

University of Maryland School of Social Work Awarded Grant to Improve Placement and Stability for LGBTQ Children and Youth in Foster Care

The Institute for Innovation and Implementation, at the University of Maryland School of Social Work (UMSSW), has entered into a cooperative agreement to establish a National Quality Improvement Center on Tailored Services, Placement Stability and Permanency for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Children and Youth in Foster Care (LGBTQ QIC). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families' [Children's Bureau](#) has awarded \$10,000,000 to be distributed over five-years.

The intent of this project is to work with 4-6 sites nationally, in partnership with state child welfare systems, to implement promising and evidence-based practices that improve placement stability, well-being, and permanency. These culturally responsive interventions will be designed to enhance staff, caregiver, and provider knowledge, skills, and competency in providing safe, affirming and supportive environments for LGBTQ youth in foster care.

[Marlene Matarese](#), PhD, Principal Investigator, expressed gratitude to the Children's Bureau for "continuing to prioritize the needs of LGBTQ children and youth." She said, "We have seen too many youth who identify as LGBTQ in the child welfare system without a plan for permanency, connections to people who unconditionally care about them, or supports that are designed to be responsive to their unique needs. I'm thrilled to have the opportunity to be part of changing this trajectory and fostering a culturally responsive workforce, and evidence based-services and supports for LGBTQ youth in foster care."

LGBTQ children and youth in foster care face a unique set of challenges such as: harassment by peers in child welfare settings, discomfort or rejection among foster parents and agency staff, and a lack of services to meet their specific needs. There is a notable cycle of system involvement and lack of permanency for youth who leave or are removed from their family home as a result of maltreatment related to their sexual orientation and gender identity.

"This opportunity to deepen our capacity to assist sexual and gender minority youth involved with child welfare services offers enormous possibilities. I am very proud to have the leadership in Marlene Matarese and amazing partners who will realize every bit of this opportunity to help transform the way child welfare works," said UMSSW Dean, [Richard Barth](#).

Among the SSW faculty and staff members who will contribute to the LGBTQ QIC are the SSW's principal investigator [Marlene Matarese](#), PhD with [Elizabeth Greeno](#), PhD, who will be the lead evaluator. [Jill Farrell](#), PhD, [Sara Betsinger](#), PhD, [Rachel Beaudry](#), MSW and [Whitney Burton](#), MSW will also be leading aspects of the LGBTQ QIC along with senior advisors [Bethany Lee](#), PhD and [Nancy Dickinson](#), PhD.

Also participating as core partners in the LGBTQ QIC are national experts including: Christopher Bellonci, MD (Tufts University); Johanna Bergan, and Brianne Masselli (Youth M.O.V.E. National); Terry Cross, PhD and Puneet Sahota, MD (National Indian Child Welfare Association); Kathy Lazear, MA and Sheila Pires, MPA (Human Services Collaborative); and Gerald Peterson, MA and Jessie Fullenkamp, LMSW (Ruth Ellis Center).

"I am excited and honored for The Institute to host the Quality Improvement Center. I know the work of this Center will impact children and youth in our child welfare systems and look forward to changes in practice and policy that will happen because of this work," [Michelle Zabel](#), MSS, Assistant Dean and Director of the Institute for Innovation and Implementation.