They will use a strengths-based approach in presenting this information and offer age-appropriate information about LGBT families to youth while also respecting older youths' decisions.
 - iv. **Waiting Children: Placements to and from Foster Families.** In their own practice, organizations will work to educate their foster families about the strengths of all client families and will work to minimize the ability of individual foster families to interfere with appropriate permanent placements with LGBT families. Agencies will also support qualified LGBT foster families in challenges by birth families.
 - v. **Infant Adoption: Working with Birth Families.** Organizations that work in infant adoption will offer information and support to birth families so they may be informed about LGBT families for placement.
- e. **Adoption Finalization**
Adoption Finalization Guiding Principle: Through its knowledge of the law and thoughtful, competent approach to all earlier steps in the adoption process, the organization will lead its LGBT clients through successful and appropriate finalization processes.
- f. **Post-Permanency Support to Sustain Families**
Post-Permanency Support Guiding Principle: Through its own work or by connecting families with external services, the organization will support, counsel and nurture LGBT-headed adoptive and foster families into the future.
- i. **Placement Is Just the Beginning: A Commitment to the Future.** With a deep understanding of the unique developmental paths of adoptive, foster and LGBT families, the organization will support clients in their preparation for the future.
 - ii. **Educational Seminars.** Agencies that offer seminars for adoptive and foster families should ensure that seminars address the additional layers of diversity and the developmental path of LGBT-headed families.
 - iii. **Support Groups.** Agencies that offer support groups for adoptive and foster families should ensure that they address the additional layers of diversity and the development path of LGBT-headed families. If agencies do not themselves sponsor such groups, social workers will be familiar with external support resources available for LGBT-headed adoptive and foster families.
 - iv. **Family Counseling and Mental Health Services.** Because adoptive families will need changing services as their children age, the organization will provide access to family counseling or mental health services or refer clients to external

services. It will ensure that those who deliver these services are competent in dealing with the specific developmental paths of LGBT-headed adoptive and foster families.

- v. **Working with Schools.** In all its post-permanency services, the organization will help its families navigate schools regarding issues that arise for children and youth in foster care or who are adopted, including issues that arise because the children are in an LGBT family.

Appendix B: All Children – All Families Pledge of Commitment

There are more than 500,000 children living in foster care across the country, and over 100,000 are waiting for permanent families through adoption. Too many of these children and youth age out of the foster care system and never know what it's like to have a family of their own. It is important to identify and remove any barriers that may prevent them from growing up with the love and stability they deserve.

We believe that all potential qualified parents, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, or marital status should be equally valued as a resource for these children and youth.

As an organization, we support the two primary goals of HRC's All Children – All Families initiative:

- Adoption and foster care agencies affirmatively welcome and support all stable, nurturing families, including LGBT-headed families, and are culturally competent in working with these families and;
- Members of the LGBT community are made aware of opportunities in domestic adoption and foster parenting and can easily identify agencies that welcome them.

As an adoption or foster care agency or organization, we pledge to implement policies and practices that welcome, affirm and support diverse families from our communities. We will strive to be culturally competent in serving LGBT foster and adoptive parents, as outlined in the All Children – All Families *Promising Practices guide*. We will implement these promising practices as they apply within our scope of services and aim to achieve all applicable benchmarks.

We will encourage our contract/partner/provider agencies to engage in inclusive practice and will provide leadership for those who wish to more formally engage in best practices with the LGBT community.

Signed _____

Date _____

Commissioner or Division/Unit Director/Manager (PCWA or Executive Director/President)

Appendix C: All Children – All Families Agency Self-Assessment

Use this document for your information only – assessments must be submitted online:

<http://acaf.hrc.org>

Up-to-date help and additional information specific to each assessment question is available online.

Questions connected to benchmarks found in the *Promising Practices* guide are indicated with the benchmark number such as **1**

Note: While we encourage all foster care and adoption organizations to utilize the All Children – All Families tools and resources, only licensed, accredited agencies, both public and private, and adoption exchanges may formally participate in All Children – All Families and earn the Seal of Recognition.

Contributor Information

Ensure the contact information for contributors is complete and accurate. We track this information to ensure that we are communicating with individuals authorized to do so on their employer’s behalf.

Only the official submitter may submit the final survey to HRC Foundation staff for review.

1. Official Submitter

First Name _____
Last Name _____
Job Title _____
Department/Division _____
Phone Number _____
Email _____
Street Address 1 _____
Street Address 2 _____
City _____
State _____
ZIP Code _____

2. Contributor

First Name _____
Last Name _____
Job Title _____
Department/Division _____
Phone Number _____
Email _____

APPENDICES

Street Address 1 _____
Street Address 2 _____
City _____
State _____
ZIP Code _____

General Agency Information

1. Which of the following best describes your organization? (Please check all that apply.)

- Public child welfare agency
- Licensed adoption or foster care agency
- Not-for-profit adoption exchange
- Other (please specify)

2. What type of adoption(s) do you conduct? (Please check all that apply.)

- International adoptions
- Domestic infant adoption
- Foster care adoptions
- Not applicable

3. Indicate your primary service provided. (Please check all that apply.)

- Adoption matching and placement
- Foster care/re-unification
- Public awareness
- Recruitment
- Homestudy
- Post-permanency support services
- Licensing
- Other (please specify)

4. Agency Address

Street Address 1 _____
Street Address 2 _____
City _____
State _____
ZIP Code _____
Main Phone Number _____
Main Fax Number _____

5. Public Web Address

6. Number of Full-Time Personnel _____
 7. Ownership Type _____

Governance and Human Resource Management

1. Does your mission or values statement use LGBT-inclusive language?

- Yes
 No

1a. If applicable, please provide the public web address (URL) where your mission or values statement is posted.

2. Does your **client** non-discrimination statement clearly ban discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation?

1

- Yes
 No

3. Does your **client** non-discrimination statement clearly ban discrimination on the basis of gender identity?

2

- Yes
 No

3a. Does your **client** non-discrimination statement clearly ban discrimination on the basis of gender expression?

2

- Yes
 No

4. Please attach a copy of your **client** non-discrimination statement as a Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx) or Adobe Acrobat (.pdf) file. Note: You must submit a copy to receive credit for benchmarks 1 and 2.

4a. If applicable, please provide the specific address (URL) of the page on your public website where your client non-discrimination statement is posted.

4b. Is this information available to the public in the following materials (please check all that apply)?

1

Agency brochures

2

Agency adoption/foster parent application

Family recruitment materials

Staff recruitment ads

Employment application

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5. Does your **employment** non-discrimination statement include the term “sexual orientation?”

- 3** Yes
 No

6. Does your **employment** non-discrimination statement include the terms “gender identity?”

- 4** Yes
 No

7. Please attach a copy of your **employment** non-discrimination statement as a Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx) or Adobe Acrobat (.pdf) file. Note: You must submit a copy to receive credit for benchmarks 3 and 4.

7a. If applicable, please provide the specific web address (URL) of the page on your public website where your employment non-discrimination statement is posted.

8. Do you have access to an expert in competent practice and delivery of service to the LGBT community?

- 6** Yes
 No

8a. If YES to Q8, indicate if the expert is a staff member, community partner or collaborator.

- Staff member
 Community partner
 Collaborator

Please describe this person or organization’s LGBT expertise.

9. Does your agency require your organizational partners, collaborators or contractors to meet your own non-discrimination standards?

- 6** Yes
 No

9a. If YES to Q9, how is this requirement implemented?

- Organize one or more specific agency education or advocacy activities for LGBT-inclusive and affirming practice among your organizational partners and collaborators
 Include in contracts with service providers specific requirements that the contractor implement LGBT-inclusive and affirming practice
 Include in contracts with service providers explicit mention of LGBT-inclusive non-discrimination policy
 Require service providers to sign a separate LGBT-inclusive non-discrimination statement with every contract
 Other (please specify)

9b. If YES to Q9, please provide documentation of this requirement.

9a. If NO to Q9, do you proactively educate and advocate for LGBT-inclusive and affirming practice among your organizational partners, collaborators or contractors?

- Yes
- No

9b. If YES to Q9a, please provide some specific details about the way your agency implements this requirement with partners/collaborators.

Evaluation and Feedback

1. Do you include sexual orientation in your demographic profile of families for tracking and reporting client data?

- Yes
- No

1a. If YES to Q1, which sexual orientations do you track? (Please check all that apply.)

- Heterosexual/straight
- Gay/lesbian
- Bisexual
- Other (please specify)

1b. If YES to Q1, in what year did you begin tracking sexual orientation?

1c. If YES to Q1, please attach a sample of how this information is tracked.

1d. If YES to Q1, do you routinely analyze demographic data regarding sexual orientation?

- Yes
- No

1e. If YES to Q1d, please describe how this information is analyzed.

2. Do you include options for individuals who identify as transgender in your demographic profile of families for tracking and reporting client data?

- Yes
- No

2a. If YES to Q2, which gender identities do you track? (Please check all that apply.)

- Female
- Male
- Transgender Male-to-Female
- Transgender Female-to-Male
- Other

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2b. If YES to Q2, in what year did you begin tracking transgender identity?

2c. If YES to Q2, please attach a sample of how this information is tracked.

2d. If YES to Q2, do you routinely analyze demographic data regarding gender identity?

- Yes
- No

2e. If YES to Q2d, please describe how this information is analyzed.

3. Does your agency currently track marital or relationship statuses?

- Yes
- No

3a. If YES to Q3, what marital or relationship statuses does your agency currently track? (Please check all that apply.)

- Civil union
- Common law marriage
- Couple/partnership (no legal status, includes living with partner, non-marital cohabitation or a married couple with no legal standing in the state)
- Divorced
- Married (different-sex/straight couples)
- Married (same-sex/lesbian, gay, bisexual couples)
- Same-sex registered domestic partners
- Different-sex registered domestic partners
- Single
- Widowed

4. Is your agency currently able to report the average length of time it takes resource families to complete the different stages of the adoption process?

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

4a. If YES to Q4, which stages of the adoption process are you able to report? (Please check all that apply.)

- Time to licensure
- Time to placement
- Time to adoption finalization

4b. If YES to Q4, does your agency report any similarities or differences in the above times for LGBT resource families and non-LGBT resources families?

- Yes
- No

If YES to 4b, please explain.

5. Do you routinely collect client satisfaction surveys from resource families who access your foster care and adoption services?

- Yes
- No

5a. If YES to Q5, which of the following areas related to client satisfaction are included in the survey? (Please check all that apply.)

- Initial contact with agency
- Friendliness/responsiveness
- Homestudy feedback
- Licensure process
- Child matching process
- Placement process including satisfaction with time from matching to adoption finalization
- Satisfaction with time from initial contact with adoption agency to adoption finalization
- Retention as a resource family over time with the agency
- Satisfaction with post-permanency services and educational programs
- Other (please specify)

5b. If YES to Q5, do you currently compare similarities and differences between service satisfaction for your LGBT and non-LGBT families?

- Yes
- No

6. Do you inform all your clients of your agency's grievance process?

- Yes
- No

6a. If YES to Q6, at what point in the process do you do this?

6b. If YES to Q6, do you compare types of grievances between LGBT and non-LGBT clients?

- Yes
- No

Staff Training Approach

1. Do you provide basic comprehensive LGBT and LGBT adoption-specific content in your training to personnel?

- 5** Yes, will/have provided through HRC
 Yes, will/have provided through other trainer
 No, training is not offered

If “Yes, will/have provided through other trainer,” please attach information describing training attendance, length and content as well as information about information about the trainer and his/her demonstrated LGBT expertise.

2. Please indicate below if you provide additional LGBT training to the following personnel based on their job/role:

5

- 2a. Case and social workers

- 5** Yes, will/have provided through HRC
 Yes, will/have provided through other trainer
 No, training is not offered

If “Yes, will/have provided through other trainer,” please attach information describing training attendance, length and content as well as information about information about the trainer and his/her demonstrated LGBT expertise.

- 2b. Managers/Supervisors

- 5** Yes, will/have provided through HRC
 Yes, will/have provided through other trainer
 No, training is not offered

If “Yes, will/have provided through other trainer,” please attach information describing training attendance, length and content as well as information about information about the trainer and his/her demonstrated LGBT expertise.

- 2c. Administrators

- 5** Yes, will/have provided through HRC
 Yes, will/have provided through other trainer
 No, training is not offered

If “Yes, will/have provided through other trainer,” please attach information describing training attendance, length and content as well as information about information about the trainer and his/her demonstrated LGBT expertise.

3. With which types of LGBT-headed households do your homestudy social workers have experience? (Please check all that apply.)

- Single lesbian, gay and bisexual parents
- Lesbian, gay and bisexual couples
- Single transgender parent
- Transgender parent with partner

4. Does your agency include standardized LGBT-specific language, examples and exercises in all family training (MAPP, PRIDE, etc.), educational activities or family group meetings?

9

- Yes
- No

If YES to Q4, please attach a sample of LGBT-specific content used in your family training/educational activities/family group meetings as a Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx) or Adobe Acrobat (.pdf) file.

Agency Environment

1. Do you have pictures, art, magazines or handouts inside your agency that feature LGBT families?

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

If YES to Q1, please attach samples of these materials as a Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx), Adobe Acrobat (.pdf) or image (.jpg) file.

2. Do all of your agency-controlled forms and internal documents use inclusive language (e.g., "partner" instead of "spouse" or "parent 1" and "parent 2" rather than "mother" and "father")?

7

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

If YES to Q2, please attach an example of an inclusive agency form or internal document as a Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx) or Adobe Acrobat (.pdf) file.

If "Not applicable" to Q2, please explain.

2a. Does your staff acknowledge to clients when non-agency-controlled forms have language that is not inclusive and therefore may be off-putting?

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

If "Not applicable" to Q2a, please explain.

3. Do your external communications explicitly reflect the agency's commitment to working with LGBT individuals and families?

8

- Yes
- No

3a. If YES to Q3, please indicate which communications apply. (Please check all that apply.)

- Websites that use family photos include LGBT family photos
- Non-discrimination policy is posted on agency website
- All printed/web content reflects inclusive language
- Collaborates with LGBT leaders and/or organization as recruitment partners
- Includes LGBT adoptive families as recruitment partners
- Other (please specify)

If YES to Q3, please attach an example of external communications that explicitly reflect your agency's commitment to working with LGBT individual and families as a Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx) or Adobe Acrobat (.pdf) file.

Recruitment

1. Does your agency actively recruit from diverse communities?

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

1a. Does your agency actively recruit LGBT foster and adoptive individuals and families?

8

- Yes
- No

1b. If YES to Q1a, please identify the strategies used for recruitment of LGBT individuals and families from the list below. (Please check all that apply.)

- Ads featuring LGBT families
- Attend LGBT events (i.e., pride, conferences)
- Partnership(s) with LGBT community groups
- Other (please specify)

1c. If YES to Q1a, please attach a sample of LGBT-inclusive recruitment materials as a Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx) or Adobe Acrobat (.pdf) file.

1d. If YES to Q1a, is your agency prepared to handle increased volume as a result of outreach efforts?

- Yes
- No

1e. If YES to Q1a, can your agency capture data related to your specific LGBT outreach efforts to determine whether they are effective?

- Yes
- No

2. Do you ask LGBT foster/adoptive families to help you with outreach and recruitment?

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

2a. If YES to Q2, please identify the strategies used from the list below. (Please check all that apply.)

- Speaking at events
- Speaking at orientation meetings
- Participation on panel discussions
- Mentoring/buddying with current LGBT families
- Other (please specify)

3. Does your agency provide any support specifically for waiting LGBT families?

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

3a. If YES to Q3, what type of support is provided? (Please check all that apply.)

- Support groups
- Educational programs
- Information packets
- Listservs
- Referrals to other community resources
- Other (please specify)

Placement, Finalization and Adoption Support Services

1. Does your agency provide child placement services?

- Yes
- No

If YES to Q1:

2. How many foster or adoptive parents have you served at your agency over the past year? Please estimate if exact number is unknown.

Number: _____

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3. How many lesbian, gay or bisexual foster or adoptive parents have you served at your agency over the past year? Please estimate if the exact number is unknown.

Number: ____

4. How many transgender foster or adoptive parents have you served at your agency over the past year? Please estimate if the exact number is unknown.

Number: ____

5. How many of your clients achieved a finalized adoption in the past year? Please estimate if exact number is unknown.

Number: ____

6. Have you had placements/finalized adoptions with LGBT foster or adoptive parents within the past year?

- 10** Yes
 No

- 6a. If YES to Q6, how many certified LGB families achieved placement and finalization over the past year? Please estimate if exact number is unknown.

Number: ____

- 6b. If YES to Q6, how many certified transgender families achieved placement and finalization over the past year? Please estimate if exact number is unknown.

Number: ____

- 6c. If YES to Q6, how is this information tracked?

- Manual count from homestudy/family assessment
 Database collection
 Other (please specify)

Please provide an example of how this information is tracked.

7. Does your agency provide any support specifically for LGBT families after the foster placement or adoption is finalized?

- Yes
 No

- 7a. If YES to Q7, what support does your agency provide? (Please check all that apply.)

- Support groups
 Educational programs
 Information packets

- Listservs
- Referrals to other community resources
- Other (please specify)

If NO to Q1:

2. How many total families has your agency served within the past year? Please estimate if exact number is unknown.

Number: _____

3. Have you served LGBT families within the past year?

10

- Yes
- No

3a. If YES to Q3, how many LGB families have you served over the past year? Please estimate if exact number is unknown.

Number: _____

3b. If YES to Q3, how many transgender families have you served over the past year? Please estimate if exact number is unknown.

Number: _____

3c. If YES to Q3, how is this information tracked?

- Manual count
- Database collection
- Other (please specify)

Please provide an example of how this information is tracked.

3d. If YES to Q3, what services were provided? (Please check all that apply.)

- Pre/post adoption counseling
- Pre/post adoption education/training
- Homestudy services
- Adoption exchange services
- Foster care case management
- Other (please specify)

Appendix D: FAQs About the Agency Self-Assessment Process

The All Children – All Families Agency Self-Assessment allows an organization to understand and document its level of cultural competence in welcoming LGBT-headed families in its current practice. Upon completion, agencies will receive a report outlining how many of the 10 benchmarks of LGBT cultural competence they have met. An ACAF staff member will also analyze the self-assessment and provide the agency with one hour of individualized technical assistance – including a plan for each agency to improve its practice.

Here are the questions agencies ask most frequently about the self-assessment or technical assistance.

Q: “Can our agency complete the assessment just for our foster care and/or adoption program, but not the full agency that also provides other non-adoption/foster care services?”

A: Yes. All Children – All Families focuses on foster care and/or adoption services provided to LGBT clients. We encourage agencies that offer other programs and services to consider a full review of their agency’s LGBT culturally competent policies and practices but do not require other agency programs to meet the 10 benchmarks to earn the Seal of Recognition. Once the seal is granted to your agency, it may only be used in conjunction with the adoption/foster care services at your agency.

Q. “If we have other office locations in other states, can we answer just for our office or do we have to answer for the whole organization?”

A. Yes, you can answer the assessment and pursue the ACAF seal just for your one office. If your office earns the seal, only that office can publicize and promote the seal – it cannot be promoted organization-wide.

Q: “How long can I take to complete the assessment? Is there a deadline by which we need to earn the seal once we’ve begun the process?”

A: All Children – All Families has no fixed time frame by which an agency must earn the seal, but we ask agencies to complete the self-assessment within three months. And we hope that agencies consider a maximum period of six months for the entire process. If more time is needed, communicate that need with the staff member providing technical assistance. Many agencies set their own deadlines, related to a specific agency event or other internal or external purposes.

Q: “What if our agency already has some staff training on LGBT topics? Do I need more training, and does it have to be the ACAF training? What’s the difference between the ACAF training and other types of training we might already host?”

A: The ACAF training is not a requirement, but the training your agency receives must meet the ACAF objectives described in Benchmark 5. If you choose to have training from other sources, the assessment requires specific documentation, including information on the training curriculum and the trainer’s LGBT expertise. All staff must have basic, comprehensive LGBT training. Staff members who provide foster care and adoption services in the area of recruitment, homestudies and matching may need more training, depending on their position and the services they provide. If you are unsure, you can speak with the Downs Group that manages the ACAF training to assess your agency’s training needs.

Q: “If we’re not a child-placing agency but we provide other adoption services to LGBT clients, are we eligible to earn the seal? If so, do all the benchmarks in the assessment apply?”

A: Yes and yes. As a non-child-placing agency, you are able to earn the seal. All the benchmarks apply; ACAF has amended the benchmarks to ensure they are aligned with non-child-placing agencies that provide adoption services. For more information see www.hrc.org/acaf-benchmarks.

Q: “What is the technical assistance (T/A) process and how does it work?”

A: Here are the steps you will follow during technical assistance:

1. Work with HRC to schedule an initial one-hour T/A phone meeting.
2. During that call, the ACAF staff member will learn about the work of your agency, ask you clarifying questions regarding your answers to the self-assessment and discuss next steps for your agency to meet the benchmarks. You will have a chance to ask questions about the benchmarks and the process to earn the seal.
3. The staff member will send you a summary report outlining these next steps.
4. You will have two weeks to send updated materials to your T/A administrator.
5. Your agency’s ACAF assessment will be reopened, allowing you to continue the next steps in updating your assessment.
6. Your agency will continue to update its assessment, adding documents and revising answers until completing all 10 benchmarks. Throughout this process, you will have T/A available to you for questions or challenges.

Appendix E: All Children – All Families National Advisory Council

Members of the All Children - All Families National Advisory Council serve as key advisers in the development and implementation of the All Children – All Families initiative and provide leadership in educating the broader child welfare community about the importance of supporting LGBT families in every aspect of practice.

Susan Badeau

Director of Cross Systems Integration, Knowledge Management
Casey Family Programs

Lane Barker

Executive Director
Devereux Arizona

Bill Bettencourt

Senior Associate, Child Welfare Program
Center for the Study of Social Policy

Beth Brindo

Field Faculty, Case Western Reserve University
Mandel School of Applied Sciences
Independent Child Welfare Consultant

Janice Goldwater

Founder and Executive Director
Adoptions Together

Jill Jacobs

Executive Director
Family Builders

Beverly Jones

Director of Child Welfare Services
Lutheran Child and Family Services of Illinois

Joe Kroll

Executive Director
North American Council on Adoptable Children

Jill May, LSMW

Foster Care and Adoption Bureau Chief
New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Dept.

Ann McCabe

Family Therapist and Child Welfare Consultant

J. Toni Oliver

President
J.T. Oliver & Associates

Jana Rickerson, LCSW

Consultant and Trainer
Program Committee Chair, Board of Directors
Family Builders by Adoption

Greg Rose

Deputy Director, Children and Family Services
Division California Department of Social Services

Lori Ross

President and CEO
Midwest Foster Care and Adoption Association

Karey Scheyd, MPA

Director of Program Development and Improvement
Legacy Inc.

Linda S. Spears

Vice President, Policy and Public Affairs
Child Welfare League of America

Brian J. Tessier, Esq.

President
We Hear The Children Inc.

Colette Tobias

Administrator, Office of Resource Families
New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services

Diane Wagner

Division Chief, Adoptions and Permanency Resources Division
County of Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services

Rob Woronoff, MS

Child Welfare Consultant

Appendix F: About the HRC Foundation Family Project

The Human Rights Campaign, the nation’s largest lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender advocacy organization, and its affiliated Foundation envision an America where LGBT people are ensured their basic equal rights and can be open, honest and safe at home, at work and in the community. Through research, educational efforts and outreach, the Human Rights Campaign Foundation, a non-profit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization, encourages LGBT Americans to live their lives openly and seeks to change the hearts and minds of Americans to the side of equality.

All Children – All Families is an initiative of the Family Project of the HRC Foundation. The Family Project empowers members of the LGBT community to take action to protect their families, improves the practices within key institutions that serve LGBT families and promotes visibility of LGBT families.

Appendix G: Acknowledgments

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APPENDICES

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Photo on page 89 from Queerstock. All other photos by Robert Severi.



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“ The All Children—All Families initiative is truly vital for agency staff and prospective LGBT parents. It’s key to reducing the number of children waiting for ‘forever families.’ ”

- Dr. Ruth McRoy, Director, Center for Social Work Research, University of Texas at Austin School of Social Work

“ The All Children—All Families Promising Practices Guide fills a critical need by encouraging an open discussion of the issues of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender cultural competence and training. It is a welcome tool that will be an asset to every organization working to place America’s children.”

- Rita L. Sorenson, Executive Director, Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption

“ HRC’s All Children—All Families training provides child welfare systems with the support and guidance they need to add LGBT-headed families to their pool of prospective permanent homes. And this work is the right thing to do at the right time. I’m proud to be a part of an Administration that believes no child in foster care should be denied a permanent family simply because of the LGBT identity of the adults willing to provide it, or of the child seeking a new home.”

- Bryan Samuels, U.S. Commissioner, Administration on Children, Youth and Families

“ The LGBT community has largely been an untapped resource, and many child welfare professionals continue to treat LGBT people as second-class families. With 120,000 children and youth waiting for a stable, nurturing family, any and all barriers need to be removed, and that means opening our doors and truly valuing every person regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. All Children—All Families can help you do that.”

- Joe Kroll, Executive Director, North American Council on Adoptable Children



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