



Jamie Estrada knows all too well that the fight for equity doesn't begin or end in a single month. He understands firsthand the social and emotional challenges faced by one in five youth in foster care who identify as LGBTQ+.

Jamie – a member of the LGBTQ+ community himself, who at age 12 was taken in by a loving family when his own family experienced homelessness – offers a unique perspective and a steadfast commitment to those served by the Department of Children and Family Services.

As the manager for the department's new LGBTQ+ Program within the Office of Equity Division, Jamie is just the person to advance knowledge and strengthen partnerships across the department and with community agencies that support the child welfare system.

"I really appreciate that the department is providing the opportunity for education and a space for important discussions that simply must happen regarding LGBTQ+ youth in care," said Jamie, who is also a parent to two boys whom he and his partner adopted in 2014.

Over the past several months, Jamie has been hard at work defining the program's role and exploring ways to bring greater attention to the needs of youth who identify as LGBTQ+. Among the enhancements prompted by the program are volunteer "LGBTQ+ Champions" in each of the department's 20 regional offices and program divisions who will help disseminate information and increase access to resources, such as training opportunities for staff and members of the broader community.

Expanded outreach will also be a key component of the program, and Jamie looks forward to implementing fun and educational events that can connect people to resources and provide a safe space to help them learn how to better understand and engage with LGBTQ+ youth in a supportive way.

While building the capacity of this new program will take time, Jamie's 16 years of experience – primarily in the department's Emergency Response Section – prepared him well for the task at hand. And, as he looks toward the future, he recognizes that meaningful change calls for consistent, sustained efforts by the department.

"The program's goal is not to change youth, but rather to change the behavior of those around LGBTQ+ youth," he said.



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