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### Foster Care Association of Victoria Position:

Gay and lesbian individuals and couples have long been valued providers of home based care in Victoria. Today many of Victoria's Community Service Organisations are actively recruiting foster carers from the gay and lesbian communities.

Research continues to demonstrate that gay and lesbian parents engage in family making practices that result in supportive and caring environments for children and has moved beyond notions of negative stereotypes.

FCAV has the expectation that **all** carers will be assessed and accredited to care for children in an open and transparent process, absent of any discriminatory beliefs or practices.

### THE LEGAL CONTEXT

Gay and lesbian individuals and couples are welcome to apply to become foster, kinship or permanent carers in Victoria. The Adoption Amendment (Adoption by Same-Sex Couples) Act 2015 gives same-sex couples the same rights in adoption law as gay and lesbian individuals, as well heterosexual couples, but exempts religious organisations. It was passed by the Victorian Parliament in December 2015 and came into effect on 1 September 2016.

### BULLYING

Bullying of young people by peers is of course not exclusive to children with GLBTI carers or parents. Children and young people can bully others for any reason which they determine differentiates the victim from the bully.

For children and young people living in out of home care these could include teasing about the issues of abuse or neglect which have resulted in the child being placed in care or indeed the fact that they are unable to live at home. If you then include the list of general taunts about physical appearance and intellect, this can have a huge impact on the self esteem and mental health of an already emotionally vulnerable child or young person.

Bullying of young people with GLBTI carers or parents can be an issue in some families and it is important to understand that GLBTI people are not 'responsible' for this bullying. Ensuring a safe community for gay and lesbian families is a whole of community responsibility and requires open discussions and often multi-faceted interventions from across the community.

In the case of GLBTI carers it might be appropriate to involve CSO and DHS case workers, school administrators and other influential members of the local community to assist in addressing bullying behaviours and discriminatory attitudes.

The best defence to bullying is ensuring open communication and a community committed to a zero tolerance approach to responding to bullies and their behaviours. The Safe Schools Coalition is an essential resource for advice <http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org.au/>

## SUPPORT

There are many opportunities to receive support if you are a gay and lesbian carer. Many of these supports are offered to all carers irrespective of sexuality or gender however others are specifically tailored to meet the needs of the gay and lesbian communities. These include:

- **Your CSO worker or Child Protection practitioner** – Each carer family is allocated a highly trained case worker who has the job of ensuring that carers are comprehensively assessed, adequately trained and well supervised and supported. In most cases this is the person to whom carers would first approach for support. Your case worker may also suggest that you seek additional opportunities for specialist support. In cases where you are unable to access adequate support from your case worker you may consider contacting their team leader or manager.
- The **FCAV Carer Information and Support Service (CISS)** provides information, support and advocacy for all foster, kinship and permanent carers, and adoptive parents across Victoria. The phone line operates from 9am to 5pm Mondays to Thursdays and 9am to 4.30pm on Fridays. Carers can also register queries or concerns via the 'online enquiry' option on the website, [www.fcav.org.au](http://www.fcav.org.au). Call **9416 4292** if you need support.
- The **Rainbow Families Council** is a large volunteer group of gay and lesbian parents, carers and supporters who seek to respond to the needs of rainbow families living in Victoria. The Rainbow Families Council respects the diversity within gay and lesbian headed families and as such are inclusive and responsive toward kinship, foster, permanent and adoptive carers and their children. <http://www.rainbowfamilies.org.au>

Their website offers links to research, support and social groups and comprehensive book lists for both adults and children. To learn more, go to <http://www.rainbownetwork.com.au/>

- The **Rainbow Playgroups Network** are approximately 6 playgroups specifically for rainbow families operating weekly in the Melbourne Metropolitan area. Playgroups serve many functions enabling parents to discuss issues affecting their families in an informal way and also allow children to establish relationships with others who come from similar families. Such groups reflect and support diversity within the community and as a result many family constellations are represented. The network also produces a quarterly newsletter with playgroup updates and invitations to State-wide social functions for Rainbow families with children of all ages. Those wishing to know more can contact Tracey on 0427 811 186 or email [traceyandsam-8@bigpond.com](mailto:traceyandsam-8@bigpond.com)
- **Gay Dads Australia** is a comprehensive website established by gay dads, to support gay men who are planning or are already parents. The website provides access to a range of information relevant to gay dads and gay carers specifically. Go to [www.gaydadsaustralia.com.au](http://www.gaydadsaustralia.com.au) to learn more or visit their Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/groups/12297564579/> and request to join the group.

## RESOURCES

There is a comprehensive support group list available in the *'Guidelines for recruiting and supporting Gay and Lesbian Carers'* by the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare. It provides a good understanding of gay and lesbian foster care in Victoria and has an appendix of comprehensive resources

<http://www.cfecfw.asn.au/sites/default/files/Monograph%202022%20Guidelines%20For%20Recruiting%20And%20Supporting%20Gay%20and%20Lesbian%20Carers%20Web.pdf>

'Who is in your family?' is a comprehensive resource kit for gay and lesbian parents and carers comprising several fact sheets which can be given to childcare and pre-school providers to assist them to appropriately respond to the needs of children parented by gay men and lesbians. The website also has several coloured posters which represent a variety of family structures appropriate for display in educational, welfare and health settings as well as in family homes. These posters and fact sheets can be downloaded for free at <http://www.glhv.org.au/fact-sheet/%E2%80%9Cwho-your-family-%E2%80%9D-resource-kit-rainbow-families-council>

## NETWORKING VIA FACEBOOK

There are many local, regional, Australian and worldwide support and social groups available on Facebook. Each Victorian playgroup has a private Facebook page which gives carer and adoptive families access to joining playgroups, weekend social functions, holiday camps and sporting groups.

Resilient Rainbow Kids	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Resilient-Rainbow-Kids-147623975296198/?fref=ts">https://www.facebook.com/Resilient-Rainbow-Kids-147623975296198/?fref=ts</a>
Northern Suburbs Rainbow Families	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/Northernsuburbsrainbowfamilies">https://www.facebook.com/groups/Northernsuburbsrainbowfamilies</a>
Northern Rainbow Playgroup	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/northernrainbowplaygroup">https://www.facebook.com/groups/northernrainbowplaygroup</a>
Rainbow Babies and Kids Camping Kiama	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/169242403261784">https://www.facebook.com/groups/169242403261784</a>
Rainbow Families Council Victoria	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/rainbowfamiliescouncil">https://www.facebook.com/groups/rainbowfamiliescouncil</a>
Rainbow Families Inner South East Melbourne	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/792364807456502">https://www.facebook.com/groups/792364807456502</a>
Rainbow Babies Out West	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/rainbowbabiesoutwest">https://www.facebook.com/groups/rainbowbabiesoutwest</a>
Geelong Rainbow Families	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/geelongrainbowfamiliesplaygroup">https://www.facebook.com/groups/geelongrainbowfamiliesplaygroup</a>
Prospective Lesbian Parents Vic	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/173362573655">https://www.facebook.com/groups/173362573655</a>
Lesbian Parents Australia	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/groups/100180686704971">https://www.facebook.com/groups/100180686704971</a>