In our first Council meeting of 2017, the prime concern for most folks is increasing our focus on Advocacy. Though we are fortunate to enjoy many legal protections in Illinois and have made progress at the Federal level, there is growing cause for concern. Today we can plainly see examples of discrimination in many forms. Our civil rights are actively under attack. There is risk at all three levels of our government. Rights may be lost due to: legislative proposals at the state and federal level; legal cases at the judicial level; and possible repeal of protections provided by executive order… Our concerns need to be understood. We need to be heard, we need to be visible.

PFLAG is a 501c3 non-profit organization, and as such, is not permitted to get involved in politics at any level. Therefore, as an organization, we cannot endorse any specific party or candidates. We all need to be mindful of this when representing PLFAG so we do not jeopardize our non-profit standing. It is not about politics, it is simply about the issues. Social justice and equality should be bi-partisan concerns.

Know the issues. Establish simple ways to stay informed. As a PFLAG member, you should receive the Policy Matters emails. These are helpful in highlighting issues with recommendations for action. In addition, consider signing onto the email distribution of other organizations or checking their websites regularly. Some of my favorites include: Equality Illinois, HRC and the ACLU. Look for useful links later in this edition under Advocacy Matters- Know the Issues.

Know your elected Officials. Once you know the issues and how you feel, you can reach out to your representatives to voice your concerns and ask for their support. Go to the following link and input your address to find your elected officials: [http://www.elections.il.gov/districtlocator/addressfinder.aspx](http://www.elections.il.gov/districtlocator/addressfinder.aspx)

Last, but not least, don’t forget the power of your stories. Constructive conversations start with understanding the fears and concerns of others. You can best help enlighten others when you truly understand where they are on their journey. Sharing your personal experience can be a powerful catalyst to help broaden the perspective of a family member, friend, neighbor, co-worker or acquaintance.

I fully understand and respect that we are all at different places on our journeys. No matter where you are starting, don’t be afraid to step out of your comfort zone. You might be surprised at the impact you can have. It is amazing how quickly you can build confidence and get comfortable discussing and advocating for yourself and your loved ones.

Choose to be an ally for equality.

By John Hickey
President of Northern IL Council of PFLAG
PFLAG is a non-profit, tax-exempt, all volunteer, local community-based organization of parents, relatives and friends of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons. PFLAG is not affiliated with any ethnic, religious, economic or political group.

OPEN DOORS is a publication of the Northern Illinois PFLAG chapters. Articles that appear do not necessarily reflect the opinions of PFLAG, its Board of Directors or members. We reserve the right to edit any submissions. Priority is given to original work by the membership.

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www.pflagillinois.org
www.pflag.org

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Advocacy Matters- Know the Issues

PFLAG

Sign up for Action Alerts:
https://www.pflag.org/stay-informed

Guide to Being a Straight Ally:
https://www.pflag.org/publication/guidetobeingstraightsally

Guide to Being a Trans Ally:
https://www.pflag.org/publication/guidetobeingatransally

HRC

Local Issues: http://www.hrc.org/local-issues

Take Action Page: http://www.hrc.org/take-action

Join HRC’s Mobile Action Network: http://www.hrc.org/take-action

Get Critical Equality news from HRC.
Text EQUAL to 30644 to get started.
Data rates may apply. Text STOP to quit.

Equality Illinois

Equality Illinois Issues:
http://www.equalityillinois.us/issues/

Find Your Elected Officials:
http://www.elections.il.gov/districtlocator/addressfinder.aspx

Do you have a story to share? A positive experience?
Know of an upcoming event of interest?

Open Doors wants hear what you have to say.

Please submit directly to og4equality@gmail.com.
**BECOME A PFLAG MEMBER!**

Sign up today!  
It’s NEVER too late!

**BECOME A MEMBER... SUPPORT PFLAG**

By becoming a PFLAG member, you will help provide support, education and advocacy. All information we collect from you on this form will remain confidential, and we will only share it within PFLAG.

Membership runs from October 1 to September 30; no partial-year membership is available.

Please check:

___ New Membership ___ Renewal Membership ___ Donation

(Name)________________________________________________________________________________

(Date)________________________________________________________________________________

(Address)________________________________________________________________________________

(City) (State) (ZIP)________________________________________________________________________________

(Preferred Phone ___ Home ___ Cell)________________________________________________________________________________

(E-mail Address)________________________________________________________________________________

(Notes or ___In Memory of ___ In Honor of)________________________________________________________________________________

**MEMBERSHIP LEVEL:**

___ PFLAG Superhero $500+

___ Parents Flag Waver $100

___ Household/Individual Membership $45

___ PFLAG Hero $250

___ Supporting Membership $60

___ Donation $________

**SELECT A CHAPTER:**

Donations are tax deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law.

___ Aurora/Fox Valley ___ Hinsdale ___ PTI Chicago

___ Chicago Metro ___ Joliet ___ PTI McHenry

___ Deerfield ___ Kankakee/Will/Iroquois ___ PTI North Shore

___ DeKalb ___ McHenry ___ Rockford

___ DuPage ___ Oak Park ___ Sycamore / PTI

___ Downers Grove ___ Palatine ___ Tinley Park

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___ Check enclosed payable to PFLAG

Please charge my credit card (___ Visa ___ MasterCard ___ Amex ___ Discover)

(Credit Card #)________________________________________________________________________________

(Exp Date DD/MM)_________ (CVV – V/MC/D 3 digits on the back – AX 4 digits on the front)_________

(Name on Card)________________________________________________________________________________

Please return form to your chapter representative or mail form and to:

PFLAG Membership P.O. Box 734, Elmhurst, IL 60126
Deerfield CHAPTER
By Janet Svatos

We were honored to have AJ Jennings, Med, from Illinois Safe Schools Alliance, present to us this month. AJ travels to schools in our area to present to teachers and parents the best practice of acknowledging, responding to and supporting those in the LGBTQ community. She works on professional development for staff in creating affirming environments for students, ages 13-18.

Questions were many, as members asked for clarification on terms of gender identity and the difference between that and sexual identity. We learned that everyone’s “core identity” is composed of our ‘gender identity’ (sense of self; how we see ourselves; our ‘gender orientation’ (who we are attracted to); and our ‘style of behavior’ (or gender expression: hair, clothes, etc). Gender identity is usually established by the age of 3 (2 – 5); sexual orientation between 9 and 10. Cisgender was a term many of us did not know; it is our identity as aligned at birth. These were just a few of the terms discussed. Although the coming out age has dropped significantly in the last decade, no data is available for the coming out age of transgender youth.

It is important to understand that failure to support a child’s core sexual identity can result in significant harm: isolation, ostracism, victimization, psychic harm. Kids rely on unconditional support from their families – often their attitude is ‘reject part of me, reject all of me.’ Parents need to engage with an open mind. Be responsive, become fluent with LGBTQ concepts, be reflective, and show empathy. She reminds: Be honest about what you know and what you don’t. It’s a learning process. Conversations don’t have to be perfect.

I think we all wished we had about 2 more hours with AJ, as she really didn’t have time to finish her whole program with the many questions we had.

We welcomed a new member at this meeting and received two more dues payments from former members...THANK YOU!

RESOURCES:
Family Acceptance Project:
https://familyproject.sfsu.edu/
AJ Jennings email address: aj@illinoissafeschools.org

Our December meeting has always had a theme of celebration. We celebrate the end of the year; we celebrate our friendships; we celebrate the holidays; and we take the time to just sit and listen to one another for great conversation. We never book a speaker in December, as we take the entire 2 hours and devote it to catching up with one another and eating great food. Thanks to all of you who contributed!!! We had everything from pizza to fruit to brownies!!

My husband warned me that he didn’t think we’d get a large number of people, as the weather wasn’t so great....but 28 people were in attendance! We welcomed a new family and we welcomed a former member who hadn’t been back in 7 years!!! We all left the meeting with our spirits high, knowing that this year will probably bring many challenges for the LGBTQ community, but we’re ready to take it on!

Wishing you all a very happy, healthy New Year and wonderful holiday season.

McHenry CHAPTER
By Toni Weaver

The last chapter meeting of the year was a celebration of who we are as a PFLAG chapter. We did our usual holiday snacks pot luck even as we welcomed the newcomers and provided a forum for support and conversation.

We kicked off the New Year, first, by watching a short film clip of a little family drama. The kid sister in the story came upon her older brother exchanging a kiss with a baseball teammate up in the brother’s bedroom. Of course the little sister told her parents, and the scene at the dinner table that night was tense. The vignette resolved favorably some time later at the son’s birthday celebration when the dad presented his son with a present: a framed picture of his son and boyfriend. It was a most appropriate clip to show because our guest for the evening also had a story of her dad’s growing acceptance of her as a lesbian woman. KM had a compelling story to tell: her coming out to parents, her dad’s journey to acceptance, her decision to leave a long-term relationship with a partner who didn’t wish to have any more children since she already had three through a previous marriage, her desire to have children, and the process she underwent to begin a family.
KM’s dad, a year and a half after her coming out, came to her to say that he had been her father but that he hadn’t been her dad and that he wanted all that to change. He and his wife have fully supported KM through her pregnancy and are now the happy grandparents of twins. KM’s decision to have children without a partner was made easier by her parents’ willingness to assist her every step of the way.

I think the real value of KM’s presentation was to challenge us to reflect on yet another type of family, an unconventional one by conventional norms, and to be willing to grow and be stretched as we continue to become models of PFLAG’s inclusiveness.

On another note, at least four members of PFLAG McHenry participated in the Women’s March in Chicago on January 21: Cate Becker, Karen Graham, Tom and Toni Weaver. Perhaps there were more, but in a crowd of 250,000 people, we didn’t see any more. If you were there and we missed you, we apologize!

Happy New Year and together, let us MOVE EQUALITY FORWARD!

We had 2 new attendees at our January meeting and enjoyed meeting them. Kate is still recuperating, and we having her with us.

We recently found out that one of our former members, George Kolodziej passed away last December. He and his wife Velna were both very active PFLAGers. They moved to Iowa to live in a good retirement facility and to be close to their oldest son and his family.

On Sunday, January 29 Gy and Sylvia are hosting our Fifth Sunday Potluck. We always have such delicious food and are looking forward to it.

We are still working on the details of films screenings at the Maze branch of the Oak Park Public Library.

Tinley Park CHAPTER
By Debbie

PFLAG Tinley Park’s January meeting was joined by Pastor Meagan Sherman, interim associate pastor at Zion Church. We shared our stories of reconciling our faith with the struggles that we face in the LGBT community. Pastor shared resources that she has gathered throughout the years.

In April, we hope to join in Tinley Park’s Discover Tinley. This community event, held at the Tinley Park Convention Center, gathers local organizations, businesses, and churches to showcase the products or services that they offer. As we plan this, and future events, we will share the information with our fellow chapters.

Hinsdale CHAPTER
By Barb Medley

In December, we celebrated the holidays together with our annual potluck. We enjoyed a great meal and each other’s company before filling stockings with everyday necessities for donation to The Crib, the shelter run by The Night Ministry. It’s always a personally fulfilling way to begin December.

Our January meeting was held on January 1st. Marcia went to the meeting and provided this report. The group was small but everyone who came contributed to the discussion. Many expressed concerns about the new incoming Administration and how issues pertaining to the
LGBT community are going to be handled. Additionally, with a new couple present, an engaging conversation ensued about the term “non-binary” and what it means in terms of sexual orientation, identity and relationships. It was pointed out that this month’s National Geographic has an interesting and informative article on human sexuality. Other resources were discussed, and all agreed that further information should be gathered regarding this important aspect of the LGBT community.

At our February meeting, we will be hearing from youth leaders from Youth Outlook’s Transcend Drop-In Center. They will discuss their experiences being trans and non-binary youth in 2017, what their current school climates are like, and what their hopes are for the future. They are open to having a panel discussion about their stories and answering respectful questions about improving ally-ship to trans young people.

DuPage CHAPTER
By Ron & Bernadette Whitfield

We had another wonderful meeting in January that was well attended. Our guest speaker was Kim Hunt. We were also pleased to welcome author Jane Leder.

Kim shared with us her personal life and her professional work as a “community organizer” of sorts! Although divorced from her husband, the father of her 2 daughters, Kim described a loving extended family that includes her former husband, his wife and their children; Kim’s wife and their children; and more! Her story gave us hope that there can be friendship, love, peace and harmony -- even after divorce and revelations about sexual orientation. She shared “essays” written by her daughters about what it was like to grow up with 2 moms that were touching and sprinkled with humor.

Kim is an activist, urban planner, start-up enthusiast, and lifelong learner. During her 30 year career she has focused on building and strengthening thriving communities. She is currently executive director of the Pride Action Tank, a new, results-driven group that addresses challenges facing individuals and groups within LGBTQ communities through a collaborative process of inquiry, advocacy and action. She is the former executive director of Affinity Community Services (Affinity), a 20-year-old Chicago social justice organization that works with and for Black LGBTQ communities, queer youth, and allies in the areas of civic engagement, health and wellness, and leadership development. Prior to coming to Affinity she owned a community development and management consulting firm and worked for the third largest public transportation agency in the US. She is also co-host of OUTSpoken! LGBTQ Storytelling, political columnist for FOP magazine, instructor, and member of several civic boards and advisory councils. You can learn more about the Pride Action Tank at http://prideactiontank.org/.

Jane is a writer who is seeking to interview parents of gay children so that she can “update” her 1987 book “Dead Serious” about youth suicide. She intends to include two new chapters on bullying and LGBTQ youths. Recent trends have inspired Jane to address these important issues. You can learn more about Jane at http://janeleder.net/. You can contact her at J.Leder@comcast.net or 847-869-4612 if you are interested in exploring the possibility of helping her in her research by participating or supplying contact info for those who might be interested.

Downers Grove CHAPTER
By Gloria

On January 11, PFLAG Downers Grove welcomed Arlene Collins, founder of Chicago PTI. Arlene shared her own story and the story of her transgender son, and she shared some great resources available to the transgender community. Thanks Arlene!

Our next meeting will be Wednesday, February 8 at 7pm, at First Congregational UCC, 1047 Curtiss St in Downers Grove. Join us!

Our guest speaker in December was Cindy Baleskie, counselor from the Fox Valley Institute in Naperville. Cindy spoke with us about managing the stress and depression that often accompanies the holidays, and strategies to manage particularly difficult conversations with family and friends. She gave lots of great strategies and tips, and the folks in the group added more. It was an enlightening program.
Book review

The ABC’s of LGBT+  By Ashley Mardell

This is a comprehensive, easy to read and very informative book.

Ashley Mardell brings her unique style of writing to what can be a difficult concept to grasp. We have entered unfamiliar territory of a “post-binary world” where it is not as simple as checking a box male or female. We know people’s identities are much more complicated than that. Mardell gives you the language to express and explore those identities with comprehensive definitions and personal anecdotes.

I was happy to have the “cheat sheet” that her mother recommended she include. You will find this in the introduction to the book. It gives you an idea of the powerful vocabulary you are about to develop. I also appreciated the numerous personal anecdotes that gave life to the definitions. The book is further enhanced with photos and helpful drawings, which I found informative and enjoyable.

You will gain an understanding of such terms as aperiodic, neutrois, and trigender, to name just a few.

Having this gender identity vocabulary helps people that are questioning their identity to express themselves and gives others the knowledge they need to be understanding and supportive.

This book will be a great resource for PFLAG.
PFLAG Aurora/Fox Valley
Meetings held 2nd Sunday – 2 pm
New England Congregational Church
406 W Galena Blvd, Aurora 60506
pflagaurorafoxvalley@pflagillinois.com

PFLAG Metro Chicago
Meetings held 3rd Sunday – 2 pm
Center on Halsted (Senior Room)
3656 N Halsted, Chicago 60613
pflagchicagometro@pflagillinois

PFLAG DeKalb County
Meetings held LAST Tuesday – 7 pm
Federated Church of Sycamore
612 W State St
Sycamore, IL 60178
pflagdekalbcounty@pflagillinois.org

PFLAG DuPage
Meetings held 3rd Sunday – 2 pm
St Paul Lutheran Church
515 S Wheaton Ave, Wheaton 60187
pflagdupage@yahoo.com
www.pflagdupage.org

PFLAG Tinley Park
Meetings held 2nd Sunday – 2-4 pm
Zion Lutheran Church
17100 69th Ave.
Tinley Park, IL 60477

PFLAG Orland Park
Meetings held 1st Monday – 7 pm
First Congregational Church
50700 S. Ridgeland Ave., Orland Park 60462
www.pflagorlandpark.org

PFLAG Downers Grove
Meetings held 2nd Wednesday – 7 p.m.
First Congregational UCC
1047 Curtiss
Downers Grove, IL 60515
www.pflag.wixsite.com/pflagdg
pflagdg@gmail.com

PFLAG Hinsdale
Meetings held 1st Sunday – 2 pm
Unitarian Church Hinsdale
11 W Maple, Hinsdale 60521
pflaghinsdale@pflagillinois

PFLAG Joliet
Contact Maria Prekop
maria.prekop@navigant.com

PFLAG Will, Kankakee, Iroquois
Meetings held 3rd Sunday, 2-4 pm
1045 W River St
Kankakee, IL
plagkankakee@pflagillinois.org

PFLAG McHenry
Meetings held 2nd Tuesday – 7 pm
Tree of Life Unitarian Church
5603 W Bull Valley Rd
McHenry 60050
pflagwoodstockmchenry@pflagillinois.org

PFLAG Oak Park
Meetings held 4th Sunday – 3 pm
First United Church
848 Lake St, Oak Park 60304
pflagoakpark@pflagillinois.org

Parents of Transgender (Chicago)
Meetings are held the 2nd Thursday – 7 pm
Center on Halsted
3656 N Halsted, Chicago 60613
parentsottransgender@pflagillinois.org

Parents of Transgender (McHenry)
Meetings are held the 4th Wednesday – 7 p.m.
Tree of Life Unitarian Church
5603 W Bull Valley Rd, McHenry 60050
flynmb12@gmail.com

Parents of Transgender (North Shore)
Meetings are held the 3rd Sunday – 6 p.m.
Winnetka Presbyterian Church
1255 Winnetka Rd, Winnetka, IL

PFLAG Rockford
Meetings are held the 1st Monday – 6:30 pm
Rockford Public Library
215 N Wyman St, Rockford, IL
(use entrance off Mulberry St.)

Please join us for any chapter meeting.

If you are not comfortable meeting in a large group, arrangements can be made to meet one-on-one. Contact any one of our chapters for more information.