

Grapevine

NEWSLETTER OF THE LESBIAN MOTHERS' DEFENCE FUND
Toronto, Calgary & Montreal, Canada

SPRING 1984

Salute to the children: voices in the schools

by JEANNE

Recently, a reporter from the *Globe and Mail* called the Lesbian Mothers' Defence Fund to ask if he could interview some of our kids. He met with two young children and two teenagers at my place. They chose their own pseudonyms—and spoke openly.

Their message was pretty clear. "She's my mother. I don't care if she's a lesbian." Nineteen-year-old 'Cindy' summed it up well: "People get so hung up on labels. She was my mother before and she's still my mom. If anything has changed, I think we've become a lot closer, more open with one another.... I don't see what all the fuss is about."

Women who work with the Defence Fund keep pushing to educate the public, the courts, their ex-spouses and families that motherhood is our right along with the right of sexual choice.

My own children who are seven and nine maintain Cindy's philosophy. "What's the big deal? Lesbians are just like everyone else." I might add, with a wink, *but better!* That's because I feel such pride in the children of the LMDF. A lot of these kids are involved in custody disputes. Some are fed up with being asked by professionals how they feel about having a mother who's a dyke. Sometimes their opinions aren't even heard, and yet the battles go on.

One subsection in the *Globe* article was titled, "Gay parents don't raise timid kids." I don't know if we adults are totally responsible for that. I think the children develop guts on their own; they're aware of queer jokes and the difference between the myths surrounding homosexuality and what's real in their lives. Facing that difference in itself takes courage which is seldom recognized outside our own community.

Most of our children don't spend a whole lot of time talking about what life's like with a lesbian mother, so I didn't really expect the insightful answers they gave to the reporter's questions, or the seriousness they showed when explaining people's ignorance, and the frustration they feel because society puts their mothers in a taboo category. As I listened, I thought, 'they're strong and they're able to meet a challenge head on.'

Some time before this article appeared I knew my daughter had confided to some friends that I'm a lesbian. When her teacher found out she met with my daughter to tell her she thought it was perfectly okay and if anyone teased



her about it to let her know. I felt really good about her support and sent a note of thanks, enclosing copies of the *Grapevine*.

The school my kids attend has a number of other kids from gay households. They meet each other in the schoolyard, grinning with a sigh of relief that they aren't alone and are — finally — blowing apart the myth of the traditional nuclear family as the only lifestyle around.

As a lesbian mother I wanted my kids to have the power to tell whomever they felt like telling. I didn't want them to have their choices taken away by my being totally public. It was a real surprise to me to realize my kids were educating their schoolmates on their own initiative.

My seven-year-old responded to teasing about her "boyfriend" that she was going to be a lesbian like her mom when she grew up, so marriage wasn't in her plans. The child she was talking to told his mom this news. And she called the school to

complain. I met with the teacher, and am now trying to curb my daughter's politics a bit!

At the same school an eight-year-old girl stood up in her class to announce that her father was going to be on TV as a gay parent, and that they should all watch the show — they did!

In my older daughter's Grade 4/5 class a gay student teacher came out in the course of a dialogue that he and the regular teacher had planned. Everyone had a chance to ask him about what being gay is, and about some of the problems facing gay people. My daughter added points from her own experience. That night she told me, "My student teacher is gay — he told us. He knows about the LMDF. I was so proud!" and "Someone in my class thought a homosexual is someone who shaves his head! No way — I told him!"

This discussion wasn't approved by the principal beforehand (as Toronto Board of Education guidelines require), so when some parents went wild upon learning about it, I felt I should write a letter in support of both teachers. Later I found out that reactions received were two to one in favour of the teachers!

The issue at the school is fading now, and life goes on. It's just sometimes rather inspiring for me to realize that with children's busy lives, every so often they take time out, stand up and talk about the issue, really get people listening, clear up a few myths, and then return to their own activities. That, to me, takes guts!

More on gays and the schools on pages 4 & 5

The (Toronto) Lesbian Mothers' Defence Fund was set up five years ago to provide assistance to mothers who are fighting for child custody or visiting rights, and as a peer counselling support group for all lesbian mothers. We can offer:

- Pre-legal advice and info on successful cases
- Referrals to sympathetic, expert lawyers
- Financial help in building a strong court case
- Personal and emotional support

Reports from Canada's LMDFs:

Calgary

A lot of our energy has been going into the International Women's Day Committee's speakers series. The series ran from September to February, and in coalition with other community groups, we covered the following areas: pornography, women in Nicaragua (with Margaret Randall), women's health issues (at a weekend conference), militarism and the effects of violent toys on children, lesbianism, and working women.

The Calgary LMDF facilitated the discussion around lesbianism. We encouraged both heterosexual women and lesbians to attend, and had about 35 women turn out. Only about a half dozen were heterosexual, which led us to try to set up workshops within different women's groups, to reduce some of the frightening aspects of coming to an outside workshop that some women mentioned to us afterwards. At this time, we have a meeting scheduled with a birthing group, and with the Sexual Assault Center. We are hoping to set up several more as well.

At the IWD series workshop we covered several main areas, similar to those we will be touching on at future workshops. We tried to draw connections between different forms of discrimination and prejudice — both in how they arise, and in how they are experienced by the people they're directed at. For instance, we discussed how racial prejudice can lead a person of color to internalize a lot of negative stereotypes about herself, leading her to believe that she's not a worthwhile person, not worthy of respect or love, or of a decent job and life. It can lead her to act in ways which aren't in her best interest, or in the best interest of other people of color. Similarly, a woman who is becoming aware of her lesbianism, will have to deal with society's message about gays. She will have to figure out if what they say about us is true: that we're sick, perverted, immoral, unfit to raise children, deserving of society's scorn and disgust. Some women never come to terms with the lies. They never learn to love themselves, to turn their anger against those who lie and oppress us, instead of inwardly against themselves.

.... Another area we explored was lesbian participation in the women's movement since feminism's beginnings. Lesbianism has always been hotly discussed by women, both in and out of the women's movement. Many women feel that it is too scary for heterosexual women to have lesbians visible at events, that it keeps women from joining the movement because of their fear of the "leaping lesbian." Obviously it is not in a man's best interest to encourage women to see each other, even as friends, and certainly not as potential lovers. We are threatening to men, and they have made that very apparent in their promotion and preservation of negative myths about lesbians. But, if we tone our presence down, if we let ourselves become invisible again, what is the effect?

Many women feel that the right to choice in sexual orientation is just as critical a choice for *all* women as choice in other areas of our lives. Many lesbians work on abortion issues even though it's unlikely that we will need one personally. Similarly, many feel that heterosexual feminists should work for lesbian rights, for choice in that area. We talked a bit about how lesbian rights

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would also benefit heterosexual women, in opening up their choices around sexuality. Lesbians have done our fair share of work in this area, and have certainly contributed to the growing move to redefine women's sexuality, so that more women feel entitled to make their own decisions about whom to sleep with, when, and under what conditions.

...And we spent some time during the workshop talking about how we deal with the pressures that are on us, because of our lesbianism. Some felt that if we can ignore it, that's the best way to deal with it, while others felt that we shouldn't have to be subjected either to sexist jokes and comments or homophobic ones. We realized that we each survive in the best way we can, and that sometimes we have to just support each other's choices and try to work together towards a time when no woman will have to put up with what we have to now.

.... In addition to doing workshops, we are exploring the possibilities of doing a film or video this summer about the group, and about lesbians in general. We are looking both at funding sources, and at what volunteers are available over the summer to work on a project like this. We are also trying to find funding for paid people, so we will have to see how it goes. We would like to see something like *In the Best Interests of the Children* (a US-made film on lesbian mothers), insofar as it attacks many of the negative myths about lesbians. We are looking for input into this project, both in helping out with the jobs involved and in ideas for the material, so if you are interested, please give us a call.

.... The liaison group between the gay and lesbian community and the police — in which some of us are active — is taking shape. The police are using the resources of the group to put together a training video for police recruits and officers. This tape should give the officers some insight and understanding into our lives. The gay portion of the liaison group is gathering information and hoping to put together a sort of kit to be able to bring to the gay community. The kit's shape or form is uncertain at this time, but it would include information about our rights, what to do in certain situations, and other important issues gays and lesbians are concerned about when dealing with the police.

Lynn Fraser, for the Alberta LMDF

Montreal

L'association des meres lesbiennes de Quebec is holding regular meetings to which we invite local women. We are concentrating, as we reported in the last *Grapevine*, on outreach — to let French-speaking lesbian mothers know that we exist as a social forum and support group. Any volunteers, too, would be most welcome!

Carolle

In eastern Canada, contact:
Lesbian Mothers' Defence Fund
PO Box 38, Station E
Toronto, Ontario M6H 4E1
416/465-6822

L'association des meres lesbiennes de Quebec
CP 222, Succ. De Lorimier
Montreal, Quebec H2H 2N6
514/524-1040 (Monday evenings)

In western Canada:
Alberta Lesbian Mothers' Defence Fund
#124, 320-5 Avenue S.E.
Calgary, Alberta T2G 0E5
403/264-6328

Custody news

Canada

The cases we're reporting in this issue are only typical in that they show what a roller-coaster gay parents can expect when fighting for custody. Humane and unprejudiced reasoning by a judge in one case may be utterly ignored by another in the same province a year later. Or, a case may be won for all the wrong reasons, making it hard to decide if it's a victory or a loss. Anything can happen. It's important to remember that ten years ago that wasn't true; then we knew we would probably lose. Now, though we may have to fight for every inch of ground over and over, we can count more lesbian mothers every year who succeed in keeping their children and the right to choose whom to love.

Last month (March 1984) the Supreme Court of British Columbia gave custody of her children — 15, 14 and 4 — to Susanne E., who only a few weeks earlier had lost custody of all three.

The original decision seems to have been based solely on Susanne's lesbianism. The second, granting her application to vary that order, was based on two "changes in circumstances" which took place between hearings: 1) Susanne had moved away from her lesbian lover into an apartment of her own (it's not clear if she has ended the relationship); and, 2) a Child Advocate, appointed by the court, filed a report strongly supporting the children's wish to be with their mother.

Justice McDonnell said, "The views of the children, particularly children 14½ and 15½ ... are very important, because we all know from our experience that custody will not work with a teenage child or children that refuse to stay or do not wish to stay with the parent [to] whom custody has been ordered The other factor that is a change that is significant is that the unhealthy relationship or possibly so between the mother and the lady that she had an affair with has ceased, at least to the extent that they are no longer in the same home. This is a definite factor that is a change because Mr. Justice Trainor, of course, found as part of the basis for his judgment, this relationship."

The presumptions, in this decision, that lesbian relationships are "unhealthy" and that co-habitation with a lesbian lover is a legitimate bar to custody, are particularly offensive in light of the ground-breaking 1982 British Columbia Family Court decision awarding custody to a lesbian grandmother. In that case the judge found in favour of the grandmother in part because her live-in lover was "more of the mother figure" to the child in dispute than anyone else involved. His relative freedom from prejudice appears to have made no impression on his colleague.

The bottom line is that Susanne and her children are reunited. We hope she can put her life together again soon, without dreading the consequences of choices that *should* be hers alone to make.

* * * * *

Diane and Lisa (not their real names) in Nova Scotia have survived a harrowing contested divorce. Lisa's husband constantly threatened to fight for custody. In fact, it was only a few days before the court date that he withdrew his petition, perhaps to prevent Lisa from divulging information about his past behavior. Diane and Lisa had meanwhile undergone exhaustive preparations for a full-blown battle, including a psychiatric evaluation, in order to counter his allegation that Lisa's lesbianism makes her unfit to raise her children. Diane had moved out of the home she and Lisa shared, on Diane's lawyer's advice.

The divorce was granted and custody of Lisa's two children

remains with her. Diane was present throughout and was asked on the stand if she and Lisa are "involved in a homosexual relationship." Both women were truthful all along about their relationship, and they intend to start living together again very soon.

Lisa's children have been close to Diane for years. They are already a family. Now we hope they can go on with their lives in peace. Congratulations from all of us!

(The costs incurred in preparing for this case are about \$3,000. Diane and Lisa have already paid most of that. They need your help, in whatever amount you can afford, to pay the rest. Please send a cheque or money order to the LMDF, PO Box 38, Station E, Toronto, Ontario M4K 1E8, with a note earmarking it for Diane and Lisa.)

* * * * *

The three cases in Toronto and Oshawa that we described in last fall's *Grapevine* (Hope, Val and Marilyn) are all approaching resolution. We may be able to report the outcome of all of them in our summer issue.

USA

In August 1984 a Fairfax County, Virginia judge decided to uphold a joint custody arrangement between a gay father and his ex-wife who was suing for sole custody. This is the first time a Virginia court has awarded custody privileges to an openly gay parent.

The mother argued that the relationship between her ex-husband and his lover would have a damaging effect on their 8-year-old daughter. Judge Richard Jamborsky disagreed. "In this particular case there is no competent evidence that the father's conduct has had an adverse impact on the child." But he stipulated that the father may not share "the same bed or bedroom with any male lover or friend while the child is present in the home."

The father will continue to have primary custody during the school year.

From Gay Community News, Boston MA, November 1983

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Confronting the schools: Lesbian/gay youth and parents launch fight

There's a new alliance at work in Toronto which may achieve what seemed a few months ago to be a far-distant goal. The Lesbian Mothers' Defence Fund, Lesbian & Gay Youth Toronto and the Gay Fathers of Toronto have been working together (with the help of the Coalition for Gay Rights in Ontario and the Metropolitan Community Church) to prepare two strong briefs and what turned out to be an impressive delegation to the Toronto Board of Education's Advisory Committee on Sex Education.

The Advisory Committee has been meeting since last fall with an eye to formulating changes to both the Ontario Ministry of Education's and the Board of Education's guidelines on the sex education and family life curricula for all grade levels.

Some members of that Committee hope its final report will recommend inclusion of references to abortion, domestic violence and homosexuality within the Ministry's guidelines — subjects so far untouched in the government's outline of material which is *required* to be discussed in the classroom.

The Board of Education's own guidelines for the intermediate and senior levels *do* include some acknowledgment of the existence of homosexuality in general. But because the issue is not included in the overarching Ministry guidelines, teachers have the option — which most employ — of ignoring it altogether, either because of personal aversion, or fear of hostility from parents.

The exclusion of homosexuality from the government guidelines also means that teachers at the primary level are supposed to have their principal's approval before opening a discussion on homosexuality. And teachers in the upper grades are expected to seek an okay before bringing in a lesbian or gay speaker. These procedures underline the reluctance of the government and the Board to treat homosexuality as an appropriate subject for open examination at *any* age.



Women in the LMDF have an intense interest in this issue, both on behalf of their children, who are made to feel there's something bad in a subject that never seems to see the light of day in school, and in remembrance of their own experience as children and teenagers, when a few unbiased words about lesbianism might have made a difference in the choices they made.

We worked painstakingly to write a very short summary of our ideas about the importance of including homosexuality in the Ministry guidelines and expanding and improving the Board's few references to gay people and resources on

homosexuality. Then we met with the gay fathers to rework the brief to include any concerns of theirs that we might have missed. And we worked with LGYT to learn about their experiences in school and what they thought had to change. Jeanne, from the LMDF, pulled it all together, including powerful supplementary letters from individual LGYT-ers.

On April 5th we had our chance to show the Board that we are everywhere. Twenty-five of us, including five young children, attended the Advisory Committee's meeting to present our briefs, answer questions and amplify our arguments.

We met with a warmer and more interested Committee than we had let ourselves hope. They were especially struck by the strong impromptu stories told by the Lesbian and Gay Youth members about their isolation, and their realistic hopelessness about their teachers being any source of information or understanding.

There is certainly opposition on the Committee, as well as support. And if we succeed in persuading them to support our recommendations in their report next fall, we're by no means assured of a favourable hearing from the Ontario government.

But all of us who worked together relished the process itself — the construction of briefs and a delegation that represented our real selves and concerns so directly. We feel we've laid essential ground for someday soon winning recognition in the schools as people with dignity, legitimate needs and a strong community (you could say family) to back up our demands.

Francie Wyland

Here are some excerpts from the LMDF/GFT and LGYT briefs:

Within the Toronto area there are thousands of lesbian and gay headed families. These families may include a second adult, single mothers/fathers with custody of their children, or gay parents whose children live primarily with the heterosexual parent.

Children from these different families attend elementary and secondary schools in the Toronto Board of Education's jurisdiction.

To date the material that is presented in the classroom around family life and sex education has quietly and no doubt deliberately failed to acknowledge the existence of homosexuality in general, and homosexual parents in particular.

Children who come from families where there is a gay parent should have the right to have their families' lifestyle validated, through classroom discussion of the variety of family structures that exist in this city, including the lesbian/gay parent-headed family.

By not discussing lesbian/gay family constellations, the onus is put on children to keep quiet about their home life, thereby perpetuating in them a feeling that there is something shameful in their family's reality.

The thousands of parents represented in this brief are put in the position of needing to affirm that their families provide a healthy, emotionally sustaining environment — without any support from institutions such as the schools which have a powerful socializing effect on our children's view of themselves, their families and society.

As parents who are rate-payers, like everyone else, it is extremely frustrating to be deemed such a negligible constituency that our lifestyle is not even mentioned in the curriculum.

ght for recognition

Twenty years ago the existence of a growing number of single parent-led families was unrecognized in classroom discussion and Board and Ministry guidelines for teachers in the area of sex education and family life. The relatively recent inclusion of single parents as a valid topic of discussion has helped to end years of needless pain for children from homes without both a father and mother.

We urge the Board of Education to expand its guidelines to include lesbian and gay father-led families, toward making our children feel as welcome in the schools as the children of single parents now feel.

We recommend that the Ontario Ministry of Education guidelines on Physical and Health Education be amended — at the primary, intermediate and senior levels — to include, within the topic of Sexuality, an age-appropriate and non-judgmental reference to homosexuality.



The silence surrounding homosexuality [in the schools] leaves young people with no source of straightforward information. If the topic of homosexuality is raised, it usually erupts in the form of jokes or insults. This is even more undermining than silence.

The lack of resources and information about homosexuality available to teachers contributes to the confusion and isolation of lesbian and gay youth. Because the discussion of homosexuality can be left to the teacher's discretion, biases and myths prevail. Often, a teacher's own negative views become a defining part of the discussion. Then it is presented in the context of "deviance" and "sick or unnatural lifestyles" rather than as an objective and informative prepared discussion.

It is often impossible for young people to discuss homosexuality at home with their families. The educational system should assume the responsibility for openness on the subject, as part of its curricula, whenever the topic of sexuality is discussed. Human sexuality includes *both* heterosexuality and homosexuality.

The problems of forming a positive identity in the midst of silence or hostility can hamper social and academic progress. Lesbian and gay youth too often feel excluded from their peer group, alienated from "normal" development, and excluded from any shared vision of the future.

Teaching within the family life and sex education curricula usually recognizes relationships between heterosexuals, but often confines the discussion of homosexuality to "acts" without the context of caring relationships. The reality of responsible homosexual relationships needs recognition in the schools,

along with revelation of the existence of the culture, community and many resources now available to lesbian and gay youth in Toronto.

Statistically, at least ten per cent of young people are gay. Therefore, the Board of Education can assume there are lesbian and gay youths in every classroom. The fear and vulnerability most teenagers feel in the area of sexuality will in these teens result in their silence in school, until they can learn to expect acceptance from teachers, in place of derision.

The friends and siblings of gay teens also need unprejudiced information and unmonitored access to resources on the subject of homosexuality.

It is our recommendation that homosexuality be included as a standard and legitimate topic of discussion in the schools. Our right to information and validation should not be overlooked.

And from one of the letters included with the LGYT brief:

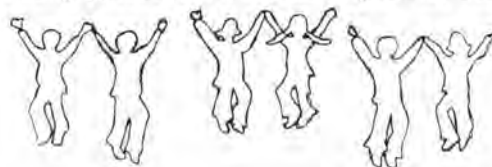
I have been out of high school for eight years, five and a half of which I've spent in Toronto. I sometimes look back at that period of my life with mixed feelings of regret, anguish and wonder. Regret that I did not know then the things I know now, anguish that there always have been and always will be gay youth in high schools in the same state I was in and a sense of wonder that as gay youth I/(we) survive the ordeal of high school at all.

I was born and raised in Fredericton, New Brunswick, where I spent the first nineteen years of my life. I think I can honestly say that I never once remember the subject of homosexuality coming up in any of my classes. Out of class was another story. Being called a faggot was at that time the worst insult that one could be inflicted with. The only time the topic arose was when someone was being ridiculed There was no one to talk to or even anyone that you would dream of mentioning it to. I felt very confused and alone and was afraid that I was probably the only person alive who felt the way I did. My family, being very homo-phobic were no better than my classmates

When I finished high school I worked with several amateur theatre groups and by eventually being cast in a production as a homosexual I met the first openly gay people I had known. They helped me to understand myself and that I wasn't an abomination or weird. Shortly afterwards I moved to Toronto and joined Lesbian and Gay Youth at the 519. My self-confidence grew immensely as well as my feeling of worth as a human being. It has taken me several years to try and unlearn the guilt and shame that we are all taught homosexuals should feel. Years that could have been spared by a more open-minded curriculum.

.... The mental torment and anguish of being a teenager can be strenuous enough, but when you are gay and don't know where to turn it can be unbearable. I've seen too many people quit because of harassment and no one to turn to for support.

If homosexuality was discussed in classes hopefully those students who are gay will know that they are not alone, and for those who are not gay, education is the first step toward acceptance.



♥ TOGETHER

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Some of Us

This column, introducing some of the women who are involved with the LMDF, is brought to you from Calgary this month!

Nancy and Sandy aren't mothers but have been involved with the LMDF since the beginning of the group in Calgary. Sandy's delicious ratatouille is becoming well known as she volunteers her cooking skills for the benefit of the LMDF's dances and other events. It looks like Nancy will be sharing her film experience with a possible upcoming LMDF summer project.

Marilyn has been involved and very active in the group for the past few years. She's in a long-term relationship (twenty years) with Lou, and they have two children, a girl 12 and a boy 9. She's also active with the Lesbian Information Line here.

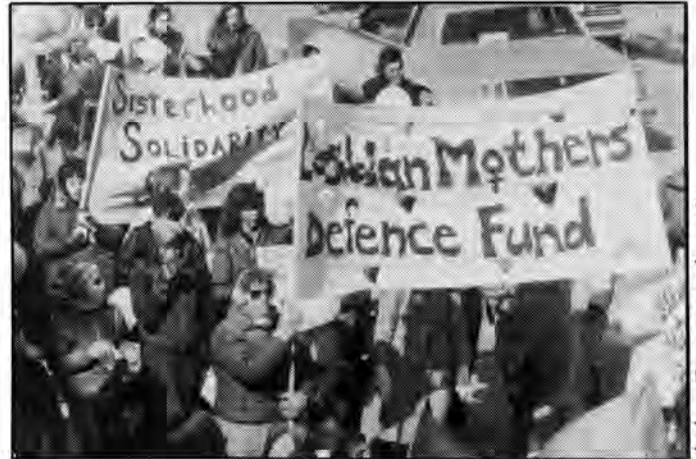


photo: Jean-Denis Lacroix

Lynn F. was one of the founding members of the Calgary LMDF and has been active since that time. She lives with her son Dustin, and her lover, Vicky. She has been very active in the lesbian and feminist groups in the city, and is currently starting up her own accounting business.

Cheryl became involved with the LMDF when she and Carol cycled across Canada to raise funds for the LMDF in the summer of 1982. She doesn't have any children and is very active with the LMDF as well as the Lesbian Information Line and other lesbian and feminist groups in the city.

Lynne P. has been involved with the group since the beginning. She and her daughter 16, and her son, 10, will be moving into the gay ghetto which also houses Lynn and Vicky next door, and Cheryl upstairs and Doreen upstairs next door. Lynne is involved with the Gay and Lesbian Police Liaison group.

Doreen is well known for her excellent poetry readings at our events, most recently for IWD this year. She has two daughters, 21 and 19 years old. Doreen has been involved with the LMDF for a couple of years.



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 Refreshments

TORONTO WOMEN'S BOOKSTORE

The Kids' Page!

re. Jeanne

Jeanne is my ma!

She aint my pa,

She is a lesbian,

So what! She still is my ma!

(AND THAT IS ALL THAT COUNTS)

She can do any thing that your ma
can do (but bettwer)

(my , well all my spelling proves that
nobody is perfect!)



a

AND I LOVE HER SO!!!! !!!

TYPING BY VELVET

AGE 9



Q

Where would a sheep go
to get a haircut?

The bad bad shop

A

by Nathan L.



LMDF tour reports

Ottawa

On Saturday, March 17th, three women from the Toronto LMDF visited Ottawa to speak at a Gays of Ottawa-sponsored meeting. About twenty-five local women took part in the informal discussion, which centred around the legal and peer support provided in Toronto for women facing child custody or visitation battles.

At the end of the meeting lesbians (both moms and non-moms) committed themselves to trying to organize a support group for lesbian mothers in the area.

Women at the meeting agreed that there needs to be more awareness in general in Ottawa's lesbian community about the needs of lesbians with kids. Even if no custody threat is looming, the lack of organized childcare at many women's events can keep lesbian mothers out of the mainstream and feeling isolated.

For more information about the lesbian mothers' resource group call the Gays of Ottawa (GO) Centre.

Waterloo

Two LMDF Steering Committee members were able to attend a Coalition for Gay Rights in Ontario (CGRO) "School for Organizers" in Waterloo on March 18th. We were given a time-slot to present the LMDF in general.

Overall, there were four basic areas discussed: 1) the history of the gay liberation movement and changes it has brought about within the last ten years; 2) the women's movement; 3) the theory of organizations (different kinds of power structures within groups, hierarchies, etc., the use of volunteers, process, consensus and accountability), and the practice of organizations (problems and practicalities of running groups – what tends to happen and what you can do about it, i.e. putting on events, dealing with martyrs, etc.); and 4) issues, in theory (what things become issues and why) and in practice (the description of particular issues already established. It was in this area that our delegates were able to present the custody issue.

Since this is obviously our prime focus, we were able to break down the custody issue microscopically, examining how custody became an issue, what problems are encountered with cases and how we are able to effectively battle with them.

Several current cases within the LMDF were outlined and problems such as biased professional assessments, lack of informed lawyers, giving support and encouragement to mothers who sometimes believe that their lesbianism negates good parenting skills, etc. were described.

There was a positive response and an active discussion ensued. We both felt we had benefitted greatly from the weekend and had been given a marvellous over-view of other organizations in our community. Our output was certainly equalled by additional session input! We look forward to upcoming speaking engagements as a means of letting people know who we are and what we would like to accomplish. This year has been a terrific start!

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Grapevine

NEWSLETTER OF THE LESBIAN MOTHERS' DEFENCE FUND

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