

Panelists:

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Please note: The following is a direct transcription and has not been edited.

Kathy Ledesma: Good Morning. I'm Kathy Ledesma, the National Project Director for AdoptUSKids and our co-presenter this morning is Dr. Ruth McRoy who wears many, many hats but we are so fortunate that among those hats is to be the lead evaluator for the AdoptUSKids project and in addition to the lead evaluator she is also the lead researcher for us. So, and also with us is Ruth Stanley Baumgartner, did I get it right, who has recently rejoined the research and evaluation team and is working on some of the projects we'll talk about today with you. So she is here not only for moral support but to help us to clarify any questions you might have.

So, Matt has asked me to read this disclaimer this morning and so I'm going to read up verbatim. "As reminder the audio for this session will be digitally recorded and once formatted for accessibility standards would be made available through the summit website in lieu of written consent participants who ask questions or provide comments during this session will be giving their permission or consent for this recording. If you have any questions about this recording please feel free to talk with one of the summit support staff." And so that's kind of the like the disclaimer they read you when you're in the exit row, right, so, just by being here implicit consent.

We're going to talk this morning about an expansion of the barriers and success factors in adoption from foster care study that the AdoptUSKids research and evaluation team conducted in the first five years that we were funded 2002-2007 and the addition and the expansion that has been made in the last year to that project with regard to serving...

[Overlapping conversation] [00:02:01]

Kathy Ledesma: ...with regard to serving the inclusion of LGBT families. Okay, let's not do this to this. It's, no, click R, yes, there we go. Okay. Okay.

[Overlapping conversation] [00:02:25]

Kathy Ledesma: So this is what we're going to do this morning. I am going to give you a very brief overview of AdoptUSKids to contextualize what the research is about and then talk about the research and the findings and then talk about what we are thinking and maybe get your ideas as well for what, how we can use this to inform practice and further research not just specifically for recruitment and retention of foster and adopted families but in general in child welfare.

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Quickly, in red is the cooperative agreement. Those of you who also have cooperative agreements know about the nature of them and that is they change from day to day and in this case that we're talking about it's great that we have a cooperative agreement to do the additional research barriers and success factors with regard to lesbian and gay families seeking to foster or adopt, we use that cooperative agreement to go back to the bureau and gain their permission to use our funds and our time to do that.

That fits within the mission of AdoptUSKids which is two-fold to raise public awareness about the need for foster and adoptive families for kids in foster care and second to provide technical support in many ways to States' and territories' tribes in courts in their efforts to recruit, retain and collect kids and families.

And we are a member, kind of an odd member in a way of the training and technical assistance network. Our National Research Centre for Recruitment and Retention of Foster and Adoptive Parents is part of the AdoptUSKids project and so as the NRC belongs to the technical assistance network but also the larger AdoptUSKids is also a part of that. This is just graphically a chart of the things that, all of the things that we do, the heart of what we do and everything that we learn really is focused on how to reconvert that into knowledge and understanding about the needs of the field with regards to prospective foster and adoptive families. So we operate the 1800 call line the families, national call line for families who see the ads for AdoptUSKids. You don't have to be perfect to be a parent, we man those calls or we staff those calls, we operate the photo listing website which is also a repository for information about recruitment and retention and other adoption in child welfare related issues and is also a place that prospective families who already have home studies and are ready to adopt can register and use the site to look for children. Also children's workers can use it for families; families' workers can look for kids.

That, that is kind of roughly what, what we do and again the heart of what we do is really informing technical assistance. We worked over the last year to take a good hard look at how we evaluate, how our partner, University of Texas at Austin evaluates things that we do to measure some outcomes so that we can convert that into knowledge for our technical assistance centers. So Ruth is talk us through the study and the findings. I'm going to talk about next steps with it.

Ruth: Okay, great thank you. Yeah, just there is some background for the project we will be describing today. The first step of course is to look at what is out there, what do we know, what are some of the laws associated in this case with gay and lesbian adoptions and what does the literature say and this was sort of the backdrop for the work that we've done on this particular topic. So I think we are all aware of the State laws and policies regarding the LGBT persons becoming foster adopted parents have been changing. You hear a lot about this in the news these days and there is no standard practice across States and so the laws vary depending upon what State you happen to be in.

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We also know that there have been a number of reports and studies that have been issued in the recent, the last decade or so looking specifically at what do the numbers look like, what are the experiences of families, what's happening. We also recognize that a lot of work needs to be done along those lines. First of all in looking at some of the data reports from the national survey and family growth in 2004 they looked specifically at that time 2004 Adoption/Foster Care AFCARS data and most of the reports including the one that was most recently issued from the Evan B Donaldson Adoption Institute that reviews a lot of the work on a variety of different topics suggest that about 65,000 children have been adopted by a gay or lesbian parent. About 14,000 foster children are currently living with their lesbian foster parents. It's about 3% of children in care and then more than half of gay men and 41% of lesbians want to have a child and that's kind of interesting.

I was reading a review of a literature the other day that suggested that as you look at families that really seek to have children by birth or adopt the likelihood, the reality is that many heterosexual couples or individual's first choice is to give birth to a child, first choice, and then if that's not happening then they look at adoption. What's different though with the gay and lesbian population is that so often there is that first desire to adopt and that says a lot, in terms of their thinking, in terms of adoption, finding or providing of family for a child. You know that an estimated 2 million lesbians and gays may be interested in adopting or if we think about the fact that current data from AFCARS 2010 suggests that 107,000 children need placement. There are some families out there that could provide a home for so many of these children.

The report that Evan B Donaldson issued initially in 2006 and updated in 2008, that was called Expanding Resources for Waiting Children, eliminating legal and practice barriers was a very interesting review of the literature and the policies related to gay and lesbian adoptions that's available on the Donaldson Institute website, and among the findings that they identify that agencies vary in terms of their responsiveness and whether or not they are welcoming and sensitive to all prospective adoptive families. They suggest in their summary and conclusions that agencies should be focused more on becoming more welcome of all kinds of families that are seeking to adopt.

They also know that the agency policies and practices for assessing and preparing families may not be appropriate, maybe they're not sensitive enough at this point to better prepare gay and lesbian prospective adoptive families, and we need to do a lot more in terms of providing agencies with clear guidance. We need more research. We need more information to help those agencies as they move towards the recruitment of families and assessing those families and preparing and supporting those families pre and post-placement, and it's clear from the literature that there is not enough at this point that has been done on that topic.

In looking at some of the materials that are available on the Children Welfare Information Gateway website there is a synopsis also of some of the materials that have been written about gay and lesbian adoptions and one person who has done quite a bit of work is a woman named Abbie Goldberg who is a Senior Fellow with the Donaldson Adoption

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Institute as well and some of her works suggest that children raised by LGBT families do not differ in the area of adjustments or functioning. A lot the, a lot of the speculation is that there could be issue with much of the literature, and research suggests that's not the case. European colleagues found that the quality of parenting and family functioning are not related to parents' sexual orientation.

Stacey and Biblarz in 2001 found that adopted and raised by LGBT parents report feeling more tolerant of diversity and quite a bit about that concept lately in the sense that because so many of those families have experienced some discrimination themselves. They are much more tolerant of diversity and sexual orientation of youth does not correlate with the sexual orientation of the parents which has been some of the speculation in the past that this will impact the youth. Other literature that is focused on this has suggested, but what are some of the advantages of placing with LGBT adoptive families. Among those is they're highly motivated to adopt that deep understanding of how it feels to be different and to be able to relate to that child, they are able to advocate with fairness and equality for their family.

And many of them have experienced lot of depression, discrimination, other obstacles in their own lives that really can relate to what these children may encounter. They also have challenges, many agencies will see LGBT families as a resource for certain kinds of children, maybe a child that has not received a family or has been waiting and waiting, or child with multiple challenges, we are finding another family replaced with them. And many agencies apply sort of a hierarchy that gives hierarchs to heterosexual parents. I've talked recently with a family that has been waiting, a lesbian couple that has been, they have been serving as foster parents, in fact they are both social workers who have been serving as foster parents for about four years seeking to adopt. They have received about 25 different children, most of which they have indicated they would adopt, none of which they have been allowed to adopt. So we think about those challenges and as you just look at the history of – I was reading their social history and some family with a five bedroom hall and they are well prepared and so forth and approved no children for adoption. So these challenges still exist.

Before I talk a little bit about our research today I just want to mention one more that I recently read that was published and applied to developmental science which I really refer you to was published in 2010 by Rachel Farr and Charlotte Patterson. They were both at University of Virginia studying child development and they did a very interesting study which compare heterosexual and gay and lesbian families who had adopted and they found -- the interesting thing that the key outcome variables had more to do with that research as how families dealt with stress, parenting stress number one. Number two, one of the key things was how they deal with the stress and their strategies for parenting the children and the third was their own relationship satisfaction. Those were the variables that were most indicative of outcome regardless of the sexual orientation of the family. We need more research that looks at some of these concepts and in their particular work they use standardized measures, they use parenting stress index other kinds of measures that very specifically look at outcomes and they did a comparative study. We need a lot more of this kind of work.

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The project that we were involved in that Kathy introduced a minute ago is something that was approved and funded by the Children's Bureau is part of AdoptUSKids and naturally what happened was that in the Children's Help Act of 2002 called for two studies to be conducted. One was to look at barriers to adoption and one was to look at success factors. And as we went about doing that particular project we included a number of families that were both gay and lesbian families as well as heterosexual families and we wanted to look specifically now at some of the outcomes for the gay and lesbian families in our project. So this has become, and Kathy, you want a talk a little bit more about our capacity building activity and how this relates to it.

Kathy: Right. When we were first funded in 2002, there was no national recruitment campaign. And when that first campaign -- you don't have to be perfect to be a perfect parent came online with TV, radio and print ads, there was a concern that States didn't have the capacity to respond to the higher number of families or greater number of families who would be contacting them and seeking to go through the process, to foster or adopt. So AdoptUSKids proposed and then created and was funded to support what we call recruitment response teams in cooperation with each State, each State identified an entity either within or outside of the public agency that would be the place that AdoptUSKids would hand off the callers in their local jurisdictions to get them connected with services in their own States.

So we operated that for about five years, but by that time the assumption was that States had that increased capacity to respond to the number of families, and the number of new families inquiring kind of had reached a level and had leveled off. So in our cooperative agreement we went back and negotiated with the Children's Bureau, how we could redirect those funds that had been paying for those recruitment response teams and the solution we came up with was to redirect those funds into capacity building activities each of which has taken out a different kind of, a different kind of direction for those families that are six years of experience, seven years of experience had shown us, had the most difficulty in penetrating the system from first inquiry and then actually getting placements of children. So those populations that we identified were African-American families, Latino and Hispanic families, especially those whose sole language is Spanish, native American families, military and global families which we redefined as US military families living abroad outside of the United States, usually on military bases outside of the country. US Expats or US citizens, non-military living in other countries and foreign nationals seeking to adopt children from US Foster Care.

So we created some services to respond to those families and then lesbian and gay families, families who on their first inquiry self-identified as lesbian or gay and ask specific questions. So this study is -- that Ruth is going to talk about, really is about that building capacity with understanding the needs and the challenges that lesbian and gay families face when they seek to foster or adopt and then directing services to them at the State level as well as at that first contact coming into AdoptUSKids. And then what we're doing with each of those projects, and I'm not going to explain to you, each one is

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different, those capacity building projects, we are evaluating that and then converting that into capacity building training and technical assistance.

Something that is now on this slide that is part of that LGBT capacity building initiative is parent support groups. Every year for the last five years, four years AdoptUSKids through the cooperative agreement has funded many grants to foster and adoptive parent support groups, peer support groups to develop respite models so that they can help ourselves sustaining after the funding goes away. We set aside last year and for the upcoming year a number of those grants, specifically for parent support groups that serve exclusively LGBT families or are inclusive of those families as one of those support measures to help families penetrate the system, get through the system and find the kind of support that they need to sustain placements once they are made.

Ruth: Thank you. As I mentioned we began with two studies back in 2002 that involved the following. One looked at barriers to adoption. This particular study involved following families who had begun the process of adoption for several years just to see what happened to them. So we had a sample of 300 families, but in addition to the families we wanted to find out from the perspective of staff around the country. What are the barriers that families experience from their perspective and do some comparing. Secondly at the same time we were doing a study that we called a success factor of study in which we interviewed families that actually had completed an adoption. They were not going through the process -- they had been approved and had received a child to find out what their experiences were. There were 161 families located throughout the country in that particular study. Those families were interviewed and they were surveyed as well to better understand what their experiences have been and we also interviewed staff to get better understand those. Those, both of those reports are available free of charge on the AdoptUSKids' website. All you have to do is Google AdoptUSKids.org it will come up and go under resources and you'll find copies of those reports which specifically track families over time.

When we had the opportunity as Kathy mentioned to focus in our capacity building initiative on specific population groups, we went back and relooked at some of our families that have participated in our studies to first of all identify those who had self-identified as gay or lesbian, to see to what extent we could reconnect with them because initially we did not, we had a standard format for our interviewing, we were not directly talking about some of the specific unique challenges or barriers that they may have experienced. So we went back to those families as part of this initiative and we had 10 families that had participated in interviews in our original study, six were lesbian couples, three gay and one single gay man. Eight of those families of the 10 had previously fostered and of those 67% were general adopters and 14% foster parent adopters and those families were from a number of different States. The States are important because laws differ in various States, but they came from California, Colorado, Minnesota and New York, there were two families, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Texas, Vermont and Washington DC. So they were sort of represented for a number of areas.

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But we recognized that, that was a very small sample and we wanted to gather additional information on the experiences of families. There were gay and lesbian going through this process. So then we conducted focus groups. We did six focus groups again in different States, we had a total of 43 participants, in those we had 25 that were female, 18 males and they were from, the participants were from Georgia, Maryland, Minnesota, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, Washington and Washington DC. Again we wanted to get their experiences and we wanted to build on the relatively small sample that we were following up to see what are these families saying, what are their experiences.

So, in terms of our family follow-up interviews, the 10 that I mentioned that participated and there eight had finalized and adopted a child from foster care and those families had adopted a total of 20 children. Two of the families had discontinued the process and one of which later completed a private adoption no longer going through the process of trying to adopt through foster care system. Of the families that participated in our focus groups 25 have been foster care adopters and they finalized children that they fostered, nine were general adopters those that were non-relative, non-foster parent adopters, six were still waiting for adoption and then two were fostering only and with no intent to adopt.

I'm going to share with you first of all the demographics of the families that were in the follow-up study, then the demographics of those that were in the focus groups and then look at what some of the findings were particularly in this presently around the issues and barriers that they experienced going through the process of adopting. Of those follow-up families the 10 I mentioned before, seven were Caucasian, two inter-racial couples and one was categorized as unknown because the second partner did not identify racial at the background. In terms of education we're looking at folks who 37% had graduate school education, 21% college degree, 26% high school diploma and so forth and again this, this really is confirmed by much of the existing literature that many of the families seeking to adopt who would be a lesbian have education, they have a lot to bring to the table as they are applying to adopt.

Average age of our participants there, for males 50, females 47. Again they came from different States with different experiences based upon the laws in the States, yes.

Speaker 3: Is that age... How does that compare to the non-LGBT population?

Ruth: These were actually a bit older than some of those, yes, they were a bit older. Yeah, that's a good question, absolutely. And so, many of these are families that would spend some time really thinking about this for a while, is this what we want. Some of them had experienced a lot of negative reactions, you know, over time that they were for the most part successful in finding children through the foster care system. Looking at it again this supports a lot of the literature on families who are LGBT families applying to adopt having sufficient income to do, to adopt. 42% had been foster parents; they had experienced parenting children from the system. In terms of their relationship three were in domestic partnerships, three identified themselves as being in committed relationships, one civil union, one was married and one was single and the information on one was missing.

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So, all of these is important to look at and to evaluate and think about in terms of their experiences. Those that were in the focus groups, we had four African-American, 33 Caucasian, four multi-racial, two did not answer on that. Again a lot of diversity in terms of the type of legal partnership that they had in this larger group here in terms of those that were married or domestic partnerships and so forth. So a lot of variation in terms of what their relationships were. We look first to see to what extent the barriers that these families experienced, to what extent they were similar to or different from those of the overall samples that I described to you before of the 300 families that were in the process of adopting in which we were following them to see what happened, what experiences they had in those that had actually adopted.

We found that the lesbian and gay families also experienced in addition to those barriers similar to all families that they identified some that were not listed by the heterosexual families in our study. We also noted that they're bringing a number of unique strengths to the table for adoption, and we found in comparing -- one of our reasons for including the focus groups was we had such a small sample to follow up. In our study we wanted to expand that by doing focus groups and we found similarity in what representatives of the overall study were saying and also those that were in the focus groups. What are they talking about? We wanted to know both positive and negative. And we asked them specifically, these are data from our family follow-up interviews, and then I'll give you the data from the focus group interviews and the focus groups that we conducted.

We asked them what do you, what's important for you in working with an agency. What will help based upon your experience and one thing that they talked about a lot was the idea of affirmation, feeling affirmed by the agency that they are okay, and we're happy that you're in the room and wanting to adopt. One of the questions that we talked with him about is whether or not they felt it would be more affirming for them, more helpful if there were a staff member in the agency who also was gay or lesbian. And they indicated that the thing that was most important for them was somebody who was competent. That was going to be the most important thing not their sexual orientation. They felt that it was important that when they came to the table that both members of the couple felt like they were treated equally.

They talked a lot about the paperwork and it's so often the paperwork is not gender neutral, you know, they had still, like husband and wife, those different, they wanted to be more, you know, open to and gay affirming what's being done there in terms of language and appropriate contact, in terms of the training as well in addition to the application materials. They want to feel included; they want the training to improve all kinds of things, not only heterosexual couples. They thought that it was useful if there were other gay and lesbian families going through the process at the same time, rather than being the only ones, for example in a pride training class that have more, that they are going through the process.

Kathy: I just want to interrupt to say, that's one of our motivators for them setting aside money for parent support groups to specifically provide a forum for peer support of gay

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and lesbian families seeking to foster and adopt for actually fostering and having adopted...

Ruth: And to have that support post-placement as well, so that they have that with other families, yeah, exactly. They also talked about what really they view as being very positive if they have a worker that is well educated in this area in terms of gay and lesbian adoptions and who -- if they have questions, feel comfortable asking those questions, and that leads to, you know, something that we've talked a lot in terms of applications of some of these findings, how often are staff really trained in this area, to know how to explore, how to raise the questions, the opportunity as they suggested to assess the partner relationship during the home study process, like heterosexuals often do during pre-marital counseling. The opportunity to talk about that relationship and they feel comfortable talking about their relationship and their hope for that there would be a support group with other lesbian and gay families.

The families that were successful from our follow-up study, that we are able to successfully adopt still indicated regardless of their ability and their success in having a child, they still dealt with issues. Those that were successful identified the following issues, that there are issues related to State laws regarding adoption when they're not legally partners, you know, the States that require, you know, one partner to adopt and then maybe the second partner adoption, all of these kinds of factors. Working with the schools can be difficult. Some of them talked about just being able to explain not only adoption to the schools but to be able to go in and talk about their relationship and to sign the papers bringing a child to school. They found difficulty in finding a Judge or Attorney to do the second parent adoption. Some of them found in the example that I shared with you earlier often very long waits for a placements, even though they have been approved, even though many were fostered, still waiting and waiting for a placement, being told that they, a child had been identified for them, however, the child's agency upon learning that the family was gay or lesbian wouldn't flex with them. A child has been identified, but the child's agency worker knows we are not going to do that.

Those were among the barriers that they experienced even though their own agency was supportive. They also found that a lot times, and they waited, some of these families waited for a long time to get a child, they were never told why they were turned down and they found that a lot of times the workers didn't have, didn't know what to say and they offered was it because of their sexual orientation, that's the reason they were turned down. One family said, we were told -- we were turned down because we were gay and white. They talked about the fact that there are still social workers who sometimes think because of their sexual orientation they're not okay for adoption.

So the agencies feel that LGBT families should only be matched with hard to place children because those families will take any kind of child for perception and perception that they want a child, we will give them a really, really challenging situation child and this has been something that a number of -- the families talked about that it's more difficult for gay men to find an agency that will place a child with them than for lesbians.

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We also ask some of the same questions with the focus groups. We talk with them about what are some of the strengths that you see of LGBT families, and they talked about some of what I described, you see confirmation something what I shared before in terms of the existing literature, the idea that LGBT parents can relate to the adopted child's feeling of differentness, the fact that so often their decision is intentional. It's not because we couldn't have a child, it was intentional we want to adopt and that's our first choice, as I said adoption is the first choice. LGBT families are more resourceful, they know where they can find help, they are aware of support systems. They can expose a child to a diverse world and many different types of people were some of the strengths that they identify when we conducted the focus groups with the families.

They also talked about the misperceptions that they experienced about their communities and they found that many believe the following kinds of things, adopting to either make more gay people or to abuse their children, misperceptions, bias, stereo types things like that they talked about, misperception, lesbian and gay parents can make up for children needing a mother or a father. LGBT parents are promiscuous or may have sex in front of children. These are some of the misperceptions that they learned about, that became aware of as they attempted to adopt. LGBT families will accept any type of child they're offered regardless of disparity or ability to care for a child and one of the respondents said LGBT relationships are unstable. Those are the kinds of things they heard in their experience trying to adopt, yes.

Speaker 3: This was the, lesbian and gay by sexual and gender group and that what they have heard....

Ruth: That's what they've heard when they've gone through their process of trying to adopt. They've experienced this, they've openly talked about what they heard as they were trying to go through public agencies attempting to adopt. We asked them to discuss situations in which they felt that staff had treated them insensitively. Yes.

Speaker 4: I'm sorry. Do most of them go to the private agencies or some of them just going through State agency or....?

Ruth: If they were going through a private agency, it was one they contracted with the State, for the purpose of, but they were all seeking children from care.

Speaker 4: They were *[indiscernible]* [00:38:58]

Ruth: Some did both. Some did both. They were trying to find any agency that would work with them and some started out interestingly enough trying to adopt an infant and were not getting accepted and then decided will go through the foster care realm. Yeah.

Kathy: One of the things that we hear really often on the front end from families who self-identify as LGBT seeking to adopt. They say the State agency will not work with me or ex-private agency will not work with me but that's what they told me or that's what others have told me. What do you know? So we are in the process of doing a survey of

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all, about 1,200 public and private agencies who are registered users of our website to determine what kinds of families will they work with, and so that we can provide that information to families on the front end when they call.

Speaker 5: Would any of the -- if we study bisexual and gender identify their experience any different than some who are identified as lesbians or gay?

Ruth: They are mostly identified is either a lesbian or gay in this sample, yes. But we talked about, it's kind of interesting why do you ask that question because that was something that was discussed in the focus groups, to what extent they were aware of differences in terms of responsiveness and reaction to someone who is transgender versus bisexual, and as you might expect there was a very -- a high likelihood that that was even more questioned than one who was identified, self-identified as gay or lesbian, you know, even more so than experiencing the more challenges, yeah.

Speaker 5: Are there states that you can adopt if you're lesbian or gay, like I heard in *[indiscernible] [00:41:09]* for example that they don't use single parent adoptions to really, the reason being so that they don't have *[indiscernible] [00:41:17]* that means they might be adopting with that group.

Kathy: You know there are, there are kinds of out and out statements in law and in policy that are masked, so when we hear that single parents can't adopt really that may be about a different kind of agenda and what we knew from the very beginning going into this and then was affirmed through these studies is what's necessary, what's on the books as law or in State agency policy or administrative rules that has the force of law, doesn't necessarily play out in actual practice, so even if the law permits the actual practice could be very, very, very different. Arkansas is definitely a case that is more vocal about not being favorable to gays and lesbians adopting.

Speaker 5: In Florida also.

Kathy: Yes Florida, and that, there has been some movement there recently.

Speaker 5: Results are not consulted, you know, the courts have the demand and so right now *[indiscernible] [00:42:41]* there maybe an internal preference to saying it's not sanction by a law any longer. There was legislation in Arizona that there *[indiscernible] [00:42:56]* that bill and I think the only state that really has a really decided preference is the state of Utah.

[Overlapping Conversation] [00:43:04]

Ruth: I mean, there is conversation, there is movement and there is, one thing is what the law says and what rule say the other really is the actual practice and that takes much longer to move the practice.

[Overlapping conversation] [00:43:28]

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Ruth: One thing that I think -- I was going to make this point later on but I think this is a really good time to make it. The reason that we have engaged in this research and the reason that we want to apply this as knowledge for the field is not because we're in any kind of advocacy role, and we have to clearly, clearly make that distinction. We're not advocating one way or another we can't do that, that's not our job. But providing information to help raise awareness and for public and private agencies as well as individual workers to make better informed decisions is our job. So it, it's a difficult road to walk for us because advocacy groups look at what we've done and make an assumption that we're advocating and we can't and are not doing that.

Speaker 4: I don't understand why we can't do that, I mean, are you advocating *[indiscernible]* [00:45:01].

Kathy: Okay, this is, this is what we advocate for. Families, children need families, so we are, we are working to expand to the greatest extent possible to pool up qualified available families from which to choose for those children in order to provide the best possible, best suited family for the child. So it is about the children, and that's where the advocacy part comes in as expanding the pool of available families across geography, so placing children from one jurisdiction to another geography, race, gender, sexual orientation by providing information -- factual information.

Ruth: And to improve services to those families who applied because I think that's part of what we were looking at in terms of the data. We identified challenges that families have had, what does that mean in terms of training so that to better be able to meet the needs of all families who apply. And so these families talked about some of the experiences that they've had of insensitivity and really based upon it recommended some changes and these are their voices in talking about the experiences they had in terms of delaying the process, grounds of discrimination, insensitive judges and so forth. They are just sort of acknowledging that they experienced insensitive treatment and what we take from the findings is, you know, in terms of maybe there is training that could be done to better enable staff to work with families. We asked some questions about what should workers know about LGBT families and they gave us the following suggestions that they need to feel comfortable asking questions. They don't understand how do you ask those questions, that there should be concept, LGBT concepts embedded in standard trainings, funded to trained workers appropriately. There was a constant theme in terms of better training related to work with LGBT families to be sensitive to questions due to life experiences, being honest about difficulties in the process, all of those things they suggest that workers should be open and honest with them.

There may be challenges, there may be some agencies that are not going to approve, do a home study for this child, let's put in on the table, that's what, that's in the families voice, that's what they're saying. They also talked about -- and we were asked, we asked some specific questions about working staff due the more effectively assist LGBT families who are going through the process and they suggested having a network of information for prospective LGBT parents, about their state laws, having some place they can go to,

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“Okay, I live in the State of Arizona, this is the law”, being able to click on it and see that, the policies and what are friendly professional organizations. To practice open recruitment practices that target LGBT families specifically. That’s the one that they recommended. To know the facts, and train staff to understand the State laws in their State, because they found that with some of the staff they work with they didn’t even understand what the law stipulated, yes.

Speaker 3: Is there a link to US websites like Lambda Legal and some others for the staff?

Kathy: Yes, we -- our job isn’t to track legislation in the States, but there are organizations that do that and who we link to is human rights campaign, all children, all families that do carefully follow that legislation, so instead of trying to keep it up to date on our website we just provide the link to go over and that was -- that was actually part of this initiative whereas to engage in conversation with them and to take advantage of those resources to inform both agencies and families, human rights campaign, yes.

Ruth: So the families were saying we need, we need assistance, we need information, and we need to know how to access this kind of thing. They again made suggestions, they asked me to put their prejudices aside, legal protections for LGBT families that existed in some States or agencies staff can exercise those prejudices. That was another acknowledgment that they made but when we ask them questions about their perspective related to the importance of staff sexual orientation, they said again in the focus groups, like I mentioned before that the families that we interviewed said something similar, that’s not their first priority to have a gay or lesbian staff member. They want somebody who is experienced. Somebody who is trained who can really help them.

They did acknowledge that maybe they, some who were trained would be able to understand specific concerns better but they found the most important thing is to have a good support network a good referral network. We asked them what advice would you give to others that our LGBT families are interested in fostering or adopting and four of them talked about that you need to find out about your own support network because that’s going to be important, find a support network that’s there, advocate for yourself and know the laws in your State, find an agency you’re comfortable with and who will closer with you. Parenting is a self-less choice they talked about and talk with someone who is adopted before talking with an agency and suggested that that preparation, and that support with somebody else who has experienced it will better enable them to be successful along the way.

Then we looked at what’s similar in the things that emerge from the interviews that we conducted -- the follow-up interviews and the focus groups. Among those things that emerged was that all of -- majority of them talked about -- there was greater discrimination against men, against gay men that the barrier seemed to be cumulative, not only if you go in and take your single, but single and gay. An added barrier they found.

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Importance of self-advocacy, importance of openness and communication from the workers to their families. They also talked about the fact that their experience as parents has been positive, and that their experience as parents allowed them to really be able to offer more diverse experiences to the children with whom -- the children that they had adopted and say well, what do you say to agencies, we will take the findings from this to agencies, what would you want them to know and among the things that both focus group participants and interview participants said were as follows:

Every family is different, and the needs of families, whether they are gay or straight families should be evaluated individually. In other words don't generalize to a group of families, every family is going to be different. Agencies must reevaluate their entire approach to recruitment and retention of LGBT adopters. It's not enough just to do a single campaign to recruit and just figure we will get everybody they suggested or talked of it recruitment. LGBT families should be integrated throughout the process not given special preference, integrate them as others. Agency staff needs to be educated about LGBT parenting and adoption, so that LGBT families don't have to fight against prejudice or work to overcome stereo types. We think about it in terms of what kind of ongoing training is typically given about work with all kinds of families.

Agency should be honest with LGBT families about the challenges. And many of the families talked about this because they want to, they would prefer for an agency to tell them, yeah, well it may be that's one agency that we refer you to is not going to work, that's just a reality but that's not to give up that there are agencies that will work with them. They, we asked them to again, what would you say to prospective adopted families. They indicated as follows, advocate for yourself, be clear that you are an LGBT family and make sure the agency is willing to work with you. They suggest go in the door and say that from the beginning. Find an agency that you're comfortable with and know that there are other options. Be realistic about your expectations, the process can be difficult. Learn the laws in your State, and in any State you consider adopting from it's important to know your rights. So they gave some very, very concrete suggestions for families that are planning to engage in the process.

We gained a lot of good information from this which was validated by our review of the literature with others that have studied this particular topic, but we also recognized in our review of the literature that the thing that is not sufficiently addressed in research at this point is we haven't heard from the voices of the youth, the voices of the children that are being raised in LGBT families. And we wanted to hear from those that were old enough to have experienced it who could share with us what their encounters had been, what about their children, other children at school and their teachers, and what happens there. So we have been recently just completed focus groups with youth who have been adopted from foster care who are currently 13 years of age or older and we wanted to hear what their experiences have been.

We also have done a survey of their adopted parents. We are in the process of listening to and analyzing the data from the youths and from the transcripts of focus groups that I have been listening to we are getting an amazing amount of information of experiences

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that these kids have had, going to school, explaining to their peers, but the thing that seems to be coming through, the ones that I have listened to so far is they're very happy about their adoptions, their placements, their experiences and are learning from those experiences and in the next conference we hope to be sharing with you the voices of those youth. So this has been a part of our initiative and Kathy is going to talk about how this sort of fits into other AdoptUSKids capacity building.

Kathy: One of the things that we knew early on when we started this piece of the work in 2009, I think 2009, in the fall of 2009 was that this, we really, this really impacted across the entire scope of the training and technical assistance network, very quickly we did partner with a National Research Centre for Permanency and Family Connections and presented the early findings, the first findings from this barrier study with LGBT families at a webinar that was directed primarily to State agency, public agency folks and we co-did that with the NRC for permanency and family connections. Right now, just last night, late last night I reviewed the next draft, or the most recent draft of a joint product that we are producing with NRC for Permanency and Family Connections and the National Research Centre for Adoptions and it takes the findings from this study and the research that it brought that informed the study into a single source that is not a huge 50 page guide that you have to pal through but really distills that into I think 3-5 pages and that's easily digestible and is factual and we hope to have that on the market probably by well depending -- how long it takes us to get through children bureau approval, which we know will go to quickly in the next month or so. We're nearing completion with that and then of course will supplement that with the findings from the youth surveys.

We will continue to work on this with our partners and then with our partners in the private sector as well and then we're very excited about the other kind of study that's going to touch on this and that's of all agencies that are out there, that are registered users of our site, just knowing what families they will and won't serve, so that we don't send families down blind alleys that are not going to have the results that they're looking for. So the first that you study, incorporate everything into a bigger barrier since success factor study and I don't know if we will do that as a supplement to the original study or it'll be a standalone report and then continue working with our partners. Again our focus is on maximizing the number of potential families, for kids who need care and this is one of those things. So that's we are and we do have half hour for questions. More questions, yes.

How did you distinguish between – I don't know how to say this exactly. But how did you tease out folks that may have been a part of many potential matches, but did not themselves accept those matches. That they themselves did want to adopt the children that were proffered them. And I know that wasn't the intention of what you were looking at and all, but I was just wondering if you were able to get that in a focus group at all.

Ruth: We were asking them about their experience adopting and there were some just varied experiences, more than we wanted to find out what barriers they encountered along the way and some had gone through many different agencies and talked about those experiences. Is this getting at what you looked before?

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Ruth: No, they're with foster parents only. They have been matched with the number of different foster children, but there's been no plan for their adopting these children and that's an ongoing experience that we heard from others as well, yeah.

Ruth: That's exactly what the parent had said.

Kathy: And that was the issue in Florida, you know, for many years is that, that gay and lesbian, singles and couples could foster but couldn't adopt the very children that they were fostering so it's kind of like, you know, interesting dichotomy, yes.

Speaker: I know in Missouri there are statutes that are in preference to the placement provider, if they've been the placement provider for nine months. Is that pretty common across the other states?

Ruth: It is. Yep.

Speaker: Did they have a legal avenue to fight that... bias I guess?

Ruth: In the example that I gave? It's kind to be interesting because they never, the children were never there for over two or three months and so for a variety of different reasons that they were given and so, when they've had range of those, most recently they had five children and they were open to taking a whole of them, and but those, nothing has happened. And I understand exactly, exactly what you're asking is that in many States, in the State I came from Oregon they change a lot at six months, that the foster parent – the care giving foster parent has the same status as a relative, that relationship enters the placement it becomes the placement of preference under the law. I think that that has -- those kinds of things and then looking at how that applies to families that are good enough to foster but not good enough to adopt. I think that's really caused some backtracking on some of that anecdotally, anecdotally. Yes.

[Indiscernible] [01:02:07]

Ruth: I have to say just right off the back we've had three very early morning, pre TNTA network conversations with some about partners including the NRC for youth permanency -- I'm blacked out on, youth permanency, youths, youth development, there you go, about just specifically about that and I know that they have done not formal research but they have done some surveys and they have done some riding about this. Is anybody here from youth development are familiar with that and then Ruth formal research. I haven't seen any specific to that topic but again that's on the list, more needs to be done, we need to, there are a number of different topics that identify that need to be studied, provide, life times practices still don't change, every research suggests that's it's okay but yeah, we need more to be done, yeah.

[Indiscernible] [01:03:40]

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Ruth: Not in this group but then many of them who adopted had fairly young children and they have not identified in any way in terms of sexual orientation. The other thing that is happening, you know, we will talk that much about is that many of these families have been adopting trans-racially, many of the families have been white families who have adopted children of color and so that too has been a piece that has come up and they talked about that experience that some were saying they were more likely to be offered children of color and did not talk about in terms of specific related to sexual orientation because they were, you know, 5, 6, 7 years of age at that point.

[Indiscernible] [01:04:48]

Ruth: Not specifically as you're describing it but some of the work that has recently come out by Rachel Farr that looks at this whole issue in terms of the parenting experience, the nurturing, the addressing parenting stress and the fact that many families for a variety of different reasons and looked a lot, with both lesbian and gay couples because they have experienced a lot of stress themselves that they kind of they are able to better relate to, some of the youths who have had challenging experiences and may have those experiences at school especially when a child will confront them and say are those your parents, and you don't look like them or why are they, you know, why they have two mothers things like that and they talked about the fact that their own experiences helped them to buffer for the children and help them to know how I respond -- how do I respond to that and to rehearse how to do that.

[Indiscernible] [01:06:30]

Ruth: Absolutely, although we didn't use a measure of resiliency, some of the comments they talked about certainly were evidence, provided evidence that was being resilient yourself as a couple made a difference for them for sure, yeah, it's part of that parenting piece I mentioned before, these families have, anytime you have to go through multiple experiences to be able to parent built that resilience for sure and trying to find, they talk mostly about the need for ongoing support, support from other, like them who have also made the decision to adopt, so they have that buffer.

Kathy: Yeah, all those issues are so complexes, it's really have to sort out what's, what, if you look at the data going back, you know, to 2000, and the number of single male adopters of children from foster care it's like, just kind of gone like this for like 2% up to maybe 4% or just over 3% has only risen so how do you separate that from a possible bias against single males and a possible bias against single male, gay males, it's really I think a very complex, complex thing and our job is really to maximize the number of resources with information, factual information.

Ruth: And given that 53% of the children need replacements are males and yet we have about 3% of those single males that have adopted based on 2010 of those data says a lot in that we have work to do.

[Indiscernible] [01:09:19]

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You know, just I think that an excellent research for that is Gary Mallon it's like single man adopting is...

Kathy: Is a gay man adopting...

Ruth: Gay man adopting, wonderful, wonderful resource working again, that's wonderful. Question from back here.

[Indiscernible] [01:09:51]

Ruth: I have two responses to that and first when we look at applying implementation science to child welfare maybe that it is best addressed in the selection process rather in -- for staff than in the training that screening upfront for those kinds of skills and attitudes so that you have a workforce that is well suited to the work to be done.

I totally agree, but there are still people there...

Ruth: Okay. So then, there is the second, there is the second piece, so some of the things that we produce hopefully will be factual information that can be embedded in that kind of training but then there are advocacy groups such as all children all families that also have training curriculum specifically for that and certify States and private agencies for incorporating that training of their staff. So it's out there.

Yeah, I guess *[indiscernible] [01:11:45]*

Ruth: Yeah, and I think that's exactly, that's exactly right, is it really is just singles and Apgars *[phonetic] [01:12:42]* does capture, does capture gender but that doesn't give you the entire picture because, right...

Ruth: No, because in those States that only allow one, if it's an unmarried couple, only allow one of the people to adopt and then the second person does an adoption after the fact in Apgars that appears as a single adoption, and so that doesn't, doesn't really give the picture.

[Indiscernible] [01:13:15]

Ruth: We, we are, we are moving in that direction and have made great strides in the last two years, you know, Penny Mesa retired from the children's bureau. We worked with Penny over the course of a year right up through yesterday to do a better alignment of the fields in the AdoptUSKids database with the Apgars fields a better alignment it will never be perfect and it won't match up. One of the shortcomings however is that we don't know because States are not, States and private agencies are not required to report to AdoptUSKids when the children that they photo listed have been placed for adoption so we don't have an entire, an entire data set, so we have again incomplete information, we do have demographic information about some of the parents who adopted those children, but not all of them. So those are huge data questions that we would like to tackle.

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Kathy: Ruth, do you want to comment on thing about Apgars?

Ruth: The experience we've had.

Well I'm not sure of it -- I'm not of the independent Apgars, if I can add anything about that. But I can say is we are in the process of doing a big family outreach survey. And we have invited literally thousands of families to contact us about *[indiscernible]* [01:15:03]

Ruth: We went through various agencies and those States identified who could help us, who had worked with families, you know, and they were able to secure a sample from that say for example we had some families from California who had worked with, who were receiving some services through Kinship Center in Southern California until some of those families were offering to be a part of the focus group that would talk about this issue. So we identified agencies in different States that could assist, that we knew had worked with gay and lesbian families before and could more easily secure a group for us. Some of them were families that were actively participating in their own sort of support groups and we were able engage them as well. And we did reach out to organizations such as All Children All Families and the -- over the five years, the last four years we funded over 100 parent support groups, some of them were specifically gay and lesbian serving. So, yeah, we did, we identified a number of sources that we could reach out and find, identify the families with the focus with and youth for focus groups, right. We deliberately wanted to have families coming from a variety of different States in which the laws were different knowing that their experiences might be different.

[Indiscernible] [01:17:07]

Ruth: Yeah, we have not yet had, we have not yet had that discussion and in this administration, in the current administration this kind of work really is possible in this environment right now. We need to finish up what we've done and we have one more year in this contract cycle in another RFP for AdoptUSKids, we are certainly going to look at those things and prioritize the things that we would like to expand knowledge about and I'm thinking just from what we're seeing that there is a whole lot more to be done.

[Indiscernible] [01:18:24]

Ruth: Yeah, I think there are, there are really lots of possibilities and we can propose some and we can also be just directed to do some and we certainly will, you know, we will do that. I just think it's been terrific that we've had this opportunity to engage in the piece of research that we've been able to do right now and it really -- there is just so much more, so much more to be done and one of the big challenges now is to really to convert that into a digestible form of technical assistance first for not only for States and Territories and Tribes but also for private agencies that contract the States.

[Indiscernible] [01:20:19]

Kathy: Why it was higher for the participants in our other study?

[Indiscernible] [01:20:41]

Ruth: Yeah, for one thing many of those families just from some of the interviews and listening to many of them talk some have waited for a longer period time to be in a relationship in which they made and also made the decision to adopt and that seems to be, that seems to be a pattern that I've heard a number of them say that that has something to do with the age and, you know, getting up to 30s, 40s and so forth and then deciding this at this point we are ready to a parent in this situation. Some others have talked about really being disappointed for some time thinking that we can't, this isn't going to happen, we're not going to be able to adopt in waiting and waiting and waiting and that led them to be a bit older.

Kathy: Just want to add to that anecdotally, part of what I do with AdoptUSKids is respond to media requests. And I was contacted in May by AARP to do -- to contribute to a short piece and people over 50, yes, adopting.

[Indiscernible] [01:22:03]

Kathy: Oh, well, we're almost at the end here. So, okay, so people over 50 adopting and they wanted us to find two or three families who at age 50 or older had done an adoption of children from foster care. Two of the three families we identified were gay couples and one was a straight couple and they chose the straight couple to feature in the article. So, interesting, yes.

[Indiscernible] [01:22:38]

Ruth: That's an interesting question. I think that sometimes both our challenges that occur in terms of the -- of agency practice, there are some who may be resistant to both trans-racial and gay and lesbian, meaning the families though talked about, their feeling sometimes that some agency sort of had a system of acknowledging the most adoptable child and maybe less adoptable also take into consideration which children, how many children were waiting and we have disproportionately high numbers of children of color waiting for adoption. That being the factor and experience also the fact that sometimes agencies in trying to place those children of color particularly African-American who had not done a good job one in finding a pool of African-American families whatever orientation just the African-American families not been successful there may have made the choice, okay, these families are saying we'll take whatever child. Some of these families had said we've been open to kids with all kinds of disabilities, we've open to whatever child they can give us we want a child and sometimes by doing that we get several families who said after they open their doors to whatever type of child they then received one. So its supply and demand, its perception, it's all those things you know.

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Kathy: You know, it's not too long ago in the history of public child welfare that we were not, unlike the private sector and because the business was about matching children to families demographics and so I, it really is challenging to think about the practice that's been pervasive of allowing gay couples or singles, LGBT families to adopt but only considering them for children that other families would not be willing to adopt. And I think that that practice persists and we have heard about that anecdotally.

Ruth: Right, and again just another sort of anecdote for a number of years I ran a group at a church in Austin, Texas of adoptive families and it came about because this was a very multi-racial church and one day the priest came to me and he said did you see what's happening in the church, and I said yes, very much so, that there are growing number of families who have both trans-racially adopted and many of those families were lesbian families and we agreed we would form a group and it was called "Parenting Across Colors." The groups still exists and St. James in the school church in Austin, Texas and the purpose of the group was to give these families the support that they felt they have not gotten from whatever agency they may have adopted from, and they wanted all kinds of specifics from taking care of the child, their gender kind of issues, some of them had adoptive male children, how do you deal with some of those issues in terms of gender development, hair care, skin care—all those things, and so the group still exists. The director of the group now has just written a book on parenting both trans-racially and also parenting as in this case a lesbian couple, and they found that this opportunity to become together on a monthly basis made all the difference in the world for them in terms of finding and sharing information, how to get services, and this past summer they had their own camp for this purpose, and now they have a respite grant from AdoptUSKids for that purpose as well.

Kathy: You know, our time is up now gave us the signal here are our email addresses, we would love to hear from you, your feedbacks, suggestions for what more we could do and explore and how we might disseminate the information that we have gathered and convert that into hopefully some guidance for practice. Thank you very much.

Ruth: Thank you for being here.