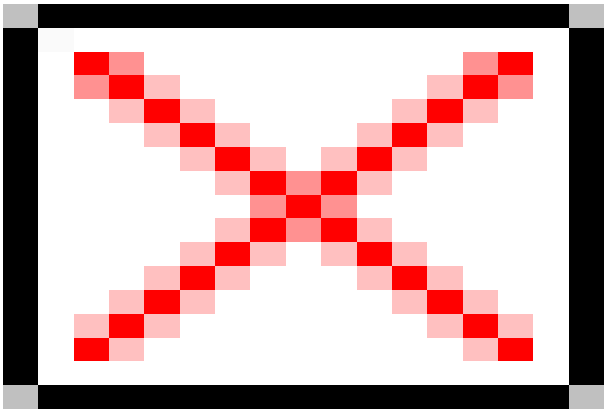
Published on *Gay-Straight Alliance Network* (http://www.gsanetwork.org)

Fighting to Make Middle School Safer: Max?s Story

Nov. 18, 2009

Meet Max. Everyone who gets to know this remarkable student leader from Valley View Middle School is impressed. You will be, too.



Before Max came to GSA Network, we'd heard stories about the amazing middle school activist fighting an uphill battle to start a GSA in Pleasant Hill, California.

Last year, at just 13, Max's friend Alyssa committed suicide after years of anti-LGBT bullying at school. "Alyssa was my mentor. We were like siblings," shared Max, who struggles to talk about the tragedy.

Alyssa's death motivated Max to take action. Amidst taunts of "faggot" and "dyke," Max found the courage to come out, first to a teacher and then to the whole school.

At a local LGBT community center in Concord, Max learned about GSA Network and the power of Gay-Straight Alliance clubs to transform unsafe schools. Max decided to start a GSA.

"It's horrible on our campus," Max told us. "Slurs happen so much that our teachers don't care anymore. I want to start a GSA because I want my school to be a safe place to learn."

Federal law requires schools to allow GSA clubs, but many schools make it difficult for students. Max's first meeting with the principal was challenging, but Max did not give up.

In August, Max became the first middle school student to attend GSA Network Activist Camp. Max and 20 other youth leaders learned about racism and other oppressions, state and federal protections for LGBT youth, and everything you need to know to start and run a successful GSA club.

With an abundance of new skills and resources, Max returned to school and requested a meeting with the principal. To prepare and strategize, Max called Kiely Hosmon, GSA Network's Northern California Program Coordinator. Kiely and Max role-played until Max felt confident and ready for the meeting.

Because of Max's leadership, the principal approved the club. The GSA club held its first meeting on Thursday, October 15th. 60 students signed up!

"Max had the first meeting today and ran it so well," shared Martha Gregory, Max's teacher and GSA Advisor. "Max has great ideas and is totally motivated. Max has truly become a leader."

Role models like Max are key to building the GSA movement in middle schools. Max's gutsy example will inspire more middle school students to take action to make their schools safer.

Now Max is the youngest member of our Northern California Youth Council and the first middle school student to help plan our annual Youth Empowerment Summit in San Francisco.

"Students are involved in all aspects of leadership at GSA Network," said Max. "Youth are really in charge here and it's amazing!"

At just 14, Max is already breaking new ground at GSA Network. With your continued support, just imagine what Max will accomplish by 18!

Thank you for supporting Max and the GSA youth movement.

Carolyn Laub
Founder & Executive Director

P.S. You can support GSA youth activists like Max by making a gift today. Donate now. [1]
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