



HUMAN
RIGHTS
CAMPAIGN
FOUNDATION™

ALL CHILDREN – ALL FAMILIES 2019 REPORT

CELEBRATING
EVERYDAY
CHANGE-MAKERS
IN CHILD WELFARE



“As an agency serving LGBTQ youth and families, we knew that wanting to be inclusive wasn’t enough — we needed to make some changes. Through our participation in All Children - All Families, we’ve transformed that desire into a proven track record of providing welcoming and affirming services. We are proud to be a trusted resource for our LGBTQ community members and we’re committed to the ongoing work it takes to maintain that trust.”

—LORI ROSS

President and CEO of FosterAdopt Connect • Independence, MO

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The Human Rights Campaign Foundation envisions a world where LGBTQ people are ensured equality and embraced as full members of society at home, at work and in every community.

For nearly 12 years, All Children - All Families (ACAF) has been a crucial component of the HRC Foundation's efforts to realize that vision by providing resources to guide child welfare agencies in developing LGBTQ-inclusive policies and practices.

These organizations, from small nonprofit foster care and adoption agencies to large county or state child and family services agencies, do extremely vital work with children, families and communities every day. We share their commitment to ensuring that all children feel a deep sense of love and belonging and that all families are valued and have access to the resources they need to thrive.

We work with agencies to identify the barriers that LGBTQ children, youth and families can face when accessing services — and provide training, tools and resources to remove those barriers. Sometimes this means putting an end to instances of outright discrimination but, more often, it is about making sure that committed, well-intentioned professionals have the skills and information they need to do their best work.

In recent years, the passage of state “religious refusal” laws has shone a light on policymakers acting against the best interests of children by permitting agencies to turn away qualified families or deny services to young people.

This report tells a different story. It celebrates the more than 70 organizations across the country that partnered closely with ACAF over the last year to improve the services they provide to LGBTQ community members. Some agencies took their first steps to protect against anti-LGBTQ discrimination and others demonstrated innovative new approaches to community engagement. They are all proof that thousands of committed professionals — from frontline workers to executives — know that LGBTQ youth are perfect just the way they are and that removing barriers for potentially qualified LGBTQ foster and adoptive parents is in the best interest of children.

This report profiles some of the change-makers and advocates on the ground and the LGBTQ youth and families they serve. Each organization is on a journey — creating a culture of inclusion and equity takes time. That is why ACAF's work promotes cultural humility, a concept that recognizes the ongoing nature of learning and improvement when it comes to serving diverse populations. It also stresses the fact that service providers have as much to learn from their clients as clients do from them. This rings true for us at ACAF. We celebrate these organizations with deep gratitude for all we've learned from them along the way.

If you are not already a part of this movement, we hope that this report inspires you to join us.

With gratitude,
Jay Brown
Senior Vice President, HRC Foundation

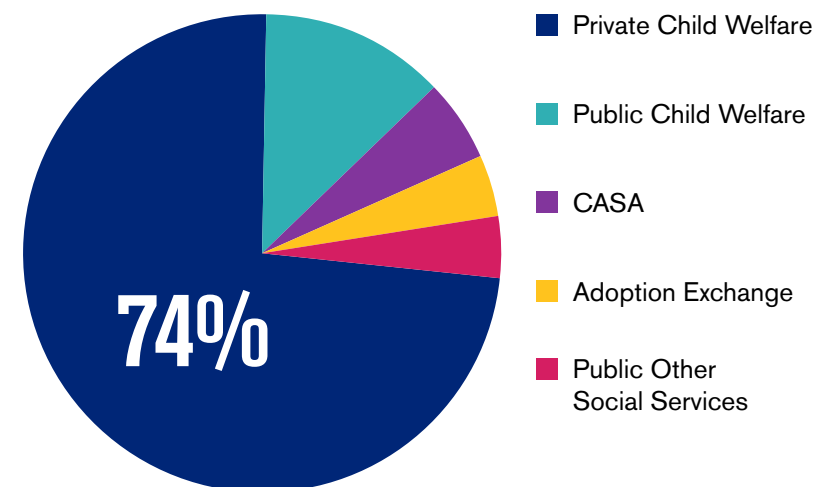
Introduction

Since All Children - All Families (ACAF) began in 2007, hundreds of child welfare agencies across the U.S. have used the project's resources to enhance their efforts to achieve safety, permanency and well-being for LGBTQ youth and families. From the start, the project focused on bridging the gap between the millions of LGBTQ people interested in adoption and foster care and the many agencies in need of more prospective foster and adoptive parents. Over time, more agencies sought out information and training on how to better support the LGBTQ youth in their care. In response, ACAF expanded its scope in 2012 to include youth-related resources, widening the project's focus beyond services for adult caregivers. This past year, ACAF once again expanded its resources and piloted a new annual process for engaging agencies in order to keep up with emerging best practices in the field.

More than 70 organizations took part in the pilot year of ACAF's new participation process. These agencies worked diligently to conduct an internal self-assessment, provide professional development to staff and implement ACAF's Benchmarks of LGBTQ Inclusion, which track policy and practice changes within agencies. This report features a complete list of participants and groups them into three Tiers of Recognition — Building Foundation for Inclusion, Solid Foundation for Inclusion and Innovative Inclusion — which celebrate the strides agencies have made towards becoming fully LGBTQ welcoming and affirming. This year, every single organization that participated was able to achieve at least the first tier because of its commitment to organizational change and LGBTQ inclusion.

For more on the pilot year's initiatives, see Appendix A. Additional details on the tiers and benchmarks can be found on page 6 and in Appendix C.

PARTICIPANTS BY ORGANIZATION TYPE



71
Participating Organizations

23
States Represented

10,670
Total Employees

352,750
Total Clients Served Annually

Why Focus on LGBTQ Inclusion?

At the core of All Children - All Families is the belief that LGBTQ inclusion is essential to achieving safety, permanency and well-being for youth. Here's why:

LGBTQ YOUTH are overrepresented in foster care and face increased risk of both negative experiences and outcomes.

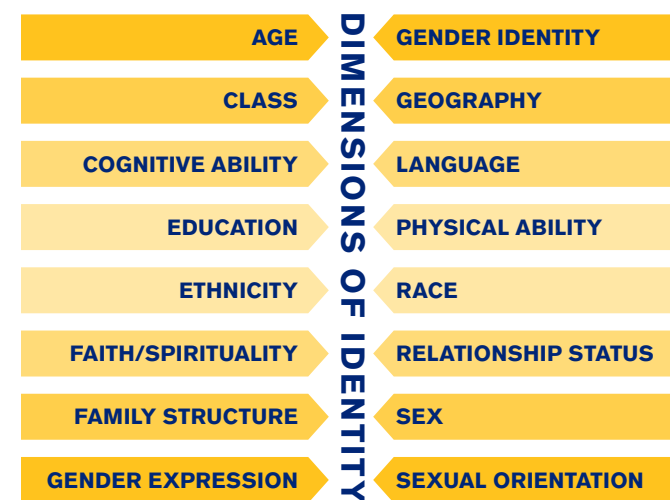
- Up to **30%** of youth in foster care are **LGBTQ**.¹
- LGBTQ youth are **2x more likely** to report being **treated poorly** while in care.²
- LGBTQ youth experience a **greater average number of placement disruptions**.²
- LGBTQ youth are **more likely** than their non-LGBTQ peers to be placed in **congregate care**.²

LGBTQ young adult leaders with experiences in foster care are speaking up and demanding change, and it's time for caring adults to join them.³

"Not only am I paving the way for LGBTQ Muslim youth of color in foster care, I am making myself proud in the process. My Blackness and my queerness go together, and I will never be willing to separate the two. I will continue to create pathways for foster children of color that are being silenced by the same system that was created to protect them."

—LUCINA
LGBTQ FosterClub member from Minnesota

SOGIE (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression) is an important part of a young person's identity and experience that is too often overlooked.



For LGBTQ youth moving through the child welfare system with multiple marginalized identities, experiences of heterocentrism and ciscentrism⁴ are compounded by other forms of oppression. Efforts to improve outcomes for youth must be intersectional — addressing the ways multiple forms of oppression overlap and compound experiences of discrimination.

**SEXISM CLASSISM
RACISM NATIVISM
AGEISM ABLEISM
SIZEISM CISSEXISM
COLORISM
ISLAMOPHOBIA**

LGBTQ ADULTS remain an untapped resource for child welfare agencies who continually need to expand their pool of potential foster and adoptive parents.

- Nearly **40 years of social science research** tell us that children raised by LGBTQ parents are doing just fine.
- Every major professional association** dedicated to the health and well-being of children and families supports LGBTQ parenting.
- 3.8 million LGBTQ millennials** are considering expanding their families in the coming years.⁵
- 84% of LGBTQ adults surveyed** would **consider adoption or foster care** in the future.⁶

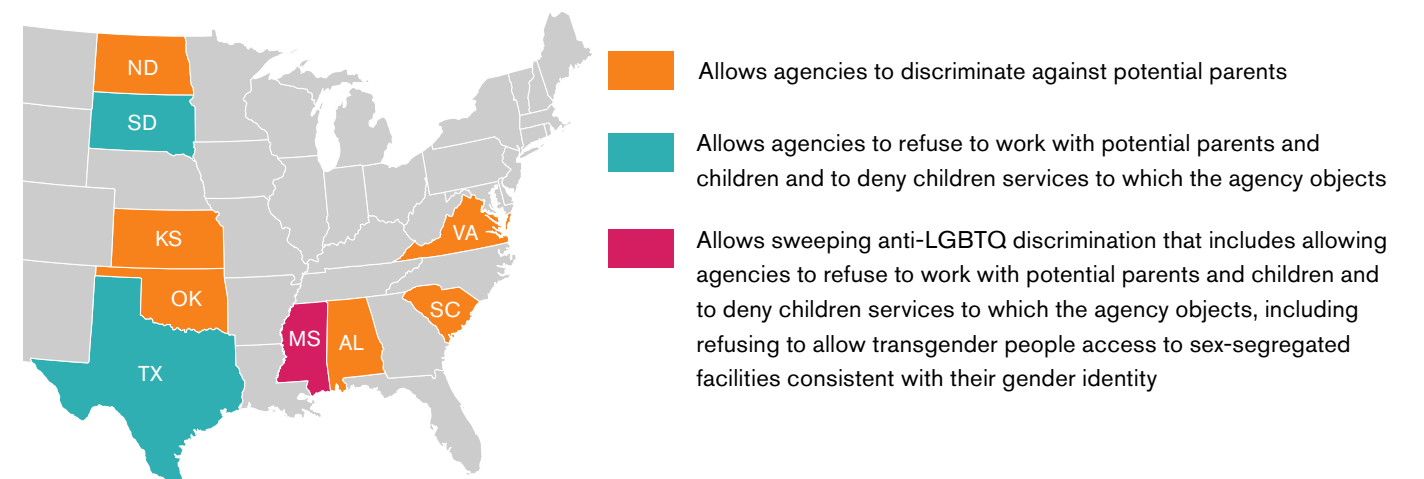
LGBTQ adults fear discrimination and bias from child welfare agencies when there are no explicit and intentional signs of LGBTQ inclusion.

- 70%** of LGBTQ adults surveyed were **concerned or unsure** about their ability to find a welcoming agency.
- 55%** feared being **turned away** because of their LGBTQ identity.
- Only 14%** know of an **LGBTQ-inclusive agency** in their community.
- 8%** of respondents who have applied for adoption or foster care **were denied** due to their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.

"Prior to becoming a foster dad, I was afraid of the process because I was certain I would have been humiliated for being transgender. In the past, I had to endure a lot of negative attitudes and verbal harassment simply for being transgender, and I was afraid of disclosing my gender history to my case manager for similar reasons. Since there were no other visible transgender and non-binary foster parents, I wasn't sure what I was going to encounter."

—TRANSGENDER FOSTER DAD
California

As of June 2019, 9 states have "license to discriminate" laws impacting child welfare.



Benchmarks of LGBTQ Inclusion

An overview of the policy and practice areas covered by the All Children - All Families (ACAF) Benchmarks of LGBTQ Inclusion is included below. For a complete list of benchmarks, see Appendix C.

1. NON-DISCRIMINATION

Establishing written policies to protect LGBTQ clients and employees from discrimination is an important first step in building an organization's foundation for LGBTQ inclusion. The non-discrimination benchmarks focus on three policies: client non-discrimination, employment non-discrimination and contracts.

2. STAFF TRAINING

LGBTQ staff training is a core component of an organization's efforts to create a culture that is inclusive and affirming of everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression (SOGIE). Staff training alone is not sufficient to achieve long-standing cultural change; however, when connected to policy changes, it can help give staff the skills and knowledge needed to translate policy into practice. The staff training benchmark has two components: ACAF webinar participation and completing an Ongoing Training Plan.

ACAF 2018-2019 Webinar Series:

ACAF delivered **20 webinars** in **five topical tracks** throughout the pilot year.

300+ organizations had staff members participate in ACAF webinars.

5,480+ professionals attended at least one ACAF webinar.

23,000+ hours of professional development through ACAF webinars reported by ACAF participants.

3. ROLLING OUT THE WELCOME MAT

"Rolling out the welcome mat" for LGBTQ children, youth and families means moving an organization beyond non-discrimination and taking concrete action to send an explicitly welcoming message. These benchmarks focus on LGBTQ inclusion in agency forms and other paperwork, visual cues within the agency and external messaging (such as on websites, brochures and social media).

4. PARENT BEST PRACTICES

Organizations that serve foster parents, adoptive parents, kinship caregivers and other caring adults should review key practices to ensure that LGBTQ adults are welcomed and included. These benchmarks focus on practice areas such as LGBTQ parent recruitment efforts, LGBTQ inclusion in parent trainings and conducting affirming homestudies with LGBTQ applicants.

5. YOUTH BEST PRACTICES

Organizations working to improve and create affirming practices with LGBTQ youth need to translate this commitment into a thorough scan of the agency environment and all areas of service provision. The policy and practice areas specific to youth services focus on removing the most common barriers faced by LGBTQ youth to ensure they are safe, affirmed and supported to achieve permanency.

6. SUSTAINABILITY & CAPACITY BUILDING

Transforming an organization's culture to ensure all stakeholders are welcomed and affirmed regardless of their SOGIE is hard work that can take years. Staff turnover, competing priorities and limited resources are among the many challenges that can get in the way of sustainable change. These policy and practice areas focus on the strategies that help support and build internal capacity for long-term and sustainable LGBTQ inclusion efforts.

7. LEADERSHIP & INNOVATION

Organizations that have established a solid foundation for LGBTQ inclusion within their own walls can lead the broader child welfare community forward in this area by sharing their lessons learned. This practice area focuses on the ways in which agencies can serve as leaders on the local, state and national levels.

"My team is motivated to solve problems and do better so that the families we serve always get our best. When they asked for more information and resources to deepen our engagement within our trans community, our longtime partnership with ACAF was invaluable. **The Benchmarks of LGBTQ Inclusion clearly outlined the concrete actions we could take to improve and ACAF staff were there to answer our questions along the way.**"

—JANICE GOLDWATER

Founder & Executive Director at
Adoptions Together, Silver Spring, MD

Participating Organizations by Tier of Recognition

All Children - All Families (ACAF) participating agencies are recognized in one of three Tiers of Recognition, depending on the extent to which they have implemented the ACAF Benchmarks of LGBTQ Inclusion. The benchmark requirements for each Tier of Recognition are outlined in the table below.

BENCHMARK REQUIREMENTS BY TIER OF RECOGNITION		
BUILDING FOUNDATION FOR INCLUSION	SOLID FOUNDATION FOR INCLUSION	INNOVATIVE INCLUSION
To achieve this level of recognition, core policy and practice areas must be in place for categories 1-3.	To achieve this level of recognition, all policy and practice areas must be in place for categories 1-6.	To achieve this level of recognition, all policy and practice areas must be in place in categories 1-6. In addition, agencies must demonstrate at least one example of innovation in practice areas 2-7.
1. Non-Discrimination	1. Non-Discrimination	1. Non-Discrimination
2. Staff Training	2. Staff Training	2. Staff Training
3. Rolling Out the Welcome Mat	3. Rolling Out the Welcome Mat	3. Rolling Out the Welcome Mat
	4. Parent Best Practices	4. Parent Best Practices
	5. Youth Best Practices	5. Youth Best Practices
	6. Sustainability & Capacity Building	6. Sustainability & Capacity Building
		7. Leadership & Innovation

Building Foundation for Inclusion

At this level, agencies are often at the early stages of inclusive policy and practice implementation. Benchmarks focus on establishing non-discrimination protections, providing staff with online learning related to LGBTQ topics and improving LGBTQ inclusion in forms, paperwork and messaging. This tier's requirements are meaningful and achievable for agencies beginning their work on LGBTQ inclusion.

Organization Name	Location
Adoption Exchange	
Coalition for Children, Youth & Families	Milwaukee, WI
CASA	
CASA Sacramento	Sacramento, CA
Private Child Welfare	
Adoption Connection	San Francisco, CA
Children's Home & Aid	Chicago, IL
Connecting Hearts Adoption Services	Orlando, FL
Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health - Philadelphia	Philadelphia, PA
A Greater Hope - Adoption & Foster Care Services	Victorville, CA
Hillside	Atlanta, GA
St. Andrew's Residential Programs for Youth, Inc - S.T.A.R. Programs	San Jose, CA
Public Child Welfare	
California Department of Social Services - Adoptions Services Bureau	Sacramento, CA
Minnesota Department of Human Services - Child Safety & Permanency Division	Saint Paul, MN
New Jersey Department of Children and Families - Child Protection & Permanency Division	Trenton, NJ
Public - Other Social Services	
Prince George's County Department of Social Services - Community Services Division	Upper Marlboro, MD
Prince George's County Department of Social Services - Family Investment Division	Upper Marlboro, MD

Solid Foundation for Inclusion

At this level, agencies have implemented the essential elements of LGBTQ inclusion in policies and affirming practices. Benchmarks go beyond basic non-discrimination protections to the policies and practices necessary to actively “roll out the welcome mat” to the LGBTQ community. These agencies have also assessed their practices specific to youth and parents to ensure LGBTQ inclusion and acted to make these efforts sustainable for the long-term. Organizations that achieve the Solid Tier receive the “You Are Welcome Here” Seal of Recognition.



Organization Name	Location
Adoption Exchange	
Adoption Center	Philadelphia, PA
The Adoption Exchange	Aurora, CO
Private Child Welfare	
A Baby Step Adoption Agency	Reading, PA
A Loving Choice Adoption Associates	Shrewsbury, NJ
Acadia Adoption Center	Bridgton, ME
Adoption Options	Denver, CO
Adoption Resource Associates	Cambridge, MA
Bayfront Youth & Family Services	Long Beach, CA
Child Crisis Arizona - Adoption & Foster Care	Mesa, AZ
Crittenton Service for Children & Families	Fullerton, CA
Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health - Georgia	Kennesaw, GA
Five Acres Foster/Adoptive Family Agency	West Covina, CA
Forever Families Through Adoption Inc.	Rye Brook, NY
Hathaway-Sycamores	Pasadena, CA
Jonathan's Place	Garland, TX

Organization Name	Location
Private Child Welfare	
Little City Foundation	Chicago, IL
Northeast Ohio Adoption Services	Warren, OH
Northwest Resource Associates	Seattle, WA
Optimist Youth Homes & Family Services	Los Angeles, CA
Pact, An Adoption Alliance - Placement Team & Adoption Agency Services	Emeryville, CA
Seneca Family of Agencies - Southern California	Anaheim Hills, CA
Uplift Family Services	Campbell, CA
Your Adoptive Family	Vashon, WA
Public Child Welfare	
Washington County Department of Social Services - Child Welfare Division	Hagerstown, MD
Public - Other Social Services	
Colorado Office of Children, Youth & Families - Domestic Violence Program	Denver, CO

Innovative Inclusion

At this level, agencies are pushing themselves beyond the solid foundation they have built and implementing innovative approaches to LGBTQ inclusion in each of the seven key policy and practice areas. Benchmarks at this level also require agencies to demonstrate leadership in areas like policy advocacy or organizational partnerships. Organizations that achieve the Innovative Tier receive the “Innovator” Seal of Recognition.

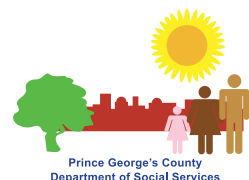


Organization Name	Location
CASA	
Child Advocates of Silicon Valley	Milpitas, CA
Norfolk CASA Inc.	Norfolk, VA
Texas CASA	Austin, TX
Private Child Welfare	
Adoption STAR	Amherst, NY
Adoptions From The Heart	Wynnewood, PA
Adoptions Together	Calverton, MD
Amara	Seattle, WA
Aviva Family and Children's Services - Foster Family & Adoption Services	Los Angeles, CA
Children's Home Society and Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota - Adoption & Foster Care Services	St. Paul, MN
Children's Home Society of Florida	Jacksonville, FL
Children's Service Society of Utah - Adoption & Kinship Care Services	Salt Lake City, UT
CHNK Behavioral Health	Covington, KY
Choice Network	Columbus, OH
Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health - Arizona	Phoenix, AZ
Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health - Florida	Orlando, FL
ExtraordinaryFamilies	Los Angeles, CA
FosterAdopt Connect	Independence, MO

Organization Name	Location
Private Child Welfare	
Fostering Futures	Ann Arbor, MI
Friends in Adoption	Poultney, VT
Hands Across The Water Inc.	Ann Arbor, MI
Jewish Family and Children's Service of Greater Philadelphia	Philadelphia, PA
Lighthouse Youth & Family Services - Out of Home Care Services	Cincinnati, OH
Lund Family Center - Adoption Department	Burlington, VT
Lutheran Child & Family Services of Illinois	River Forest, IL
Spence-Chapin Services to Families & Children	New York, NY
TLC Child & Family Services	Sebastopol, CA
Vista Del Mar Child & Family Services	Los Angeles, CA
Walden Family Services	San Diego, CA
Public Child Welfare	
Adams County Department of Human Services - Children & Family Services	Westminster, CO
Colorado Office of Children, Youth & Families - Child Welfare Division	Denver, CO
Prince George's County Department of Social Services - Child, Adult & Family Services	Upper Marlboro, MD
Ramsey County Department of Social Services - Adoption & Foster Care Services	St. Paul, MN



AFFIRM staff members, from left, Amena Johnson, Harry Morgan and Tia Brooks



ORGANIZATION PROFILE

Taking an Intersectional Approach at Prince George's County Department of Social Services

Amena Johnson has a message for the world.

"When I started doing this work 12 years ago, there weren't people who looked like me," says Amena Johnson, supervisor at AFFIRM, a program in Maryland's Prince George's County Department of Social Services (DSS) focused on LGBTQ youth and their families. "In thinking of my own identities as Black, female and lesbian, I realized that voices like mine were not out there. I want to show the world what a Black LGBTQ woman looks like."

"I have my wedding pictures up in my office for a reason," Johnson, 44, says. "I want the youth who come in to see those photos. I want them to see that not only can you have the life that you want, you can also be open about it."

AFFIRM is one of only a few child welfare programs in the country dedicated solely to supporting LGBTQ youth and their families. Its implementation is part of the LGBTQ2S Quality Improvement Center,* a groundbreaking national effort to build new evidence-based strategies for improving services for LGBTQ youth and families. AFFIRM works with young people in the foster care system whose families have trouble accepting their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression or who experience bullying in school or other forms of abuse. The program gives youth coping skills and teaches parents and caregivers how to validate and support their children's LGBTQ identities and experiences.

DSS serves a largely Black and Latinx clientele, and AFFIRM takes an intersectional approach to its work—a focus that is personally meaningful to Johnson and her AFFIRM team of Harry Morgan and Tia Brooks.

"In thinking of my own identities as Black, female and lesbian, I realized that voices like mine were not out there. I want to show the world what a Black LGBTQ woman looks like."

—AMENA JOHNSON

AFFIRM Supervisor at Prince George's County Department of Social Services

"If you are a person of color, you are dealing with systemic racism on top of LGBTQ bias that may be in your family and the world at large — as well as discrimination based on your immigrant status or other identities," Johnson says.

Morgan, AFFIRM caregiver specialist, grew up in the heart of Baltimore, where he was afraid to come out as gay because of the negative messages he heard about LGBTQ people. When friends asked him about his dating life, he says, "I would hesitate to respond for fear of losing them as friends."

So when Morgan, 33, had the chance to work at AFFIRM, he grabbed it. "I was excited about the opportunity to change ideas and minds so that everyone would feel welcome because I knew how it is not to feel welcome," Morgan says.

HRC's All Children - All Families (ACAF) program, which has recognized DSS at the Innovative Inclusion Tier of Recognition, has trained county staff, including AFFIRM staff members, as facilitators to provide LGBTQ competency training to hundreds of child, adult and family services staff throughout the large public agency and agency partners.

"We have to continually provide education and opportunities for staff to grow," Morgan says. "A lot of staff didn't know that outcomes for LGBTQ youth were so bad. We make it clear to caseworkers that LGBTQ kids in care need our help."

The AFFIRM program gives LGBTQ youth in the Prince George's County foster care system the skills they need to face adversity. "AFFIRM doesn't pretend that life is going to be all rosy," Johnson says. "It gives you the tools to cope."

Brooks, 33, AFFIRM youth specialist and ACAF trainer, holds eight-week sessions to help youth deal with stress and discrimination based on their intersecting identities and to build resilience.

"As a therapist, I believe it's important that there are affirming spaces for LGBTQ youth of color to let out the stress," she says. "And they need to feel that their therapist supports them."

The youth are asked to identify parents or other caregivers in their lives who could benefit from skills-building. "That's empowering in itself," Morgan says.

"When I share something with a foster parent, I've planted a seed in them that I am hopeful they will water," Morgan says. "They could water it two months from now or a year from now. But the seed is always there."

"As a therapist, I believe it's important that there are affirming spaces for LGBTQ youth of color to let out the stress, and they need to feel that their therapist supports them."

—TIA BROOKS

AFFIRM Youth Specialist at Prince George's County Department of Social Services

*AFFIRM is one of fourteen projects across four sites being designed, implemented and evaluated in the National Quality Improvement Center on Tailored Services, Placement Stability and Permanency for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, and Two-Spirit Children and Youth in Foster Care (QIC-LGBTQ2S), a five-year federally-funded project led by the Institute for Innovation and Implementation at the University of Maryland Baltimore School of Social Work. The QIC-LGBTQ2S is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau under grant #90CW1145. The contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the funders, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.



Nakiya Lynch, in front of Maryland's House of Delegates on Legislative Shadow Day for foster youth

YOUNG LEADER SPOTLIGHT: NAKIYA LYNCH

Discovering the Power of Black LGBTQ Role Models

“I had no queer adult roles models in my life. They showed me that it is possible to live a contented life as a queer Black person.”

—NAKIYA LYNCH

Nakiya Lynch, who is genderqueer and identifies as lesbian, felt out of place for a long time.

After Lynch's mom died when they were 12, they moved from Georgia to live with an aunt in Lanham, Maryland. When Lynch came out to their aunt, it went terribly and, for their own safety and well-being, they chose to cut off contact with their family. “I decided to be myself,” says Lynch, 20, who now lives on their own in Greenbelt, Maryland.

As a Black LGBTQ person, Lynch has also felt out of place among both LGBTQ and Black people.

“It's really hard,” they say. “We not only have our Blackness to consider but also our queerness. While Black people are your ethnicity, sometimes you can't be who you are in terms of your sexuality or gender identity because of prejudice. But when you get into LGBTQ spaces that are majority white, you feel like a little piece of you is missing or you are completely discriminated against.”

So imagine Lynch's relief and delight when they walked into the offices of AFFIRM, a program devoted to helping LGBTQ youth and families in foster care in Prince George's County, Maryland.

They saw the rainbow, trans and pansexual flags flying high in what AFFIRM staffers call their “gayborhood.” All three AFFIRM staff members are LGBTQ people of color.

Lynch felt that they had come home. “I had no queer adult roles models in my life,” they say. “They showed me that it is possible to live a contented life as a queer Black person.”

Lynch says that it's important for child welfare providers to “normalize” the experiences of youth like them and to provide mentorship opportunities for young people who are under their care.

AFFIRM has helped Lynch develop leadership skills. They received a small grant to organize an event at Pride this year that will be a chance for LGBTQ youth under age 21 who feel isolated or depressed to forge connections with each other.

AFFIRM also brought Lynch to a national event where they say they were “able to discover my true passion” — opening an LGBTQ center in Prince George's County. As a first step toward their goal, they plan to major in social work when they attend Bowie State University, a historically Black public university in Maryland, this fall.

Lynch has a message for other queer Black youth: “Don't be afraid. The world looks like it's scary but I promise it's not. The sooner you get out into it and see other people like you, you will find that you are not alone and that it will be easier to live your life.

“Just do it and be yourself,” they say.



Nakiya Lynch addresses national leaders of youth-serving organizations at Human Rights Campaign.



ACAF team members, from left, Karey Scheyd and Alison Delpercio, and Children's Home Society of Florida staff members, from left, Garry Bevel, John Miller, Arminda Jones, (former staff member) Rebecca Gonzalez, Elizabeth Phelps, Alexandra Fields, Rene Ledford and (former staff member) Sam Oliver



ORGANIZATION PROFILE

Leading with Love, Grace & Forgiveness at Children's Home Society of Florida



CHS staffers, top row from left, James Oliver, Kimberly Cook, René Ledford, Kymberly Pleasants, and Christopher Bonaros. Bottom row from left, Heather Dauphiny, Linda McLaughlin and MaryKay Temmel

Growing up in Kentucky, Kymberly Cook, who is cisgender and identifies as straight, had two gay friends who were bullied and shunned. One nearly died by suicide.

These experiences drove Cook, 54, the senior vice president of operations for the northern region of the Children's Home Society (CHS) of Florida, to enter the child welfare field and to embrace the agency's efforts to be more welcoming and inclusive.

"We see the struggles that children and families go through, the challenges that our staff have with their own children who struggle with gender identity and acceptance and the suicide rate of LGBTQ kids," she says. "To see and hear the stories of these children spoke to our heart."

CHS also knew that staff weren't meeting the needs of transgender youth in their residential programs — from making appropriate room assignments to talking sensitively with youth who came out while in their care. The agency also needed a policy to prohibit referrals to practitioners of conversion therapy.

When a core group began the process of earning recognition from HRC's All Children - All Families (ACAF) — CHS has now been recognized at the Innovative Inclusion Tier of Recognition — "it became about changing the face of CHS so that we would be known for acceptance and inclusion. We wanted to be the first statewide agency in Florida to say 'all children are accepted here,'" says Cook.

The Orlando-based agency has a \$118 million budget and provides prevention, diversion and foster care case management services and a wide range of supportive services.

The agency's leadership embraced the inclusion journey, which sent a powerful signal to CHS's 2,000 staff members. Still, some didn't want to take the ACAF training because of concerns that it would conflict with their religious beliefs.

"CHS's consistent message has been that while we respect everyone's personal beliefs, as a team member you have to be willing to uphold our views on nondiscrimination, create a safe and inclusive environment for all of our clients and wholeheartedly support our mission, vision and values," says René Ledford, 59, director of quality improvement and training.

And Cook says that it helped to share the many startling national statistics on disparities faced by LGBTQ youth in care, including higher rates of homelessness stemming from family rejection.

Walk into a CHS office today, and you will see ACAF posters and inclusive photos. On "dress-down" day, staff wear HRC T-shirts. Staff are encouraged to give their pronouns when they introduce themselves.

CHS was the first agency in the country to participate in ACAF's Training of Facilitators Program, which builds an organization's internal training capacity by preparing a cohort of staff to lead LGBTQ trainings. The training focuses on such issues as the needs of parents, caregivers and youth who are navigating the child welfare system and issues related to sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, says master trainer Garry Bevel, 38, who is also a children's ombudsman in CHS's northeast division and supports the ACAF initiative across Florida.

The ACAF trainings have helped staff work sensitively and effectively with families who believe being gay is a sin. In one family, the father especially struggled with accepting his gay son, and staff worked to prevent the child from being removed from the family and placed into out-of-home care. "We said, 'This is what your child is going through. We're not trying to change your biblical beliefs, but we don't want your family to be torn apart,'" Cook says. "The family was afraid. Knowing that we were walking hand in hand with them helped."

Over time, the parents grew more accepting and the child remained at home.

It's stories like these that fuel the staff's drive to make the world a better place for LGBTQ young people.

"I just have to fight against injustice," says Ledford. "It's not fair that LGBTQ kids are so marginalized. As long as I have the voice, the skills and the ability, I'm going to fight for their rights."

Bevel himself went through a rough patch with his dad when he came out to his family, but his father is more accepting today. "I asked my dad if he would be willing to talk to another dad of a queer kid," Bevel says. "And he said 'yes.' Seeing his evolution reminds me how important it is never to give up on folks. People need a certain level of love, grace and forgiveness."

Bevel's work at CHS is deeply gratifying to him. "The thought that someone somewhere might have a better outcome because we are bringing LGBTQ issues out of the silence is all I need," he says. "Every single day is worth it."

"The thought that someone somewhere might have a better outcome because we are bringing LGBTQ issues out of the silence is all I need... Every single day is worth it."

—GARRY BEVEL

Children's Ombudsperson at Children's Home Society of Florida



The Shoop family, from left, Andrew, Jeremiah, Aniya, Jahmai, Drew and Carrie

FAMILY SPOTLIGHT: THE SHOOP FAMILY

Sharing Lessons of Love & Acceptance

“They told me that they loved me and that their love would never change. They said it was okay and that I don’t have to be ashamed.”

—JAHMAI SHOOP

Jahmai Shoop, 19, had been in and out of 20 foster homes since the age of 1 — “they were really horrible,” he says — when he came to live with Carrie and Andrew Shoop, who adopted Jahmai and, later, his biological sister.

When he was 16, Jahmai Shoop decided to come out as gay to his family. He was scared. He knew kids like him whose families kicked them out. But this would not be Jahmai Shoop’s fate — far from it.

“I was really nervous to say it out loud and tell them,” says Jahmai Shoop of Macclenny, Florida, a small town of only 6,500 people outside Jacksonville. “They told me that they loved me and that their love would never change. They said it was okay and that I don’t have to be ashamed.”

Says his dad, Andrew Shoop, 40, a public school teacher, “I adopted Jahmai for him, not for who he was going to love or marry. There is nothing that can change that love.”

Not everyone was as supportive initially. Some of Jahmai Shoop’s extended family called him “an abomination” and, at first, his grandfather refused to hug him. “These are some of the things that people have to deal with,” says his mom, Carrie Shoop, 42. “They say, ‘I love you, but ...’ ”

Carrie Shoop connects this to experiences she has had as a white person raising Black children. “You begin to see prejudice in a way you never have before as part of the majority culture,” she says. “Families who are raising LGBTQ kids and/or thinking about adopting and becoming a transracial family need to know that you have to communicate and not be afraid to talk about hard issues.”

The Shoops had robust support from the Children’s Home Society of Florida (CHS) — which has attained the All Children - All Families Innovative Inclusion Tier of Recognition — while navigating difficult conversations after Jahmai Shoop came out. CHS counselors were there for them as they helped extended family members understand and accept his sexual orientation. “You can ask CHS anything or come to them with any issue,” Carrie Shoop says. “They are a safe place to talk about the hard times or fear about raising a child in the LGBTQIA+ community in a city that is not very friendly.”

When Jahmai Shoop came out, CHS had just started a SOGIE (sexual orientation, gender identity and expression) support group for youth in care.

CHS staff told the youth in the group that “we are all part of the same community,” Jahmai Shoop says. “I shared some things with them that I haven’t shared with anyone else. It felt like a safe space. We can say anything there.”

“They helped me learn more about the community and the different things I can do to help others,” he says. “If I see someone struggling, I suggest we talk. I learned what all the SOGIE letters meant and what the rainbow flag meant. I felt really good about it.”

Jahmai Shoop is the only member of his SOGIE support group who has been adopted, says Carrie Shoop, who volunteers at CHS as a family advocate — teaching a course for foster and adoptive families and supporting families during the adoption process. “We have several kids in care who are transgender, who are gay, lesbian or bisexual, and they struggle to find families,” she says.

“I watch families who are looking for kids flip through the books. If they suspect a child is LGBTQ, they just quickly turn the page,” she says. “That’s why our children languish in the foster care system — because we have so many people who look at people in the LGBTQ community as less. I want them to be seen as equal, if not more.”

Carrie Shoop is taking the lessons learned from CHS and spreading the word to other families. “That is why I am so passionate about teaching adult classes — to share that all of our kids deserve a family. That they are no less. That they are so amazing.”



Jahmai Shoop



Adams County Department of Human Services staff members Edie Winters, Angela Wilson, Shane Longton, KP Longton, Michelle Cox and Anna Carmichael



ORGANIZATION PROFILE

Deepening Empathy at Adams County Children & Families Services Division

“I wish all kids could have what I had — a family that can embrace unconditional love and support.”

—ANGELA REYES WILSON

Supervisor of Foster Care at Adams County Department of Human Services

“I had the most amazing coming out experience,” says Angela Reyes Wilson, who is cisgender and identifies as a lesbian. “I wish all kids could have what I had — a family that can embrace unconditional love and support.”

But, sadly, that is not always the case, as Wilson, 43, knows all too well. As supervisor of foster care at the Adams County Department of Human Services’ Children and Family Services Division, Wilson knows that stigma can make it difficult for some LGBTQ families to become foster parents. “You have to be brave to show up and face rejection,” she says.

Doing the work to make the Colorado agency more welcoming and inclusive was therefore “a no-brainer” for Wilson.

The public child welfare agency, which has 280 staff members, is dedicated to achieving safety, permanency and well-being for children. The county government’s vision is to be the most innovative and inclusive in America, so perhaps it wasn’t surprising that when Wilson and her colleagues brought HRC’s All Children - All Families (ACAF) project to the department’s management team, it was approved. But staff were surprised at the speed of the approval — unusual in a large public agency. “I was pretty excited about that,” says KP Longton, 36, an adoption caseworker.

Not surprisingly, the team spearheading the efforts at the county encountered some bumps in the road. “It takes so much to make change in a large organization,” Longton says. “There’s a lot of red tape.” For example, the agency couldn’t change its employee nondiscrimination policy to include sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression on its own. The entire county government’s policy had to change, and that took time.

The core group of change-makers also faced some resistance from staff who didn’t want to take the ACAF trainings because they felt it conflicted with their religious beliefs. “That was hard,” Wilson says. “These are people who sit near me — to know that everyone is not in the same place as I am was a little rough.”

She says that’s why it’s important to assemble a team to push the work through: “When someone was feeling discouraged, there was someone else who could see the sunlight at the end of the tunnel.”

But there were also unexpected benefits to the staff working to gain ACAF recognition — the agency has now been recognized at the Innovative Tier of Recognition. “We’ve created allies with those who are not in the LGBTQ community,” Longton says.

One such ally is Jeremy Sawyer, 37, the agency’s continuous quality improvement and training resource manager. “Now I have the tools to be able to speak up and advocate and not sit idly by in the face of bigotry,” he says. “I can show up and be a good ally.”

Sawyer says that he has even learned lessons from ACAF that he has applied to his family. He told his 8-year-old son, for example, “I accept everybody — whether a man loves a man or a woman loves a woman. I wouldn’t have been able to have that conversation if it weren’t for All Children - All Families.”

It’s even been a learning opportunity for some LGBTQ staff.

“Going on this journey has made me realize my own limitations as someone who is part of the community — like understanding what our trans community is experiencing — things that I take for granted that are not afforded to them,” Wilson says. “It helps me come from a more empathetic place.”

Sawyer says other large agencies contemplating gaining ACAF recognition should be prepared “that it’s going to get harder before it gets easier. It’s a long journey but you need to stay the course.”

Longton agrees. “Social change is not easy,” she says. “And never give up.”

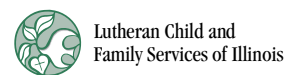
“Now I have the tools to be able to speak up and advocate and not sit idly by in the face of bigotry. I can show up and be a good ally.”

—JEREMY SAWYER

Quality Assurance Manager at Adams County Department of Human Services



Lutheran Child & Family Services of Illinois staff members, from left, Beverly Jones and Sara LoCoco meet with Illinois State Senator Suzy Glowiak (D-24th District) on the agency's advocacy day.



ORGANIZATION PROFILE

Doing the Right Thing Grounded in Faith at Lutheran Child & Family Services of IL

Beverly Jones, vice president and chief operating officer at Lutheran Child and Family Services (LCFS) of Illinois, had a decision to make.

After she joined the organization 11 years ago, she learned that the agency, which was affiliated with the conservative Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, had a policy against placing children with same-sex foster or adoptive parents.

"I was appalled," Jones says. "My best friend is a lesbian." She says her own experiences as an African-American woman who was not always welcomed made her sensitive to discrimination and exclusion of all people. And she says her Christian faith taught her that "we are all God's people, and God loves us all."

"I decided that if we did not change, I was not going to stay at the agency."

A lot was riding on the decision, and not just for Jones. If the agency opened its arms to the LGBTQ community, it would lose its affiliation with the national denomination. But if it didn't, it would lose its contract with the state of Illinois to deliver services to children in need — Illinois required its contractors to have a nondiscrimination policy that included sexual orientation.

LCFS, which provides foster care, adoption and clinical and other services to more than 2,000 children and families a year, debated what to do. At times, those conversations were "hard, painful and ugly," says Jones, 70.

To do what's best for children and families, LCFS decided to embrace inclusion and diversity and update its policies to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation. Jones stayed.

"For me, it's a matter of doing what's right and what's just. It's very consistent with what I feel Christ would do."

—MIKE BERTAND

President and CEO of Lutheran Child & Family Services of Illinois

Since then, the agency has revised these policies further to protect clients from discrimination based on gender identity and gender expression. As President and CEO Mike Bertrand, 53, says, "For me, it's a matter of doing what's right and what's just. It's very consistent with what I feel Christ would do."

Still, it wasn't easy. A Lutheran pastor on the agency's Board of Trustees resigned. A handful of Lutheran congregations that had donated to LCFS dropped their support. One congregation said that LCFS could no longer hold meetings there. Some of the agency's 300 staff quit.

Others struggled to do the right thing. A trans girl arrived at LCFS' emergency shelter in a rural part of Illinois after her foster family kicked her out for being trans. Some shelter staff resisted using her pronouns and opposed housing her with other girls. The shelter's director sprang into action, sharing All Children - All Family (ACAF) resources with staff. They took ACAF trainings. They watched videos. They processed what they learned. "ACAF is a wonderful support system in helping you navigate this together," Jones says.

Ultimately, the staff became the girl's advocate. "I'm really proud of the work they've done and continue to do," Jones says.

There were other upsides to the new policy of inclusion at LCFS — which has been recognized as an Innovator by ACAF.

"We have gained so much," Jones says. "New learning, new partnerships, new donors, new prospective foster and adoptive families for children and, most importantly, a supportive and affirming environment for children and youth whose sexual orientation and gender identity and expression have been rejected previously by so many."

Some foster parents who have opened their homes to LGBTQ youth say their lives have become richer because of the kids who have been placed with them. "Their faith drives them to want to make society better," Jones says.

Bertrand and Jones agree that while LCFS has come a long way, the work is never done. "You have to continue to reinforce with staff that the culture is welcoming to all — in a respectful way," says Bertrand. "Not to invalidate people's beliefs but to say, 'you need to reconcile those beliefs with the work that you do and, if you can't, this might not be the place for you.'"

As Jones puts it, "This is a journey. You never stop. Especially now in this political climate we are in, it's even more important to stay vigilant."

"This is a journey. You never stop. Especially now in this political climate we are in, it's even more important to stay vigilant."

—BEVERLY JONES

Vice President and Chief Operating Officer at Lutheran Child & Family Services of Illinois



Fostering Futures staff members: far left, Ashley Bennett; top row from left, Jordan Barnes, Tabitha DeCoster, Lorell Walker, Emily Adamek, Tammy Talvite; bottom row, Katie Boeving, Lorren Karns, Julia Szilagyi, Casey Williamson, Brittany Valliere, Judy Truong and Jennifer DeVivo



ORGANIZATION PROFILE

Celebrating the Strengths of LGBTQ Parents at Fostering Futures

Jennifer DeVivo, the executive director of Fostering Futures, a small foster care and adoption agency in Ann Arbor, Michigan, once worked at a Catholic adoption agency that enforced exclusionary practices toward the LGBTQ community. She witnessed firsthand the pain inflicted on prospective LGBTQ adoptive parents and youth in care.

“I find it really heartbreaking that there are kids who need homes but are not getting them because of an agency’s firmly held religious beliefs,” she says. “It’s unfair that kids are sitting in shelters or group homes because of those beliefs and the agency thinks that’s okay.”

That agency’s discriminatory views also meant that DeVivo wasn’t able to give children and youth complete information about their care. She couldn’t, for example, give a girl going to live with a gay couple — who had to pretend they were just roommates — an understanding of who her parents were. “It was absurd,” DeVivo says. “It was never talked about. I didn’t have any support in the agency to address it.”

These experiences drove DeVivo, 46, to leave the Catholic agency and open her own foster care and adoption organization 10 years ago. She hired staff committed to welcoming all from day one. About 25%-35% of Fostering Future’s adoptions each year are with LGBTQ couples.

“It feeds my soul,” she says. “It’s the right thing to do.”

The payoff has been tremendous.

“Our LGBTQ families are vocal advocates and champions for the needs of their foster children,” she says. “They use their experience of being

marginalized and having to fight for their rights and channel all this knowledge into fighting for their children.

“I think of babies recovered from neonatal drug addiction who are now in grade school and thriving... LGBTQ couples who adopted sibling groups of 4 and 5 children, all with trauma, so they could grow up together...” says DeVivo. “There are so many stories like this that would not exist if it were not for our commitment and work with this community and their big hearts, incredible tenacity and their advocacy for children in foster care.”

Fostering Futures has been recognized at the Innovative Inclusion Tier of Recognition by All Children - All Families, and its commitment to inclusion has helped recruit staff. “I was so excited to come here,” says Katie Boeving, 29, licensing team lead. “Being an ally has been important to me for as long as I can remember. I feel incredibly fortunate to work for an agency whose values and mission align with my own personal values.”

It has also been meaningful to Brittany Valliere, 35, the agency’s co-founder and chief financial officer.

“When I get to interact with people who are so hurt being discriminated against and they are so grateful to have an agency where they are accepted and see people like themselves, it’s been really impactful for me,” she says.

LGBTQ families won a victory in March when the state of Michigan settled an American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) lawsuit against its Department of Health and Human Services. Under the agreement, faith-based adoption and foster care agencies that receive taxpayer funds will no longer be allowed to discriminate against same-sex couples.

“Until now, it has always been a choice in Michigan whether agencies treat people equally, and there is no doubt that allowing discrimination against the LGBTQ community has cost us many good, loving foster and adoptive homes for our children needing placement,” says DeVivo, who testified against the license-to-discriminate legislation when the Michigan Legislature was debating it. “No longer are agencies like ours special because we do NOT discriminate against LGBTQ clients!”

As Boeving puts it, “It’s amazing that there are more loving homes for children. The kids just want people who love them.”

“Being an ally has been important to me for as long as I can remember. I feel incredibly fortunate to work for an agency whose values and mission align with my own personal values.”

—KATIE BOEVING

Licensing Team Lead at Fostering Futures

“Our LGBTQ families are vocal advocates and champions for the needs of their foster children. They use their experience of being marginalized and having to fight for their rights and channel all this knowledge into fighting for their children.”

—JENNIFER DEVIVO

Executive Director at Fostering Futures



Rick Wurth of CHNK Behavioral Health at the Cincinnati PRIDE parade



ORGANIZATION PROFILE

Embracing Growth & Change at CHNK Behavioral Health



Agency staffers Megan, left, and Mia Neal

When Mia and Megan Neal interviewed for therapist positions last year at Children’s Home of Northern Kentucky/CHNK Behavioral Health, the first document they were handed was about HRC’s All Children - All Families (ACAF) project.

It blew them away. “It made us feel that this is the place for us!” says Megan Neal, 33, who’s been married to Mia for nearly 2 years. “It was the driving force for us to want to work for CHNK Behavioral Health.”

Says Mia Neal, also 33, “If there isn’t a welcome mat or people saying ‘I am supportive, I am an advocate, I am inclusive,’ I tend to assume that they are not. It’s very important to have physical representation of your support. When your whole society is heteronormative, it’s a very big deal.”

It wasn’t always so at Mia’s employer.

Five years ago, the agency’s new CEO, Rick Wurth, learned that his nonprofit agency, based in Covington, Kentucky, lagged behind peers in nearby Cincinnati when it came to inclusive policies and programs. Employees’ same-sex or domestic partners had no health benefits.

Those who openly identified as LGBTQ had no protections. There were no visual cues about inclusion or diversity.

Around the same time, Wurth, 51, came across the staggering statistic that up to 40% of homeless youth nationwide identify as LGBTQ and that LGBTQ youth are overrepresented in foster care.

“I heard about how LGBTQ kids were treated at other children’s homes or that they were shown the door by their families because of their sexual

orientation or gender identity. It lit a fire in me,” he says. “It can’t be underestimated how traumatic it can be for a kid without the proper supports to face people who see them as an affront to family, an affront to faith, an affront to all things good and decent.”

In researching what to do about these issues, Wurth’s staff learned about ACAF and the resources it offers. With its Board of Trustees fully in support, the agency — which operates two residential care programs and offers outpatient mental health and substance abuse services — updated its employee policies and revamped programs to be more inclusive and welcoming. It now displays Pride flags and materials from LGBTQ organizations. It also lets vendors know about the agency’s values and, as the Neals can attest, ensures that potential employees are clear about those values from the very beginning.

Overall, its new approach has paid dividends. Though the agency did lose some donors, Wurth says, it also attracted new ones because of its affirming culture. And he says that “we have become more of a destination for young professionals who see the embrace of inclusion as the right thing to do.”

Megan Neal agrees. “I have no pressure to hide who I am — being able to be more open about my personal life has made my job easier and more enjoyable,” says Neal, who does individual therapy as an outpatient services therapist and raises, with Mia, their two birth children and four foster children.

Mia Neal, who, as a day treatment therapist, conducts group therapy sessions with elementary-age children, says that the process of making the agency more welcoming and inclusive has “changed me for the better and made me a better social worker and a better therapist.” As someone who lacked the support of teachers and church members when she came out, she says, “It’s been eye-opening in the best possible way to see the change in these kiddos and to see them thrive and grow when they are in an inclusive environment.”

This year the agency is being recognized at the Innovative Inclusion Tier of Recognition — it is the only organization in Kentucky to receive ACAF recognition — but Wurth and his team know that the work of inclusion is never done. “If CHNK Behavioral Health is going to be true to its mission of providing hope to children and families, we have to embrace growth and change and make change part of the very fiber of who we are.”

“It’s been eye-opening in the best possible way to see the change in these kiddos and to see them thrive and grow when they are in an inclusive environment.”

—MIA NEAL
Day Treatment Therapist at
CHNK Behavioral Health

Take Action

Spread the Word about ACAF

Help other child welfare professionals learn about All Children - All Families (ACAF) by sharing these videos today! Find them at hrc.org/acaf.



All Children - All Families 2019



Sam & Nicole's Story

Become an Official ACAF Participant

Interested agencies can [request to participate online](#) and the ACAF team will be in touch with more information and next steps. The participation process is detailed in Appendix B.

Subscribe to ACAF Monthly E-Newsletter

ACAF's [monthly newsletter](#) offers best-practice resources based on challenges and inquiries that you and your peers are currently navigating — allowing you to stay ahead of the curve when it comes to supporting and serving LGBTQ youth and families.

View ACAF Webinars

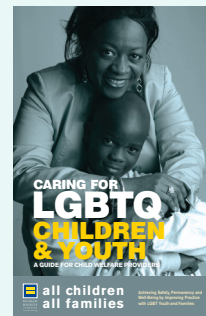
More than [20 free webinars](#) on LGBTQ inclusion are available on demand in these topic areas:

- Core Webinars on LGBTQ Inclusion
- Best Practices Serving LGBTQ Youth
- Best Practices Serving LGBTQ Parents
- For Caregivers
- For Leadership

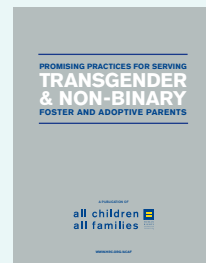
Bring ACAF Training to Your Agency

In addition to the formal participation process, ACAF offers [staff training](#) on LGBTQ competency that can be customized for the needs of individual agencies and is offered on a fee-for-service basis. ACAF offers two options: a Training of Facilitators to build an agency's internal training capacity and a three-part, customizable Training Series for which ACAF Master Trainers provide training for agency staff.

Read Other ACAF Publications



The Caring for LGBTQ Children & Youth Guide for child welfare providers covers essential information on care and support of LGBTQ children and youth in out-of-home care.



Promising Practices for Serving Transgender & Non-Binary Foster & Adoptive Parents is a first-of-its-kind comprehensive guide for child welfare professionals seeking to intentionally recruit, certify and support transgender and non-binary adults to serve as resource parents for young people in care.



The Beginners guide to LGBTQ Inclusion is designed to give child welfare professionals a place to start when implementing a system free of discrimination for LGBTQ youth and parents.

Appendix A: About the 2018-2019 Pilot

In June 2018, All Children - All Families (ACAF) launched a pilot of its new participation process and tools. Formal invitations to participate were sent via email to all agencies previously engaged with the ACAF project. Leading national organizations called on the child welfare field to commit to LGBTQ inclusion and take advantage of ACAF's new resources (see Appendix D for organization statements).

The pilot included these new elements:

- **Enhanced Benchmarks of LGBTQ Inclusion:** To keep up with emerging best practices in the field, ACAF revised its recognition criteria by creating three separate tier levels for its participants to pursue. This allowed the project to simultaneously raise the bar to encourage innovation from agencies that have been participating for years and provide “easy wins” for new agencies.
- **New & Improved Online Self-Assessment Tool:** Participants assess their policies and practices using ACAF's online survey tool, which asks questions specific to each of the Benchmarks of LGBTQ inclusion. This year the assessment was upgraded to reflect the enhanced benchmarks and allow agencies to grade themselves as they work toward one of the three recognition levels.
- **Multi-Track Webinar Series:** To increase access to LGBTQ-related professional development content, ACAF designed and delivered more than 20 webinar offerings over the course of the year. These webinars were free and available to all interested child welfare professionals.
- **Interactive Group Technical Assistance Sessions:** To help child welfare professionals learn from each other, ACAF facilitated virtual technical assistance sessions focused on each specific benchmark requirement.
- **Annual Cycle for Engagement:** To provide participants with an implementation plan for their LGBTQ inclusion efforts, ACAF launched its new annual cycle with suggested process points and deadlines along the way.

Participants by Organization Type

Seventy-one organizations took part in the pilot year of ACAF's new participation process. The majority of participating organizations (61 organizations) were either public child welfare agencies (county- or state-level departments of child and family services) or private child welfare agencies contracted with states or counties to serve youth in out-of-home care and/or provide licensing, placement and matching services with foster and/or adoptive parents and other caregivers. These organizations were assessed on each of these benchmark areas: Non-Discrimination, Staff Training, Rolling Out the Welcome Mat, Parent Best Practices, Youth Best Practices, Sustainability & Capacity-Building and Leadership & Innovation.

Tailored assessment questions on benchmarks for adoption exchanges (3 organizations) and CASA affiliates (4 organizations) were provided to replace other best practice questions that did not apply.

A detailed description of all benchmarks is included in Appendix C.

Participating on Behalf of an Agency Division

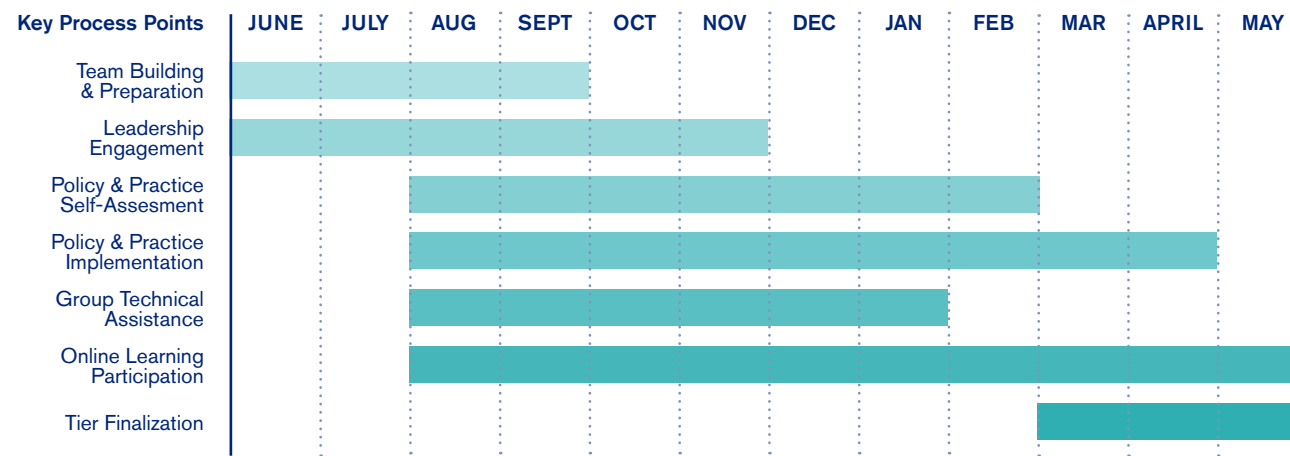
Organizations could indicate whether they were participating on behalf of an entire organization or a specific division within the organization. If a specific division is represented, this is indicated in the organization's name in the official tier listing. In the case of three divisions outside the scope of child welfare, the assessment focused on the core benchmark areas easily applicable across all service areas: Non-Discrimination, Staff Training, Rolling Out the Welcome Mat, Sustainability & Capacity-Building and Leadership & Innovation.

Participating on Behalf of Multiple Locations

Many participating organizations offer services from multiple locations, some spanning multiple cities, counties and/or states. In these cases, organizations certified that all policies and practices reported apply to every location. The headquarter/main location is listed in the official tier listing.

Appendix B: Participation Process

All Children - All Families (ACAF) engages with agencies on an annual cycle. The information below outlines the main steps that ACAF participants take during the year-long engagement with the project.



Team Building & Preparation

First, ACAF encourages agencies to select a team of staff members who will collaborate on leading the organization's participation process. Depending on an agency's size, this can range from a 2-person team to a 15-person steering committee (for larger, public agencies).

Leadership Engagement

Ensuring buy-in from leadership is essential to any organizational change effort. To assist in this important step, ACAF provides an "Executive Briefing" webinar tailored to agency leaders. All participating agencies are required to have at least one senior leader attend a briefing during the participation process and are encouraged to do so no later than November.

Policy & Practice Self-Assessment

Each participating agency receives a unique link for the ACAF online Agency Self-Assessment. This tool guides an agency's review of the Benchmarks of LGBTQ Inclusion. Agencies are required to complete the assessment by February of each year, at which point ACAF works with agencies to finalize their responses for that year's cycle.

Policy & Practice Implementation

As an agency completes its self-assessment, necessary policy and practice changes will be clear. Throughout this stage, ACAF resources such as model policies and group technical assistance sessions are available to assist in implementing the improvements necessary to achieve the Benchmarks of LGBTQ Inclusion in a particular tier.

Group Technical Assistance

ACAF leads group technical assistance (TA) sessions for participating agencies, which focus on specific benchmarks and serve as an opportunity for agencies to learn from their peers as they navigate the work of LGBTQ capacity-building. These TA sessions begin in August and run through January of each annual cycle.

Online Learning Participation

A key component of ACAF participation is the professional development available to agency staff through the project's annual webinar series. Participating agencies are required to meet specific participation goals based on the tier they are pursuing.

Tier Finalization

After agencies submit their self-assessment, ACAF works with them to finalize their responses. This process includes opportunities to further discuss policy and practices, provide updates to ACAF and be informed of the agency's final Tier of Recognition (by mid-May). Each year ACAF celebrates all participating agencies in its annual report.

Appendix C: Benchmarks of LGBTQ Inclusion

All Children - All Families participating agencies that meet specific benchmark requirements are recognized in one of three tiers: Building Foundation for Inclusion, Solid Foundation for Inclusion and Innovative Inclusion.

The requirements for each tier are indicated below in the following way:

- Building Foundation for Inclusion: **Policy and practice areas in bold text.**
- Solid Foundation for Inclusion: All policy and practice areas, except italicized text.
- Innovative Inclusion: *All policy and practice areas including italicized text.* (Note: While multiple examples of innovations are listed in practice areas 3-7, agencies must demonstrate only one in each area to meet the Innovative Tier.)

1. NON-DISCRIMINATION

Establishing written policies to protect LGBTQ clients and employees from discrimination is an important first step in building an organization's foundation for LGBTQ inclusion. The non-discrimination benchmarks focus on three policies:

- Agency's client non-discrimination policy is inclusive of "sexual orientation," "gender identity" and "gender expression" and communicated to staff and clients.**
- Agency's employment non-discrimination policy is inclusive of "sexual orientation" and "gender identity."**
- Agency's contract language includes explicit LGBTQ non-discrimination standards.

2. STAFF TRAINING

LGBTQ staff training is a core component of an organization's efforts to create a culture that is inclusive and affirming of everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression (SOGIE). Staff training alone is not sufficient to achieve long-standing cultural change; however, when connected to policy changes, it can help give staff the skills and knowledge needed to translate policy into practice. The staff training benchmark has two components and the specific requirements for each depend on which Tier of Recognition an agency is striving to achieve:

- Agency meets minimum participation requirements for All Children - All Families Webinar Series.**
- Agency completes an Ongoing Training Plan detailing the ways in which LGBTQ topics are integrated into its ongoing staff training efforts. *This plan must meet minimum training length requirements for Innovative Tier.*

3. ROLLING OUT THE WELCOME MAT

"Rolling out the welcome mat" for LGBTQ children, youth and families means moving an organization beyond non-discrimination and taking concrete action to send an explicitly welcoming message. These benchmarks focus on LGBTQ inclusion in agency forms and other paperwork, visual cues within the agency and external messaging (such as on websites, brochures and social media).

All agency-controlled forms and internal documents use LGBTQ-inclusive language, including:

- Agency forms use gender-neutral language (e.g., "Parent 1" and "Parent 2" rather than "Mother" and "Father") where applicable.**
- Agency forms provide the opportunity to indicate a gender other than "Male" or "Female."
- Agency forms provide the opportunity to indicate a preferred/ chosen name that is different than a person's legal name.
- Agency forms provide the opportunity to indicate the pronouns (e.g., she/her, he/him, they/them) by which a person would like to be addressed.*
- Agency demonstrates other innovation in LGBTQ inclusion in forms and paperwork.*

Agency consistently communicates its commitment to LGBTQ inclusion externally, including:

- Agency displays visual cues throughout common areas to communicate support and inclusion of LGBTQ clients and their families.**
- Agency's external communications (website, printed materials, etc.) explicitly and consistently reflect its commitment to working with and welcoming LGBTQ clients and their families.
- Agency uses social media to communicate its commitment to working with and welcoming LGBTQ clients and their families.*
- Agency demonstrates other innovation in its LGBTQ-inclusive external communications.*

4. PARENT BEST PRACTICES

Organizations that serve foster parents, adoptive parents, kinship caregivers and other caring adults should review key practices to ensure that LGBTQ adults are welcomed and included. These benchmarks focus on practice areas such as LGBTQ parent recruitment efforts, LGBTQ inclusion in parent trainings and conducting affirming homestudies with LGBTQ applicants.

- Agency targets LGBTQ resource parents in recruitment efforts (e.g., using ads featuring same-sex couples or trans parents, attending LGBTQ events, partnering with LGBTQ community groups and engaging current LGBTQ resource families as ambassadors).
- Agency ensures LGBTQ parents feel included in parent trainings (e.g., trainers are prepared to deliver LGBTQ-related content and skilled in creating an inclusive space for LGBTQ parents).
- Agency's parent trainings provide information on creating a safe and affirming environment for LGBTQ youth (e.g., agency LGBTQ youth policy, research on LGBTQ youth in care, affirming caregiver behaviors).
- Agency provides LGBTQ-inclusive ongoing support and education to existing resource parents and other caregivers.
- Agency provides staff with guidance on conducting LGBTQ-affirming homestudies and assessments.
- Agency tracks data on the number of LGBTQ resource parents served (e.g., information on number of LGBTQ parents licensed and number of placements in LGBTQ-headed homes).
- Agency identifies and utilizes a list of LGBTQ-competent referrals for outside services for LGBTQ families, parents and caregivers.

Innovations (at least one):

- *Agency has developed a strategic plan for its LGBTQ parent recruitment efforts focused on maximizing results and continual improvement.*
- *Agency has engaged LGBTQ parents in innovative ways (e.g., parent mentoring, advocacy efforts, etc.).*
- *Agency demonstrates other innovative practice(s) with LGBTQ parents and caregivers.*

ADOPTION EXCHANGE BEST PRACTICES

Adoption Exchanges do vital work to connect children and youth in foster care to prospective adoptive parents. In this work, Adoption Exchanges should implement the following key practices to ensure that their services are LGBTQ inclusive and affirming. Each practice below is required for the Solid Tier. If any of the services do not apply to an Adoption Exchange's practices, there is an opportunity to indicate "Not Applicable" in the Agency Self-Assessment.

- Adoption Exchange provides staff guidance on handling SOGIE-related disclosures in child-centered recruitment.
- Adoption Exchange advocates for LGBTQ-inclusive and affirming practices in child welfare systems (both generally and case-specific).
- Adoption Exchange provides LGBTQ-inclusive post-permanency/ongoing support and education to families.
- Adoption Exchange's public education/information sharing resources are inclusive of LGBTQ-specific topics.
- Adoption Exchange provides other LGBTQ-inclusive services.

CASA BEST PRACTICES

Court Appointed Special Advocates are uniquely positioned to support LGBTQ children and youth as they navigate the child welfare system. CASA affiliates should implement the following key practices to ensure that LGBTQ adults are welcomed and included as CASA volunteers. Where applicable, CASA training and support materials should include considerations for advocating for LGBTQ youth. Each practice below is required for the Solid Tier.

- CASA targets LGBTQ volunteers in recruitment efforts (e.g., using ads featuring LGBTQ volunteers, attending LGBTQ events, partnering with LGBTQ community groups and engaging current LGBTQ volunteers as ambassadors).
- CASA ensures LGBTQ volunteers feel included in volunteer trainings (e.g., trainers are prepared to deliver LGBTQ-related content and skilled in creating an inclusive space for LGBTQ volunteers).
- CASA volunteer trainings provide information on creating a safe and affirming environment for LGBTQ youth (e.g., agency LGBTQ youth policy, research on LGBTQ youth in care, affirming caregiver behaviors, etc.).
- CASA provides LGBTQ-inclusive ongoing support and education to existing volunteers.
- CASA provides staff with guidance on conducting LGBTQ-affirming volunteer interviews/assessments.

5. YOUTH BEST PRACTICES

Organizations working to improve and create affirming practices with LGBTQ youth need to translate this commitment into a thorough scan of the agency environment and all areas of service provision. Too often LGBTQ youth face barriers due to institutional structures and policies rooted in anti-LGBTQ bias and/or assumptions that fail to recognize youth with diverse SOGIE. The policy and practice areas specific to youth services focus on removing the most common barriers faced by LGBTQ youth to ensure they are safe, affirmed and supported to achieve permanency.

- Agency provides youth in care with an LGBTQ-inclusive "Bill of Rights" or similar information on their rights while in out-of-home care.
- Agency provides staff with guidance on assessing resource parents' capacity to provide safe and affirming homes for LGBTQ youth.
- Agency provides staff with guidance on creating LGBTQ-inclusive safety plans for youth, including considerations of the unique risk factors for youth with diverse SOGIE at all points in the placement process.
- Agency has policy in place to enforce trans-affirming placements in sex-separated facilities to ensure placement decisions affirm the child's gender identity, are made based on the safety and well-being of the young person and are not based on the child's sex assigned at birth.
- Agency identifies and utilizes a list of LGBTQ-competent referrals for outside services for LGBTQ youth.

Innovations (at least one):

- *Agency provides staff with guidance on discussing SOGIE with young people.*
- *Agency has a written policy in place that prohibits conversion therapy for youth in care.*
- *Agency has implemented a gender-neutral dress code policy that ensures young people can authentically express their gender through clothing styles.*
- *Agency has conducted a review of services to ensure that LGBTQ youth receive equitable services when compared to their non-LGBTQ counterparts.*
- *Agency engages LGBTQ youth in care in its efforts to change policy and practice (e.g., youth focus groups, taskforces and youth-led initiatives).*
- *Agency provides specialized programs/interventions for LGBTQ youth in care.*
- *Agency demonstrates other innovative practice(s) with LGBTQ youth.*

- CASA tracks data on the number of LGBTQ volunteers served (e.g., information on number of LGBTQ volunteers approved and number of placements, etc.).
- CASA identifies and utilizes a list of LGBTQ-competent referrals for outside services for volunteers.

6. SUSTAINABILITY & CAPACITY BUILDING

Transforming an organization's culture to ensure all stakeholders are welcomed and affirmed regardless of their SOGIE is hard work that can take years. Staff turnover, competing priorities and limited resources are among the many challenges that can get in the way of sustainable change. These policy and practice areas focus on the strategies that help support and build internal capacity for long-term and sustainable LGBTQ inclusion efforts.

- Agency's leadership supports LGBTQ inclusion efforts (e.g., leadership "buy in" is clear through board/senior leadership communications on the importance of the work and action to hold stakeholders accountable). (Note: Participation in an Executive Briefing by at least one senior leader is required of all ACAF participants.)
- Agency takes a team-based approach to its LGBTQ inclusion efforts (e.g., forming an LGBTQ committee to lead policy and practice review and changes).
- *Agency has an LGBTQ staff advocate who is identified to all staff and clients and is charged with resource collection and dissemination, advocacy, support and intervention specifically for LGBTQ clients.*
- *Agency builds relationships with and engages local LGBTQ experts in its LGBTQ inclusion efforts.*
- *Agency has formalized its process for SOGIE data collection from youth and/or adult clients, including the collection, tracking and analysis of the data for quality improvement work.*
- *Agency conducts LGBTQ-specific client feedback surveys to measure the impact of its LGBTQ inclusion efforts on the experiences of children, youth and families served.*
- *Agency conducts LGBTQ-specific staff surveys to measure current agency climate and the knowledge, skills and attitudes related to LGBTQ inclusion.*
- *Agency has developed LGBTQ expertise among its internal staff trainers through a training of trainers or other effort.*
- *Agency has implemented policies and benefits to recruit and retain LGBTQ employees (e.g., inclusive health insurance benefits, gender transition guidelines, and targeted staff hiring and recruitment efforts).*
- *Agency demonstrates other innovative practice(s) to ensure LGBTQ inclusion efforts are sustainable.*

7. LEADERSHIP & INNOVATION

Organizations that have established a solid foundation for LGBTQ inclusion within their own walls can lead the broader child welfare community forward in this area by sharing their lessons learned. This practice area focuses on the ways in which agencies can serve as leaders on the local, state and national levels.

- Agency serves as a leader in LGBTQ-inclusive practices among its partner agencies (e.g., organizing trainings or events, leading an LGBTQ taskforce, etc.).
- Agency has participated in LGBTQ-related public education events (e.g., panel discussion at a university, radio or television appearances, etc.).
- Agency has engaged in pro-LGBTQ public policy advocacy (e.g., submitting written or oral testimony related to legislation, writing an op-ed, participating in a lobby day, etc.).
- Agency demonstrates other innovative forms of leadership.

“Working with All Children - All Families has made us the employer of choice, the service provider of choice and the charitable organization of choice in our community. People know that we are an inclusive agency and that draws people to us. Attaining the Innovator Tier of Recognition this year has reaffirmed our standing in Arizona as the most qualified provider of services for the LGBTQ community.”

—LANE BARKER

Executive Director at Devereux Advanced Behavior Health • Phoenix, AZ

Appendix D: Statements from National Child Welfare Leaders

The Adoption Exchange Association

“All Children - All Families has been a valuable partner to AEA member organizations across the county as we build families through adoption and support those newly-formed families. As a national leader on serving LGBTQ children, youth and families, All Children - All Families has been an essential collaborator with AEA providing training and technical assistance to our members, ensuring our work is always inclusive and sharing effective practices to help unite children in foster care with families.”

—KAMILAH BUNN

Chief Executive Officer, The Adoption Exchange Association

Annie E. Casey Foundation's Child Welfare Strategy Group

“We know that children who are LGBTQ and involved in child welfare are disproportionately represented, are very often children of color and experience disparate treatment and negative outcomes. Sadly, the field is hampered by a dearth of data on LGBTQ children and a lack of LGBTQ culturally informed policies and practices. All Children - All Families has been a leader in helping child welfare agencies improve their practices for many years and their enhanced tools and technical assistance will be a benefit to LGBTQ children and families throughout the country. The stakes are too high. It's time we ensure equity and opportunity for all young people.”

—TRACEY FEILD

Director & Manager, Annie E. Casey Foundation's Child Welfare Strategy Group

Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption

“Now, more than ever, the groundbreaking All Children - All Families project must be woven into the work of every child welfare agency to ensure that LGBTQ children and families are treated with understanding, personal respect and professional competency. With the project's new tools added to its innovative and ongoing technical assistance, training and support, the Human Rights Campaign Foundation simply encourages each of us in child welfare to build up, rather than tear down, the significance of human diversity.”

—RITA L. SORONEN

President & CEO, Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption

National Center on Adoption and Permanency

“The importance of the work conducted by All Children - All Families is hard to exaggerate. It fills a critical void in the field; it provides a level of expertise and professionalism that would be great to have in all aspects of child welfare; and, most importantly, it serves a population that needs and deserves our support. NCAP's mission is to enable children, youth and families to succeed. That's exactly what this extraordinary project of the Human Rights Campaign Foundation is doing, and we should all be very grateful.”

—ADAM PERTMAN

President, National Center on Adoption and Permanency

North American Council on Adoptable Children

“NACAC has been a partner of the All Children - All Families project since its inception and we applaud their great leadership in bringing LGBTQ awareness and inclusion to a new level in foster care and adoption. Now — more than ever — it's important for welcoming agencies to understand and embrace best practices for serving and supporting LGBTQ families and youth.”

—MARY BOO

Executive Director, North American Council on Adoptable Children

Voice for Adoption

“Voice for Adoption has long understood the importance of protecting the well-being of children at all costs. Now more than ever, it is important for organizations in child welfare to protect, nurture and celebrate the diversity of the children and families we serve. HRC's All-Children All - Families is an important step in the right direction. No child or family should be refused services or denied the ability to adopt, or be adopted, based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. We need every single family we can get, and we need to ensure that our children feel that they are safe and don't need to hide their true selves from the world. Children belong in families, period.”

—SCHYLAR BABER

Former Executive Director, Voice for Adoption

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Endnotes

1. Baams, L., Wilson, B.D.M., Russell, S.T. LGBTQ Youth in Unstable Housing & Foster Care. *Pediatrics*. (2019) Available at: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/early/2019/02/07/peds.2017-4211.full.pdf>
2. Wilson, B.D.M., Cooper, K., Kastanis, A. & Nezhad, S. Sexual and Gender Minority Youth in Foster Care: Assessing Disproportionality and Disparities in Los Angeles. (Los Angeles: The Williams Institute. 2014). Report.
3. Quotes from HRC & FosterClub #FosterEquality campaign testimonials: <https://www.hrc.org/blog/national-foster-care-month-meet-dameon-david-marcus-lucina-timothy>
4. Heterocentrism is the ideology and assumption that all people are heterosexual. Ciscentrism is the ideology and assumption that all people are cisgender.
5. Family Equality Council (2019) LGBTQ Family Building Survey. <https://www.familyequality.org/fbs> (April 29, 2019)
6. In 2019, researchers at Clark University and the Human Rights Campaign Foundation teamed up to measure the experiences of LGBTQ people and families' in foster care and adoption processes via an online survey. This survey recruited over 3,460 respondents — primarily through social media advertisements and dissemination by partner organizations and institutions. While these results can't be considered nationally representative, they serve as a powerful snapshot of the experiences of many folks in the LGBTQ community.

NOTE TO READERS

This report details the efforts of more than 70 organizations working to best serve LGBTQ children, youth and families. The Tier of Recognition earned is one indicator of the organization's level of LGBTQ inclusion. All organizations must continually work to ensure policies are translated into practice and the LGBTQ community is safe, welcomed and affirmed while in their care. For the many organizations not included in this report, you can look for signs of inclusion on the organization's website and pay attention to word of mouth among LGBTQ community members. For examples of where else to look, see the "Non-Discrimination" and "Rolling Out the Welcome Mat" benchmarks in Appendix C. Above all, your own individual experiences matter. In the event you feel you have been discriminated against, most organizations should have a grievance process through which you can communicate your concerns to the organization's leadership. You can learn more about state laws to understand your legal rights at www.hrc.org/state-maps.



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Find out more at: [HRC.org/ACAF](https://www.hrc.org/ACAF)

