# Informational Letter

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| To:         | Commissioners of Social Services  
             Executive Directors of Voluntary Authorized Agencies |
| Issuing     | Strategic Planning and Policy Development |
| Division/Office: | |
| Date:       | March 25, 2016 |
| Subject:    | Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and Family Acceptance Project Release: *A Practitioner’s Resource Guide: Helping Families to Support Their LGBT Children* |
| Suggested Distribution: | Directors of Social Services  
                          Voluntary Agency Program Directors  
                          Child Welfare Supervisors  
                          Foster Care Supervisors  
                          Staff Development Coordinators  
                          Adoption Supervisors  
                          Youth Bureau Directors  
                          Directors of Detention Programs  
                          Child Advocacy Center (CAC) Staff  
                          Planning Coordinators |
| Contact Person(s): | For questions concerning this release, contact on OCFS regional office, Division of Child Welfare and Community Services:  
                          Buffalo Regional Office - Dana Whitcomb (716) 847-3145  
                          Dana.Whitcomb@ocfs.ny.gov  
                          Rochester Regional Office - Karen Buck (585) 238-8201  
                          Karen.Buck@ocfs.ny.gov  
                          Syracuse Regional Office - Sara Simon (315) 423-1200  
                          Sara.Simon@ocfs.ny.gov  
                          Albany Regional Office - Kerri Barber (518) 486-7078  
                          Kerri.Barber@ocfs.ny.gov  
                          Spring Valley Regional Office - Yolanda Désarmé (845) 708-2499  
                          Yolanda.Desarme@ocfs.ny.gov  
                          New York City Regional Office - Raymond Toomer (212) 383-1808  
                          Raymond.Toomer@ocfs.ny.gov  
                          Native American Services - Heather LaForme (716) 847-3123  
                          Heather.LaForme@ocfs.ny.gov |
| Attachments: | None |
I. Purpose

The purpose of this Informational Letter is to inform local departments of social services (LDSSs) and voluntary agencies (VAs) of the availability of A Practitioner’s Resource Guide: Helping Families to Support Their LGBT Children, a resource guide released by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the Family Acceptance Project.

II. Background

Over the past quarter-century, youth have increasingly been coming out or identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) at much earlier ages than prior generations. Emerging research indicates that families of LGBT adolescents, in accepting or rejecting the youth, have a significant impact on the youth’s health and well-being. This has led to calls for the development of proactive family-oriented approaches to support youth who identify as LGBT, including: helping parents and caregivers who react to their LGBT children with ambivalence and rejection to understand how these reactions contribute to health risks for their children, and providing accurate information on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression for parents, caregivers and practitioners in primary care, behavioral health, school-based services, family service agencies, runaway and homeless youth (RHY) programs, and foster care and juvenile justice settings.

In 2009, the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) published the Informational Letter: 09-OCFS-INF-06, Promoting a Safe and Respectful Environment for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Children and Youth in Out-of-Home Placement. OCFS continues to be committed to creating safe and affirming environments for all youth and families. In 2013, OCFS issued regulations that increase the protections afforded to LGBT individuals by prohibiting discrimination and harassment by LDSS and VA staff, volunteers, and certified or approved foster parents against applicants for adoption services, families receiving preventive services, prospective foster parents, foster parents and foster children, youth in RHY programs, and youth in detention on the basis of race, creed, color, national origin, age, sex, sexual orientation,
gender identity or expression, marital status, religion, or disability, in order to promote and maintain a safe environment for children, youth, and families whom OCFS serves.\(^1\)

A recent SAMHSA publication, *A Practitioner's Resource Guide: Helping Families to Support Their LGBT Children* is designed to help health, mental health and social service practitioners implement best practices in family-focused prevention and care for LGBT youth. The guide emphasizes the critical role of family acceptance and rejection in regard to the health and well-being of adolescents who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. It is based on current research and more than a decade of family intervention work, and is the first resource guide published by a government agency to provide core principles and research-based approaches to engage and help families support their LGBT children. The publication was prepared by Caitlin Ryan, Ph.D., ACSW, Director of the Family Acceptance Project at San Francisco State University under contract with SAMHSA, and was released in 2014.

### III. Program Implications

The guide is available in the public domain and may be reproduced or copied without permission from SAMHSA. The guide may be downloaded or ordered at:


You can also call SAMHSA at 1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727) to order the guide.

The Family Acceptance Project website can be found at:

http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/

/s/ Thomas R. Brooks

Issued By:
Name: Thomas R. Brooks
Title: Deputy Commissioner
Division/Office: Strategic Planning and Policy Development

\(^1\) 9 NYCRR 180.5(a)(6), 182-1.5(g)(1) and 182-2.5(g)(1), and 18 NYCRR 421.3(d), 423.4(m)(7), 441.19(d) and 441.24.