



JUST FOR US

FOCUS ON SCHOOL

Vol. 18 #3
2006

FOR PEOPLE WITH LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND/OR TRANSGENDER PARENTS

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS – STILL A LONG WAY TO GO

by Robert Mercier

My name is Robert Mercier. I'm eleven years old, and I am in sixth grade. I have two moms and a little brother who I love a lot. He is almost five. Our family is one of just a few families with LGBT parents in our community. I am proud to have two moms.

My school seems to be okay with people who are LGBT. My friends all know I have two moms and are okay with it. I think they react better if I just tell them when we first become friends. I think that if you don't come out right away when you meet someone, it's like you are not okay with it, maybe kind of ashamed, and it's easier for other kids to say mean things to you or about you. At the beginning of each school year, my moms go and tell my teacher that I have two moms. I haven't had one teacher that has been obviously uncomfortable with it.

The only thing that annoys me at school is when people start saying stuff like "This is gay" or "You're gay". I think that saying these things is a way to bully other kids. When I hear people say

that, I tell them to stop, but they normally just keep doing it. The teachers don't do anything about it either, but some of my friends and their parents tell them to stop too. But if only a few people are telling the kids who are saying that to stop, they are just going to keep saying it. (I can't believe they actually think it is cool to say stuff like that!) I think that if the schools would start to pay attention more, they would see that it is a problem too.

Sometimes, not as often, some of the boys in my school (always the boys) have started saying stuff like, "Dude, you're a lesbian" funnily enough. I believe that the children who say this phrase don't understand what they are saying.

I think that if some of the kids who have LGBT parents and other kids whose parents support LGBT people would get together and talk to the schools about the things kids say, they might pay better attention. I think one reason I don't do it is that I'm scared the principal or the other sources of power at the school might discriminate against



my family. The other reason is that there aren't many other kids and their parents who would speak up.

When kids learn that I have two moms, they are normally okay with it. Sometimes I'll come across someone who says it is weird but that doesn't bother me because I'm fine with my family.

I tend to not be very good friends with the kids who say it is weird to have LGBT parents because I am almost certain that the kids who say that are some of the few who are not okay with it. I think it helps that my family and I are so out with who we are.

But until the kids stop saying "This is gay, That's gay", I am going to do my best to get them to stop saying that and make my school a safer environment for the other kids with LGBT parents.

Robert Mercier lives in Flint Michigan with his two moms and his brother. He has attended Family Week in Saugatuck, Michigan, for three years.

COLAGE AND FAMILY PRIDE UNVEIL NEW BUSTER EDUCATIONAL BUNDLE

Put your community on track for family equality!

In the Spring of 2005, the federal government said that our families should only exist in the dark. We shouldn't be heard. And we definitely shouldn't be seen.

U.S. Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings, denounced the episode of the PBS kid's show "Postcards from Buster" about a ten year old girl in Vermont—simply because she had two moms. Not only was this hurtful, it was shocking—since Buster is a show designed to foster cultural diversity among school-aged children. Karen Pike, her partner Gillian Pieper, and their children Emma, David and James were featured in the episode.



In this "controversial episode," Emma teaches Buster about Vermont maple syrup, campfires with neighbors, and Shabbat. So why was Secretary Spellings so hopping mad? Spellings sent a letter to PBS CEO, Pat Mitchell, stating that "many parents would not want their young children exposed to the lifestyles portrayed in this episode." Spellings also suggested that PBS refund

the government money that was used to create this particular episode.

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends and Families,

Many of us have learned the hard way that school isn't necessarily the easiest place to

be a COLAGEr. For me, that experience happened in middle school. I had confided in my best friend that my mother was a lesbian. At first, telling her didn't cause any problems for me. But in 7th grade the two of us got into an argument - as best friends sometimes do - and this friend decided to spread rumors at school about me and my lesbian mom. At a track meet, during one of my races, she actually used a bullhorn to yell homophobic slurs about my mother and me. Not only was I upset and embarrassed, I also lost many of those who I had counted as friends.

After this experience I became pretty closeted about my mom, refusing to tell anyone else at school and avoiding questions from peers and classmates. Even after graduating from high school, I remained secretive about my family background. In college I worked with two other students for various political causes, yet it wasn't until graduation that we found out that all three of us had lesbian or gay parents.

Luckily, much has changed in the many

years between my experiences in middle school and now. Much of that progress can be attributed to the activism and leadership of youth and adults with LGBT parents. For example, it was a high school-aged daughter of a lesbian mom who created the first-ever Gay Straight Alliance club at her school in Massachusetts as a way for her to address homophobia. COLAGErs are frequently the leaders and members of GSA clubs creating safer schools for queerspawn, LGBT students, and our allies. We make a difference in other ways, too. Hundreds of youth and adults with LGBT parents have used classroom settings - from elementary school to graduate school - as a way to showcase our experiences, conduct research guided by our community, and to promote safer schools for all students.

COLAGErs around the country are using COLAGE visibility tools, books and curricula, and the power of their own experiences to advocate for school environments that are more supportive of youth with LGBT parents and our LGBT peers. In addition to creating tools for our youth members to bring to their classrooms, local districts and school boards, COLAGE continues to be involved in the Safe Schools movement on national, state, and local levels. Through our own efforts, and collaboration with organizations such as GLSEN, Safe Schools Coalition, and GSA Network (just to name a

few), COLAGE is dedicated to making sure that queerspawn are proud and empowered in their schools - and everywhere!

This issue of *Just For Us* aims to give voice to the diverse experiences - both positive and negative - we've all had in school and with our own coming out processes. Through this issue, COLAGE also hopes to highlight and celebrate the ways that we are actively making change in schools across the country.

I encourage everyone reading to consider taking that first step towards making change in your community. Change in schools can come from the smallest act of being out and proud about your family to your classmates and teachers. If you are already out - or can't be out - change can also come from other sources. Try standing up to a bully, going to a school board meeting, or getting involved with a local community group. The actions we take now will resonate far beyond our own lives to impact other students, and even future generations.

As always, we hope you enjoy this issue of *Just For Us*, and look forward to hearing about the change you inspire and create in the world around you.

Sincerely,

Beth Teper

COLAGE

MISSION

COLAGE ENGAGES, CONNECTS, AND EMPOWERS PEOPLE TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE FOR CHILDREN OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND/OR TRANSGENDER PARENTS AND FAMILIES.

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GAY? FINE BY ME - AND MY SCHOOL!

by Emily McGranachan

Having gay parents has made me much more compassionate and open to helping other people from all walks of life. That is why I take a very active role in the clubs at school. Through the Civil Rights Team/Gay Straight Alliance I have been able to make a positive impact on my fellow students, school, and the community at large.



In 2005 at Family Week in Provincetown, MA, I saw one facilitator wearing a t-shirt that stated, "Gay? Fine by me". I was there with my family for the third year in a row, and for the third year my good friend Christina came too. She does not have LGBT parents, (although we feel she has been unofficially adopted by mine), but she has become a staple at Family Week. Upon our first year there she was christened SPK (Straight Parented Kid), and now some people don't even know her real name! Her constant love for my parents and her loyal friendship has given me the confidence to speak out about my family. When school started I researched the web site that sold

the t-shirts. Together with my friend, who is the president of the Civil Rights Team, we brought the "Gay? Fine By Me" t-shirts to our school. At first we expected some students from the club to buy the shirts, but were happily surprised when more and more students came up to us asking where they could get shirts too. Soon the shirts were being sold at the school store, and by the end of the year all 100 had been sold.

What touched me most about sharing the shirts with my school is that people would come up to me and tell stories about wearing the shirts outside of school. Many kids would tell me about strangers who would ask them where they could get one too. Adult and teenage strangers sought them out because they wanted to make it known they were friends of the LGBT community. It reassured me that friends, family and supporters of LGBT people exist in numbers and are looking for outlets to make their support known.

My mother, Nancy, was touched when she attended a Civil Rights Team fundraiser because all the members there were wearing their t-shirts. She saw me, Christina, and my now openly gay friend proudly showing our devotion to equality. As she said, "As a gay adult I realized what a different world you lived in". It is true my school, the community, and the world has come a long way, but it is with friends like Christina, the love of my family, and the support of COLAGE that we will make it even better for everyone.

Editor's Note: You can follow Emily's lead and bring the Gay? Fine by Me t-shirt project to your school! According to the t-shirt project, over 75 schools have placed orders in the last year. In June, they celebrated the distribution of over 50,000 shirts across the country! To find out more about this positive visibility campaign, or to order t-shirts of your own, visit www.finebyme.org

Emily McGranachan lives in Georgetown, Massachusetts with her two mothers, Cathy and Nancy. She is a junior at her local high school and an active member of several school organizations including the Civil Rights Team\Gay Straight Alliance. She looks forward to Family Week in Provincetown every year and wishes everyone with LGBT parents could take part in the life changing experiences and friendships fostered by COLAGE.

BUSTER EDUCATIONAL BUNDLE Continued from page 1

families are coming from the very highest levels. It is up to us to go into our schools and communities, and talk about the need for inclusion, respect, and safety for ALL families. The U.S. Secretary of Education said LGBT-headed families are inappropriate and should not be seen. We will not stand for it... we will be visible!

The Buster Educational Bundle is a perfect way to start a conversation about our families for parents, children, teachers, librarians, and administrators. Why? To expand our circle of allies and friends who are fighting for family equality.

This bundle contains a DVD of 4 Buster episodes (including Sugartime!), a book version of the Sugartime! Buster episode, and a t-shirt that reads "Love & Hate are four-letter words. Which do you want your child saying?"

All proceeds from the sale of these bundles will be evenly split between Family Pride and COLAGE.

These are just a few ways that the Buster Bundle can be used to advocate for LGBT-headed families:

The DVD: Show the banned episode to friends, family, and neighbors. After watching it together, talk about what you need friends and family to do to secure full family equality. See if there are teachers, counselors, or other community leaders who will help get the DVD shown in local schools and day care programs.

The Book: Donate it to your school's library so other children can see an LGBT-headed family. Give it as a birthday gift. Parents can read it to children - COLAGERS can enjoy it themselves, with friends, or use it to talk to younger queerspawn about their families.

The T-shirt: Wear it with pride—it is an amazing conversation starter.

For more information on how to order this educational bundle, go to www.familypride.org/bundle.



SPEAK OUT

How is it to be someone with LGBT parents at your school?

Allison, 15, New Orleans, LA

I'm definitely the only person at my school with LGBT parents. I'm really involved at school and I'm class president, so I wouldn't say that having LGBT parents has negatively affected me. Most of the people who know about my family don't seem to care, but there are always those people who have an issue with it and act like me having a different family makes me somehow not normal. I wish that people would stop judging people for no reason at all. I just don't understand why the fact that my family is different should affect the way people look at me and I hate that it does.

Sissy, 6, Taunton, MA

It's OK to have a Daddy and a Papa at our school. Sometimes, teachers see Daddy only and ask about his wife or something, because they don't see our parents together all the time. It can be hard when some kids don't get that my brother and I don't live with Mommy. But we have fun at our house a lot so it doesn't bother me.

Eren, 11, Port St Lucie, FL

You have to choose the right people to be your friend and will take it cool. I am only out to some of my friends and my one teacher because she has two brothers that are gay. I wish that not so many teachers hid that they are LGBT because there is nothing wrong with it.

Cara, 16, Salt Lake City, UT

It's hard to walk down the halls and constantly hear demeaning comments directed at the LGBT community. Some teachers and classmates support LGBT issues more than others. Teachers usually do not comment on LGBT issues because they are not "allowed". Not very many classmates know that my dad is gay. It is mostly an issue of feeling safe. I don't want to be judged for having an LGBT parent, so I choose to only tell people that I really trust.

Jackson, 15, Whittier, CA

I have lesbian parents and I try only to tell my most trusted friends. I wish that all schools would have more education about lesbians and gays and that the kids would have more education about lesbians and gays. Maybe then kids would be more accepting. We're all just people you know!!

Jessica, 15, Cockeysville, MN

At my school a lot of people are cool with me having 2 moms. Some think its really cool and ask me a lot of questions. But, others don't care or they are against it and call my parents and I names like faggot, gay, lesbo, lezzies, or queers. Some students think that since I have two mommies that I am gay too but I am not. Last year one teacher heard a student say something very rude about gay lesbian people in general and she confronted them and I was very happy. In middle school I would get teased more often and it hurt but I still love my parents.

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MAKING SCHOOL AN "EVERYBODY PLACE": Interview with Mary Belton



Mary Belton has been in school for longer than most COLAGErs - after college she got a degree in elementary education

and has been working in schools ever since. JFU interviewed her about her perspective on what it takes to turn a school into a welcoming place for all families.

JFU: How old were you when your mom came out?

Mary: My mom came out when I was at the end of middle school. We lived in the midwest, so it wasn't socially accepted there. The family was part of a religious group so our whole community was broken apart - we were kicked out of the group and I had to switch schools. Very few of my friends were still allowed to come over to my house.

JFU: Did you tell people at your new school about your family?

Mary: No, I didn't come out at my new school. I didn't want people to come over to the house, or to have to answer any questions about my family. My older brother took me aside in high school and said not to say anything about mom to anybody or we wouldn't have any friends.

JFU: When did you decide you wanted to become a teacher?

Mary: I always knew I wanted to be a teacher. I used to play school, and baby-sit a lot. I also knew that I wanted to work with younger kids - the oldest I have worked with is kindergarten.

JFU: Have you had any training as a teacher in how to include LGBT families in your classroom?

Mary: I went to school at Indiana University at South Bend. There were discussions about

working with families and involving parents in education, but no education about LGBT families or how to include different kinds of families that might usually be marginalized in society. More recently, I took a class in San Francisco, and a speaker did come and talk about gay families and I was able to discuss my own experiences growing up. Other teachers taking the class took to it pretty well and included thoughts about gay families in their final presentations.

JFU: Have you witnessed homophobia from other teachers or school administrators?

Mary: When I was a student teacher, I was in the teacher's lounge one day, in a school with a student who had lesbian moms. Everyone was talking about how weird the moms were and how weird one of the moms looked. Now I have the tools to say, "My mom is gay and that really offended me." At that time, I didn't know what

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COLAGEr starts Chapter in Tulsa, Oklahoma

I haven't always been a member of COLAGE, nor of the Tulsa community. But once I became both, a relationship between them seemed necessary. Shortly after moving to Tulsa in 2005, I got to know Nancy McDonald. Nancy had once been head of the national PFLAG organization and, in 1996, testified before the U.S. Congress regarding the Federal Defense of Marriage Act. Nancy lives in Tulsa and is the proud mother of a lesbian daughter. She was delighted to meet me and discover that I am the proud daughter of a lesbian mother and that I showed interest in co-hosting groups for children of queer parents. I was well aware that my lack of roots in Tulsa was a short-coming for community organizing, but I hoped to help where needed.

During my first month of living in Oklahoma, I attended a "back-to-school night" at a local church where students, parents, teachers, and administrators discussed LGBT issues in the public schools and I introduced COLAGE as an organization and encouraged people to spread the word. I delivered COLAGE posters to schools to be hung in hallways, but nearly all of the

schools will only permit COLAGE materials to be displayed in the confines of a counselor's office. Knowing that I would only be in Tulsa for a year, my focus was planting a seed through outreach, be that by showing the "In My Shoes" documentary at the youth center, co-sponsoring a panel on LGBT issues and the law, or throwing a barbeque party for LGBT families.



A young COLAGEr enjoying the Family FunZone at Tulsa's 2006 Pride Festival.

In taking on a leadership role within COLAGE, I have been exposed to new challenges facing our community, found remarkable support, and met amazing people. I'm thrilled that Dr. Lynne Moyers will be keeping the chapter alive after I've moved away. Lynne is a recently retired public school teacher who acted as the faculty liaison for the Gay-Straight Alliance at Jenks Public School. She told me about the trials of starting and supporting the GSA, including having to explain to parents why Fred Phelps was protesting at the graduation ceremony. Lynne shared that she felt connected with

the COLAGE community given her experience growing up with divorced parents in the 1950s and feeling the weight of society's judgment on familial differences. COLAGE-Tulsa may just be starting, but it has a very exciting future.

PRIDE, continued from page 1

to say and didn't say anything. I had never talked openly about my family before, and it was hard to figure out my role as a new student teacher. It made me realize that no one around me knew where I was coming from. But, I did go back to the college class and said something about what I heard in the teachers' lounge. I told them what happened and said to my classmates, "You're going out there, you're going to be teachers, and children come from all different places. When you make statements like the ones I overheard, you don't know who you are offending." It was hard to decide to speak up, but it felt really good to stand up and say something.

I have also worked at places where it just wasn't set up to welcome gay families - like the last school where I taught had all these events like a mother's tea and father-child Saturday and other special events that were really oriented around Mom-Dad-child family set-ups. I asked what might happen if a child didn't have a mother or father, or had more than one - could they participate in these events? But the reaction I got was that there wouldn't be situations like that in this school.

Over time I have realized that if the school doesn't

put it in the curriculum it's my job to bring it to the table.

JFU: How does the school you teach at now work to include LGBT families?

Mary: I have been working for a little over a year at a pre-school called Little School. At the beginning of the school year someone came in to the school I work for and did a presentation about including LGBT families. She suggested things like "put a little rainbow flag in your classroom" and other subtle signals, like the books on your shelf, that you are accepting and that you welcome all kinds of people or families. Every year when we celebrate Chinese New Year parents will organize a celebration where all the children bring a picture of their family and write something special about them - what they do together or eat together, what trip they took together, or something else that is unique to their family. My school is the first place I've ever worked where I could put my family on the wall like that and be proud - it was no big deal. We also have something called Family Share Day - you bring in something special to your family, and your whole family can actually come to school to share with the

class. My supervisor is really wonderful, and sets up the school to be an "everybody" school. The first thing you see when you walk in the front door is posters about different kinds of families. There's no question about it, no way a parent or family could think it wasn't welcoming.

JFU: Do you have any advice for other teachers who want to have inclusive classrooms?

Mary: Educators need to be aware of all the different kinds of families - and think about how it impacts your holidays, the wording you use in the classroom, the forms the parents fill out...These may seem little, but it is the little things that make someone feel welcomed or not. It's good to be aware so that people are not being excluded or made to feel bad about themselves.

JFU: Do you have any advice for other queerspaw who are still in school?

Mary: I think my only advice is that it feels good to finally stand up and say who you are and who your family is instead of hiding. Even though it's hard to do, be proud of who you are and where you come from.

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO COME OUT by Jonathan Feakins

My father always got ready for work in black leather pants and an urban camo-t, with spiked blonde hair, 20+ piercings and chains around her wrists and neck. Dad rode a Kawasaki Ninja motorcycle down the road to an 8-hr. day as an senior air traffic controller, and came back in the evening to do intricate airbrush paintings of the back fenders of '54 Chevrolets, and read books on Rembrandt and string theory. One of my brother's friends wanted to start a band called simply, 'Shawn's Hot Dad.' Meanwhile, back at school, one of my classmates had donned a miniskirt instead of Levis, makeup instead of cologne, and a first name more traditionally allotted to the bearers of Y chromosomes.



Unbeknownst to me, the former eyed the latter with considerable envy.

My father is the poster child for 'still waters run deep': a modern-day transwoman whose closet slowly transformed into a bomb shelter, with air filtration, years of canned food, and no escape hatch. She is the emblem for torn, confused, and could-be beautiful closet cases everywhere: a woman-to-be who watched her three sons cavort with lesbian slam poets, adorn their bedrooms with rainbows, and pistolwhip each other with gender theory, and yet who didn't crack open the closet door herself until well into her 50s. Hers is the story that homophobia has wrought.

And all through high school, and most of college, I hadn't a damn clue about any of this.

At the age of 15, I packed up my leopard print beanbags and dogeared copy of Flatland, and moved into a state-funded, residential nerdfarm up the road. For the next three years, I reveled in a bonanza of geekitude where equations were our battle cries, parabolas our paramours, and shopping carts our playthings. I co-founded the yoga club, talked smack in third-year Russian, and, like a quarter of the student body, packed the lecture hall to the gills for every meeting of the gay-straight alliance. In certain rarified circles, 'gay' was a term of endearment, not ridicule.

I once pointed out my transgender classmate to my father, on the way to the car. I heard nothing in response: just an appraising glance and an unlocking of the door. "I really wanted to go talk to her," says my father now, from the

comfort of my grandmother's upstairs apartment. "Boy, did I really want to go talk to her. But I obviously controlled myself, just as I had been controlling myself for eons..." My father these days is still rocking out in pinstripe pants as she ever was. The piercings have reduced in number, now that they're no longer the release valve of androgyny like before. Her hair is longer and fuller, her five o'clock shadow a memory. She's still a headturner, albeit in a different way: she's not yet used to the catcalls. "You reach a critical mass of sorts," she continues.

"Such that you cannot not come out...The biggest fear of the whole thing was how you were going to be taken by your family, your extended family, your personal friends: that was the debilitating fear, the biggest single emotional hurdle of it all..." The acceptance of my brothers and I, she says, was one of the only green lights she had to come out, totally and completely, in the face of her own paralyzing fear and worry. My father's half-century of concealment came to a close in December, 2005.

So, I ask: How'd that go? "Exceptionally well." She's smiling on the other end of the phone, enjoying the understatement. 'You have no idea how important it really was.' My father was the perfect storm of acceptance: loving children, understanding family, an atmosphere where GLBT culture was as graciously welcomed into our own home as it was in the homes of Greenwich Village or Castro Street. And still, as one of the two strongest women I know - my mother being the other - she was left to struggle for half a century, alone, for fear of an intolerant world that would ridicule her feelings, castigate her decisions, condemn her soul.

My father attended my college graduation in full femme, six months after swallowing five decades worth of self-doubt and coming out to me, my brothers, the rest of the family. I hauled her through the throng to introduce her to my former roommates, professors, and whoever else I felt should meet the brilliant gentlewoman I call Dad.

Jonathan Feakins spent the summer being chased by albino peacocks in western Turkey. He spent his childhood in Chicago, his young adulthood in New York, and now lives above Toys in Babeland in Seattle. He bikes downhill, laughs easily, reads too much, volunteers excessively, dances hard, and is presently trying to author an anthology of essays from the children of transgender parents.

FRAMELINE MAKES *TRANSPARENT* AVAILABLE TO COLAGE MEMBERS

"transparent" is a documentary film about 19 female-to-male transsexuals from 14 different states who have given birth and, in most instances, gone on to raise their biological children. The film details these transmen and their children's extraordinary experiences with gender, biology and their every day life as a family.

Frameline, the nonprofit distributor of transparent is selling this important film to COLAGE members at a special low price of \$49 (plus \$10 shipping/handling), making it affordable for individuals and groups in the COLAGE family. To take advantage of this special offer, contact Denah at Frameline via phone (415-703-

8650), mail (145 Ninth St., Ste. 300, San Francisco, CA 94103), or email (distribution@frameline.org) and mention the discount code "COLAGE1". We hope that you will encourage your local schools, public libraries and community groups to obtain discount status from Frameline to get access to the regular discount pricing on its entire collection of educational LGBT films. See our website, <http://cart.frameline.org/> for a list of all of Frameline's youth-appropriate films, including the COLAGE production *In My Shoes: Stories of Youth with LGBT Parents*. Many thanks to Frameline for their work "changing the world, one movie at a time."

2006 was the second year that COLAGE teamed up with the volunteer-run Rainbow Families Great Lakes to put on Family Week in Saugatuck, MI. Attendance for the week almost doubled this year, with 81 families bringing 42 youth ages 9-17 together for COLAGE programming. The week was filled with COLAGE events such as youth workshops, pizza & bowling night, a teen kayak trip, a scavenger hunt, tie-dyeing, a basketball tournament, and beach and pool parties. The week was wrapped up with a community dance, featuring a live performance by Suzi Nash of songs from her children's music album, Rainbow Sprinkles.

It was a year of new growth and collaboration in Provincetown, where COLAGE continued its work with

Special thanks to everyone who donated their time, energy, and other resources; without you, Family Week would not be possible!

VOLUNTEER STAFF

April Anthony
Christine Bachman
Christy Hubert
Claire Knight
Dakota Fine
Danielle Silber
Danna Cook
Debra Rosenberg
Dori Kavanaugh
Doug Fenton
Elizabeth Castellana
Elizabeth Hunt
Ember Cook
Hope Steinman-Iacullo
Greg Jasgur
Jamie K Evans
Jamie Larson
Jamon Franklin
Jonah EtShalom
Kelly Densmore
Monica Canfield-Lenfest
Nathaniel Obler
Nava EtShalom
Ramzi Fawaz
Ruby Cymrot-Wu
Shana Joy
Tracy Fogarty
Wade Meyer
Whitney Moses



COLAGE Director, Beth Teper, poses with Provincetown youth

Sydney marches in the parade



COLAGers at the MI Bowling Party



Teens enjoy Lake Michigan in Saugatuck



COLAGers get ready to march!

WRAP UPS!

Family Pride to put on the 11th annual Family Week. Over 500 families were registered to Family Pride, bringing 248 youth to COLAGE events. The fun-filled week included the 2nd appearance of the COLAGE Olympics for the 3rd to 5th grade group, scavenger hunts, a multitude of youth workshops, the Teen Panel, and, of course, the end-of-the-week Show and Tell. This was also the kickoff year for COLAGE's new Facilitator in Training program. The FIT program was created in conjunction to the teen workshops as a new way for our oldest teens to gain skills as facilitators and leaders as they transition out of high school.

Special thanks to everyone who donated their time, energy, and other resources; without you, Family Week would not be possible!

COLAGE RECEPTION

Co-Hosts

John Logan

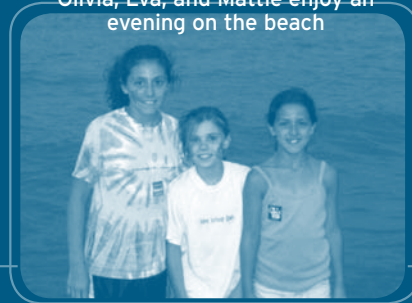
Kevin Woodward

Andrea Wachter



Kyle shows off his Tie-Dye

Olivia, Eva, and Mattie enjoy an evening on the beach



David Wall, Bob Houck, and their daughter, Elizabeth, accept the Families of Courage Award from Beth Teper and Jenn Chrisler



COLAGE Teens enjoy the outdoors in Saugatuck



COLAGErs get down at the dance in Provincetown



COLAGE Olympians Endure Record-Breaking Heat

SEX, RELIGION, AND POLITICS:

ARGUMENTS USED TO OPPOSE DIVERSITY EDUCATION AND HOW YOU CAN RESPOND

According to Women's Educational Media, it is estimated that six percent to 11 percent of schoolchildren have a gay or lesbian parent or sibling. Many efforts to fight homophobia in schools focus on high school where there are higher numbers of out LGBT students. But COLAGE often hears stories from children as young as seven or eight years of age who are affected by hearing anti-gay slurs at school. That's why it's so important for inclusive and positive messages about families and diversity to start in pre-school, and continue throughout our schooling.

Often, people who are hostile to LGBT people or families, or even those who are unsure of how they feel about the issue, say that educating children about LGBT and family diversity issues

is "inappropriate". Sometimes teachers and day-care workers shy away from discussing "gay issues" to avoid being accused of inappropriate "sex talk". Another common concern is voiced by conservative people of faith who feel that their religious freedom is threatened by pro-LGBT safe schools activism.

If you are a student of any age, a parent, teacher, or administrator, it is important to be prepared to respond to these and other concerns when you are working to make your curriculum and school policies more inclusive. The following points and counter-points can be used at school board and PTA meetings, in letters to the editor, or in any other forum where your right to a safe and inclusive school environment is being challenged.



THEY SAY...

"I don't think it's right to talk to young children about sex."

"Parents should decide when and how to talk about sex and sexuality with their children."

You may also be accused of "encouraging sex", "graphic descriptions of homosexuality," or "promoting the gay lifestyle."

"I am a Christian and oppose homosexuality. I wish to pass these values along to my children. When schools teach them to 'respect' homosexuality, that is a violation of my religious freedom."

"Teaching to accept LGBT people is insulting to religious people. Most religions are opposed to homosexuality."

"It is the parents' job - not the school's job - to teach children values. I do not want my children learning pro-gay values at school."

"Promoting respect for homosexuals is part of a political agenda and has no place in schools."

"I disagree with gay marriage and don't think gay people deserve any special rights. Why aren't my political values being respected in my school/my child's school?"

"Rules against 'harassment' of LGBT people in our school violates my right to free speech. I should be able to say anything I want to say, even if someone else finds it offensive."



WE SAY...

The curricula and activities we want are about concepts such as tolerance, respect, and equality. It is both appropriate and healthy to talk about differences among young children's families.

Sex education is already taught to high school students here. The concepts described in that class should be inclusive of all students regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or family background. Everyone who chooses to have sex deserves to know how to do so safely.

The school is not teaching children to respect homosexuality - but we are teaching them to respect all people, including gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people. You can disagree with homosexuality and still treat a person with kindness.

As a public school, it is not our place to make policies based on religious ideals. We are bound to state laws and federal, state, and local ordinances regarding discrimination, regardless of whether some, or even most, religions oppose them.

All schools teach children values, such as responsibility, punctuality, and manners. The values we want taught are pro-safety, pro-respect, and pro-equality. These are values we think everyone can agree with.

Although LGBT rights, including family recognition, are currently political issues, respect is not part of a political agenda. Respect is something that everyone in our school needs to show each other, regardless of our political or other differences, so that every student, teacher, and parent is able to attend and participate in school safely.

Slurs, cussing, hate speech, and verbal or physical abuse are not protected forms of speech. You can express your opinions about an issue without teasing or bullying other students.

IDEAS FOR AGE-APPROPRIATE DIVERSITY EDUCATION

An important part of encouraging inclusive curricula, and supporting teachers who may be nervous about introducing this topic in their classroom for the first time, is to offer some pointers and frameworks within which they can build their lesson plans. What follows are some basic guidelines for age-appropriate ways to talk about diversity - especially family, sexual and gender diversity - with children at all levels of school. Many of these ideas come from organizations with experience working in schools - such as the Safe Schools Coalition - and others come from our own school experiences as COLAGERS. For more information see our list of school resources on p12.

IDEAS TO INTRODUCE TO STUDENTS: In Pre-School and Elementary School

- Name-calling and teasing are never o.k.
- There's no such thing as "girl colors and

boy colors" or "girl games and boy games". Boys and girls don't have to act, dress, or talk a certain way.

- Everyone is different, and being different is o.k.
- Families come in all shapes and sizes. What makes a family is that you love each other and help take care of each other.

In Middle School

- Define words such as "bias," "stereotype," "discrimination," and "prejudice" and discuss stereotypes about people based on sex, gender, and sexual orientation.
- Introduce myth-busting information about groups of people who are subject to prejudice and stereotypes, including (but not limited to) LGBT people.
- Provide more specific information about different kinds of families, such as blended families, LGBT families, extended families,

single-parent families, and families formed through adoption, foster care, donor insemination, or other methods.

In High School

- Point out contributions to society that have been made by LGBT individuals, or people from LGBT families. (This can be worked into already-existing curricula, including math and science, social studies, english/literature, and the arts.)
- Provide specific information about gender, sexual, and family diversity, in the context of comprehensive sex education.
- Educate students about national and state laws that protect or discriminate against different groups of people (including, but not limited to, LGBT people), and information about the history of those laws and the social justice struggles that put them in place.

ACTIONS TO TAKE AT EVERY AGE

It's a good idea for parents and young people to check in with each other about where they're at in terms of being "out", and how they want to handle different situations that might arise. Parents and students may have different ideas about how best to handle anti-gay occurrences, or un-inclusive activities. Parents should remember that it is their child, not them, who must actually attend school everyday, and respect their child's wishes about whether and how to get involved. Try to understand that COLAGERS have good reason to avoid or delay coming out to our peers - we may face verbal or physical abuse, stigmatization, or loss of important friendships. Just as you (parents) had to go through your own process of deciding when, whether and how to come out, we must also go through ours. You can help us by teaching us skills for dealing with bigotry, sharing your own coming-out experiences, and making sure we're connected to other young people from families like ours (COLAGE has local chapters, a pen-pal program, and email lists to support this process).

COLAGERS - as much as we might sometimes want to pull away from our parents as we grow up - we should remember that our parents can be important allies to us in school, and may be able to help us influence people in power such as teachers, school board members, or administrators in ways that we can't (or shouldn't have to). Parents are an important source of support in our education, so speak up and tell your parents what you need from them to improve your life at school.

When we're ready to do so, these are just a few ideas of how COLAGERS and/or our parents can take action to make our school a safe place for us to be and learn:

- Check in with teachers about their general curriculum ideas.

Stress to them the importance of inclusive activities and classroom materials.

- Make sure that your school has books and other media that reflect the diversity of your community. COLAGE has booklists that you can pass along to the teachers or school librarians. We also have books you can buy and donate to your school.
- As a student, you can start or join your school's Gay-Straight Alliance, Ally club, or other organization devoted to making your school a safe and welcoming place for everyone.
- Identify safe people and safe places - teachers, friends, counselors or coaches who you know you can talk to if things aren't going well in school or at home.
- Students, parents, and teachers can share skills and ideas about how to address bullying and other forms of harassment in school.
- Find out what kind of policies your district has to protect its students - work to create or change these policies if they are not already inclusive of you and your family. Organizations listed on page 12 may have sample policies you can consult.
- If you feel safe doing so, it can help to introduce your family to the teachers and principals at your school before the school year starts. Often teachers want to support every child in their classroom, and knowing that some of their students come from LGBT families can motivate them to take steps on their own to be more inclusive. If a teacher is not supportive, it can also be helpful to know this ahead of time.
- Use COLAGE visibility resources to raise awareness in your class, student club, or the community at large.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR SCHOOL!

As you read the stories in this fall's *Just For Us*, you might find yourself wondering where else to go for information about making your school safe for all. Starting with COLAGE, here are five organizations that want to help you make change. Whether it's ideas for lesson plans, legal advice regarding a hostile or violent school situation, or even grant money to turn your dream curriculum into a reality, these organizations can help get you started on the path to justice.



1 COLAGE, www.colage.org

Publications: "Tips for Making Classrooms Safe for People with LGBT Parents" (aimed at teachers), and "How to Make a Difference in Your School" (aimed at students, parents, and community activists)

Classroom Materials: Booklists organized by age, so you can build up the collection in your school library; *Respect All Families* poster series for use in classrooms, hallways, and guidance counselor offices

Ways to Spice Up the Curriculum: COLAGE visibility resources, such as *That's So Gay* photo-text exhibit and the *Focus on MY Family* writing anthology, can be used to raise awareness in your classes and school community, and come with special discussion and activity guides for teachers or group leaders who want to use these materials as part of a lesson plan or workshop series.

Trained Speakers and Panelists: COLAGE members from your area can come to speak at your school (or give special in-service presentations to your teachers) about how to make the school environment safer.



2 GLSEN (GAY, LESBIAN, AND STRAIGHT EDUCATION NETWORK), www.glsen.org

Gay-Straight Alliances: GLSEN has comprehensive guides to help you set

up your GSA, ideas for fun and educational activities, and information about what to do if your club faces opposition by the school district or community members. You can also connect with students across the country through list-serves, national conferences, and local chapters to get support for the work you're doing.

Teacher Support and Training: If you are an educator, GLSEN has resources for you to help create inclusive curriculum, respond to school violence, and get the training you need to make your school safe. You can also connect to other educators who share your goals and values.



The Safe Schools Coalition: A Public-Private Partnership in Support of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Youth

3 SAFESCHOOLS COALITION, www.safeschoolscoalition.org

Resources: The Safe Schools Coalition has a HUGE resource

library, with educational hand-outs for students, teachers, parents, and administrators on a variety of topics, including school violence, marriage, sex education, mental health issues, inclusive curricula, and how to be an ally. Some of their resources are available in Spanish.



4 THE ACLU (AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION), www.aclu.org/lgbt/youth/index.html

Legal Advocacy: Some school districts simply aren't safe, and there are

principals and school boards across the country that, instead of protecting all their students, have allowed, or even encouraged, anti-LGBT harassment. If your school has taken measures to ban your GSA or similar group, or have refused to put a stop to violence and harassment in the hallways, the ACLU is one place to go. They have successfully sued school districts - sometimes for hundreds of thousands of dollars - to protect the rights of youth to attend school in safety, to start and join clubs, and to speak openly about themselves and their families.

Education: If you're not sure what the law is in your state, or you want some additional information about making sure that your district is in compliance with federal, state, or local anti-discrimination ordinances, check out the many educational resources published by the ACLU, or ask "Sybil Liberty", the ACLU's advice columnist who answers students' questions about freedom of speech, school safety, and other civil rights issues in schools.



5 TEACHING TOLERANCE, www.tolerance.org

Resources for Teachers: The

Teaching Tolerance website has a special site for teachers that includes classroom activities and kits. These kits often come equipped with discussion materials, visual aides, teacher guides, and other key components to a complete unit or lesson plan.

Wide Range of Anti-Oppression and Diversity Tools: Not only will the materials on this site be useful in anti-homophobia and bullying discussions, there are also materials on civil rights movements, ideas for acknowledging "history months" for Latinos, African-Americans, women, and other groups, as well as information on diversity in the arts.

Grants: You can apply for funding to turn your ideas into great projects. Teaching Tolerance offers small grants to support innovative anti-bias education efforts in schools and communities.



SPAWN TALK

by Abigail Garner

Visibility Still Lacking on "Friendly" Campuses"

Each time I am scheduled to speak about LGBT

families on a college campus, I call in advance to interview a few students and faculty. I ask them questions about the campus climate regarding queer issues. Even at the most progressive schools, students of LGBT parents are still just a rare afterthought. For example, here's a recent interview with a student from a campus LGBT office:

Me: What about people with LGBT parents? How involved are they in queer activities on campus?

LGBT Student Organizer: It's a super supportive school. Everybody's out.

Me: But what about people who have LGBT parents?

Student: Yeah, that's a total non-issue here. Like, our advisor was totally open when she had her commitment ceremony, and now she and her partner are raising twins. So it's something we are totally used to.

Me: But I'm asking about *students* who have queer parents. How involved are they? Can I talk to a few of them to find out about their experiences on campus?

Student: Oh! Students with queer parents!

Hmmm...that's a good question...hmmm...no..I don't know of any students here with gay parents. Wow. I hadn't thought about that.

Conversations like this are the rule rather than the exception. Although queer students embrace the idea of becoming parents themselves, few recognize that queerspawns are among their peers. Everyone on the LGBT spectrum would benefit from making sure that "queer-friendly" schools are also culturally competent to serve queerspawns. I'm talking about thoughtful inclusion, not just categorizing kids of queers as "allies" and then directing them to the workshop where they'll be offered remedial tips for allies like "use gender neutral language" and "don't assume everyone is heterosexual." Presuming that 18-year-old queerspawns need to be educated with knowledge that is second-nature to them is both insulting and alienating.

I know that feeling of alienation first-hand from my own experience at Wellesley College. During my first semester, I attended a campus outreach panel of students who talked about being lesbian or bisexual. I sat there wanting to nod my head feverishly in solidarity with their stories of their daily encounters with heterosexism. But our stories deviated at the point where their biggest obstacle was acceptance from their parents, and my biggest obstacle was acceptance

from *them.*

Many people are surprised when they learn now that I wasn't a big queer activist on campus. But no one -- and I mean no one, not my family, not queer students and certainly not straight students -- understood how I could be interested in the queer community without thinking I was in deep denial and struggling to come out of the closet.

I grew weary of having to prove myself as queer enough to not be an outsider to queer-identified women, but still not queer enough to want to make out with any of them -- no matter how many beers I drank.

They didn't "get" what I was about, so after awhile, I just gave up on any hope of getting involved in queer activism. In hindsight, the "they" who wore me down were just a handful of outspoken organizers at Wellesley, and I let their judgments define me way too much. And at the time, I didn't have the words, "culturally queer," to help me hold my ground. Fifteen years later, queerspawns remain mostly invisible on college campuses, but that is changing. As more of them choose to carve out an identity for themselves, more queer students who meet queerspawns will change their reactions from curiosity and suspicion to solidarity and inclusion.

Abigail Garner, 34, is the author of Families Like Mine: Children of Gay Parents Tell It Like It Is. Her blog, "Damn Straight" is at AbigailGarner.net.

SPEAK OUT, continued from page 4

Terrece, 13, Wisconsin

I don't know anyone at my school who has a LGBT parent. So it kind of feels like I'm the only one with a LGBT parent. Not a lot of classmates know and I don't know if any teachers know. My friends know and they don't treat me any different. Some kids found out, but I don't know how. When they found out they made fun of me CONSTANTLY and then after a couple of weeks they got bored with it and made fun of someone else. But once in a while the subject comes up. I wish that they could have a program for kids who have LGBT parents. That way I would know that I'm not alone and that people can accept me.

Sarah, 15, San Francisco, CA

Most of my close friends know about my gay dads, however I don't tend to broadcast it to the entire school, and as it is the

beginning of the new school year, most of the new students and my new friends don't know. My teachers know however, because my parents are very active in my academic life and make a point of meeting all of my teachers and communicating with them on a regular basis.

Courtney, 16, Bourne, MA

Kids at my school know about my parents, not all of them, but you can basically tell when you see them together. I have been teased in the past by older girls, it was quite a hard time for me. I got through it by talking to other kids from COLAGE, and I also asked the opinion of one of the COLAGE staff (at Provincetown Family Week). He helped me to get through by showing me that these girls were being unrealistic, and I just disregard their comments. My school talks about LGBT issues but not extensively.

COLAGE NOTES

COLAGE RADIO TOUR

COLAGE is thrilled to announce an exciting collaboration with Freedom To Marry to launch the first-ever Radio Tour of Youth with LGBT Parents. To highlight the unique experiences of COLAGE youth while promoting awareness and acceptance from the American public, the radio tour will target local and national level radio stations to feature the members of our Radio Tour on programs this October.

This radio tour features bright and articulate members of the COLAGE community sharing their experiences with the American public, therefore showcasing the truth about LGBT families and the case for LGBT equality. The personal stories of these COLAGE Speak OUT members will add passionate voices and a compelling new dimension to current national debates about marriage, family, adoption, foster care, and social justice.

Radio Tour members include:

Caroline Cox-Orrell, IN
Kerry Cullen, NJ
Avi Silber, MD
Becca Lazarus, CT
Marina Gatto, CA
Jessie Voors, IN
Emily McGranachan, MA
Joe Herrington, CT

COLAGE WELCOMES SUMMER INTERNS

COLAGE was pleased to welcome three interns to our San Francisco office this summer. Mario, April, Lily, and Jamon bring diverse backgrounds and skills to share with COLAGE.

Jamon Franklin grew up in Cleveland, Ohio with one brother, one straight mom and two gay dads. From there she moved as far away as possible, to Santa Cruz, CA to go to college.



After graduating in 2001 with a degree in Women's Studies, she moved to San Francisco. During her time in SF, she has volunteered with various social justice organizations in the Bay Area, including Community United Against Violence and Books not Bars. In her spare time, she enjoys riding bikes, hiking, reading, and pretending that she likes the rain. She looks forward to finding more of a community of folks with queer parents during her summer internship with COLAGE.



April Anthony, a genderqueer COLAGEr from Southern CA, graduated with honors from the Literature program at UC Santa Cruz in June 2005. She has lived in San Francisco since September 2005. He

has an extensive background in youth/teen and theater organizing. In addition to performing and publishing her writing, April also has taught creative writing to 'at-risk' and 'queer-at-risk' populations. He is still looking to find a stronger sense of community in the Bay as well as folks who are interested in pushing the boundaries of queer performance spaces in the Bay. Needless to say, April is very excited to be able to continue her social justice work at COLAGE.

Mario Lio is a fresh high school graduate who is recently began college at the University of California, Berkeley. This Peruvian-Chinese queer seventeen year old moved to San Francisco in 2001, and since then he has



done activism advocating equal rights to everyone, particularly in the LGBTQI community. Mario is a determined and optimistic guy who is ready to face any obstacle that comes his way. In his leisure time, he enjoys cooking, reading, sleeping, and looking out his window when it rains.



Lily Donovan-Seid graduated from high school in Los Altos and is beginning her college career in Seattle this fall. As a member of the COLAGE Youth Leadership and Action

Program, Lily was featured in the *That's So Gay* phototext exhibit, *Focus on MY Family: A Queerspaw Anthology*, and as a producer and extra in *In My Shoes: Stories of Youth with LGBT Parents*. She is half Chinese and Half Irish and has a straight mom and gay dad. When not at COLAGE, she plays drums for an all-girl rock band.

UPCOMING COLAGE EVENTS

COLAGE AT THE FAMILY MATTERS CONFERENCE San Diego, CA, October 21, 2006

Community building and leadership empowerment for youth ages 8 and up during Family Matters annual LGBT Family Conference. www.sdfamilymatters.org

FIRST-EVER COLAGE CHAPTER INSTITUTE Dallas, TX October 27, 2006 11 AM- 4 PM

For present and potential leadership of COLAGE Chapters across the country. Come to Act OUT early for this exciting networking and skill building opportunity.

ACT OUT: THE NATIONAL LGBT FAMILY CONFERENCE Dallas, TX, October 27-29, 2006

The not-to-be-missed event of the year. Full slates of programming for children and adult COLAGErs as well as our parents. Leadership training, community building, a Halloween dance and much more!

For more information about COLAGE'S upcoming events, or to organize an event in YOUR area, get in touch with Meredith Fenton at meredith@colage.org, or visit our website at www.colage.org.



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