

**GROUPS**

**Rainbow FLAGS**

"I wasn't quite sure how I was going to go about becoming a foster parent," says Daniel Dale, co-founder of Rainbow FLAGS. "I was wondering who else has tried, how many more gays, lesbians, bisexuals were out there?"

Dale did eventually become a foster parent for the state of Oregon and then started the group to get information and find support. The group's goal is to serve as a resource for members of the sexual minorities community who are foster and/or adoptive parents, as well as those who may be interested in becoming parents. The mailing list for the 16-month-old group has grown from five families to more than 50.

The group has rap sessions, guest speakers, "baby showers" for new parents and provides a social time to get to know other parents while getting information and support.

"It's a lot easier to adopt children than I thought," Dale says. "That's basically the whole reason for starting the group."

Dale wants to let folks in his community know that they can adopt children or become foster parents.

"We are trying hard to get that message out and find homes for a lot of these children who are in foster care," says Dale, who is currently in the process of adopting two of his foster sons.

The group meets at 6 p.m. on the second Tuesday of every month at Metropolitan Community Church of Portland, 2400 N.E. Broadway. Call (503) 281-8616 for more information.

**Love Makes a Family**

Tucked away on the second floor of Portland's Union Station is an organization with a lot of heart. The group's founder, Bonnie Tinker, has diligently worked since the early '90s to change the way the general public perceives families. Now her office is the national headquarters for Love Makes a Family Inc.

"The right wing was trying to claim the term family," Tinker, a mother of three and grandmother of two, explains. "Then we realized we had to get out there publicly and say family and mean a different kind of family than they were talking about."

Love Makes a Family provides advocacy and resources for sexual minority families. The group holds monthly support groups for parents

**Parents, politics and pals**

Parenting is tough enough without going it alone; these groups offer support, advocacy and friendship

BY JONATHAN KIPP



Terry Furman shows off photos of the three children he raised; now he is a facilitator of the Dad's Support Group

and children, and plans activities throughout the year for its members. In addition to general support, Love Makes a Family is committed to institutional change and public education surrounding the issues of sexual minority families.

"We want to change the world so people define their own family," Tinker says.

Tinker adds that changes at Portland Public Schools are among the most dramatic since her organization's inception. Tinker and her supporters helped lobby for changes in the school district's anti-discrimination policies and educated administrators and teachers about the importance of being supportive to the children of sexual minority parents.

"We're coming to a place where we can now say to heterosexuals, 'Do you want your family defined by the state or do you want your family defined by love?'" Tinker explains.

"When we say 'Love makes a family,' we mean everyone," she adds.

Tinker feels gay parents are some of the best.

"There is a level of awareness of what a privilege it is to have children and the trust that is placed in us as parents when we have

children," she says. "I see just incredibly good parenting from sexual minority parents."

Love Makes a Family is also working toward a joint venture of sorts with Parents Anonymous for parents facing challenges with their children. The support group will be for sexual minority parents who fear they might abuse their children and for those "who are aware that there are challenges in parenting that might push them into emotional reactions where parents might not be functioning at the height of their ability," Tinker says.

Anyone interested in groups and activities of Love Makes a Family can reach the organization at (503) 228-3892, [lmfamily@teleport.com](mailto:lmfamily@teleport.com) or [www.teleport.com/~lmfamily/](http://www.teleport.com/~lmfamily/).

**Dad's Support Group**

Twice a month, 15 or more dads—most of them gay—meet to offer one another support. The Dad's Support Group is part of the Speak to Your Brothers program organized by Cascade AIDS Project.

While many fathers in the midst of coming out don't find their way to this support group,

others find the group vital to the process. For some, the group provides more than just support.

"I come more for the social interaction than anything else," says Jeff, a father of two girls.

While some regularly attend the twice-monthly meetings, others attend for a short time and then move on. Periodically, some dads return for what one referred to as a "recharge."

The content of each meeting changes according to the needs of the group.

"One time an entire meeting was focused on one man," another father of two said. "He wanted to come out to his kids, but he wasn't even out to himself yet."

While the group may talk over problems with ex-wives or financial fiascos, the group's emphasis is on the children.

"The kids are an unspoken center," a father of two nearly grown sons says.

"Coming out to your kids is a show stopper," he adds, explaining that his journey has taken him nearly five years, with his sons' well-being as his focus.

Mike, a father of two teen-age sons, sometimes facilitates the meetings. Divorced for 14 years and out for three years, Mike clearly values the Dad's Support Group and the men that attend.

"I fought it!" he recalls about his coming out.

Then he realized that the fight was "insane," and he reached a level of maturity that finally allowed him to come out.

"Since then, [coming out] is the best thing I've ever done, because this group of men and the gay men I've met have been some of the most phenomenal people," Mike adds.

While the Dad's Support Group wants to reach out to as many men as possible, the group clearly is divided over publicizing its meetings in the mainstream press.

For some dads out there, one man says, the group's relative anonymity is the only thing that gets them through the door. For others who attend, the issue of reaching as many struggling fathers as possible is the focus.

Both sides agree, however, that the number of men at the support group doesn't reflect the number of men with children who are leaving their marriages and coming out.

"There are so many more," one dad says. For additional information about the Dad's Support Group, or other Speak to Your Brothers groups, contact Sam at Cascade AIDS Project, (503) 223-5907, ext. 233.

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