

We Must Protect all LGBTQ Youth from Bullying and Suicide

The recent suicidal deaths of several LGBTQ or perceived LGBTQ individuals greatly sadden us at EqualityToledo. Our heartfelt condolences go out to the families, friends and loved ones of those individuals who have recently died. The recent news reports tell us about Billy Lucas, 15, who hanged himself on 9/9/10 at his Indiana home after years of reported harassment by students who judged him to be gay. Asher Brown, a 13-year-old in Harris, TX, who had reportedly recently come out, took his life with a gun on 9/23/10 after years of being picked on for his size, religion, clothing and perception that he was gay. Seth Walsh, a 13-year-old in Tehachapi, CA, who passed away on 9/28/10 after 9 days on life support from hanging himself. Police reported he had been mercilessly taunted by fellow students over his perceived sexual orientation. Tyler Clementi, 18, a Rutgers freshman, who leapt to his death on 9/22/10 from the George Washington Bridge after a roommate allegedly broadcast him via the Internet in a same-sex encounter behind closed doors in his dorm room. And Raymond Chase, a 19-year-old openly gay sophomore from Johnson and Wales, who hanged himself in his dorm room on 9/29/10.

Also, last week, in our own State, Tyler Wilson, an 11-year-old boy in Findlay was taunted with homophobic remarks and had his arm broken by two schoolmates who apparently assumed him to be gay because he decided to join a cheerleading squad that had been all-female. As a gymnast, he was interested in the athletic elements of cheering. Since returning to school, he's been threatened with having his other arm broken, too.

EqualityToledo is committed to continuing its work to protect and defend young people against bullying in schools and universities through our Safe Schools Project. While we know these are not new occurrences, the recent media attention around bullying of LGBTQ youth reminds us all of the seriousness of bullying and the fact that LGBTQ young people do not feel safe, accepted or protected.

Judy Shepard of the Matthew Shepard Foundations stated it well in her recent appeal: "Our young people deserve better than to go to schools where they are treated this way. We have to make schools a safe place for our youth to prepare for their futures, not be confronted with threats, intimidation or routine disrespect.

Quite simply, we are calling one more time for all Americans to stand up and speak out against taunting, invasion of privacy, violence and discrimination against these youth by their peers, and asking everyone in a position of authority in their schools and communities to step forward and provide safe spaces and support services for LGBT youth or those who are simply targeted for discrimination because others assume they are gay. There can never be enough love and acceptance for these young people as they seek to live openly as their true selves and find their role in society.

Suicide is a complicated problem and it is too easy to casually blame it on a single factor in a young person's life, but it is clear that mistreatment by others has a tremendously negative effect on a young person's sense of self worth and colors how he or she sees the world around

them. Parents, educators and peers in the community need to be vigilant to the warning signs of suicide and other self-destructive behaviors in the young people in their lives, and help them find resources to be healthy and productive.”

We echo these sentiments. EqualityToledo’s Safe School Project is continuing to work to protect and defend LGBTQ young people in schools and universities. We are working to increase awareness so these senseless deaths that stemmed from bullying and harassment can be eliminated. We strive to live in a society where our youth can be who they are. We encourage your activism and support because we cannot do this work alone.

For additional resources to any LGBT youth contemplating suicide, we urge you to immediately reach out to The Trevor Project, day or night, at (866) 4-U-TREVOR [866-488-7386] or visit <http://www.thetrevorproject.org/>. The Trevor Project is a nonprofit endeavor established to promote acceptance of LGBTQ youth, and to aid in suicide prevention among LGBTQ young people.

Sincerely,

Sherry Tripepi, Executive Director
EqualityToledo