



For Immediate Release

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BAYC Symposium to Address Challenges for LGBTQ Youth in Foster Care

Organization Hosts a Forum to Improve System of Care

Hayward, CA - August 27, 2009: Bay Area Youth Centers (BAYC) is hosting a symposium titled *The Experiences and Needs of LGBTQ Youth in Out-Of-Home Care* on September 16, 2009 at Preservation Park in Oakland. The symposium will focus on the experiences and needs of LGBTQ-identified (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning) youth in the foster care system. The objective is to provide a forum for foster care providers to engage with one another about how to increase the competency, safety and accessibility of services within the foster care system for LGBTQ-identified youth. It will also serve as a general forum for dialogue and information sharing on issues and concerns LGBTQ-identified youth and their foster care providers face, including high-risk behavior, physical and emotional safety, developing community, gender expression and fluidity of identity.

This symposium comes at a time when the foster care system in California is particularly strained, and when youth in the system are more likely than ever to have placement issues. "LGBTQ youth in foster care share all of the challenges of other youth in out-of-home care, but historically, these difficulties have been compounded by their LGBTQ identity," explains Josh Leonard, Executive Director of BAYC. "Inappropriate placements and ignorance or indifference about their needs can make things even more difficult." It is because of this that the need for the symposium is so urgent. "We are very excited to be able to provide this forum," adds Leonard. "Service providers, youth, advocates and academics can come together and talk about where we are as a system in terms of providing a safe, healthy and accepting environment in which LGBTQ youth grow. We want and need to continue improving service delivery to this specialized population of foster youth."

Symposium keynote presenters include Kevin West (*Youth Keynote Speaker*), Jody Marksamer, Esq. (*National Center for Lesbian Rights*), Nick Gorton, MD (*Lyon Martin Health Center*). Additional panelists include representatives from California Youth Connection, Seneca Center, Project Eden Lambda Youth Program, Lavender Youth Recreation and Information Center (LYRIC), inVision Consulting, The Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project and more. The symposium will begin with informal networking between 9:00 am and 9:30 am, and programming will run from 9:30 am - 4:30 pm (lunch included).

Registration Information

This symposium is made possible through generous support provided by the Tides Foundation, and is offered free of charge to Bay Area foster care providers. **Advance registration is required.** Register online at <http://bayc.eventbrite.com> or contact Emily Rankin at (510) 867-6938 or by email at emily@bayareayouthcenters.org.

About Bay Area Youth Centers

Bay Area Youth Centers (BAYC) operates as the East Bay division of Sunny Hills Services and works with youth ages 14-24 who are emancipating from the foster care system. BAYC's programs are designed to support successful transitions to adulthood by helping young people to develop positive relationships, healthy lifestyles, independent living skills, and the achievement of educational goals. BAYC programs include supported and transitional housing programs, a group home, a housing program for foster youth who are pregnant or have children. Each of BAYC's programs includes integrated mental health services and a healthy dose of adult encouragement to ensure these youth have the opportunity they deserve to reach their full potential. For more information about BAYC, visit the agency online at www.bayareayouthcenters.org.