



THE CENTER FOR
YOUTH & FAMILY
SOLUTIONS
cyfsolutions.org

Media Contact: Celeste Matheson, Director of Marketing and Development

Office: (309) 323-6619

Cell: (309) 634-1611

Email: cmatheson@cyfsolutions.org

The Center for Youth and Family Solutions, HRC Join Record Number of Partners Working on LGBTQ+ Inclusivity

New Report: 172 agencies partner with the Human Rights Campaign Foundation's All Children - All Families program, including The Center for Youth and Family Solutions, and together serve more than 1.4 million clients annually.

The Center for Youth and Family Solutions is proud to be one of the 36 FIRST TIME / 136 RETURN partners.

Peoria, Illinois – The Center for Youth and Family Solutions is proud to be one of 172 child welfare organizations joining the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) Foundation's All Children - All Families (ACAF) program in 2023, as highlighted in a new report. Together, these organizations work to improve the services provided to the LGBTQ+ community, including children in foster care and prospective foster and adoptive parents who are LGBTQ+. This year alone, this multi-organization partnership assessed 9,500+ policies and practices within child welfare organizations to ensure they meet ACAF best practices criteria — approximately 6,000 more than were assessed when this report was first released in 2019. This allowed for over 1.4 million children, youth, and families across 43 states to benefit from these LGBTQ+ inclusive policies and affirming practices.

"Providing children and families with the most inclusive environment in which to grow should always be the number one priority," said **Phii Regis, Director of HRC's All Children - All Families Program**. "We are grateful for The Center for Youth and Family Solutions work as part of this partnership — together, we can win the fight for equality and build safe and loving communities at the same time."

The Center for Youth and Family Solutions CEO Patrick Phelan also stated, "this recognition by the Human Rights Campaign All Children All Families Program is the ultimate validation of the fact that we have achieved what our agency founders set out to do. They built a safe place where every person in our communities can access the help they need without judgement, and with the respect and care that they deserve. We are proud to be leading the way in providing affirming services to the LGBTQ+ community."

This report comes at a time when LGBTQ+ people, particularly LGBTQ+ youth, are under threat. Laws and policies protecting LGBTQ youth in foster care from discrimination are a patchwork from state to state. Only 13 states and the District of Columbia have explicit laws or policies in place to protect foster youth

from discrimination based on both sexual orientation and gender identity. Seven additional states explicitly protect foster youth from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation but not gender identity. Approximately 1 in 3 youth in foster care are LGBTQ+, and laws that attack them on the basis of sexuality and gender put an already vulnerable community at risk. When they are not allowed in homes that support them, LGBTQ+ youth face higher rates of abuse and mistreatment than their non-LGBTQ+ peers. Data shows 44% of LGBTQ+ youth in state custody were removed, ran away, or thrown out of their home for reasons related to their identity.

At the same time, there are an overwhelming number of LGBTQ+ families who have at least considered adopting or fostering a child in the future, but 55% of them feared being turned away because of their identity, and only 14% knew of an LGBTQ+-inclusive agency near them. One couple was quoted in the report as having been rejected from two child welfare agencies on the basis of their identity before finally being accepted to foster with an ACAF partner agency: “[I] got rejected twice from two different agencies and I didn’t see how going to another agency was going to make any difference. One day I was just browsing online, and I found a foster care licensing agency and they [had] the LGBT flag so I called them, and I found that, yeah, they’re inclusive to everybody. It’s kind of like it was meant to be.”

With the work of ACAF, a record-breaking 10,650+ professionals were trained in how to make their agencies as inclusive of LGBTQ+ families and youth as possible. Additionally, all partner organizations that earned a Tier of Recognition with the program, such as The Center for Youth and Family Solutions, now include “sexual orientation,” “gender identity” and “gender expression” in their client non-discrimination policy and communicate this policy to staff and clients. They also documented client forms featuring gender-neutral language, such as “Parent 1” and “Parent 2” rather than “Mother” and “Father,” and they display visual cues throughout common areas to communicate support and inclusion of LGBTQ+ clients and their families.

To learn more about The Center for Youth and Family Solutions please visit <https://www.cyfsolutions.org/> or contact Celeste Matheson at (309) 323-6619. To learn more about the All Children-All Families program, please visit <https://www.thehrcfoundation.org/about/all-children-all-families>.

CYFS is a not-for-profit social service agency that provides critical counseling, casework, and support services to children, families and individuals who have experienced significant trauma, grief and loss, abuse, neglect, and other significant family life challenges. All five core programs - adoption, foster care and intact family services, behavioral health, residential services for youth, and youth, family, and community outreach and senior services- are designed to help children and families heal, cope, and thrive. Its mission is to engage and serve children and families in need with dignity, compassion, and respect by building upon individual and community strengths to resolve life challenges. CYFS has 11 offices across Illinois, and annually serves 20,000 individuals in 37 counties.

###