

October 10, 2017 – LGBTQ Meeting

Thanks so much to our panel: **Jorge Tormes** (GAL program), **Robert Latham** (UM Law), **Judge Scott Bernstein**, **Landon Woolston** (Pride Lines), and **Steve Dixon** (Children's Rights). You really raised our awareness of the LGBTQ youth we advocate on the behalf of and provided better ways to communicate with them. We appreciate the knowledge you shared and the resources you exposed us to. What an informative meeting!!

To those who attended, you received the full benefit of this panel and the meeting. To those who read the notes, I apologize because so much of this particular meeting was interactive and conversational, and the notes will never convey accurately the discussion behind the "bullet points.". This was one of those "where you just had to be there."

We were given some pretty **eye-opening stats**:

- Gay youth have 4x the arrest rate;
- Gay youth have 10x the suicide rate;
- 40% of the homeless population identify as LGBTQ;
- Gay youth are kicked out of their homes more often due to non-acceptance;
- Gay youth experience much greater societal pressure to conform (on top of the normal high school peer pressures).

A study was done in L.A.:

- 10% of the general population is LGBTQ, but 25% of foster youth identify as LGBTQ;
- 2% of the general population identify as transgender, but this represents 6% of foster youth.

Oftentimes, an LGBTQ youth's emotional and psychological development is delayed while trying to figure out their gender identity.

There is a difference between gender identity and sexual orientation:

- Gender identity is how individuals perceive themselves -- individuals are usually assigned their gender at birth, which may or may not correspond with how they identify their own gender.
- Sexual orientation is the emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to other people -- it is who you are interested in dating or being intimate with.
- Someone can be transgender, but also be gay, straight, bisexual, or asexual.
- View sexuality, gender, and gender expression as 3 lines of a continuum: sexuality from completely straight to 100% gay; gender from completely male/female to somewhere along the continuum; and gender expression as how you choose to express yourself.

The letter "Q" -- questioning or queer. For those of us older generation, the word queer was a pejorative expression which was used in a disparaging manner. That is no longer the case. **The word "queer" has been reclaimed and is now said with pride.**

Definitions are personal and not constrained by any one letter!

If a youth on your case is brave enough to open up to you --shut up and listen!!!!

- Trust, talk, be open and understand what is going on with them.
- Let them know that you are understanding, non-judgmental, and are there to listen.
- Ask them how open you can be with the information they have shared. You can always speak to your attorney and request a side-bar for sensitive issues or the attorney can request the courtroom to be cleared.
- Use gender neutral pronouns
- Have a visual marker (maybe a rainbow on your folder) that lets them know you are safe for them to confide in.

When kids are placed in a group home, they have the right to be themselves!! Florida is the only southern state with gender, gender identity, and sexuality laws for group homes.

- They have the right to have their identity respected. In most cases, DCF must place the youth according to their gender identity. To place the youth with a different gendered program requires a staffing where the agency considers safety, wellbeing, and preference. Included in the staffing are the GAL, parents, case manager and therapist. The decision must be made based on the youth and the program -- NOT ON stereotypes and individual biases.
- They have the right to express themselves: Group homes must provide reasonable and safe access to grooming products and clothing that are appropriate for age, gender expression, culture, and development
- They have the right to be safe and affirmed; staff cannot attempt to change or discourage sexual orientation, gender identity or expression. They cannot harass or treat a youth differently. Conversion therapy is completely forbidden!!
- **If you know someone who is not being respected in their placement contact your GAL attorney. If it is a youth not on your case, a resource is the Children & Youth Law Clinic (305-284-3123 or lgbtqchildwelfare@law.miami.edu**

Pridelines is an organization that serves LGBTQ youth and the community at large through affirming programs and services which promote dialogue, wellness and foster social change. Their **guidelines** are:

- All decisions made focus on the improvement of the lives of S. Florida's LGBTQ community members, especially youth.
- They focus on identifying resources for the LGBTQ community, creating the most comprehensive system of services.
- Working together building relationships based on equality & mutual respect.
- Programs are flexible and respond to the emerging needs and issues of the LGBTQ community
- Commitment to creating an affirming, nurturing and inspiring environment that encourages self-expression, personal growth and community
- A commitment to providing leadership opportunities to empower LGBTQ youth as full participants in the governance of their own services
- A commitment to providing health services, including HIV and STI testing, to ensure the health and safety of the community, and to de-stigmatize HIV/AIDS.

Some of the programs offered are:

- **Rainbow Circle** -- peer led LGBTQ support and discussion groups
- **Youth Council** -- youth leadership team
- **Young Adults Taking Action** -- focuses on sexual health and HIV/STI prevention education
- **Beyond the Binary** -- peer-ed transgender and gender non-conforming youth
- **Social Fridays** -- fun social activities, including game nights, movie nights, sleep-overs, art projects, etc.
- **Activities** include LGBTQ youth prom, campout, field trips, and celebrations.

For more info : info@pridlines.org or 305-571-9601. They are located at NW 64th St. and Biscayne Blvd.

Many high schools have **GSA- Gay Straight Alliance** - a school group.

Here are links to reports that were referenced:

- <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/research/safe-schools-and-youth/lafys-aug-2014/>
- <https://www.lambdalegal.org/publications/safe-havens>
- <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/LGBTQyouth.pdf>

For more info, they also recommend the specific child welfare resources at Lambda Legal:

- <https://www.lambdalegal.org/all?issue=11462>