

Beloved Community

From Maru Gonzalez

Throughout his career, Martin Luther King, Jr. strove to create a “Beloved Community,” a society characterized by unconditional love, unity, and justice. In today’s times of political divisiveness and dichotomous ideology, the concept of a “Beloved Community” seems unattainable and, often, laughably naive. Nevertheless, I know such a community exists for I had the distinct privilege of experiencing it firsthand during the Safe Schools Advocacy Summit (SSAS).



Every year, GLSEN- the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network- selects eighteen adult activists and eighteen student leaders to attend a summit in Washington, D.C. In four days, attendees learn the ins and outs of grassroots organizing and legislative activism in preparation for a day of lobbying on Capitol Hill. This year, GLSEN’s primary focus was the Safe Schools Improvement Act, an amendment to the Safe and Drug-Free School and Communities Act. This provision would define bullying and harassment and include enumerated anti-bullying policies that specifically cover sexual orientation and gender expression. The amendment would also require states to include bullying and harassment data in statewide needs assessments.

To be perfectly candid, I am not a trained lobbyist nor am I an expert on the politics surrounding the Safe Schools Improvement Act. Yet, I carry within me a story and the stories of countless young people who are silenced everyday due to the bullying and harassment they encounter at school. As I met with legislative staffers on Capitol Hill, I gave voice to the millions of LGBT students who are too afraid to speak up for themselves; I told *their* stories.

For me, the Safe Schools Advocacy Summit was an intensely human experience. In four days of laughter, tears, and deep self-reflection, I came to realize that, as humans, our struggles are connected. We all share the same hopes, dreams, and fears. In listening to the stories of hardship and sorrow, courage and success, I experienced Dr. King’s vision of a “Beloved Community.” My life will never be the same.

To learn more about GLSEN and the Safe Schools Improvement Act, visit www.glsen.org/.