



A Thousand Moms
Building Community Support for LGBT/Q Youth
in Foster/Adoptive Care

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Miss New York Supports Organization for Highest
Risk Group in Foster, Adoptive Care**

Annual Hamptons Event Addresses Crises Among
Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgendered Youth

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Newly crowned Miss New York, Claire Buffie, will join supporters of A Thousand Moms at “A Celebration of Youth and Diversity,” October 9 in East Hampton. Hampton’s resident Walter Donway will host the second annual fundraiser for A Thousand Moms, which addresses a growing statewide and national problem: the alarming increase of social problems, including suicide, of youth in foster care who may be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, or questioning (LGBT/Q) of their sexual orientation. The fundraiser for A Thousand Moms will be held at the home of Walter Donway and his wife, Robin Shepherd, in East Hampton.

Date: Saturday, October 9

Time: 5-7 pm

Place: Home of Walter Donway and Robin Shepherd

279 Stephen Hands Path

East Hampton, NY

LGBT/Q youth represent a far preponderance of the total number of youth in foster and

adoptive care. In one telling statistic, data suggests that gay youths account for approximately 30% of all completed adolescent suicides, according to a report by Lambda Legal Defense, an advocacy group for lesbian and gay legal issues. A Thousand Moms, a statewide organization, offers a novel, non-governmental approach to the needs of this group in foster/adoptive care.

As Miss New York State, Claire Buffie's platform is "Straight for Equality: Let's Talk." She will represent New York in the Miss America pageant in January. On her blog, Claire has written:

[A friend] sent me a link to an organization she thought I may want to look into. Wow, am I glad I did. I have been in contact with the founder, Fred Elia and his partner David and they have shared unbelievable stories with me that show the dire need for attention on this issue. So many times, we hear gay rights and immediately think marriage; there is sooo much more.

Too often, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBT/Q) youth in foster/adoptive care experience rejection, from their families, from their peers, from society. The results are among the highest rates of social problems, most alarmingly, teen suicide. [A Thousand Moms](#), a non-profit organization, works to build community support so that these youth may live in stable homes and live healthy, productive lives.

In Central New York, there was a five year-old boy who lost his birth parents. At age 10, he was adopted with his sister who was three years older. Overall, he had a great relationship with his adoptive family. Approaching 16, he was going through puberty and questioning his sexuality. This boy is gay and his parents and sister do not accept him. He ran away - was placed in a psychiatric unit - was placed in diagnostic therapy to "get over being gay." That, of course, did not work. The family said they were willing to allow him to come home if he never discussed being gay in their home and if they controlled all aspects of his life, so he would not engage in gay acts. Deservingly so, this child wanted to be readopted by a family who loved and accepted him just as he is.

I challenge you not to gasp...Children have been UNADOPTED because they have come out to their foster parents. Think about that one for a second. When you adopt someone at age two, you don't know what their sexual orientation is! 30% of LGBT kids are "dumped" into foster care because they are not wanted. 1 in 4 foster children are dealing with issues of sexual orientation. These kids have the highest rate of substance abuse and attempted suicide.

A Thousand Moms offers the parenting and life experiences of its member "Moms" to counsel families, youth, and social work agencies, with the intention of preventing problems from escalating to serious matters. A Thousand Moms aims to keep families together, according to Fred Elia, the organization's president, "because families offer the best situations for gay youth, and the costs for state-sponsored group or residential care is ten times that of state support for foster and adoptive families."

Local chapters of A Thousand Moms are being established statewide and include New York metro and Long Island communities.

Elia, president of A Thousand Moms, knows well the insecurity and confusion of growing up in foster care--and as a youth questioning his sexual orientation. In 1959, as a two-year-old, he

was thrust suddenly into a strange home and family. Living his entire childhood with that same stable, large foster family, he escaped the rejection found then and, alarmingly, now rising, for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and questioning youth (LGBT/Q) who live in foster or adoptive families. Elia lives today with his partner of 16 years in the same home of his upbringing, an homage to his supportive foster- and birth-families.

Elia has spent his working life supporting and improving the lives of youth in the child welfare system. While a state social worker, he established the NYC LGBT Foster Care Coalition, which addresses recruitment and support needs of LGBT foster/adoptive parents and of all foster/adoptive parents of LGBT/Q youth in New York City's child welfare system.

A Thousand Moms, founded by Elia, fellow social workers, and other professionals, believes it's time to celebrate and support the lives of New York State's LGBT/Q youth in foster or adoptive care. With the help of private citizens from all walks of life in New York's communities—anyone can be a “Mom”—the group seeks solutions and reaches out to youth, families, and the state and private agencies who hold legal responsibility for their care. A Thousand Moms' staff is organizing a network of members--everyday citizens--including homemakers, educators, businesspeople, as well as civic and religious leaders, and many others. “A Thousand Moms wants to ensure that these youth be put on a course that leads to productive, positive lives,” says Elia.

A Thousand Moms derives its name from the organization's dedication to the nurturing, parenting, and support skills of “Moms,” fathers--parents--and all who support them. The organization also seeks the involvement of civic organizations, businesses, as well as individuals (sons, sisters, extended families, and friends). “We want everyone to participate,” says Elia.

Community education, outreach, and support are directed at foster/adoptive and birth parents of LGBT/Q youth. The non-profit organization raises funds and establishes contracts with public and private social work agencies, which are the guardians of youth in foster care. By concentrating first in specific regions in New York State (Capital Region, New York City, Long Island, Rochester, Utica, Binghamton, and Hudson Valley), A Thousand Moms will measure its effects on the communities it serves.