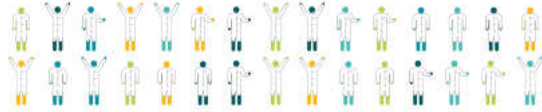




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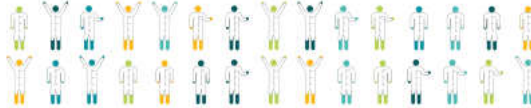


Children who identify as transgender, homosexual, gender nonconforming or elsewhere on the gender spectrum face hurdles in medical, educational and legal fields.

By **Deborah Strange**

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Circuit held a training for child advocates to discuss the challenges the group faces.

“There’s such a disparity by the transgender youth and cisgender youth on the national level,” said Katie Zeile, child advocate manager for the Guardian ad Litem program. Guardians ad litem are people appointed by a judge to look out for the interests of children who come into the court system because they have been abused, abandoned or neglected.

Children who identify as transgender, homosexual, gender nonconforming or elsewhere on the gender spectrum face hurdles in medical, educational and legal fields, Zeile said. More often than their gender conforming peers, she said, these youth run away from home or are kicked out.

“We want to make sure our youth, all youth, are treated fairly and feel safe,” Zeile said.

Earlier in May, the Guardian ad Litem program brought child advocates together to talk about strategies for helping children who often lack support in society.

“We’re perhaps the group who has to jump through the most amount of hoops to be our authentic selves,” said Gina Duncan, Equality Florida’s director of transgender equality.

At the training, Duncan spoke of her transition in adulthood, saying that coming out “certainly is an act of trust.”

“Everything in life is at risk,” Duncan said, explaining that people can lose their finances, relationships, hobbies and jobs after coming out.

Nationwide, about 6 percent of youth in foster care are transgender, and 13 percent identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or queer, according to Currey Cook, counsel and project director for Lambda Legal.

Analyiese Hancock-Smith, a psychologist in UF Health’s medical psychology division, spoke at the training about the differences and correlations between one’s sex and gender. An individual’s sex is biological, while gender is culturally defined, she said.

“There are no typical gender behaviors in children,” Hancock-Smith said. By age 3, she said, children demonstrate gender behavior by mimicking their parents and peers.

While there are biological and emotional components to one’s gender identity, she said, “We don’t come with these. We learn these.”

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’s top advocates, and she ished regulations oms aligning with their

condition,” she said.

last year that limited

Alachua County Public Schools’ non-discrimination policy protects individuals’ gender identity.

While some schools across the nation facilitate accommodations for transgender youth, Duncan said, one district spent thousands of dollars for a portable toilet a transgender student could use.

“There’s a wide gap between accommodating and segregation,” Duncan said.

Zeile said while many advocates want to help these youth, they might need training to juggle the different aspects of identifying as an atypical sex or gender.

“There’s not a lot of knowledge out there about what this specific population faces,” she said. “I really want people to learn and be able to understand what this particular group has to go through.”