

The New LGBT Parenting Network*

(*Yet to be named - see contest at end of document.)

Who We Are

The New LGBT Parenting Network is a collaborative programme committed to addressing the needs of LGBT-led families in the Greater Toronto Area and beyond. The new Network has emerged from the original LGBT Parenting Network founded by the *Family Service Association of Toronto (FSA)*, and Queer Parenting Programmes at *The 519 Church Street Community Centre (The 519)*. With new funding from the Ministry of Health and Long-term Care, *Sherbourne Health Centre* now plays a major role. The new Network is now shared among these three agencies.

Sherbourne Health Centre is the lead agency with respect to funding from the Ministry of Health and Long-term Care. Among its areas of focus, Sherbourne Health Centre delivers primary health care services to LGBT communities in Toronto, and resources and consultation services on a broader scale. Sherbourne Health Centre will be the new home base for the LGBT Parenting Network formerly based at Family Services Association of Toronto and will be the employer of the Coordinator of the original LGBT Parenting Network created through the FSA.

The 519 Church Street Community Centre (The 519) has a history of serving the LGBT communities in Toronto, including providing family support programmes and space for LGBT-led families for two decades. The new Ministry funding has enhanced The 519's services to these families by adding to the established resources of its Queer Parenting Programmes and its Coordinator. The Ministry joins Growing Up Healthy Downtown (Public Health Agency of Canada), and East York East Toronto Ontario Early Years as funders supporting our families. The 519's Queer Parenting Programmes and the FSA's LGBT Parenting Network have collaborated and shared in the delivery of many programmes and services for LGBT-led families over the years. The new Network is a natural progression of this working relationship.

Family Service Association of Toronto (FSA) has been the home base of the original LGBT Parenting Network since its inception in 2001 and has supported the many facets of the programme's development. The FSA will remain involved as a collaborative partner offering guidance and expertise to the programme and taking responsibility for the Network's web based communications.

Our Team

Guided by management at the three agencies, the Network has two coordinators: Rachel Epstein – Coordinator of the LGBT Parenting Network, and Chris Veldhoven, Queer Parenting Programmes Coordinator. They work with a wide range of other service providers within the three partner agencies and in the broader community. There are also grass-root groups and parent volunteers who share in the work of the Network. These include doulas, midwives, family support workers, ECE workers, adult educators, researchers, social work placement students, community advisory committee members and other volunteers.

Our Common Vision

We have come together to contribute to the creation of healthy and informed communities within which LGBT-led families thrive. This means LGBT-led families will be free from the impacts of ignorance,

hostility, harassment, discrimination and oppression, intentional and/or unintentional, and can participate fully in all levels of community life.

Our Goals

To enhance the health and well being of LGBT-led families through local programmes and services.
To provide knowledge, consultation and resources on LGBT-led families locally, provincially, and beyond.

Our Objectives

To reduce social isolation and promote healthy, resilient LGBT-led families by providing information/support services to prospective parents, people at different stages of parenthood, and their children.

To promote culturally competent programmes and services for LGBT-led families and foster healthy, inclusive public policy through research, knowledge transfer, training and consultations with service providers and decision makers.

To guide future programmes and services through evaluation and planning with input from clients/community members and service providers.

Our Programmes and Services

Educational Programmes

Daddies & Papas 2B / Dykes Planning Tykes

9-week courses for gay/bi/queer men and lesbian/bi/queer women who are considering parenthood. These courses explore some of the practical, emotional, social and legal issues related to LGBT parenthood.

The TransParent-cy Working Group

A committee creating support for trans men considering pregnancy and other ways of becoming a parent. A pilot manual and course, **TransFathers 2B**, is in development.

The Queer Positive Pre-Natal Class

A weekend course for people of diverse identities and family structures in late pregnancy or expecting a newborn.

The Queer Parenting Exchange

A monthly discussion and networking forum for LGBT parents and prospective parents. Topics include: legal issues, families of origin, the adoption process, discussions for parents of colour, interracial families, transgender/transsexual parenting, bi parenting, parenting teenagers, LGBT families and schools, talking to kids, co-parenting, step-parenting, dealing with homo/trans-phobic ex-partners, collaborative ways of resolving conflict, etc.

Positively Parenting

A working group creating support for HIV positive LGBT people considering parenthood. A collaboration with Voices of Positive Women and The Positive Pregnancy Programme.

Family Resource Programmes

Daddy, Papa & Me / Mum's The World!

Monthly queer-positive and specific family programming, one for gay, bisexual and trans fathers and their children (age 0 to 6), and the other for lesbian, bisexual and trans mothers and their children (age 0 to 6). An opportunity to meet other families and find: support, snacks, activities, music, toys, discussions and queer parenting resources. **Resource Library** - We provide access to a variety of LGBT positive parenting and children's books through these Family Resource Programmes.

Special Events

The Annual Queer Family Fun Fair

The 519's kick off event for Family Pride Month. Families, prospective parents, and resource people are invited to celebrate with games and activities for kids, live music, food, refreshments and resources for LGBT parents and prospective parents. It is held on the first Saturday of each June.

Family Pride

An annual collaboration with Pride Toronto to provide family-friendly space and activities during Pride weekend. Includes lunchtime events on Saturday and Sunday, and on-going programming throughout the weekend.

Social and Recreational Events

Picnics, skating and/or tobogganing parties, celebratory events and social gatherings are held throughout the year as an opportunity for families to meet, socialize, and network.

Information Services

Calls / Emails / Drop-Ins

We respond to approximately 40 inquiries a month with regards to a wide range of LGBT parenting issues.

Parenting Network E-News and *Pride & Joy* Newsletter

The Parenting Network has an email list with approximately 1,000 members. We send out a monthly ENews with information about upcoming activities, relevant information and resources. *Pride & Joy* is a hard copy newsletter that is published twice a year. It also contains information about activities and resources, as well as longer articles and a very popular "Birth and Adoption Announcements" section.

Presentations/Workshops/Training

We are called on frequently to do presentations, workshops and trainings in academic and community settings and for health, legal, social work and education professionals.

Media Work

We are frequently called on to speak to the media on behalf of LGBT-led families, and/or to assist journalists in their research and in finding people to speak with.

Website

The LGBT Parenting Network currently has a devoted page on the Family Service Association of Toronto website. People can find information about upcoming events and programmes, as well as the Queer

Parenting Info Brochure Series, the E-News and *Pride & Joy Newsletter*, which are available for download. Go to: <http://www.fsatoronto.com/programs/lgbtparenting.html>.

Educational Tools

Queer Parenting Info Brochure Series

A series of seven brochures on: LGB Parenting for Family and Friends; Transsexual/Transgender Parenting; Co-Parenting; Parenting Options for Gay Men; Choosing a Sperm Donor; Insemination Procedures; Information for New Lesbian Parents in Ontario.

“Who’s in Your Family Tree?” Poster

A collaboration between the LGBT Parenting Network, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), Chinese Family Services, Gay Fathers of Toronto, and TGStation to produce a poster designed to bring visibility to LGBT-led families in schools, daycare centres, libraries, community centres, health services and other public spaces. The poster celebrates LGBT families by using positive, colourful visuals; by representing the diversity within queer families on different “branches” of the family tree; and by defining the “roots” of LGBT families—including love, respect and diversity. As part of this, the border of the poster includes the word “family” in more than 30 languages.

“Young and Proud: A Manual for Staff Working with LGBT Families”

A collaboration between The Metro Association of Family Resource Programs and The 519 to create a working tool to assist Early Childhood Educators, Day Care Staff, and Family Support Workers with creating supportive and inclusive children’s programmes and spaces for LGBT-led families.

Research Projects

Impact of Homophobic Public Discourse on Young People with LGBT Parents

A research project exploring the impact of the same-sex marriage debate on young people with LGBT parents – with emphasis on school experiences. Funded by Wellesley Central Health Corporation. We interviewed and conducted on-line surveys with young people (10-18), parents and teachers and are currently in the data analysis phase. The Vanier Institute of the Family has expressed interest in assisting with knowledge mobilization.

Father Involvement Research Alliance – Gay Fathers Cluster

The LGBT Parenting Network heads up the Gay Fathers Research Cluster of this national, SSHRCCURA funded project on Father Involvement. We have interviewed gay fathers in Toronto and Calgary and are currently in the data analysis phase, with plans underway for knowledge mobilization.

Mothering on the Margins (MOMS)

A collaboration with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. The LGBT Parenting Network is a community partner in this research project focusing on the experiences of queer women during conception, pregnancy and early parenthood.

Same-Sex Adoption in Ontario

A further collaboration with CAMH on a provincial study of same-sex adoption policies and practices.

Celebrating Our Families

A further collaboration with CAMH and several community-based researchers and organizations to explore the service and research needs of LGBT parents of colour. We are currently working with members of African and African/Caribbean communities to design a series of focus groups and planning

is underway for a similar project working with people within Asian communities.

Advocacy

Research projects will lead to advocacy and policy work on behalf of LGBT-led families. We have been involved in Health Canada's process of developing the regulations for the Assisted Human Reproduction Act, and in various legal cases involving recognition of LGBT-led families.

Moving Forward

Historically the partner agencies have developed numerous projects both autonomously and together. The new Network will meet its goals and objectives for community service by jointly coordinating the planning, delivery and evaluation of our current and future initiatives.

Community Accountability

The new Network is committed to the involvement of parents/families in the planning and delivery of the programme. There will be regular opportunities for the families to contribute their ideas, skills to the programme and to be consulted about their needs and priorities.

Name Contest

The Network is conducting a contest for a name to better reflect this collaborative programme and its expanded functions. Please send the coordinators your name submissions. The winner will be named later in the year and awarded a prize.

Contacting the Co-Coordinators

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