



MEDIA RELEASE



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ANN ARBOR CHILD WELFARE AGENCIES LEAD MICHIGAN IN LGBTQ+ INCLUSION

Recognized as Innovators by Human Right Campaign Foundation

August 26, 2021 (Ann Arbor, MI) ----Fostering Futures and Hands Across The Water, Inc. proudly announce that they are being recognized in [2021 Change-Makers](#), the Human Rights Campaign Foundation's annual report highlighting 119 child welfare agencies across the country who have worked with the HRC Foundation's [All Children - All Families](#) (ACAF) program to improve the services they provide to the LGBTQ+ community, including children in foster care, 1 in 3 of whom are LGBTQ+, and prospective foster and adoptive parents. Hands Across The Water is celebrating a decade of HRC recognition this year, while Fostering Futures has been recognized since 2014.

"Fostering Futures is grateful for the guidance and support of the HRC all these years, as we've worked hard to continue to improve our LGBTQ services and supports to our clients, staff and community," said Executive Director Jennifer DeVivo. "We are also really thrilled to share the celebration of this important work with Hands Across the Water! I hope our example inspires other agencies to develop a relationship with the HRC and increase their commitment to all families."

Hands Across The Water Executive Director Katie Page Sander noted "Now more than ever, agencies and individuals serving marginalized populations are challenged to commit publicly to inclusion. HATW is proud to continue to work towards delivering services that affirm all people, to use our platform to advocate publicly and proudly for these rights, and to be humble enough to recognize that we still have room to grow, learn and improve."

The agencies featured in this report conducted an internal self-assessment, provided professional development to staff and implemented ACAF's "Benchmarks of LGBTQ Inclusion," which track policy and practice changes within agencies. The [2021 Change-Makers](#) report features three tiers of recognition, which celebrate the progress agencies have made toward becoming fully welcoming to their LGBTQ+ clients. With 32 new participants this year, ACAF also expands the program's reach into six new states -- Alabama, Connecticut, Mississippi, Montana, New Mexico and North Carolina -- and the District of Columbia for the first time. 92% of participants met a tier of recognition, and 14 of the returning organizations advanced to a higher tier of recognition.

- **Innovative Inclusion:** 44 organizations met all 25 applicable criteria and are going beyond to innovate their services for LGBTQ+ youth and families
- **Solid Foundation for Inclusion:** 40 organizations met all 25 applicable policy and practice criteria for LGBTQ+ inclusion

(more)

- **Building Foundation for Inclusion:** 25 organizations met foundational criteria, including non-discrimination protections

Of the four Michigan agencies included in the report, Fostering Futures and Hands Across The Water are the only two to reach the highest tier of recognition, Innovative Inclusion.

Page Sander and DeVivo are scheduled to co-present a session at the Michigan Federation of Children and Families Senior Management Conference in October about the importance of committing to LGBTQ-inclusive practices in child welfare, in which they hope to encourage other agency leaders to work toward recognition by HRC.

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Founded in 1999, [Hands Across The Water](#) supports and empowers children and families through inclusive, strengths-based services. In addition to foster care, HATW provides international, infant and waiting child adoption services, pregnancy options counseling, parent education and behavioral health services.

[Fostering Futures'](#) mission is to provide a safe, healthy, informed and supportive environment where all people can grow and thrive.

CONTACT

Fostering Futures
Jennifer DeVivo, LMSW
Executive Director
jendevivo@ffkids.org
Cell: 734-864-6879

Hands Across The Water
Katie Page Sander, LMSW
Executive Director
kpagesander@hatw.org
Cell: 734-497-7396

