

A Face on Family

Say what you will about Bonnie Tinker. Some have called her methods "radical" and her nonprofit organization "ineffective." But her efforts are tenacious in justifying her family, and yours, to Oregon voters.

Tinker has been in the public eye for two decades, introducing her interracial family led by two moms to mainstream America. She has appeared on various talk shows including *Ricki Lake*, *Investigative Reports* and *20/20*, touting nationwide that love makes a family.

In 1992, she founded the nonprofit organization by that name. Tinker describes her group as part of a grassroots social movement, blending rights for queer families with the anti-war movement, police accountability and economic oppression—a stance some have labeled unfocused or too political for the everyday concerns of families.

"We know there are LGBT families from across the political spectrum. Our particular view is the oppression of LGBT people is directly linked to the oppression of other minority groups and economic oppression of working people," Tinker said. "Therefore, when we address systems of oppression, we look at it across the board."

While her ideologies resonate with many, implementation of those beliefs has often alienated Tinker from a movement of which she fancies herself the grandmother.

Some of her activist tactics have included calling for the picketing of heterosexual weddings, advocating for queer tax resistance and hijacking press conferences called by other groups.

Rumors swarm around the mismanagement of Love Makes a Family and its effectiveness in putting these tactics to work when serving Portland's queer families. A financially struggling organization, the group has cut programs and staff to keep its doors open.

"I see out in the field that there are a lot of missed opportunities," said the Rev. Tara Wilkins of the Community of Welcoming Congregations, who worked on the campaign to defeat the same-sex marriage ban. "While marriage equality certainly does support gay and lesbian families, Love Makes a Family used to do more programmatic things to build community with gay and lesbian families. We've picked up the pieces that I thought would have been right up Love Makes a Family's alley

because Bonnie is so focused on the marriage issue."

Some parents have said Love Makes a Family dropped the ball in filling gaps in service in areas including lobbying schools, holding parenting and adoption forums, continuing anti-bullying education and hosting more community-building events.

"When Love Makes a Family was doing the work about bullying in schools, that was good work. Then Bonnie, who was working on the marriage issue for many years, got her feelings hurt because she was not first in line to get married," said Jack Danger, a local activist and talk show host. "I believe that Love Makes a Family has been stuck on stupid, because when you talk to Bonnie, all she can do is criticize [Basic Rights Oregon]. I hope people are saying to her, 'Remember the work you did in the schools, because that was critical work.'"

Tinker admits she's had to scale back projects because she needs more money and volunteers to run them. MultiQueer, a program geared toward queer youth of color, and the Middle School Transitions Project have been shelved for lack of funds.

Love Makes a Family holds two monthly support groups for sexual minority parents and children. The organization charges a fee to conduct speaker training workshops on nonviolent

speech techniques.

"Our main interest in marriage is not to come up with what the right answers are but to do speaker trainings which unleash the power of grassroots people to tell their own stories," said Tinker.

Besides speaker trainings and the support group, Love Makes a Family is involved with the Equality Coalition, a group composed of Love Makes a Family members and students who meet at Portland Community College's Cascade Campus to discuss civil rights for sexual minorities.

Wilkins says she chose to distance herself and the Community of Welcoming Congregations from the Equality Coalition.

"I felt like theirs was a disgruntled viewpoint that they were going to organize around. To me, it seemed kind of toxic. CWC doesn't want to participate in anything like that," Wilkins said.

Tinker's organization also makes referrals to services available to queer families in need.

"Call us for tips about marriage, adoption (legal referrals and agencies), counseling, crisis support, nonviolent parenting, friendly churches or school advocacy," urges the Love Makes a

Family and Friends coordinator for Love Makes a Family, described Tinker as an ancestor deserving of respect.

"I believe we need to be looking locally at successful queer history and progressive queer leaders and respecting the success that we've had historically," said Hicks. "I respect my ancestors."

Staying Afloat

According to Tinker, foundation grants comprise 40 percent to 50 percent of Love Makes a Family's budget, and

member contributions range from 15 percent to 30 percent. The balance is made up in speaker training fees, newsletter sponsorships, fund-raisers and T-shirt sales. Member contributions were down in 2004 because, Tinker suggests, most resources were poured into the No on 36 campaign.

"Election years are periodic problems because everyone's coffers are drained," said Tinker.

During these hardship years, Tinker is laid off from Love Makes a Family, her

sole source of income, and collects unemployment. Tinker is currently in that circumstance, working only six hours a week for the nonprofit she directs.

"The way it gets made up is periodically I am unemployed and therefore I can only work six hours a week," she said.

Love Makes a Family is in good standing with most of the foundations that fund it. Officials from Portland's Equity Foundation, Seattle's Pride Foundation, Black United Fund of Oregon, Rosenberg Fund for Children and McKenzie River Gathering Foundation have all reported that Loves Makes a Family is eligible for funding in the future, and some have recently awarded grants to the group.

Meyer Memorial Trust, however, did not receive a required evaluation on how Love Makes a Family spent its grant. That report was due June 1, 2004. The \$32,000 award, which was distributed over two years beginning March 2002, funded the Middle School Transition Project.



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—The Rev. Tara Wilkins

Family Web site.

Tinker has made allies and admirers along the way. She has gained the respect of former AmeriCorps volunteers assigned to Love Makes a Family.

"If people call because they need something, Bonnie is almost always able to help them, and she will go to the nth degree to help them. I have a lot of respect for her," said Sima Teherani, who finished her AmeriCorps assignment last June.

Amber Hicks, also a former AmeriCorps volunteer who worked as the Middle School

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