

# **Community Care live**

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**BAAF Trainer/Consultants**

# What is BAAF?

- National Charity striving for the highest possible standards for 'looked after children', their families and their carers/adopters.
- Offices throughout UK
- Training and Consultancy
- Influencing Government
- Research
- National conferences/Regional workshops
- Help-lines
- Publications
- Panel membership

# Good Practice for you and your Agency

- Legislation
- Research and Statistics
- Recruitment
- Assessment
- Support
- Using a Sexual Orientation Competency Model to put into practice the above

# The Legal context

## Human Rights Act 1998

- Article 14 prohibits discrimination “on any ground such as race, colour, language, religion....or other status”.
- Da Silva Mouta case 2001- European court of Human Rights held that Article 8 HRA was breached by denying PR to a father on grounds of his homosexuality
- Re W 1997 held adoption order could be made in favour of single person living with another in a same sex relationship

# Adoption and Children Act 2002

- Allows unmarried couples, including same sex couples to apply jointly to adopt
- Any unmarried couple including same sex couples wishing to adopt, will need to be able to demonstrate that their partnership is 'an enduring family relationship'
- Order may be made on the application of an unmarried couple where both have reached the age of 21.

# The Legal Context

## **Civil Partnership Act 2004**

- Legal recognition of same sex partnerships
- Civil registrations December 5 2005
- Same legal rights and obligations as married couples

- **Equality Act 2006 - Sexual Orientation**
- The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003 currently offers protection against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in the workplace.
- With the addition of new powers introduced by the Equality Act 2006, it is unlawful (subject to certain exemptions) to discriminate on the grounds of sexual orientation in the following areas:
  - ***The provision of goods, facilities and services,***
  - It puts an onus on public sector bodies to eliminate discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation when delivering services to the community.

# Barriers/ Assumptions

- Lesbians and gay men are emotionally disturbed and are more likely than heterosexuals to sexually abuse children.
- Homosexuals do not possess adequate knowledge, skills, or personality characteristics to raise children
- Their lifestyle is inconsistent with forming a stable family environment.
- Children raised in lesbian- and gay-headed households are more likely to experience serious psychological problems and to become homosexual themselves

# Does sexual orientation affect parenting outcomes?

- The desire to parent is not exclusive to heterosexuals but is shared by many lesbians and gay men.
- Studies have found no negative effects of lesbian and gay parenting:
- ‘Parental sexual orientation per se has no measurable effect on the quality of parent- child relationships or on children’s mental health or social adjustment’

Stacey and Biblarz (2001 )

# Assessment and 'sameness' models?

Hicks BJSW 2006

- Although an equality position has been adopted in law and guidance, there is still a need to move on from 'sameness' models, which argue that lesbian and gay carers are 'just like' heterosexuals
- ...towards acknowledging the different experiences that being a lesbian or gay foster carer or adopter brings
- Lesbian and gay men are less defensive about this now and do not feel so bound to argue a 'no differences' position.

# DfES Practice Guidance: **'Key assessment criteria'**

- *the ability to make and sustain close relationships;*
- *the capacity for emotional openness;*
- *the capacity for reflectiveness or 'psychological mindedness';*
- *the successful resolution of earlier losses or traumatic experiences;*
- *for couples, the quality, stability and permanence of their relationship;*
- *support networks; and,*
- *tolerant social attitudes.*

# Beliefs

- ‘As with beliefs about other socially stigmatized groups, the beliefs held generally in society about lesbians and gay men are often not based on personal experience, but are frequently culturally transmitted’

Patterson: Lesbian and Gay Parenting (2005)

# Particular issues for gay and lesbian carers:

## **First contact**

- Are the professionals and support staff they meet open and accepting of gay and lesbian carers?
- The applicant at the initial interview may not be 'out'
- The applicants themselves may be in turn 'assessing' the social worker and agency for 'safety', and trying to determine whether the agency will support them

# Preparation groups

- Many lesbian and gay carers say they felt isolated and vulnerable in a preparation group. Some have said they felt nervous about dealing with homophobia in a group setting
- They felt they were under an onus to 'come out' at the start of the sessions
- Likely in fact to be a range of reactions in such a group – from discomfort or shock, to ready acceptance
- Not the applicants' job to educate the group or manager the homophobia of group members – that's the professionals task
- Therefore need for clear ground rules about accepting diversity and challenging discriminatory statements

# Unacknowledged discrimination still?

- While many children in care have a troubled past, and challenging emotional and behavioural issues, there has been an unacknowledged policy of placing disabled children and children with learning difficulties and special needs with lesbian and gay carers. This is gradually changing in some agencies.
- Is it changing in your Agency?
- The child's birth parents or previous foster parents may also object to the placement on grounds of sexual orientation.
- Panel awareness

# Matching and placement

- Once approved, some applicants are then rejected by Children's social workers, or offered children outside their stated choices, or they experience unbearably long delays in matching.
- Lesbians are urged to take boys when they have expressed a preference for girls, while gay men may not be offered girls even if they ask for them'

# Is there an unspoken hierarchy of preferred placement choice in Fostering and Adoption ?

- Heterosexual couple
- Single heterosexual woman
- Lesbian couple
- Gay couple
- Single heterosexual man
- Single gay man

# Adoption Register Statistics

- 2004/2005
- 1131 adopters referred
- 122 single
- 23 same sex couples
- 3 male
- 20 female
- 0 children matched to same sex couples

- 2005/2006
- 1250 adopters referred
- 156 single
- 42 same sex couples
- 12 male
- 30 female
- 0 children matched to same sex couples

- 2006/2007
- 1333 adopters referred
- 183 single (179 female/4 male)
- 56 same sex couples
- 31 male
- 25 female
- 4 Children matched to same sex couples
- 2 matched with a female couple and 2 matched separately with 2 male couples

How can you  
make a  
difference?

# Recruitment

*“The first component of a recruitment campaign is the delivery of a clear message that foster carers are valued members of a children’s services team”*

Sellick & Thoburn (1996)

- What messages do gay & lesbian people receive about themselves through your services?
- How are these messages delivered?



# Recruitment: Points to Consider

- Agency policy/ practice
- Training available to child care staff
- Visibility/ inclusivity of gay and lesbian families
- Language
- Support and resources

# Recruitment: Key Points

- Word of mouth
- Lesbian & Gay press
- Inclusive Information/ representation
- Initial contacts
- Follow- up
- Senior management/ policy support
- Training & Support

# Thinking about assessors - Sally Holland

- **There is a tendency to form explanations of an individual or family early on in the contact, and for this initial assessment to shape or determine further assessment as the worker seeks information to confirm their early explanation.**
- Assessors should perform a 'cultural review' on themselves early on in the assessment.

For example:

- What do I know about lesbian and gay couples, and where does my knowledge come from?
- What prejudices do I hold?
- What do I know or expect about families like this?

*Child and Family Assessment in Social Work Practice, by Sally Holland (2004)*

# Some questions to begin to ask **all** applicants, as we know assessors often struggle to explore sexuality and sexual orientation

- **Is everyone heterosexual in your extended family?**
- **Is there anyone who is gay or lesbian within your family and is it spoken about?**
- **What language and terms is/are used in your family regarding Sexual Orientation**
- **Are there myths/stories surrounding Sexual orientation within your family?**
- **Can you share a memory of a gay or lesbian relative within your family network?**
- **What are your family's beliefs and values about sexual orientation? Do you identify with these?**
- **What do you value as the important messages from your family concerning sexuality?**

- Cultural/Sexual Orientation Competence (with added impetus from Equality Act 2006)

- The cultural competence model was developed in USA (Cross et al 1989, Carballeira 1997) by professionals working with ethnic minority communities
- It is the integration and transformation of knowledge about individuals and groups of people to increase the quality of services, thereby producing better outcomes.
- Can we apply it to sexual orientation?
- Yes we think we can

# Sexual Orientation Competence

- This necessitates working on three interrelated and interdependent components
- *Sexual Orientation Knowledge*
- *Sexual Orientation Sensitivity*
- *Sexual Orientation Awareness*

# Sexual Orientation Competency

## Sexual Orientation Knowledge

The background of service users  
Values, beliefs, history  
Collating information

Working solely on this level can lead to stereotyping

## Sexual Orientation Sensitivity

The ability to change working practices and develop skills and strategies to work positively with sexuality differences.

## Sexual Orientation Awareness

A positive and open attitude enables a mutual respect to value difference and diversity  
Critical to this is the ability to think critically about our own assumptions and values

sexuality Reflexivity anticipates sexual orientation differences and attempts to understand and appreciate difference

# Sexual Orientation Competence

- Sexual Orientation Competent Framework practice is driven in service delivery systems by acknowledging preferred choices, not by ignoring sexuality or that sexual orientation is the over-riding factor

# Sexual Orientation Competence

- 'Practitioners occupy a position of power as they have access to resources .Whether services are generic or specific, the service is dependent upon the values, skills and attitudes the professionals bring to specific interactions' Smith (1998)
- A culturally (sexual orientation) competent system of care provides a supportive working environment for staff and service users, where gay and lesbian practitioners/service users do not feel marginalised or reduced to sexuality-matching interventions (i.e. only gay and lesbian individuals to discuss gay and lesbian issues)

# How competent is your team/agency?



Thank you

*Andy Sayers and Julie Cooke*

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