

Basic LGBTQ Policies, Training & Services for Child Welfare Agencies

There is a dire need for child welfare agencies nationwide to take remedial steps throughout their programs, policies, training and services to improve the quality of care provided to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (“LGBTQ”) clients. Agencies providing child welfare services should acknowledge that LGBTQ youth are in their midst and should implement basic yet vital reforms. These specific reforms can help remedy LGBTQ invisibility, prevent abuse and improve care for these vulnerable young people.

ADOPT NONDISCRIMINATION POLICIES AND ENFORCE THEM.

Adopt explicit written policies prohibiting discrimination based on the actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity or HIV status of youth, foster and adoptive parents and other household members, and child welfare staff. This should include a prohibition on all forms of harassment and discrimination, from name-calling and slurs to physical violence. Incorporate these policies in agency manuals, post them prominently, distribute them to all staff and youth in the system, and require that contracting agencies adhere to them as well. Every agency should offer a formal grievance procedure for confidential complaints and provide prompt neutral third-party investigations.

PROVIDE MANDATORY TRAINING FOR STAFF AND FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENTS.

Require mandatory training for staff and foster and adoptive parents on the following topics:

- State and agency nondiscrimination policies regarding sexual orientation, gender identity and HIV status;
- Sensitivity to sexual orientation and gender identity;

- Supporting a youth coming out as LGBTQ; and
- Educating LGBTQ youth about their sexuality and sexual health, including prevention of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

In 2009, Lambda Legal with the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) trained 40 master trainers nationwide in turn to train out-of-home care service providers to work competently with LGBTQ youth. To find master trainers in your area or to order copies of the NASW-Lambda Legal training curriculum *Moving the Margins: Training Curriculum for Child Welfare Services with LGBTQ Youth in Out-of-Home Care*, contact Lambda Legal at 1-866-LGBTTeen (toll free) or 212-809-8585.

IDENTIFY AND TRAIN FOSTER PARENTS TO CARE FOR LGBTQ YOUTH.

Your agency should make diligent efforts to identify and train qualified foster and adoptive parents, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender adults interested in caring for LGBTQ youth.

FOSTERING TRANSITIONS

A CWLA/Lambda Legal
Joint Initiative



PROVIDE SAFE GROUP HOME PLACEMENTS.

Your agency should consider whether in the short term, the pressing needs of LGBTQ youth in group home settings would best be addressed by designating specific group facilities as safe havens for LGBTQ youth. It should, however, be a priority to make every group facility a safe, supportive environment for LGBTQ youth through strict enforcement of nondiscrimination policies, staff training, sensitivity education for non-LGBTQ residents and services and resources for LGBTQ youth.

ENSURE THE AVAILABILITY OF APPROPRIATE COUNSELING SERVICES.

Your agency should ensure that professional one-on-one and group counseling services are available for LGBTQ youth. Your agency should also adopt a strict policy against the use of so-called conversion or reparative therapies intended to alter a person's sexual orientation or gender identity.

IDENTIFY AND DISTRIBUTE RESOURCE LISTS AND COMMUNITY CONTACTS FOR AGENCY STAFF, FOSTER PARENTS AND LGBTQ YOUTH.

Your agency should compile and widely distribute LGBTQ resource guides that include community contacts, peer support groups, reading lists and materials, hotlines, LGBTQ advocates in the child welfare system and other resources. All youth in foster care should have direct, ready and confidential access to developmentally appropriate resources about LGBTQ issues.

PROVIDE MEANINGFUL, CONFIDENTIAL SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION AND SERVICES.

Provide youth with developmentally appropriate information and resources about sexuality and sexual health, including LGBTQ issues and prevention of HIV and other STD's. Adopt explicit written policies providing youth with access to free and confidential HIV testing without requiring the consent or notification of their legal guardians. Agency policy should mandate, not merely permit, all employees to maintain confidentiality of a youth's HIV status with disclosure on only a limited, need-to-know basis to provide for a youth's well-being.

CREATE A POSITIVE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT IN YOUR AGENCY THAT WELCOMES AND AFFIRMS LGBTQ PEOPLE.

Display recognizable signs and symbols, such as pink triangles and rainbow flags, to let all your clients know that your agency is a sensitive, safe and welcoming place for LGBTQ people. You can post Lambda Legal's LGBTQ Youth in Out-

of-Home Care poster, included in this tool kit and available in English and Spanish at www.lambdalegal.org as a sign that your LGBTQ clients are safe to be open at your agency.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Getting Down to Basics: Tools for Working with LGBTQ Youth in Care. The many other components of this tool kit offer additional support, tips and information on a variety of topics related to meeting the needs of LGBTQ clients. Other topics include: *Basic Facts About Being LGBTQ*, *Caseworkers with LGBTQ Clients*, *Teaching LGBTQ Competence in Schools of Social Work*, *Working with Transgender Youth*, *Families Supporting an LGBTQ Child*, *Information for LGBTQ Youth in Care* and *LGBTQ Youth Resources*. Distribute this and other handouts included in this tool kit to coworkers, foster parents, and LGBTQ young people. To order free copies of the *Getting Down to Basics* tool kit, contact Lambda Legal at 1-866-LGBTTeen (toll free) or 212-

809-8585, or download it for free at www.lambdalegal.org or www.cwla.org.

Out of the Margins: A Report on Regional Listening Forums Highlighting the Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Youth in Care, Child Welfare League of America and Lambda Legal (2006) free of charge at www.lambdalegal.org or www.cwla.org.

Youth in the Margins: A Report on the Unmet Needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Adolescents in Foster Care, Including a Survey of Fourteen States and Proposals for Reform, Lambda Legal (2001) free of charge at www.lambdalegal.org.

CWLA Best Practice Guidelines for Serving LGBT Youth in Out-of-Home Care, Shannan Wilber, Caitlyn Ryan and Jody Marksamer, CWLA Press (2006) for purchase at www.cwla.org.

Agency Readiness Index: A Self-Assessment and Planning Guide to Gauge Agency Readiness to Work with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth, National Network for Youth, Washington, D.C. (2003) for purchase at www.nn4youth.org.

“ Agency directors need to take a visible stand, implement real change, ban discrimination, and hold staff accountable for discriminatory treatment. ”

— Youth in Care

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