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Hats off to Humboldt County

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Last weekend, GSA Network took an epic 3-day road trip to Humboldt County to train youth leaders and adult allies on how to make schools safer. I, along with youth trainers Alexa Lopez, K. Boucher, and Nick Penland, traveled over 550 miles round trip to Eureka for the Humboldt County GSA Leadership Summit.

A little background: Humboldt County is largely rural and is one of the northern-most counties in California. Prior to the announcement of the summit, GSA Network only had five registered Humboldt County GSAs in its database. Looking at the number of registered GSAs in the county compared to the number of public middle schools and high schools, we could see this was a big opportunity to boost GSA support.

We were right. On the day of the summit, over 20 youth and 20 adults came together for a full day of programming on legal rights and building and supporting a GSA, as well as a film screening of Out in the Silence, a documentary about LGBTQ fairness and equality in small-town and rural America. Through small group discussions and activities, participants were able to connect with one another about their school climates and the change they wanted to see in their schools.

At least three students said they wanted to start GSAs in their schools, and adult educators, including two from middle schools, showed strong support for new GSA efforts. Participants remarked that they learned tons of useful information that they would take directly back to their schools. Youth and GSA Network representatives brainstormed ways to stay in contact for ongoing assistance, including phone calls and Skype trainings.

Youth Trainer Nick Penland said the experience was energizing, explaining: ?I believe the students took away from this summit the knowledge that they are the ones who truly have the power to make it better now, not only for themselves and their friends, but also future LGBTQ students. They don't have to wait for it to happen.?

Local partners included the Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services [1], Humboldt County Transition Age Youth Collaboration [2], and the Eureka Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence [3]. GSA Network would like to give huge thanks to Qaiel Peltier for hir incredible organizing efforts, Julie Freitas for presenting a workshop on working with LGBTQ youth, and Crystal Barr and Gr Keer for their amazing hospitality!

We're so excited to see the GSA movement spread across all of California and the country! If you'd like to request a site visit in NorCal, email me at amanda@gsanetwork.org [4].

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Links:
[1] http://co.humboldt.ca.us/hhs/
[2] http://www.humboldtyouth.org/
[3] http://www.eurekasisters.org/
[4] mailto:amanda@gsanetwork.org