

**a MenTalk
for gay dads!**

**Sunday, April 23rd
7:00-10:00pm**

contact André at CAP to
register: 223-6339 ext. 135

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Worth the turmoil

A gay man is "thrilled" when CSD reverses its decision to disqualify him from applying to become a foster parent

by Inga Sorensen

Brian Copsey's life has turned upside down in recent months. His family won't talk to him, and he's been harassed so much that he's moved from his Grants Pass home to a coastal town where he hopes he can live in peace. Despite the emotional turbulence, Copsey says it has all been worth it.

Copsey, you may recall, is the 53-year-old retired Merrill Lynch executive who was seeking to become a foster parent when he received a letter from Oregon's Children's Services Division telling him he was unfit for the job because he is gay.

Several weeks ago, Copsey's attorney filed a lawsuit against CSD alleging the agency violated his client's constitutional right to equal protection under the law. In response, Copsey says CSD has agreed to consider his application to become a foster parent without making his sexual orientation a factor.

"I'm thrilled. It never should have been an issue in the first place. I hope my painful experience helps prevent gay men and lesbians from being discriminated against in the future," says Copsey, who sought no monetary damages. "The issue for me was that gay men and lesbians should not be denied the same exact rights that heterosexuals receive, simply because of who we are."

Copsey's troubling journey began last summer when he decided to pursue becoming a foster parent and approached the Josephine County CSD branch. He went through the initial steps of the process: filling out application forms, undergoing a criminal background check, and supplying references. The next step required that he take a series of pre-placement parenting classes designed to ensure that potential foster parents have the skills to meet the special needs of the children placed in their homes. (Copsey had years of parenting experience, raising not only his own son but five of his sister's children, as well.)

According to Copsey, everything was moving

along smoothly when he received a letter, dated Aug. 9, from foster care certifier Dean Nunnemaker. In the letter, Nunnemaker said he had learned from an acquaintance that Copsey is gay.

Nunnemaker wrote: "I spoke with my supervisor today and she felt, due to community standards, we could not support placement of children in your home. She also said that we would be putting you at risk for potential allegations, and that we couldn't withhold this information from the children's biological parents. If I had known this information beforehand, I would have discussed this with you then and let you know our position."

In regard to the decision, CSD spokeswoman Karen Lee said in February: "There is no administrative rule that says a person cannot be a foster parent simply because of his or her sexual orientation."

In regard to the decision, CSD spokeswoman Karen Lee said in February: "There is no administrative rule that says a person cannot be a foster parent simply because of his or her sexual orientation."

The reasons someone can be disqualified from consideration include things like the applicant has a criminal record or there's evidence of sexual abuse. Gays and lesbians can certainly become foster parents."

"I think the letter made all the difference as to why things worked out OK," says Copsey. "Here was tangible proof that they were discriminating against me simply because I'm gay."

Springfield attorney Robert Ackerman filed a lawsuit on Copsey's behalf in federal court in Eugene saying his client's constitutional rights had been violated. Ackerman, too, has called CSD's correspondence a "smoking gun letter."

CSD officials did not comment on the apparent reversal of the agency's decision.

Copsey, who was featured on the front page of a newspaper in southern Oregon, says his family will no longer speak to him because of the case. He claims he has received harassing phone calls, which have prompted him to leave Grants Pass.

"It was really hard at first," he says. "I began to wonder if I should have said anything. Now I am glad I did. It was the right thing to do."

Veterans' plates now available

Veterans for Human Rights, a nonprofit military veterans group that advocates for gay and lesbian veterans and military personnel, says the state Department of Motor Vehicles has approved its request for recognition license plates.

In order to gain such approval, VHR had to prove the group exists for the purpose of supporting or recognizing veterans and that it was "not an organization established primarily to influence political causes or issues other than those directly to veterans' benefits." VHR members say oftentimes gay and lesbian veterans do not realize that they, just as any veteran, are welcome to and deserve the services of the Veterans Administration.

The plate, which is now available to all Oregon drivers, displays the name of the group. For more information about the plate or VHR, call 223-1373.

Goose Lake Ranch hosts Equestrian Playday

The Gay, Lesbian, Family and Friends Equestrian Playday and Camp-out will be held May 12 to 14 in Bend at the Goose Lake Ranch.

The ranch is owned by Steve Jones and C. Ray Gould, who have held this event on their land just east of Bend for the past four years. The two expect 400 people to attend this year. Equestrian events will include trail rides, barrel racing, pole bending, and an obstacle course. A bicycle rodeo will also be held.

The weekend cost of \$50 includes campsite, horse space, events, some meals, live entertainment, and awards. Registration deadline is April 29. For more information, call 388-3680.

Compiled by Inga Sorensen