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

GSA Youth Stand Up for Immigrant Rights

Dec. 9, 2010 ? Daniel

GSA Network supports the DREAM Act, which has a chance to get passed in Congress right now, and President Obama has pledged to sign it. The DREAM Act passed the House on Wednesday, December 8th and now it faces passage in the Senate. This legislation would enable undocumented youth who grew up in the U.S. to access college and citizenship. Call Congress today to tell them you support the DREAM Act. Call the Congressional switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask for your senators' office.

And check out this blog from Ryan King, a GSA Network youth leader about the connection between GSA clubs and organizing for immigrant rights.

My name is Ryan King and I?m the founder and Co-President of the Gay-Straight Alliance at Saugus High in Santa Clarita, California. Like many people in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) community, I have faced my share of oppression. As LGBTQ Americans, we face challenges when trying to get married, adopting children, being safe at school and living our lives openly, just to name some of the numerous challenges faced by millions of LGBTQ Americans. If this discrimination isn?t bad enough, what happens when you?re both LGBTQ and an undocumented immigrant? Until a few years ago, I had never really thought about this question and then I dated someone who had to answer it everyday of his life.

An undocumented immigrant is a person who has come into the United States without legal permission for lots of different reasons. Because our immigration system is biased against the countries where many people want to come to the US to work and support their families, most undocumented immigrants have to choose between seeing their families live in poverty or come and do hard work in the US. Some undocumented immigrants never even had a choice in whether they would come to the US, since their parents brought them when they were just children. However undocumented immigrants came to be in the US, they all are forced to live in the shadows of America because they don?t have the legal permission to be here.

Undocumented immigrants make up about a third of the total immigrant population in the United States today. Many identify as LGBTQ, meaning they face oppression based not only their sexual orientation and gender identity, but also their lack of a legal status. When you add

discrimination because of your sexual orientation and gender identity to the discrimination faced by undocumented immigrants, it can make life that much harder. In addition to the injustices faced by all members of the LGBTQ community, undocumented LGBTQ immigrants can?t get a driver license, can?t get a legal job, can?t qualify for student financial aid, can?t leave the United States and can never come in contact with the government without fear of deportation. More importantly, these people can?t live their lives openly without fear of intense social disapproval and discrimination. But this isn?t just about being in the closet for being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer. This is the second closet occupied by undocumented LGBTQ Americans.

Personally, I never felt strongly about the issue of undocumented immigration because I did not know anyone who was undocumented. I knew that it was wrong for businesses to abuse undocumented workers, but that all of the economic arguments seemed so distant to me. This all changed when a man I was dating at the time revealed to me that he was born in Mexico and crossed the border illegally with his family when he was one year of age. The next week, my best friend from the fifth grade revealed to me that he, too, was not a documented American. As more people became open to me about their undocumented status, I came to a realization. Just like LGBTQ folk don?t live up to all of the stereotypes society sets aside for us, undocumented Americans come from all walks of life. They sit next to you in your math class, they order the same decaf latte as you at Starbucks, and listen to the same pop music. Undocumented Americans aren?t leeches bringing American society down, they are contributing, valuable members of society. They are your classmates. They are Americans.

When I began leading my GSA in October 2009, I did not understand the great potential for activism beyond LGBTQ issues that Gay-Straight Alliances provide. A very important part of the job of GSAs is to fight for all human rights and stop social injustices. GSAs are a crucial part of the movement working for immigrant rights. Your GSA can take a stand and begin making a difference for the rights of undocumented immigrants!

This power of GSAs became fully apparent to me at a local immigration reform rally I organized in July 2010. Though I had never addressed immigrant advocacy in GSA, I noticed that twenty of the thirty protestors present were from my school?s GSA club. That was a wake up call for me and I decided to combine my GSA activism with the advocacy for immigrant rights I was doing separately. Even if you may not think that your club is ready to take on immigrant rights activism, give your members the benefit of the doubt and test the waters of immigrant advocacy. Your club may surprise you with how strongly they stand behind bettering the lives of undocumented immigrants.

Your club can also hold workshops to educate your members or you could also bring in a guest speaker to inform club members on the issue. Once that has been accomplished, your GSA can work on building coalitions with ethnic clubs or human rights clubs on campus to plan educational events. For example, your GSA can team up with the Asian American Club to organize a school-wide presentation on the challenges faced by undocumented students trying to go to college and build lives for themselves. Holding this event can help your GSA make your school better for undocumented students, and also help show that the GSA cares about everyone?s rights. For other ideas on what your GSA can do to fight for the rights of immigrants, go to GSA Network's

resource: GSAs and Immigration [1].

GSAs looking to create a school-wide environment of acceptance and respect for all cultures can also print fliers for meetings and events in a variety of languages other than English. GSA clubs are also a great way to promote an immigrant leader?s outside activist work. Students involved in a Gay-Straight Alliance already are likely to support civil rights activism, and once educated on the issue of undocumented immigration, they are likely to be a great base of support.

Education is the key to acceptance and understanding. Every GSA that takes on immigration rights activism marks another step towards improving the lives of undocumented immigrants - LGBTQ and straight. GSAs are a powerful way to let the undocumented community know that their fellow Americans within the LGBTQ community stand alongside them in the fight for civil rights -- todos somos humanos, y todos merecemos derechos iguales.

Source URL: http://www.gsanetwork.org/news/blog/gsa-youth-stand-immigrant-rights/12/09/10

Links:
[1] http://gsanetwork.org/resources/coalition-building/gsas-and-immigration