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Movement Building in the Midwest

Dec. 4, 2012 ? Alan R

Last month, I took a trip ? and got to see the national GSA movement in action.

As National Network Manager, I travel to a different region of the country every year to work with members of the National Association of GSA Networks. This year brought me to the Midwest, visiting the Iowa Pride Network (IPN), the Missouri GSA Network, and the Indiana Youth Group. On top of working with these partners on strengthening GSA coalitions in Iowa, developing a board of directors in Missouri, and managing youth-adult partnerships in Indiana, I learned a great deal about the fabulous work National Association members do across the region.

For instance, Iowa Pride Network has a great coalition model and holds amazing events that bring GSAs and LGBTQ youth leaders together, as well as an equally impressive Safe Schools Certification program. Together, these programs illustrate IPN?s dual approach to creating safer schools: empowering youth and supporting teachers and administrators.

In Missouri, I was fortunate to meet MO GSA Network?s board. Comprising both young people and adults, the board talked to me about their recent leadership summits, programming, and their future plans. Most inspiring, I heard about the youth-led efforts to raise money for transportation so students can attend their GSAs after school. This is what youth empowerment is about!

My visit to Indiana Youth Group gave me great perspective on how communities come together to fulfill an unmet need. It was great to hear about the history of the organization and how IYG is a safe space for young people to get involved with their community and their GSAs.

After these visits, I headed to the National Safe Schools Roundtable convening in Chicago. Not knowing what to expect, I was thrilled to see familiar faces from the National Association and even one GSA Network alum, Jennifer Ledesma, who stopped by to say hello in between her college activities. From Idaho to Louisiana, I learned about the amazing work that activists are doing in states with limited resources and often less-than-friendly political climates. There were presentations on social emotional learning, strategies to develop partnerships to conduct relevant research, and a presentation from the Illinois for Safe Schools Alliance?s Youth Committee (creators of the awesome video below).

Easily ? and unsurprisingly ? the highlight of the trip was the panel on intersectional organizing put on by National Association members. Although I work with many organizations on a range of issues, I rarely get an opportunity to step back and see the impact of GSA Network?s work. Hearing GSAFE Wisconsin, New Mexico GSA Network, and the Student Equality Network of Georgia speak highly of the support they?ve received from GSA Network for their intersectional organizing made me truly proud to work at an organization that is a leader in this field, and to work with so many amazing organizations across the country who are shifting the movement to be truly inclusive and intentional about social justice.

This trip was more than supporting National Association partners; it was about building community and learning from one another. In the end, it is this community building and this learning that strengthens our movement and propels us towards social justice.

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