



THE CENTER FOR
YOUTH & FAMILY
SOLUTIONS
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The Center for Youth and Family Solutions Recognized by Human Rights Campaign Foundation for LGBTQ+ Inclusion Efforts

Peoria -- Today, The Center for Youth and Family Solutions, one of central Illinois largest nonprofit social service agencies, proudly announced that it is being recognized in [2021 Change-Makers](#), the Human Rights Campaign Foundation's third annual report highlighting 119 child welfare agencies across the country who have worked with the HRC Foundation's [All Children - All Families](#) (ACAF) program to improve the services they provide to the LGBTQ+ community, including children in foster care, 1 in 3 of whom are LGBTQ+, and prospective foster and adoptive parents. These organizations serve more than 1 million clients annually in 35 states and employ more than 24,000 employees.

Michelle Gaede, Clinical Supervisor for The Center for Youth and Family Solutions, who led the agency through the self-assessment process, stated, "It's been an incredible journey so far, seeing the commitment to learn, grow, adjust, and want to do better for all those we serve; across programs and departments in every site, I recognize the humility and dedication from staff in serving the LGBTQ+ community. I am excited to see what the next year brings and hopeful we will continue to serve our LGBTQ+ clients and staff with dignity, compassion, and respect as we continue to learn and grow as an agency. "

"The third edition of our Change-Makers report shows that, despite the many hardships of the last year, more organizations than ever before are working alongside the Human Rights Campaign Foundation to make impactful change for the LGBTQ+ youth and families they serve," said **Alison Delpercio, Human Rights Campaign Foundation Director, All Children - All Families**. "This year's participants also demonstrated a growing commitment to intersectionality and ensuring organizational policies and practices do not reinforce the same systems of oppression that put youth and families at risk in the first place. By taking on these challenges, the change-makers featured in our 2021 report are models for youth-serving professionals everywhere."

The release comes at a time when many have been sounding the alarm about the particular risks foster youth face due to [COVID-19](#). LGBTQ+ inclusion work in foster care systems could not be more important. Studies have shown us that LGBTQ+ youth are overrepresented in foster care, and that child welfare systems must do more to ensure that the trauma of foster care, where LGBTQ youth already face an increased risk of both negative experiences and outcomes, is never compounded by that caused by unsafe and non-affirming foster homes:

- Approximately 1 out of every 3 youth in foster care is LGBTQ+
- LGBTQ+ youth report higher rates of mistreatment while in care
- LGBTQ+ youth report more frequent placement disruptions
- LGBTQ+ youth report a higher likelihood of being placed in congregate care settings

The agencies featured in this report conducted an internal self-assessment, provided professional development to staff and implemented ACAF's "Benchmarks of LGBTQ Inclusion," which track policy and practice changes within agencies. The [2021 Change-Makers](#) report features three "Tiers of Recognition," which celebrate the progress agencies have made toward becoming fully welcoming to their LGBTQ+ clients. With 32 new participants this year, ACAF also expands the program's reach into six new states -- Alabama, Connecticut, Mississippi, Montana, New Mexico and North Carolina -- and the District of Columbia for the first time. 92% of participants met a tier of recognition, and 14 of the returning organizations advanced to a higher tier of recognition.

- **Innovative Inclusion:** 44 organizations met all 25 applicable criteria and are going beyond to innovate their services for LGBTQ+ youth and families
- **Solid Foundation for Inclusion:** 40 organizations met all 25 applicable policy and practice criteria for LGBTQ+ inclusion
- **Building Foundation for Inclusion:** 25 organizations met foundational criteria, including non-discrimination protections

The report features profiles of four child welfare organizations that are setting the bar for LGBTQ+ inclusion while adapting to the demands of the [COVID-19 pandemic](#) and responding to calls for an end to systemic racism -- including in child welfare: Vista Del Mar in California; Extraordinary Families in California; Texas Casa in Texas; and 360 Youth Services in Illinois. The report also features interviews with individuals who have been impacted by LGBTQ+-inclusive services, including: Manuel Padilla, a foster parent in Colorado; and Victoria, a former youth in care and now trainer at Lawrence Hall in Illinois.

Since 2007, hundreds of child welfare agencies across the U.S. have used [ACAF's](#) resources to enhance their efforts to achieve safety, permanency and well-being for LGBTQ+ youth and families. Read the full report [here](#).

The Center for Youth and Family Solutions is a not-for-profit social services agency that works with those who have been impacted by trauma, grief and loss, abuse and neglect, and other significant family life challenges. The organization provides foster care and adoption services; behavioral health counseling; crisis pregnancy counseling; intact family intervention; residential services for youth; senior services; and youth, family, and community outreach services. 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 over 8,000 families in 37 counties, and over 20,000 individuals statewide.**

For more information on The Center for Youth and Family Solutions, please visit www.cyfsolutions.org or contact Celeste Matheson at 309-323-6619.

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