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Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender People with Developmental Disabilities and Mental Retardatio: Stories of the Rainbow Support Group

John D Allen

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Experience the birth of the first support group for sexual minorities with developmental disabilities!

Reflecting an unprecedented development in the disabled and sexual minority communities, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender People with Developmental Disabilities and Mental Retardation: Stories of the Rainbow Support Group describes the founding, achievements, and history of a unique group providing support for people with developmental disabilities or mental retardation (DD/MR) who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender. In this pathbreaking book, group founder John D. Allen describes the Rainbow Support Group's beginnings in 1998 at the New Haven Gay & Lesbian Community Center in Connecticut and the ways in which it has been shattering myths and stereotypes surrounding people with mental retardation ever since.

From the author: “Not only are people with DD/MR full human beings with the same needs and desires for intimacy and healthy sexual expression as people without intellectual disabilities, but the group is evidence that some people with DD/MR have an understanding of sexual orientation as well. Acknowledging that people with mental retardation are sexual is a new development in the human service field, but one that is still in the pre-Stonewall days regarding those who are gay. Although people with mental retardation are given unprecedented freedom to make personal vocational decisions, there is an unfounded expectation that they do not have a sexuality—let alone a homosexuality. Members of the Rainbow Support Group discuss the same concerns as other gay people, but in a support system that recognizes their unique perspective.”

This insightful book shows how membership in the Rainbow Support Group addresses the very real fears and concerns of its members, including:

- being forced into heterosexual social situations, since that is the only available option for socialization
- dealing with being “outed” to peers and staff—since many DD/MR people are not their own legal guardians, this can lead to removal of privileges, various kinds of abuse, and other negative consequences in their day-to-day lives
- being ridiculed by unsupportive staff
- being excluded from family functions because of their sexual orientation

It also illustrates the purely positive aspects of membership in the group, which provides:

- a place to learn appropriate ways to meet others, hear messages about safe sex, and feel empowered to advocate for their own intimacy needs
- an increased chance of finding a like-minded partner (although the group is certainly not a “dating service”)
- an avenue for members to connect with others like them and with the larger gay community in the area
- events to participate in, such as holiday parties, field trips, movie nights, and gay pride celebrations

Everyone has joined the host community center to begin receiving regular mailings and event discounts. Supervising staff report that members perform better at work, have fewer behavioral issues, and experience a greater feeling of contentment. For people with mental retardation, just to be able to say the words 'gay,' 'lesbian,' 'bisexual,' and 'transgender' in an affirming environment is a cutting-edge breakthrough. What the group has accomplished and will hopefully continue to illuminate is the understanding that people with

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