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[Home](#) > Training Youth Leaders throughout Southern California

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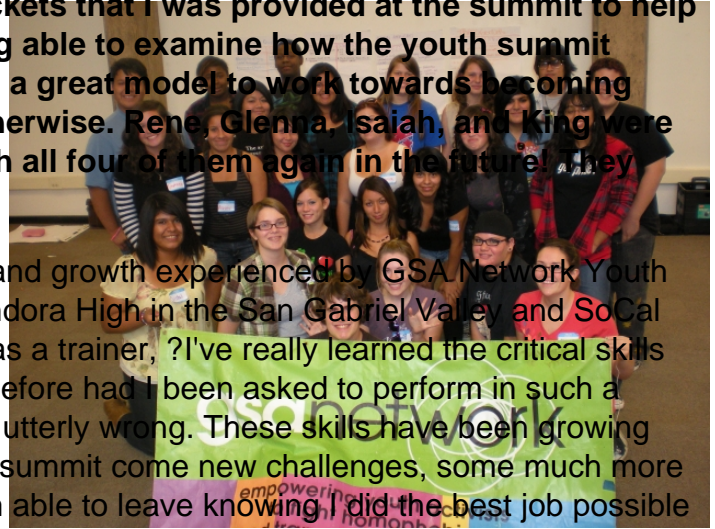
Dec. 3, 2009 ? Daniel

GSA Network organizes regional **GSA Leadership Summits** throughout California in order to provide GSA activists with the skills and resources necessary to transforming their schools into safe and inclusive learning environments, as well as to connect youth to one another. Current high school students trained by GSA Network staff to be peer educators, lead all workshops in our Leadership Summits.

In our Southern California region, GSA Network staff has organized [Leadership Summits](#) ^[1] in communities ranging from the **San Gabriel Valley** to **Long Beach** to **the Coachella Valley to Bakersfield** to **Southeast LA County**. More Summits are scheduled for 2010 in **Orange County**, **East LA**, **South LA**, **San Diego**, the **Antelope Valley**, and **Ventura County**.

Zach Gonzalez, GSA President at East Bakersfield High in Kern County, recently attended our **Bakersfield GSA Leadership Summit**. Even in the short month since he attended the Summit, Zach has been able to dramatically help his GSA. He says,

"Taking what I learned at the summit, our GSA is much more structured and organized. We've really used the resource tools and packets that I was provided at the summit to help keep things in order and focused. Also, being able to examine how the youth summit leaders presented at the event really showed a great model to work towards becoming when addressing our GSA in meetings or otherwise. Rene, Glenna, Isaiah, and King were all fantastic leaders. I would love to work with all four of them again in the future! They were that great!"



Zach's enthusiasm is matched by the learning and growth experienced by GSA Network Youth Trainers. **Isaiah Baiseri**, GSA President at Glendora High in the San Gabriel Valley and SoCal Youth Council member, says of his experience as a trainer, "I've really learned the critical skills of improvisation and time management. Never before had I been asked to perform in such a manner where things can go completely right or utterly wrong. These skills have been growing exponentially with each new summit. With each summit come new challenges, some much more difficult to deal with than others. Despite this, I'm able to leave knowing I did the best job possible and have gained a great amount of tenacity unparalleled by any other experience out there.?"

In addition to the personal growth that Isaiah has had as a Trainer, he has also been able to directly contribute to the building of a grassroots, youth-led GSA movement throughout Southern California. **GSA Network Coachella Valley Leadership Summit, College of the Desert.** Photo credit: Daniel Solis

Isaiah shared that, "The best part of training at a summit would have to be witnessing the changes in the youth present. Many arrive totally unaware of what they're about to experience, but leave a much more empowered youth prepared to fight for what they believe in. It's as if I can literally see eyes opening and perspectives broadening throughout the day.?"

Beyond our usual one day Leadership Summits, GSA Network also partners with Rainbow Pride Youth Alliance (RPYA), a center for LGBTQ and straight ally youth based in San Bernardino, to provide a three day leadership camp called **Q Camp for LGBTQ youth in the Inland Empire** counties of San Bernardino and Riverside.

36 youth from as far away as **Victorville, San Bernardino, Rialto, Moreno Valley, and Thermal** attended Q Camp that provided leadership training in many areas of GSA activism as well as workshops on developing positive self image, learning healthy communication skills, and how to get into college. In the far-flung Inland Empire, connecting LGBTQ youth with one another and resources is critical for their safety and development.

Q Camp is part of GSA Network's commitment to supporting the growth and development of empowered youth activists throughout California. Organizing a camp for LGBT and straight ally youth in Southern California's Inland Empire is an important step in providing leadership opportunities for GSA youth activists outside of Los Angeles. Collaborations such as Q Camp present an opportunity for GSA Network to develop the skills of youth throughout California, connect them with local organizations that can provide day-to-day support, and create the structures needed to fight homophobia and transphobia in every school and community.

~ Daniel

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Links

[1] <http://gsanetwork.org/events/trainings-and-summits>



Participants and staff of Q Camp 2009,

Camp de Benneville Pines. Photo credit: Larissa Vasquez