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Beyond the Transgender Day of Remembrance: Making YOUR School Safer for Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Students!

Nov. 15, 2010 ? Daniel

The ***Transgender Day of Remembrance*** is a national day of action held in November each year to memorialize those who were killed due to anti-transgender hatred or prejudice. Although not every person represented during the Day of Remembrance self-identified as transgender, each was a victim of violence based on bias against transgender people. After the November 1998 murder of Rita Hester, a transgender woman living in the Boston area, Gwendolyn Ann Smith and other organizers formed the "Remembering Our Dead" project and accompanying vigil in San Francisco in 1999.

The ***Transgender Day of Remembrance*** is an opportunity for GSAs to not only raise awareness of the intense harassment and discrimination transgender and gender non-conforming youth face every day, it is also a chance to begin a campaign to educate students and staff about gender non-conformity and transgender issues as well as fight for the policies that will provide strong protections for transgender and gender non-conforming youth.

GSA Network spoke with two GSA activists, **Benji Delgadillo**, GSA President at San Juan Hills High in southern Orange County and **Emily Coffin**, GSA Co-President at Saugus High in northern Los Angeles County, to see what they're planning for the Transgender Day of Remembrance and how they're using this Day of Action to make real change in their schools.

GSA Network: Why is it important for GSAs to observe the Transgender Day of Remembrance?

Emily Coffin: It is important for GSA's to have the Transgender Day of Remembrance on their campus because it sheds the light of acceptance into the younger generation, hopefully fostering acceptance and understanding in our future.

Benji Delgadillo: GSAs should observe it to raise awareness of hate crimes and harassment

against transgender people, as well as stepping forward as allies in the fight against transphobia.

GSA Network: What specific activities is your GSA planning for Transgender Day of Remembrance?

BD: Our GSA is planning an educational display put on by individual GSA members. GSA members will each have a sign on them that reads "Ask me about _____?" and in each blank there will be the name of a different transgender youth killed due to anti-transgender violence. Thus, people will ask about the person whose name is displayed and receive an answer about the transphobic violence done against the person, as well as an explanation about Transgender Day of Remembrance and how our GSA is working to fight homophobia and transphobia in our school. ??

EC: We are planning to commemorate people who have been victims of transphobic violence and educate students on gender non-conformity and transgender issues. We are making copies of info sheets on transgender victims and posting them around campus to put actual faces on the hateful events that occur everyday. At lunch, we plan to go into the quad and form a circle of people holding hands to remember all those who have died. We are also going to put the definition of transgender on posters and post them around school to inform students about what it really means to be transgender. We also plan to make a video segment for our school news to help further educate people on transgender issues. All of these add up so that it's impossible for someone at our school not to learn about transgender people.

GSA Network: What has your GSA done to make your school safer for transgender and gender non-conforming students?

BD: Our GSA fought and successfully stopped the annual "Battle of the Sexes" pep rally and week-long activities that go along with the event. We also fixed the school's formal dance dress code to be inclusive to all students rather than be gender segregated. This year, our GSA is focusing on educating our school about how to address the issues of transgender and gender non-conforming students.

EC: We are getting ready to make our school safer for transgender and gender non-conforming students, so the officers led a workshop in our GSA about the gender spectrum and the gender binary system. We have made it our priority to make our GSA transgender friendly and open to all members of our school community. Educating all members on the basics of this issue has been a great way to do that.

GSA Network: Why is it important for your GSA to do more than just organize the Transgender Day of Remembrance once a year?

BD: We chose to make these changes in our school because it is extremely important to create a safe and inclusive environment for all students. Transgender and gender non-conforming students can easily be ignored not just by teachers and the staff, but also by the GSA. We know that having good activities during the Transgender Day of Remembrance is a smart way to get our school's attention on the issue. By doing more throughout the year, like doing a gender

identity campaign, we can make our school better for transgender students forever, not just for one day.

The changes our GSA made also were a major step in the fight against homophobia and transphobia in our school. This year, our work on educating the broader school community will hopefully help to create a change within the social dynamics of our school toward one that favors embracing diversity.

GSA Network: What are the next steps you're planning to make your school better for transgender and gender non-conforming students??

EC: Our GSA has gotten our administration to support anti-bullying education that focuses on LGBT harassment. The GSA will teach this presentation to other classes. We plan on including in that anti-bullying curriculum a big focus on the issues of gender non-conforming and transgender students to combat both bullying and gender non-conforming issues, since a safe school requires both. We're going to bring the anti-bullying presentation to various classes so that it will impact the entire school.

BD: Our GSA is planning to work to get our school and district to formally adopt a policy on how to address the issues of transgender and gender non-conforming students. The policy tells teachers, staff and principals what to do to make sure that transgender students are safer and aren't being discriminated against. We got the policy sample from GSA Network. By having our school and district adopt this policy, our GSA is making these changes forever, even after we graduate. We are also planning on getting our school to hold teacher and staff trainings to educate them about LGBT students and issues.

Make the Transgender Day of Remembrance just the start of what your GSA is doing to make your school better for transgender and gender non-conforming students!

To learn more about what your GSA can do to make your school better for good, check out our guide on the [Beyond the Binary Campaign](#) [1].

If you want your GSA to organize a campaign to protect transgender and gender non-conforming students, or if you have questions, contact your local GSA Network staff person:

Central Valley ? [Joey Fernandez](#) [2], Central Valley Program Coordinator

Southern California ? [Daniel Solis](#) [3], Southern California Program Manager

Northern California ? [Monica Canfield-Lenfest](#) [4], Interim Northern California Program Coordinator

We'll even bring pizza to the campaign training!

For a list of Transgender people that have been the victims of violence, go to: <http://www.rememberingourdead.org> [5]

For a sample of what a good school policy on protecting transgender and gender non-conforming students looks like, go to: http://www.casafeschools.org/#student_safety ^[6]

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Links

[1] <https://gsanetwork.org/get-involved/change-your-school/campaigns/beyond-binary>

[2] <mailto:joey@gsanetwork.org>

[3] <mailto:daniel@gsanetwork.org>

[4] <mailto:monica@gsanetwork.org>

[5] <http://www.rememberingourdead.org>

[6] http://www.casafeschools.org/#student_safety