



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE MODEL STANDARDS PROJECT

CALIFORNIA FAMILY TO FAMILY INITIATIVE (SEPT 2007)

INTRODUCTION: In 2002, Legal Services for Children and the National Center for Lesbian Rights launched the Model Standards Project, a multiyear project to develop and disseminate model professional standards governing services to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth in out-of-home care. The project grew out of staff members' direct experience working with LGBT youth and their families, as well as inquiries from LGBT youth across the country who shared distressing and discriminatory experiences they had in out-of-home care, and from service providers who sought guidance on how best to respond to these situations and guidelines for providing appropriate care for these vulnerable children and adolescents.

The goal of the Model Standards Project is to improve services and outcomes by giving child welfare and juvenile justice agencies accurate, up-to-date information about the best practices for providing competent services to LGBT youth, based on the knowledge and practical experience of experts in the field. Project staff conducted a series of focus groups and interviews with LGBT youth involved in child welfare and juvenile justice systems across the country. Staff also convened a national advisory committee composed of individuals with direct experience in public agencies serving youth, including young people with direct systems experience and child welfare and juvenile justice professionals with specific interest and expertise in the concerns of LGBT youth. In consultation with Advisory Committee members, project staff developed a draft set of standards, which they pilot-tested in workshops and trainings nationally. The standards were published in 2006 by the Child Welfare League of America as *Best Practice Guidelines: Serving LGBT Youth in Out-of-Home Care*.

The Project complements the training mandate of California's Foster Care Non-Discrimination Act (AB 458), which prohibits discrimination in the foster care system on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. Because training is crucial to enable service providers to fulfill their responsibilities to provide safe and nondiscriminatory care, placement and services to foster children, AB 458 mandates initial and ongoing training for all group home administrators, foster parents and department licensing personnel. AB 458 likewise recognizes that ongoing training of county child welfare workers, group home staff, foster family agency staff and relative caregivers is crucial to enable them to fulfill their responsibilities under the law.

In 2004, the Model Standards Project partnered with the Annie E. Casey Foundation and identified the Family-to-Family Initiative as an opportunity for site-based implementation efforts. Project staff selected three counties—Alameda, Fresno and San Luis Obispo—to receive ongoing technical support and assistance for the specific purpose of focusing attention on improving outcomes of LGBT youth in out-of-home care. The counties were selected based on their expressed interest in the Project, their commitment to the child welfare reform efforts of the Family-to-Family Initiative, and their geographic and demographic diversity. Technical support and assistance has consisted of on-site meetings with individual counties; presentations and trainings for child welfare staff, caregivers and community partners; meetings with other agencies facing similar challenges; and regular telephone and email support.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT MODEL STANDARDS PROJECT, please email Carolyn Reyes (Carolyn@lsc-sf.org), Staff Attorney, Legal Services for Children or <http://www.f2f.ca.gov/LGBT.htm>

ALAMEDA COUNTY SOCIAL SERVICES AGENCY

Alameda County's Model Standards Project Workgroup is made up of child welfare workers and community partners who work with LGBT youth in Alameda County. The workgroup meets twice a month and in Spring 2007, developed a LGBTQ Policy for the Department. The policy was first presented at the Quarterly Department Manager's meeting with a presentation by Caitlin Ryan, Director of the Family Acceptance Project in San Francisco. She made a brief presentation about her work with families around acceptance and rejection, followed by a panel presentation by an adoptive family of a transgender youth, and gay and lesbian former foster youth who shared their experiences. Child welfare supervisors were given packets containing the policy, the cover letter that will be sent out to resource families and providers, copies of CWLA's Best Practice Guidelines: Serving LGBT Youth in Out of Home Care, and other valuable resource materials to distribute to their staff at November Unit Meetings. A Forum for Providers is being planned for early December 2007, to present the Policy to both resource families and providers. In December and early January 2008, the LGBTQ Policy, cover letter and a packet of supportive materials will be sent to resource families and community partners. Two day-long trainings, funded by Annie E. Casey, will be offered to resource families, community partners and staff in February 2008 at both north and south Alameda County locations.

FRESNO COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

The Model Standards Project (MSP) Taskforce, a committee aimed at implementing strategies outlined in the Fresno County Department of Children and Family Services Model Standards Project Strategic Plan of Action, meets regularly twice a month. The committee, made up of Department of Children and Family Services staff (DCFS), juvenile probation staff, children's mental health staff, and Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender & Questioning (LGBTQ) community resource agency staff, has done tremendous work in raising awareness of needed resources for LGBTQ youth and their families. A majority of MSP taskforce members have participated in the "Creating Inclusive Systems of Care for LGBTQ Youth" Training and many taskforce members have been trained to become trainers themselves on this curriculum. The committee has begun training other Department of Children and Family Services staff on this curriculum and plans are underway to hire a contract provider to continue the work. Training has expanded to foster parents, with presentations regarding MSP Taskforce objectives and LGBTQ foster youth rights at Spanish speaking Coffee Connections and Foster Parent Association Meetings. Informational presentations at the community level have also begun, with presentations for California State University Interns, and Fresno Pacific College Students. The MSP Taskforce has also focused on raising the awareness of staff within the Department of Children and Family Services by participating in the "Multi-Ethnic Cultural Festival," a festival that highlights the food and traditions of a variety of ethnic and cultural groups. The MSP Taskforce has developed a brochure with valuable community resources available to LGBTQ Youth and their families.

The Department of Children and Family Services has provided several opportunities for the expansion of knowledge and in having the most accurate and up to date information on best practice approaches when working with LGBTQ youth and families. DCFS staff attended the "Finding Better Ways: Best Practice in working with LGBTQ Youth" in Nashville, Tennessee. Several

members of the MSP Taskforce were also invited to attend the “True Colors” Conference in Great Britain, Connecticut, including DCFS staff, Probation staff, and youth.

The Department of Children and Family Services participated in the 2007 Gay Pride Festival with a booth aimed at recruiting foster and adoptive parents, as well as community representatives from the LGBTQ community. Further outreach efforts extended to include recruitment advertisements in LGBTQ community media such as Community Link, Inc.’s “News Link” newspaper, “The Pink Pages” Business Directory, and an informational interview on “It’s a Queer Thang” radio show.

In the joint collaboration between the Department of Children and Family Services and LGBTQ community partners, “Xpress”, an LGBTQ Foster Youth Forum has been developed. The group, which meets twice a month, is designed to provide a safe and supportive atmosphere for foster youth, ages 14-21, who identify as, or are friends of LGBTQ foster youth. Collaboration efforts have extended to this year’s “18th Annual Reel Pride Gay and Lesbian Film Festival” which has graciously donated tickets to the youth focused portion of the event to Fresno County Independent Living Program eligible foster youth.

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

San Luis Obispo County remains committed to the six goals outlined in the Model Standards for LGBTQ youth in out-of-home care. In the past 6 months, San Luis Obispo has been focused on developing and implementing our plan for how to use the training, “Creating Inclusive Services for LGBT Youth in Out of Home Care.”

A revision of the PRIDE training curriculum for new Resource Parents has been completed and used in several training cycles. Some of the curriculum for on-going Foster Parent training is also being used. Reviews received from both trainers and Resource Parents have been positive.

The first week of September the first in a series of four trainings were offered, providing staff/partners on The 3,5,7 Model Training with Darla Henry, which deals with loss, grief and permanency by answering the global questions of: Who am I? Identity; What happened to me? Loss; Where am I going? Attachment; How will I get there? Relationship Building; When will I know I belong? Safety & Claiming. After setting the stage with these trainings, a staff/partner training is planned in 2008.

Two workgroup members, a County Office of Education staff member and a PRIDE trainer, will be making a presentation to representatives from all of the School Districts in October. The goal of the presentations are to educate and also to ask those representatives how to best move forward to reach school staff in each of the Districts with the OHYAC training. Similar activities are planned for the Community School Principals.

This summer, the Model Standards Work Group merged with the California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP) Task Force to be more effective reaching permanency outcomes for LGBTQ youth. The CPYP Task Force is comprised of a cross section of agency staff and community partners, including foster youth.