

## HIGH SCHOOL MEMORIES



I have to give a shout out to Ruth Debra who among other things is President of Desert Stonewall Democrats. No matter how much some of us try to just have programs month after month on doing political things, she makes sure that we have programs on social issues. She makes certain that Civil Rights, LGTB issues, and caring for the disadvantaged among us are covered. In March we covered LGBTQ youth and how we support them and how we can increase our support.

The panel discussing the issue included Geoff Kors (National Center Lesbian Rights) and Vinnie Pompeii (Human Rights Campaign) who covered legal aspects, and Doug Hairgrove (Safe Schools Desert Cities) and Enrique (Gay Straight Alliance at College of the Desert) discussed reality on the ground. Looking at the legal aspects, the glass is more than half full. Through the good work of California activists many laws protect students against bullying and allow them to participate in activities corresponding to their perceived sex.

However, these laws weren't funded by the legislature, meaning information on them was not disseminated to the schools and teachers, schools were not monitored as to whether they implemented the new laws, and many students are still harassed. It is one of those glass half full situations. In California we have lots of good laws that protect youngsters in schools, but oft times the students and families affected don't know about it.

In our Valley Safe Schools, the GSAs, and various organizations are trying to help. When students wore anti-LGBT bands at Shadow Hills High, Safe Schools and their friends worked with the school to put on activities that explained how this activity hurt their fellow students. Every year the Pride Prom, Rainbow Youth Summit, and Harvey Milk Breakfast are held for

LBGTBQ youngsters and their supporters. However, much of the best work comes one on one.

As Enrique pointed out at his High School there was a wonderful teacher who headed the GSA of about 30 students, and that teacher was responsible for much of the good vibes at that school. Doug reported there are still many teachers who are anti-Gay, and who show it in the classroom. Again, it is the supportive teachers on site who make the difference between a good outcome and a person feeling abandoned and possibly being homeless or committing suicide.

I certainly found that to be the case in my experience with the State of Wyoming Department of Health program for helping “at risk” LBGTQ youth. While I was involved, they passed the first anti-bullying law, and our Committee was asked for input. Out of the three professionals who helped write and implement the new law, two were pro-helping LBGT youth and one against. By a 2 to 1 “vote” the world changed for the better. And in that rural state I met those teachers who headed up their high school GSAs, safe spaces, and after school spots both official and unofficial. I also met those who had tried to help and were fired by their school districts.

Desert Stonewall meets monthly. For more information about Desert Stonewall, go to their website at <http://www.desert-stonewall.org/>.

---Bob Warburton