

## NORTHWEST BRIEFS

Sunday's symposium begins at 2 p.m. at Hoffman Hall, on the west side of the PSU campus (12th Ave. and I-405 exit). For more information and directions, visit [www.keepthemseparate.org](http://www.keepthemseparate.org).

—A. Daniels

### PFLAG Launches First Ever African-American Chapter

The first Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) chapter in the country dedicated specifically to the African-American community will open with a meeting at Ainsworth United Church this Saturday. It's also the second culturally specific chapter in the country, following New York City's PFLAG for Families of Color.

"Right now, we just want to fill the need," said Geri Washington, community organizer for Black/African-American PFLAG. Washington was deputy director for the "No on 9" campaign and is currently a board member for the Multnomah County Education Services District. Her post with Black/African-American PFLAG is the first paid position that a local chapter has offered.

The nonprofit hired Washington

through a grant they received from the McKenzie River Foundation to address the specific needs of the African-American population. Black/African-American PFLAG also received a grant from Equity Foundation and the national PFLAG, and has reapplied for these grants next year.

"The good thing about what PFLAG did is that they went back to the old concept of organizing. You have to look like the community that you're organizing or else it won't work," said Washington. "The idea was to identify 10-12 community leaders and to focus on the faith community." She's been distributing flyers at area churches and meeting one-on-one with leaders, with two pastors on board so far.

For Washington, the fight for gay, lesbian, bi and trans acceptance in the African-American community is personal: "My niece identifies as a lesbian. It's difficult to deal with her mom saying 'not my daughter, not my daughter.' Last year my nephew came out. My brother-in-law is in denial," she added. "We can no longer have our children go through a situation where they are being denied their true feelings."

The need for a gay, lesbian, bi and trans African-American-specific organization is felt more deeply since Unity Project, the reincarnation of Brother-to-Brother, went on hiatus.



SUBMITTED

Ger Washington is the community organizer for the first PFLAG chapter in the country dedicated specifically to African-Americans, which opens with a meeting April 18 at Portland's Ainsworth United Church. "We can no longer have our children go through a situation where they are being denied their true feelings."

"We're going through our issues," said Craig Tyson, chair of the Unity Project board. The organization's executive director, Alisa Simmons, resigned and fled the state in September. She left the group fiscally devastated and faces charges of embezzlement, theft of property and fraud.

Unity Project closed its offices in December. It has the appearance of being defunct—its phone is disconnected, its blog has never been updated—yet Tyson assured *Just Out* that the group is going through a period of rebuilding: They just hired Cory Murphy as their director of organizational development and are in the planning stages for Black Pride.

"We love PFLAG. We look forward to working with them in the future," Tyson said. Unity Project assisted with the formation of the Black/African-American PFLAG chapter by helping them fill the outreach position. Inger McDowell held the community advocate post prior to Washington, who was referred by Basic Rights Oregon.

BRO is among the other organizations working in partnership with the new group, along with SMYRC and GLSEN. Black/African-American PFLAG is also in contact with Unity Project's board and has tapped into their support base.

Black/African-American PFLAG's inaugural meeting takes place 10 a.m.-noon April 18 at Ainsworth United Church, 2941 NE Ainsworth St. For questions or to RSVP, contact Geri Washington at 503-421-3343 or [washington.geri@yahoo.com](mailto:washington.geri@yahoo.com).

—Adina Lepp

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