all children
all families

HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN FOUNDATION

ALL CHILDREN - ALL FAMILIES REPORT:

CHANGE-MAKERS IN CHILD WELFARE 2020

"

Our social workers and staff told us they needed additional training to feel competent serving LGBTQ children, youth and families. After a year-long effort, we now have a sustainable set of policies and practices to ensure equitable treatment for the LGBTQ community. The opportunity to participate in All Children - All Families is the capstone of this achievement and provides incentive to continue to excel as an affirming agency.

"

– Sara Sturtevant

Management Analyst at Monterey County Department of Social Services - Family & Children's Services Division - Salinas, CA (first-time participant, 2020 Innovator)

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WELCOME

For nearly 13 years, All Children - All Families (ACAF) has been a crucial component of the Human Rights Campaign Foundation's efforts to realize a world in which LGBTQ people can live free from bias, discrimination and inequity.

In our current reality, as we are all confronted with COVID-19 and what it means for our daily lives, our shared work is more important and impactful than ever. As the pandemic deepens the inequalities that LGBTQ people face, particularly LGBTQ youth, we are deeply grateful for all the leaders and organizations profiled in this report who are doing their very best to ensure all children and all families can weather the challenges ahead.

ACAF is the only national program dedicated to advancing LGBTQ inclusion in child welfare systems by building understanding, empowering agencies and promoting policies and practices that help LGBTQ youth thrive and LGBTQ families grow. This includes providing resources to give professionals the tools they need, including skills and information, so that they and the families they serve are set up for success. Working in partnership, we are able to address critical issues facing LGBTQ youth and families — from unintentional hurdles to outright discrimination.

This report is now in its second year and has grown to include the participation of 100 child welfare organizations. These organizations are committed to improving the services they provide to the LGBTQ community, and we are committed to working alongside them to help make this change possible.

This growing momentum shows that, despite hate-fuelled attacks from anti-equality leaders and others who seek to license anti-LGBTQ discrimination, these organizations recognize the importance of being LGBTQ-inclusive and ensuring that every child and every family has the support they need to truly thrive.

This report highlights some of the organizations and advocates in local communities who are doing groundbreaking work in serving their LGBTQ youth and families. So many of the organizations profiled in this report are not simply demonstrating LGBTQ inclusiveness — they are pushing themselves to be creative and innovative with how they support and encompass LGBTQ children and families in their work.

However, we also recognize that each organization is on a journey and that creating a culture of inclusion and equity takes time. With that in mind, ACAF promotes a concept known as cultural humility, which embraces the idea that in order to successfully serve diverse populations, organizations must learn and improve every day. Encouraging service providers to learn from their clients is a way for everyone to feel included in the process. We are proud to celebrate these organizations and to thank them for all that they've taught us.

The Human Rights Campaign Foundation is committed to standing with every organization in this report, and with all those serving the LGBTQ community. This work would not be possible without you — thank you for everything you have done and that you continue to do.

In Unity,
Alphonso David
President, Human Rights Campaign Foundation
He/Him/His

Introduction

One year ago, All Children - All Families (ACAF) released its first annual report, detailing the pilot year of a new model for agency engagement. The ACAF participation process had changed — after more than a decade of supporting child welfare agencies in their LGBTQ-inclusion efforts — to an annual cycle to keep up with emerging best practices in the field. The 2019 report also introduced ACAF's three Tiers of Recognition — Building Foundation for Inclusion, Solid Foundation for Inclusion, and Innovative Inclusion — which celebrate the strides agencies make toward becoming fully LGBTQ welcoming and affirming. This tiered approach provides beginner organizations meaningful and achievable goals while also encouraging returning participants to keep innovating.

The 2020 annual report once again celebrates organizations that partnered with ACAF over the last year to implement LGBTQ-inclusive policies and practices and features a complete list of participants grouped by Tier of Recognition. One hundred agencies — up from 71 in year one — 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 participation increase illustrates a growing movement within child welfare that recognizes LGBTQ-inclusion is essential to achieving the goals of safety, permanency and well-being.

A majority of the 33 new participants featured in this report achieved at least the first Tier of Recognition. Those that have not yet met a tier — some in part due to delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic — still made impressive progress toward their goals and are listed on page 30. The group of new participants expands ACAF's reach into five states for the first time: Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, North Carolina and Oregon. The list also reflects the success of coordinated efforts within networks of organizations, including six organizations within Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health and four new participants across the state of Illinois.

Several of the 67 returning organizations advanced to a higher tier, including Adoption Options (Colorado), Bayfront Youth & Family Services (Longbeach, CA), Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health - Philadelphia - Foster Care Services and Uplift Family Services - Foster Care & Adoption Services (Campbell, CA). Every single 2019 Innovator continued participating into the 2020 cycle, demonstrating new and enhanced innovations in LGBTQ-inclusive practice.

For more on the participation process, see Appendix A. Additional details on the tiers and benchmarks can be found on page 6 and in Appendix B.

100
Participating Organizations

28
States Represented

15,000+
Total Employees

614,000+
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. We asked members of the Youth Advisory Council at Lighthouse Youth Services — a 2020 Innovator in Cincinnati, Ohio — to explain why LGBTQ inclusion work is important. Here's what the young leaders said:

"**LGBTQ people make up a large percentage of the youth homeless population, so they deserve a voice in the decision making.**"

— LENAYA SHARP

"**Humans are afraid of what they don't understand, often leaving the LGBTQ community feeling alone. Our job is to make them feel welcomed and comfortable in their own skin. To give them a home where they are not afraid to be who they are and to be loved just like everyone else!**"

— SASHA ROACH

"**...I want everyone to feel accepted and to be able to be their true selves in a judgment-free zone.**"

— KESHIA DIXON

"**...teens and young adults still get bullied and harassed... LGBTQ inclusion work is the reason people get along and can feel safer.**"

— C.J. WIGLE

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 B.

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 2019-2020 Webinar Series:

ACAF delivered **35 webinars** in **three topical tracks** throughout the year.

600+ organizations had staff members participate in ACAF webinars.

5000+ professionals attended at least one ACAF webinar.

16,000+ hours of professional development through ACAF webinars reported by 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 benchmarks 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 benchmarks 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. The benchmarks specific to leadership and innovation focus on the ways in which agencies can serve as leaders on the local, state and national levels.

"
Completing the Agency Self-Assessment and working toward the benchmarks has been a great exercise for our organization. We're already planning enhancements for next year. "

– RENEE LEHOCKY, LCSW
Director of Strategic Initiatives at Lawrence Hall - Chicago, IL

(First-time participant at Solid Foundation for Inclusion Tier for 2020)

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 benchmarks must be in place for policy and practice areas 1-3.	To achieve this level of recognition, all benchmarks must be in place for policy and practice areas 1-6.	To achieve this level of recognition, all benchmarks must be in place for policy and practice areas 1-6. In addition, agencies must demonstrate at least one example of innovation in policy and 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
MN Adopt	St. Paul, MN
CASA	
CASA Child Advocates of Montgomery County	Conroe, TX
CASA Sacramento	Sacramento, CA
Private Child Welfare	
A Greater Hope - Adoption & Foster Care Services	Victorville, CA
Advocates for Children & Families	North Miami Beach, FL
Arbor Circle - Adoption & Foster Care Services	Holland, MI
Children's Home & Aid	Chicago, IL
CHRIS 180	Atlanta, GA
Connecting Hearts Adoption Services	Orlando, FL
Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health - Colorado	Westminster, CO
Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health - Connecticut	Washington, CT
Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health - New Jersey	West Deptford, NJ
Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health - New York	Red Hook, NY
Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition	St. Louis, MO
Four Oaks Foster & Adoptive Family Connections	Cedar Rapids, IA
Glove House Inc. - Foster Care Services	Elmira, NY
Hillside	Atlanta, GA
Jewish Family Service of Nashville & Middle Tennessee Inc.	Nashville, TN
Koinonia Family Services - Foster Care Services	Carson, CA
McKinley Children's Center	San Dimas, CA
Multi-Agency Alliance for Children Inc.	Atlanta, GA
Onward Hope Inc.	Phoenix, AZ
St. Andrew's Residential Programs for Youth Inc. - S.T.A.R. Programs	San Jose, CA
Youth Advocate Services	Columbus, OH
Public Child Welare	
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

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 Foundation for Inclusion Tier receive the "You Are Welcome Here" Seal of Recognition.

Organization Name	Location
Adoption Exchange	
Adoption Center	Philadelphia, PA
The Adoption Exchange	Denver, CO
Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange	Boston, MA
CASA	
Tippecanoe County CASA	Lafayette, IN
Private Child Welfare	
A Baby Step Adoption	Reading, PA
A Loving Choice Adoption Associates	Shrewsbury, NJ
Acadia Adoption Center	Bridgton, ME
Adoption Center of Illinois at Family Resource Center	Chicago, IL
Adoption Resource Associates	Cambridge, MA
Child Crisis Arizona - Adoption & Foster Care	Mesa, AZ
Community Youth Services - Foster Care Services	Olympia, WA
Crittenton Services for Children & Families	Fullerton, GA
Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health - Georgia	Kennesaw, GA
Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health - Philadelphia - Foster Care Services	Philadelphia, PA

Organization Name	Location
Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health - Texas Treatment Network	League City, TX
Five Acres Foster/Adoptive Family Agency - Foster Care & Adoption Services	El Monte, CA
Hathaway-Sycamores	Pasadena, CA
Jonathan's Place - Foster Care & Adoption Services	Garland, TX
Lawrence Hall	Chicago, IL
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 - Bay Area	Oakland, CA
Seneca Family of Agencies - Southern California	Anaheim Hills, CA
Your Adoptive Family	Seattle, WA
Public Child Welfare	
Washington County Department of Social Services - Child Welfare Division	Hagerstown, MD

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 Inclusion 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	
360 Youth Services - Youth in Care Program	Naperville, IL
Adoption Options	Denver, CO
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
Bayfront Youth & Family Services	Long Beach, CA
Children's Home of Northern Kentucky/CHNK Behavioral Health	Covington, KY
Children's Home Society and Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota - Adoption & Foster Care Services	St. Paul, MN
Children's Home Society of Florida - Adoption & Foster Care Services	Orlando, FL
Children's Service Society of Utah - Grandfamilies/Kinship Care & Adoption Services	Salt Lake City, UT
Choice Network - Private Infant Adoption Services	Worthington, OH
Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health - Arizona	Phoenix, AZ
Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health - Florida	Orlando, FL
Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health - Massachusetts & Rhode Island	Rutland, MA
Extraordinary Families	Los Angeles, CA

Organization Name	Location
Forever Families Through Adoption Inc.	Rye Brook, NY
FosterAdopt Connect	Independence. MO
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 - Child Welfare & Open Arms Adoption Services	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	Oakbrook Terrace, IL
Spence-Chapin Services to Families & Children	New York, NY
TLC Child & Family Services	Sebastopol, CA
Uplift Family Services - Foster Care & Adoption Services	Campbell, CA
Vista Del Mar Child and Family Services - Adoption & Foster Care Services	Los Angeles, CA
Walden Family Services	San Diego, CA
Public Child Welfare	
Adams County Department of Human Services - Children & Family Services Division	Westminster, CO
Colorado Office of Children, Youth & Families - Child Welfare Division	Denver, CO
Monterey County Department of Social Services - Family & Children's Services Division	Salinas, CA
Prince George's County Department of Social Services - Child, Adult & Family Services Division	Upper Marlboro, MD
Ramsey County Department of Social Services - Adoption & Foster Care Services Division	St. Paul, MN

Devereux's clinical directors from across the country during March 2020 retreat

INNOVATOR PROFILE: DEVEREUX ADVANCED BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Moving the National Needle on LGBTQ Affirming Foster Care and Behavioral Health Services

Dr. Yvette Jackson, LMSW, DBH, began her work as a foster family recruiter 22 years ago. At that time, she attended community events, set up a table and spoke with passersby about the benefits of becoming foster parents. "What excited me about being a foster family recruiter was that finding the right home for the right child could completely change the trajectory of their life," she says.

Jackson is now executive director of Devereux Arizona, the Arizona center of national nonprofit Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health, one of the largest behavioral healthcare organizations in the country. Devereux's Arizona center serves more than 4,000 youth annually through treatment in residential settings, special education day schools, foster care, respite and outpatient/other specialized services.

Now and again, she runs into families she recruited all those years ago. "Knowing these kids, and seeing them blossom within their foster homes, with supportive families, is incredibly rewarding," she explains.

Jackson and her predecessors at the Arizona center helped pave the way for Devereux's national LGBTQ inclusion efforts. In 2011, when she was assistant executive director, the organization began placing significant focus on recruiting LGBTQ foster families. Around that time, her team learned about HRC's All Children - All Families (ACAF) Seal of Recognition program.

The Arizona center earned the ACAF seal in 2012, and the rest of the organization was eager to follow suit. Devereux's Florida and Georgia centers have since earned the Seal of Recognition, and its Colorado, Connecticut,

Massachusetts/Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York and Texas centers are currently undergoing the certification process.

Jackson feels LGBTQ inclusion has come a long way, particularly in recruiting foster families. "Several years ago, when we first earned the ACAF seal, it was challenging to match youth to LGBTQ foster parents because they were being overlooked."

Since then, advocacy efforts from Devereux staff, along with support from HRC, have created a culture shift. "Today," Jackson says, "we are finding that everyone is incredibly supportive of our LGBTQ foster families, and we couldn't be more thrilled because our foster parents are amazing!"

Dr. Yolanda Graham, Devereux's senior vice president and chief clinical/medical officer, says she has seen positive effects from these inclusion practices, both in her work and on a personal level. "What I've seen change at our organization is the ability to systematically look at inclusion practices, replicate them across the organization, and ensure our employees provide the most welcoming and supportive environment possible," Graham explains. "We are grateful to ACAF for providing guidelines to help us standardize our efforts and best practices. Enhancing our inclusion practices has also helped me, as a professional and as someone who identifies as a lesbian," she continues. "I felt like I was well informed, but what I learned over time is that I never stopped learning."

Devereux offers a broad spectrum of care for its youth, including clinical, therapeutic, residential, educational and employment programs, as well as child welfare services. Graham and Jackson are particularly proud of how the organization has quickly adapted its programs to be more LGBTQ affirming and, in particular, to create a safe environment for trans and non-binary youth.

"During the admissions process, if a youth requiring our services identifies as trans or non-binary, we have tools in place to help assess each young person's needs before they are admitted," notes Jackson. "And once on our campus, these youth are addressed and housed according to their preferred gender expression."

"One of the most heartwarming parts of our job is our commitment to ensuring that any youth who walks through our doors and identifies as LGBTQ will receive welcoming, supportive and affirming care," adds Graham. "The fact that our 7,500+ team members offer this type of environment to the individuals and families we serve — every day — is what brings me joy in my role."

> "What I've seen change at our organization is the ability to systematically look at inclusion practices, replicate them across the organization, and ensure our employees provide the most welcoming and supportive environment possible.

– DR. YOLANDA GRAHAM
Devereux's Senior Vice President & Chief Clinical/Medical Officer

Yolanda Graham, M.D. and Yvette Jackson, LMSW, DBH

The FosterAdopt Connect staff team

> " Just to have people on my side — to have somewhere I can be open about the journey and struggle and it won't be hushed or judged — that means the world. "

– JESSIE GREENFIELD
Program Support Specialist at FosterAdopt Connect

INNOVATOR PROFILE: FOSTERADOPT CONNECT

Building a Gender-Inclusive Workplace

For the last five years, Jessie Greenfield has worked with FosterAdopt Connect, an adoption and foster care agency serving Missouri and Kansas. Initially a part-time behavioral interventionist, Greenfield has since taken on a full-time position supporting the Vice President of Family Programs. Greenfield's own personal and family connections — their niece and nephew were adopted — fueled their interest in adoption and foster care work. "I always wanted to work with children, and that passion just grew over the years," Greenfield explains. "I grew up in a home that potentially could have put me in foster care, so I just have a soft spot for foster and adoptive families, and working to put them in a place to succeed."

When Greenfield made the transition to full-time work at the agency, they were also going through a more personal transition — to identifying openly as non-binary. Luckily they found that FosterAdopt Connect was support-ive. "I got to have my journey while I was working in a safe environment," says Greenfield. "I don't know how others can do it without that support." Even with a supportive and accepting environment, Greenfield found they had to advocate for changes in the workplace that better accommodated their identity, including converting one set of bathrooms, which already had single stalls, to be gender neutral and suggesting that all staff put their pronouns in their email signatures.

FosterAdopt Connect CEO Lori Ross — a member of the All Children - All Families (ACAF) National Advisory Council and early adopter of the program — has been really supportive throughout the inclusion process, according to Greenfield. When they came to FosterAdopt Connect in 2015 there was already a committee working on LGBTQ inclusivity. "It's something that has been a big interest to Lori," says Greenfield. "She's had children from the LGBTQ community that she has fostered and adopted. I think because of that she really pushed the agency to take bigger steps in making sure we are inclusive." Ross is quick to act on Greenfield's sugges-

Jessie Greenfield

tions. The same day that Greenfield suggested staff add pronouns in their email signatures, Ross added them to hers and emailed the whole staff to encourage others to do so. "She wrote, 'I highly encourage everyone to put their pronouns at the bottom of their signature so we can support our non-binary and transgender communities,'" recounts Greenfield. "Pretty much everyone did, which was pretty awesome."

FosterAdopt Connect's participation in ACAF has also improved their expe-rience as a non-binary employee, says Greenfield. In particular, ACAF helps the agency maintain its commitment to continually learning and improving its work, especially in inclusion for transgender and non-binary commu-nities. "It's okay, we're gonna make mistakes," says Greenfield. "I think our staff understand that and have become a lot more open and accepting of the ongoing learning process through the ACAF training. It's been cool to see the changes in how we talk and the language we use." Greenfield says this work has also had a positive impact on those the agency serves. "That training and knowledge is passed through and trickles down to our clients. We are inclusive, we are accepting, and we really try to make it known who we are and where we stand."

In the end, Greenfield is grateful to have been in such a welcoming environ-ment at this phase of their career and life. "Just to have people on my side," they explain, "to have somewhere I can be open about the journey and struggle and it won't be hushed or judged — that means the world."

Robyn Barbee and her son

"

I don't think I've ever had a client who has fought so hard and for so long. "

– SETH MIDDLETON
Family Advocate with FosterAdopt Connect

PARENT PROFILE: ROBYN BARBEE

Overcoming the Realities of a Biased System to Care for a Loved One in Need

Robyn Barbee became a foster parent when a 4-year-old relative needed a place to stay after witnessing a traumatic incident. She already had a connection with the child, having been in his life since his birth, so she was a logical family member to offer him a home. The child welfare system didn't get involved until he'd been with her for a year.

But as soon as the system did get involved, Barbee says she faced extra scrutiny and challenges, and failed to receive the same support as other foster parents she knew. As a Black transgender woman living in Kansas City, Missouri, Barbee eventually began to feel like there was bias at play. When she tried to talk to her caseworker's supervisor, her concerns were dismissed. However, it was clear that her identity was influencing how she was being treated.

Meanwhile, despite the lack of support she received, Barbee worked to make sure her son adjusted well and was able to cope with the impact of the trauma he experienced. She got him into therapy, and offered support through his behavioral challenges. Barbee says that he faced added stress when his placement with her was in question because he was happy and wanted to remain in her home.

Three years into navigating the system, Barbee was connected with FosterAdopt Connect, an adoption and foster care agency serving Missouri and Kansas. That was when things finally started to change, she says. They helped connect her to foster parent resources and validated her experiences of bias and discrimination. Seth Middleton, a family advocate with FosterAdopt Connect who helped support Barbee, went to meetings and court dates with her and provided support through a difficult process. "She's a transgender woman of color, so the reality is that she is being treated differently by the courts," Middleton says. "I'm a white man, so part

Robyn Barbee and her son

of what I can do is lend that privilege to my clients." Middleton says he sees how people of color in particular are treated differently by the system. "There is an immediate lack of respect. I think it is getting better, but anyone who doesn't conform to a white patriarchal standard of social etiquette is definitely treated differently."

Barbee speaks highly of the FosterAdopt Connect staff, including Taneeka Hill, the licensing worker she met when she first came to the agency. "If I could give her a plaque in her honor I would," says Barbee. "She helped me so much." Of Middleton, Barbee appreciates how straightforward he always is, and the speed with which he gets back to her with answers and resources.

Middleton also has high praise for Barbee, both as a parent and as an advocate for herself and her son. "Robyn is a fantastic parent," he says. "She is one of the most passionate people I think I have ever met. She's a fantastic advocate for her son in school. I really have nothing but praise for her in that regard."

Last fall, Barbee was finally able to adopt her son, six years after he came to her home. Middleton says that Barbee stayed determined, even when the situation was challenging. "I don't think I've ever had a client who has fought so hard and for so long," he says. Barbee reports that her son is really happy to be at home with her, and they are glad that the placement is now final.

The Amara staff team

Amara

INNOVATOR PROFILE: AMARA

Taking LGBTQ Inclusion Statewide through Training of Trainers Program

Trey Rabun always knew he wanted a family, but it wasn't until he found himself working in foster care and adoption that he began to really understand what that process could look like. "I was so naive about it," he explains. "I pictured a baby that I would get to name and pick up from the hospital. That's the picture the media tends to show about adoption." In reality, Rabun quickly realized, the biggest need is foster homes for children of all ages, some of whom eventually need a permanent adoption placement.

After moving back to his hometown of Seattle for graduate school, Rabun became a foster care specialist. As a Black gay man, Rabun says he's encountered a really welcoming environment at Amara, the adoption and foster care agency where he's worked for the past nine years. "I knew of Amara's longstanding history of working with gay and lesbian families," Rabun recalls. "We didn't have that many LGBTQ staff at the time, but I always felt affirmed and welcomed. "

Amara joined the All Children - All Families (ACAF) program in 2012. The agency has been licensing same-sex couples since at least the early '90s, and was one of the first foster care agencies nationally to do so, according to Rabun. While it has long been a leader in gay and lesbian advocacy, Rabun says that the ACAF process has helped Amara improve on trans competency. "It keeps us accountable and keeps us doing more training, especially around our trans and gender non-conforming clients. That's been a huge learning curve. Having ACAF resources has helped us make sure that our staff is really competent to work with the entire LGBTQ community and not just cisgender gay and lesbian folks."

In 2018, Amara received a grant to create a training about supporting LGBTQ youth in care. After doing focus groups with agencies, community members, and LGBTQ foster care alumni, Rabun created a train the

> ❝ Having ACAF resources has helped us make sure that our staff is really competent to work with the entire LGBTQ community and not just cisgender gay and lesbian folks. ❞

– TREY RABUN
Foster Care Supervisor at Amara

Trey Rabun (left) with his husband Phil and their son Reggie

trainers program which would allow the material to reach a wider group of prospective foster families. "Seattle, where I'm based, tends to be pretty LGBTQ resource heavy," says Rabun. "Now the training is being offered statewide in places where I don't have connections," he explains. Though he was initially concerned about a few prospective foster families and how they might receive the material, Rabun says that overall outcomes have been positive. "It's been cool to see the growth for some families," he says.

In addition to the statewide LGBTQ training initiative, Rabun is also leading Amara's efforts to recruit more foster families of color. He created an initiative specifically focused on recruiting Black foster families. "That was very intentional to help meet the cultural needs of the Black kids in care," Rabun explains. "We're still trying to build up our competencies of working with families of color, and we're always looking to remove any internal barriers that exist."

Rabun's own experience building his family through adoption confirmed the importance of this work. When he and his husband (who is white) decided to adopt, they were committed to adopting a child of color. They are now parents to Reggie, a 5-year-old Black and Native American child. The fact that Rabun is Black helped Reggie's family of origin trust that his needs would be met. "It showed how important race is for folks and how we can sometimes dismiss that part of our kiddos' identities," says Rabun.

Creating the conditions for foster youth's whole identities to be seen is an important element of Rabun's work. He completed three train the trainers sessions last year as part of the LGBTQ training initiative, reaching six organizations. Rabun says he can see the impact they have had on other groups around the state. "These groups were already doing good work around supporting LGBTQ families," says Rabun, "but now they've seen what Amara has done in really pushing toward doing even better. It's great to see the influence we've had to build up LGBTQ competencies in the state."

J.Proud Consortium marching together in the Philadelphia Pride Parade in 2019, with representatives from 13 local Jewish organizations

INNOVATOR PROFILE: JEWISH FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICE OF GREATER PHILADELPHIA

Using Faith To Guide LGBTQ Advocacy

As LGBTQ Initiative Program Manager at the Jewish Family and Children's Service of Greater Philadelphia (JFCS), Galia Godel has a unique role. "Based on our research, we are the only Jewish social service organization in the United States that has an LGBTQ-specific department," Godel explains. She has worked within that department since 2018, helping to ensure that the organization is following best practices and is "as supportive as possible for LGBTQ youth in care."

JFCS has a long history of acceptance when it comes to the LGBTQ community. "We've been LGBTQ affirming for probably at least 60 years," says Godel. "We've never turned folks away based on their sexual orientation or gender." But recently, JFCS has moved beyond acceptance and taken a more proactive stance. "We've realized in the last decade or so that we've needed to make a firm push toward doing advocacy and action work." Godel now works with other Jewish organizations to help them become more LGBTQ affirming, conducting workshops, trainings and audits of their programming.

Godel also recruits LGBTQ folks into JFCS' foster care programs. "A lot of folks in the community don't realize they can be foster parents," she says. Joining the All Children - All Families (ACAF) program has really helped Godel strengthen her trainings and curriculum. "It's been incredible," she says. "I was so grateful to go through the ACAF process and see it as a set of guideposts. It really made my influence within our child welfare program even stronger than it could possibly be."

While JFCS is a Jewish organization, it serves people from all different faith backgrounds. The faith aspect of its work, says Godel, instead "shapes the way that individual Jewish members of the organization do this work supporting families, saving lives and aiming for the wellbeing of all our clients."

"It's been incredible. I was so grateful to go through the ACAF process and see it as a set of guideposts. It really made my influence within our child welfare program even stronger than it could possibly be."

– GALIA GODEL
LGBTQ Initiative Program Manager at JFCS

Galia Godel

Godel herself comes from a legacy of religious leadership — her grandfather is a well known rabbi in the Philadelphia area. "My grandparents, and grandfather especially, have been really supportive," she says. While people unfamiliar with Judaism might be surprised by how affirming the community is of LGBTQ people, Godel says that it is an incredibly supportive and social justice-oriented religion. In her partnerships with local Jewish organizations and synagogues, Godel says they are on board with LGBTQ acceptance, and are simply searching for the best way to adapt.

Such an affirming and welcoming foster care and adoption agency is unfortunately not the norm nationally, or even in Philadelphia. The local Catholic Social Services agency is the plaintiff in a case that will be heard by the Supreme Court, in which they are protesting the City of Philadelphia's requirement that they license LGBTQ foster parents in order to receive full city funding for their foster care program. "It's very concerning that there are social service agencies discriminating against youth who need homes and folks who want to give homes," says Godel. "It makes me feel so grateful to work for an organization that is inclusive and accepts LGBTQ foster and adoptive parents. We are proud to be an option for them." Despite this kind of major opposition, Godel does see things improving. "I think it's absolutely becoming more positive. I know there are faith-based organizations who are digging their heels in," she explains. "But overall, I see organizations realizing that in order to support people, they need to understand more about their experience. I've seen that shift happening and I look forward to seeing it more."

Brent Blair with his three children, Emi, Obi and Amadi in front of their Los Angeles home

Finding "Possibility Models" for a Path to Parenthood

Ever since Brent Blair came out as gay in his late teens, he has always wanted children. But growing up in the AIDS epidemic really shaped him. "My first thought was I didn't know if I was going to live beyond 30, there was a lot of death in my world," he says. As time went on, stigma and a lack of role models — especially single fathers — also kept him from his dream of parenting. "I didn't see very many role models of gay dads unless they were really wealthy and had hired a surrogate," he explains.

Decades later, at a foster adoption seminar at his local LGBTQ center in Los Angeles, Blair finally found the route to parenting he had been looking for. "I went home and I remember weeping," he says. The workshop, hosted by foster care, adoption and advocacy organization Extraordinary Families, showed Blair that there were 30,000 children in the foster care system who needed parents. Additionally, the facilitators were very encouraging and shared that they'd had a lot of success in placements with LGBTQ families, Blair recalls. Following the seminar, Blair joined Potluck Club — a group that hosts potlucks for fostered and adopted families. "It was mostly geared toward gay men," Blair says. The host was an LGBTQ single dad of three foster adopted children, and he was also 50, Blair's age at the time. Meeting that dad showed Blair that becoming a parent was still a possibility, and he began the process.

As with many foster parents, Blair's path to becoming a permanent family was a complicated one that spanned a number of years and placements. He credits Extraordinary Families with offering the support he needed to navigate it all. "There's no way I could have imagined doing this without them," he says. "They have been so helpful and supportive in every way. Every new social worker we've worked with has been more supportive than the last."

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> There's no way I could have imagined doing this without them. They have been so helpful and supportive in every way. Every new social worker we've worked with has been more supportive than the last.
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> "
>
> **– BRENT BLAIR**

Blair is now the parent of three boys, all siblings ranging from ten years to 17 months in age. Emi, the oldest, is genderfluid, which Blair says caused challenges with past foster homes. While one previous foster family was loving, they were also conservative and religious, and didn't respond well to Emi's requests to carry the mother's purse or wear women's clothes.

As a gay man, Blair has been able to offer Emi some support around exploring his gender expression, and Blair says Emi loves the fact that he has a gay dad. "Every other day, Emi will rock a dress with a choker to school," says Blair. "He just has his own style. He is completely original and completely unimpressed with people who are gender bound."

The Extraordinary Families team has also seen the benefits of Blair's support. "Brent is affirming of and nurtures Emi's visibly and openly expressed gender fluidity and identity," shares Blair's adoption social worker Fesseha Tessema. "He routinely checks in with Emi, without shame nor blame, as to what gender expression best meets Emi's needs for the day, week or month."

Supporting his kids' identity formation — particularly as a white parent to three Black children — is something to which Blair has given a lot of thought. He is intentional about conversations with the children about racism, education and fostering a multiracial community for their family. Identity is complex and intersectional, and Blair does his best to see where his strengths and challenges are, as well as what support his kids need to thrive. The Extraordinary Families team continues to offer support and assessment to Blair and his family, including fostering a community where they can connect with other families with similar experiences through events and gatherings. "It's been amazing," Blair says.

While parenting three boys of such diverse ages is not what he pictured at the outset of his journey, Blair says it's been the best experience of his life. He encourages others who are interested to take the leap. "If I can do it alone with three kids, with all of the struggles that we've had, believe me anybody could do it."

Alexis Oberdorfer and part of her adoption team enjoy a Vikings game at US Bank Stadium

> " Really for me it is about raising the bar and raising the floor at the same time. How to raise the baseline so that we expect everyone to be at a higher level. "

– ALEXIS OBERDORFER

President of Children's Home Society & Vice President of Adoption & Foster Care at LSS

INNOVATOR PROFILE: CHILDREN'S HOME SOCIETY AND LUTHERAN
SOCIAL SERVICE OF MINNESOTA - ADOPTION & FOSTER CARE SERVICES

Moving Open Minds Toward Action in Support of LGBTQ Inclusion

Alexis Oberdorfer has experienced adoption and foster care from a number of different angles. She was adopted, as were two of her three children, and she has spent more than 25 years working in child welfare. For the last 11 years, Oberdorfer has worked with Children's Home Society and Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota - Adoption & Foster Care Services. She currently serves as president of the Children's Home and associate vice president for adoption and foster care at LSS.

As a self-identified straight and cisgender ally, Oberdorfer learned a lot through HRC's All Children - All Families (ACAF) program. "Going in, we were very open-minded and open-hearted in our beliefs and our practice," she recalls. But the process showed her that mindset was only one piece of the puzzle needed for truly inclusive programs. "Because we believed that we were accepting, I think we were not as active as we could have been," Oberdorfer explains.

When it came to putting those values into practice, Oberdorfer found a number of concrete steps that her organization could take. "While we have those good intentions," she says, "we had not gone to the level of making sure our forms used gender-neutral language, or putting up signs for our gender-neutral restrooms." These are just two examples of how Oberdorfer and her team went about making sure that their organization was truly LGBTQ inclusive.

The connection Children's Home & LSS has to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) influences their approach. "Our local ELCA bishops are in full support of our services in adoption and believe that we are in keeping overall with the practices of other social ministry organizations in the ELCA. Our mission is to find permanent, loving homes for children in a nurturing environment where they can prosper."

Alexis Oberdorfer

Children's Home & LSS has also placed an emphasis on recruiting a diversity of families to match the diversity among the youth in care. "Knowing that our kids are diverse, and we see a lot of disparities in terms of race and many of our youth being LGBTQ, we want families that are able to match our kids," she says. "It helps all of our kids in identity development and being free to be who they are." The organization has undertaken specific recruitment efforts with Black churches and with a Jewish synagogue interested in supporting the LGBTQ community.

Even with such an open-minded staff and leadership, the ACAF training process revealed additional areas for growth. "It became more apparent to me that there was a wide range of knowledge about LGBTQ issues among my staff," she says. "Not that they weren't open to moving through the trainings, but as I participated I could hear my staff's questions and comments." That knowledge has given Oberdorfer a focus for her organization's LGBTQ inclusion work. "Really for me it is about raising the bar and raising the floor at the same time. How to raise the baseline so that we expect everyone to be at a higher level."

Oberdorfer can see evidence of progress. This year, for the first time, a transgender youth from one of their programs is sharing their story publicly. "Part of that conversation is about their identity and needs," she says. "They've chosen to share that story and it's being displayed in a very open and positive way. I don't know if we would have done that in the past or not. I've now seen it for the first time and it's lovely to watch people celebrate."

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 A.

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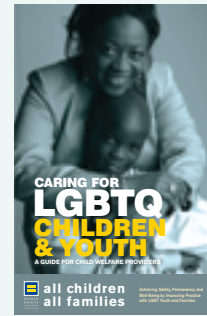
The Caring for LGBTQ Children & Youth Guide for child welfare providers covers essential information on care and support of LGBTQ children and youth in out-of-home care.
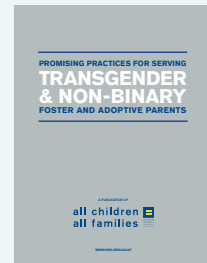

Promising Practices for Serving Transgender & Non-Binary Foster & Adoptive Parents is a first-of-its-kind comprehensive guide for child welfare professionals seeking to intentionally recruit, certify and support transgender and non-binary adults to serve as resource parents for young people in care.
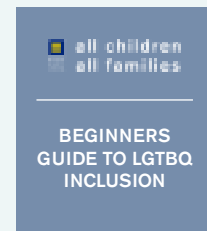
The Beginners guide to LGTBQ Inclusion is designed to give child welfare professionals a place to start when implementing a system free of discrimination for LGBTQ youth and parents.

Appendix A: About the 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 program.

Key Process Points	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEPT
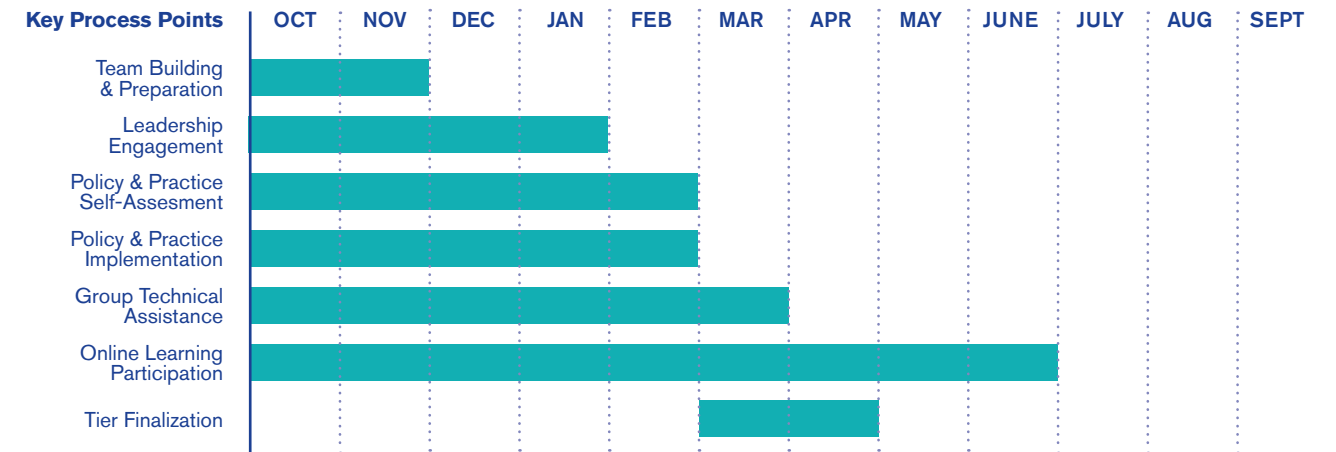
Team Building & Preparation

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 two-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 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 October and run through February of each annual cycle.

Online Learning Participation

A key component of ACAF participation is the professional development available to agency staff through the program'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 the end of April). Each year ACAF celebrates all participating agencies in its annual report.

About the Participating Organizations

One hundred organizations participated in the 2019-2020 cycle. The majority of participating organizations (88 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 policy and practice 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 (6 organizations) and CASA affiliates (6 organizations) were provided to replace other best practice questions that did not apply.

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

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.

Participants with "In Progress" Tier of Recognition

In light of the disruptions to the final stages of the All Children - All Families participation process caused by COVID-19, the tier status for many new participants was designated as "In Progress" as they continue to work toward their goal tiers.

These six organizations were designated as "In Progress" for the 2019-2020 participation cycle.

Organization Name	Location
ACH Child & Family Services	Fort Worth, TX
Aunt Martha's Health & Wellness - Child Welfare Services	Olympia Fields, IL
Baltimore County Department of Social Services - Children's Services Division	Baltimore, MD
DA Blodgett St. John's	Grand Rapids, MI
Kansas Children Services League/Adopt KS Kids	Wichita, KS

PARTICIPANTS BY ORGANIZATION TYPE

- 78% Private Child Welfare
- 10% Public Child Welfare
- 6% CASA
- 6% Adoption Exchange
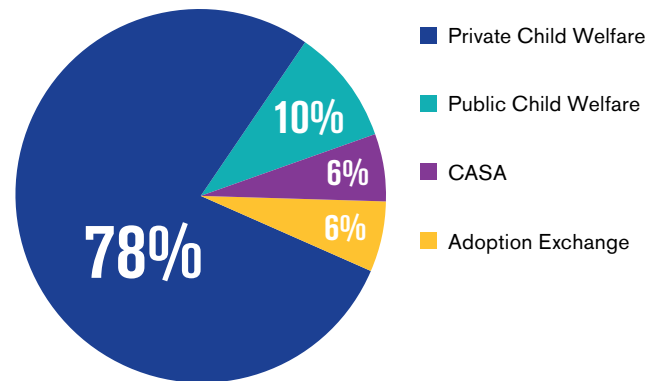
Appendix B: Benchmarks of LGBTQ Inclusion

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: **Benchmarks in bold text.**
- Solid Foundation for Inclusion: All benchmarks, except italicized text.
- Innovative Inclusion: *All benchmarks 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 Inclusion 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.*

"As we continue implementing the ACAF benchmarks, we've broadened our focus on diversity, equity and inclusion to include all marginalized and oppressed groups. We're particularly focused on training to support supervisors in challenging staff around implicit bias and microaggressions in their work."

– KATIE PAGE SANDER, LMSW
Executive Director at Hands Across the Water - Ann Arbor, MI
(2020 Innovator)

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.
- *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 Foundation for Inclusion 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 Foundation for Inclusion 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.
- 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.

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.
- *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.*

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.*

Acknowledgments

All Children - All Families Team

Alison Delpercio, MSW
Director, All Children - All Families

Jean-Phillipe Regis, MPS
Associate Director,
All Children - All Families

Anela Galić
Assistant, All Children - All Families

Note to Readers

This report details the efforts of 100 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 organizations in this report with an "In Progress" Tier of Recognition and all 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 B. Above all, your own individual experiences matter. In the event you feel you have been discriminated against, see if the organization has 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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