

a kid on your caseload

We Are ...

your son

Gay

Lesbian

your foster daughter

your student

Bisexual

your grandchild

Transgender

GLBTQ

your daughter

Questioning

We Are...GLBTQ Video Overview and Discussion Guide

Acknowledgements:

Evonne Hedgepath-Project Coordinator/Interviewer

Derek Himada-Video/Broadcast Director

Sharon Newcomer-Program Manager/Producer

Carolyn Jones-Program Manager/Producer

Renee Klosterman-Multimedia Production Manager

Jeanne McShane-Editorial Consultant

Marianne K. Ozmun-Editorial Consultant/Discussion Guide Author

We cannot emphasize enough, our gratitude and respect for the young men and women who shared their stories in the making of this movie. They are models of strength, and resilience. Antoine, Donovan, Halo, Jordan, Kahelia, Kasey, Lizz, Shawndell, Skooter and Tyler courageously talked about their own experiences of abuse, alienation, and overcoming adversity for the sole purpose of helping prevent other young people from facing the same difficulties.

Introduction:

Few topics give rise to greater controversy than those of sexual orientation and gender identity issues. This subject matter brings into play science, society, religion, and politics and impacts greatly on the experiences of children and youth in sexual minority groups involved in child welfare systems throughout the country. Regardless of one's spiritual convictions or political persuasions, the bottom line is that these children and youth are on our caseloads, in our schools, neighborhoods, families, and in our homes. We as professionals, substitute caregivers, and child advocates have an obligation to protect them, and provide for their basic needs; we must also serve as bridges to necessary services and supports. More than anything, we must model acceptance and help these young people reach a place of self-acceptance.

The purpose of this video is to provide some facts and dispel some commonly held myths about sexual orientation and gender identity. Viewers will meet a group of amazing young men and women whose traumatic life experiences lead them to foster care, only to find that some professionals, helpers, and substitute caregivers held similar prejudices and lack of understanding to the families and communities from which they came.

Ultimately, the caring and compassion of many of their current caregivers have helped these young people overcome their early difficulties.

We each have the opportunity to be that one caring and compassionate adult in the life of a hurting child.

A Few Facts:

"Approximately 5-10% of the general population is estimated to be gay or lesbian. Given that the nation's total out-of-home care population of youth ages 11 and older is estimated at 244,000, it can be assumed that at a minimum 12,000-24,000 lesbian and gay adolescents are in out-of-home care, or that one of every ten to twenty adolescents in care is lesbian or gay.

But even these figures do not adequately reflect the numbers of LGBT youth in the foster care population, for LGBT adolescents make up a disproportionate part of the foster care pool.

Because gay, lesbian, and gender nonconforming adolescents commonly find themselves disapproved of or overtly rejected by their own families, they are more likely to be forced from their homes to become part of the foster care, runaway, and 'throwaway' populations."

All data and quoted references on this page are excerpted from Youth in the Margins, A Report on the Unmet Needs of LGBT Youth in Foster Care Including a Survey of Fourteen States and Proposal for Reform. By the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund.

- 33% of gay men and 34% of lesbians reported suffering violence at the hands of a family member as the result of sexual orientation.
- 50% of gay adolescent males reported a negative reaction from their family upon disclosing their sexual orientation and 26% say they were forced to leave home as a result.
- Approximately 25-40% of youth who become homeless each year are gay, lesbian, or bisexual.
- More than 90% of LGBT students reported hearing homophobic comments in school and 61% report outright verbal harassment.
- 22% of gay or bisexual males and 29% of lesbian or bisexual females report have been physically hurt by a fellow student because of sexual orientation
- 28.1% of bisexual and gay males and 20.5% of bisexual and lesbian females reported attempting suicide.
- **30% of all completed youth suicides in the U.S. are committed by GLBT youth.**

Selected Terms:

Coming Out

A lifelong process of self acceptance and disclosure to others of one's sexual orientation or gender identity.

Gender Fluid

A term used by some individuals to describe their own gender identity. It is often used by those who have the anatomy of one gender but whose feelings, thoughts, and behaviors may be perceived to be more consistent with the opposite gender.

GLBTQ

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning

Homophobia

Negative feelings, attitudes, actions, or behaviors against members of the GLBT community or people who are thought to be GLBT.

Reparative Therapy

Any formal attempt to change a person's sexual orientation, usually from homosexual to heterosexual, through counseling or specific religious ministries.

Sexual Orientation

The orientation within human beings that leads them to be emotionally and physically attracted to persons of one gender or both.

Transgender

A broad term used to describe an individual who has a self-image not traditionally associated with their biological gender. Some transgender people wish to change their anatomy to be more congruent with their self-image, others do not.

Dispelling Myths:

Myth: Only adults know their sexual orientation or gender identity

People may come to realizations about their sexual orientation or gender identity at various stages of life but many report feeling “different” long before ever starting elementary school.

Myth: Sexual orientation and gender identity are chosen and can be changed.

Most people in sexual minority groups feel that they were born that way. Research concluded that homosexuality is not a disease, it cannot be changed, it is a normal variation of human sexuality. Efforts to change sexual orientation through programs such as reparative therapy or transformational ministries have not been shown to have lasting results but have shown the tendency to cause greater harm to those seeking help through them. The American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Psychiatric Association specifically caution against the practice of referring youth to reparative therapies or any program that attempts to change sexual orientation.

“First we have to make sure that the young people are seen and noticed and acknowledge that they are living human beings within the system of care. So it’s the invisibility that really is kind of a special need.”

~ Rob Woronoff, Child Welfare League of America

Myth: LGBTQ Youth are sexually aggressive

These young people are no more likely to offend against other children than their heterosexual counterparts. They are; however, more likely to be sexually assaulted because they are members of a sexual minority group. In addition, sexual predators are skilled at preying on young people who keep secrets which glbtq youth often feel compelled to do.

Myth: LGBTQ Youth mostly care about sexual relationships

Like most adolescents, glbtq youth are curious about sexual experiences. However, they are also interested in seeking companionship. They are no more likely to seek out partners **exclusively** for sexual activity than heterosexual youth.

Myth: LGBTQ Youth are not spiritual or religious

Contrarily, many of these youth have sought membership in faith communities only to be turned away. Many others who have long held deep religious beliefs come to feel unworthy and even “evil” upon realizing they were glbtq. The good news is that many faith communities are reaching out to and supporting these young people in finding self acceptance.

Why is ‘Coming Out’ so important?

Psychologists agree that keeping such an important secret about one’s self is very difficult and damaging to the human psyche.

Insights:

The young people and their caregivers shown in this film would like to share the following insights with youth professionals, potential substitute caregivers, and child advocates about what might make their experience with the child welfare system more positive.

- Potential foster parents and caseworkers should discuss whether a particular placement is appropriate for a glbtq youth
- It's important that not only are the foster parents accepting of glbtq youth but the other children in the home must be as well.
- When you have a foster child who tells you they are lesbian or gay, your reaction should not be shock, it should be supportive.
- Foster parents should have an open heart and mind about who a young person is and accept them for who they are.
- When we accept a child into our home and the child "comes out" or we discover that child is gay, it is not our role to try and change that child, it is our role to change our own thinking and feeling, and educate ourselves on how to nurture and accept that child.
- It would make it more comfortable if foster parents put up a "safe zone" poster or some other symbols to let young people know that all are welcome.

- Caseworkers should be well versed in local resources for glbtq youth and maintain frequent contact with those youth.
- Foster parents should feel fortunate for the opportunity they have, they can really help change someone's life.

Six things you can do to improve the life of GLBTQ youth in foster care:

- Create a safe space. Make it obvious that these young people are welcome. For Example post posters or stickers that have rainbow flags or say, "This is a Safe Zone", have books, literature, and information about local GLBTQ resources available.
- Be honest about your own fears and prejudices and make a commitment to get to know glbtq youth as people and to become more open and accepting.
- Get support for yourself, join a local chapter of Parents, Family, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG).
- Pay attention to what is happening at school to kids in your care. Report any or all forms of abuse, not just physical, to the school principal.
- Don't tolerate negative comments or off color jokes about glbtq individuals, have the courage to speak up.
- Take advantage of ongoing training and education and invite others to attend as well.

We Are...GLBTQ Video Discussion Questions

Tyler's mom said, "to tell you the truth it scared me to death. I never had to deal with a gay youth."

- What kinds of fears do you think parents have about GLBTQ youth?
- What might we do to help resolve those fears?
- Is there a likelihood that we have all encountered glbtq youth and might not have been aware of it?

Tyler stated that he always felt "evil" in his parent's eyes.

- Do you think that sense of being different, abnormal, wrong, or evil is common among glbtq youth?
- What can we do as caregivers to counter those negative feelings?

Antoine said, "if I had my way, I'd like to be heterosexual?"

- Do you think this might be a common experience for gay adolescents?
- What might we do to help Antoine gain a better sense of self acceptance?

Kasey discussed identifying as a "male" when necessary and "out of respect."

- Do you think that Kasey should have to identify herself as a male to make those around her more comfortable?
- What responsibility do we have as supportive adults to help make Kasey and other transgender youth feel more comfortable?

Jordan and Halo both describe themselves as "gender fluid."

- Do you think gender is hard wired and concrete? Should gender be determined by an individual's external anatomy?
- There are those who have external anatomy that conflicts with their body's hormonal make-up and others who self identify as "intersexed" who are born with the anatomy of both genders. How do these people fit into a concrete gender system?

If we have lingering fears or prejudices about glbtq youth

- What can we do to resolve those fears?
- What steps can we take right now to help improve quality of life for GLBTQ youth?

Resources:

Child Welfare League of America

www.cwla.org/programs/culture/glbtc.htm

Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation

www.glaad.org

Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network

www.glsen.org

GLBT National Help Center

www.glbtnationalhelpcenter.org

GLBT National Youth Talkline

1-800-246-PRIDE (7743)

Human Rights Campaign

www.hrc.org

Lambda Legal Defense Fund

www.lambdalegal.org

OutProud

www.outproud.org

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (National)

www.pflag.org

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (Washington State)

www.pflag.org/Washington.243.0.htm

Safe Schools Coalition

www.safeschoolscoalition.org



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Administration**

**1115 Washington
Street SE, Box 45710
Olympia, WA 98504
(360) 902-7919**

www1.dshs.wa.gov/ca