



A Thousand Moms
Building Community Support for
New York's LGBT/Youth in
Foster/Adoptive Care

www.athousandmoms.org

518 322-0607

For Release: Immediate

Contact:

Fred Elia

518 322-0607

**A Thousand Moms' "Network of Support" Addresses "Coming Out":
 The Words That Change Everything, or Do They?**

New York State parents, child welfare case workers and supervisors, and members of A Thousand Moms recently joined together on a statewide "Network of Support" conference call to discuss "Coming Out," an issue being increasingly faced by gay youth and foster/adoptive parents. Participants addressed issues ranging from multiple identity crises for LGBT/Q teens to a need for greater sensitivity on the part of case workers to the need for parents and case workers to set aside their own values and beliefs.

"We have to start where the client is, that is the youth," said Fred Elia, president of A Thousand Moms. "You can't assume the child is gay. Being in foster/adoptive care can lend an extra identity crisis for a youth." Foster care and adopted youth often undergo multiple crises, included separation and multiple placements with families. "Coming out is a process and comes with cues from the youth; crises come about not because of sexual behavior."

"Developmental processes for gay youth are often different and delayed. These youth can be delayed, emotionally. Feelings of being gay, etc., are layered on top," said Elia. Elia grew up in foster care and is gay. "These youth have to deal with a triple loss: loss of childhood innocence due to neglect and/or abuse, loss of birth family due to foster care placement, and now feeling "I'm not what people think I am."

On the role of social work agency staff, it was agreed that children are looking for a sympathetic person. "Most youth dread telling their parents," said Marcia B. Novey, network facilitator for A Thousand Moms. "Workers can help their kids, role-playing, neither discouraging or encouraging them."

Sue Cardoso, outreach director for Gay and Lesbian Youth Services of Western New York, cautioned that “kids have to be able to come out in their own time.” Ms. Cardoso acknowledged that youth may perceive a religious bias among workers and parents. Also, homes may have more than one youth and coming out for a teen may have a large impact on siblings and the entire family.

Participants called for greater training on LGBT/Q issues for social workers. “When reality hits, generally agencies discourage LGBT/Q discussion,” it was agreed. “At group residential homes, 30% of youth are LGBT/Q, three times the rate you would expect,” said Esther Taylor-Evans, who works with A Thousand Moms. “If you work, you’re going to come across LGBT/Q youth. We need you to be prepared,” she said.

All agreed that particularly in the last five years, youth are coming out in greater and greater numbers and at earlier and earlier ages. We don’t know the reasons for this, but nevertheless the fact remains, and parents and workers must learn to better understand LGBT/Q youth in foster/adoptive care and the process of coming out.

The next “Network of Support” teleconference will be held in late February. Please visit www.athousandmoms.org to check for date, time, and topic.

A Thousand Moms Mission Statement

A Thousand Moms will help our communities in New York State organize, educate, and mobilize in order that we may meet the emotional, developmental, and social needs of youth in our child welfare systems who may be Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, or Questioning their sexual identity so they may reach their full potential.