



Report of the Early Head Start National Resource Center
Expert Work Group
May 15-16, 2013

Overview:

The Early Head Start National Resource Center (EHS NRC) holds two Expert Work Group (EWG) meetings for the Office of Head Start each year. The purpose of these meetings is to explore timely topics of interest that impact programs serving infants, toddlers and their families. EWGs include content specialists, parents and practitioners from the field, along with federal staff, and training and technical assistance (T/TA) staff. Facilitated discussion of a topic over a two-day period helps to illuminate related issues. Recommendations for addressing these issues are captured and shared with the Office of Head Start.

Background:

The EWG met May 15-16, 2013 to explore the topic of serving lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) families in Early Head Start programs. The purpose of the EWG was to inform federal staff and training and technical assistance providers about the realities LGBT families face across communities and to articulate the challenges programs face as they work to provide services for all families in need. To do this, the EHS NRC invited several program and parent representatives, T/TA representatives from the National Centers on Health (NCH); Parent, Family and Community Engagement (NCPFCE); and Culture and Linguistic Responsiveness (NCCLR), Federal staff from the Office of Head Start and the Administration on Children and Families, and experts in the field to join in the 2-day meeting.

The EWG engaged in a rich and stimulating discussion. Day 1 began with an overview of LGBT families, debunking some of the myths about these families, and helping to raise awareness that LGBT families live in every community. The group heard directly from program representatives and parents about their experiences and explored needs and challenges to receiving services in communities and in programs. On Day 2 the EWG developed strategies for addressing some of the needs identified and captured recommendations for use by OHS to further address the issues.

The following notes include the strategies and recommendations developed by the group.



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Expert Work Group
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Strategies for Engaging Around Community Needs:

1. *Issue: LGBT families have to navigate state laws that often restrict rights and create challenges to parenting*

EHS Program Strategies:

- a. Ensure access to community experts and resources to help families navigate laws regarding LGBT rights (e.g., second parent adoptions; medical rights; etc.)
- b. Include language about resources for families in program resource guides or parent handbooks
- c. Train Family Support Workers to be prepared to help parents develop safety plans when domestic violence is an issue
- d. Partner with national organizations that maintain information about states laws and LGBT family rights

2. *Issue: LGBT families can be "hidden" in communities, particularly in communities that are not open to LGBT individuals*

EHS Program Strategies:

- a. Ensure their community assessment addresses hidden communities
- b. Hold events; create a welcome committee to invite LGBT families into program
- c. Include visible symbols of equality in the program (flag, rainbow)
- d. Engage with LGBT families currently being served about the resources they use and what's been helpful to them
- e. Participate in Gay Pride Week or Pride Month events (e.g. include an EHS resource table at parade sites)
- f. Partner with Gay/Straight Alliances in the community
- g. Include articles in parent newsletter about LGBT families and upcoming events
- h. Include new birth announcements for LGBT families in newsletters (only if the family is out and open about their status)*
- i. Invite LGBT community advocates and/or family members to participate on the Policy Council



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3. *Issue: Community partners have biases or discriminatory policies against LGBT families*

EHS Program Strategies:

- a) Be specific about addressing LGBT issues when partnering with community partners
- b) Explore whether community partners have non-discrimination policies and determine if they are welcoming to all families.
- c) Be prepared to engage with community partners that are better equipped to support LGBT families
- d) Articulate program philosophy about working with LGBT families at the outset of partnership and make sure the philosophy is integrated into the MOU
- e) Invite community partners to trainings and or attend trainings by community partners that are aimed at understanding the LGBT community
- f) Develop partnerships at the local level with child welfare and LGBT foster families

4. *Issue: LGBT families in rural communities sometimes face specific challenges related to access to resources; acceptance and openness to being "out"; availability of community supports*

EHS Program Strategies:

- a) Help rural programs know that LGBT families exist in the community
- b) Ensure the program is a safe place for families and staff
- c) Address isolation issues for families
- d) Extend invitations to LGBT parents to have a conversation about unique issues and needs in the community; in the school system, and in the neighboring community
- e) Use technology to link parents across distances to connect to families or resources (use Facebook, Twitter or other social media)

*Important reminder: "Out" doesn't necessarily convey a permanent state. Parents go "in and out of the closet" depending on the environment and feelings of trust and safety.



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Strategies for Improving Program Responsiveness:

1. *Issue: LGBT Families lack support within EHS programs to be "out" and open*

EHS Programs Strategies:

- a) Include non-discrimination policies on LGBT issues; ensure governing boards are in agreement with non-discrimination policies
- b) Create inclusive forms to be used during enrollment and recruitment (use parent vs. mother and father)
- c) Consider developing policies that support LGBT staff with access to benefits
- d) Expand interview process questions including LGBT competencies questions to assess comfort level and competency; also to send a message to applicants about the program philosophy
- e) Send job announcements to LGBT specific listservs**
- f) Include community resources for LGBT families in parent handbook; ways to navigate systems; include rating information on community partners
- g) Include book and video resources for adults to use to learn about LGBT families
- h) Include sexuality into curriculum approaches (look at resources from NAEYC and SEICUS)

2. *Issue: EHS Program staff and families do not understand LGBT families or issues*

EHS Programs Strategies:

- a) Expand the approach to diversity training to include opportunities for reflection and uncovering staff or individual biases, values, beliefs
- b) Support staff to engage with all families in a respectful and appropriate way
- c) Create a balance of appropriate training and thoughtful opportunities for education of staff, and ensuring staff have the dispositions needed to work with a diverse population of families
- d) Ensure staff have opportunities for ongoing reflective supervision
- e) Provide learning opportunities through training and peer discussions about child development, working with families, and cultural identity and expression
- f) Help staff develop skills to handle and be comfortable with uncertainty

**Important reminder: some grantees may not have the leeway to alter hiring practices



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Recommendations for the National TA System and the Office of Head Start:

Recommendations for TA:

1. OHS National Centers and Regional/State TA Providers can incorporate LGBT training into the menu offered at regional and national trainings
2. OHS National Centers can develop resources to support EHS program staff engage in difficult and complex discussions about diversity with peers, parents, community partners
3. OHS National Centers can develop resources about partnerships with child welfare and the involvement of LGBT parents as foster care providers
4. OHS National Centers can work in partnership with other entities that address LGBT issues to develop resource materials for EHS programs
5. OHS National Centers can develop cross-center products that address LGBT issues
6. OHS National Centers can include sessions on LGBT issues at the OHS Leadership Institute, and at the Birth to Three Institute
7. OHS National Centers can include a reflection of LGBT families within the PFCE framework
8. OHS National Centers and Regional/State TA Providers can consider certain “core” issues for training specifically related to LGBT families, including:
 - a. Gender identity/expression
 - b. Sexual awareness
 - c. Incorporating issues of gender identity/expression and sexuality into curricula
 - d. Expanding definitions of family and understanding who LGBT families are
 - e. Broadened definition of culture

Recommendations for OHS:

1. OHS can be more overt about including LGBT families in the PFCE framework; make language more clear
2. OHS can direct the OHS National Centers to create a resource list of books and other resources that include LGBT families
3. OHS can scan how programs are implementing mental health services to provide supports to families, and whether they have LGBT competencies
4. OHS can partner with the Children’s Bureau to explore LGBT individuals involvement in the foster care system



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Expert Work Group
May 15-16, 2013

In conclusion:

Early Head Start programs are tasked with delivering comprehensive services to the neediest families with infants and toddlers. Programs depend on their community partners and well-trained staff to deliver these services to all children and families who qualify for the program. A key factor to high quality delivery of services is addressing barriers to services that may result from a lack of knowledge and/or understanding of individual differences. Identifying issues facing the LGBT population and generating recommendations will hopefully provide opportunities for programs to deliver high quality services to a wider range of infants, toddlers and their families over time.

Resources for Working with LGBT Families and Children:

The Human Rights Campaign <http://www.hrc.org/>

As the largest civil rights organization working to achieve equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Americans, the Human Rights Campaign represents a force of more than 1.5 million members and supporters nationwide — all committed to making HRC's vision a reality. Founded in 1980, HRC advocates on behalf of LGBT Americans, mobilizes grassroots actions in diverse communities, invests strategically to elect fair-minded individuals to office and educates the public about LGBT issues.

Family Equality Council <http://www.familyequality.org/>

Family Equality Council connects, supports, and represents the three million parents who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender in this country and their six million children. We are changing attitudes and policies to ensure that all families are respected, loved, and celebrated—including families with parents who are LGBT. We are a community of parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren that reaches across this country. For 30 years we have raised our children and raised our voices toward fairness for all families.

LGBT Interest Forum at NAEYC http://www.naeyc.org/community/interest_forums

NAEYC Member Interest Forums were created to encourage the exchange of diverse opinions and to further discussion, dialogue, and reflection of particular topics relevant to NAEYC's mission and goals. Discussion occurs online throughout the year on NAEYC's Online Interest



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Forum Communities and in-person at NAEYC's Annual Conference and National Institute for Early Childhood Development. This forum is helpful for staff thinking about hiring and ensuring supports for LGBT staff

Welcoming Schools <http://www.welcomingschools.org/>

Welcoming Schools offers tools, lessons and resources on embracing [family diversity](#), [avoiding gender stereotyping](#) and [ending bullying and name-calling](#) in elementary schools. It offers an LGBT inclusive approach that is also inclusive of the many types of diversity found in our communities. [Administrators](#), [educators](#) and [parents/guardians](#) can find materials here necessary to create learning environments in which all students are welcomed and respected.

Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) <http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/home/index.html>

GLSEN, the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network, is the leading national education organization focused on ensuring safe schools for all students. Established in 1990, GLSEN envisions a world in which every child learns to respect and accept all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. GLSEN seeks to develop school climates where difference is valued for the positive contribution it makes to creating a more vibrant and diverse community. *Ready, Set, Respect!* (<http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/library/record/2833.html?state=tools&type=educator>) was developed to help elementary educators ensure that all students feel safe and respected and develop respectful attitudes and behaviors.

Parent Services Project <http://parentservices.org/>

Making Room in the Circle Curriculum <http://parentservices.org/our-programs/making-room-in-the-circle/>

Parent Services Project is proud to share our groundbreaking early childhood curriculum, Making Room in the Circle: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Families in Early Childhood Settings. This curriculum has been developed to assist early childhood providers to create welcoming, high-quality environments that actively include LGBT families, and diminish the silence, taboo and bias that target LGBT families and harm all children. Making Room in the Circle is an interactive curriculum based on diversity learning and



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family support principles, designed for training early childhood practitioners to recognize and include LGBT families.

National Association for the Educations of Young Children (NAEYC)

<http://www.naeyc.org/publications>

Publications: NAEYC publishes an extensive line of books, videos, brochures, and posters. All these NAEYC materials, as well as selected educational resources from other publishers, may be ordered through our Online Store. NAEYC publications include books on sexuality in child development.

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS)

<http://www.siecus.org/index.cfm>

SIECUS educates, advocates, and informs.

Educate: We help schools and communities develop comprehensive sexuality education curricula, train teachers to provide high quality sexuality education in the classroom, and help parents talk to their kids about sex.

Advocate: We educate policymakers and their staff about issues related to sexuality and train advocates on the local, state, and national levels to build support for comprehensive sexuality education and access to reproductive health information and services.

Inform: We produce countless resources for a wide variety of audiences—from policymakers to parents, healthcare providers to teens—to ensure that everyone has access to accurate, complete, and up-to-date information about sexuality.