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**Amy:** [00:00:00] Welcome to Fostering Conversations. I'm Amy Smith, your host, and today our co-host is Tami Carson, who is the Director of Community Volunteers at Utah Foster Care.

**Tami:** Thank you for having me on the Podcast, Amy. I'm really happy to be here for this conversation that's so important for Pride Month.

**Amy:** Yes. Thank you for joining us. Our guest today is Adrienne She's a foster, adoptive parent and runs our LGBTQ plus cluster group. June is Pride month, so we wanted to take this [00:01:00] opportunity

to chat with her about the resources that Utah Foster Care offers and the different resources across the state as well.

Adrienne will you introduce yourself to our listeners?

**Adrienne:** Hi, I am happy to be here. My name is Adrienne Like Amy said, I've been a foster parent for 14 years through that time, we've adopted five kiddos. Our oldest is 25, our youngest is 15, and I have to do a, a humble brag about my cutest grandson who's

four.

**Amy:** Awesome. I love that. So Adrienne is very involved with the LGBTQ plus community, and I would love to start the conversation by chatting about what to do if a child comes out to you. What

are ways that a foster parent or a traditional parent could respond? if a child comes to them and, and comes out?

'cause that can be a really scary thing for kids to do.

**Adrienne:** It can be coming out is one of the. Scariest things, and I think we probably all know someone who has

or knows someone who has had a horror story about coming [00:02:00] out. Especially when you're in care, these are new people to you. So coming out can be even scarier. Um, statistically, 30% of children in care are L-G-B-T-Q, so it's likely that at some point during your fostering experience, this may happen. And I think one of the most important things is to show acceptance and love that it won't change the relationship. That even though this is scary, it might be scary for you as the parent, but say that you're on the same team, that nothing has changed. You love them and we'll work through it together. Another thing that's very important is believing these kiddos that come out and say. They're, they're bi, they're trans, they're gay, they're lesbian, that whatever they're feeling at that time is valid and whatever name, whatever pronouns they choose to say, We use those in every conversation, in every opportunity that we can, because that shows [00:03:00] them that. What matters to them is important to us as well. lastly, if we have questions, then find answers. There's resources, there's communities, there's opportunities to learn and grow. And so find that community that can help you find those resources.

**Tami:** . So good

to

share those with us. Why is it important to have

specific space for. Q plus foster families and the youth in their care.

**Adrienne:** Thank you. That's a really good thing to think about. We, we know that foster care is just.

It's tough. It's tough. On these kiddos, they feel different because their life is not what they may see all around them. And then when you add the layer of being L-G-B-T-Q on top of that, it's just another, perhaps barrier to everyone around them.

So they just feel more different. Anytime we get foster kiddos together and they have that shared identity, it's [00:04:00] magic. And so if we can get. Foster kiddos that are also sharing their L-G-B-T-Q, sameness then, then they have that connection as well and that helps them to feel more confident to have a space where they are heard, to have a space where they don't have to question about what they're wearing, what their pronouns are, and if it matches, or what anyone will say, where they can just be themselves.

**Amy:** Yeah, I think with anything that kids or adults experience in life when you are with. People that have similarities, that's where it's comfortable, right? Like we want to be with people that are similar to us. So I think that's amazing that we have these resources in these communities. So you run what's called the Fly Cluster.

can you tell us what that stands for and what a cluster is in general?

**Adrienne:** So clusters were organized around the state. of Utah for

Utah foster care, mostly geographically, so that it can be a support with other foster [00:05:00] parents in your same area. They have activities, learning opportunities, classes where you can get to know each other and have that support for the fly cluster.

Fostering L-G-B-T-Q Youth, we cover the whole state of Utah because we're found all over the whole state of Utah. And so it is an opportunity where we have activities. Again, to support those that are L-G-B-T-Q or those that are supporting L-G-B-T-Q Youth. Anyone that is an ally, we welcome. I always say, I think everyone should be part of this cluster because we always need more and we want to show these kids just how special they are.

**Tami:** I love that, that intention behind that for these children to feel loved, to feel

connected, to see how they. Are like others is beautiful. So how often does the fly cluster meet and what types of activities do you do together?

**Adrienne:** We [00:06:00] meet once a month virtually so that we can reach everyone across the state, and

it is on the second Wednesday of the month. and we meet for an hour just over zoom so people can ask questions. People can, again, make ties to the community, find resources, um, answers. Just as, as parents kind of expressing what, questions they have or what they might be feeling so that then they can go and be there for their children. We also have activities, again, just a fun get together where these kids get to be themselves. We've done, I. root beer floats at the park. we've done just hot chocolate bars. We've done movies before and so we try to just do fun things where anyone is welcome and we can have time to chat and get to know and be open.

**Amy:** What are some of the biggest successes or things that you've seen through this fly [00:07:00] cluster as families are getting to

know each other, or youth are getting to spend time together? Like do you have any examples or thoughts about, you know, what have you seen that is like, oh my gosh, this is why we do that.

**Adrienne:** I love having been able to open up a space where

parents can come and I. Share their own resources where they shared their journey, where someone can say, Hey, this is what I'm experiencing. And another parent can say, I was in the same boat and this is what I did in this, in that situation, this is what I found helpful, or try this.

And so it's not so much as coming to the expert, but it's forming a community of people who understand.

**Amy:** Yeah. I think that makes a huge difference in all aspects, but especially this as. Some of these foster families may be navigating it for the first time, and so I think that can be a really important space to be in, to have [00:08:00] other resources from other foster parents. I love that you say, you know, it's not the experts necessarily, but it also is the experts because us people who are living it become the experts.

Right. So I love that, you know, that connection that it brings. That's awesome.

**Tami:** Yeah, that lived experience is so important for others to be able to tap into how did you handle this situation? How did you handle also the emotions that come with that, and how do you help this child navigate the new world they're in? To honor their identity and all the spaces you might be in with them, with your family members and with others in the community.

I think that's so important. Speaking of community, here's a question I have. If there are community members out there listening to this and they have a heart for this work, especially for L-G-B-T-Q, youth or

families, are there ways in which they could donate, say maybe space for events or other ways

they could support the fly cluster even if they are not a

foster family?

I.

**Adrienne:** [00:09:00] Absolutely. I know Utah Foster Care has great people to handle that. I think Tami would be a wonderful person to reach out to.

Um, space is always needed, you know, to have a space where we can gather. I mentioned that I like to have it. Open where we can just communicate. And so having a gathering where is big enough to handle a lot of people, but small enough that where we can have conversations with each other is important. I would love to have, um, parties hosted. We actually had a catering company luxe Catering who hosted a dinner for our L-G-B-T-Q youth they went and learned how to cook the dinner and they prepared the dinner and had a fancy dinner. And just opportunities like that even away from parents where they can, um, connect and relate is really important. So speak to Tami if you have any resources that you'd love to share.

**Tami:** Yep. Happy to take anyone's help.

**Amy:** Yeah, [00:10:00] I think it's so important to recognize, you know, we were chatting before we started recording, that you don't have to be a foster family to help. And yes, we need more foster families and we especially need foster families that are willing to, support and love and welcome L-G-B-T-Q. Youth into their home.

but if you can't foster, which not all of us can, there are so many other ways to be involved and to give back and to create space and connection and opportunities for foster families and for the youth in their care. So I love that. there are lots of resources around the state and you talked about, you know, if a child comes out to you.

What can you do? And, And,

sometimes that might be overwhelming

as a parent, but where are some of the resources that you could recommend for parents to go and, and get that support that they are looking

for?

**Adrienne:** One of the great resources that has been prepared is on the

Utah foster Care website, Utah foster care.org. It's under foster parent resources [00:11:00] and there's an L-G-B-T-Q tab. Under that, there's lists of resources, organizations that run throughout the state as well as specific for different counties. And I think because Utah has recognized, fortunately we've recognized that there is a need for these kiddos because Utah has one of the highest. Suicide rates for these teens. So Utah has really come together and made different organizations, Pride Center and Encircle all across the state. They're saying this is a need and this is how we can fulfill that. So even if you're in the four corners up north, there are places all across the state that you can find. And a good place to start is on the Utah Foster Care website.

**Amy:** And anybody can access those resources. It's not just foster parents. So that's a great link to go to and to utilize, as anybody that's listening and is looking for more support. what is some of the just. [00:12:00] Great moments that you've had as a foster and adoptive parent in or out of the LGBT community?

Either one, but just what are some, I think it's always awesome to share the great moments that we have as foster parents because like you said earlier, you hear the horror stories, but

there's also a lot of beautiful moments with taking kids into our care and loving them. would you be willing to share one or two of those?

**Adrienne:** personally, um, out of my adopted kiddos, we've had

two who identify as queer

and they have both individually said. I don't think I would be where I am if I were with my original family and that's. That's hard to kind of take in sometimes, but because it is so difficult to be queer and sometimes children are brought into care partially because of their [00:13:00] being L-G-B-T-Q, and so it, it's really cool just to, to hear our personal experiences of our kiddos saying like, thank you for being open and for having. This space where they could explore and they could grow and become themselves.

**Tami:** That's so good. I, I would love to highlight that as foster parents, you have made a safe space for the children that have come into your care because there can be a lot of fear wrapped around parenting a child who's queer, and you've done a beautiful job of doing that.

If you

could say even one thing to a foster parent, I know we touched on what

are things you would say, but what

would you say to them to help them address the fear that they might have?

**Adrienne:** the fear that the parents might I think, could be a very real fear of being unsafe and. I think it's so [00:14:00] important. Like Tami, you mentioned creating a safe place, showing that this home is safe for anyone to come and be who they are is important. Another resource that I want to mention from the Utah Foster Care website is a safe home pledge, that list things that you will do in your home, like honoring the preferred pronouns and preferred name, providing a safe space. And it just kind of lists things that you can do in your home. Um, we actually have it hanging on our front door, inside the house, so every time the kids leave, they see it. so if parents are feeling fearful about having L-G-B-T-Q kids in their home. Reach out so that you can find, find help and support because it can be scary and there are some very real fears, but helping those children to feel safe with you, we often talk about how if kids just [00:15:00] have one safe person that they can be themselves with, it can make a huge difference.

**Amy:** I'm thinking of, one of my youth, not, not a child that lived with me, but a youth that I've really grown to love over the years. Um, and as they transitioned and just seeing how much they struggled. Before the transition versus how much they're thriving now that they've been accepted it, it really is really neat to see that, yeah, you weren't, you weren't yourself, and now you are, and you're feeling.

I'm proud of who you are and people are accepting you and it is really neat to get to see that child be embraced and, supported when it was really hard for a few years, I'm sure for them. And just you can just physically see the change of, you know, feeling confident and. Embraced as who, who they are and who they want to be.

And I think that's a really neat experience, and I'm sure you've seen that with your [00:16:00] kids and

other kids in the community. But it, it is, I think, can be very scary for someone that it's foreign to. but seeing

that is, it's really neat and really rewarding to see

kids be accepted.

**Adrienne:** reminded me, I think I forgot because it's been so many years since our, kids have come out, but our, one of our little kiddos was really suffering from depression and they. Were just struggling. The doctor said like, they're too young for these many problems and to fill this deep, but they were, they were severely depressed.

They were having anger issues at school. They were having anxiety, and through those years of transition has just completely turned around. Their depression is nowhere near what it was, and sometimes it, it would've been easy to say like, well, yeah, they're suffering because. They're in foster care. They're having these experiences that are really traumatizing and [00:17:00] being taken away from your original family. But then to see one of those things that needed to change was them allowed to come out and be themselves, and that is what helped them the most. I.

**Amy:** And I think as a very conservative community, it can be very scary for a lot of people to accept. But just seeing kids thrive when they can be themselves is, is really, really neat. So. well, we're about out of time. It always goes fast. but

Adrienne are you gonna be at our pride

booth for Utah Foster Care?

Um, up

coming

up in June.

**Adrienne:** Yes. I'm so excited that

Utah Foster

Care will be continuing having a booth. We've done it for a couple years and it's so exciting to be able to share that space with so many wonderful people

that have so much love to give.

**Amy:** Yes. I remember last year we had the big sticky note board and everybody gotta come up and write sticky notes of just like ways that they felt loved [00:18:00] or embraced, I think it was. And it was just so cool to see all the different words on there. so make sure to go look for the big purple. The Utah Foster care tent, and you will find, awesome allies under there.

So Tami, is there anything else that you wanted to ask or share before we wrap up this awesome podcast with Adrienne today?

**Tami:** I would love to share my gratitude for both of you in the examples you are of being foster parents and adoptive parents, and being a safe. Space for children. It is not always easy in a conservative culture to even know how to land in that because I think sometimes we worry that if we accept and love it does something that is. Not good for children when in fact the opposite is true. And you both have accepted and loved children where they are. And I think of all of the foster parents around the state who have queer children in their home. So grateful for the work that you're doing to make this a safer space for them, and inviting the rest of us to elevate ourselves to be more loving and

more accepting.

So thank you for the work that you're [00:19:00] doing.

**Amy:** Thank you. You, Tami, thanks for being our co-host today and Adrienne thank you for being our guest today and sharing all of these

awesome resources and

information

with

**Adrienne:** Thank you for having

me.

**Amy:** if you want to learn more about how to get involved with the fly cluster, or if you want to

just learn more about foster care in general, you can head over to Utah foster care.org to learn more. Thanks for joining us on Fostering Conversations.