

Sowing the Seeds of Change

Diverse Families Teach Our Children to be Advocates for Equality and Acceptance

A study conducted by The Williams Institute of UCLA estimates that 39 percent of same-sex couples in the United States are raising children. Many of these children are products of former heterosexual relationships; some children are brought into the couples' lives by other means. Even though the 2010 census won't count our families, it is reasonable to expect increasing numbers of same-sex couples will have families or will blend existing ones.

Earlier this month the Q Center hosted a Family Pride event, a wonderful occasion for queer families in Portland to celebrate Pride in a "family-friendly" way. Events like this are prime opportunities for the adults in our community to begin teaching our children what it means to stand up for and be proud of their diverse families.

Those of us raising children know they are aware of the "differences" between other families and theirs. Each day they must be prepared for a crude word from a classmate or a hurtful comment that, even without intention, is cutting. I know that before I send my children into the world I'm readying them for battle — or at the very least, readying them to defend themselves if necessary.

I don't pretend that it won't happen — I tell them it *will* happen at some point and they



LIVING
OUT
LOUD

by Kathryn Martini

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need to be ready. They must be prepared for any adversity they will face for having a diverse family. They are taught to reply with compassion, conviction and humor. These tools empower them in a situation that isn't empowering, and they're keys to teaching children to be advocates — for themselves and others.

The Oregon Safe Schools or "anti-bullying" act is a fine start to hold accountable those who influence our children six hours a day. All children — those queer identified and

those with same-sex parents — deserve to be safe while within those walls. Hopefully the measure will minimize harassment toward kids and be a basis for further education and acceptance.

As adults, we make efforts to evoke change, but we will realize the greatest change from and through the children themselves. They are the ones to make a difference in this world for all of us, but they need to be shown how. Advocates aren't born — they are created. They learn by watching role models in their own families and in their community. They learn about the world they witness; if they can't see the issues, they can't solve the problems. When we teach our children to be advocates, we are giving a gift to the world, for they will share their own message of acceptance and change with others.

For an end-of-year assignment, my oldest daughter Mikayla, 14, wrote a "This I Believe" essay. The project was presented to her entire eighth grade class, and in it, she wrote about her family:

"My family isn't the 'American Dream,' we don't have 2.5 children, a white picket fence, a dog, or married mom and dad. I have three moms, a dad, two sisters, two dogs, two houses, and no white picket fence. My family is different — we have diversity. My family may not

be a 'typical' family but we are still a family. We love and care about each other just like your family does but we have to fight more for our rights and sometimes deal with being treated a little differently. I believe that if everyone had understanding and diversity, we could eliminate being judgmental and treating us like we aren't a family. I hope that everyone that reads this will look at families differently and maybe take a new view at the world around. Everyone is different and everyone has something special about them, no matter what their family looks like."

Each of us has the opportunity to influence a child, in our families, and in our community to be a change we want to see in the world. Advocates aren't born — they are created — and if we plant the seeds of justice early, we will watch them grow into a future of acceptance and equality. 

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