

About Our Circle



Our Circle is a registered Non-Governmental Organization representing LGBT persons in Belize. OC was legally registered in October 2014. Since then, Our Circle has engaged in numerous community-driven initiatives aimed at mobilizing, educating, informing and supporting the LGBT community in Belize. Since inception, OC has been collaborating with various organizations.

VISION:

“By 2020, OC is an LGBT centered organization creating positive change through the efforts of the community and its allies.”

MISSION:

“OC aims to reflect equality and equity within the diversity of the LGBT community by encouraging active participation from the community in achieving a solid, safe support system for the LGBT community and families in Belize.”

OVERALL GOAL:

“To improve the quality of life and access to opportunity for LGBT persons and families of LGBT persons ensuring a socially inclusive Belize.”



About the Strengthening LGBT Families Against Social Inequality Campaign



In the five years since its founding, Our Circle (OC) has played a major role in creating social change through the efforts of the LGBT community and its allies. The Strengthening LGBT Families Against Social Inequality Project aids LGBT families and families of LGBT persons in understanding and minimizing the effects of social inequality.

While homophobia and exclusivity riddles our legal, political and social systems, there are identifiable means and ways to addressing social inequalities, however, not much attention has been raised to these ways. OC believes, by addressing and securing social stability for the LGBT families, it will enrich the lives of the LGBT persons and create a new image for the LGBT community. OC has and continues to work to create changes to improve the climate within and surrounding the LGBT community. OC's engagement in numerous community-driven initiatives aimed at mobilizing, educating, informing and supporting the LGBT community in Belize and sensitizing the public has seen much success thanks to the active involvement and ownership from the local LGBT community and families and friends of LGBT persons in designing and implementing OC's initiatives.

In Belize, strengthening the economic security of Belizean families remains a key policy priority for decreasing poverty, reducing inequality and growing our economy through a sustained and supported middle class. Not all families in Belize, however, are equal under Belizean law. Unfortunately, majority of the government-sponsored programs treat LGBT families different from the straight and non-transgender counterparts.

Due to narrow definitions of who constitutes a "family", many of the more than 100 children living with gay or transgender families in Belize do not have the same access to the economic safeguards afforded to other children in Belize today. Moreover, this discrimination in government programs exacerbates the economic insecurities created by the high rates of discrimination facing the LGBT population. Even couples who have not crossed over to parenthood face discrimination in healthcare, housing, and the workplace. Far too many LGBT couples in Belize cannot secure health or life insurance in conjunction



with their partners, cannot do financial banking as couples and are therefore, they are not able to find affordable housing, and in turn may not be able to find a job that makes ends meet.

With inequitable access to safety net programs and with persistent and pervasive discrimination, the LGBT families have a lower household income, are more likely to find themselves in poverty, and are more likely to be uninsured than their straight and non-transgender counterparts. Therefore, OC, through consultation with the LGBT community in Belize has seen the urgency to actively address the inequalities faced by LGBT couples and families, at the same time pursuing legal relationship recognition, as a means of redressing these inequities within the LGBT community.

To collectively address this much-needed social change, OC sees the need to educate and empower the LGBT community to be able to identify and actively appeal these outdated, harmful laws, so that public policy can keep up with the changing reality of what the Belizean family is the LGBT community needs to be afforded the opportunity to safely congregate, understand and make recommendations to the policies and laws that stifle our security as couples and families.

Through legal clinics, media engagement and engagement with key stakeholders, OC leads the favourable changes to these policies, which will in turn, improve the way of life for LGBT couples and LGBT families, minimizing their fear of discrimination and affording them the ability to become more stable and socially secured.

If more and more LGBT persons engage these systems along with the political engagement from the relevant organizations, social inequalities and processes can be properly documented, comprehensively compiled and systematically circulated. By doing this, Our Circle purposefully sensitizes key persons in legal and political spaces in an effort to make the process inclusive and welcoming to LGBT persons and families of LGBT persons hence, minimizing the fear of being stigmatized, discriminated or ridiculed for enquiring and engaging these processes.



International Family Equality Day Campaign



International
Family
Equality
Day

The launch of a Campaign on IFED will coincide with the hosting of the ***Living Outside the Safety Net Symposium***. The official launch of the IFED Campaign is key to fostering inclusion and visibility of Rainbow Family life and driving sustainable social development.

The IFED Campaign is an attempt to positively influence social norms in support of long-term, sustainable shifts in behaviour and changes in attitudes in regards to diverse family structures. The aim is to get people thinking about making the desired change, while engendering positive values, attitudes and behaviours support our nation's development and promote social transformation which caters to all families in Belize. The reality is that Belize cannot consider itself an advanced nation if positive values, attitudes and behaviours do not translate into building a positive environment for human and social capital within communities in our nation as a whole.

Our Circle recognizes that these desired values, attitudes and behaviours can only begin to be inculcated within the family and home environment and later reinforced in our schools and work places.



“Living Outside the Safety Net”

Family Equality Symposium

May 2nd & 3rd, 2019

Kiki Witz Accommodations and Events Centre

Symposium Objective and Expected Outcomes

The overall goal of the *Living Outside the Safety Net Symposium* is to serve as a platform for the national community to dialogue on important issues confronting the institution of the family and the inequality which exists for Diverse and Rainbow Families in Belize, as we move forward to achieve the tenets expressed in Horizon 2030 National Framework as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Other objectives of the symposium include:

- ◆ To bring together key social sector stakeholders who would facilitate the sharing of information, building of knowledge and creating established networking arrangements to foster inclusive family life and well-being in Diverse and Rainbow Families in Belize;
- ◆ To commence articulation, achievement and integration of LGBT families into the Strategic Goal: “To promote the right of children and adolescents to grow up in a nurturing family environment”;
- ◆ To sensitise and bring awareness to policy/decision makers, practitioners, researchers, students, programme implementers, and the wider national community about inequality which exists in policies which;
- ◆ To establish a committed Working Group to aid in the reform process in an effort to integrate LGBT Families;
- ◆ To profile and provide higher value and visibility for Our Circle’s work, inclusive of the International Family Equality Day (IFED); and
- ◆ To stimulate further research.

