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

Student forms school?s first gay-straight alliance

YUCCA VALLEY ? When Krista Blevins returns as a senior to Yucca Valley High School next month, she?ll bear the torch as president of the True Colors gay-straight alliance, the first successful alliance for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered students at her school.

Last month, Blevins, along with other community members, was honored by San Diego City Commissioner Nicole Murray Ramirez with a congressional recognition award for her support and contributions to the LGBT community. Blevins is credited with giving fellow students an avenue for discussion, support and resources on campus.

The battle for a gay-straight alliance at YVHS has been ongoing since at least the mid-1990s.

Former YVHS student Crystal Sunday recalls a short-lived alliance at the school in 1995. Sunday says the group was ?not just the gay people, it was about their families and friends and how to deal with it.? She said the group, which was formed sometime in January, quickly dissolved.

?I think by April, it had gone away,? she said via telephone last week.

Bennett Hubbard, who graduated in 2007, said he wasn?t able to garner enough support for an alliance, but he did make an effort to shed light on the troubles facing gay and lesbian students.

?I tried to raise awareness slowly by organizing a day of silence, to (inform people) about the prejudices and bigotry that gay students face throughout the nation,? Hubbard said via telephone last week from Oregon, where he attends college.

He got about 12 participants to be silent for the day. They held a demonstration during lunch the same day, showing statistics about discrimination toward lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered students.

?So many students are harassed each year,? Hubbard said.

According to the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), which conducted the National School Climate Survey in 2007, a survey of 6,209 middle and high school students found that nearly 9 out of 10 LGBT students ?experienced harassment at school in the past

year.? The survey also found that about 60 percent of those students felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, and some stayed home out of fear of harassment.

Hubbard wrote to his now-defunct school newspaper about what he felt was a double standard on behalf of the administration.

?It seemed that there was some apathy on the administration?s part in terms of slurs about sexual orientation, whereas racial slurs were taken very seriously,? Hubbard said.

Sunday remembers verbal and physical threats being an issue during her years as a student.

?In ?95, all the kids, if you even mentioned a gay person, they?d be like, ?Oh I?m gonna go beat them down,?? she recalled.

Blevins?s girlfriend and fellow alliance supporter, Hailey Citrine, said the True Colors alliance was formed partly to address the issue of harassment on campus. ?In past years at the high school, violence was an issue,? she said.

Nobody knows that issue more than Daniel Harris. Harris was a student at YVHS in 1998. He knew he was making a bold move by being open about his sexuality, but even showing his face became daring.

?I basically went from being unnoticed, to everybody knowing who I was and talking about me and either throwing something or getting in my face,? Harris said via telephone Friday from Las Vegas, Nev., where he now lives.

He said he was often targeted when there was no campus security around, but he was most vulnerable when he was off school property. On the same evening that he was turned down by the town?s youth commission for help in forming a gay-straight alliance, he was encircled by a group of teens outside the meeting room.

?They just walked right up and started hitting me with their skateboards, to the point where I was on the ground,? he recalls.

Now, over a decade later, Blevins said physical attacks on gay students aren?t commonplace at the high school anymore. The violence may have subsided, but she said the initial support for the alliance was weak.

Upon registering her alliance with the administration, Blevins said, a faculty member, citing complaints from parents, encouraged her to leave out the words gay and straight.

Blevins says she was told to ?try and put just True Colors? on the form.

?How ironic that 16-year-old Krista received a national honor for her efforts, yet is forbidden from discussing it openly and honestly by the local school administration,? Mike Lipsitz, editor of Hi-Desert LGBT News said via e-mail last week.

Carl Phillips, principal at YVHS, said he wasn?t aware of any discrimination or push-back on behalf of the administration.

?That?s not true at all,? he said when asked if the administration had discouraged the alliance, or use of specific terminology.

?This is the first time in six years that anything?s come across my desk,? Phillips added in reference to previous years, noting that he signed off on the paperwork for True Colors without hesitation.

?I support strongly the rights of students aboard any school site to form a club or alliance with any allegiance that is not in any way harmful to other students or a disruption to the education process,? Morongo Unified School District Board Member Ed Will wrote via e-mail Monday. ?I am pro human rights and support the efforts of the LGBT community,? Will continued.

Blevins noted that while she did face protest from a couple of Associated Student Body members when forming the club, most of her peers and teachers have been supportive.

?We were voted ?cutest couple? in the yearbook,? Blevins said of she and Citrine. The couple also attended prom together in spring.

?I think the main thing is the administration doesn?t want to upset the parents and they want to make a safe environment, but I don?t see how we can do that if there isn?t a club to advocate safety and awareness and understanding,? she added.

Jul. 21, 2010
News Article
http://hidesertstar.com/articles/2010/07/10/news/doc4c381676... [1]
Hi-Desert Star
Courtney Vaughn

Source URL: http://www.gsanetwork.org/news/student-forms-school%E2%80%99s-first-gay-straight-alliance/072110

Links:
[1] http://hidesertstar.com/articles/2010/07/10/news/doc4c381676e780a743459301.txt