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Home > Youth Empowerment Summit

Youth Empowerment Summit

The Youth Empowerment Summit is an annual GSA Leadership Conference that happens every December in San Francisco.

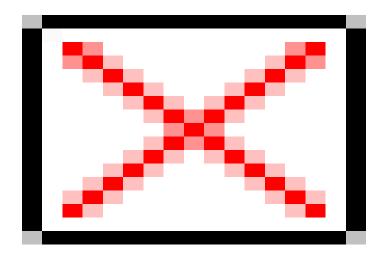
YES is a free, annual conference for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and intersex (LGBTQQI) youth activists and allies who are dedicated to defeating homophobia and transphobia and creating safe, supportive schools for everyone. YES is youth-planned and youth-led.

The last conference took place on December 4, 2011.



We hope to see you in 2012!

Youth Empowerment Summit 2010



YES 2010 Included:

DANCE

The after-YES booty shakin' dance, 5-8pm, (for youth only), including special drag performances by local drag troupes!

WORKSHOPS

A huge range of workshops including legal rights, safer sex, gender and sexuality, how to have a kick-ass GSA, HIV/AIDS education, and much more!

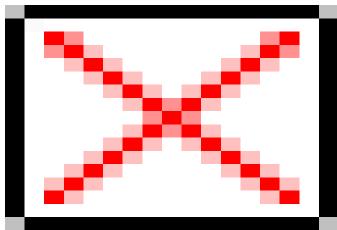
COMMUNITY RESOURCE FAIR

Where youth and allies can learn about services and organizations in the community.

YES Highlight 2010

On Saturday, December 11th, 2010, over 450 youth activists came together to gain leadership skills and tools to fight homophobia and transphobia at Gay-Straight Alliance Network's 7th

annual Youth Empowerment Summit (YES). This year's conference showed record-breaking attendance, as the largest YES event in GSA Network history!

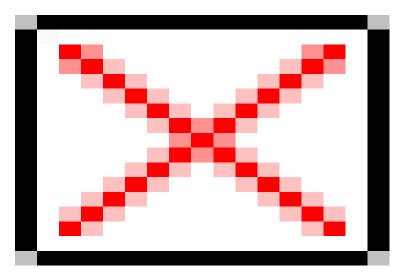


Middle and high school youth activists traveled from all over Northern California, the Central Valley, and even a busload from Eugene, Oregon to Horace Mann Middle School in San Francisco, California to be a part of this dynamic activist conference.

This event, organized and led by student leaders from GSA Network's Northern California Youth Steering Committee, was for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, questioning, and straight ally youth who are dedicated to fostering safe schools and youth activism. **Sam Alavi**, a sophomore at Aragon High School and Youth Council member said:

"I enjoyed being a part of such a great community and I am proud to be involved in something that will hopefully help youth gain the encouragement and resources to be strong community leaders."

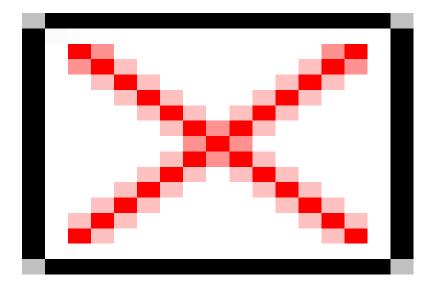
The conference was a daylong event that began with a presentation about GSA Network's <u>Make</u> <u>It Better Project</u> [1], youth speaker **Rochelle Hamilton**, and a screening of the film *Always My Son* by the <u>Family Acceptance Project</u> [2].



All of the morning speakers told the audience how acceptance and student activism could make schools safer for all. Rochelle Hamilton, a former Vallejo Unified School District student, spoke about how she was harassed by teachers at her school and worked with the <u>American Civil Liberties Union-Northern California</u> [3] to sue her school district. Students were so inspired by Rochelle's courage that they came up to her throughout the day to talk to her about her actions and acknowledge her bravery. She took little credit for her bravery, insisting any young person can stand up to bias and win.

The Family Acceptance Project [2] shared data on how an accepting home environment can lead to greater feelings of self-esteem among LGBTQ youth, as well as less risk of HIV, homelessness, suicide, and substance abuse. A screening of their film, *Always My Son*, was followed by Q&A with researcher, **Caitlin Ryan** and the **Plata family**. Youth audience members were moved to tears by watching the family's process of acceptance with their son, and at the close of the film, the family received a standing ovation from the crowd. Inquisitive and excited, youth audience members asked the family tons of questions about their son's life and where he was now since the making of the film.

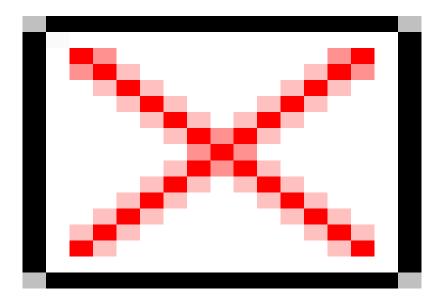
GSA Network's Make It Better Project [1] was featured through a montage of film clips that youth created on how they are making change in their schools, communities, and personal lives in regard to anti-LGBT bullying and harassment. Students were encouraged to be a part of the Make It Better movement by telling their stories at the conference's storytelling and film workshops.



Overall, the conference held thirty-three workshops that students and their adult allies could attend to learn how they could make their communities and schools more respectful and inclusive of LGBTQ students. Workshops included ones led by the American Civil Liberties Union [3] on students' legal rights, a domestic violence workshop led by La Casa de las Madres [4], and several suicide prevention workshops led by Trevor Project [5] and San Francisco Suicide Prevention [6]. In the Make It Better Project workshop, youth learned how to tell their personal stories and were invited to create Make It Better videos to reach out to other LGBTQ youth. The videos were edited together and shown at the closing ceremony, where they received laughter and heartfelt responses from the audience. The conference also had three new 'Live Social Networking' workshops where youth from all over could chat with one another to connect their school Gay-Straight Alliances and meet new friends in the movement.

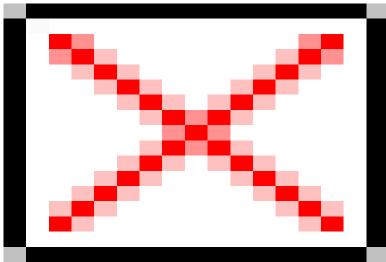
After the full day conference, youth were invited to a three-hour dance party to get down and have fun! The DJ spun hits from Lady Gaga to Madonna and Usher until the activists couldn't shake it anymore. "Words cannot describe the energy and enthusiasm presented by each person at YES!" said **Max Philp**, a 17 year-old student at Menlo-Atherton High School.

"It was amazing to be a part of the planning process and to see all of the hard work come out so beautifully. The discussion group I led was probably the best part of the conference for me because so many people got to network and meet student activists that live near them."



With the conference's timely focus on preventing bullying and suicide, YES received additional attention from local media. Thanks to several TV stations that showed portions of the opening speeches on the evening news, the YES conference was able to spread the message that we can make it better to a much larger audience.

Events like YES showcase how LGBTQ youth are today's leaders in the safe schools movement. At GSA Network's events, which include YES in San Francisco, Expression Not Suppression [7] in the Central Valley, Models of Pride [8] in L.A., GAYLA [9] and Queer Youth Advocacy Day [10] in Sacramento, the National Gathering [11], and dozens of leadership summits throughout the year, youth gain new skills and learn organizing tools through leadership training that they take back to their schools. GSA youth activists are using these skills to make it better for themselves and their communities.



"As a new staff and first-timer to YES, it was exciting to be a part of this year's event and to see youth teaching each other

skills, asking really great questions, and offering as equally great solutions. I am humbled by their passion and look forward to many future YES conferences"

said **Amanda Harris**, GSA Network's new Northern California Program Coordinator. "I am also impressed by the level of hard work and diligence YES organizers **Monica Canfield-Lenfest** and **Renee Bracey-Sherman** put into this conference. We had the biggest YES event to date thanks in large part to their incredible leadership," she added.

"Everyone who came to YES should be the ones being thanked because they all are striving to be youth activists and to change the world. They all give me hope about our generation," said Alavi.

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Source URL: http://gsanetwork.org/yes2010

Links:

- [1] http://makeitbetterproject.org/
- [2] http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/
- [3] http://www.aclunc.org/
- [4] http://www.lacasadelasmadres.org/
- [5] http://www.thetrevorproject.org/
- [6] http://www.sfsuicide.org/
- [7] http://gsanetwork.org/ens
- [8] http://www.modelsofpride.org/Home.html
- [9] http://gsanetwork.org/events/gayla
- [10] http://gsanetwork.org/events/queer-youth-advocacy-day
- [11] http://gsanetwork.org/events/national-gathering