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

My Date with Hate

Mar. 9, 2013 ? Ruhi Bhalla

When I found out the Westboro Baptist Church was coming to picket my school on February 25th, I knew I had to do something.

And thanks to some quick planning and my fabulous GSA, we turned that awful event into a day of peace, positivity, and love ? and raised over $6000 [1] to support GSAs across the country!

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?m awed by what our community accomplished in response to hate. And I?m more convinced than ever that youth can create incredible change at the local level. So, for all of the other GSA activists out there, I?d like to share some steps that helped us pull this off:

1. **Have a clear decision-making process BEFORE anything happens.** [2] Before jumping in, I knew that people would be looking to me for answers as co-President of the GSA. I took some time to reflect on how to tackle the situation, which at first seemed incredibly overwhelming. I realized that no matter what was going to happen on the 25th, I wanted our GSA?s message of positivity, peace, and self-love to be seen and spread.

2. **Pull together a team to make a plan.** [3] I quickly met up with up with other GSA leaders to formulate a plan. The Westboro Baptist Church had already given a hateful press release, so we decided to counterbalance their odious behavior with a ?Wall of Humanity Fundraiser? to spread the message of our GSA. We would stand in front of school linked in solidarity with our backs faced towards the protestors, and we?d fundraise for the wonderful GSA Network, so they could use the money to help schools like us, to create a safe

educational environment.

3. **Spread the word**. Once we had a plan, we talked to the administrators on campus. Right away we set up a meeting and before I knew it, I was having lunch with all the house principals explaining my plan to everyone. Soon meetings with admin grew into all the staff; we communicated our plan with the messages of positivity, peace, and safety for all. We let everyone know that our school has resources for everyone. GSA Network has some tips on how to talk to people in your school when you're dealing with hostility [4].

Sharing our message with administrators, staff, students, the police, and even local press allowed our Wall of Humanity Fundraiser to be a day filled with pride, love, and unity. Thank you Westboro Baptist Church for giving us the opportunity to raise this much money and unite Santa Monica.

Youth leaders take a stand; reach out to everyone and anyone. Make your voices heard, find a common goal and communicate it. Make the change you wish to see.

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Links:
[1] http://www.crowdrise.com/samohigsa/fundraiser/gaystraightalliancen
[2] http://www.gsanetwork.org/resources/building-your-gsa/decision-making
[3] http://www.gsanetwork.org/resources/gsa-actions-events/planning-events
[4] http://www.gsanetwork.org/resources/building-your-gsa/dealing-hostility-opposition