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GSAs and Immigration

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GSAs are a powerful tool to make your peers and community aware of oppression and discrimination in our society. Immigrants are discriminated against in many ways.

But why are immigrant rights a queer issue?

Although maybe not obvious at first sight, immigrant rights and LGBTQ issues are closely connected. At the most basic level there is a connection simply because many people are both immigrants and LGBTQ. They often face multiple types of discrimination, not only based on their immigrant status but also due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Both groups:

- live under laws that treat them as less human,
- are a scapegoat for society?s problems,
- are afraid for the security of their families,
- feel vulnerable and unsafe because of policies, institutions and attitudes that keep them on

the margins,
- are frequently ignored, misrepresented, or made fun of by the dominant culture.

Immigrants in the U.S.

The United States is a nation of immigrants and, with the exception of Native Americans, all of us are in this country as the result of voluntary or involuntary immigration, including slavery. The reasons that immigrants continue to come to the U.S. for are manifold ? to reunite with family, escape persecution in their country of origin, or to find better employment opportunities. Immigration has built the political, economic, and cultural strength of this country from colonial days to the present. Yet, virtually every group of newcomers has faced discrimination, hostility, and stereotyping from those already here. Particularly in times of economic difficulty or fear about ?homeland security,? immigrants are blamed for the problems of our society and are viewed with anger, suspicion, and/or fear. Racial, religious, and cultural prejudices have fueled hostility toward each wave of new immigrants. This ignores the fact that U.S. corporations, policies, and military aggression have devastated the economies of other countries, forcing workers to migrate to the U.S. They are often separated from their families for years, just to be able to support them. Both LGBTQ people and immigrants are victims of injustice. Did you know that:

- While U.S. citizens and their foreign heterosexual partners can easily claim spousal status and the immigration rights that it brings, U.S. citizens with foreign same-sex partners, do not have federal recognition of their relationships and cannot assist their partners with immigration. If they want to live together, they will either have to leave the U.S. and move to another country or the foreign partner has to stay in the U.S. illegally.
- All immigrants, regardless of status, will pay on average $80,000 per capita more in taxes than they use in government services over their lifetime. The Social Security system reaps the biggest windfall from taxes paid by immigrants who are not in a position to claim benefits.
- In some parts of the U.S. local laws require all public officials to check immigration papers, even teachers, nurses and librarians. They're forbidden to help anyone lacking them.

What you can do:

1. Discuss. Bring in newspaper articles and books about (LGBTQ) immigrants. Discuss them in your GSA.
2. Get informed. Look up information on immigration regulations regarding LGBTQ immigrants (http://immigrationequality.org/ [1]). Compare them to regulations applying to heterosexual immigrants. Put your results on a poster!
3. Find out about cases of LGBTQ immigrants (use Google or the links below), such as the case of Victoria Arellano. Create posters, flyers, or artwork telling their stories.
4. Build coalitions. This issue provides the opportunity to form coalitions with other student groups who work on issues around racism, human rights, etc.
5. Organize an event. Invite a guest speaker, create a photo exhibition, or make posters telling immigrants? stories. Design a workshop activity that helps students explore our common and different experiences with immigration and how it has shaped our families.

6. Language is a common barrier that students face at their school and immigrants face in their everyday life. Make sure your flyers are translated into multiple languages to reach a broader audience. Have bilingual meetings and events.
7. Support. Many groups are working to create a more fair and equal immigration policy in the U.S. Your GSA can help support them by writing letters to your representatives in Congress, donating funds, or volunteering. Check out efforts to help immigrant students who?ve lived most of their lives in the U.S. qualify for financial aid and permanent residency under the Federal Dream Act.

Useful websites:

- http://immigrationequality.org/ [1]
- http://www.quir.org/ [2]
- http://www.lambdalegal.org/ [3]
- http://www.hrw.org/reports/2006/us0506/index.htm#Report [4]
- http://www.usstudents.org/our-work/legislative/federal-dream-act [5]
- http://cadreamnetwork.org/home.html [6]

Movies:

UNVEILED, Angelina Maccarone, dir. (2005). The story of an Iranian immigrant seeking asylum in Germany after being persecuted in her home country due to her lesbian relationship.

Cases:

Victoria Arellano, 23, a Mexican transgender woman, died in the intensive care unit of a hospital in Los Angeles' San Pedro district. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials detained her, an undocumented immigrant, in May 2007 after she entered the country for the second time. **Victoria**, who was HIV-positive, died after she was denied medication by Immigration Enforcement officials.
Chet, 67, and his Taiwanese partner Wei, 59, have been committed partners for two decades, during most of which Wei has lived in the U.S. undocumented: ?We have lived together and been devoted to each other for the last twenty years and have tried every way possible to get him permanent residence... Every possibility has been a dead end because of immigration laws against gay partners.?

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Links:
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