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M-A senior Max Philp, once a victim of anti-gay bullying and now an outspoken advocate against homophobia and California's Proposition 8, wants people to know that harassing others about their sexual orientation and withholding marriage rights for same-sex couples are not okay.

On Monday morning Philp spoke at a Marriage Equality USA rally in San Francisco where he gave a youth perspective on gay marriage and talked about why it is important to him. He then watched the full trial of the appeal of Prop 8 at the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ? the step before the Supreme Court, where the case will most likely go next.

?Based on what I saw it was going really well for the pro-gay marriage side,? Philp says.

It helps that one of the most famous conservative lawyers in the country, Theodore Olson, is representing No on Prop 8.

Philp's busy schedule continued that night when he joined a radio talk show for a discussion panel on LGBT bullying issues. Again, Philp represented the youth point of view and talked about his experiences with bullying and how he thinks things can get better for other people.

?If you don't feel like you have anywhere to go to you can join the GSA (Gay Straight Alliance)?you can go to LGBT events in your area?if you are really feeling like you are in a hole you can call hotlines.?

The past few months have witnessed an increase in suicides amongst Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender teenagers in the United States. Clearly anti-gay bullying has become a pressing issue. Although his quest to stop bullying was not spurred explicitly by these suicides, Philp has been working intensely to combat bullying, especially bullying tormenting LGBT students, telling affected kids that ?it will get better.?

Philp has endured bullying related to his sexual orientation firsthand. Before he came to M-A, Philp had a Youtube channel where he would perform music videos and other antics. Then one day he went onto the site and found that someone had created a hate channel directed specifically at him.

“Someone had made a channel mocking me, calling me gay and the f word and all sorts of stuff,” remembers Philp. He put up with being pushed against lockers and verbal put-downs at both his old school and later at M-A.

“Prior to that I had gotten a lot of hateful comments but those I can just ignore. But when a hate channel and then shortly after that two more hate channels came up, that’s something that I can’t really ignore.”

Philp deleted his Youtube videos and tried to get the other hateful videos taken down. Unfortunately, upon his arrival at M-A, some of Philp’s new classmates searched for him on the Internet and found the videos. “But it’s completely over now,” says Philp. “Compared to my old school people [at M-A] are much more accepting.”

However, Philp states that work still needs to be done at M-A. The administration clearly thinks so as well, as an anti-bullying campaign called Teen Truth Live hit M-A last month.

In addition to his efforts at M-A, Philp spent one month of this summer living in Los Angeles and working for the Vote for Equality department of the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center.

There he spent his time researching gay marriage to help his department figure out how people’s votes on Prop 8 were affected by Yes on Prop 8’s advertisements. More specifically, the Center wanted to counter the ads created by those in support of Prop 8 that claimed children would be negatively affected by gay marriage.

While Philp interned he also had the chance to work with LGBT youth, inspiring him to become even more involved with the GSA and the nationwide GSA Network.

As the co-president of M-A’s own GSA club, Philp is working to spread awareness about the LGBT community at M-A. “A lot of people don’t know that it’s there, but it is,” he says.

“We’re trying to tell people not to use hurtful words such as f-a-double g-o-t.”

Furthermore, “the phrase “that’s so gay” is used way too often and a lot of people think it’s just common language like saying “oh, that’s cool” but it’s degrading to a community of people.”

On National Coming Out Day, October 11, Philp spoke to the school on the PA system to spread awareness.

“My main message was to tell people that they can be whoever they want to be and that there are always going to be people who love them. It was really just about people being able to come out as whoever they want to be whether they want to come out as gay or want to come out as an artist or whatever.”

Also on October 11, Philp chose to cross-dress, which ignited some controversy. Philp is not a cross-dresser, but “if I wanted to be I should be able to,” he says. “People should be who they want to be don’t give them a hard time about it.”

The GSA Network recently started a campaign called the Make It Better Project, which encourages working toward improving the lives of LGBT youth. The Project serves as a counterpart to the It Gets Better Project, a campaign started by gay blogger Dan Savage, who writes a column called Savage Love to tell possibly suicidal teens that it will get better for them.

The Mercury News and NBC Bay Area recently interviewed Philp for stories about the huge number of LGBT youth suicides in the past few months, and consequently both stories used Philp as an example of a teen who is working to "make it better" right now.

In the coming months Philp plans to continue working on "anti-bullying stuff," specifically related to LGBT bullying issues. Ultimately, he wants people to know that "if someone who was possibly thinking about suicide were to read this article, that it's going to get better and that people are going to be making it better now."

It got better for Philp, and now he is urging others to "make it better" too.

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By Lindsay Keare

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