



Coalition des familles homoparentales

NEWSLETTER - VOLUME X- No. II – December 2008

An Important Project

By Mona Greenbaum

LGBT Family Coalition Executive Director

When it comes to speaking about their family situation with friends and at school, most of our children must still navigate with caution. Almost all the primary and high school kids that I know choose very carefully whom they speak to about having gay or lesbian parents. Their closest friends might know but most others are kept in the dark. Even in the most progressive schools, our kids still hear homophobic insults every day in the schoolyard, in the lockers and in gym class. “Faggot”, “gay” and “lesbo” are such commonly used insults that there’s no surprise that our kids don’t feel comfortable talking about “mommy and maman” or “papa and daddy”. They certainly don’t feel proud.

Meanwhile, many of the people who work with our kids know nothing about our families. Although some people on the school staff may be relatively open-minded about our families, many have doubts. Wouldn’t it be great if all that research that has been carried out on our families became general knowledge? After all, serious researchers no longer even study whether or not our children develop normally or if gays and lesbians can parent. That was determined long ago.

The situation in Quebec’s primary schools with respect to our families is what prompted the Coalition, in November 2007, to submit a grant application to Quebec’s Ministry of Education. Our goal was to educate and sensitize the professionals working with our families (school staff, medical and social services personnel, etc.) to our realities. We proposed a 2-part approach. First of all, a 3-hour workshop to deconstruct the myths and stereotypes around our families and to motivate people to act. Second a “toolbox” full of information, activities and resources to help professionals deal with homophobia in their institutions (especially in the schools) and to work toward including our families.

We succeeded. Last March we had confirmation that we received close to \$100,000 to carry out this project.

Here are some of its main elements:

1. Our workshop is similar to that of GRIS-Montreal in that it will be given by a duo of presenters. But for us it will be pairs of parents (or future parents) – ideally a lesbian mom and a gay dad. And our target audience is adults (not kids). We will go to primary schools, or other institutions, to sensitize teachers, principals, daycare staff, social workers, etc to the reality of our families. For now we will only be carrying out a French version of this workshop, but the English version is in our future plans. Our workshop will be adaptable to various audience sizes, though the ideal is around 10-15 people.
2. We are working with UQAM and McGill University to learn how to clearly communicate the results of 35 years of research about our families in a way that non-experts will be able to easily understand. In this way,

professionals working with our families will be able to overcome some of their stereotypes (ex: Our kids will be gay; A family needs one parent of each gender; Our kids won't have a normal gender development; Gay couples are unstable, etc.). They will also become motivated to become more inclusive of our families and to fight homophobia and heterosexism in their institutions.

3. Each institution will receive, for free, a lot of material (including lesson plans, best practices guide, posters, lists of books and videos, etc) to help them work against homophobia and toward inclusion.
4. We are currently working on filming video testimonies of children, parents and teachers, to help bring our families out of the invisibility that usually surrounds us. Our filming is taking place in 6 regions of Quebec. These clips will be used in our workshops to help professionals understand our and our children's real experiences.

How can you get involved?

If you are at all interested in helping us to make this project work you can get involved in a number of ways:

1. Become a presenter: You can go into schools or other institutions and have a real impact on the people who work with our kids. In 3-4 sessions we will teach you how to become a presenter. Presenters must attend all training sessions and be willing to carry out at least 2 real workshops. Each time you carry out a workshop you will receive a \$100 honorarium to cover your expenses (missed working hours, babysitting fees, etc).
2. Book a gig for us: We will begin carrying out workshops starting in September 2009. If you know of a school or other institution that may be interested in learning about our families and becoming more inclusive, you can help us to book the gig! It may even be your own child's school!!
3. Help us to raise funds. \$100,000 may seem like a lot of money but it sure goes fast. If you know of a business that would be willing to sponsor our project let us know. We can't issue tax receipts, but we can offer publicity for companies who sponsor us on our web site, in our newsletter or even within the workshop.

For those of you who are interested in becoming future presenters we will be holding training sessions in Quebec City and in Montreal. Workshops will take place throughout Quebec. Please contact us as soon as possible if you would like to have more information on how to become a presenter. If you know of an institution that would be interested in participating in our workshop please let us know as well. We are putting together a promotion package for you to use to help advertise our services. And finally we will be putting together a package as well to seek sponsors for our project. For all information regarding the project please call Mona at 514-846-1543

Interested in writing for our newsletter? Send your articles at any time to info@familleshomoparentales.org or by post to CFH, 2401 Coursol, Montreal, Quebec, H3J 1C8

News Briefs: September - November 2008

Montreal and Quebec News

September 6 (Montreal, Quebec) The federal government overstepped its authority when it drafted laws on assisted human reproduction, the Quebec Court of Appeal has ruled. In a 53-page judgment, the court said dozens of federal provisions on clinical and research activities are unconstitutional because they encroach on provincial jurisdictions. Appellate court justices determined that assisted reproduction should be considered a health matter as opposed to a criminal justice issue regulated by Parliament.

The federal law on assisted human reproduction was passed in 2004 and bans human cloning and the buying and selling of human embryos. It also sets out guidelines for in vitro fertilization and the licensing of fertility clinics.

The Quebec government had asked the appeals court to review the law, believing parts of it should be under its control. The court agreed, ruling 22 articles aimed to regulate "an entire area of medical practice," a task usually left to the provinces. Quebec's Health Department has often complained that Health Canada was on its turf by controlling elements of the assisted human reproduction industry. Health Minister Philippe Couillard even tabled a bill last year to create provincial norms for clinical and research activities.

Quebec's *Commission de l'éthique, de la science et de la technologie* was asked by the provincial ministry of Health (MSSS) in 2007 to carry out a public consultation on issues related to reproductive technologies and the well-being of children who were born as the result of a gamete donation. Dr Karine Igartua, the director of the McGill University Sexual Identity Centre, in collaboration with the LGBT Family Coalition, presented a brief to the commission related to the well-being of children in families with gay and lesbian parents. Her brief was presented in Montreal on **September 26th**. The commission also carried out an on-line survey in September to assess public opinion on questions relating to children conceived via gamete donation or surrogacy.

The result of these reflections, as well as the commission's recommendations will be published in the winter of 2009 and will inform the drafting of legislation on assisted human reproduction.

October 27, 2008 (Montreal, Quebec) In the presence of a number of Quebec's political personalities, artists and community organisers, the 5th edition of the Gala Arc-en-ciel was held on at the Lion d'or in Montreal. The *Conseil des gais et lesbiennes du Québec* recognized the contribution of individuals and community organisations throughout Quebec. The LGBT Family Coalition was awarded the prize attributed to an organization that has contributed to the advancement of the LGBT community. The guest of honour, Ms. Louise Arbour, former Chief Prosecutor at the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague and United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights from 2004 to 2008, was awarded First Prize of the Conseil quebécois des gais et lesbiennes 2008 for her outstanding involvement in defending, promoting and insuring the respect of human rights, in particular the rights of gay, lesbians, bisexual, transexual and transgender people both in Québec and world-wide.

Canadian News

October 20, 2008 (Toronto, Ontario) A man facing first-degree murder charges for allegedly spreading the virus that causes AIDS saw his case go before a jury in what's believed to be the first prosecution of its kind in Canada. Johnson Aziga, 52, has spent five years in pre-trial custody while cycling through several legal teams. Two women died after allegedly having unprotected sex with him.

“It’s going to be a landmark case,” Aziga’s lawyer, Davies Bagambiire, said in an interview. “This is the first time that a Canadian is prosecuted for alleged murder through the alleged dissemination or transmission of the HIV virus.”

Aziga, a former research analyst with Ontario’s Ministry of the Attorney General, has pleaded not guilty to two counts of first-degree murder and 11 counts of aggravated sexual assault. Alison Symington, with the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, said the case is significant but adds the allegations against Aziga are rare.

“There are 60,000 people living with HIV in Canada,” said Symington. “These are very rare cases indeed, but there’s so much attention to them and so much misinformation and panic around them that it really kind of increases stigma and discrimination, which ultimately may be counterproductive. The best way to protect the public is to educate them so that HIV-positive people feel comfortable disclosing their status to sexual partners. Condoms, disclosure: that’s going to prevent transmission. Criminal charges aren’t.”

October 24, 2008 (British Columbia) A class action lawsuit has been filed by Olivia Pratten, the representative plaintiff, on behalf of all people in the province of British Columbia conceived via anonymous sperm, egg and embryo donation or what is called “gamete donation”. It is believed to be the first time a case of this sort has been brought forward by donor offspring in Canada. The lawsuit is against the Attorney General of British Columbia and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia.

The lawsuit claims that the present law discriminates against persons who were conceived as a result of gamete donation. By contrast, adopted children have, by law, certain legal rights and opportunities to know about their biological parents that children conceived by way of gamete donation simply do not enjoy. The lawsuit is based on the guarantees of equality and security of the person in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The lawsuit seeks the immediate and ultimately the permanent protection and preservation of all files related to the practice of gamete donation in the province of British Columbia. Currently all information from health to identifying information about the gamete donor, can be destroyed at whim by the practicing physician after six years. One woman included in the suit already had her files destroyed.

In 2001, Pratten was told that her biological father was healthy and that a “verbal medical check had been done.” The physician, Dr. Korn, gave the minimal information of height, weight and hair color on a piece of hotel stationery.

“The issue of protecting the files and having my right to access their full and complete information is one of principle to me. I’m tired of having to explain or defend my desire and my right to know this information,” said Pratten.

Pratten, along with others in the suit, have attempted to gain information and access of vital health information from various physicians in BC who practiced donor insemination. No one has managed to obtain information and many have been told that the files are destroyed or will be destroyed if further action was taken.

Once destroyed, a person born by way of a donor cannot get the medical or social history of a donor, and cannot learn crucial components of their identity such as racial, cultural, religious and linguistic history, which may cause psychological distress, the legal action claims.

Gay Marriage - A Time Line

August 25th (New York City) A conservative Christian group, the American Family Association, urges its members to write to Hallmark Greeting Cards to complain about the company's new same-sex wedding cards. Hallmark unveiled the cards after California joined Massachusetts as the only U.S. state with legal gay marriage. A handful of other states have recognized same-sex civil unions.

September 29 (Athens) About a hundred gays and lesbians demonstrate in front of the **Greek** Parliament to denounce a court challenge by the government to the country's first same-sex marriages. The government has filed a court motion to have the marriages of a gay couple and a lesbian couple declared invalid. In June, Mayor Tasos Aliferis performed the weddings on the island of Rhodes. Hundreds of friends of the couples turned out for the ceremonies, as did dozens of curious townsfolk and the media.

October 10 - The **Connecticut** Supreme Court issues its ruling in *Kerrigan v. Commissioner of Public Health*, the equal marriage case allowing same-sex couples to marry. Connecticut is the 3rd state to allow gay marriage.

October 10 (Oslo) Although same-sex marriage will become legal in **Norway** in January, the Church of Norway votes not to allow its pastors to perform church weddings. The decision follows what is reported to have been a heated debate in the Council of Bishops.

October 10 (Lisbon) **Portugal's** Parliament votes by a large majority against proposals to allow same-sex marriages in the mostly Roman Catholic country. The governing Socialist Party and the main opposition Social Democratic Party both oppose legalizing gay and lesbian marriages.

The proposals came from two minor opposition parties, the Left Bloc and the Green Party, which argued that the Portuguese Constitution grants equal rights for all and protection against discrimination.

November 4 (San Francisco, California) Voters in the American presidential election are also asked to vote on questions of gay rights in a number of states.

Californian voters choose to ban same-sex marriage, months after it was legalized by the state's top court. California's legal approval had seen thousands of gay couples wed there since May. State Attorney General Jerry Brown has said those marriages will remain valid. Legal challenges to the measure, known as Proposition 8, are likely.

Similar bans on same-sex marriage are approved by voters in Florida and Arizona; while in Arkansas the electorate endorses a measure to prevent same-sex couples from adopting.

November 6 (California) The passage of Proposition 8 stirs anger, protests, lawsuits and a deep sense of loss among gays in California. At least three legal challenges are filed and others are being prepared, ban opponents say.

More than 1,000 people take to the streets against the ban in Los Angeles and West Hollywood, blocking traffic. Hundreds also gather on the steps of San Francisco's City Hall.

It was unclear what will happen to the estimated 18,000 gay and lesbian couples, many from other states, who married after same-sex marriage was legalized in California in June.

November 6 (Stockholm, Sweden) Swedish Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt says legislation allowing

Because we want this to be an LGBT- only course we need to know how many people can commit to a full weekend day at the end of January or beginning of February 2009 and then reserve in advance. The cost of this course is \$48 for individuals and \$91 / couple

If you are interested and available please let me know, **before December 15th**, so that I can reserve a space for you. You can contact me at **514-846-1543** or by e-mail at **info@familleshomoparentales.org**

FEBRUARY 2009:

□ THURSDAY FEBRUARY 19TH at 7:30 p.m..

PART 4: PARENTING COURSE: THE KNOWN DONOR (FOR WOMEN)

Some of us choose to ask a friend or acquaintance to be our donor. What were the reasons behind this choice ? What type of health screening is necessary if the inseminations are to be carried out at home ? How can safe-sex practices be negotiated during the insemination period ? Will the donor be available for inseminations when we need him ? Should he be present at the birth ? Whether our donors are involved or not they are still part of ours and our children's world. Come and meet moms who have chosen known donors and find out how it all works ?
Guest Speakers : Susie Mintzberg and Nathalie Tremblay

Location: UQAM 320 Ste Catherine East (Métro Berri), Room DS-2901

See attached flier for details on this series for future parents and parents with young children.

BULLETIN BOARD:

◆ Nous recherchons un **5 1/2 (ou +) au rez-de-chaussé**, accès à la cour, quartier paisible, idéalement dans un de ces quartiers: centre-sud de l'arrondissement Ville-Marie et l'arrondissement Plateau-Mont-Royal.

SVP contactez Melodie Paquette et Sylvie Roy au melodiepaq@hotmail.com

◆ **Le Centre des femmes de Rivière-des-Prairies ! 514-648-1030** - Nous sommes ouvertes aux lesbiennes ! Si vous avez besoin de plus d'informations vous pouvez consulter notre site web : www.cdfrdp.qc.ca ainsi que le site de notre regroupement : www.rcentres.qc.ca/propos.html

◆ **L'association des lesbiennes aux femin'elles:** L'Association lesbienne vous invite à ses soirées le deuxième et le quatrième mardi du mois, de 19h à 21h30 au CLSC situé au 411, Hotel Dieu à **Chicoutimi**. Ces rencontres ont comme but de briser l'isolement et s'adressent aux femmes lesbiennes qui désirent socialiser en compagnie d'autres femmes lesbiennes, afin de permettre un échange positif. Au plaisir de vous rencontrer! Informations: **418-550-2259**.

◆ **L'Écho des femmes de la Petite Patrie** est un centre de femmes qui offre des rencontres pour lesbiennes. Ces rencontres ont lieu les lundis soirs aux deux semaines de 19h00 à 21h30, et sont animées par une personne ressource. Ces rencontres, qui se veulent un lieu d'échange, de ressourcement et d'information, s'intéressent aux réalités et aux conditions de vie des lesbiennes. Les rencontres sont en français. Un service de halte-garderie est disponible avec réservation faite une semaine à l'avance. Le

centre est situé au **6032 St-Hubert (métro Beaubien)**. Téléphone (514)277-7445, télécopieur (514)277-1689

MISCELLANEOUS

♦ **Traducteurs, redacteurs, etc:** We are looking for volunteers to help translate this newsletter from English to French. Any contribution (even 1-2 pages a month) would be appreciated. If you are available and willing, **please contact us at: info@familleshomoparentales.org**

♦ **Batshaw Youth and Family Centres** is encouraging English speaking and bilingual gay and lesbian couples, and singles, to consider becoming **foster parents**. There are babies, pre-schoolers and older children who are waiting for a foster home. For some the plan will be to help them return to their families. For other children, the plan will be to work toward **adoption**. What a remarkable feeling it is to know you have made a difference in the life of a child by providing a stable, safe and loving environment. For more information, please call, **Rena Rubin, Foster Care Recruiter, at 932-7161, local 416, or send an e-mail to rena_rubin@ssss.gouv.qc.ca**.

♦ The **Open Book Library's** collection includes over 5500 books written by glbt authors or by authors who write about our communities. Some of these books are for children and adolescents. We are very proud that approximately half of our collection is in French. Much more information as well as online consultation of the book collection is available at our Web site www.ccglm.org/en-b. We are located at **2075 Plessis (CCGLM)** in the Village. Come visit us! Open Wednesdays and Fridays from 1-8 p.m. (514) 528-8424.

The bulletin board is a free forum for members to communicate amongst each other. If you want to post an announcement in the next issue please send it to us at any time to info@familleshomoparentales.org or by post to CFH, 2401 Coursol, Montreal, Quebec, H3J 1C8. If you have something to advertise, sell, rent or buy...anything where money must change hands, you can place an ad in the newsletter. Ads cost 20 cents per word.

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