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The 2012 YES Conference

The Gay-Straight Alliance Network (GSA Network) is a national organization which links school-based Gay-Straight Alliances across the country with each other, to community partners, as well as aids in leadership development and activist training. Jill Marcellus, the Communications Manager at GSA Network based in San Francisco, explains how deeply involved youth are in their organization, ?GSA Network is a youth-driven organization, and we operate on a model of youth-adult partnership. This carries all the way to the top of the organization: young people comprise about half of GSA Network's Board of Directors. There are a number of opportunities for youth to become leaders within the organization, from becoming a youth trainer and leading the peer-to-peer workshops that are at the heart of our work to joining a regional Youth Council and helping shape our program work for the year. We train young people not only to change their schools, but to become leaders in LGBT and other social justice movements.?

One component of the work the GSA Network does is the Youth Empowerment Summit (YES) held annually. December 5, 2012 marked the 8th YES summit and drew over 700 allied youth and adults to Mission High School in San Francisco. Those who attended heard four keynote speakers, attended over 40 workshops, met with community partners in a resource fair, participated in discussion groups and students could take part in a youth only drag show and dance.

As part of the conference, three panelists, Emery Cohen, Espii Gutierrez, Raymond Ferronato, T. Murray, and moderator Isaias Guzman discussed this year?s theme: the school-to-prison pipeline and how it affects their community and themselves. As one GSA member, Sabina Jacobs, a senior at Sequoia High School in Redwood City, explains, ?the?pipeline is polices and practices that school districts use to unintentionally push out LGBT, people of color, people with disabilities, or low income youth.? Sabina believes this year was a huge success and in the years to come would like to see the workshops? topics expand. Sabina explains, ?[I?d like to see] more comprehensive workshops on gender identity in general,? and beyond the YES conference, Sabina expresses the need for a system to be put in place to educate young people about the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community and demystify the continuing stigma. ?We need to educate people and make school a safe place for learning. While it is a safe place for some, it?s not for all. Especially if you?re going to school and worried about getting beat up in the locker room for how you?re dressing or who you?re dating. We need to make school an actual

safe place and help people out who need the help.?
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News Article
http://blogs.kqed.org/americangraduate/2013/01/31/the-yes-co... [1]
KQED American Graduate
Lisa Hewitt

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