

THIRD 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



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.

Human Rights Campaign Foundation

1640 Rhode Island Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036
phone **202-628-4160** TTY **202-216-1572** fax **866-304-3257**
website www.hrc.org/acaf e-mail family@hrc.org

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all children all families

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

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 approach to working with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) foster and adoptive parents. While some in the child welfare profession still question whether children should be placed with LGBT parents, we believe that debate is over: 30 years of social science research and thousands of real success stories illustrate that LGBT parents are equally nurturing, strong and committed.

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.

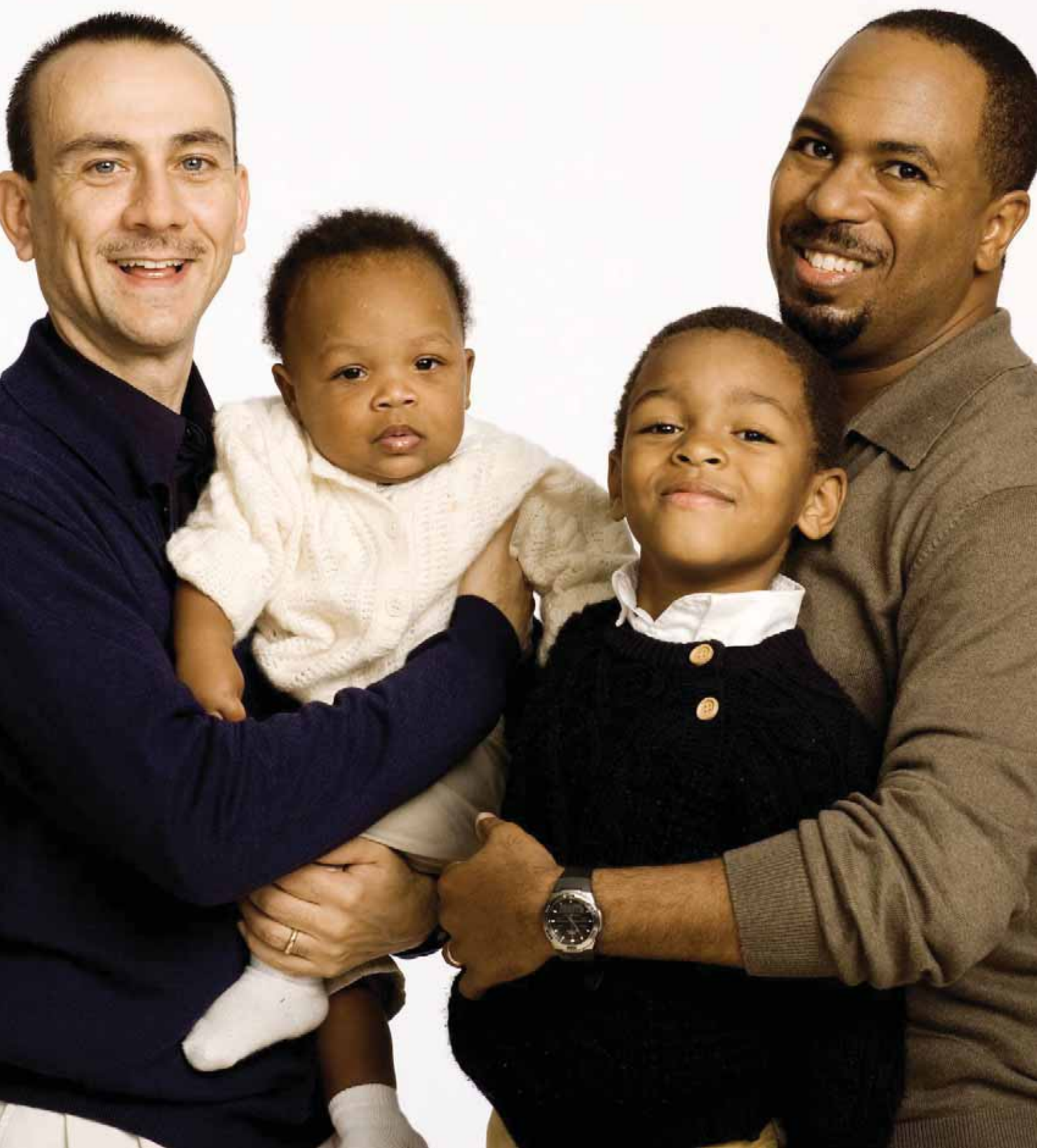
Since launching All Children – All Families in 2007, we have celebrated many successes, including the distribution of 2000 Guides to agencies across the country, earning endorsements from leading child welfare organizations, receiving pledges of commitment from 40 agencies and issuing the All Children – All Families Seal of Recognition to seven of them. 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

All Children – All Families National Advisory Council
(For list of members, see [Appendix D](#))



INTRODUCTION

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

More than a half-million children and youth in the United States are in the foster care system. More than 100,000 of these vulnerable children are waiting for adoption by loving, permanent families. 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.

- An estimated 27 percent of same-sex couples identified in Census 2000 have a child under 18 living in the home with them.¹
- 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.²
- 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.³

Many more would like to become parents — an estimated 2 million lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people are interested in adopting.⁴

Research shows, however, that less than one-fifth of adoption agencies attempt to recruit adoptive parents from the lesbian and gay community.⁵ Even in states where it is legal for LGB people to adopt children and youth from the foster care system, many LGB 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. There is widespread confusion and misinformation about transgender people, and this is intensified when they are seeking adoption services. Transgender people face high

levels of discrimination, especially regarding their ability to be effective parents.

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.

In the 2008 elections, Americans elected a president who “believes that we must ensure adoption rights for all couples and individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation.”⁶

At the same time, a majority of voters in Arkansas supported a ban on adoption by unmarried cohabitating couples. This ban prevents lesbian and gay couples from adopting in Arkansas. Anti-gay legislators in many states continue to propose laws that would limit the ability of gay men and lesbians to adopt or serve as foster parents. And while these efforts continue to fail, they lead to public — and often ill-informed — debate about the parenting abilities of LGBT adults and the well-being of children and youth raised in these families.

“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.⁷ 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

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reality has changed, in practical terms,” Pertman says.

“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 found that “laws and policies that preclude adoption by gay or lesbian parents disadvantage the tens of thousands of children mired in the foster care system who need permanent, loving homes.”⁸

The report recommended that agencies:

- Revise policies and practices that may impede the consideration of gays and lesbians as adoptive parents;
- Develop clear statements in support of such adoptions;

- Develop contacts in the gay/lesbian community “to engage in genuine, informed outreach”;
- Help agency staff “examine their attitudes and beliefs about gay and lesbian parenting”;
- Affirm the value of these families “by including them in outreach, training materials and parent panels”;
- Include and educate children, recognizing that they may encounter prejudice if adopted by gay parents;
- And conduct research to support post-adoption success.

This Guide — Promising Practices in Adoption and Foster Care — hopes to give 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);
- And 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.

PARTICIPATING IN ALL CHILDREN – ALL FAMILIES

The first step to engaging in All Children – All Families is to sign the **Pledge of Commitment** ([Appendix B](#)). This is a public statement on an agency's support of principles of fairness for LGBT prospective adoptive and foster families. Agencies that sign the pledge qualify for a listing in the HRC All Children – All Families database of agencies, which will make it easy for prospective foster and adoptive parents to find them.

Agencies should then review this Guide and complete the **Agency Self-Assessment** ([Appendix C](#)). This assessment allows an organization to understand and document its level of cultural competence in welcoming LGBT-headed families in its current practice. The assessment is completed online, allowing agencies to complete it at their own pace. Upon completion, agencies will receive a report outlining how many of the 10 benchmarks of LGBT cultural competence they have met. At this time, a member of the ACAF National Advisory Council will 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.

Once an agency has improved its practice and 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 All Children – All Families Seal of Recognition 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.*

ALL CHILDREN – ALL FAMILIES

OUR VISION

- More children in the U.S. foster care system are placed in loving, permanent families
- Public and private child welfare agencies affirmatively welcome families headed by LGBT adults and exhibit cultural competence in working with and supporting those families
- LGBT adults understand the opportunities for domestic adoption and foster care and can identify agencies that welcome all prospective parents

OUR SHORTER-TERM GOALS

- The child welfare field increasingly discusses issues of LGBT cultural competence and advocates policies that welcome all families
- Child welfare agencies use the new Promising Practices Guide and related Organizational Self-Assessment to understand and enhance their cultural competence
- Agencies pursue training and technical assistance to improve their performance and implement effective recruitment efforts targeting LGBT adults
- LGBT-headed families have improved experiences working with public and private agencies
- More waiting children are placed with qualified LGBT adults



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TOOLS & RESOURCES

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

Training Curriculum

A five-part training program that can be customized for the needs of individual agencies. The content and competencies addressed in this training are directly linked to the 10 benchmarks outlined in this Guide. Each module of training is approximately three hours long (See All Children – All Families Training Curriculum).

Training Videos/DVDs

Videos and DVDs include some of the country's most skilled trainers addressing a wide range of topics related to LGBT foster and adoptive parenting, offering agencies anywhere in the United States access to tools that will assist in improving culturally competent practices.

Media/Recruitment Campaign

Based on their recruitment and outreach capacity, agencies that achieve the Seal of Recognition may take advantage of the basic elements of a recruitment campaign targeting the LGBT community, titled "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Family," which the All Children – All Families initiative developed. These elements include ad images and outreach materials. The "Life, Liberty & Pursuit of Family" ad campaign has successfully run in Los Angeles and Alameda counties in California and in the District of Columbia. For more information, see Targeted Media Campaign.

Outreach

The project will sponsor plenary sessions, workshops and symposia at key conferences in the field that bring together child welfare and adoption professionals. It will also produce 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. As of the date of the time of this publication, 40 agencies, both public and private, have signed the All Children – All Families Pledge of Commitment.

Participation among public agencies has grown with several agencies signing the Pledge of Commitment, including: Alameda County Social Services Agency (Calif.), Clark County Department of Family Services (Nevada), New Jersey Division of Youth & Family Services and State of Connecticut Children Services.

Seven agencies have thus far earned the Seal of Recognition. Throughout this Guide, there are stories from three of the seal earners: Adoptions Together, LA County and Family Builders.

The next page highlights some of the initiative's main achievements.

SEVEN AGENCIES EARNED ALL CHILDREN – ALL FAMILIES SEAL OF RECOGNITION		
Agency Name	City	State
Adoptions from the Heart	Wynnewood	PA
Adoptions Together	Silver Spring	MD
Family Builders	Oakland	CA
Family Focus Adoption Services	Little Neck	NY
LA County Dept. of Child & Family Services	Pasadena	CA
National Adoption Center	Philadelphia	PA
Southern California Foster Family & Adoption Agency	Los Angeles	CA

ALL CHILDREN – ALL FAMILIES HIGHLIGHTS



L.A. County Is First Public Agency to Achieve All Children – All Families Seal of Recognition

On April 9, 2009, L.A. County became the first public agency to be awarded the All Children – All Families Seal of Recognition. Pictured at left are agency leaders after being awarded their seal.

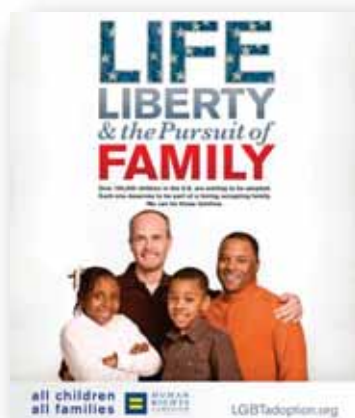
John Wagner, director of the California Department of Social Services, said the following about this achievement: “As the state child welfare agency, we applaud Los Angeles County for their visionary and inclusive work in identifying loving families for all

children in foster care. Our hope is that other communities across the state will follow Los Angeles’ lead in reaching out to all communities to find loving, permanent homes for children in foster care.”

Adoptions Together is First Agency in D.C. Area to Be Awarded Seal

On April 18, 2009, Adoptions Together was awarded the seal as well. Based in Silver Spring, Md., Adoptions Together has participated in All Children – All Families since its inception, and Janice Goldwater, founder and executive director of the agency, serves on the All Children – All Families National Advisory Council.

Ellen Kahn, HRC Family Project director, presented the seal to Goldwater and members of Adoptions Together’s board at a reception at HRC’s headquarters (pictured at right).



Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Family Ad Campaign

Both L.A. County and Adoptions Together are participating in the “Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Family” Ad Campaign. This campaign was developed by Better World Advertising and designed to raise awareness of opportunities to foster and adopt children within the LGBT community. The ads highlight agencies that are formally engaging in the All Children – All Families initiative. Currently there are three adoption agencies taking part in the campaign nationwide – Adoptions Together (Silver Spring, Md.), Family Builders (Oakland, Calif.) and L.A. County Department of Children & Family Services (Pasadena, Calif.).

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

All Children – All Families offers the unique opportunity to explore and evaluate, in depth, the degree to which your organization currently addresses the needs and concerns of LGBT adoptive and foster families. It also allows you to monitor the progress your agency makes 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 conduct the following activities to use this Guide.

This Guide will help you prepare realistically 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.

As you review the Guide, we recommend that you complete the Agency Self-Assessment ([Appendix C](#)) so that you can gauge your baseline measures in each area of practice and assess where you are doing well and what needs your attention. Prior to beginning the self-assessment, you may want to use existing tools to assess staff attitudes and knowledge of LGBT people and past behaviors with LGBT clients. Visit www.hrc.org/acaf for more details.

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, these leaders say, a task force can help maintain energy and momentum even as individual administrators leave an agency.

WHAT'S NEW IN THE 3RD EDITION?

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

- Content related to **transgender prospective parents** can be found in the Resources section of this guide. Two transgender foster/adoptive parents also offer stories throughout the guide that reflect their experiences in the process of becoming parents, and show where even the best agencies can enhance their practices.
- Tips and stories related to **adoption exchanges**, with the leaders and staff members from three exchanges offering insights.
- Feedback from directors of three **adoption/foster care agencies that have earned the ACAF Seal of Recognition**. These agencies — two private agencies and one large public agency — provide ideas for improving policies and practices as well as strategies for overcoming obstacles that may arise.
- ACAF has also developed a **comprehensive, five-part curriculum it can deliver to agencies seeking training**. The training modules are discussed in depth in the Staff Training section of the guide. Specific components of the training modules are also highlighted in relevant sections throughout the guide.

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

In addition to the technical assistance from an All Children – All Families Advisory Council member, agencies may need the additional assistance of staff training. A brief list of experienced trainers is included in this Guide, and the All Children – All Families initiative will build that list over time and update it online. The initiative has also developed a comprehensive **five-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.

While there is no formal timeline for completing the assessment or earning the seal of recognition after signing the All Children – All Families pledge, we highly recommend that you 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.

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 sign the pledge or pursue achievement 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.

GUIDE TOPICS AND SOURCES

The Guide illustrates promising practices used by adoption and foster care agencies and adoption exchanges that are welcoming and affirming of LGBT-headed households. These promising practices are endorsed by All Children – All Families and are viewed as the best contemporary measure we have to determine LGBT-inclusive and competent practice. Practices comprise 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.

These practices are highlighted through stories, tips and samples 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.

The Guide also features additional resources and information, including a Bibliography, Review of State Laws on LGBT Parenting, Research on LGBT Parenting and Trainers & Consultants.

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 and/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. The All Children – All Families initiative will not address international adoption specifically. It is our hope that over time all countries that place their children with U.S. families will recognize the value of LGBT families and adjust their laws and policies accordingly.



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.

The following pages include discussion of promising practices in governance, human resource management, evaluation and feedback, client rights and staff training.

SYMBOL KEY	
✓	Guiding Principle
?	Assessment Note
B	Benchmark Note

The promising practices are highlighted throughout the text by the symbol ✓. It is also noted where principles are directly linked to assessment questions and/or benchmarks. A guiding principle for each practice is followed by stories from the field, tips and samples that illustrate the practice in action. These principles are compiled in [Appendix 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.

✓ 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 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-gay criticism, these executive directors say that 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:

About four years ago, 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 organizations 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,” she says. “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 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 straight — 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 of Bellefaire JCB in Cleveland describes how her agency 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 new 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.

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” 20 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.

Blechner of Family Focus Adoption Services is doing just that. Her agency is an adoptive-parent-led agency, with 51 percent of the board composed of adoptive parents. However, the agency does not currently have any openly LGBT board members. Given whom the agency serves and its new targeted recruitment campaign, Blechner is consciously seeking board candidates who are openly LGBT.

TIPS

- Jill Jacobs of Family Builders explains that one way to ensure board-level discussion and support for an agency’s welcoming approach is to 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. (See sections on Mission or Values Statement and Client Non-Discrimination Policies.)

- The Southern California Foster Family and Adoption Agency decided that its board of directors should meet families served by the agency to enhance its connection to the agency's work. The 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.
- Ken Mullner, executive director of the National Adoption Center, thinks it's helpful to approach each board member individually about a new initiative or policy, especially if you anticipate resistance. "Make sure you have allies on the board who will be in your corner," Mullner recommends. "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 terms such as "sexual orientation" 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 where the law does not. 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 adoptive or foster 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.

Given the history of adoption and foster care in the country and the ongoing debate about parenting by LGBT people, LGBT people may assume they are not welcome or they are "second-class options" without a statement that specifically welcomes or includes them.

"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 discriminate 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."

Shari Levine of Open Adoption & Family Services, which has offices in Oregon and Washington, says that the cultures of many adoption agencies are not forthcoming about their adoption statistics, making it difficult for prospective adoptive parents, as well as birth parents, to learn many facts about an agency.

"Agencies aren't open about how many people adopt through them, how long the wait time might be and who they're really willing to work with," she says. "Many clients are disheartened when they have to read between the lines to find out if they're truly welcome."

Public agencies similarly have an opportunity to make their adoption and foster care placement approach clear through development of a policy statement. Fredi Juni, adoptions management analyst for the Alameda County (Calif.) Social Services Agency, Department of Children and Family Services, 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 question 1 addresses this topic.*

TIPS

- When making a public commitment to welcoming LGBT prospective parents through changes in mission statement, non-discrimination policy or other affirmative policies, Beth Brindo of Bellefaire JCB 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,” per a sample provided by the agency:

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 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.

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 and gender identification will not be tolerated.

Family Builders

“Mission Statement” and “Welcome to Family Builders,” per documents from the agency:

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/familysupport/lgbtq.html

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.

[The agency then describes its inclusive welcoming and mission statements, special support groups, its program and staff person dedicated to LGBT outreach, its role in advocating policy change to enhance adoption opportunities for LGBT families, and its agency training curriculum and program, among other activities that illustrate its philosophical commitment.]

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.

✓ 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 or other statements specifically reference LGBT adults or same-sex couples; include terms such as “sexual orientation,” “family structure” or “nontraditional

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 describes 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.”

families”; and/or include a broad commitment to working with all qualified families.

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, 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 on the staff level, “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 policy of non-discrimination 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, a 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."

ROOTS Inc., an adoption agency in Georgia, has a client non-discrimination policy on the main page of its website: "All ROOTS services are provided to prospective parents regardless of race, age, sex, marital status, physical disability, sexual orientation or income."

"The mission of our agency is to improve the adoption opportunities for African-American children in foster care," explains Toni Oliver, president and CEO of ROOTS Inc. "With that came the desire to work with families who were historically discriminated against in their quest to adopt from the foster care system. And that's the list you see [in the agency's non-discrimination policy.]"

"But what's important is not what you say, but what you do," Oliver says. For example, many adoption agencies may say they place children with single adults or people who live in apartments or people of moderate income, Oliver says, when in reality their practice demonstrates a preference for middle- and upper-income couples who own, not rent. For Oliver, the practice of non-discrimination in the agency's work with LGBT adults and overall is what is important.

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 requirements. 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 nondiscrimination 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, 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 expectations, 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, adoptions management analyst for the county’s Social Services Agency, Department of Children and Family Services, 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 questions 2-4 address this topic.*

SAMPLES

The Home for Little Wanderers

“Adoption by GLBT Families”

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

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 improving 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.

ROOTS Inc.

"Welcome to ROOTS Adoption Agency"

www.rootsadopt.org

All of **ROOTS** services are provided to prospective parents regardless of race, age, sex, marital status, physical disability, gender identity, sexual orientation or income.

✓ 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

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, a director should model this inclusive approach in all he or she does.

Lisa Funaro, executive director of 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. "When I started here three years ago, it was on my radar to look at how the agency was responding to this particular group of prospective families. I've seen this as a group we need to embrace, who are embracing the children who need families."

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 wants to ensure that policies and trainings are properly in place — at her exchange and the other agencies she works with — before launching an active 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 had a strong commitment 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 gay- or lesbian-headed families. The agency is affiliated with two churches with differing views on adoption by gay- or lesbian-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.”

Robyn Harrod, director of adoptions for 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 nontraditional 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 successfully sought funding for a program through the federal Healthy Marriage Initiative that targeted married heterosexual couples.

Still, 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.

While the exchange understood the grant program itself could not expressly include

LGBT families, the agency later worked to create a program and tested the program at the LGBT community center and received mostly positive feedback. ARW is continuing to develop additional materials specific to LGBT family concerns.

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, adoptions management analyst with the Alameda County (Calif.) Social Services Agency, Department of Child and Family Services.

“Alameda County has supported gay and lesbian 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 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, nondiscrimination statements, and other policies. Why reinvent the wheel?”

TIPS

- Open Adoption & Family Services looks at everything in its program and considers how it reflects openness and honesty. Executive Director Shari Levine recommends that other organizational executives ask themselves key questions: “Do their social workers fundamentally believe they know what’s best for people? Do they only provide birth moms, who are choosing a family, with the three longest-

waiting families to review? Does their agency share the full homestudy with the birth mom? Are they forthcoming about how many people adopt through them or about how long the wait time might be? Do they say they're open to all families, but have religious restrictions about who can adopt? It all starts with honesty and openness ... After that, the key is: Don't discriminate — treat everyone the same and fairly. With those two things in place — honesty and non-discrimination — gay and lesbian couples and individuals will find the agency that feels comfortable to them."

- 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.

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. Even so, Colette Tobias was unsure of her agency's hiring practices when she was conducting the self-assessment included in this Guide. She was pleased to learn that the term "gender identity" is included, a policy which offers her institutional support as she advocates other policy changes.

Rudy Estrada of New York says there are sometimes pre-existing regulations that can support the welcoming policies described in this Guide. "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 a social service 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)." He recommends researching the state regulatory code related to human or social services to find language to support proactive policies.

- The National Adoption Center 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 Executive Director Ken Mullner, "but you need money to implement them." Mullner recommends seeking foundation and other support as leaders launch efforts to enhance services or improve practices.
- Janice Goldwater 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 the initiative.
- Jill Jacobs 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."

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 for staff members 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 has to embrace in many venues: the HR department, media relations" and others. Carr says her agency adopted its employment non-discrimination policy and domestic partnership policies 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.

According to the HRC publication "Small Business Basics," 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 questions 5-7 address this topic.*

SAMPLE

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).

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% 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% in 2002.
- In 2008, 36% of lesbian and gay employees are closeted at work compared to: 44% in 2007.

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.

Similarly, Maris Blechner of Family Focus Adoption Services says her agency has always had openly gay staff members. For the first time, however, she specifically sought applicants from the LGBT community for a new position at the agency. The person who is hired will lead the agency's new recruitment campaign seeking LGBT adoptive parents. "We specifically hired a lesbian adoptive mom who has been an activist in the community — she knows the organizations, leaders and strategies," Blechner says.

Colby Berger, formerly of The Home for Little Wanderers, urges agencies to "hire LGBT staff 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 heterosexual 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 these 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 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 recruitment 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 gay and lesbian parents. In seeking employees to do recruitment, the agency informs candidates that they might need to work at gay pride events and asks about their comfort with that work.

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 now 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.

SAMPLES

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/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 quality 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, 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 for, or capacity to indicate that a prospective foster/adoptive parent is a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender individual, or a same-sex couple. As a result, there is very little accurate tracking and reporting regarding recruitment, licensing, placement and longer-term outcomes with the LGBT community, 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 e-mail 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 (see sample script below)
- Orientation meetings
- Application Forms
- Homestudy Forms
- (Past/Present) Client Consumer Surveys

It is 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/clients.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

Family Builders knows it has a high percentage of families headed by gay or lesbian 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.

"Right now we have only M/F as options for our staff to code gender. With our hope of seeing more transgender-identified adoptive parents coming to our agency, we will modify the database to include other options, such as transgender — FTM, MTF."

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 now 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 10-11 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 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.

✓ PROTECTING DATA/PRIVACY ISSUES

The organization will protect data from unintended 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 homestudy 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 sexual orientation 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.”

TIP

- “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 adults, 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 fact to its clients.

Toni Oliver of ROOTS Inc., an adoption agency in Georgia, 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 describes the entire process to these clients and assures them that no one at ROOTS will judge their ability to parent based solely on their sexual orientation. However, she also tells 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 tells these 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 gay and lesbian 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 12 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 them 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 systems. Training will build and enhance core competencies, as identified below, 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 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 five-part training curriculum that can be tailored to meet the specific needs of an individual agency and can be delivered over time.

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 is helping to put together 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 All Children – All Families seal.

"We welcomed the opportunity to revisit our policies to make sure that they were inclusive and used sensitive and correct language," says Chris 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."

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

"I realized that while I considered my agency open and welcoming, I was also aware from

statements made and questions asked that my organization lacked a baseline of information and we lacked a shared conceptual framework related to parenting issues for prospective LGB and T foster and adoptive parents," she says.

Oliver identified the following as key learning gained by her agency 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."

"I sense a much greater comfort level on the part of staff to discuss feelings and seek ways to become more culturally competent," she says. "I also sense that staff is less judgmental, more accepting of difference and better able to identify strengths and needs of LBGt families."

Since the training, the agency has 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 has 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 agency, says Lisa D. Maynard, director of adoptions.

"Our investment in training staff and the implementation of the *Promising Practices Guide* developed by the Human Rights Campaign for the All Children – All Families

initiative 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 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 at the agency.

The training builds skills so staff can work competently with gay and lesbian prospective parents from recruitment through adoption finalization. It debunks myths about children raised by gay and lesbians parents, discusses current research on these families and issues that gay and lesbian 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 gay and lesbian 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.

Kinship Center's Adoption Clinical Training Curriculum includes LGBT issues as part of the training experience in the eight-day course. All professional staff members complete this curriculum as a part of their job training. Additionally, child placement staff members have received LGBT-specific training in California. "Staff training is vital in establishing an agency's culture. At Kinship Center, the training helps ensure a culture of inclusiveness that sets a clear tone for all staff that discrimination is not tolerated," states Kinship Center Executive Vice President Carol Bishop, who is administrator for child placement and the agency's education institute.

Bellefaire JCB hired a trainer to deliver a multiday 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 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.”

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 procedures and before launching an active recruitment campaign.

“We created a three-part training curriculum and hired Colby Berger to do it,” 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 will be 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.



STORY OF A SEAL EARNER: L.A. COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services is one of the largest public child services agencies in the country. Making changes in that setting might seem daunting, but Diane Wagner, Division Chief of Adoption and Permanency Resources, says the All Children – All Families Guide, assessment and consultations made it manageable to improve practices and earn the seal.

“The guide was a great starting point,” Wagner says, “It gave me something I could share with others on my team and with the community agencies we work with. It’s filled with so many nuggets of information, and it made me think, ‘Hey — we can do this!’”

Through answering the self-assessment, the department learned that it was already working with a large number of LGBT resource families. “It wasn’t something we tracked,” Wagner says, “so we surveyed our staff and learned that 3 percent of the adoptions we had completed in the previous 12 months were with LGBT families and that nearly 9 percent of our newly approved resource families were LGBT. It surprised us.”

Realizing that the agency was already working with many LGBT families, Wagner focused on the ability of the department to deliver competent services to those families. Comprehensive training for staff seemed to be the biggest need — and challenge.

“We had to train close to 350 professional staff and we also wanted to train our 100 clerical staff members,” Wagner says. “We didn’t have funds to do the training.”

When the L.A. Gay and Lesbian Center offered to help deliver the training, Wagner gladly accepted. She also enlisted the help of staff members from her own agency who were experienced in conducting homestudies with LGBT families. The training was mandatory for all staff, and it received excellent evaluations from participants.

Wagner said she valued the technical assistance that the All Children – All Families initiative offered her agency while it earned the seal. “It was extremely helpful,” she says. “It’s important to be able to ask questions and discuss ideas.”

“Don’t go it alone,” Wagner advises. “Seek out community partners. We would not have gotten our staff trained without support of the community.”

“When we really looked at what we were doing, we learned that: a) we were already working with more LGBT families than we thought, and b) we realized we should get our staff trained,” Wagner says. “Earning the seal really opened the door to that process for us.”

“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.”

Goodman’s training includes a discussion of language, theories of the origin of sexual orientation, myths and realities and the process of coming out. She then introduces some case families and asks participants, based on what they learned of the families, what issues they would seek to learn more about during homestudy interviews. Goodman hopes the training will allow participants to discuss potential issues that may arise, and then to prepare for, prevent or deal with them when they do.

“I’m not here to change your personal opinions,” she tells participants. “I’m here to help you be better professionals, in a non-discriminatory way.”

“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.”

? *Assessment questions 13-14 addresses 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 that trainers are themselves 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 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.
- Michael Colberg recommends a training that explores beliefs held by staff members without telling them “what to feel.”

“You need to respect their beliefs and try to work with them,” Colberg says. “You don’t want workers to change what they are doing simply because they are worried they’ll lose their jobs. Clients will sense that.”

- 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.

COMPETENCIES

The competency-based training 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 the following:

- 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.
- Participants will 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.
- Participants will have accurate information about LGBT people and be able to distinguish common myths and stereotypes from facts.
- Participants will be knowledgeable about how to interact with LGBT individuals in an affirming, welcoming manner.
- Participants will be knowledgeable about laws relating to LGBT adoption and foster placements in relevant jurisdictions.
- Participants will develop empathy toward LGBT parents and will understand the value of LGBT families in serving children and youth in the foster care system.
- Participants will have accurate information about LGBT parents and their children — based on evidenced-based research — and therefore be able to distinguish common myths and stereotypes from facts.
- Participants will know concrete steps they can take to create affirming environments for LGBT foster and adoptive parents.
- Participants will feel prepared to adapt their parent recruitment practices to be more inclusive of LGBT families.
- Participants will 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.
- Participants will 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.
- Participants will 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.
- Participants will 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.
- Participants will understand the challenges that LGBT adoptive families may encounter at various stages of their family life.
- Participants will explore the intersection of LGBT issues and other issues facing adoptive families.
- Participants will learn how to be allies for LGBT families as they interact with birth families, other foster/adoptive families, schools and services providers related to the children placed in their homes.
- Participants will be knowledgeable about the resources, tools and skills needed to support LGBT families throughout their case and post-adoption.

 *Assessment questions 13-14 address this topic.*

ALL CHILDREN – ALL FAMILIES TRAINING CURRICULUM

The All Children – All Families initiative has developed a five-part training program that can be customized for the needs of individual agencies. The content and competencies addressed in this training are directly linked to the 10 benchmarks outlined in this Guide. Each module of training is approximately three hours long. To learn more about our training curriculum, visit www.hrc.org/acaf.

Module 1: Basic LGBT Competency for Foster Care & Adoption Agencies

Purpose: This critical first session in the All Children – All Families training series is designed to introduce child welfare professionals to accurate and up-to-date information about 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, including an understanding of the full range of issues relating to sexual orientation and gender identity. Module 1 of this curriculum will cover the fundamental terminology, facts and concepts that agency staff need to know to build an informed and sensitive practice. “This is for every staff member,” Scheyd says. “Everyone from the receptionist to the oldest and dearest board member should receive it. Some agencies may have had a similar training, but this is delivered from a foster care/adoption perspective, which folks might not have experienced.”

Intended Audience: All staff members

Prerequisites: None

Module 2: Foundations of Effective Practice with LGBT Parents

Purpose: The second session is designed to build upon child welfare professionals’ basic knowledge of the LGBT community by helping them to develop a specialized understanding of LGBT-headed families. Agencies will learn about LGBT family demographics, the legal landscape surrounding these families, what makes them similar to and unique from non-LGBT families, and what research tells us about them. Module 2 will also emphasize the experience of LGBT families through the firsthand accounts of LGBT parents and their children. “This training builds on the first — we expect that participants will know basic terminology and concepts. We ask them to take all that rich knowledge to talk specifically about LGBT families,” Scheyd explains. “We debunk myths and assumptions about LGBT parents and their children, and provide facts based on years of social science research. We also discuss local adoption laws. Everyone should get these two trainings — all staff, volunteers and board members. We think these first two modules are critical to good work.”

Intended Audience: All staff members

Prerequisites: Module 1 (or the equivalent)

Module 3: Rolling Out the Welcome Mat: Establishing Agency Communications, Spaces & Recruitment Practices that Embrace LGBT Families

Purpose: Module 3 covers the essential steps all agencies need to take in order to create welcoming environments for LGBT prospective parents. In this session, child welfare professionals will utilize the knowledge of LGBT individuals and families gained in Modules 1 and 2 to thoroughly examine the messages they send to potential and current LGBT clients through agency communications, including policies, literature and staff behavior. In this module, trainers will offer concrete suggestions on how to be more welcoming to LGBT applicants, while giving extra attention to helping agencies develop parent recruitment strategies for this specialized population. “Exercises help staff be reflective of how prospective parents experience the agency,” Scheyd explains.

Intended Audience: Managers, staff responsible for parent recruitment, training or licensing, or any others who interact with LGBT parents at early stages of their foster/adoptive certification process

Prerequisites: Module 1 and Module 2 (or the equivalents)

Module 4: Conducting Home Assessments and Child-Matching with LGBT Parents

Purpose: In Module 4, trainers will lead participants through what many identify as the most challenging aspect of working with an unfamiliar parent population. Agency staff members will have a chance to explore their own feelings and readiness in evaluating and certifying LGBT parents, and trainers will provide specific, practical suggestions for how to conduct non-biased, LGBT-competent home assessments. This session will conclude with helping agencies navigate challenges and pitfalls in the process of matching LGBT parents with children awaiting families. Throughout this module, trainers will encourage participants to confront the ways in which personal beliefs, societal attitudes and discriminatory policies can interrupt and impede successful work with LGBT foster and adoptive clients. “We focus on how to conduct competent and respectful homestudies, and then on how to help in the matching process,” Scheyd says. “Even welcoming agencies get all the way to the matching stage and then struggle to make good placements. We discuss barriers and how to avoid or overcome them.”

Intended Audience: Staff members who are involved with any aspect of family assessment or child placement

Prerequisites: Module 1 and Module 2 (or the equivalents)

Module 5: Case Management and Post-Permanency Support with LGBT Families

Purpose: Despite the many months of preparation and assessment often required before foster and adoptive parents have a child placed, their parenting journey does not truly begin until that child is in their home. Module 5 is based on the premise that agencies committed to helping their LGBT parents provide stable, lasting homes for children must know how to support those parents throughout their family’s development. This session prepares case management and/or clinical staff for the special considerations and skills needed when working with LGBT families, from the early stages of their family development to adoption finalization and beyond. “This is the advanced-level training, and will evolve as we see what the needs are at agencies,” Scheyd says. “Right now, it’s focused on ongoing case work with these families — how agencies may continue to be allies for these families while they interact with schools, medical professionals and the court system, leading to finalization, and as their own family development progresses.”

Intended Audience: Staff members who work closely with LGBT parents and their children, including clinicians, caseworkers and supervisors

Prerequisites: Module 1 and Module 2 (or the equivalents)



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 specifically addresses parent recruitment strategies in Module 3. (See All Children – All Families Training Curriculum to learn more, or visit www.hrc.org/acaf).

✓ 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

While Family Focus Adoption Services has worked with LGBT adoptive parents for years, it recently launched 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 gay and lesbian 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.”

ADOPTION AND FOSTER CARE SERVICES

“I’m eager to do this and train my staff better,” she says.

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 wants the campaign to result in placing 10 older children within a year with LGBT families. Over the course of the three-year effort, Blechner says she hopes “the gay community of New York state will 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, they 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 gay and lesbian 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 gay people, they didn’t think they could become parents. We talked about adopting a 13-year-old,

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: BEFORE LAUNCHING A RECRUITMENT EFFORT

Bill Bettencourt 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.

with no diapers. Those kids are who we’re really advocating for, and they still need a family.”

Al Toney, a diversity trainer and consultant, is a father and licensed foster parent who has worked for years leading and assisting social service organizations in Massachusetts. A dozen years ago, he 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 gay men and lesbians 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 gay and lesbian 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 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 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 a recent 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 gay or lesbian 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 gay or lesbian 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. The goal is to reach and welcome all families.
- 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 straight 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 respite 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.”
- Shari Levine of Open Adoptions & Family Services says the agency has no specific recruitment effort for LGBT adults; instead, LGBT adults find her agency from around the world. She says the agency’s long-standing reputation as a welcoming agency is key. This reputation was amplified by a unique event, the publication of *The Kid: What Happened After My Boyfriend and I Decided to Go Get Pregnant*, a book by Dan Savage, one of the agency’s gay clients who is also a popular syndicated advice columnist.

SAMPLES

Family Builders, 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. See www.adoptionsf.org.

✓ 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 called Talbot Perkins Children's Services. While there, she collaborated with Terry Boggis, 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, a consultant with the Family to Family foster care initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, says one important idea 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.

ADOPTION AND FOSTER CARE SERVICES

“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.

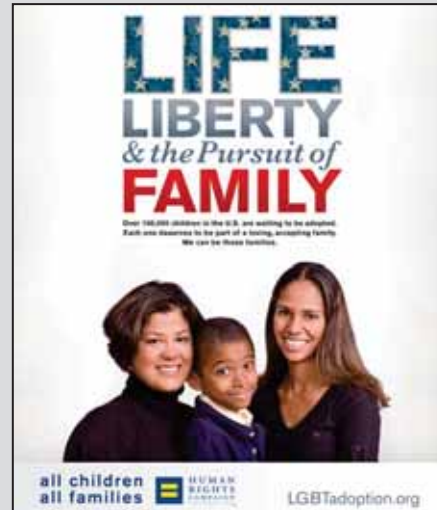
“When sites do that, when they really sit down and talk to folks that know a neighborhood or a community, they really come up with some creative ideas,” he says. “They’ll get word-of-mouth out in the community.”

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. Unhappy, unsupported foster families cannot help recruit other resource families.

? *Assessment questions 20-22 address this topic.*

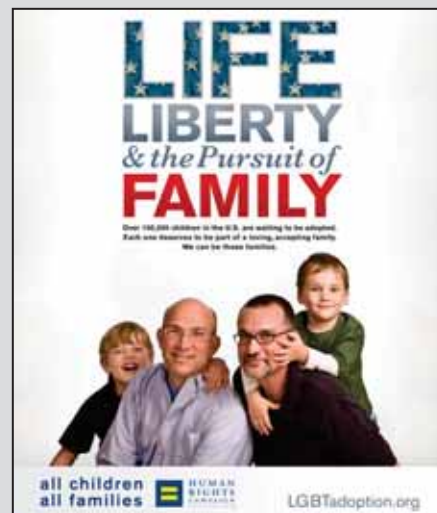
TIPS

- 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. Bettencourt says sites have found that to be an effective strategy.
- The National Adoption Center sought input from the LGBT community as it launched its outreach effort. “We knew we needed to get LGBT families on board for feedback, as advisers and to connect us with resources,” says 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



LIFE, LIBERTY & THE PURSUIT OF FAMILY AD CAMPAIGN

In spring 2009, All Children – All Families launched an adoption awareness ad campaign titled, “Life, Liberty & the Pursuit of Family.” This campaign was developed by Better World Advertising and designed to raise awareness of opportunities to foster and adopt children within the LGBT community. The ads highlight agencies that are formally engaging in the All Children – All Families initiative. Currently, there are three adoption agencies taking part in the campaign nationwide – Adoptions Together (Silver Spring, Md.) (this campaign launched in November 2008), Family Builders (Oakland, Calif.) and L.A. County Department of Children & Family Services (Pasadena, Calif.).



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



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.

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 and/or connections to reach out to their local LGBT community. The All Children – All Families initiative plans to collaborate with agencies to develop 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 had no 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.”⁹

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 & 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 sections below describe many areas in which an agency can demonstrate its commitment to being welcoming and affirming. The All Children – All Families training curriculum specifically addresses these ideas in Module 3 (See All Children – All Families Training Curriculum to learn more, or visit www.hrc.org/acaf).

✓ PHYSICAL SPACE

The organization will ensure that its waiting room and other physical spaces include visual and other material 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 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, gay and lesbian people will feel welcome. Or do you only have *Christian Quarterly*? What is the message? How does it feel and look?”

“Agencies should create a les-bi-gay-trans–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 question 17 addresses this topic.*

TIPS

- Review artwork, books and magazines that prospective clients will be viewing while in your waiting room. Do they specifically reflect LGBT-headed families?
- LGBT related material/policy statements/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.

✓ 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.¹⁰

Open Adoption & Family Services, with offices in Oregon and Washington, includes images and discussions of its many LGBT clients on its website and in its general brochure and other materials.

According to Executive Director Shari Levine, the inclusion of gay and lesbian potential parents “has come about in an organic way for us as an agency that doesn’t discriminate ... We believe that every birth mom has the right to make an informed decision about who is going to parent her child. Therefore, we provide her with a complete packet of information on every adoptive family she’s considering. This packet includes the homestudy, autobiographies and a photo collage. The choice of adoptive parents should lie in her hands.”

By ensuring that the agency’s materials openly reflect its full community of parents, Levine describes how this also welcomes some non-LGBT potential clients: “One straight couple told us that they were looking at other agencies’

ADOPTION AND FOSTER CARE SERVICES

websites, and they said, ‘We didn’t see our people there, but we looked at yours and found our people.’”

The main page of the agency’s website features rotating photos of waiting families, which include same-sex couples (see www.openadopt.org).

The site also features a special section in its “Adoptive Parents” area for gay and lesbian parents (see www.openadopt.org). There, it welcomes gay and lesbian adoptive parents and describes its program and services; it offers details on placement numbers and average wait time for placements. It links to a client story by a lesbian couple (www.openadopt.org) and organizational resources for gay and lesbian adoptive parents (www.openadopt.org).

It has an area, “Facts about Children Raised by Gay and Lesbian Parents,” which is also available through its birthparent section (see www.openadopt.org). This summary of research about parenting by gay men and lesbians is especially helpful, Levine says, “if the birth parents feel good about choosing a gay or lesbian parent, but their own family doesn’t.”

The agency also developed a new brochure for prospective parents, featuring photos and quotes from several families; one of the featured families is a gay male couple. In one section, “How OA&FS is Unique,” the brochure says, “We welcome all prospective adoptive parents regardless of age, race, religion, sexual orientation or marital status. Our prospective adoptive pool includes heterosexual couples, same-sex couples and single parents.”

Additionally, a recent edition of the agency’s newsletter featured a story about a lesbian couple who founded an open adoption support group for gay and lesbian parents.

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 (see www.familybuilders.org).

The websites of some agencies may be outdated, accidentally sending the wrong signals to web visitors. “When we were filling out the

assessment [in this All Children – All Families Guide], 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 recently 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.”

HOPE Adoption & Family Services International, licensed in Minnesota and Wisconsin, has created a special brochure for LGBT prospective parents: “The Little Book of Big Advice: Hints, Tips and Suggestions from Other Gay and Lesbian Families Who Have Been Exactly Where YOU Are Right Now.” The 10-page guide includes stories from gay and lesbian clients of the agency.

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.”

? Assessment question 19 addresses this topic.

TIPS

- An organization's word-of-mouth reputation matters greatly among prospective parents considering adoption or foster parenting. Now and into the future, however, those parents will also use technology to answer many questions with a quick click. If your agency intends to welcome LGBT parents, its website should specifically reflect that intention.
- Shari Levine recommends asking 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. Most LGBT clients of Open Adoption & Family Services who responded to these questions said they did not prefer separate materials or events, but preferred to be actively included in all of the agency's materials and events.
- 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."

SAMPLES***Amara Parenting & Adoption Services***

"Family Connections Newsletter, Spring/Summer 2007"

www.amaraparenting.org

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

Features a story on the main page of the 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

Includes a welcome page for LGBT parents, with links to letters from LGBT adoptive parents. Sample text:

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

Includes information about the center's 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

Beth Brindo with Bellefaire JCB no longer handles most intake calls in her daily activities at the agency, but when she does, she follows 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.

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Many times only one partner in a couple will contact an agency, says Donna Ibbotson 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 and social workers 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 gay and lesbian adoptive 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 adoptive parent on a panel at a recent community

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 life 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.

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 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 gay pride in Philadelphia, McCabe thought, “Why don’t we get together with a local gay-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?”

Open Adoption & Family Services hosts a one-and-a-half-day seminar on open adoption, which features a panel of birth parents, adoptive parents and an adoption attorney. LGBT-headed families are often included in these panels. The facilitator prepares for all types of families, questions and opinions. Generally for this agency, “people are very accepting,” says Executive Director Shari Levine. “So many heterosexual couples have chosen our agency because we work with gay and lesbian couples.”

The session includes an exercise to assess the impact that infertility and loss may have on the adoption process. The agency uses three instruments for this “brief assessment of infertility stress events” — one for straight clients, one for gay men and one for lesbians.

“We define infertility as the inability to control or predict when or how or if you’d become a parent,” Levine says. “For gay men, there’s the genetic continuity piece, and they have this in

common with straight men at the table. We explore how deeply impactful this loss is. For lesbians, we may explore how grieving styles are different and how this affects a couple when one tried to become pregnant and the other didn’t.” The tool allows the facilitator to discuss common experiences among all the couples.

Donna Ibbotson of Lilliput Children’s Services similarly encourages agencies to address infertility with their LGBT clients, whether in orientations or in homestudy interviews. “It just gets lost” with these families, she says.

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, Department of Children and Family Services, 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 traveling 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 a gay or lesbian 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 Agency (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 question 18 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.

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”
(See 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 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 question 16 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 a LGBT foster/adopt parent panel to be included in the training presentations.
- If you outsource the parent training, check in with the trainers to ensure that they 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 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.

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. (See [All Children – All Families Training Curriculum](#) to learn more, or visit www.hrc.org/acaf.)

✓ 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 with 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. “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 recent 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.¹¹

Denise Goodman 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 which 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.

Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE) similarly has a list of agencies and professionals that they know to be welcoming of LGBT families, based on the experiences of family 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 lesbian or gay identity; how confident they feel in relation to their sexual orientation and the integration of their lesbian or gay 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. Here is a brief exploration of those areas.

COMING OUT/IDENTITY & 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 how their family is with them, about acceptance,” says Robyn Harrod. “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’re working with has very right-wing conservative parents, and he hasn’t had any contact with them for three years. He’s in the process of adopting two little boys, and now his mom wants to be a grandma and she’s tried to make contact. But there’s 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 of Bellefaire JCB says the agency 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 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 notes that staff have 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 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 forthcoming 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.¹²

MOTIVATION

Mallon says:

Parenting for most lesbian and gay families is a choice — while it is often not a choice in the heterosexual world. This may mean that a lesbian or gay parent may be more motivated and deliberate as they embark on deciding to parent. For lesbians and gay men, 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.¹³

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.¹⁴

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 the family will face collectively and the child will face individually. Additionally, in Moltz's experience at the agency, gay and lesbian families adopt transracially more often than heterosexual 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, issues surrounding their own safety and any discrimination their children may face.

Nathan Monell 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."

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 communication 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

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: WORKING WITH A NEW COMMUNITY

"I see a parallel, from personal and professional experience, and as an adoptive parent and former foster parent. I see similar patterns with other formerly underserved parents," says Beth Brindo. "It's the same as when we first started doing transracial adoptions or working with parents with physical disabilities and single parents. The common threads that run through this are issues of validity in the community, confidence and communication style. Sometimes new populations are like pioneers stepping over a line into a new frontier. Once we're aware of those characteristics, then we can understand and apply the unique approaches that work for the prospective applicants."

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.¹⁵

Karey Scheyd 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 of Lilliput Children's Services 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 [a LGBT couple's] relationship, even though they may ask it of straight 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 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 LG people might face.”

? *Assessment questions 14-15 address this topic.*

TIPS

- Robyn Harrod of Southern California Foster Family and Adoption Agency agrees. “I do a workshop on transracial adoption, and there are so many layers to explore. It’s like peeling an onion. 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? Parents need to be patient and flexible and, at times, parenting beliefs are challenged. We talk about this a lot in the homestudy process.”
- In Washington, D.C., homestudy visits are conducted by social workers who lead a cohort of applicants through a parent preparation class. “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.” In general, 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. “Ohio already uses that model, so it was easy to apply it to this issue. It was familiar to lots of people.”
- Beth Brindo urges agencies not to view all homestudies as the same. “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.” She says agencies should look closely at the structure of the family support system.
- 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. “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.”

- “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,” says social worker and family therapist Arlene Istar Lev. “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, how to make them 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 more 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

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: WORKING WITH LATINO FAMILIES

Maria Quintanilla, executive director of 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.”

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 of 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 that there is agreement 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 agency 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 girlfriends 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 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.

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 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 gay and lesbian 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

ADOPTION AND FOSTER CARE SERVICES

we know are open to gay and lesbian 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

gay 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.”

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 Gerald P. 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 home study/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 consequences 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 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 a 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 applicant 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 he 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 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 applicant 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.

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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. (See [All Children – All Families Training Curriculum](#) to learn more, or visit www.hrc.org/acaf.)

✓ 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.

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

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: INTERNATIONAL ADOPTIONS

Beth Brindo of Bellefaire JCB says her agency follows 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 applies 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 have to overtly lie, I won’t do it. I know other agencies do that, but to be consistent with our message of honesty and transparency, we are not going to lie.” Brindo also worries 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.”

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 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 gay-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, 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 gay and lesbian waiting parents, depending on the needs of their clients.

Beth Brindo of Bellefaire JCB 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 of Lilliput Children’s Services 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 and/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.

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.”

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.”

TIPS

- 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 should communicate clearly with LGBT waiting parents so they know exactly how the process works, including any reasons for potential delays.
- 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 gay 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 & 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 sees both ends of the competence spectrum. “Bias among professionals 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.”

TIPS

- Bill Bettencourt 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.

✓ 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 welcome 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."

In all her years in the field, Maris Blechner says that "maybe once in all that time" she remembers an older youth opposing a placement with an LGBT family. "A teenage boy said he was uncomfortable being adopted by a female couple."

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 youths, 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 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 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."

✓ 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 gay and lesbian families," says Fredi Juni. "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."

SAMPLES

See the *Alameda County Social Services Agency* document, "Information Regarding Adoptive Planning," at

www.hrc.org/issues/parenting/adoptions/8397.htm

TIPS

- 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 gay and lesbian 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 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. “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 says some birth mothers have preferences not to place with gay and lesbian 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. “Sexual orientation 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 a gay or lesbian 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 gay or lesbian. Only 1 percent of unwed pregnant women choose adoption, so they’re nonconformists by

definition. Gay and lesbian couples can relate to this because they know what it’s like to be vilified.

“We’re also seeing more and more women who review profiles of gay, lesbian and heterosexual couples” and make their decision based on other criteria. Levine said some of this is due to the types of families who choose open adoption and work with her agency. “A study that compared our agency with others found that the education level is higher among both our adoptive parents and birth parents. When people are educated, they may know how to break apart a difficult process. They’re well-informed and well-read, and they’re probably better prepared for a high-level relationship.”

? *Assessment questions 23-25 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 question 25 addresses this topic.*

TIPS

- 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.

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 below describe ways that agencies can offer longer-term support to LGBT families. The All Children – All Families training curriculum focuses on this post-placement support in Module 5. (See [All Children – All Families Training Curriculum](#) to learn more, or visit www.hrc.org/acaf.)

✓ 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,” he 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 important 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 question 26 addresses this topic.*

TIPS

- 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 featuring 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 better 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.

Open Adoption & Family Services encouraged and supported the efforts of its LGBT clients to create a support group for their families. The agency featured a story in its newsletter about the open adoption parent support group for LGBT parents. The group meets every other month at homes, parks, restaurants and play spaces. One of the parent organizers of the group says, “Our hope is that we’re giving our children chances to form lasting friendships and thereby helping them to avoid feeling different and/or alone.”

“Our value, as an agency, is around empowerment,” says Shari Levine. “We want our families to have that support group look the way they want it. It’s their group. That’s our model for our families — to form an ongoing adoption group, make a long-term commitment to gather and know other families, so their kids will grow up knowing other kids of open adoption. It’s amazingly successful and popular.”

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.”

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: RETAINING FOSTER PARENTS

Agencies can apply many of the post-permanency services 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/mfm.php.

“We recommend that agencies look at dedicated support positions, so that a live person is available 24/7 to help foster families,” Bettencourt 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.”

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

ADOPTION AND FOSTER CARE SERVICES

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.

SAMPLES

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.circleofsupport.org

Open Adoption & Family Services lists national and local resources for gay and lesbian adoptive parents: www.openadopt.org

✓ 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.

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 a 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 just completed a book chapter (in press) 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?¹⁶

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 due to 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.¹⁷

Maria Quintanilla of 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 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 interact 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’ sexual orientation,” 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. Adopted 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.”¹⁸

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

TIPS

- 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.

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 *All Children– All Families Seal*, you can choose to proudly display it on your website, on your office door or in printed materials. More information at www.hrc.org/acaf_benchmarks.

1. The agency's **client** non-discrimination statement clearly bans discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.
2. The agency's **client** non-discrimination statement clearly bans discrimination on the basis of gender identity and gender expression.
3. The agency's **employment** non-discrimination statement bans discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.
4. The agency's **employment** non-discrimination statement clearly bans discrimination on the basis of 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 their 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. 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 provided foster/adoption services to LGBT families within the past year.

* In cases where benchmarks are not applicable to your particular agency, the seal will be provided upon achievement of all applicable benchmarks.



ACHIEVE THE 10 BENCHMARKS OF LGBT CULTURAL
COMPETENCY AND BE AWARDED THE
ALL CHILDREN – ALL FAMILIES SEAL OF RECOGNITION.

FOR THE MOST UP-TO-DATE LIST OF AGENCIES TO HAVE ACHIEVED THE
SEAL, VISIT www.hrc.org/acaf.



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 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.

RESOURCES

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 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/or “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

Questions 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

RESOURCES

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 a transgender person who changes 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 INDIVIDUALS 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.

A few states have laws that restrict adoption or fostering by gay people:

- **Florida** is the only state with a law that categorically bans all gay and lesbian people from adopting, whether single or coupled, although gay and lesbian individuals and couples are permitted to serve as foster parents. In November 2008, a Florida trial judge declared the exclusion unconstitutional, concluding based on the scientific evidence presented that it is “beyond dispute” that gay and heterosexual people make equally good parents and that “the best interests of children are not preserved by prohibiting homosexual adoption.” The state appealed and the case is pending at the appellate court.
- **Mississippi** law prohibits adoption by “couples of the same gender.” The law is silent with respect to gay individuals and says nothing about foster care.
- **Utah** law disqualifies from adoption individuals who are cohabiting outside of a marriage that is valid and recognized under state law. **Arkansas** has the same exclusion but it also extends to foster parenting. These laws apply to lesbian, gay, bisexual and heterosexual individuals living with unmarried partners. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and heterosexual single people who are not living with a partner are not excluded. Similar measures have been proposed in a number of Southern states since the Arkansas law was enacted by the voters in November 2008. The measure was put on the ballot in Arkansas as a citizen-initiated law after the state’s high court struck down a ban on fostering by lesbian and gay people because it lacked any connection to promoting children’s health, safety or welfare. Cohabitation restrictions appear to be the new tactic of opponents of lesbian and gay parenting so such measures are likely to continue to be proposed.

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:

- **California, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Jersey and New York** have laws or regulations that expressly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation in the adoption process.
- In addition, it is clear that sexual orientation is not a basis for exclusion from consideration as an adoptive parent in **Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Pennsylvania, Vermont and Washington, D.C.**, because those states (in addition to **California, Massachusetts, New Jersey and New York**) have appellate court decisions expressly permitting lesbians and gay men to petition to adopt their partner’s children (“second-parent adoption”) or adopt jointly with a partner.
- 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** [effective Jan. 1, 2010] and **Vermont** [effective Sept. 1, 2009]¹⁹) or enter into civil unions or domestic partnerships that provide all of the rights and obligations of marriage under state law (**California, Nevada** [effective Oct. 1, 2009], **New Jersey, Oregon, Washington state and Washington, D.C.**). This is because joint adoption and step-parent adoptions are among the rights of married couples and those in civil unions and domestic partnerships.

RESOURCES

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.

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 discussed above, a Florida court recently concluded that discriminatory treatment of lesbian and gay prospective adoptive parents is unconstitutional.

Religiously affiliated agencies that contract with states to place dependent children should do the same. 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 her 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 violate the constitutional mandate of separation of church and state.

Some caseworkers, placement agencies (public and private, religious and secular) and judges across the country appropriately treat LGBT applicants the same as other applicants and routinely approve adoptive and foster placements with LGBT people. Some do not. In states where courts have expressed disapproval of lesbian and gay parents in other contexts (e.g., appellate case law in **Alabama, Mississippi** and **Virginia** have endorsed the denial of custody to biological parents based on their lesbian or gay orientation), it's possible that case workers and agencies feel less comfortable approving placements with gay parents.

ADOPTION BY BOTH PARTNERS IN SAME-SEX COUPLES

For same-sex couples seeking to adopt a child together, in many states only one member of the couple can be a legally recognized adoptive parent. This leaves the 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 by appellate court case law or by marriage or civil union/domestic partnership in the following states: **California, Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Washington state** and **Washington, D.C.** In addition, **Colorado** and **Connecticut** have statutes providing that a parent may choose to have a second adult adopt her child.

In contrast, appellate courts in **Kentucky, Nebraska, Ohio** and **Wisconsin** have interpreted their state adoption laws not to allow joint or second-parent adoption.

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.

In jurisdictions where same-sex couples 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.

Different-sex couples where one partner is transgender may be able to establish parental rights for both partners by jointly adopting as a married couple or doing a step-parent adoption (even in states that limit marriage to different-sex couples). However, the validity of such marriages varies from state to state and the law is not settled in most states. Appellate courts in **Florida, 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.

To work with LGBT adults, agencies should know whether the jurisdictions in which they work permit adoption jointly by same-sex couples or only by LGBT individuals; they must also know whether second-parent adoption is available and provide guidance on legal protections for same-sex parents within the state of residence. And they should find out whether there is any law indicating whether marriages involving transgender spouses are valid in the jurisdiction.

(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/acaf).

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.²⁰ 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.²¹

There have been several reviews of the existing literature on lesbian and gay parents.²² 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.

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 & Rauch).²³

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 nonrandom, 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.²⁴ 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.²⁵ 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.²⁶ 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, nonsibling 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; Green, 1978; Green, 1998a).^{27 28 29} 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).³⁰

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.³¹

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/lgbc/publications/lgparenthome.html.

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 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 & ADOPTION AND FOSTER CARE

Contributing author: Arlene (Ari) Istar Lev LCSW-R, CASAC, Choices Counseling & Consulting

UNDERSTANDING TRANSGENDER

PHENOMENA

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, genderqueer, and those that 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 transgender phenomena is one that produces an array of reactions. Many people find themselves uncomfortable dealing with the idea of transsexualism and gender reassignment 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.

TRANSGENDER PHENOMENA 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 that 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 specific issues regarding their gender expression and how that might have an impact 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 feels 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 a prospective parent is 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

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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 has managed these situations numerous times and is 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 their masculinized voice is still cracking. This is called "transition" for a reason. Be very gentle with people in this process, and honor them for risking a homestudy evaluation during this time.

For other people, their transition process may be an 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 sometime 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 parent/s and their willingness to share this process with the worker. Before asking challenging questions, the worker should carefully assess their own reasons for asking. If they are simply "curious," it is generally better to not ask. The worker 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 impact 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.³²

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.³³ 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

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puberty or a young adult. Of course, the nature and personality of the individual child, as well as their 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 impact 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 (like many parents), and therefore 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, however, unlikely to have an impact 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 impact 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 gender identity and sexual orientation?
- How will you feel if you have a child who struggles with their 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 a person 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, and like 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.

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TRAINERS AND CONSULTANTS

As highlighted in the Leadership and Management section of the Guide, All Children – All Families has developed a comprehensive training that can meet the needs of private and public agencies that provide any range of services to LGBT foster and adoptive parents. Below is a list of trainers that have a range of experience and expertise on the practice issues referenced in the Guide. Please keep in mind that when you complete the agency self-assessment and receive your consultation, we will help you identify your staff development needs and help to plan and coordinate training for your agency. If you are working outside the framework of All Children – All Families, you are encouraged to contact any of these trainers independently to inquire about their ability to meet your agency’s training needs. See www.hrc.org/acaf for updated list of approved trainers and consultants.

JUDY APPEL

Executive Director
Our Family Coalition
870 Market St., Ste. 872
San Francisco, CA 94102
415-981-1960
Judy@ourfamily.org

COLBY BERGER, Ed.M., MSW

Executive Director
Adoption & Foster Care Mentoring
727 Atlantic Ave., 3rd Floor
Boston, MA 02111
www.afcmentoring.org

BETH BRINDO, LISW-S

Child Welfare Consultant
Chardon, OH
MEB10951@aol.com

RICH BULEY-NEUMAR

Family Transition Worker & Administrative
Liaison
Family Focus Adoption Services
54-40 Little Neck Parkway, Ste. 4
Little Neck, NY 11362
718-224-1919
ffasrich@optonline.net

TRACY FLYNN

Sole Proprietor
Tracy Flynn Consulting
Seattle, WA
206-200-7315
tflynn@seanet.com
www.tracyflynnconsulting.com

DENISE GOODMAN

Independent Trainer
Specializing in training for staff and
foster/adoptive/kinship families who care for
youth who may be GLBTQQ
1824 Snouffer Road
Worthington, OH 43085
614-395-8321
dagphd@aol.com

JILL JACOBS

Executive Director
Family Builders
401 Grand Ave., Suite 400
Oakland, CA 94610
510-272-0204
jjacobs@familybuilders.org

ARLENE ISTAR LEV LCSW, CASAC

Trainer and family therapist specializing in
gender identity issues
Choices Counseling and Consulting
523 Western Ave., Suite 2A
Albany, NY 12203
518-463-9152
www.choicesconsulting.com
info@choiceconsulting.com

A DVD of a 2 ½-hour training she led for
agency leaders, called “Transgender
Competence in Foster and Adoptive Parenting
Services,” is available from HRC. Contact
family@hrc.org for more information.

GARY MALLON

Professor, Hunter College School of Social Work
129 E. 79th St.
New York, NY 10075
212-452-7043
gmallon@hunter.cuny.edu

ANN MCCABE

Family Therapist and Family Welfare Consultant
Specializing in LGBT issues and supporting LGBT adoptive families
609-204-0549
ann13@comcast.net
www.annmccabetherapy.com

MARY MCGOWAN

Trainer
Specializes in working with LGBT foster and adoptive parents
612-866-5499
marymmcgowan@msn.com

ELIJAH C. NEALY, M.DIV, LCSW

New York City
917-509-6242
nealynyc@verizon.net

TONI OLIVER

ROOTS Inc.
Founder and CEO
1007 Virginia Ave., Ste. 100
Hapeville, GA 30354
404.209.7077
toliver@rootsadopt.org

**OUT OF HOME YOUTH ADVOCACY
COUNCIL OF THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY
AREA**

Working to improve care for LGBTQ youth and families involved in the California foster care system; has a curriculum for trainers to assist agencies and counties in working with LGBT youth and families
870 Market St., Suite 370
San Francisco, CA 94102
415-392-6257 ext. 308
info@ohyac.org

DENNIS PATRICK

Professor
Eastern Michigan University
Department of Communication
Media and Theatre Arts
124 Quirk
Ypsilanti, MI 48198
734-487-4199
dpatrick1@emich.edu

MICHAEL SANDERS

Trainer/Consultant
Self-employed
90 Fitzgerald Place
Atlanta, GA 30349
614-439-6771
MSanders220@aol.com

KAREY SCHEYD

Family Recruitment Specialist and Trainer/Consultant
3203 Walnut Ave.
Austin, TX 78722
917-482-334
kscheyd@gmail.com

AL TONEY

Education and Diversity Consultant
AK Consulting Services
P.O. Box 337
Jefferson, MA 01522
508-397-2059
al@akconsultingservices.com

ROB WORONOFF

Independent Consultant
1114 La Zanja Dr.
Glendale, CA 91207
202-607-0615
robworonoff@hotmail.com



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 terms such as “sexual orientation” 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 or other statements specifically reference LGBT adults or same-sex couples; include terms such as “sexual orientation,” “family structure” or “nontraditional families”; and/or include a broad commitment to working with all qualified families.
- 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 quality 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 unintended 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 adults, 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, as identified below, 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.** The competency-based training 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. It will include content that addresses these competencies.

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 material 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 relevant language, know legal issues facing same-sex couples and gender non-conforming individuals in relevant jurisdictions and are able to access support resources for LGBT families.
- 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 — Single, Single with Partner, Single with Roommate, Couple?** 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 more 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**
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 over 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:

That 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 Guides 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

Title

Department/Division

Main Phone #

Email

Street Address 1

Street Address 2

City

State

Zip code

2. Contributor

First Name

Last Name

Title

Department/Division

Main Phone #

Email

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

If Other, please specify.

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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 (check all that apply):

- ☐ Adoption matching and placement
- ☐ Foster care/re-unification
- ☐ Public awareness
- ☐ Recruitment
- ☐ Homestudy
- ☐ Post-permanency support services
- ☐ Licensing
- ☐ Other

If Other, please specify.

4. Agency Address

Street Address 1:

Street Address 2:

City:

State:

Zip Code:

Main Phone:

Main Fax:

Web Address:

of Fulltime Personnel:

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 where your mission or values statement is posted.

http://

2. Does your **client** non-discrimination statement clearly ban discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

3. Does your **client** non-discrimination statement clearly ban discrimination on the basis of gender identity?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

3a. Does your **client** non-discrimination statement clearly ban discrimination on the basis of gender expression?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

4. Please attach a copy of your **client** non-discrimination statement. Note: You need to submit a copy to receive credit for benchmarks 1 and 2.

4a. If applicable, please provide the public web address where your non-discrimination statement for clients is posted.
http://

4b. Is this information available to the public in the following materials (please check all that apply)?

- ☐ Agency brochures
- ☐ Agency adoption/foster parent application
- ☐ Family recruitment materials
- ☐ Staff recruitment ads
- ☐ Employment application

5. Does your **employment** non-discrimination statement include the term “sexual orientation”?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

6. Does your **employment** non-discrimination statement include the term “gender identity or gender expression” or “gender identity”?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

7. Please attach a copy of your **employment** non-discrimination statement. Note: You need to submit a copy to receive credit for benchmarks 3 and 4.

7a. If applicable, Please provide the public web address where your employment non-discrimination statement is posted.
http://

8. Do you have access to an expert in competent practice and delivery of service to the LGBT community?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

8a. If YES to Q8, indicate if the expert is a staff member, community partner or collaborator.

- ☐ Staff member
- ☐ Community partner
- ☐ Collaborator

9. Does your agency require your organizational partners, collaborators or contractors to meet your own non-discrimination standards?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

9a. If YES to Q9, how is this requirement implemented?

- ☐ Organize one or more specific agency education or advocacy activity 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
- ☐ Service providers must sign a separate LGBT-inclusive non-discrimination statement with every contract
- ☐ Other

If Other, please specify.

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

Evaluation and Feedback

10. Do you include sexual orientation in your demographic profile of families for tracking and reporting client data?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

10a. If YES to Q10, do you routinely analyze demographic data regarding sexual orientation?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

11. Do you include gender identity in your demographic profile of families for tracking and reporting client data?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

11a. If YES to Q11, do you routinely analyze demographic data regarding gender identity?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

12. Do you have a transparent grievance process that is inclusive of LGBT clients?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

Staff Training Approach

13. Do you provide basic comprehensive LGBT and LGBT adoption-specific content to personnel?

5

- ☐ Yes, all employees required to attend
☐ Yes, only supervisors/managers required to attend
☐ Yes, only some employees required to attend
☐ Yes, but training is not mandatory
☐ No, training is not offered

If YES to Q13, please indicate which topics are covered:

- ☐ One's own values, beliefs and assumptions related to the LGBT community
☐ Impact of homophobia/heterosexism
☐ Defining sexual orientation
☐ Defining gender identity and gender expression
☐ Using common terms — such as LGBT and “coming out”
☐ Using evidenced-based research that supports LGBT parenting
☐ Value of LGBT families in serving children and youth in the foster care system
☐ Creating an environment that is supportive of LGBT families
☐ Laws on LGBT adoption and foster placements in relevant jurisdictions
☐ Resources to support LGBT placements, including appropriate legal services

If YES to Q13, who delivers this training?

- ☐ All Children – All Families Trainer
☐ Local LGBT organization
☐ Internal trainers
☐ Other trainer

If Other trainer, please provide information:

Name

Credentials

If YES to Q13, are employees asked to update LGBT-specific training on an annual basis?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

14. Please indicate below if you provide additional LGBT training to the following personnel based on their job/role:

5

14a. Case and social workers

- ☐ Yes, training is mandatory
- ☐ Yes, training is optional
- ☐ No, training is not offered

If YES to Q14a, please indicate which topics are covered:

- ☐ Concrete steps to create affirming environments for LGBT foster and adoptive parents
- ☐ Importance of first contact between agencies and LGBT applicants
- ☐ Best practices for recruiting and retaining LGBT parents
- ☐ Conducting a homestudy/family assessment with LGBT couples or LGBT individuals
- ☐ The impact that relevant laws on adoption and foster placements have on LGBT adopting and fostering
- ☐ Matching children in foster care with LGBT parents (for case/social workers involved in homestudy/family assessment and matching)
- ☐ Talking to children in foster care about LGBT families (for case/social workers involved in homestudy/family assessment and matching)
- ☐ Talk to birth parents/kinship caretakers/foster parents about LGBT families (for case/social workers involved in homestudy/family assessment and matching)

If YES to Q14a, who delivers this training?

- ☐ All Children – All Families Trainer
- ☐ Local LGBT organization
- ☐ Internal trainers
- ☐ Other trainer

If Other trainer, please provide information:

Name _____

Credentials _____

If YES to Q14a, are employees asked to update LGBT-specific training on an annual basis?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

14b. Managers/Supervisors

- ☐ Yes, training is mandatory
- ☐ Yes, training is optional
- ☐ No, training is not offered

If YES to Q14b, please indicate which topics are covered:

- ☐ Concrete steps to create affirming environments for LGBT foster and adoptive parents
- ☐ Importance of first contact between agencies and LGBT applicants
- ☐ Best practices for recruiting and retaining LGBT parents
- ☐ Conducting a homestudy/family assessment with LGBT couples or LGBT individuals
- ☐ The impact that relevant laws on adoption and foster placements have on LGBT adopting and fostering
- ☐ Matching children in foster care with LGBT parents (for case/social workers involved in homestudy/family assessment and matching)
- ☐ Talking to children in foster care about LGBT families (for case/social workers involved in homestudy/family assessment and matching)
- ☐ Talk to birth parents/kinship caretakers/foster parents about LGBT families (for case/social workers involved in homestudy/family assessment and matching)

If YES to Q14b, who delivers this training?

- ☐ All Children – All Families Trainer
- ☐ Local LGBT organization
- ☐ Internal trainers

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- ☐ Other trainer

If Other trainer, please provide information:

Name _____

Credentials _____

If YES to Q14b, are employees asked to update LGBT-specific training on an annual basis?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

14c. Administrators

- ☐ Yes, training is mandatory
☐ Yes, training is optional
☐ No, training is not offered

If YES to Q14c, please indicate which topics are covered:

- ☐ Concrete steps to create affirming environments for LGBT foster and adoptive parents
☐ Importance of first contact between agencies and LGBT applicants
☐ Best practices for recruiting and retaining LGBT parents
☐ Conducting a homestudy/family assessment with LGBT couples or LGBT individuals
☐ The impact that relevant laws on adoption and foster placements have on LGBT adopting and fostering
☐ Matching children in foster care with LGBT parents (for case/social workers involved in homestudy/family assessment and matching)
☐ Talking to children in foster care about LGBT families (for case/social workers involved in homestudy/family assessment and matching)
☐ Talk to birth parents/kinship caretakers/foster parents about LGBT families (for case/social workers involved in homestudy/family assessment and matching)

If YES to Q14c, who delivers this training?

- ☐ All Children – All Families Trainer
☐ Local LGBT organization
☐ Internal trainers
☐ Other trainer

If Other trainer, please provide information:

Name _____

Credentials _____

If YES to Q14c, are employees asked to update LGBT-specific training on an annual basis?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

15. With which types of LGBT-headed households do your homestudy social workers have experience?

- ☐ Single lesbian, gay and bisexual parents
☐ Lesbian, gay and bisexual couples
☐ Single transgender parent
☐ Transgender parent with partner

16. Does your agency include standardized LGBT-specific language, examples and exercises in all family training and education activities (MAPP, PRIDE, etc.)

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Not applicable

If Not applicable, please explain.

16a. If YES to Q16, please attach sample of LGBT-specific content used in your family training/homestudy training.

Agency Environment

17. Do you have pictures, art, magazines, or handouts inside your agency that feature LGBT families?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not applicable

17a. If YES to Q17, please attach samples of these materials (PDF, JPG, .doc or .docx file).

18. 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 Not applicable, please explain.

18a. Do your staff acknowledge to clients when non-agency- controlled forms have language that is not inclusive and may, therefore, be off-putting?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not applicable

If Not applicable, please explain.

19. Do your external communications explicitly reflect the agency's commitment to working with LGBT individuals and families?

- 8
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No

19a. If YES to Q19, please indicate which of the communications reflect this commitment (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

If Other, please specify.

Recruitment

20. Does your agency actively recruit from diverse communities?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not applicable

20a. If YES to Q20, does your agency actively recruit LGBT foster and adoptive individuals and families?

- 8
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No

20b. If YES to Q20a, please identify the strategies used for recruitment of LGBT individuals and families from the list below (check all that apply).

- ☐ Ads featuring LGBT families
- ☐ Attend LGBT events (i.e. pride, conferences)
- ☐ Partnership(s) with LGBT community groups

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- ☐ Other

If Other, please specify.

20c. If YES to Q20a, please attach a sample of LGBT-inclusive recruitment materials (PDF, JPG, .doc or .docx file).

20d. If YES to Q20a, is your agency prepared to handle increased volume as a result of outreach efforts?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Not applicable

20e. If YES to Q20a, can your agency capture data related to your specific LGBT outreach efforts to determine whether they are effective?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Not applicable

21. Do you ask LGBT foster/adoptive families to help you with outreach and recruitment?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Not applicable

21a. If YES to Q21, please identify the strategies used from the list below (check all that apply).

- ☐ Speaking at events
☐ Speaking at orientation meetings
☐ Participation on panel discussions
☐ Mentoring/buddying with current LGBT families
☐ Other

If Other, please specify.

22. Does your agency provide support specifically for waiting LGBT families?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

22a. If YES to Q22, what type of support is provided (check all that apply)?

- ☐ Support groups
☐ Educational programs
☐ Information packets
☐ Listservs
☐ Referrals to other community resources
☐ Other

If Other, please specify.

Placement, Finalization and Post-Permanency Support

23. How many lesbian, gay or bisexual foster or adoptive parents have you served at your agency over the past year? Please estimate number: _____. Please estimate percentage: _____

24. How many transgender foster or adoptive parents have you served at your agency over the past year? Please estimate number: _____. Please estimate percentage: _____

25. Have you had placements/finalized adoptions with LGBT foster or adoptive parents within the past year?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Not applicable

If Not applicable, please explain.

25a. If YES to Q25, how many certified LGB families achieved placement and finalization over the past year?

Please estimate number: _____. Please estimate percentage: _____

25b. If YES to Q25, how many certified transgender families achieved placement and finalization over the past year?

Please estimate number: _____. Please estimate percentage: _____

25c. If YES to Q25, how is this information tracked?

- ☐ Manual count from homestudy/family assessment
- ☐ Family applications
- ☐ Intake forms
- ☐ Other

If Other, please specify.

26. Does your agency provide support specifically for LGBT families after the foster placement or adoption is finalized?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

26a. If YES to Q26, what support does your agency provide?

- ☐ Support groups
- ☐ Educational programs
- ☐ Information packets
- ☐ Listservs
- ☐ Referrals to other community resources
- ☐ Other

If Other, please specify.

APPENDIX D: 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*

Bill Bettencourt

*Senior Consultant, Pacific Region
Annie E. Casey Foundation, Family to Family
Initiative*

Maris Blechner

*Executive Director
Family Focus Adoption Services*

Madelyn Freundlich

*Consultant
Excal Consulting Partners*

Janice Goldwater

*Founder and Executive Director
Adoptions Together*

Jill Jacobs

*Executive Director
Family Builders*

John Levesque

*Board of Directors
North American Council on Adoptable Children*

Ernesto Loperena

*Executive Director
New York Council on Adoptable Children*

Penelope Maza

U.S. Children's Bureau—retired

Ann McCabe

*Family Therapist and Child Welfare Consultant
Private Practice*

Nathan Monell

*Chief Executive Officer
Foster Care Alumni of America*

J. Toni Oliver

*Founder and CEO
ROOTS Inc.*

Adam Pertman

*Executive Director
Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute*

Maria Quintanilla

*Executive Director
Latino Family Institute*

Karey Scheyd

Family Recruitment Specialist

Andre Wade

*Foster/Adoptive Parent Recruiter Clark County
Department of Family Services*

Diane Wagner

*Division Chief, Adoptions and Permanency
Resources Division
County of Los Angeles Department of Children
and Family Services*

John Wagner

*Director
California Department of Social Services*

APPENDIX E: 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.

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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

“This is a really useful tool. At trainings around the country, people ask the same questions and the Guide answers those questions. If you can’t get to a conference or to a training, it’s a way to have the answers and have them when you need them. Have the Guide next to you when you write the homestudy. It’s a hands-on tool – there when you need it.”

- Jill Jacobs, Executive Director, Family Builders

“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



HUMAN
RIGHTS
CAMPAIGN
FOUNDATION

All Children – All Families

1640 Rhode Island Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

202/668-4160 TTY 202/216-1572 Fax 866/304-3257

family@hrc.org

www.hrc.org/acaf