

# **Creating Inclusive Services for LGBT Youth in Out of Home Care**

## **Training Resources**

Prepared by the Out of Home Youth Advocacy Council  
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## **Out of Home Youth Advocacy Council (OHYAC)**

These training materials were developed by the Out of Home Youth Advocacy Council (OHYAC), a project administered jointly by Family Builders by Adoption, Legal Services for Children and the National Center for Lesbian Rights. OHYAC is a multi-disciplinary collaboration of individuals and organizations in the Bay Area working to improve services and outcomes for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT)<sup>1</sup> youth in foster care. The Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund and the San Francisco Foundation have generously supported the work of OHYAC.

OHYAC is made up of over 70 members from Alameda, San Francisco, San Mateo, Marin and Contra Costa counties, with representatives from a diverse array of organizations and agencies that serve or advocate for youth and families involved in foster care. These members include representatives from the California Youth Connection, the Bay Area Academy, California CASA, the Youth Law Center, California Social Work Education Center, county child welfare departments, individual judges and lawyers, foster family agencies, and the Administrative Office of the Courts, Center for Families, Children & the Courts. OHYAC partners have also worked closely with the Family Acceptance Project at the Cesar Chavez Institute at San Francisco State University <http://familyproject.sfsu.edu>, and the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project at San Francisco State University's Bay Area Academy. <http://youthtrainingproject.org/>.

One of the primary goals of OHYAC is to promote and facilitate the implementation of AB 458, the Foster Care Nondiscrimination Act. Effective January 1, 2004, AB 458 prohibits discrimination in the foster care system on the basis of actual or perceived racial or ethnic group identification, ancestry, national origin, religion, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, mental or physical disability or HIV status. Because training is crucial to enable child welfare professionals and providers to fulfill their responsibilities to provide safe and nondiscriminatory care, placement and services to foster children, AB 458 also mandates initial and ongoing training for all group home administrators, foster parents and licensing personnel. This law is the first in the nation to provide explicit protections to LGBT youth and adults involved in the foster care system.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout these materials, LGBT youth refers to youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, youth who are perceived as LGBT, and youth who are questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Since its inception in 2003, OHYAC has conducted multiple trainings and workshops across the state, and has worked with the California Youth Connection and the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project to recruit and train a group LGBT youth trainers to participate in ongoing educational activities. OHYAC has also developed alliances with key statewide child welfare agencies, initiatives and organizations including the California Department of Social Services, the Child Welfare Redesign, the California Permanency for Youth Project, the Statewide Foster Care Ombudsman's Office, the Child Welfare Directors Association, the Judicial Council of California, and the Family to Family Initiative. Finally, OHYAC and its partners have developed several key resources to support local efforts to provide competent, nondiscriminatory services to LGBT youth in out-of-home care. Most of these resources are contained in these training materials and copies are available free of charge.

***The ultimate goal of OHYAC is to build capacity at the local level to implement the nondiscrimination and training provisions of AB 458.*** The statute's requirements cannot be achieved by simply drafting policies or providing a single training. Meaningful implementation requires a cultural shift and a demonstrated commitment at every level of the foster care system. Child welfare agencies and their partners must undertake ongoing training and supervision, and integrate respectful, affirming and equal treatment of LGBT youth as a core agency value. The passage of AB 458 and the activities of OHYAC and its allies have provided an opportunity to work toward achieving these important goals.

### **Training Resources**

This binder contains several resources that constitute a comprehensive training package. The resources were designed to be used together. In particular, the power point training presentation should be used in conjunction with the Best Practice Guidelines and the *Breaking the Silence* digital stories. Trainers should feel free to use and distribute these training resources. **Please provide appropriate attribution and do not alter or edit any of the resources without the explicit consent of the author(s).** The resources included in the binder, and directions for obtaining additional copies, are listed below:

- ***Know Your Rights Guide***

This colorful and straightforward brochure is designed to inform LGBT youth of their rights in the foster care system. Educating LGBT youth

about their right to safe, fair and equal treatment is an important aspect of creating inclusive systems of care. Trainers should provide participants with copies of the brochure to display in appropriate locations or distribute directly to youth. Download a PDF version at <http://nclrights.org/publications/youth.htm> or order hard copies from NCLR at [www.nclrights.org](http://www.nclrights.org). The brochure is also available on the CD that comes with the *Breaking the Silence* DVD.

- ***AB 458 Fact Sheet***

This 3 page fact sheet summarizes the provisions of AB 458, the Foster Care Nondiscrimination Act. It is a useful handout for trainings or as an attachment to newsletters or other means of communicating important information to providers, resource families, child welfare personnel, or legal professionals involved in the California foster care system. Many people directly affected by AB 458 – both consumers and providers – are unaware of its provisions. Tools like this fact sheet can help continue the process of education and implementation. Download a PDF version of the AB 458 Fact Sheet at [http://nclrights.org/publications/pubs/ab458\\_fact\\_sheet.pdf](http://nclrights.org/publications/pubs/ab458_fact_sheet.pdf). The fact sheet is also available on the CD that comes with the *Breaking the Silence* DVD.

- ***"Hate Free Zone" poster***

This colorful poster contains the words "Hate Free Zone" in large block print, behind which are a series of words designating the range of human diversity (Gay, Jewish, Disabled, Youth, etc). The poster is available in letter size and poster size. The purpose of the poster is to designate the space in which it is displayed as affirming of *all* individuals, including LGBT youth. The poster's message is a powerful celebration of diversity in all its manifestations, and helps create an atmosphere in which young people can feel free to explore and discuss their emerging identities without fear of adverse consequences. The poster can be displayed in courtrooms, schools, health care settings, child welfare offices, group homes, foster homes, and any location in which young people and their families are likely to see it. Trainers should show a copy of the poster during the training, and inform participants how to obtain copies. Order posters from Legal Services for Children from [Carolyn@lsc-sf.org](mailto:Carolyn@lsc-sf.org).

- ***Bay Area Resource Directory for LGBT Youth***

This 27-page directory lists a range of social, medical, recreational, spiritual, and support services in the five Bay Area counties that are welcoming and affirming of LGBT youth and their families. The guide may be useful to youth, families, and anyone working with youth and

their families. Trainers should provide copies of the guide to participants, and highlight the resources most relevant for their specific audience and geographic area. Download free copies of the Bay Area Resource Directory for LGBT Youth at <http://www.ohyac.org/tools.html>.

- ***CWLA Best Practice Guidelines: Serving LGBT Youth in Out of Home Care***

This easy-to-use resource contains the first set of comprehensive professional guidelines governing services to LGBT youth in child welfare and juvenile justice systems. The Best Practice Guidelines build on the recommendations developed by the Model Standards Project, a collaboration of Legal Services for Children and the National Center for Lesbian Rights. Research findings from the Family Acceptance Project at the Cesar Chavez Institute, San Francisco State University (<http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/>) have informed and framed the scope of this work. Purchase hard copies of this book from CWLA: 1.800.407.6273, [www.cwla.org/pubs](http://www.cwla.org/pubs). ISBN# 1-58760-095-1 Price: \$14.95, or download a PDF version from <http://nclrights.org/publications/pubs/bestpracticeslgbtyouth.pdf> or [http://www.lsc-sf.org/web/pub\\_main.html](http://www.lsc-sf.org/web/pub_main.html). The Best Practice Guidelines are also available on the resource CD that comes with the *Breaking the Silence* digital stories.

- ***Breaking the Silence: LGBTQ Foster Youth Tell Their Stories***

*Breaking the Silence* is a DVD containing ten short digital stories created by former foster youth who identify as LGBT at a four-day workshop organized by the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project and National Center for Lesbian Rights. Through these young people's thoughtful, honest, and insightful words and images, viewers hear directly about their experiences in foster care and juvenile justice systems, as well as their recommendations for improving services to LGBT youth in the future.

*Breaking the Silence* also comes with a CD containing more than 25 training tools and resources, including articles, reports, and fact sheets. Trainers should familiarize themselves with these resources, and either provide them as handouts or inform workshop participants of the resources they may find particularly useful. Free copies of *Breaking the Silence* are available at <http://nclrights.org/publications/breakingthesilence.htm>.

- **Creating Inclusive Systems of Care for LGBT Youth**

This power point presentation was developed by OHYAC<sup>2</sup>, and contains four modules. Module One is designed to provide an overview of sexual orientation and gender identity, including a review of terminology, a discussion of homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexual privilege, an assessment of personal and agency attitudes about these issues, and a discussion of the “coming out” process. Module Two traces the pathways of LGBT youth into public systems of care, their experiences while they are in care, and the legal and ethical requirements governing care to LGBT youth in foster care. Module Three is an overview of the Best Practice Guidelines, which provide a comprehensive set of professional standards governing services to LGBT youth in out-of-home care. Module Four reviews action steps for demonstrating support of LGBT youth and putting into practice the best practices reviewed in the training. A PDF version of the power point presentation can be downloaded from [www.ohyac.org](http://www.ohyac.org). An electronic version in power point format is also available upon request from Carolyn@lsc-sf.org.

### **Training Tips**

- **Tailor the training to fit the audience**

Trainers should determine the time allotted for each module according to skill level and composition of the audience, and the objectives of the training. For example, the trainer might decide to present a half-day training on Module One to a group of resource parents who have little familiarity with sexual orientation or gender identity, and who need substantial time to ask questions and express concerns. If the audience has had more exposure to these issues, the trainer might allocate less time to Module One. In addition, although the key messages are the same for all audiences, the trainer might use different examples or emphasize different aspects of the material depending upon the composition of the audience. For example, if the audience is primarily composed of child welfare workers, the trainer might spend more time talking about developing, supporting and identifying appropriate placements.

- **Familiarize yourself with the training resources**

Trainers should read the Best Practice Guidelines, and review them prior to the training. The guidelines provide the substantive underpinnings of the training materials, and should be used as the

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<sup>2</sup> OHYAC would like to acknowledge and thank Mitzi A. Lowe, Ph.D. for her contributions to this curriculum.

primary text for trainers and workshop participants. Trainers should refer to relevant guidelines and commentary throughout their presentations. Trainers should also view the digital stories, and review whatever resources are relevant to the training modules they intend to present. Many of the slides in the power point presentation contain notes directed to the trainer with tips for presenting the material or relevant citations to the Best Practice Guidelines. The trainer should carefully review the training notes and relevant sections of the guidelines prior to the training in order to feel comfortable presenting the material on each slide, leading the exercises and facilitating audience discussion.

- **Include and integrate youth trainers**

If possible, youth trainers should be involved in the trainings. Ideally, youth trainers should present the digital stories and facilitate audience discussion following the viewing of the stories. One of the primary values supporting the development of the digital stories is the empowerment of youth. Full inclusion and integration of youth trainers promotes this value and strengthens the presentation by including the uniquely insightful perspective of youth who have lived the stories.<sup>3</sup>

- **Create an open and safe environment**

These training modules address adolescent development of sexual orientation and gender identity. These are sensitive and complex topics that often provoke strong feelings and reactions. Trainers should model a respectful and nonjudgmental approach, and reassure participants that “there is no such thing as a stupid question.” Work with the audience to establish discussion guidelines to create a safe environment for people to express their opinions and ask questions. Trainers may also want to practice or role play challenging situations (e.g., domineering or judgmental individual) with a trusted colleague prior to the training. And don’t forget to have a sense of humor! Laughter helps to reduce anxiety and discomfort.

- **Assess your comfort level**

Trainers should clarify and assess their own values, attitudes and assumptions regarding sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. This process is necessary in order to avoid unintentionally conveying one’s own biases or unexamined beliefs. It is also important because the trainer will help facilitate an exercise in which participants will be asked to assess their attitudes and assumptions. Sometimes it

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<sup>3</sup> Trainers may contact the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project to inquire about the availability of youth trainers. <http://youthtrainingproject.org/>

is helpful for the trainer to share some ways in which her or his beliefs and opinions on these issues have evolved, or something he or she has learned while preparing for the training. This kind of disclosure can help establish an open and safe learning environment.

- **Actively engage participants**

Involving participants in active discussion, small group activities, and other types of learning exercises keeps them alert and engaged with the subject matter. Because people tend to have strong personal views as well as questions about sexual orientation and gender identity, it is particularly important to give them an opportunity to actively participate. Uninterrupted lecture is not an effective means of conveying information in general, and is especially inappropriate with issues related to adolescent sexuality and gender expression. In addition to using the group exercises in these materials, trainers should take every opportunity to involve the audience in an exchange about the issue being discussed.

- **Make it real**

It is not enough to simply assert that LGBT youth are entitled to fair and equal treatment. Trainers need to help participants understand how to apply these concepts in practical situations. Give concrete examples, present case studies for discussion, ask participants to share their own experiences, and encourage them to ask questions about real situations. (Remind participants to avoid disclosing identifying information about an individual.) Openly address the most controversial or complex issues (e.g., housing of transgender youth in sex segregated facilities, permitting romantic but nonsexual same-sex relationships, etc.) Use the expertise in the audience to help problem solve.

### **Key Messages**

These training materials cover a broad range of information, and participants will not remember everything they have heard. For that reason, it is important to emphasize the core principles for effective and sensitive services for LGBT youth. Reiterate and amplify on these concepts as often as possible throughout the training.

- **All youth benefit from an inclusive and respectful environment**

The most critical aspect of providing sensitive and effective services to LGBT youth in public custody is creating an inclusive organizational culture in which the inherent worth and dignity of every person is

respected, and every person is treated fairly and equally. An inclusive and respectful environment benefits all youth by making it safe for young people to explore their emerging identities – a crucial developmental task for adolescents – and to accept and value differences in others.

- **LGBT youth do not have unique needs**

It is important to avoid pathologizing LGBT youth or suggesting that they require “special” treatment. Training participants may respond to the recommended best practices by asking, “Isn’t this what all youth need?” The answer is a resounding “yes.” LGBT youth need the same supports and services that all youth need. However, LGBT youth as a group face unique challenges, including disapproval, rejection, harassment, and violence from family, peers, faith communities, and other institutions. Coping with stigma has social, behavioral, and health-related consequences that can increase risk behaviors and intensify psychological distress and risk for suicide. Thus, LGBT youth are particularly vulnerable to negative outcomes (substance abuse, depression, truancy, etc) NOT because of inherent internal deficiencies but because of externally imposed stressors.

- **The goal is to provide fair treatment and promote positive outcomes, not to change anyone’s personal beliefs**

Training participants may have strongly held religious or moral beliefs condemning homosexuality or gender nonconformity. It is important to clarify that neither the trainer nor the training seeks to change people’s personal beliefs. Rather, the purpose of the training is to explain the obligation of the foster care system to provide equal and nondiscriminatory treatment to all youth, including LGBT youth. This obligation applies to everyone involved in the foster care system, regardless of her or his personal beliefs.

- **Coming out promotes adolescent health**

Exploration, expression and integration of identity are crucial parts of positive adolescent development. Coming out during adolescence and disclosing one’s sexual orientation or gender identity to others promotes self-esteem and helps decrease negative outcomes. Youth who share their sexual orientation with others report feeling better about themselves and more comfortable being “out” at school and in their communities, underscoring the importance of providing a safe space in which youth are able to integrate a positive LGBT identity.

- **Family acceptance promotes well-being; family rejection promotes unsafe behaviors and negative health outcomes**

All youth need and deserve families to nurture them and to help them make a successful transition to adulthood. Family support is especially crucial for LGBT youth, who must navigate the usual challenges associated with adolescence while learning to manage a stigmatized identity and cope with social, educational, and community environments in which victimization and harassment are the norm. Supportive families help LGBT youth develop the self-confidence and resilience necessary to integrate positive and healthy identities in a predominantly hostile environment. Conversely, family rejection places LGBT youth at high risk for abuse, neglect, and self-destructive or anti-social behaviors, which can lead to out-of-home placement and negative health and mental health outcomes.

- **Transgender and gender nonconforming youth are entitled to acceptance and respect of their gender identity**

Integration of a positive gender identity is a critical aspect of healthy adolescent development. Caregivers, providers and child welfare personnel should not require youth to conform to traditional conceptions of gender nor punish youth who are transgender or gender nonconforming. Rather, they should validate a young person's core gender identity, as defined by the youth. Adults should not require youth to dress, behave, or express themselves in narrowly prescribed ways because of their gender. They should permit transgender youth to wear clothing that is consistent with their gender identity. Similarly, adults should use the name and pronoun preferred by an individual youth, whether or not they conform to the youth's birth sex. Finally, caregivers and facility staff should avoid unnecessarily segregating activities according to gender, and should encourage youth to participate in educational and recreational activities that interest them – regardless of whether these activities are considered stereotypically male or female.

- **LGBT youth are legally entitled to safety and equal treatment**

Children and youth in the custody of the state have a constitutional right to physical and emotional safety, as well as adequate food, shelter, clothing and medical care. This means that child welfare agencies are obligated to protect the safety and well-being of all children in their care, including LGBT youth. California law explicitly protects LGBT youth and adults involved in the foster care system from discrimination or unequal treatment or services. These laws place an obligation on the adults who are responsible for the care and custody of LGBT youth in foster care: child welfare personnel, resource families, group care staff and administrators, and licensing personnel.

- **Families of LGBT youth need support and education**

Regardless of their beliefs and background, most families struggle to adapt to their child's emerging LGBT identity. In particular, many parents and caregivers cannot reconcile their child's sexual orientation or gender identity with their own strongly held religious beliefs or moral views. However, virtually all families – including those who are overtly rejecting – also are concerned for their child's safety and well-being. They express an urgent need for information and contact with other families experiencing similar issues, fear for their child's safety, and a desire to resolve family conflict related to their child's LGBT identity. Child welfare agencies and their community partners need to develop family-centered interventions designed to help families come to terms with their children's sexual orientation or gender identity.

- **LGBT youth need permanent families**

For some LGBT youth, family preservation or reconciliation is not a viable option. Some families are unwilling or unable to provide a safe and stable home for their lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender child. LGBT youth, like all youth, need permanent connections to committed supportive adults. Child welfare agencies should develop a strong agency focus on permanence, and involve LGBT youth in identifying adults who may be able to provide a permanent connection. Agencies should also reduce reliance on group care for LGBT youth by investing resources in recruiting, training and supporting LGBT-affirming families.