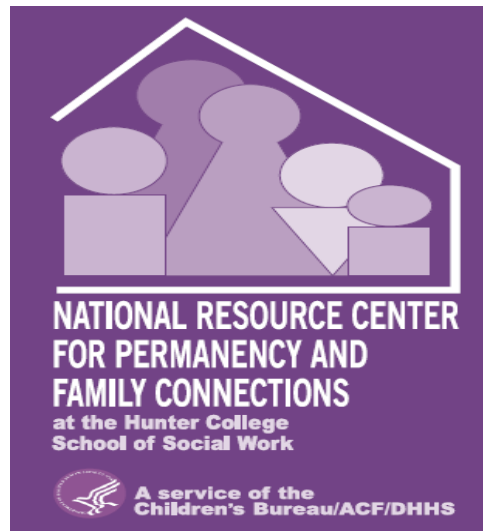




# Practice Issues with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Families

June 16, 2010



Co-sponsored by  
National Resource Center for  
Permanency and Family Connections  
& AdoptUsKids



Members of the Children's Bureau T/TA Network

# Today's Agenda

- Introductions
- Overview of the Teleconference
- Preliminary Findings from Research with Lesbian and Gay Foster/Adoptive Families – Dr. Ruth McRoy
- Available T&TA on Practice with LGBT Families from the Children Bureau T&TA Network
- Working with LGBT Foster/Adoptive Families
- Inclusive Practice: Agency/Case Levels
- Resources/References/Requests for T/TA
- Discussion/Questions

# Introduction and Welcome

Focus of Today's Teleconference,  
co-sponsored by NRCDFC and AdoptUsKids:

- First of several teleconferences and webcasts on LGBT Issues
- On and Off-Site T&TA and Information Services which can be provided by the Children's Bureau One Training & Technical Assistance Network on a range of LGBT Foster/Adoptive Parenting issues
- Inclusive Practice with LGBT Foster/Adoptive Families

# Opportunities for Permanency & Family Connections

- We can increase opportunities for permanency for children and youth in the child welfare system by engaging in inclusive and affirming practice with LGBT families, including foster, adoptive, and kinship families.
- In working with all families, including LGBT families, it is important to recognize that there are a variety of family structures that are healthy and supportive for children and youth.

# Opportunities for Permanency & Family Connections

We hope that this teleconference will begin an important dialogue for states and tribes about Practice with LGBT Parents and help listeners to reflect on two primary questions:

- How can we as child welfare systems put out the welcome mat for folks from the LGBT community and increase the pool of qualified prospective foster and adoptive families for our children and youth who need loving, permanent families?
- How can we do a better job in our work with LGBT families?

# Barriers & Success Factors in Adoption From Foster Care: Follow-up Study of Participating Gay and Lesbian Families

**June 16, 2010**



*A service of the Children's Bureau, a member of the T/TA Network*

# AdoptUsKids: Barriers and Success Factors Research

- Nationwide longitudinal study (2002-2007) to assess:
  - Barriers faced by families in the process of adopting a child from foster care (300 families, 382 adoption staff)
  - Success Factors study involved interviews with families who completed an adoption of a child from foster care (161 families)
- Families were interviewed and surveyed over time to understand their process and experience
- Adoption staff were interviewed or surveyed to gain staff perspectives on barriers and success factors

U.S. Children's Bureau (2008). *Barriers and success factors in adoptions from foster care: Perspectives of families and staff*. A report to the U.S. Congress, supported by The Adoption Opportunities Program. Also available at: [www.adoptuskids.org](http://www.adoptuskids.org)

# LG Family Follow-Up Study (2010)

- 16 families (14 couples and two singles) self-identified as gay or lesbian in the original studies (2002-2007) and were re-contacted to participate in a follow-up study to assess barriers and success factors specific to being Lesbian or Gay
  - 10 of the 16 agreed to participate in a 1-2 hour telephone interview their experiences during the process of trying to adopt a child from foster care
    - 6 lesbian couples
    - 3 gay couples
    - 1 single gay man



# Adoption Process Status

- 8 (80%) finalized an adoption of a child from foster care (total of 20 children adopted by these 8 families)
- 2 (20%) discontinued the process of adopting a child from foster care (1 of which did complete a private adoption)

# Demographics of Sample

## Race/Ethnicity

- 7 Caucasian couples
- 2 Interracial couples
- 1 Unknown (one partner Caucasian, second partner unknown)

## Age

- Males –avg. age 50
- Females—avg. age 47

## Education

- 26% High school diploma
- 11% Some college
- 21% College degree
- 37% Graduate school
- 5% Missing

## State of Residence

CA, CO, DC, MN, NY, OK,  
PN, TX, VT

# Demographics

## Family Income

- Range \$30,000 - \$100,000

## Foster Parent Experience

- 42% (8) had been foster parents

## Legal Partnership

- 3 Domestic Partnerships
- 3 in committed relationship
- 1 Civil Union
- 1 married
- 1 not applicable
- 1 missing

# Findings

- LG families experienced similar barriers and success factors as in the full sample of the original study.
- However, they also experienced unique barriers as well as success factors.

# Positive Adoption Experiences

- Agency affirmed LGBT families
- Agency employed gay or lesbian staff
- Both members of the couple felt treated equally
- Paperwork that was gender neutral
- Gay affirming training including inclusive language and appropriate content
- Having other gay or lesbians going through the process at the same time

# Positive Adoption Experiences

- Home study worker well educated on gay and lesbian adoptions
- Opportunity to assess partner relationship during HS process like heterosexual couples often do during pre-marital counseling
- Support group with other LG families
- Sisters (placed for adoption) were excited because they would “each get a Mom”

# Barriers Experienced by Successful Adopters

Even successful adopters identified barriers/issues they experienced during the process of adoption:

- Often need to deal with various state laws regarding adoption when not legally partnered
- Working with the schools has been challenging—sons harassed about having two Dads / schools geared towards Mothers in general
- Can't find a judge or attorney to do the second parent adoption
- Long waits for placement
- Told that the child's agency wouldn't place because they were lesbian (even though family agency was supportive)

# Barriers Experienced by Successful Adopters

- Never told why turned down
- Told we were turned down because we were gay and white
- Not all social workers will consider you an okay family for adoption
- Some agencies feel that LGBT families should only be matched with hard to place children because those families will take any kind of child
- Harder for gay men to get matched with a child than lesbians



# Implications

- Most worked with gay friendly agencies, yet had challenges
- Families very committed to the process
- Staff need training in working with GL families and in modifying their procedures/forms, etc. in keeping with families' needs
- More research needed with a larger sample of gay and lesbian adopters

# LGBT Focus Groups (2010)

- Six focus groups have been conducted and four have undergone preliminary analysis
- The five groups that have been conducted were held in the following states:
  - DC, MN, TX, VT, WA
- Data analysis is ongoing, but preliminary results from four groups will be presented.

# Demographics (n=4 groups)

- Three of the focus groups were made up of subsets or combinations of existing support groups; one was convened for the sole purpose of the focus group
- Size of groups:
  - Ranged from 5 to 8 participants

# Focus Group Participants (n=25)

## Race/Ethnicity

Caucasian = 19

African American = 3

Bi-racial = 2

(Caucasian/American Indian;  
Caucasian/Hispanic)

Hispanic = 1

## Sexual Orientation

Lesbian = 16

Gay = 8

Bisexual = 3

Queer = 1

Straight = 1

## Relationship Status

Single = 5

Couples = 20

Civil Union = 1

Marriage License = 7

Domestic Partnership = 5

Reciprocal Beneficiaries = 4

No legal partnership = 4

## Gender Identity

Female = 17

Male = 8

Transsexual = 0

Transgender = 0

# Focus Groups

## Preliminary Thematic Analysis(4 groups)

### ***What factors influenced your decision to pursue adoption from foster care?***

- So many children need a good home (n=4 groups)
- Cost, foster care adoption less expensive (n=3 groups)

### ***Strengths of LGBT families?***

- Process is harder for LGBT families so family is more committed (n=4 groups)
- Heterosexual couples often adopt due to infertility / for LGBT families, it's the first choice (n=3 groups)
- Decision is very intentional (n=3 groups)
- LGBT parents can relate to adopted children's feelings of differentness/more compassionate (n=3 groups)

# Focus Groups

Preliminary Thematic Analysis (4 groups)

***Participants were asked to discuss when staff had treated them insensitively.***

- A single worker can make decisions based solely on homophobia, not best interests of the child. This is done even when the agency is supportive or legally mandated to be so, while publicly giving other reasons for decisions (n=3 groups)

# Focus Groups

## Preliminary Thematic Analysis (4 groups)

### ***What should workers know about LGBT families?***

- Staff should feel comfortable asking questions if they don't understand something about the family (n=2 groups)
- LGBT concepts should be embedded into standard trainings, not separate (n=2 groups)
- Just want to feel included (n=2 groups)
- More funding to train workers appropriately/more education, especially young, new workers with little life experience (n=2 groups)

# Focus Groups

Preliminary Thematic Analysis (4 groups)

***Legal and policy requirements dictate what staff can/can't do. What are some things staff can do to more effectively assist LGBT families?***

- State agencies should send out user-friendly information to prospective LGBT parents about their laws and policies (n=2 groups)
- Agency staff must put their own prejudices aside (n=2 groups)
- Legal protections for LGBTs don't exist in some states so agency staff can exercise their prejudices (n=2 groups)



# Focus Groups

## Preliminary Thematic Analysis (4 groups)

### ***Advice to LGBT peers interested in fostering/adopting?***

- Take stock of your support network because it is very important (n=2 groups)
- Parenting is a “selfless choice”/not something to do because it is trendy (n=2 groups)
- Find an agency that you are comfortable with; this is very important (n=2 groups)
- Talk with someone who has adopted before talking with the agency (n=2 groups)

# Next Steps

Final Report completed by June 30<sup>th</sup>

- Complete data from LG family follow-up study
- Complete data from LGBT focus groups
- Comparison of data
- Literature Review

For further information contact:

Ruth G. McRoy, PhD

The University of Texas at Austin,  
Center for Social Work Research

[r.mcroy@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:r.mcroy@mail.utexas.edu)

1-866-471-7372

# Training, Technical Assistance



# Sample Areas of T&TA include:

- Engaging LGBT foster and adoptive families
- Assistance in developing supports for LGBT foster and adoptive families
- Working with Family Support and Preservation Workers to support LGBT youth remaining in their families of origin
- Working to facilitate all forms of permanency (reunification, kinship, guardianship, and adoption) for LGBT children and youth

# Sample Areas of T&TA include:

- Working with States and Tribes to develop LGBT affirming policies and practices
- Working with States and Tribes to develop strategies to engage parents and community partners in the provision of safety focused, individualized family-centered services to LGBT children, youth, and families
- Working with States and Tribes to develop strategies to develop skills in the practice of family group conferencing as they relate to LGBT children, youth and families and family group decision making

# Sample Areas of T&TA include:

- Promoting the practice of family search/engagement strategies to identify all family members, including LGBT family members, for children and youth separated from their birth families
- Retention and support of resource families and dual licensure issues for foster and adoptive families headed by LGBT people
- Promoting practices and policies that focus on cultural competency to increase understanding of diverse cultures, including the cultural traditions of LGBT persons

# Sample Areas of T&TA include:

- Promoting practices that build relationships between Tribes and States and LGBT community-based resources
- Working to promote partnerships between parents and LGBT foster parents
- Working toward a full collaboration between child welfare and legal and judicial partners, especially with respect to LGBT family issues

# Sample Areas of T&TA include:

- Understanding healthy development and mental health care issues for LGBT children, youth, and families in foster care
- Expanding the service array and improving LGBT competent services
- Promoting child welfare practices that addresses substance abuse, domestic violence and mental health services in a LGBT context



# Sample Areas of T&TA include:

- Promoting system of care approaches that include LGBT affirming services in foster care and adoption and all other community based services
- Post-permanency services that support LGBT children and youth in families moving toward permanency
- Other areas as identified in State PIPs
- For a complete list, visit:

[http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info\\_services/TAforStatesandTribes\\_LGBTQ.pdf](http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/TAforStatesandTribes_LGBTQ.pdf)

# Information Services: Understanding Respectful Language

- LGBT: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning
- Sexual Orientation
- Gender Identity
- Transgender Identity

# Diversity in LGBT Community

- The LGBT community is diverse in every sense of the word – racial/ethnic, age, economic, geographic, religion/spirituality, political, life experiences...
- The way people identify varies and should be respected. Use the person's preferred language, including their preferred personal pronouns.

# Assumptions

- **DON'T ASSUME** someone's sexual orientation or gender identity. It is not possible to know whether someone is straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning unless they tell you.
- **DO ASSUME** that it is always important to work in a way that is inclusive and affirming of LGBT children, families, and youth and a diversity of family structures.

## WHAT IS THE SAME...

*when working with any family (regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity)*

- Capacity to parent: Myths vs. Research
- The focus of the work: The main focus should not be on sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Opportunities and choices that are available to a foster/adoptive parent/family.
- Basic requirements in terms of safety, etc.

WHAT MAY BE DIFFERENT...  
*when working with LGBT Foster/Adoptive Families?*

- Some supports needed for the parent or family may be specific to their being an LGBT family.
- It is important to remember that different families will have different needs. What may be a concern for one LGBT family may not be for another.

# Inclusive Practice with LGBT Families: Agency Level

- Staff training on LGBT Topics
- Inclusive Recruitment Efforts
- Inclusive Paperwork Documentation
- Inclusive Informational Materials/Website
- Recognizing and making visible LGBT families

# Inclusive Practice with LGBT Families: Case Level

- Use respectful language as preferred by person/family. Allow person to self identify. Avoid “outing” people.
- Include LGBT people in family engagement/kin search.
- Avoid focusing on sexual orientation/gender identity AND be available to provide support around LGBT issues as needed.



# The Myths

- The only acceptable home for a child is one with a mother and father who are married to each other.
- Children need a mother and a father to have proper male and female role models.
- LGBT people don't have stable relationships and wouldn't know how to be good parents.

# The Myths

Children raised by LGBT parents are more likely to grow up LGBT themselves.

Children who are raised by LGBT parents will be subjected to harassment and will be rejected by their peers.

# The Myths

- **Gay men are more likely to molest children.**
- **Children raised by LGBT people will be brought up in an "immoral" environment.**

# What Does the Research Say?

All of the research to date has reached the same unequivocal conclusion about LGBT parenting: the children of LGBT parents grow up as successfully as the children of heterosexual parents.

In fact, not a single study has found the children of LGBT parents to be disadvantaged because of their parents' gender/sexual orientation.

# What Does the Research Say?

## Key Findings:

- There is no evidence to suggest that LGBT people are unfit to be parents.
- Home environments with LGBT parents are as likely to successfully support a child's development as those with heterosexual parents.
- Good parenting is not influenced by gender/sexual orientation. Rather, it is influenced most profoundly by a parent's ability to create a loving and nurturing home -- an ability that does not depend on whether a parent is LGBT or heterosexual.

# What Does the Research Say?

## Key Findings:

- There is no evidence to suggest that the children of LGBT parents are less intelligent, suffer from more problems, are less popular, or have lower self-esteem than children of heterosexual parents.
- The children of LGBT parents grow up as happy, healthy and well-adjusted as the children of heterosexual parents.

## Organizations Who Support Foster Care/Adoption by LGBT Parents

Numerous professional organizations have issued position statements supporting adoption by LGBT parents

- American Psychological Association
- Child Welfare League of America
- American Bar Association
- American Psychiatric Association
- National Association of Social Workers
- North American Council on Adoptable Children
- American Academy of Pediatrics
- American Psychoanalytic Association
- American Academy of Family Physicians

# Strategies for Recruiting Parents

The first component of a recruitment campaign is the delivery of a clear message that LGBT persons as foster and adoptive families are valued members of a children's services team.



# Strategies for Recruiting Parents

What generally works in recruitment?

- Word of mouth
- The initial contact
- Engaging the LGBT community
- Use of the press, both LGBT and mainstream
- Use of the terms “lesbian,” “gay,” “bisexual” and “transgender” in materials
- Use of visible LGBT models in ad campaigns
- Use of information packs

# Specific Recruitment of LGBT Foster and Adoptive Parents

The following questions are important for agencies and professionals to consider when seeking to recruit LGBT persons as foster and adoptive parents:

- Is the agency's senior management supportive of specifically recruiting LGBT persons as foster or adoptive parents? If not, how can this be addressed?
- What training is available to social workers, managers and panel members in relation to LGBT persons fostering and adoption? Where can such training be accessed?

## Specific Recruitment of LGBT Foster and Adoptive Parents

- Are LGBT families visible anywhere in your agency publications?
- Are pictures of LGBT families featured along with other families in agency materials, or in photographs displayed throughout the premises?

## Specific Recruitment of LGBT Foster and Adoptive Parents

- Does your agency have a welcoming statement to all families?
- Is it inclusive of LGBT applicants?
- Do your forms say “applicant” or “parent” or do they ask for “male and female” applicants or “husband and wife”?

# Specific Recruitment of LGBT Foster and Adoptive Parents

- Is your training inclusive of LGBT people?
- Are LGBT persons depicted in case studies, in examples given, or on panels at trainings?
- What support services are you able to offer families?
- Are other LGBT parents available as mentors?
- Is a support group offered for LGBT parents?
- Are staff familiar with resources for LGBT families?

# Preparing for the Possibility of Negative Feedback

- Negative responses from public figures and the media have made some local authorities and foster/adoption agencies reluctant to publicize their willingness to recruit LGBT persons.
- At a time when there is a shortage of people willing or able to take on the complex needs of children and youth in public care, individual workers and managers need to be prepared for negative comments and develop confidence in challenging the myths and stereotypes associated with LGBT parenting.

# Supporting Lesbian and Gay Foster and Adoptive Parents

Like other foster parents and adopters, gay men and lesbians are interested in seeking ways to incorporate their children into their lives and help them make a smooth transition into family life.

Like their heterosexual counterparts who adopt or become foster parents, they will at various times need support to sustain and maintain these connections.

They also want to meet other lesbians and gay men who have taken on the challenge of parenting.

# Supporting LGBT Foster and Adoptive Parents

- Loneliness and isolation – overlapping issues of being a LGBT parent with a child who has attachment difficulties
- Validity as a parent and as a family – as a LGBT parent how do you present yourself to the world and negotiate the world and the tension this causes
- Rejection and fear of rejection for themselves as parents or for their children as children of LGBT parents
- The perception of LGBT families as second-best



# Supporting LGBT Foster and Adoptive Parents

- On a positive note, the unique experiences of being a LGBT adults can contribute to their overall effectiveness as foster/adoptive parents, given their ability to empathise with difference and cope with rejection.
- The need for ongoing support and an opportunity to share commonalities and differences within a 'safe space' is essential for individuals to continue to work through their own issues and to better understand how these influence and affect the unique relationships between parent and child.

# Key Points in Supporting LGBT Foster/Adoptive Parents

- It is important that agencies provide peer support and a 'safe space' to explore issues
- LGBT applicants should be given information and linked into support groups.
- Adoption and fostering professionals need to recognize the particular vulnerabilities and strengths of LGBT parents.
- It is important that accessible and ongoing post-permanency training is provided.

# Additional Resources for Inclusive Practice with LGBT Children, Youth & Families

## Videos

- **Living Adoption: Gay Parents Speak, 2010.** A new training and recruitment DVD for adoptive families and the professionals who work with them. Photosynthesis Productions.  
<http://www.photosynthesisproductions.com/>
- ***Daddy & Papa: A Film About Gay Men Becoming Parents, 2002.*** *An intimate look at the issues faced by gay men who become parents. ITV Productions.*  
<http://www.daddyandpapa.com/>

# Additional Resources for Inclusive Practice with LGBT Children, Youth & Families

## Internet Resources

### **Permanency Planning Today – Summer 2010**

This issue of NRCPFC's free bi-annual newsletter, *Permanency Planning Today*, focuses on inclusive practice with LGBT Resource Families.

<http://www.nrcpfc.org/newsletter/ppt-summer-2010.pdf>

# Additional Resources for Inclusive Practice with LGBT Children, Youth & Families

## Internet Resources

### **All Children, All Families – Human Rights Campaign**

The All Children – All Families (ACAF) initiative seeks to enhance LGBT cultural competence among child welfare professionals and educate LGBT people about opportunities to become foster or adoptive parents to waiting children

<http://www.hrc.org/issues/parenting>

# Additional Resources for Inclusive Practice with LGBT Children, Youth & Families

## Internet Resources

### **Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians & Gays (PFLAG)**

PFLAG is a national organization dedicated to providing information, education, and support for the parents, families, and friends of lesbians and gays. You will find a list of local chapters, their mission statement, and general information about sexual orientation at the PFLAG site.

[www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)

# Additional Resources for Inclusive Practice with LGBT Children, Youth & Families

## Internet Resources

### *CenterKids*

Center Kids, Center Families is the NY LGBT Center's family program for LGBT parents and their children, for those considering parenthood, and for all LGBT people in the context of their families. Founded in 1989, Center Kids gives children ongoing opportunities to befriend others from similar families, while their parents have a chance to meet, socialize and build their own support network.

Center Kids, has become a national and regional model for LGBT family organizing.

<http://www.gaycenter.org/families>

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# RESOURCES

NRC for Permanency and Family Connections

[www.nrcpfc.org](http://www.nrcpfc.org)

AdoptUsKids

[www.adoptuskids.org](http://www.adoptuskids.org)

Child Welfare Information Gateway

[www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov)

# Presenter Contact Information

Gerald P Mallon, DSW

[gmallon@hunter.cuny.edu](mailto:gmallon@hunter.cuny.edu)

Kathy Ledesma, MSW

[kledesma@adoptuskids.org](mailto:kledesma@adoptuskids.org)

Ruth McRoy, Ph.D.

[r.mcroy@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:r.mcroy@mail.utexas.edu)



# Discussion/Questions