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FINANCIAL SERVICES

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YOUTH

Join the club

A new international club for young kids of gay and lesbian parents is the first of its kind

by Inga Sorensen



The American Bar Association estimates there are more than 8 million daughters and sons of lesbian and gay parents in the United States, many of whom are younger than 10. Despite these enormous numbers, books which are geared toward this younger audience—titles such as *Daddy's Roommate* or *Heather Has Two Mommies*—face the constant threat of being pulled from public library shelves due to pressure from the right. Compounding the problem, many general bookstores, particularly outside of major metropolitan areas, simply don't stock titles for children that feature gay and lesbian characters.

So what's a young kid of gay or lesbian parents to do?

An international organization known as Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere has come up with a solution. The group, which was formed in 1988 to meet the needs of teenagers of gay and lesbian parents, has started COLAGE Kids Club, designed to help the younger offspring of sexual minority parents connect with each other.

The club is purportedly the first and only organization for young kids with gay or lesbian parents.

"The most pressing problem facing kids with lesbian and gay parents is our isolation," says organization staffer Suzanne Pullen, who is the daughter of a lesbian mother. "It isn't about an adult world of politics—it's about the kids' world of connecting and making friends who understand. It exposes kids all over the world to a community they are a product and part of, in a way that they can relate to."

COLAGE members say it's vital that young people have resources they can turn to, especially when society continues to largely ignore the existence of gay- and lesbian-led families.

Here's the gist of the new club: Children join the Kids Club for a fee. (There are four membership levels. Annual fees range from \$20 to \$50; a lifetime membership costs \$500.) All membership levels provide youngsters with a membership card;

a "Pen Pal Connection," which helps put them in touch with potential pen pals; and a quarterly publication known as *FunPages*, which resembles the kids' pages often found in the Sunday newspaper. However, unlike the Sunday *Oregonian*, for instance, these *FunPages* include lesbian-and-gay-positive cartoons, games and member submissions.

A sample *FunPages* issue includes a book review by 7-year-old Hope Steinman-Iacullo, who offers her thoughts on Alyson Publications' picture book *One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dad, Blue Dads* by Johnny Valentine. "Lots of kids would like this book because it tells them you can have one dad or two, and that doesn't matter," writes Steinman-Iacullo. "I think it should be given to kids because of the beautiful pictures and bright colors. It shows that all people can do the same

things. It doesn't matter if they are different."

It also includes a piece written by 10-year-old Maimouna Pausa Alexander-Fleurant, who talks about meeting Audre Lorde (who died in 1992 of cancer).

Lorde, who described herself as a "black, lesbian, mother, warrior poet," was an activist, teacher and author of 18 books of poetry and prose. Alexander-Fleurant writes: "Audre Lorde is very special to me because Audre gives me pride. Audre Lorde has also told people things that really touch them. Audre has given some very powerful speeches about feminism, South Africa and racism. Audre is very courageous when she talks her mind in front of people. I really admire her." Also included is a hidden word puzzle with a family-values theme featuring words like honesty, inclusion, love and respect.

COLAGE currently has more than 1,000 members and two dozen affiliated peer groups in the United States, Canada and Northern Europe. For more information, contact: COLAGE, 2300 Market St., Suite 165, San Francisco, CA 94114; (415) 861-5437; fax: (415) 255-8345; or e-mail: KidsOfGays@aol.com.

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