

northwest

Real Families Get Real Facts

Family Pride Coalition comes to Portland

by Malka Geffen

Fox News may have been up in arms about the 200 queer parents and their families who attended this year's traditional White House Easter Egg Roll. But the executive director of Family Pride Coalition, which coordinated their attendance, knows something about families that conservatives don't: There's nothing normal about a traditional family.

"Only 23 percent of children in this country are currently being raised by a mom and a dad," Jennifer Chrisler said. "The point being that this rose-colored view of a 'traditional family' that's being held onto by the religious right is not the reality of what our families look like. We should spend time making all families strong instead of legislating back to the '50s."

Chrisler delivered the presentation "Real Families, Real Facts: The Truth About LGBT Families and Politics" June 29 at Portland's Q Center. She spoke about how our families are being used in politics and what her Washington, D.C.-based coalition is doing in response on a national level.

"Portlanders, like many in this country, are facing a time when the conservative right uses LGBT families as fodder in their political battle," said Chrisler. "It's important that they know how to speak out and what the truth is about gay and lesbian parents and how to share that with friends, family and community members—anyone and everyone who will listen!"

The coalition is the only national nonprofit

organization dedicated to the equality of queer families. It supports nearly 200 membership-based parenting groups and has a base of 35,000 supporters nationwide. For 25 years, the coalition has focused on advocacy, education and support.

"Our No. 1 goal is to ensure equality for LGBT parents," said Chrisler. "We do that by fighting against anti-LGBT family legislation, educating the American public about gay and lesbian families and making sure that LGBT parents can share their stories and the real facts about how the children raised by LGBT parents fare." The coalition also works to create positive environments for our children in schools and positive workplace policies to protect our families.

Q Center hosted approximately 40 people for a meet-and-greet cocktail party, followed by Chrisler's presentation and an extensive question-and-answer period. "The Q & A was the best part!" says Barb Bloom, Equity Foundation board member. She and her partner, Gabrielle Groshong, who have two children, sponsored the event. "We are really supportive of what Jennifer is doing and what Family Pride Coalition is all about. We wanted to bring them to Portland and help spread the word about the organization."

According to Chrisler, attendants' questions ranged from "What does the research actually say about children raised by LGBT parents?" to "How

can we make our leaders stand up for these issues?" to "What can we do here in Portland?"

"Parents in particular are very passionate about wanting to protect their children," she said. "They need the resources and information to do it well."

Chrisler talked about parents becoming trained on how to communicate their families' stories, about joining parent-teacher associations, about writing letters to editors whenever a published article doesn't accurately reflect their lives and about working with Family Pride to lobby legislators.

"We clearly face a vocal, well-organized and well-funded minority of people working very hard to spread misinformation and lies about gay and lesbian parents," said Chrisler. "Parents tend to be very busy people, so figuring ways to involve them in this civil rights battle takes creativity so they don't have to take too much time from their home life."

One way the coalition makes it easier for parents to get involved is through its publication *52 Ways to be Outspoken*, which encourages parents to send birth announcements and honor roll announcements and to submit op-ed pieces about how discrimination hurts them and their children. The coalition also trains parents to be ready to speak to the media and helps them organize lobby days and rallies.

Mark Clift, a Portland accountant who attended the Q Center event, said it's important to support a group like Family Pride because it watches out for us



Family Pride Coalition executive director Jennifer Chrisler address issues facing families in Portland and nationally.

on a national level. "We go about our day-to-day lives, but we could easily lose what rights we do have," he said. He and his partner, Jeff Knapp, have hosted three foreign exchange students and are involved with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metropolitan Portland. "I'd love to see if people who are most affected by this will band together. I personally want to be aware on behalf of my clients."

Gwenn Baldwin, Q Center board co-chairwoman, added: "Jenn is a wonderful speaker—very passionate about what's at stake: our families and what's best for children. That was really the theme: If everyone just kept the needs of children and their best interests in mind, no one would want to stop marriage, adoption, foster care or anything that supports families and caring for children."

Baldwin says she hopes this event will be the beginning of a speaker series at Q Center. "We'd like to build a strong family voice." **10**

For more information about FAMILY PRIDE COALITION visit www.familypride.org.

Now's the Time. [7:15 p.m.]

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