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Snohomish County CASA Program Recognized by Human Rights Campaign Foundation for LGBTQ+ Inclusion Efforts

SNOHOMISH COUNTY, Wash., August 26, 2021 – Today, Snohomish County announced that the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program is being recognized in [2021 Change-Makers](#), the Human Rights Campaign Foundation’s third annual report highlighting 119 child welfare agencies across the country that have worked with the HRC Foundation’s [All Children - All Families](#) (ACAF) program to improve the services they provide to the LGBTQ+ community. This includes children in foster care, 1 in 3 of whom are LGBTQ+, and prospective foster and adoptive parents. These organizations serve more than 1 million clients annually in 35 states and employ more than 24,000 employees.

Joelle Kelly, Division Manager of the Snohomish County CASA Program, stated, “It’s an honor for our program to receive recognition as a leader for inclusivity in the LGBTQ+ community. As a program, we understand that in order to advocate for LGBTQ+ youth, who face unique challenges in the child welfare system, we must be well trained with education and resources and provide a welcoming environment for all. We are working to shatter stereotypes with open hearts to all the children and families we serve.”

“The third edition of our Change-Makers report shows that, despite the many hardships of the last year, more organizations than ever before are working alongside the Human Rights Campaign Foundation to make impactful change for the LGBTQ+ youth and families they serve,” said Alison Delpercio, Human Rights Campaign Foundation Director, All Children - All Families. “This year’s participants also demonstrated a growing commitment to intersectionality and ensuring organizational policies and practices do not reinforce the same systems of oppression that put youth and families at risk in the first place. By taking on these challenges, the change-makers featured in our 2021 report are models for youth-serving professionals everywhere.”

The announcement comes at a time when many have been sounding the alarm about the particular risks foster youth face due to [COVID-19](#). LGBTQ+ inclusion work in foster care systems is very important. Studies have shown us that LGBTQ+ youth are overrepresented in foster care, and that child welfare systems must do more to ensure that the trauma of foster care, where LGBTQ youth already face an increased risk of both negative experiences and outcomes, is never compounded by that caused by unsafe and non-affirming foster homes:

- Approximately 1 out of every 3 youth in foster care is LGBTQ+
- LGBTQ+ youth report higher rates of mistreatment while in care
- LGBTQ+ youth report more frequent placement disruptions
- LGBTQ+ youth report a higher likelihood of being placed in congregate care settings

The agencies featured in this report conducted an internal self-assessment, provided professional development to staff and implemented ACAF's "Benchmarks of LGBTQ Inclusion," which track policy and practice changes within agencies. The [2021 Change-Makers](#) report features three "Tiers of Recognition," which celebrate the progress agencies have made toward becoming fully welcoming to their LGBTQ+ clients. With 32 new participants this year, ACAF also expands the program's reach into six new states -- Alabama, Connecticut, Mississippi, Montana, New Mexico and North Carolina -- and the District of Columbia for the first time. 92% of participants met a tier of recognition, and 14 of the returning organizations advanced to a higher tier of recognition.

- **Innovative Inclusion:** 44 organizations met all 25 applicable criteria and are going beyond to innovate their services for LGBTQ+ youth and families
- **Solid Foundation for Inclusion:** 40 organizations met all 25 applicable policy and practice criteria for LGBTQ+ inclusion
- **Building Foundation for Inclusion:** 25 organizations met foundational criteria, including non-discrimination protections

The Snohomish County CASA Program earned the Building Foundation for Inclusion benchmark and is currently working towards completion of the next two tiers.

Some of the changes made by Snohomish County CASA include the following:

- Engage in training and resource opportunities to educate staff and volunteers on how to effectively advocate for LGBTQ+ youth
- Display signage in office spaces and online to affirm LGBTQ+ youth and the LGBTQ+ community
- Change the CASA volunteer application to allow individuals to share their preferred gender identity and pronouns
- Update case management software to include preferred gender identity and pronouns
- Require CASA volunteers to sign a statement of commitment acknowledging their dedication to upholding CASA's policies and procedures, which includes an expansive and inclusive nondiscrimination policy

The report features profiles of four child welfare organizations that are setting the bar for LGBTQ+ inclusion while adapting to the demands of the [COVID-19 pandemic](#) and responding to calls for an end to systemic racism -- including in child welfare: Vista Del Mar in California; Extraordinary Families in California; Texas Casa in Texas; and 360 Youth Services in Illinois. The report also features interviews with individuals who have been impacted by LGBTQ+-inclusive services, including: Manuel Padilla, a foster parent in Colorado; and Victoria, a former youth in care and now trainer at Lawrence Hall in Illinois.

Since 2007, hundreds of child welfare agencies across the U.S. have used [ACAF's](#) resources to enhance their efforts to achieve safety, permanency and well-being for LGBTQ+ youth and families. Read the full report [here](#).

About Snohomish County CASA Program

The Snohomish County CASA program is dedicated to bringing a voice to every abused and neglected child in state dependency. For details about the role of the CASA, how to apply to become a court appointed special advocate (CASA) volunteer, and upcoming training dates, visit the [CASA Website](#). For additional information, contact by email: CASA@snoco.org or by phone: (425) 388-7854.

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