



*The year 2019 has been instrumental in the advancement of human rights for vulnerable communities in Belize. With the development of the Anti-Discrimination Bill and the revision of the Families and Children's Act, in lieu of Human Rights Day 2019, made the following submission to the Anti-Discrimination Steering Committee and the National Children and Families Committee, around the language being used in the drafting and revision process was submitted by the Our Circle Team.*

### Proper Language is the Key to Our Inclusion

The Our Circle team expresses its concerns mainly around three key terms "child", "family responsibilities" and "parent".

**"Child"** - the children within emerging diverse families and particularly our LGBT families are not included in the definition of a child within this document. We have "families" where children are neither natural nor adopted and cannot be deemed as step children due to our unrecognized relationship status. The team specified "foster" children but cross referencing to the Families and Children's Act (FACA), a child can only be considered "fostered" if that child became a responsibility of the state and through a care order has been granted a dependent of an adult/couple. The FACA as is allows for the interpretation that a "child" does not have to be biologically associated to his/her parent and the language being used by the draft legislation detracts completely from the equality we are aiming for. We suggest if a more inclusive definition cannot be developed, the definition of the "child" remain as defined in FACA. We are also not sure why the definition has "sixteen/eighteen"; however, the FACA defines child as "a person below the age of eighteen years". Keeping this simplified definition would suffice if a better structured definition cannot be identified.

**"Family Responsibility"** - We personally don't like the term "family responsibility" as our laws have yet to define what "family" is. Therefore, we have the possibility of this Act being outweighed by a successive interpretation of the term "family". The family is not legally responsible for a child in regards to FACA it's the parent/guardian. We suggested looking at the term "parental responsibility" and having it defined in line again with the FACA, but shaping to say something similar to "rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authority which, by law, a parent of a child has in relation to the child and his property". Again, this definition allows for inclusion of diverse families, as family responsibility can be based on genetics and disregarding step parents and non-biological same sex parent.

**"Parent"** - the definition of "parent" again, as defined in the draft legislation still excludes the diverse composition of families within the country. The FACA similarly constructs its definition in the way this document has done it. However, there may be a way for this document to capture a parent as the "primary care giver of a child regardless of the care giver's gender". I'm sure we can't just disregard what has been written within the FACA, but this might be a way to revise and create inclusion.