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Becoming a GSA Leader: Isobel?s Story

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Like many GSA activists, **Isobel Murillo** stepped up to lead the GSA at **Pete Knight High School** not out of choice, but out of necessity.

Isobel lives in Palmdale, a conservative community in the Antelope Valley where there are few spaces for LGBTQ youth. In school, anti-LGBTQ slurs and harassment are common and teacher allies are few and far between.

Convinced that a strong Gay-Straight Alliance would improve the climate for LGBTQ students, Isobel decided to become President of the GSA. That decision, as Isobel quickly learned, was just the first step. Because once you are in charge, what comes next?

For Isobel, like many GSA activists, the next step was to reach out to GSA Network for support and resources. Isobel connected with Daniel Solis, GSA Network's Southern California Program Coordinator, and applied to attend GSA Activist Camp in Southern California in July 2009.

Since going to Activist Camp, Isobel joined the Southern California Youth Council and became a Youth Trainer to help other GSA activists learn how to lead their GSAs and fight against homophobia and transphobia in their schools.

Now Isobel has trained GSA activists from Bakersfield to Orange County, and is helping to organize the first ever GSA Leadership Summit in the Antelope Valley!

We asked Isobel what it?s been like to become a GSA leader. Here?s what Isobel had to say:

?Before I became involved in GSA Network, I was very

unskilled, unorganized, unresourceful, and timid. I wasn't much of a leader at all, and my GSA was relatively stagnant compared to other GSAs. During the few meetings we had, we often didn't know what to talk about, except unreachable goals that weren't even properly planned.

I didn't really have any skills at all. I wasn't born a leader, as some are; I became a leader out of necessity. I was still very shy at the time, and had a lot of trouble speaking in front of the club, and didn't know how to get them in the right direction, partly because I didn't have a direction myself. The only thing that kept my GSA going was my desire to have an LGBT-friendly space at my school, and that's about all we were. We did almost nothing until I began to really look into GSA Network's resources.

GSA Network helped me gain skills as a leader through its numerous resources. The fact that much of it is youth-led helped me a great deal. I saw how professional and intelligent the other youth leaders were in appearance, their mannerisms, and how they spoke, and I wanted to take on similar professionalism.

The first GSA Network event that I attended was Activist Camp, and it was an amazing help. I was trained on every aspect of running a club and more. I learned the basics, such as the basics of sexual identity, how to effectively facilitate a club meeting, how to encourage full participation from my quiet members by creating a comfortable club environment, how to manage conflict, and plan and run a campaign on campus and beyond, even form coalitions with other clubs and organizations.

I also learned how to defend myself, my GSA, and other students from anti-LGBT discrimination in school. At Camp, I found out about the resources, equal treatment and fairness my school is required to provide to us by law. Activist Camp even went above and beyond LGBT issues, teaching us about ALL forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, ageism, classism, and more, and how to recognize and help prevent them. Throughout the time spent at camp, I also learned how to work with others and not always do things on my own. The moment that stands out the most for me is the Community Yarn Circle we had at the end of Activist Camp. I felt like I was truly with my community. I felt more at home than my physical home.

GSA Network helped me become a much more educated person. Before Activist Camp, I was

relatively ignorant of LGBT issues. I learned of oppression and discrimination that I wasn't even aware was happening all around me. I learned that even I was being insensitive and oppressive without even realizing it! I've learned through GSA Network, about how to be all-inclusive of people of all genders when speaking. It isn't proper to refer to a group of people of mixed genders as "you guys," because not everyone identifies as a guy. So instead I've learned to say "you all" or "y'all" (which I prefer, due to cuteness). I've also become much more aware and caring of other forms of oppression, including passive racism and sexism, patriarchy, and others.

I recommend other youth to work with GSA Network no matter what they are passionate about. GSA Network is there to fight all oppression, not just homophobia and transphobia. It is an organization unlike any other. The members are incredibly friendly and helpful, and I consider them to be a second family. ?

With all the new skills and support that Isobel has gained from working with GSA Network, this fierce youth leader is ready to make a difference throughout the Antelope Valley. By helping to plan the first ever GSA Leadership Summit in the Antelope Valley on March 20, 2010, Isobel is setting the stage for other GSA activists to learn, connect with one another and begin working to change the culture in the communities of the Antelope Valley.

As Isobel and other GSA activists work to fight homophobia and transphobia in their schools and communities, GSA Network will be there to support them.

You can support GSA youth activists like Isobel by making a gift today. Donate Now.[1]

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