



**County of Los Angeles  
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES**

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December 22, 2023

To: Supervisor Lindsey P. Horvath, Chair  
Supervisor Hilda L. Solis  
Supervisor Holly J. Mitchell  
Supervisor Janice Hahn  
Supervisor Kathryn Barger

From: Brandon T. Nichols  
Director

**FINAL REPORT: TAILORING SERVICES AND PROGRAMS FOR LGBTQ+ FOSTER YOUTH (ITEM NO. 10, AGENDA OF JUNE 22, 2021)**

On June 22, 2021, the Board of Supervisors (Board) approved a motion, authored by Supervisors Kuehl and Solis, directing the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), in collaboration with the Chief Executive Office (CEO), and in consultation with Subject Matter Experts (SME) from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer or Questioning (LGBTQ+) community, to:

1. Report back to the Board in 30 days with a plan outlining services that will be implemented to address the aforementioned gaps, for example, a 24/7 helpline for LGBTQ+ foster youth who are in crisis and need support, a dedicated unit of social workers within DCFS that specializes in working with this population, and a recruitment and retention program for resource families;
2. Identify funding sources and an amount that will immediately be utilized to begin addressing gaps in services for the LGBTQ+ youth population with DCFS involvement; and
3. Create a plan to report back to the Board every 30 days for six months with an update on this work, followed by a report every six months for two years.

This serves as the Department’s final report on the implementation of the above-mentioned directives and provides a comprehensive update on DCFS’ ongoing efforts, collaborations and engagements with partnering County departments, stakeholders, and LGBTQ+ community partners as well as youth with lived experience to improve and further our efforts around the needs of, and resources for, LGBTQ+ foster youth.

*“To Enrich Lives Through Effective and Caring Service”*

## **Background**

A 2014 study by the Williams Institute, UCLA, found that 19% of foster youth, ages 12-21, in Los Angeles (LA) County, identify as LGBTQ+. Additional studies by the Family Acceptance Project and The Trevor Project found that LGBTQ+ youth experience increased negative outcomes, including attempted suicide, mental health challenges, drug use, substance abuse and lack of housing. As stated in the June 22, 2021 motion, the Board has continued to advocate and support equity initiatives to improve safety, well-being, and permanency for youth and young people identifying as LGBTQ+ and specifically within LA County systems of care. The Board, as evidenced in part by the creation of the Office of Equity (OOE), has continued to challenge persistent inequities and lack of services experienced by LGBTQ+ foster youth, particularly among youth of color who are the most disproportionately impacted.

## **Current Efforts**

As previously reported and mentioned in other Board-related motions addressing the needs of DCFS LGBTQ+ foster youth, the Department has made notable progress in its efforts to address gaps in services for these youth. Further, we continue to effectively prioritize support for LGBTQ+ youth and young adults whose unique needs require tailored services, programs and resources to help mitigate critical risks as well as address the distinctive issues LGBTQ+ foster youth face, such as barriers to accessing affirming mental health counseling, medical care and placements.

DCFS' efforts in implementing the motion's directives are detailed and summarized below.

*Directive 1: Report back to the Board in 30 days with a plan outlining services that will be implemented to address the aforementioned gaps, for example, a 24/7 helpline for LGBTQ+ foster youth who are in crisis and need support, a dedicated unit of social workers within DCFS that specializes in working with this population, and a recruitment and retention program for resource families.*

As mentioned in our June 22, 2023 report, DCFS continues to actively work with staff as well as with our County partners and community stakeholders to improve practice around having authentic engagement and conversations with young people about intersecting identities, including Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE). It is our goal for youth to feel safe to share their identities so they can be connected to appropriate and necessary services.

Since the implementation of a new pathway to services for LGBTQ+ youth and young adults in March 2022, the Department has continued to progressively improve its collaborative efforts in creating safe spaces and expanding educational resources to staff around affirming practices and access to affirming services and resources. As mentioned

in the Department's prior progress reports, the launch of the LGBTQ+ SOGIE dashboard on July 19, 2022, has continued to support the LGBTQ+ Program to enhance our efforts in successfully tracking and measuring data collection for our foster youth by providing real-time aggregated data that is readily available for all DCFS staff and informing them of how youth with open DCFS cases self-identify as it relates to their sexual orientation, gender identity and sex assigned at birth. Furthermore, the dashboard can be accessed at any given moment, giving staff the ability to track their office progress and provide a snapshot of the number of youth and young people who identify as LGBTQ+.

Additionally, as we shared in the Department of Health Services (DHS) report to the Board on November 17, 2022, which directed the establishment of a Gender Health Program (GHP), youth who identify as LGBTQ+ have the option of participating in the GHP. The GHP offers an array of services through our collaboration and partnership with the Los Angeles LGBT Center, Penny Lane Centers, The Help Group and the LGBTQ Center Long Beach. When a youth is referred, these participating agencies complete a comprehensive intake assessment to offer, link and connect the youth to needed services, including gender-affirming health and medical care through the GHP or other affirming agencies and partners. With a formalized pathway to services now in place, DCFS is exploring additional opportunities to enhance access points for LGBTQ+ youth and young adults in the child welfare system.

It is noteworthy to mention that, throughout this reporting period, the LGBTQ+ Program continued to actively participate and engage in opportunities to inform and educate DCFS staff, County partners, stakeholders and community members about equity efforts and initiatives intended to improve the safety and well-being of LGBTQ+ youth and young adults under DCFS care. As an example, since November 2022, the LGBTQ+ Program has continued engaging each of the 18 regional offices by providing various affirming resources and materials on improving the practice of engaging youth in conversations about SOGIE. These resources included, but were not limited to, the following:

- Number of youth who have a SOGI of "Unable to Determine" and "Did Not Ask;"
- Practice tips to engage youth of various ages around SOGIE;
- List of affirming resource homes; and
- DCFS policy entitled, "LGBTQ+ Children/Non-Minor Dependents."

### *Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Data*

In October 2020, DCFS data revealed that less than one percent of DCFS youth self-identified as LGBTQ+. More specifically, DCFS data indicated that approximately 88% of youth had a sexual orientation of "Unable to Determine" and 90% of youth had a gender identity of "Did Not Ask." As a result of the LGBTQ+ Program leading the charge with an intentional focus on a safe visibility and awareness campaign, LGBTQ+ Toolkit Training, LGBTQ+ Tailored Services to Youth Program and other efforts to improve equity, the most recent data shows a decrease in the reporting of "Unable to Determine" and "Did

Not Ask” by over 50%. With the focus on safely engaging youth around their SOGIE, the number of youth who self-identify as LGBTQ+ has also increased. In 2021, there were less than 100 youth who identified as LGBTQ+. As of November 27, 2023, there were approximately 550 LGBTQ+ and 150 transgender or gender nonconforming youth and young adults. With the creation of the SOGIE dashboard, DCFS regional offices are able to better assess the impact of ongoing efforts. Currently, the LGBTQ+ Program is assisting regional office staff with creating strategic plans aimed at decreasing the use of “Did Not Ask” and “Unable to Determine” responses.

In an effort to increase education and awareness around SOGIE, the LGBTQ+ Program, in collaboration with LGBTQ+ youth, hosted the “See Me & Hear Me, This is Me!” event on September 21, 2023. The event was successfully attended by approximately 200 people, including representatives from the Board offices, DCFS, DMH, DHS, the Department of Public Health, Office of Child Protection, Probation, resource parents, young people with lived experience and affirming faith-based ministries. The event included music, videos, a presentation from an affirming faith-based ministry in the Antelope Valley, a live preview of the SOGIE dashboard, one breakout group and a curated panel discussion including two resource parents and two LGBTQ+ young people with lived experience in the child welfare system. The event was well received by participants, and they were excited about forthcoming opportunities for DCFS’ LGBTQ+ Program events.

#### *24/7 Helpline for LGBTQ+ for Foster Youth in Crisis*

As mentioned in the Department’s prior Board reports, there were several areas being explored to ensure and improve the safety and well-being of youth and young people who identify as LGBTQ+. For example, DCFS previously explored leveraging The Trevor Project and the Family Urgency Response System (FURS) as potential ways to ensure LGBTQ+ youth had knowledge and access to a crisis intervention and suicide prevention helpline. As mentioned in the sixth progress report, The Trevor Project representatives postponed discussions to the Fall of this year to focus on the launch of their 9-8-8 national suicide hotline. However, FURS is listed as a resource on the DCFS public website for youth who identify as LGBTQ+, <https://dcfs.lacounty.gov/youth/lgbtq-youth/>. In addition, as part of the LGBTQ+ Tailored Services to Youth Program (see Page 4, subsection - LGBTQ+ Tailored Services), contracted agencies ensure that youth participating in the program are aware of 24/7 helplines. Further, a new policy guide was created to provide Department staff with guidance on the provision of FURS services for children/youth/NonMinor dependents, ages 0-21, who are currently or formerly werein foster care or probation, and their caregivers (defined broadly to include resource families, biological and adoptive parents, guardians, Court Appointed Special Advocates, teachers or coaches, etc.).

#### *Dedicated Unit of Social Workers*

As previously reported, the Department has found great success in the identification and ongoing utilization of LGBTQ+ Champions department-wide throughout its various regional offices and programs. As such, it has been determined that the establishment of a dedicated unit of social workers within DCFS that specializes in working with this population will not be pursued at this time.

The LGBTQ+ Champions continue to play an integral role in engaging regional offices and programs around better understanding and meeting the needs of LGBTQ+ youth and young people. The LGBTQ+ Program has continued to leverage the LGBTQ+ Champions as SMEs to provide the LGBTQ+ Toolkit Training, coaching staff working directly with youth to effectively serve LGBTQ+ youth, encouraging the collection of LGBTQ+ data (e.g., SOGIE data) and providing feedback on the newly formed LGBTQ+ Tailored Services to Youth Program.

Currently, there are a minimum of two LGBTQ+ Champions in each of the 20 regional offices as well as in many of the specialized programs. Collaborating with the regional offices continue to be critical in successfully implementing the LGBTQ+ Tailored Services to Youth Program given the direct engagement the social workers, their supervisors and other key staff have with children and youth who identify as LGBTQ+. Further, the LGBTQ+ Champions continue to promote the LGBTQ+ Toolkit Training. As previously reported, the LGBTQ+ Training Toolkit consists of various tools and resources around topics related to starting a conversation about SOGIE, outcomes for youth experiencing rejection or affirmation, connecting youth to affirming resources, and instructions for collecting SOGIE data. Currently, eight regional offices, the High Risk Services Division and identified Temporary Shelter Care Facilities staff have accessed and participated in some variation of the LGBTQ+ Toolkit Training. DCFS will continue to monitor, track, and adapt accordingly to ensure that the training is effective and having the desired impact.

#### *Recruitment and Retention Program for Resource Families*

As of March 1, 2022, the RaiseAChild (RAC) contract was amended to include efforts that increase targeted recruitment for LGBTQ+ and LGBTQ+ affirming resource parent(s); increase recruitment for transgender, transgender affirming, and gender non-conforming resource parent(s); and support the formation of a parent support group for LGBTQ+ and LGBTQ+ affirming resource parents. Over the past eight months, RAC's recruitment and support activities have included the following:

#### May

- KTLA Interview – DCFS Director 5/9/23

#### June

- West Hollywood Pride Festival 6/3/23
- West Hollywood Pride Festival & Parade 6/4/23

- Los Angeles Pride Festival & Parade 6/11/23
- KLTA Interview – LA County Board of Supervisor Horvath, SD3 6/12/23
- DCFS LGBTQ+ & Affirming Family Info Session 6/15/23
- Dodger Pride Night 6/16/23
- Disney Pride 6/20/23
- 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Compton Pride 6/24/23

August

- KTLA Interview – The Stephens (Honors Family) 8/30/23

September

- KTLA Interview – Garrison Starr – LGBTQ+ Advocate 9/27/23

October

- 2023 RaiseAChild Foster Family Honors 10/14/23
- KTLA Interview – The Andersons (Honors Family) 10/18/23

November

- KTLA Interview – Ramirez-Robles Family 11/15/23

December

- RaiseAChild Holiday Tree Grove – Century City Monthlong
- Adoption Awareness Month Info Session 12/6/23
- Parent Forum 12/11/23
- DCFS LGBTQ+ & Affirming Family Info Session 12/16/23

Additionally, RAC purchased a commercial and on-air advertisement with the radio station KBLA. The commercial aired from mid-November through December 2, 2023, and stated:

*“Ask any former youth in foster care what they missed most while growing up, and they will most likely answer “someone to show me unconditional love.” Now, isn’t that something we all wish we could experience? Here in Los Angeles, up to 40% of homeless youth on our streets identify as LGBTQ+. The most prevalent reason for homelessness among this population is the rejection they’ve experienced from their own families. The LA County Department of Children and Family Services and RaiseAChild are searching for safe, nurturing and affirming foster parents within our community willing to stand up and serve all children and youth in foster care, especially LGBTQ youth. One of the many benefits to becoming a foster parent. Attend a free RaiseAChild virtual or in-person informational event to learn more. RSVP now at RaiseAChild.Org. That’s raiseachild.org. And thank you.”*

The on-air advertisement consisted of an in-studio interview with our OOE Division Chief and LGBTQ+ Program Manager on December 11, 2023, where they highlighted the need

for affirming resource homes, underscoring the disproportionality of LGBTQ+ and Black/African American youth in the child welfare system as a premise for meeting this need. During this interview, they also candidly shared current data, initiatives, barriers and successes around supporting LGBTQ+ youth and young adults. The on-air interview was shared on social media platforms, including radio and YouTube on December 11, 2023.

As mentioned in the June 2023 Board report, the LGBTQ+ Program created a strategic plan to increase the number of affirming resource homes. The plan included the following activities:

- Collaboration with DCFS' Business Information Systems (BIS) Division to develop a report that provides currently identified resource homes for LGBTQ+ and gender diverse communities; and
- Collaboration with the Resource Family Recruitment and Approval and the Resource Family Support and Permanency divisions to discuss processes and procedures as well as create and distribute a survey in both English and Spanish to all applicants and approved resource homes that gauges their current desire and ability to care for LGBTQ+ youth and young adults.

Next steps included: 1) a review and analysis of current approval and re-evaluation processes for resource homes to better understand how SOGIE is assessed as a population served; and 2) use of the survey results to update resource home profiles in our Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS), understand current needs and link resource parents to available training and resources.

On October 12, 2022, BIS created a report that identified specific LGBTQ+ affirming resource homes that are available throughout Los Angeles County. Subsequently, on November 30, 2022 and December 12, 2022, a survey was electronically sent to all prospective and approved resource homes registered in the Binti system. There were 274 respondents to the survey with the following results:

- 168 respondents indicated they were willing, ready and able to care for LGBTQ+ youth and young adults;
- 136 respondents indicated they were willing, ready and able to care for Transgender and gender nonconforming youth and young adults;
- 124 respondents indicated they were willing, ready and able to care for Intersex youth and young adults;
- 7 respondents indicated they were not willing, ready or able to care for LGBTQ+ youth or young adults but were open to discussion;
- 36 respondents indicated they were not willing, ready or able to care for LGBTQ+ youth and young adults; and

- 172 respondents requested additional information, resources or education in order to better prepare for working alongside LGBTQ+ youth and young adults.

Based on the above results, we were able to update 172 profiles in the CWS/CMS database as affirming resource homes. On June 5, 2023, there were a total of 613 affirming resource homes and an additional 58 affirming resource homes through Foster Family Agencies (FFA). As of November 6, 2023, there were a total of 670 affirming resource homes and an additional 68 affirming resource homes through FFAs. To help bolster the number of FFA affirming resource homes, the LGBTQ+ Program has partnered with the Foster Together Network (FTN) to explore processes and procedures relative to the designation of affirming resource homes through FFAs. DCFS will continue to partner with FTN and others to ensure that LGBTQ+ children, youth and young adults are placed in safe and affirming homes.

It is noteworthy to mention that DCFS continues to actively recruit and develop resource families to provide placement resources for children. These efforts include both general recruitment activities, such as informational orientations, resource fairs and community booths, and targeted recruitment efforts in neighborhoods and communities, such as LGBTQ+ affirming faith-based and community-based leaders and organizations.

#### *LGBTQ+ Tailored Services*

As previously mentioned in our December 23, 2021 report, the Request for Statement of Interest (RFSI) process was completed in October 2021, whereby six agencies were selected to provide services to youth and young people who identify as LGBTQ+. Upon further assessment and completion of the RFSI process, the Department entered into a partnership with four of the six agencies in what is now formally known as the LGBTQ+ Tailored Services to Youth Program.

As of March 1, 2022, the LGBTQ+ Tailored Services to Youth Program was implemented whereby the contracted agencies are actively providing affirming services to youth who identify as LGBTQ+ that are tailored to fit their needs and that of their families while uplifting and celebrating the youth's SOGIE. To access the program, youth can be referred by DCFS, a community partner or self-referred to one of the four agencies. Given the confidentiality of SOGIE information, youth must consent to the sharing of their personal information in order to be referred to an agency.

It is also noteworthy to mention that while there are an array of LGBTQ+ services offered throughout LA County, the LGBTQ+ Tailored Services to Youth Program offers unique services that are *inclusive of*, rather than *regardless of*, the youth's SOGIE. Services are available in each of the Service Planning Areas and youth are referred to an agency based upon where they currently reside/live. Each agency has a history of providing services to the LGBTQ+ community and have both the ability and capacity to meet the

unique needs of our LGBTQ+ youth as it relates to prevention, intervention, reunification and aftercare services. A snapshot of these services are detailed as follows:

- Prevention services – provide education and support, including training around LGBTQ+ identity development for the youth, family and support team. Prevention services will also ensure that youth and families are connected to affirming, trauma-informed, and healing-centered individual and family counseling and that family-finding efforts and protocols are inclusive of affirming LGBTQ+ identities, especially during times of crisis and/or child abuse and neglect investigations.
- Intervention and reunification services – include the use of a wraparound team, or similar support team, to provide support for individual children/youth, the family of origin, and resource parent(s), including therapy around the development of safe and nurturing relationships. These services will also explore affirming mentorship programs to provide youth with ongoing support and guidance. The Family Acceptance Project indicated that LGBTQ+ youth who experience accepting and affirming behaviors are more likely to see themselves as happy and healthy LGBTQ+ adults compared to LGBTQ+ youth who experience rejecting behaviors from their family, close friends and community.
- Aftercare services – provide the youth and family with ongoing support such as a wraparound team, individual and family therapy and counseling, mentorship program, education and employment opportunities, placement assistance, parent support groups, coming out groups, teen clubs and other supportive services to assist the youth with achieving safe, supportive and affirming permanency.

All of the aforementioned services include the provision of affirming case management services with a team of staff that are educated, well-trained, and knowledgeable about SOGIE and specifically, the LGBTQ+ community and the unique issues that impact LGBTQ+ individuals.

Currently, approximately 270 youth have accessed some level of services as part of the LGBTQ+ Tailored Services to Youth Program. To help promote the visibility and expansion of the program, the LGBTQ+ Program has presented to the following entities/stakeholders:

- DCFS regional offices
- Los Angeles County Office of Education – Foster Care Liaisons
- Children’s Law Center – LGBTQ+ Committee
- DCFS Resource Family Support & Permanency Division
- End Abuse Long Beach
- Youth Services Network, Long Beach
- Prevention and Aftercare Stakeholder Meeting
- Family Preservation Roundtable

- Foster Family Agency and Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Program Forum
- DCFS Dependency Court

Eligibility criteria to participate in the program include the following:

- Identify as LGBTQ+;
- Must consent to the voluntary program;
- Be a youth or young person 2 through 25 years of age; and
- Have had previous contact with DCFS as a referral or case;

The youth does not need to have a currently open referral or case, nor reside in LA County, as some services are virtual. Once a youth is referred to the program, the assigned contracted agency has three business days to contact the youth and complete an intake needs assessment. Given that the program is voluntary, the youth can participate in as many or as few services desired. If there is a service that the youth and/or family needs that the assigned agency does not provide, the agency must refer and link the youth to an agency that does provide the requested service. Further, the agencies work alongside the youth, family and DCFS as a continual process for assessing needs and ensuring positive outcomes and experiences. DCFS continues to explore a variety of strategies and opportunities around informing the community and other stakeholders about the program.

As a reminder, the direct services contracts are scheduled to conclude on February 28, 2024. However, the Department's LGBTQ+ Program is currently working closely with its Contracts Administration Division on requesting Board approval for the extension of three of the existing LGBTQ+ Tailored Services to Youth contracts from March 1, 2024 through February 28, 2025. Simultaneously, DCFS released a new Request For Proposals (RFP) solicitation in October 2023, which will establish long-term contracts for the identified LGBTQ+ services, as appropriate, to ensure sustainability and continuity of services to our LGBTQ+ children, youth and their families. A mandatory proposer's conference was held on November 28, 2023, and five community-based partners were in attendance. Proposals can be submitted until December 27, 2023. DCFS is committed to ensuring the safety and well-being of LGBTQ+ youth through continued funding, direct services and improved practices.

*Directive 2: Identify funding sources and an amount that will immediately be utilized to begin addressing gaps in services for the LGBTQ+ youth population with DCFS involvement.*

DCFS has successfully identified and secured ongoing funding that will be utilized to address the gaps in services for the LGBTQ+ youth population served by DCFS. As previously mentioned, four contracts were awarded and implemented as of March 1, 2022, and the contracted agencies provide tailored services and programs for LGBTQ+ foster youth. The Department exercised its delegated authority to extend the

contracts through February 28, 2024, and is currently seeking Board approval to extend three of the contracts for an additional year to ensure that there are no gaps in services while completion of the RFP process is underway. Upon Board approval of the extension, the LGBTQ+ Tailored Services to Youth Program will be offered through February 28, 2025, with the new contracts anticipated to begin on March 1, 2025.

*Directive 3: Create a plan to report back to the Board every 30 days for six months with an update on this work, followed by a report every six months for two years.*

As previously stated above, this serves as the Department's final report on our collaborative efforts and implementation of the aforementioned Board directives. Further, as LA County continues making strides towards providing equitable, tailored services to the LGBTQ+ youth in foster care and as youth voluntarily participate in the LGBTQ+ Tailored Services to Youth Program, we anticipate that the number of youth who identify as LGBTQ+ will continue to grow. This will be an opportunity to ensure that through our ongoing collaborative partnership, DCFS along with other County departments, stakeholders and community partners are educated, resourced and aware of the service needs for this population.

We are very appreciative and thank your Board for its continued support, commitment and advocacy for our LGBTQ+ children, youth, and young adults in care. DCFS will continue to monitor the success of the aforementioned strategies outlined in this report as well as prioritize our ongoing efforts to ensure that sufficient specialized services and resources are available for this most critical population.

If you have any questions or need additional information, you may contact me or your staff may contact Aldo Marin, Board Liaison, at (213) 371-6052.

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