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Keeping Harvey's Dream Alive

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This past weekend GSAs throughout California and the nation marked the f**irst annual Harvey Milk Day on May 22nd**. After lobbying the California Legislature to adopt Harvey Milk Day for two years, students celebrated their hard won victory by organizing events in their schools and communities. Students held educational rallies, movie screenings, gave out cookies with milk, talked to their peers, served Harvey Milkshakes, and even had birthday cakes for Harvey!

Cynthia Schroeder of I-Poly High in Pomona shared with us her GSA's creative idea that would have made Harvey Milk proud. Wanting to raise funds for their GSA's activities next year and educate their school about Harvey Milk, the I-Poly High GSA sold Harvey Milkshakes. As Cynthia described it, "We took each Milkshake cup and put on a sticker with Harvey's picture and a brief summary on why he is significant to not only the LGBT community, but to all of California." Delicious and educational!

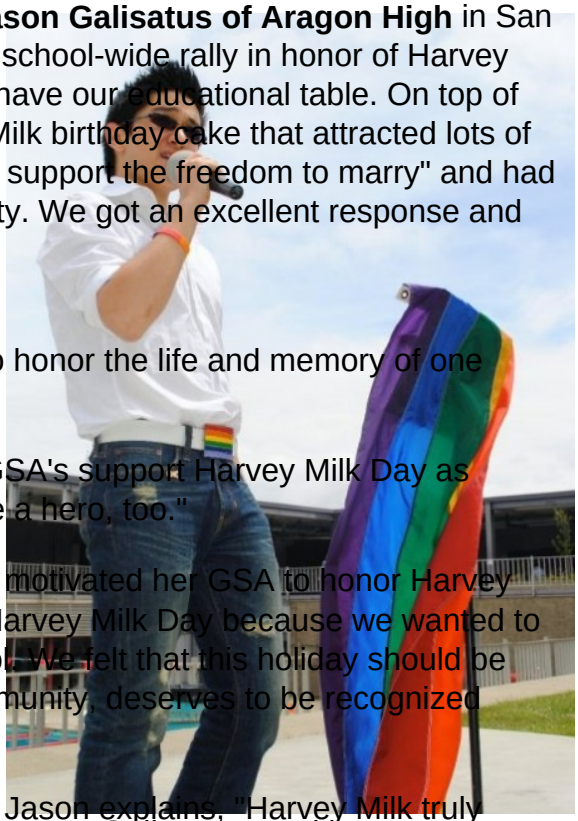
Other GSAs used Harvey Milk Day as a chance to build coalitions fighting for equality with other students in their schools. **Aaron Alvardo of Dinuba High** in the Central Valley, explained how his GSA did this. Aaron said, "We had a movie screening of the Harvey Milk documentary and accompanied that with milk and cookies. Instead of just having our GSA members attend, we sent letters to different ethnic clubs, multicultural clubs, and clubs that strive to achieve diversity, in order to build a stronger network of progressive Dinuba High School youth who will be willing to help us in future events." By building bridges with other progressive students groups on Harvey Milk Day, Dinuba High's GSA is creating the alliances that make equality a reality, just like Harvey Milk did.

Students at **El Cerrito High School** in the Bay Area similarly saw the opportunity to build progressive coalitions in honor of Harvey Milk's civil rights legacy. Four clubs took turns throughout last week honoring "Forgotten Activists" of several civil rights movements. The coalition included the GSA, the Jewish Student Union, Green Justice, and the African-American/Black Student Union. On Monday, this week, the GSA read a short bio of Harvey Milk and re-enacted Harvey Milk's famous "You Gotta Give 'Em Hope [1]" speech during lunch in the main quad.

Dinuba High School prepares for Harvey Milk Day

Other GSAs took Harvey's message to heart and are building connections between GSAs in different schools. **Ale Alarcon of Hawthorne Math and Science Academy** in Hawthorne has been working to unite her local GSAs to celebrate Harvey Milk Day together. Ale described how her GSA celebrated Harvey Milk Day: "Our GSA decided to reach out to the other high school GSAs in the South Bay area. For the past couple of weeks the leaders of each of the GSAs have worked together to come up with a what we?re calling 'South Bay GSA Mixer: Harvey Milk Day'. Basically, the event is a typical GSA meeting with the focus set on Harvey Milk. What makes the event unique is that it brings together youth from the same community with the same beliefs and interests. It gives everyone the opportunity to network and form coalitions fighting for the rights of LGBT people in the South Bay area of Los Angeles County."

Some GSAs focused on organizing rallies to educate their schools not just about Harvey Milk, but all the issues facing LGBT people in the United States. **Jason Galisatus of Aragon High** in San Mateo described what his GSA did: "Our GSA planned a school-wide rally in honor of Harvey Milk. At this rally, we had music playing and continued to have our educational table. On top of that, we had fun decorations and balloons and a Harvey Milk birthday cake that attracted lots of students. At the table, we handed out stickers that said "I support the freedom to marry" and had people record short videos about why they support equality. We got an excellent response and compiled them into a Youtube video that can be seen at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f4gv82l1ugI." [2]


Jason Galisatus speaking at Aragon's HMD rally

What motivates so many youth in different communities to honor the life and memory of one man?

Anna Sturla of Emerson High in Davis, explained her GSA's support Harvey Milk Day as simply being, "To let LGBT youth know that they can have a hero, too."

Cynthia Schroeder of I-Poly High in Pomona shared what motivated her GSA to honor Harvey Milk at her school. Cynthia said, "Our GSA organized a Harvey Milk Day because we wanted to spread awareness about this historical figure to our school. We felt that this holiday should be celebrated and that Harvey Milk, a hero to the LGBT community, deserves to be recognized amongst all students and staff."

Jason Galisatus draws inspiration and hope from Harvey. Jason explains, "Harvey Milk truly means hope. To many people during his time, Harvey was a true role model. He led the coming out movement and jump-started the modern LGBT liberation struggle. To our GSA, he is revered as the father of our movement, for without his work, having a GSA might not even be possible. We all owe it to him and his work that GSAs and subsequent support networks for LGBT youth and their allies exist."

Aaron Alvardo sees Harvey Milk as representing a change in what the LGBT community thought was possible to achieve. Aaron reflected, "Harvey Milk symbolizes to my GSA a pivotal turning point in LGBTQQIA history and in how LGBTQQIA people saw themselves. With Harvey Milk's election to office, young LGBTQQIA youth were able to open up a paper and see somebody like them, somebody that society deemed deviant and wrong, achieved a position of power that was won through public support. Harvey Milk opened the eyes of a whole generation of LGBTQQIA youth to the fact that not being part of a majority doesn't make us bad, sick, or any less capable of achieving great things."

Golden West GSA in the Central Valley rocked T-Shirts and gave out Milk Duds

In honoring Harvey Milk Day and making it a day of activism and education, GSA activists are fighting to bring Harvey's dream of full equality for LGBT people to communities throughout California. From Pomona to Dinuba, the victories GSA activist youth win everyday in their schools are proof that the cause Harvey gave his life for is alive and well. Let's keep Harvey's dream alive everyday by working to make our schools and communities safe and accepting places for all LGBT students.
Read an AP article on Harvey Milk Day [3]

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Links:
[1] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MbWDNM0wuAc
[2] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f4gv82l1ugI."
[3] http://gsanetwork.org/news/california-other-states-prepare-honor-milk/052110