



## MONDAY MORNING MEMO

Monday, April 2, 2007 ☞ Volume 2, Issue 6

### ***LGBTQ Youth in Foster Care: Supporting All Children***

One out of every 10 to 20 adolescents in out of home care is lesbian or gay, according to Lambda Legal’s report *Youth in the Margins*. Yet the issue of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ) youth in care often remains one of the least discussed and supported among the individuals and systems dedicated to serving children in foster care.

“It’s not always the easiest thing to talk about,” said Rob Conlon, who directs the state’s Children’s Centers Program. Conlon has served on the Board of Directors for the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network’s (GLSEN) Hudson Valley Chapter since 2001 and was elected to the GLSEN National Advisory Council. “I’ve facilitated tons of these conversations,” he said, “and have heard just about every response imaginable.”

***“What you want to discuss are attitudes of acceptance and respect toward fundamental human identity.” – Rob Conlon***

One suggestion Conlon offers to CASA programs seeking to enhance volunteer and staff training on this issue is to separate the discussion from conversations about sexuality. “Sexual orientation is not the same as libido,” he said. “What you want to discuss are attitudes of acceptance and respect toward fundamental human identity, not get into issues of sexual practice. Keep the conversation as concise and separate as possible.”

Richard Heyl de Ortiz, who prior to becoming the co-executive director of CASA of Ulster County led Philadelphia’s LGBTQ community center and created NYC Orientation, a program at New York City’s community center for people who are coming out, concurs. “What you want to get to is people’s sensitivity and willingness to be open,” Heyl de Ortiz said. “It’s a conversation about bringing people to awareness of their own cultural biases and how those impact their work with families. Make no assumptions that someone’s background will make them more or less sensitive.”

Particularly critical are appropriate responses to foster youth who are engaged in the “coming out” process while in care. “Disclosures happen when people feel safe,” Conlon said, so this can and does occur once a child has been removed from an unsafe environment. Negative messages about the child’s sexual orientation can also have been a part of the abuse the child suffered prior to coming into care, Heyl de Ortiz adds. Suddenly the child is getting affirmation for being who he or she is, and may feel it is time to reach out. “This can be an abrupt process,” Conlon said. The average age for coming out 10 years ago was 26; it is now 14 to 15, a positive trend due to greater acceptance and increased positive portrayal of LGBTQ youth and adults in the media.

As with any disclosure, CASA volunteers need to examine what attitudes they bring to the conversation and how what they say and do in response to the child impacts his or her well-being. “It’s important not to make a bigger deal of it than it is for the child,” Heyl de Ortiz said. “You need to focus on what the child needs from you, not what you think should be done.”



What needs of the child may be met, though, may be limited by what services and supports are available in the community. Each CASA Program should maintain a current list of good resources, and know what agencies and individuals are available to assist with case situations or training, prior to any disclosures being made.

In 2005, at a roundtable discussion of CASA Directors on the subject of LGBTQ youth, directors indicated they would appreciate an LGBTQ Resource Group, individuals they could contact during training and when specific cases require. The CASA Assistance Program has begun reaching out to individuals to form such a Resource Group. Rob Conlon ([rconlon@courts.state.ny.us](mailto:rconlon@courts.state.ny.us)) has offered his assistance to local directors, as has Richard Heyl de Ortiz ([richard@casaulster.org](mailto:richard@casaulster.org)). The NYS UCS CASA Assistance Program would appreciate hearing from other directors, volunteers and board members if they are interested in being part of this group, or are aware of other individuals who might be willing to offer their services. Please contact Darlene Ward at [daward@courts.state.ny.us](mailto:daward@courts.state.ny.us) with any suggestions. We would like to gather these individuals together later this year to discuss how best to serve the network on this issue.

Heyl de Ortiz stresses this is not just a youth issue, but also involves exploration of attitudes toward gay and lesbian birth, foster and adoptive parents. Heyl de Ortiz, who with his partner adopted a child in foster care, said he had a volunteer express concerns about a proposed adoption by a gay couple on one of their cases, concerns that would not have been voiced about a heterosexual couple. “Raising awareness of all of this is key,” said Heyl de Ortiz. “We have to be open to all types of families.”

***For more information on this issue:***

- The Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) website, [http://www.siecus.org/pubs/fact/FS\\_lgbt\\_youth\\_issues.pdf](http://www.siecus.org/pubs/fact/FS_lgbt_youth_issues.pdf) offers an excellent five-page fact sheet. There is also an extensive Annotated Bibliography at that site.
- The Child Welfare League of America recently devoted a special issue to LGBTQ Youth in Child Welfare. You can purchase the issue for \$30 through the CWLA website, <http://www.cwla.org/pubs/pubdetails.asp?PUBID=10455>. Also on their website is a good fact sheet: <http://www.cwla.org/programs/culture/glbtfacts.htm>
- CWLA and Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund are engaged in a project titled “Fostering Transitions” to support LGBTQ youth and adults involved in the child welfare system. The three-year effort seeks to explore services and policies and facilitate solutions. For more information on the project, go to <http://www.cwla.org/programs/culture/glbtfacts.htm> or to <http://www.lambdalegal.com/>
- A workshop titled “Welcoming All Families” will be held at the NYS Citizen’s Coalition for Children Adoption 2007 conference May 10-12. The workshop seeks to identify skills and competencies needed to work effectively with the gay and lesbian community. For more information, go to [www.nysccc.org](http://www.nysccc.org).
- An annotated bibliography is available at National CASA’s program technical assistance site, [http://www.casenet.org/download/diversity/0612\\_lgbtq\\_0032.pdf](http://www.casenet.org/download/diversity/0612_lgbtq_0032.pdf)



### ***Collocated Substance Abuse Counselors Improve Outcomes***

Recognizing both the complex needs of families with addiction issues and the high percentage of these families involved in the child welfare and family court systems, the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (NYS OCFS) and the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) have undertaken a demonstration Collocation Project to improve outcomes for these families by offering additional skilled resources collocated in local social service districts and/or probation departments.

This Collocation Project will provide Credentialed Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Counselors (CASACs) and mentors (paraprofessional support staff) to be sited in the offices of local Departments of Social Services and/or Probation, offering expertise and guidance in addressing the needs of families with substance abuse issues who are referred for child maltreatment or PINS issues. The goal of the project is to coordinate early identification (screening) access and referral to substance abuse prevention and treatment services, as well as to reduce out-of-home placements.

The \$5 million demonstration project was initiated this year. It is anticipated to last three years. Funding for the project comes from New York State. Nine counties, which were selected based on need and additional criteria, are participating in this project. They are: Erie, Dutchess, Genesee, Fulton, Livingston, Onondaga, Orange, St. Lawrence, and Westchester. This project will be evaluated over the three years and is expected to document the impact early identification and referral to substance abuse services will have on family outcomes. State agency and county agency collaboration has been strong as this project has developed implementation plans.

### ***Honor an Attorney who Advocates for Children***

Nominations for attorneys who have actively advocated for children are being accepted for the annual Child Advocacy Award of the American Bar Association (ABA). Deadline is April 30<sup>th</sup>.

In 1990, the American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division (YLD), in conjunction with the Center on Children and the Law, established the Child Advocacy Award to honor lawyers for distinguished service on behalf of children. The ABA Young Lawyers Division Child Advocacy Award is given to an individual based on his/her personal achievement and commitment. The Division will announce one award for each category: Young Lawyer (36 years of age or less or admitted to practice in his/her first bar within the past five years) and Non-Young Lawyer (37 or more years of age). For details, see:

<http://www.abanet.org/yld/awardschildadvocacy.html>

## **Resources**

### ***The Empire Page Hosts Variety of Statewide Data***

**The Empire Page**, which modestly bills itself as “The Ultimate Website for News and Information on Politics and Government,” does contain an impressive array of statewide data including census figures, reports on social services, education and the economy, and comprehensive information on a host of other issues affecting the families we serve. A place to go for some good references for grant applications. Go to: <http://www.empirepage.com/newsindepth.html>



# CASA ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

OFFICE OF ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION AND COURT IMPROVEMENT

## ***Volunteer Protection Act and D&O Insurance***

A number of not for profit boards struggle with the question of whether or not they are in need of directors and officers (D&O) insurance (the answer is generally yes!). There's a brief but good analysis of what the federal Volunteer Protection Act of 1997 covers versus what is covered by D&O insurance at Aon Association Services' website, <http://np.npo-ins.com/vpa.jsp?subd=np> .

## ~~~~~ **The A-Train** ~~~~~

## ***Prevent Child Abuse Conference in Albany April 16-18***

The annual Prevent Child Abuse New York conference will be held April 16-18 in Albany. This year's conference, titled "Investing in Children, Investing in Our Future," will feature plenary speakers Robert Anda, M.D., co-principal investigator of the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study, "The Wide Ranging Health and Social Consequences of Adverse Childhood Experiences," and Jim Hmurovich, President & CEO, Prevent Child Abuse America, discussing "Preventing Child Abuse & Neglect: Where We Are, Where We Need to Go."

For more information on the conference, go to: <http://www.preventchildabuseny.org/conf07/index.shtml>

## ~~~~~ **Next Issue** ~~~~~

Due to staff vacation, the next issue of the Monday Morning Memo will be on **Monday, April 30<sup>th</sup>**.

## ~~~~~ **Quote of the Week** ~~~~~

*"Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat."*

***-- Theodore Roosevelt***

***This is a publication of the  
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