



FOURTH ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM ON FAIRNESS & EQUITY ISSUES IN CHILD WELFARE TRAINING

Regional Presentation: Bay Area Academy **The Shortest Distance Between Two People Is a Story: LGBTQ Youth Digital Stories of Foster Care**

Jamie Lee Evans, *Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project Coordinator*; George Del Rio, *Trainer*; Kevin West, *Trainer*; and Susan Manzi, *Trainer*

Summary of Presentation

April 27, 2006

The presentation began with the showing of four digital stories, created through the Y.O.U.T.H. (Youth Offering Unique Tangible Help) Training Project.* The digital stories are utilized to train social workers to improve their ability to support transitioning youth. The stories are made by, and are about, former foster care youth. Following the digital stories, each youth trainer described their foster care experience more fully and provided recommendations. Their key points are as follows:

Susan Manzi:

- Know that queer foster youth have more to deal with than just queer issues.
- Sexual abuse doesn't make someone queer.
- Try to ensure that there is tolerance; do not consider homophobic placements.
Homophobia is prevalent.
- Remember that everyone goes through their own sexual identity process and try not to assume anything.
- Provide fair and equitable treatment. The agency needs to start from the inside with its own employment practices.

George Del Rio:

- Treat youth like human beings.
- Don't give up hope.

* <http://www.youthtrainingproject.org/>

- People need to work together.
- Trauma support groups for youth would be beneficial.
- Encourage higher education.

Kevin West:

- Form a relationship with your youth and be an ally.
- Do not let your personal beliefs interfere with your ability to help support youth.
- Do not work from a place of ignorance. LGBTQ youth do not need to be separated from other youth in group homes and should not be forced to dress or behave in certain ways.
- Help youth find and maintain permanent connections.

Jamie Lee Evans:

- Do not compare lesbian and gay sexuality to drug addiction and alcoholism.
- Be aware that homophobia still exists.
- We cannot have any homophobic placements. It is not okay for any children. “Whether you are gay or straight, being put into a home full of hate is not a good thing.”
- When you are developing curriculum think about not only being an ally but also resisting objectification.