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

Georgia GSA Summit: Breaking out my rainbow bowtie

Mar. 15, 2013 ? Jessy - Georgia...

Running on two cups of coffee and five hours of sleep, I stepped into Agnes Scott College for the 2013 Georgia youth GSA summit. The

moment I stepped in, I was energized. The energy radiated off of everyone and there were over 350 people in attendance, representing nearly 80 college and high school clubs from across Georgia. I had on a purple button up and a rainbow bowtie. I knew I could wear whatever I wanted today without fear of judgment. The only judgment I received was positive: ?I LOVE YOUR BOWTIE!?

I met a group of students who were working on making their GSA known, my first new connection of the day. The sessions had not even started, and we had already exchanged contact information and experiences. The friendly and open environment made it easy to talk to others in the room. The safe zone that encompassed the whole session made being myself easy.
As someone who constantly has to hide who I am, it was refreshing to be able to be me, all of me, every part of me, not just the parts that were socially accepted.

My favorite session was Aspiring Allies. The group was small and personal, allowing free-flowing conversation to be one of the main learning tools. After some introductions by the speakers, the class was challenged to think of ways in which they were or could be an ally. The session challenged everyone in the room to keep ?aspiring to be an ally,? because you are never REALLY done.

During lunch, there were stands set up downstairs with information for different organizations and schools. Before lunch was over, my bag was filled with pamphlets and candy; it was almost like LGBTQQIA trick or treating.

After workshops, the resource fair, and dinner, a large portion of the summit attendees came back to Agnes Scott for a talent show. Some youth sang, some did stand-up comedy, some played instruments. No matter what they did, their performance was cheered on by the friendly crowd that filled the room.

Saying goodbye to my friends was the hardest part of the day (besides getting out of my oh so comfy bed). I refused to leave without a phone number, facebook name, or tumblr url. My favorite part of each summit is the connections I am able to make, and that was no different this year. I am hooked on the comfort and opportunities that are present at the GSA youth summit, and I plan to go every year possible.

First held in 2011, the third annual GSA Youth Summit is an event for middle school, high school, and college-aged young people hosted by the Georgia Safe Schools Coalition. The main function of the Summit is to help build up new young leaders and activists by offering a full day of learning, networking, socializing, and advocating. The Summit provides leadership training skills, exciting youth-driven workshops, and support for students leading or trying to start a Gay-Straight Alliance. If you want to help support this event in the future please visit the GSSC website[1] or email info@georgiasafeschoolscoalition.org[2]

The *Georgia Safe Schools Coalition (GSSC)* [1] *is a partnership of educators, community organizations, and safe school activists dedicated to eliminating LGBTQ oppression in Georgia schools. We educate and advocate on issues affecting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning and intersex students and families. GSSC works to address the intersections among various systems of oppression, understanding that one cannot eradicate transprejudice and heterosexism without simultaneously working to end all forms of injustice. By serving as a resource for Georgia students, educators, and families, we strive to engender positive social growth among Georgia?s youth, and to foster a safe and affirming school climate for all.*

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[1] http://www.georgiasafeschoolscoalition.org/
[2] mailto:info@georgiasafeschoolscoalition.org