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GSA Activism Brings Awareness to a Closeted Orange County Community

Jun. 29, 2010 ? Adrian Pedroza

It was late September of 2009, when a student told me, ?I don?t think a lot of people are going to join that group, something like that.? I had just started collecting signatures to form the first Middle College High School Gay-Straight Alliance. I was more nervous than I have ever been. Asking for people?s signatures was hard enough, but now I had to actually run this club. Despite how hard it might be to get people excited about a new club or speak in front of large audiences, I knew that I had to start the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) at my school. It was a matter of life and death.

Thousands of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer students like myself face depression and suicide everyday. It is estimated that every 5 hours there is an LGBTQ youth that commits suicide in the US and for every actual suicide there are 20 who attempt it. A survey showed that about 10% of all students, grades 9-12, reported having attempted suicide at some point in their life. Compare this to the 30% of gay and bisexual teens who attempt suicide every year. The higher rate of LGBTQ youth that consider, attempt and commit suicide is the direct result of the harassment and discrimination we face everyday in our schools, homes and communities.

This is the world that I have grown up in. My community in Orange County shows little compassion for the struggles of LGBTQ youth. There is a mentality here that puts LGBTQ youth below everyone else. This senseless intolerance and bigotry has pushed me to stand up and fight for the rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer people in our world, starting with our schools.

There is no excuse for using words like ?faggot? and phrases like ?that?s so gay.? They are thrown about so casually at my school and each one makes Middle College High a less safe and supportive place for LGBTQ youth. The fact that these words of hate are used with indifference shows that homophobia and transphobia are a big part of the way uneducated heterosexual students are raised and taught. Helping students at our school to discover the meaning behind the degradation and humiliation that these words and actions bring upon the LGBTQ community

was a big reason I started the Middle College High School GSA.

There should never be a moment of shame or rejection for a LGBTQ youth at their school. For that reason, I began the GSA to create a safe place where everyone can be accepted for who they are in my school. The GSA is not just about bake sales, rainbows, and bracelets. It is an opportunity to educate people about the thousands of LGBTQ people who have stood up to fight discrimination every day and the ones who continue to do so.

I was partly relieved and absolutely jubilant when I was not the only one at my school who held these views. From the first meeting on, I have received positive comments and encouragement from students and staff. Perhaps I am the only one, but whenever there is a rainbow flag flown proudly, an equality sticker worn with pride, or a gay couple holding hands with pomp and circumstance, it gives me hope in the inevitability of our liberation from our closets, into a brave new world.

Not everyone is as lucky as I am. I was able to receive help when I needed it the most. My brothers and sister share in my struggle coming out as a queer teenager. I could not receive any more compassion from my family and my mother than I have already received to this day. I sympathize with every person who has yet to come out of the closet, who has yet to discover their identity, and who has yet to develop a pride within themselves. I was once there as well. Not anymore and never again.

I would like to believe that what I do and what my community does makes the world a little easier for those still in the closet. I have to be hopeful. And I got to give them hope.

Adrian Pedroza is the founder and President of the GSA at Middle College High in Santa Ana, California. A version of this article appeared in his high school newspaper, ?Spellbinder.? Adrian is a graduating member of GSA Network?s Southern California Youth Council. He will be first year student at Humboldt State University in the Fall of 2010.

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