

A guide to creating your own

Parent Support Group



Family Services à la famille Ottawa
312 Parkdale Ave.
Ottawa, Ontario
K1Y 4X5
(613) 725-3601

Copyright © 2006 by Family Services a la famille Ottawa. All rights reserved.

No part of this toolkit may be reproduced, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying or by any information storage or retrieval system, except for personal use, without permission in writing from the Family Services à la famille Ottawa.

The Around the Rainbow project is funded in part by the Government of Canada's Social Development Partnerships Program. The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

Introduction

The *Around the Rainbow* (ATR) project received funding in the spring of 2005. Family Services à la famille Ottawa (FSFO) created the project in response to feedback from participants attending a series of focus groups held at the following locations; Centretown Community Health Centre, Minwaashin Lodge, Pinecrest-Queensway Community Health Centre - Ontario Early Years Centre West, and Western Ottawa Community Resource Centre.

Focus group participants were asked four questions:

1. What is the definition of family?
2. What are some of the barriers and challenges gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, two-spirit or queer (GLBTTQ) families face?
3. What are the strengths of GLBTTQ families?
4. What are the services and supports needed within the Ottawa community for GLBTTQ families?

Participants shared their experiences with systematic homophobia and heterosexism within the school system such as, not being taken seriously as a family, and not providing forms that reflected their family structure. These types of experiences underscored how systemic discrimination is a major barrier to GLBTTQ families within the Ottawa community. In addition, participants recognized a lack of peer support services for parents and children of GLBTTQ families. FSFO saw the development of the ATR project as a huge step towards challenging systemic homophobia and heterosexism within the preschool and public school system, and increasing support for GLBTTQ families within the Ottawa community.

The ATR project is committed to working with the GLBTTQ community, and their allies to support diverse families within childcare, preschool, schools, and the Ottawa community. In doing so, the ATR project provides educator trainings, parent trainings, as well as community and agency-specific art projects to promote the social inclusion of GLBTTQ families within the school system and the greater community.

Educator trainings provide information to teachers, early childhood educators, as well as service providers working with children age 0-6 regarding how to be inclusive of GLBTTQ families within the education setting. Parent trainings focus on self-advocacy for GLBTTQ parents, and the trainings provide tools to help navigate the education system regarding parent, child, and educator rights. Art projects are designed to bring the community together and celebrate diverse families through the creation of art pieces reflecting diverse families.

In addition, the ATR project identifies the importance of and need for peer support services for GLBTTQ families within the Ottawa community. Rainbow Families, a peer support group for GLBTTQ families was created by FSFO, Centretown Community Health Centre, and The Ten Oaks Project in 2004, and continues to thrive within the Ottawa community. However, a valuable way to offer continued support to GLBTTQ parents and their families is the creation of a guide that will help GLBTTQ parents develop their *own* parent support groups. Support groups encourage GLBTTQ parents to come together, connect, and discuss common issues they are facing within their families and the community. They provide a space for listening, support, networking, education and advocacy for GLBTTQ parents who face the challenges of discrimination based on their sexual orientation and gender identity on a daily basis. These groups can be large or small, formal or informal, and made up of those parenting, considering parenting, pregnant, or awaiting adoptions or surrogate birth. Parent support groups can organize social, educational and advocacy-based activities for their families and the community, as well as conferences, workshops and social dinners. Parenting groups are a wonderful place for your children to make friends, and for parents to share ideas, discuss parenting tips, and locate support. GLBTTQ parent support groups can take many shapes and forms.

ATR is offering this step-by-step guide as a tool to help new parent support groups define goals, objectives, and to get the ball rolling for your group! Be creative, original, and design a parent support group that works for your group members. ATR can provide your group with resources for local parents, help you trouble-shoot and support the creation of your parent support group.

For further information please contact the project:

Email - info@around-therainbow.com.

Phone - 613-725-3601

Internet - www.around-therainbow.com



This guide was adapted from Family Pride’s “A step-by-step guide: Starting a parents group,” which can be accessed online at:

<http://www.familypride.org/publications/startingaparentsgroup.pdf>



Your Community

1. Is there a need for a group within your community?

2. Are there other activities or resources for GLBTTQ families and parents? If there are, have you contacted those involved that may be able to provide knowledge, guidance and support?

3. What supportive organizations exist to help you locate parents and families?
List all local GLBTTQ friendly organizations or groups where you may look to locate parents and families

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

 When Family Services à la famille Ottawa (FSFO) and Centretown Community Health Centre (CCHC) were looking for GLBTTQ families to participate in the Rainbow Families support group, they contacted community health and resource centres, early years centres, and agencies currently providing services to the GLBTTQ community. They drew their members from Pink Triangle Services, Family Services à la famille Ottawa, Oasis, Minwaashin Lodge, Pinecrest-Queensway Health and Community Services, and Ottawa Early Years Centre.

4. **What resources are needed to create and maintain your group? For example, designing and printing flyers, locations to hold meetings, etc.**

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

 FSFO and CCHC required a meeting location for Rainbow Families, as well as funds to pay for pizza dinner, youth workers, and early childhood educators.

5. **What resources are available to your group? Can any of your “needed” items be donated? Can you hold meetings at a local community center for no cost?**

Use your connections within the community!

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

 FSFO provides youth workers for children aged 7-12, as well as the pizza dinner. CCHC provides the space to hold Rainbow Families, as well as early childhood educators for children 0-6. Rainbow Families asks families who are able, to contribute \$5.00 toward the cost of the pizza dinner.

6. **Will your group be open and inclusive to all family types? Gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, two spirit, and queer? Formerly married, straight spouses, non-biological parents, foster parents, step families and blended families?**

-
7. **Will your group be open and inclusive to all individuals? Moms, Dads, parents of toddlers, parents of teenagers? Reflect on questions six and seven. Who do you want to include, and why?**
 8. **How often would you like your group to meet?**
 9. **Where would you like your group to meet?**

The Nuts and Bolts of Starting a Group

1. **How will your group be organized? Do you want one person to take entire responsibility for running the group? Or do you want responsibilities to be divided up equally between group members? Once you have secure group members, you may find it useful to discuss how many hours a month each of them can commit to planning and organizing the group. It usually takes about 40-50 hours to start up a group. After the group is on its feet, the hours required to run the group are much less.**



Rainbow Families is run by Family Services à la famille Ottawa and Centretown Community Health Centre. Rainbow Families has two facilitators, one from each of the centres, who facilitate the meetings with GLBTQ parents. These facilitators are also responsible for planning childcare, pizza dinner, as well as maintaining the website and email address for Rainbow Families.

2. **Who will help put this group together? On a separate sheet of paper create an outreach list. Gather contact information, including names, addresses, phone numbers and emails of individuals you believe would be interested in getting involved, as well as other groups in the community from which you could gather members. For example; local GLBTQ groups, GLBTQ-friendly churches, schools, bookstores, etc.**

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.
- f.

 **Remember - FSFO used local community and health centres, organizations supportive of the GLBTQ community, and other local services providers when forming their group**

3. **Choose a name for your group. Brainstorm a group name with other parents. Be creative, and choose a name that reflects the personality and mission of the group.**

- a.
- b.
- c.

4. Choose contact information for your group. Some options are a post office box, email address, phone number, or answering service. There is also the option of creating a group on Yahoo or Google. This is a quick and easy way to share information with your group members. List a few of ideas for safe contact inform

- a.
- b.
- c.

 Rainbow Families has an email address, phone number, and website that can be used for information and contact purposes. The facilitators of Rainbow Families manage all emails and phone calls.

5. Choose a date and activity for the initial group meeting. With the help of your group members, choose a fun “kick off event” that will attract parents, children, and families. Use the who-what-where-when-why format and brainstorm ideas.