



ARROWS CHARTING THE COURSE

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE
ILLINOIS SAFE SCHOOLS ALLIANCE



**SPRING
2012**

The mission of the Illinois Safe Schools Alliance is to promote safety, support and healthy development for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth, in Illinois and communities, through advocacy, education, youth organizing and research.



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Words from the Executive Director

Welcome, once again, to the Illinois Safe Schools Alliance's newsletter. We are proud and excited to produce this second issue and to keep you updated about, and involved, in our work to transform schools to places where everyone is respected regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.

In this issue, we are focusing on people. Without all of the youth, volunteers, staff and Board who are engaged with the Alliance, our work could not be done! In that vein, I'd like to introduce you to our newest staff member: Iman Crutcher, Youth Organizer.

Iman joined the Alliance during the summer of 2011 in the newly created role of full-time Youth Organizer. Through this position, she has the opportunity to directly support the Alliance's youth leaders in their work to both be agents of change in schools and to develop the activism work of their peers.

In Iman's own words: "I was teased and bullied during my K-12 education and I now have the opportunity, as an adult, to work with youth to have the confidence, skills and knowledge to stand up for themselves and their classmates. There are many youth out there ready and excited to do this work. Working with the Alliance as a Youth Organizer I have opportunities to work with youth on conflict resolution, helping LGBTQ students engage more with their straight allies, and on the purpose of policy change work and becoming an advocate and activist. I think that my favorite part of my new position is going to visit schools all over Illinois. In the next few months I hope to recruit a diverse group of youth to join our Youth Committee. I am excited about bringing my performing arts background into my youth development career. I am invested in being a role model for LGBTQ youth in our many communities of color and to empower them to know that they have the ability to become leaders regardless of their perceived social, racial, or economic status."

I want to take this opportunity to officially welcome Iman to the Alliance. We are excited about her commitment and contribution to the work and we look forward to how this role will further activate youth leadership in all areas of the Alliance's work.

All my best,



Shannon Sullivan

P.S. - A special thank you to the team from EPIC for the revamped title and layout of the Alliance newsletter. Please see the Communications Update for more details on this exciting project.



Iman Crutcher, Youth Organizer

In Iman's own words:

"I think that my favorite part of my new position is going to visit schools all over Illinois."

In the next few months I hope to recruit a diverse group of youth to join our Youth Committee."



Shown here: Past and present Alliance Youth Committee members, Board Members, staff and volunteers at the Spring Youth Leadership Summit.

YOUTH COMMITTEE MISSION



**ILLINOIS SAFE SCHOOLS ALLIANCE
YOUTH COMMITTEE**

We educate youth on issues that affect them so that they can **become leaders, take action, and make long term change.**

The Youth Committee is **brilliant, intelligent, fierce and queer.**

UPCOMING EVENTS

Night of Noise

Friday, April 20
5:30p - 8:30p

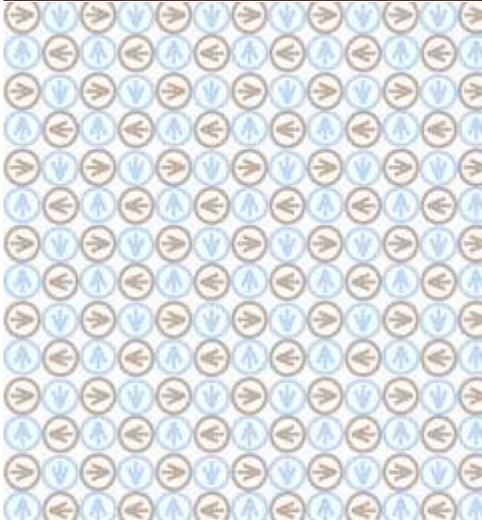
James R. Thompson Center
100 West Randolph St.
Chicago, IL

THE ALLIANCE YOUTH

Annual Spring Youth Leadership Summit

On February 18, 175 youth activists gathered at Evanston Township High School for our Sixth annual Day of Silence Organizing summit. This summit, planned and facilitated by Alliance Youth Leaders, provided opportunities for youth in the Chicagoland area involved in their high school Gay Straight Alliances to build community, learn more about activism and organizing, and prepare for the Day of Silence.

This summit included great workshops to help students learn how to set goals and organize for social change, brand and market their GSA, and build coalitions in support of their goals. Additionally, youth participants had opportunities to reflect on the change they have created in their own communities, learn more about education inequality, and get access to resources through our community fair. This was all packaged together with plenty of chances to network, play games, and have fun.



POLICY IN ACTION

Whoever thinks policy work is mundane doesn't work with the Alliance!

How can you get more involved?

Contribute your time!

Volunteers are essential to the work! You can choose your level of involvement, from a one-time event to ongoing committee work. *For more info or to join us visit <http://illinoissafeschools.org/committees/>.*

Give generously to help meet our challenge grant!

The Alliance has been pledged a \$10,000 challenge grant. To receive the full amount, we must match it with new, increased or renewed donations. Please consider making a donation today! *Visit www.illinoissafeschools.org and click the Donate Now button.*

Join the Brunch Committee!

Every fall the Alliance holds its annual fundraiser where we recognize those committed to and actively pursuing the mission of the Alliance. Would you like to be a part of planning this year's event and help recognize these courageous leaders? *For more info, contact Loren Linder, Development Director at loren@illinoissafeschools.org.*

There is much going on in our part of the world. Here's a snapshot:

HB 5290 - Bullying Prevention Bill

On February 8, with support from the Alliance, the Prevent School Violence Illinois coalition, and our partners, Rep. Kelly Cassidy filed HB 5290, a bill to amend the Illinois Prevent School Violence Act (PSVA).

The PSVA, which became law in 2010, improved the School Code by defining the conduct that constitutes bullying and enumerating the characteristics upon which bullying is prohibited (including actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression) to keep students safe in schools. However, it omitted requirements we know are essential for schools to promote truly effective bullying prevention. HB 5290 would improve the law by prohibiting bullying on the basis of physical appearance, socioeconomic status, academic status pregnancy, parenting status and homelessness (the law currently protects against bullying on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and other categories). The bill also would set out the seven components required to be included in the bullying policies schools are already required by law to have, including requirements that the policy be developed with the input of students and other school stakeholders and list alternatives to exclusionary punishments schools can take to address bullying.

Bias-Based Bullying Survey

After months of hard work and the incredible partnership of Stacey Horn and her PhD students at the University of

Illinois-Chicago, the Center for Prevention and Research Development at the University of Illinois, and the Prevent School Violence Illinois (PSVI) coalition, we completed the Bias-Based Bullying Survey (BBBS). The BBBS includes thirty questions that will elicit data about the roles bias based on the perceived differences associated with personal characteristics such as sexual orientation, religion and skin color play in bullying behavior.

PSVI is now advocating that high schools across Illinois registered to give their students the 2012 Illinois Youth Survey add the BBBS as an addendum. Once the bias-based bullying data are collected, PSVI will work with schools to develop specific strategies for bullying prevention through a model that integrates student and family engagement, skill building, and restorative discipline.

To get a copy of the BBBS, go to: <http://education.uic.edu/564-bbbs-survey>. If you have connections to an Illinois high school or middle school and are interested in helping to advocate for the BBBS, please contact Sarah Schriber, Alliance Policy Director, as soon as possible at (312) 368-9070 ext. 323 or sarah@illinoissafeschools.org.

We also recognize the importance that communities play in working proactively to make sure that schools get the training that they need. That is why we focus on training community members throughout the state so that they can advocate for professional development, and help us to increase our capacity to provide the trainings themselves.

Join the Alliance Policy Committee!

Consider, for a moment, the exciting work described under "Policy In Action." As a member of the Alliance Policy Committee, you could be instrumental in efforts like these and more. Are you interested in:

- Partnering with a broad-based group of committed advocates to develop the Alliance's influential policy initiatives to create safe and welcoming schools for all youth and families regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression?
- Working in tandem with the Alliance Youth Committee to move forward the Alliance's policy initiatives?
- Working with schools, agencies and government officials to put policy theory into practice?
- Educating decision makers and allied organizations about the relationships between bullying prevention and other efforts to positively transform schools?
- Making a powerful difference in schools across Illinois?

We would love to have you!

For more information, please contact Sarah Schriber at (312) 368-9070 ext. 323 or sarah@illinoissafeschools.org.



IN THE SCHOOLS

Organizing Communities to train teachers

A big part of our work at the Illinois Safe Schools Alliance is training school personnel on sexual orientation and gender identity issues. In fact, professional development is a key component to making schools safer for LGBTQ, and all, youth.

We recently went to Champaign/Urbana in Central Illinois and provided a training of trainers to a dedicated group of school personnel, parents, and community members. This group will be working throughout the end of this school year to advocate that schools within Champaign/Urbana schedule Professional Development for next school year. Additionally, they are planning outreach to the surrounding communities outside of Champaign/Urbana in an effort to reach schools that are continuing to struggle with issues relating to supporting LGBTQ youth.

We believe that these community organizing efforts are crucial in ensuring that all schools across Illinois are working proactively to make students safer, more respected, and included within their communities.



Shown here: Shannon Sullivan, Stacey Horn, and Ryan Ford at UIC.

COMMUNICATIONS



The Communications Committee is excited to announce that The Alliance has been chosen to take part in an EPIC Creative Rally!

EPIC is an organization committed to working with social service nonprofit organizations that have “big stories to tell” and limited funding for strategic communication and marketing plans. EPIC has recruited an amazing team of “creatives” who will be volunteering their time and offering their expertise – over the course of an eight-week period – to help create an Alliance media kit, a video that introduces the work of the Alliance, and other design collateral that further establishes the Alliance as the go-to resource in Illinois for safe schools work.

The EPIC Rally Celebration will take place on March 22nd, where the creative team will unveil the final products--we can't wait for you to see them! Taking part in an EPIC Rally will allow the communications committee to move forward with effective messaging to all our constituents across the state of Illinois.

NEWS

UIC and the Alliance receive a Ford Foundation Grant

Shannon Sullivan, Stacey Horn, and Ryan Ford (L – R above) gather with 5 other research teams and the Ford Foundation. The Alliance is working with UIC to research the contexts of anti-LGBT language and behaviors.

With funding and support from the Ford Foundation, our Project Safe SPACES will be learning more about shifting youth behavior. Sign up for our e-mail list to stay updated with what we are learning: please email loren@illinoisafeschools.org to join it.

Illinois Gay-Straight Alliances Gear Up for the Day of Silence

Across the state, Illinois GSAs are getting prepared for the Day of Silence, a nation-wide, student-led day of protest that brings awareness to the silence, harassment, and discrimination faced by LGBTQ youth in schools, held this year on April 20. The Alliance works to support Gay Straight Alliances in preparing for the Day of Silence through our organizing summit, providing Day of Silence kits, and providing technical assistance.

While this day is important in bringing awareness to LGBTQ issues, it is also an opportunity to bring about social change. Every year, we work with GSAs to utilize the Day of Silence as a tool to advocate for social change through policy change and implementation, getting school personnel trained on issues of sexual orientation and gender identity, providing LGBTQ-inclusive lesson plans to students, and so much more.



SPOTLIGHT ON YOUTH

Tea Sefer

*Shown here:
Tea Sefer and friends at the Fall Youth
summit in 2010*

Tea Sefer joined the youth committee in 2008, and her two years with us was full of fire, passion, and commitment to making schools safer for ALL. Tea was one of three youth leaders who took on Chicago Public Schools, working diligently over a year's time to amend the CPS Non-Discrimination Policy to include Gender Identity/Expression.

She was fearless in her commitment to the work, and one of our fondest memories of Tea was when she cornered Mayor Daley at an event to demand his support in our work with Chicago Public Schools, and refused to walk away until he agreed (he did). Though we were sad to lose her when she graduated in 2010, we knew she would continue to be a force to be reckoned with as she fought for social justice.

We had no idea how right we were! Tea is now a Sophomore at American University (AU) in Washington D.C., and will be graduating from there in Spring of next year with a double major in International Studies and Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies. She has recently started a not-for-profit with several friends InTransit Empowerment Project, which seeks to work with immigrant and refugee youth to open dialogue and create art around what it means to hold multiple identities in America.

As if graduating early and starting a non-profit weren't enough, Tea is also incredibly active in

different AU groups and campaigns. Her work on issues relating to LGBTQ people has not stopped—in fact, she currently facilitates a Safe Spaces program at American, and speaks on panels about LGBTQ issues. Additionally, Tea is on the Executive Board for AU Students for Choice, and is a peer educator at the Student Wellness Center, where she provides workshops on issues of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking.

Most recently, Tea was featured on CSPAN! She spoke at a press conference on February 9, 2012 advocating for women to have access to birth control and other contraception at Catholic colleges and universities. Her accomplishments never stop astounding us, and we can't wait to hear about the amazing work she continues to do.



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Visit us online at IllinoisSafeSchools.org

Make a donation through the **Donate Now** link on our homepage.

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