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Group supports parents of ex-gays

By Julia Duin
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Unhappy with the sympathetic publicity given parents of homosexuals, the Family Research Council announced yesterday it is sponsoring a new support group for friends and relatives of former gays.

Called Parents and Friends of Ex-Gays (Pfox), it is being offered as an alternative to the Washington-based Parents and Friends of Lesbians And Gays (PFLAG) founded 15 years ago in New York.

PFLAG is now attracting celebrities, such as singer-actress Cher, appearing along with her 27-year-old lesbian daughter, Chastity, at a reception tonight in Arlington.

"PFLAG has become very politicized, to where they affirm their children in a homosexual lifestyle," said Anthony Falzarano, the acting Pfox coordinator who also runs Transformation, a Washington-based Christian ministry for ex-homosexuals.

"Parents need to know there are options if their children are gay," Mr. Falzarano said.

"Trying to change homosexual children "is a result of the negative stereotypes of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in our communities," PFLAG President Mitzi Henderson responded.

"Rather than trying to change our children, we have chosen to change our attitudes," she said.

Pfox has \$10,000 in initial funding, donated by a Northern Virginia man who has a homosexual brother and who read about Mr. Falzarano in The Washington Times. The money will be used to open a Washington office, hire an executive director and begin preparations for a national conference in March.

The organization already has fledgling chapters in Rockville and Vienna.

Pfox meetings will include referrals to therapists who conduct "reparative therapy," psychological treatment helping people establish fulfilling nonsexual relationships with members of the same sex.

"It can also include parents who wish their children would get out of it or don't agree with the homosexual lifestyle," Mr. Falzarano said.

"For too long, we've been too timid in discussing this issue from a Christian perspective," said Michael Johnston, who appeared at a Pfox press conference as coordinator of today's "National Coming Out of Homosexuality Day" for former gays.

He, Mr. Falzarano and 10 other ex-homosexuals — including a man who's had two sex changes — will tell their stories at 10 a.m. today on the Capitol West Terrace overlooking the AIDS Memorial Quilt on the Mall.

"These are individuals whose lives have been changed, who'll tell what they've been through and what their lives have been like since," said Mr. Johnston, 36, who is dying of AIDS.

"When we talk about the ability to change, people ask us, 'Don't you know homosexuals are born this way?'" said Jane Boyer, a former lesbian and former alcoholic.

"Even if there is a chemical in the brain or a gene predisposed toward homosexuality, there's still hope for those who want it," she said.