

A Step-By-Step Toolkit

Putting the Power of Parents to Work



The Power of Parents

Parents have tremendous potential to influence systems and institutions. This toolkit addresses how LGBTQ family groups can play a key role in harnessing that power into organized efforts to advance equality and social justice for LGBTQ parents and their families.

The concept of “family” is universally understood allowing LGBTQ families to connect in a fundamental and organic way with non-LGBTQ families. The common bond of parenthood opens doors and creates access to many mainstream communities and institutions, providing opportunities to make inroads towards changing hearts and minds in ways that other LGBTQ activists can’t. LGBTQ family groups can put this power and passion to work to achieve social and legal equality locally, as well as at the state and federal levels.

Political Advocacy



Parents are so busy being parents that they often think they don't have the time to advocate for themselves and their families. When you look closer, though, many of the simple, everyday actions that LGBTQ parents take on behalf of their children or their family is advocacy. Reframe advocacy as these kinds of daily acts of courage that LGBTQ parents do regularly. Offer advocacy efforts that are simple, relevant, and if possible, fun.

Ways to engage your members:

- 1 Keep your members informed about issues impacting LGBTQ families.
 - ▶ Through your e-communications or events, educate and update your members about issues and advocacy efforts relevant to LGBTQ families.
- 2 Encourage your members to support the advocacy efforts of other organizations working on behalf of LGBTQ families.
 - ▶ Forward action alerts from organizations like *Family Equality Council* asking supporters to take a specific action on an issue.
 - ▶ Encourage members to join their state LGBTQ political organization.
- 3 Lift up powerful stories — As you work directly with LGBTQ families, you will hear powerful stories that portray the joyful celebrations and the heart-wrenching injustices that our families experience.

Organizations like *Family Equality Council* need these stories to share with lawmakers, as moving personal stories can change hearts and minds to help advance pro-LGBTQ legislation.

- ▶ Encourage members to share their stories or get permission to pass along the story and pictures on their behalf.
 - ▶ Stories can be submitted on the *Family Equality Council* website: www.familyequality.org.
- 4 Develop a local speakers bureau or team to help change hearts and minds in your community.
 - ▶ Recruit LGBTQ parents and parents-to-be who are willing to talk about their families out in the community.
 - ▶ Parents and guardians need not be expert speakers, just willing to share information about their families.
 - They are putting a face to LGBTQ families—making our families real, not just an abstract issue being debated.
 - ▶ Advertise your speakers bureau to:
 - Colleges and community colleges
 - Churches
 - Schools
 - Other organizations that may be interested in having a guest speakers.

Political Advocacy



- 5** Mobilize families when action is needed in your local community.
 - ▶ Organize actions to support pro-LGBTQ efforts or to fight anti-LGBTQ decisions.
 - Encourage families to show up at a school board meeting to testify in support of an LGBTQ-inclusive policy
 - Empower families to speak out against the banning of an LGBTQ-themed book in a school library
- 6** Organize a photo campaign.
 - ▶ During Pride month, encourage your members to mail a photo of their family to their legislators with a note about who they are and what equality means to them.
- 7** Participate in your state's LGBTQ lobby day, and make LGBTQ families a visible part of the movement.
 - ▶ Connect with a statewide or national LGBTQ advocacy organization beforehand for up-to-date information on key issues and lobbying tips, and check the *Family Equality Council* website regularly for policy advocacy updates.

Institutional Change with Service Providers



Some LGBTQ parents fear that their family will not be understood or treated equally when they interact with service providers, and for many, this fear is a reality. LGBTQ family organizations can:

- ▶ Work to reduce these barriers
- ▶ Help institutions become more welcoming and inclusive of LGBTQ parents and their children

Institutions and their employees need to interact effectively and respectfully with people of diverse backgrounds. Cultural competency training on LGBTQ families equips service providers with information about the unique needs of LGBTQ parents and their children, and offers suggestions for institutional changes to create welcoming and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ families.

Strategies for Institutional Change Work

- 1 Conduct a needs assessment. See if any LGBTQ cultural competency training programs already exist in your community.
 - ▶ In some regions, there are already organizations providing cultural competency training on LGBTQ issues.
 - You may be able to partner with existing organizations to ensure that the unique needs of LGBTQ families are being addressed, and that institutions working with families are being reached.

▶ In many regions, your organization will be the first to offer such a service.

2 Identify what types of organizations you plan to train. All local organizations or institutions that work primarily with families should be considered. Potential training opportunities may be found in:

■ HEALTH CARE INSTITUTIONS THAT WORK PRIMARILY WITH FAMILIES

- Practices specializing in family medicine
- Pediatrics
- Reproduction / fertility

■ FAMILY SERVICE AGENCIES

- Case management
- Daycare assistance
- Mental Health services
- Financial assistance services
- Homeless services

■ COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENTS

- Social work
- Counseling
- Public health
- Education
- Nursing
- Child care

■ ADOPTION AGENCIES

3 Develop the curriculum for your training. Many resources already exist that can be tailored to the specific needs of your target audience. You can also reach out to *Family Equality Council* for assistance.

Institutional Change with Service Providers



In general, consider including the following topics:

▶ **Terminology**

Many trainings begin with an overview of terminology related to LGBTQ families so that providers have accurate and inoffensive language to use.

▶ **Inclusive policies**

Policies for both staff and clients should explicitly prohibit discrimination and harassment based on:

- ▶ Actual or perceived sexual orientation
- ▶ Gender identity and expression.

▶ **Inclusive language and forms**

An institution's forms and the language staff uses with clients can be welcoming and inclusive or create a feeling of marginalization. Encourage staff to listen to the language a client uses to describe themselves and their family, and reflect the same language back. Forms should allow for family diversity:

- ▶ "Parent/Guardian" is more inclusive of various family structures than "Mother" and "Father".
- ▶ Using the term "relationship status" instead of "marital status" on forms and including a check-box for "partnered" recognizes the committed relationships of non-married couples.

▶ **Inclusive Physical Environment**

The physical environment should help create a welcoming climate as soon as families enter.

- ▶ Provide LGBTQ-related brochures or media in the waiting room.

- ▶ Post the non-discrimination policy visibly in the waiting area.
- ▶ Post a rainbow in the reception area.
- ▶ Include LGBTQ families in marketing materials.

▶ **Train parents on how to effectively facilitate the training**

- ▶ Parents who work in the field in which you are training may be especially effective trainers — For example, if possible, find an LGBTQ parent who is a pediatrician to work with you on training pediatricians

▶ **Market your cultural competency training to local service providers**

- ▶ Mail and email letters or flyers outlining what your training offers.

▶ **Seek out opportunities to present workshops at local conferences for service providers.**

Tips for Trainers

- ▶ Arrive early for set-up and to prepare for last minute changes.
- ▶ Begin with introductions and a warm-up activity.
- ▶ Include anecdotes or stories of real experiences, positive or negative, that help depict the needs of LGBTQ families.
- ▶ Provide a hand out that summarizes the points made during the training for creating a welcoming and inclusive experience for LGBTQ families.

Broader Social Justice Work



Many LGBTQ organizations and family groups are engaged in efforts in their state or region to achieve full legal and social equality for LGBTQ families. Our families clearly care about achieving LGBTQ rights, but our identities are not solely comprised of sexual orientation and gender identity. LGBTQ families are part of every:

- ▶ Racial and ethnic group
- ▶ Socioeconomic class
- ▶ Ability/disability group

The intersection of our families' diverse identities fundamentally links LGBTQ issues with broader social justice issues, including racial and economic justice and disability justice. If an issue impacts families, it impacts LGBTQ families. Some of these issues include:

- ▶ Health care
- ▶ Immigration
- ▶ Welfare
- ▶ Housing
- ▶ Employment
- ▶ Foster care
- ▶ Disability rights

The movement for equality for LGBTQ families needs to be part of a broader social justice movement. Not sure how? Here are some suggestions from a few LGBTQ family groups that are engaged in broader social justice work:

▶ *Internal Work*

- Approach all your work from an anti-oppression framework, always recognizing and challenging racism, classism, ableism, ageism, and sexism.
- Strive to be inclusive of traditionally underrepresented, underserved groups.
- Educate your own members about why a particular issue is relevant to LGBTQ families.

▶ *External Work*

- Seek opportunities to make connections and build alliances across issues.
- Educate other organizations about why a particular issue is relevant to LGBTQ families.
- Join or develop coalitions with other movements and organizations.
- Be willing to take a back seat sometimes, or a humility and learner posture. There is no “just us” in justice.

Be patient and maintain realistic expectations about the amount of time it will take to see desired changes at each level of advocacy. When successes happen, no matter how small, be sure to share widely with your members and community. Seeing that a difference has been made for LGBTQ families from the work that members have done in the community is the best motivation to continue advocating! Use your listserv, social media platforms, and group gatherings to shout the good news from the rooftop!