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Fists in the air: Expression Not Suppression 2013

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Terisa Tinei Siagatonu, a spoken word artist and poet, asked 200 people to stand and raise their fists in the air. That was just the start of the day -- and that spirit of solidarity and empowerment persisted throughout this year's incredible Expression Not Suppression (ENS) conference.

The ninth annual ENS conference drew a record-breaking 200 LGBTQIA youth and allies to Fresno to work together to create safer schools in the Central Valley. Youth attended workshops ranging from GSA Network classics like "How to Have a Kick-Ass GSA" and "Beyond the Gender Binary" to partner-led workshops about student rights, grassroots organizing, and the school-to-prison pipeline. There was also a lively resource fair and an Advisor Institute for the GSA advisors attending.

GSA Network youth trainers Espii Gutierrez and Brianna Luna emcee'd the conference, welcoming everyone to the event and, perhaps most importantly, teaching everyone the Fruit Salute [1]. Calen Valencia, a GSA Network board member and youth trainer, closed the conference. He shared how, since starting his GSA and getting involved, he's felt "more empowered than ever."

Other youth participants picked up on that excitement. As one shared at the end of the day: "This ENS conference was amazing! I will definitely attend next year and will be able to use what I learned here today to better my high school GSA."

Dawn-Marie Luna, the Central Valley Program Coordinator, put together a truly memorable event for her first ENS conference. Many thanks to the Central Valley youth trainers, co-host Community Link, Terisa Siagatonu, ENS sponsors and supporters (we're including the baker of the fabulous rainbow cupcakes), and the many organizations that ran workshops or contributed to the resource fair.

And thank you to all of the youth who came and made ENS so amazing. As one young person summed up before leaving: "I don't feel alone."

Check out more photos from ENS at GSA Network's Central Valley Facebook page [2].

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Links
[1] http://youtu.be/ddg_fJWaCsM
[2] http://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.607977722552051.148826.117250761624752&type=3