

2015-
2016

SAFER SCHOOLS, BRAVER YOUTH

GSAFE Annual Report

The world can sometimes feel like a lonely place when part of who you are isn't accepted or even acknowledged. At GSAFE, we work with LGBTQ+ youth to help them better understand their world and instill confidence and knowledge that allows them to better navigate it. This includes leadership programs, conferences, educational opportunities and more. Additionally, we work with adults throughout Wisconsin to equip them with the tools they need to effectively reach, and be an advocate for, LGBTQ+ youth.



Together we foster transformation in our communities that encourages all youth to thrive.

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Our Mission

We do this by:

- Developing the leadership of LGBTQ+ students.
- Supporting Gay-Straight Alliances/Gender & Sexuality Alliances in Schools (GSAs).
- Training educational staff.
- Advancing educational justice.
- Advocating for public policy.
- Deepening racial, gender, trans, and social justice.



Highlights

GSAFE hosts events and workshops as a way to build a supportive community for LGBTQ+ students and train educators and other community members on topics affecting the lives of LGBTQ+ students. We were honored to receive the **2016 Tammy Baldwin Statewide Impact Award** from Fair Wisconsin in recognition of our contributions to the advancement of LGBTQ equality in Wisconsin. The following is a glimpse at some of these contributions:



The GSAFE staff provided **consultation, leadership development, and support to Gay Straight Alliances** across the state. There were 203 total GSAs at the end of the 2016 school year, including 24 new GSAs formed in the 2015-16 school year, 11 of which were middle school GSAs. 61 students attended Safe Schools Safe Communities in April of 2016 exploring what health, educational, and racial justice looks like for LGBTQ youth in

both schools and communities.

We **provided in-depth learning opportunities to students** through our facilitated coursework and institutes focused on the intersections of racial justice and LGBTQ+ justice. **73 students** were enrolled in the Foundations of Leadership Course, 133 Students attended the Fall 2015 GSA Conference, and 46 students attended Leadership Training Institute.

We **worked closely with educators** to ensure transgender inclusive policies and provided learning opportunities to equip educators with the tools they need to build safer, more affirming classrooms and school environments. **23 school districts hosted in-district staff trainings, 155 educators attended Safe Schools Safe Communities in April of 2016, and over 175 school districts had instated trans-inclusive policies by the end of the 2015-16 school year.**

GSAFE effectively supported LGBTQ+ students in the state of Wisconsin while also **contributing nationally**. GSAFE's Racial Justice Youth Organizer Ali Muldrow served as a facilitator and travelled to Boston with student leaders to The National Gathering, hosted by the National Association of GSA Networks. Senior Director of Education and Policy Brian Juchems participated in the Human Rights Campaign inaugural Facilitator Certification Training Program earning National Certification with the Welcoming Schools Program.

Developing Youth Leadership

ACADEMIC COURSES

Advanced learners from the Madison school district came together on the UW Madison campus for FOUNDATIONS OF LEADERSHIP. The class is held weekly throughout the school year and focuses primarily on social justice activism and the legacy of leadership rooted in LGBTQ+ and racial justice movements.

The NEW NARRATIVE PROJECT is a weekly course facilitated for youth in the Dane County Detention Center, disproportionately LGBTQ+ youth and youth of color. Themes of the course include self expression and developing an understanding social justice issues that impact them directly.



"The summer after my first year of high school I attended LTI, GSAFE's camp for youth leaders. The most important thing I took away from LTI was the knowledge that I was not alone. I met other queer youth from all over Wisconsin. I met another Asian queer for the first time. I left LTI feeling empowered and brave. I left LTI not only wanting to survive, but wanting to thrive."

- Haruka Yukioka, Fond du Lac

relationship building, and GSAs for justice. In recent years, more and more GSAs have changed their name from "Gay-Straight Alliance" to "Gender Sexuality Alliance" to be more inclusive of the many different identities its members hold.

The Transgender Justice Program hosted a multi-generational TRANSGENDER SUMMIT held in Milwaukee. The day long event was a space for transgender youth to connect with their peers and allies to participate in workshops and build new relationships.

ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP

YOUTH LEADERSHIP BOARD is made up of Dane County high school students who help our staff guide, design, and implement our programming. Members develop and lead workshops at GSAFE student events, and serve on student panels for educator and administrator trainings. Youth Leadership Board also has the opportunity to connect with local GSA leaders and build their own skills around organizing, social justice, and anti-oppression work.

COMMUNITY BUILDING

The LEADERSHIP TRAINING INSTITUTE is a week-long camp held at the UW Madison campus every summer. GSA leaders from across the state come together to build community, connect with other student leaders, and gain strategies for making their schools and communities more welcoming and affirming for LGBTQ+ youth of all identities.

The LGBTQ+ Youth, particularly youth of color and transgender/gender nonconforming youth, are often isolated in Wisconsin communities. GSAFE's programs remind them: You are not alone.

GSAFE hosts annual GSA CONFERENCES open to all student leaders interested in starting a GSA or making their GSA more effective and sustainable. Sample workshops include trans-inclusive practices, ideas for



Student Spotlight: KEIANA JAMES

The GSAFE Youth Scholarships award up to four high school seniors \$1000 each. The recipients of these awards have demonstrated a commitment to promoting just and respectful schools for all, with an emphasis on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning students and issues (LGBTQ+). This scholarship is open to all Wisconsin high school seniors, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

2016 GSAFE Youth Scholarship winner Keiana James

This article was originally printed in Our Lives Magazine, July/August 2016



How do you explain why some people are able to achieve things that seem impossible?

As a young, rebellious, and outgoing teenager everything was possible to me.

My mind was full of passion, dedication, and motivation. I was a part of a choir group during middle school and I couldn't wait to see and explore the great clubs and activities my high school would have to offer.

As a freshman at Milwaukee Riverside University High School I was curious to learn everything about myself and others. I wanted to be able to help all students feel free to be themselves without feeling judged or harassed by others. When I first learned about my school GSA I didn't know much about what it was or what it was about, but I did my research and I joined.

The reason I joined is because I was bullied in my school gym locker room for being LGBTQ+ and I was terrified, humiliated, and depressed. I knew that by joining GSA I could help make sure no one else ever had to go through the harsh situation I went through, because they would have protection, care, and support through GSA such as I did. Instantly, I had another family.

This was the starting step to activism, where I was able to find the person I am today, to be accepting of all, and to stand up and be the voice that brings allies together within the GSA and our community to promote fairness and equality for all students to feel safe, accepted, and appreciated.

My goal was to spread acceptance and tolerance throughout my high school. As my school GSA president, I pushed this philosophy through activities and campaigns such as the Day of Silence, Ally Week, and Words Hurt, Words Heal.

These workshops were able to help build healthy relationships and acceptance throughout my high school. From everything I have experienced through my high school GSA, whether it is workshops, board meetings, or even summer camp at LTI, I'm beyond honored and ecstatic to have been part of my GSA's journey and success.

My three most motivated GSAFE advisors, Ali, Brian and Tim, who love me for who I am. They teach me something different every day and I hope to continue to learn from them all. I'm so grateful to the entire GSAFE committee, too, for believing in me and giving me the chance of a lifetime to be one step closer to making a change within our community.

Transforming Communities

PUBLIC POLICY

GSAFE ADVOCATES FOR PUBLIC POLICY AND PRACTICES that create just schools for LGBTQ+ youth, to organize for trans-inclusive policies and practices on a district by district basis. Wisconsin currently lacks clear statewide protections for transgender and gender nonconforming students and educators.

GSAFE worked closely with community partners to successfully ORGANIZE COMMUNITY OPPOSITION FOR AB469, the so-called “Student Privacy Protection Bill.” This bathroom bully bill, which sought to ban transgender (and by default intersex) students from using the gender-segregated facilities that align with their gender identity, was an attack on transgender students in our K-12 schools. The bill would have required transgender students to either use the facility that aligns with their sex assigned at birth or use single-occupancy facilities. It would have also allow individuals to sue a school district if they suspect they are in violation of this policy.

The bill was dismissed but as more bills of its kind are introduced on a national and local level, GSAFE will continue to join in the fight for equal protections of all transgender and gender non-conforming students in Wisconsin.

INVESTING IN EDUCATORS

GSAFE now offers the Welcoming Schools curriculum which provides a comprehensive approach to IMPROVING SCHOOL CLIMATE IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS with training, resources, and lessons to help schools in embracing family diversity, creating LGBTQ-inclusive schools, preventing bias-based bullying, creating gender-expansive schools, and supporting transgender and non-binary students.

GSAFE continues to partner with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction to provide in-depth TRAINING AND CONSULTATION for more than a dozen priority districts, including organizing a three-day professional learning community with teams of educators from four Milwaukee schools in the spring.



SAFE SCHOOLS SAFE COMMUNITIES is an annual conference for school and community-based adults who work with LGBTQ+ youth, as well as middle and high school youth leaders. This year’s theme was “Justice for LGBTQ Youth” which explored what health, educational, and racial justice looks like for LGBTQ+ youth in both schools and communities.

Wisconsin has a strong history of supporting GSAs AT THE MIDDLE SCHOOL LEVEL going back ten years when the first middle school GSAs formed in Madison in 2005. GSAFE has held three conferences specifically for middle school GSAs, and we regularly get phone calls from other GSA-serving organizations around the country asking for help in supporting middle school GSAs.

“Elementary schools have historically been underserved with regard to LGBTQ and gender topics. More and more we’re hearing from parents of elementary age transgender children who fear for their children’s safety. Whether you have a child who has two moms and wants to share about their family or you have a gender-expansive first grader who is being harassed for how they express their gender, educators need the tools to address these topics with students and families in age-appropriate ways. Welcoming Schools does just that.” - Brian J., GSAFE Senior Director of Education and Policy

During the 2015-2016 academic year, GSAFE’s Manager of GSA Outreach made multiple trips to Janesville, training district administrators and facilitating planning sessions for the support staff at Janesville’s three middle schools as they prepared to kick-start GSAs.

“A GSA at the middle school level was long overdue for us at Marshall. Now all of our students know that they have a school that supports this important work and therefore communicates to students that Marshall welcomes ALL! We wouldn’t be here without GSAFE’s leadership and your commitment to our students in Wisconsin.” - Synthia Taylor, Principal, Janesville Marshall Middle School

Program Spotlight: The New Narrative Project

The New Narrative Project was developed in partnership with Proud Theater, the Madison Public School District, GSAFE, The JVN Project and the Dane County Juvenile Detention Center. This coalition formed as part of purposeful effort to connect incarcerated young people with programs that will give them access to academic achievement, community building, mentorship, and artistic expression beyond the detention center and probations. We are determined to provide incarcerated young with the opportunity to build meaningful relationships with innovative educators/community leaders during their incarceration.

On the first day I taught in the Dane County Juvenile Detention Center I arrived nervous and unsure of how I would navigate the environment and earn the trust of my students.

*As I was buzzed through the fourth door into the facility I remembered something my friend Josh had said: "Art is Freedom." With that in mind I asked the students that first day to draw a picture of the house they would live in 10 years from now. I read them Silvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* and asked them to make a map of the choices they would need to make to get to that house. The students wrote and drew and worked quietly and respectfully until it was time to present their futures. When they did my heart exploded.*

The children, ages 13 to 17 and living in the Dane County Juvenile Detention Center, wrote about having houses with enough room for their grandma who would need a ramp for her wheelchair. They wrote about wanting to travel and go to college and fall in love. One student wrote about all the tests he would take in medical school.

It's moments like these that inspire me to look forward to voting for my students and reading their books and seeing them use their leadership to change the world. It was looking at their first assignments that made me question the outcomes that incarcerating children typically promotes, outcomes like adult incarceration and chronic unemployment. The GSAFE curriculum we use invited incarcerated students to defy the odds and define their own paths to academic achievement and civic engagement.

My drive to uplift young people who struggle with the learning process is what brought me to the detention center. My work is inspired by a profound gratitude for the teachers who believed in me and saw me for who I really was before even I did.

The classroom experience inside the walls of the detention center mirrors the context of another GSAFE program called Foundations of Leadership, an advanced learner's course that is based in the experiences of LGBTQ youth of color. The majority of my students come from communities that many of their classes fail to recognize, include, and learn from. When designing the curriculum, I found myself bewildered by how to bring representation of LGBTQ+ people of color, differently abled communities, immigrants, and so many more identities into our classroom to ensure the students would see themselves reflected in what we were calling leadership.

I set out to create curriculum that promotes consent while giving students the space they need to take ownership of their right to an education. Often when I describe the leadership development work I do with students I tell people it's an orientation of the imagination. We at GSAFE teach young people how to turn obstacles into opportunities and how to turn tragedy into triumph by challenging them to study what impacts them, and then supporting them as they create innovative and sustainable ways to address the needs of their communities.



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