

**W**hen Aquene and Laura Am-arys brought their son home in 1997, they didn't know any other queers with kids.

So a few months later Aquene did something about it: She created Rainbow Rascals, a resource group for Lane County gay men and lesbians with babies and toddlers. Only one other family attended the first meeting.

Since then, that number has grown to 20. And the kids have grown up, too, with some now as old as 7.

Rainbow Rascals offers fun activities for gay and lesbian parents and their children. It welcomes new members who have kids by birth, make a family through adoption, are new to the area or just are in search of support.

Two years ago five Rainbow Rascals families began holding annual campouts up the McKenzie River. This year they reserved seven campsites at Honeyman State Park on the Oregon coast for Labor Day weekend.

"In 2000 I know my family got the Sleepless Nights Award, as we brought our 9-month-old daughter, Indigo," Aquene reflects. "I'm happy to say in 2001 we passed that award to a family from Jefferson who had an even younger baby."

The goal of Rainbow Rascals is to create commonality and opportunity. Children run and play with other families that look like theirs, and adults talk about topics ranging from potty training hints to finding schools. Participants share baby-sitting duties with one another and bring potluck dishes for parents with new babies or when someone is ill.

"I think the kids themselves look forward to the group even more than the parents do these days," Aquene explains. "We form extended family that, for many of us, is lacking."

## THE LITTLE RASCALS

Queer parents come together for fun and support by Susan Detroy

As of yet, no gay men with small children have joined the group. But if any need support, members agree they are welcome.

Kim Olson, a Salem mother of two boys who travels to the Eugene meetings, started a Rainbow Rascals group in May for Oregon's capital city. She wanted to bring the same energy and support to parents where she lived.

Olson points to one difference: "We feel that if someone who has older kids wants to come, they are more than welcome." The first gathering drew five women and seven children between 15 months and 7 years old.

Michelle Howard-Popple and Ereena Howard, a 20-year Salem couple with three children, attend both groups. Although many queer parents face a number of challenges, they consider themselves fortunate.

"We haven't had any negative response to our being a lesbian couple with children,"



Rainbow Rascals participants say Rosie O'Donnell has helped put a familiar face on queer parenting

he doesn't. Rainbow Rascals provides support for parents and children in just this kind of situation.

Olson has been out for three years without encountering conflicts as a queer parent, other than family concerns about what kind of teasing Jesse and Dylan, 6 and 3, might face from classmates. She thinks it is helpful that talk show host Rosie O'Donnell finally came out of the closet this year to fight Florida's gay adoption ban.

"This is probably the first opportunity that some of her fans have had to know a gay parent," Olson says. "Once it becomes someone you know and love, it makes a big difference."

Aquene—who hopes to get a group started in Lane County for kids between 7 and 11 years old—thinks O'Donnell's high visibility only can help because she is well liked, showing that good parenting has nothing to do with sexuality. She says this reinforces that family is about love, nurturing, communicating, interacting, creating a stable home and being there for children.

"Rosie has been a great example and has shown this to the public eye, and I think it's awesome that she finally came out," Aquene says. "And not only did she come out, but she came out with a cause." □

Howard says. "Our family and neighbors knew us as a couple long before we had children, and they have all been very supportive."

This year the Howard-Popple family had its first contact with the Salem-Keizer School District. The response was positive.

One dilemma came when their 6-year-old boy realized all of his friends and cousins have a dad and

RAINBOW RASCALS meets from 10 a.m. to noon on the second Saturday of every month in Eugene. To join call 541-344-5847. Contact the Salem group at 503-581-5102 or kimolson1@hotmail.com. For more information visit the Internet site [www.rainbowrascals.org](http://www.rainbowrascals.org).

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