

Speak.

Dedications

To all the teens who work to make their communities better. To Genny and Evie, who inspire me more than they know. To my parents for raising me to be the person I am today.

There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest. -- Elie Wiesel



table of contents

-Foreword

part 1: The activists

-genny

-evie

part 2: The teens

-day of silence

part 3: The issues

-community service

-derogatory words

foreword:

“Activism can be really simple. People think you have to go to a rally or you have to go to an organization and voice your opinion, but really, activism can be as simple as stopping someone from saying a racist word, or saying “faggot”, or saying “cracker”, or just anything like that. If you just stop someone from saying that one thing, you have just become an activist.”

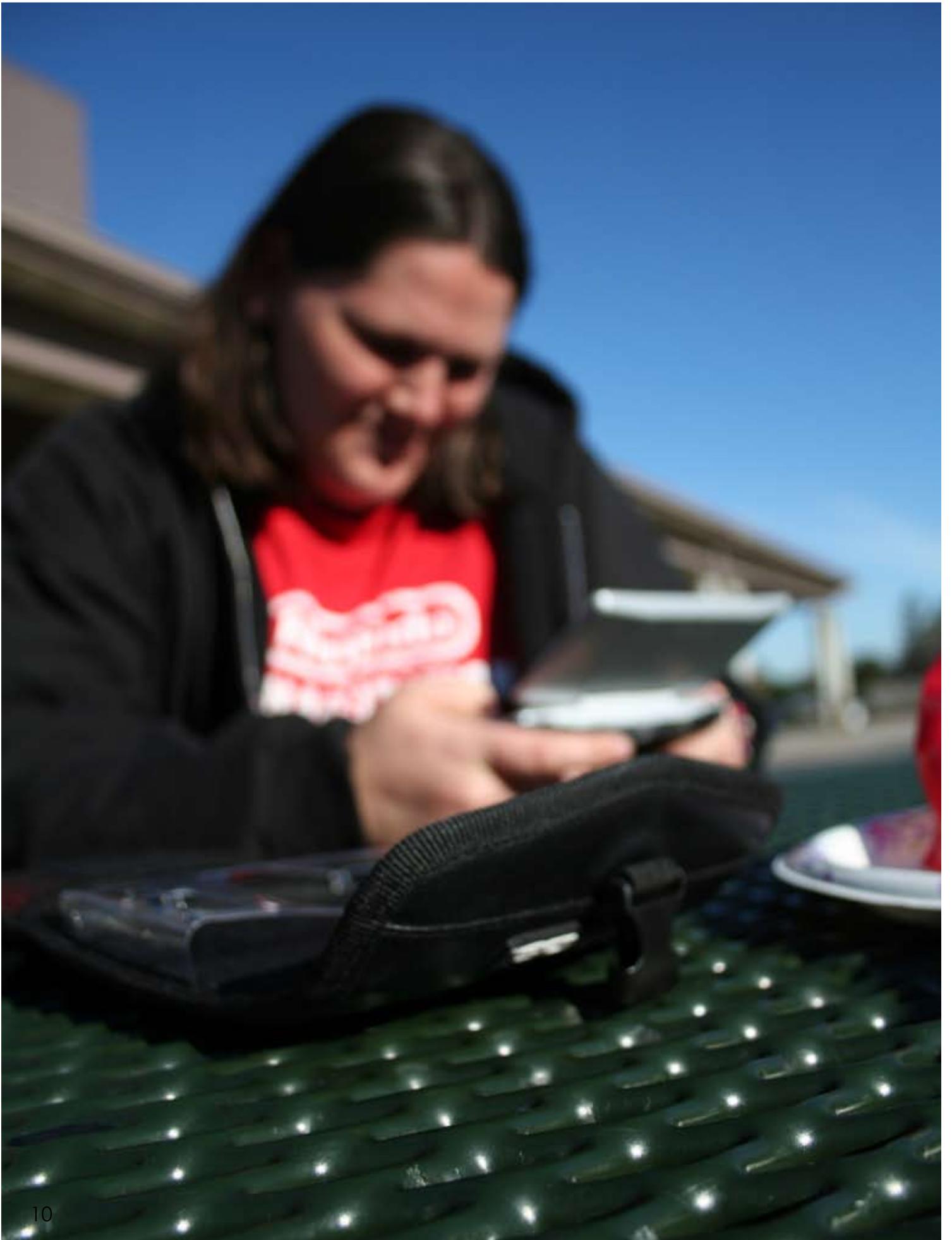
-Genny DiLeonardo

When we were faced with the choice of what we wanted to do our documentary on, I wanted to choose a group of people who aim to change the future. People who want to make the world we live in a better place, but I also wanted to choose a group that I as a teen could relate to. This led me, of course, to the choice of teen activists; I feel that teen activists are inspiring people who, despite their young age, show a deep care for the communities they live in. Teen activists are people who see social injustice and devote their time to fixing it. They are people who, as cheesy as it sounds, are leading the way to our future and are deciding how our lives will be led

part one:
The

Activists





Genny

"My name is Genny, my age is 18. The school I go to is Mountain View High School. I am a girl. I'm into anime, video games and movies and such. I play Pokemon a lot, and no it's not over, there's like a lot of people into Pokemon."

Genny DiLeonardo age eighteen, from Mountain View, California, is what I like to call, a teen activist. Genny is involved with a few groups in the Mountain View community. The first and most prominent being the Mountain View Youth Advisory Group, in which she and other teens in the area join together to give the city advice on things teen in the area would like.

"The City of Mountain View Youth Advisory Group (YAG) is a City-commissioned group which was founded in 1999. YAG is comprised of middle school and high school students that represent Mountain View teens in local government and have the opportunity to advise adults concerning teen issues. All meetings are open to the public."

"The Youth Advisory Group accepts Mountain View residents from local schools (Mountain View High School, Los Altos High School, Mountain View Academy, Alta Vista, Saint Francis, Bellarmine and more)." - The YAG website

Genny is also involved with a few LGBTQQ (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer Questioning) group in the area, including Mountain View High School's GSA, and Outlet, another group in the area. Genny is someone that I've always associated with helping the LGBTQQ community.

"Outlet is the only program of its kind on the Peninsula providing support, leadership development, outreach and education for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning youth ages 13-18."

"The program is a lifeline for hundreds of youth each year as they struggle with feelings of isolation, homophobia, and harassment. Outlet is a safe, accepting, and confidential place for LGBTQQ youth to express themselves, develop their strengths, and help improve their communities."

Genny, despite her interest in helping the community, is just a normal teen, who just wants to be able to do what she wants in her community.

Evie

Yvette “Evie” Ortiz is not a “goody two shoes”. She doesn’t go around saving kittens from burning trees, and she doesn’t plan on becoming a saint. Evie is simply a normal teenage girl who wants to help others when she can.

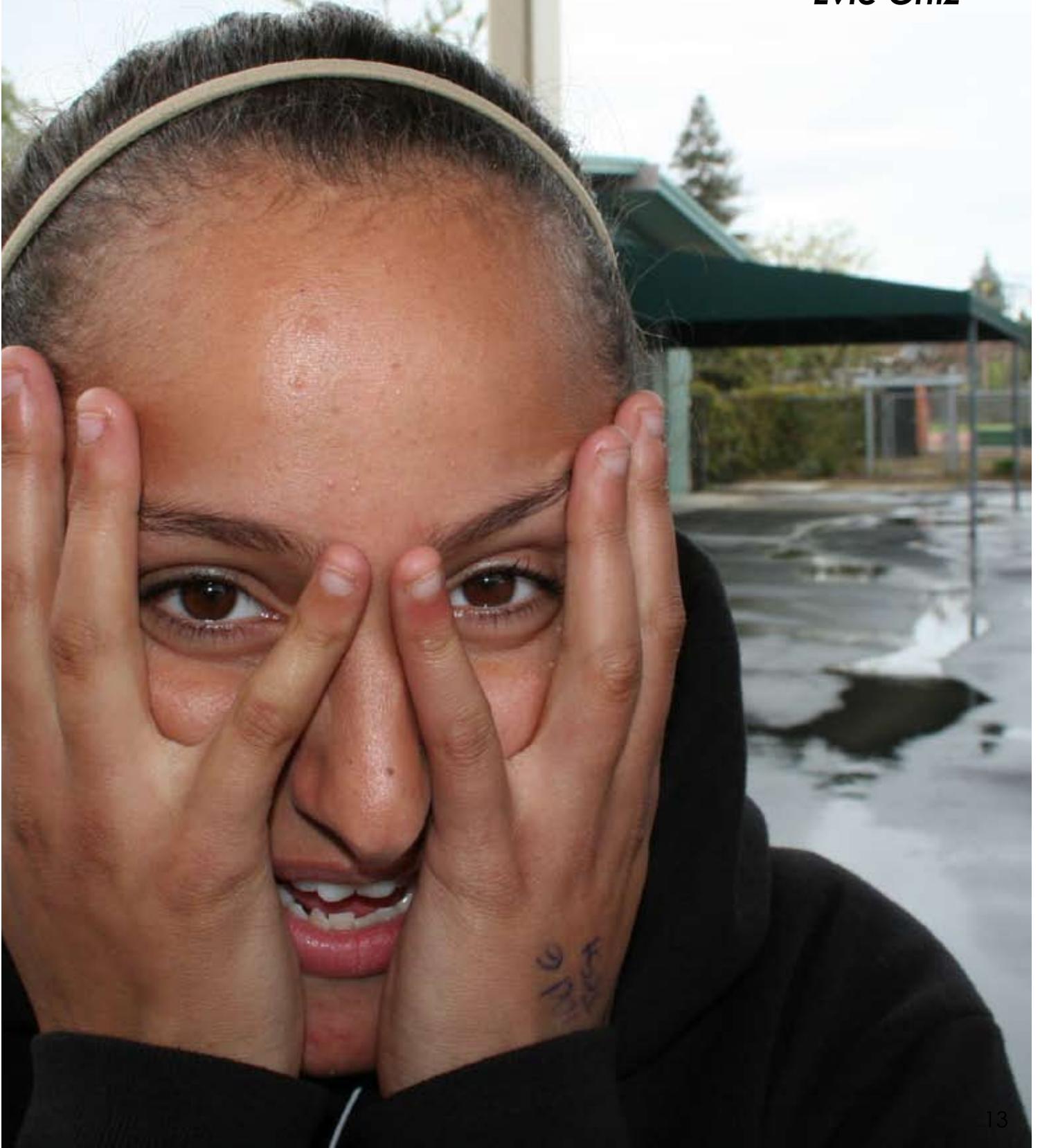
Evie is a fun, smart, seventeen year old girl that I met in Ms. Good’s fourth period trigonometry class, and until conversation changed to the topic of community service, I had no idea that Evie was so involved in the community.

“Everyday except Tuesdays and Thursdays.” She told me when I asked what days she helped out at the Boys and Girls Club, the meetup spot for her main volunteer group, Keystone Club. “We are a volunteer/leadership group and we help out in East Palo Alto, in the community, any community basically, and we help to make the community better.” Evie, aside from the scholarship money she received from the “Youth of the Year” program, gets no form of payment for the volunteer work she does. She simply feels that it’s something that needs to be done, and will just help to make the community a better place for everyone.

“My Keystone club went to plant trees and there was this one street in East Palo Alto that was really ugly so we were going to plant trees along the sides along the sidewalks and we were trying to promote other teens to help us, people outside of the club, and you know in East Palo Alto, everyone has to be hard, and you know, “gangsta”, so we were talking to these teens, and I couldn’t really understand all of what they were saying but basically, it was really hard because we had like four people come and help us, and three of them were from Keystone, because all of the people we tried to recruit were like, “Oh that’s a bunch of bull”, you know, “that’s stupid” blah blah blah, but it was really hard, but it was actually really fun, we basically just goofed off while we were planting trees so we had a fun time with it.”

Keystone Club is a small group concerned with service to the community, leadership development, education and career development, and social recreation for club members age 13-18. A Keystone Club is sponsored by the center and is affiliated with the National Association of Keystone Clubs.

***“I think [teens] need to think a little more about the world rather than just themselves.”
-Evie Ortiz***



part two:
The

Teens



Day of Silence

Founded in 1996, the Day of Silence® has become the largest single student-led action towards creating safer schools for all, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. From the first-ever Day of Silence® at the University of Virginia in 1996, to the organizing efforts in over 1,900 middle schools, high schools, colleges and universities across the country in 2002, its textured history reflects its diversity in both numbers and reach.

1996 - The Day of Silence® is born. Students organized the first Day of Silence®, its original name, at the University of Virginia. With over 150 students participating, those involved felt it was a great success. The Day of Silence® received extensive local press coverage and a positive response from the UVA community members, motivating Maria Pulzetti to take the Day of Silence® nationally.

1997 - From one, to one hundred, National Day of Silence® takes off. With a web page and much dedication, Pulzetti and then 19-year-old Jessie Gilliam, developed the project to be used in schools across the country. It was renamed the National Day of Silence®, and that year nearly 100 colleges and universities participated. Some schools in Australia heard about the project and modeled a similar day for Australian schools.

1998 - The Day keeps growing, the Project begins. Pulzetti and Gilliam realized they could not expand the National Day of Silence® alone, so they organized a team of regional coordinators who could assist schools better by working with and understanding local networks. Expanding from a one-day vow of silence to include additional actions and educational events, the Day of Silence® was officially inaugurated. That year, for the first time in a recognized number, students in high schools joined the organizing efforts, helping double the number of participating schools to over 200.

1999-2001 - More people, more time, a message of unity sets in. Through the sponsorship of Advocates for Youth, Gilliam worked part-time over the summer of 1999 to maintain and expand the Day of Silence®. A first in the project's history, a team of volunteers met for a weekend in Boston to discuss strategy and develop future plans towards assisting schools. The Day of Silence® continued to support high schools, colleges and universities around the country with volunteers led by then 18-year-old Chloe Palenchar, as the National Project Coordinator. Over 300 high schools participated that year.

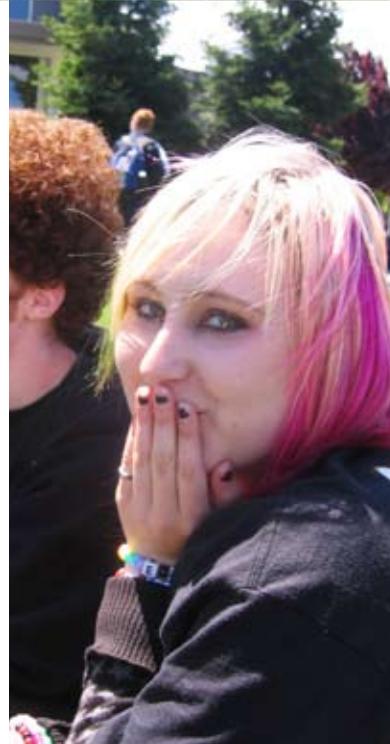
2001 - Day of Silence®; still growing, still strong. Chris Tuttle, GLSEN's National Student Organizer, Gilliam and Palenchar developed a proposal to provide the Day of Silence® with new funding, staff, volunteers and an official organizational sponsor, GLSEN. To ensure its success, GLSEN developed a first-ever Leadership Team of high school students to support local high school organizers around the country and a partnership with the United States Student Association, to ensure colleges and universities receive equal support.

2002 - Making noise, making history. In what has become the largest single student-led action towards creating safer schools, the April 10th Day of Silence® was organized by students in more than 1,900 schools across the country, with estimated participation of more than 100,000 students. Representative Eliot Engel introduces the first ever resolution on the Day of Silence® in Congress, which received support of 29 co-signers; additionally, Governor Gray Davis of California issued an official proclamation making April 10, 2002 the National Day of Silence®. Local Day of Silence® organizing efforts appear in over fifty media stories across the country, including USA Today, MSNBC, CNN, Voice of America and a live broadcast on NPR. Breaking the Silence rallies are organized with tremendous success in Albany, NY, Kalamazoo, MI, Missoula, MT, Ft. Lauderdale & Sarasota, FL, Eugene, OR, Boulder, CO and Washington DC, among other places.



Today - The possibilities are endless Just imagine: tens of thousands of students, from San Francisco, California to Irmo, South Carolina, united in a visible silence to create real change in local schools. Whether used to educate classmates on the damaging effects of anti-LGBT bullying and harassment or to demand passage of a statewide nondiscriminatory act inclusive of LGBT people, the Day of Silence® is an awesome opportunity to create more inclusive school environments and make some noise.

Students will hand out "Speaking Cards" which say: - "Please understand my reasons for not speaking today. I am participating in the Day of Silence, a national youth movement protesting the silence faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and their allies. My deliberate silence echoes that silence, which is caused by harassment, prejudice, and discrimination. I believe that ending the silence is the first step toward fighting these injustices. Think about the voices you are not hearing today."



(above) Teens sit in the quad during lunch

(below) Several teens don duct tape to show others their silence.





V





The lunchtime peaceful protest is a time when the LGBT students, as well as the allies all sit together during lunch and eat in silence. Designated talkers walk around explaining the aim of the silence to anyone who wants to learn about the Day of Silence. 21

part three:

The

Issues

IN VIEW-LOS ALTOS UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

In View High School
15000 Sherman Avenue
Los Altos, CA 94040 4598
94040 4600

COMMUNITY SERVICE RECORD FOR: _____
(Your Name)

DATE, DATES, AND TIME OF SERVICE:

HOURS SERVED _____

DESCRIBE WHAT YOU DID DURING YOUR SERVICE:

DESCRIBE WHAT YOU LEARNED ABOUT OTHERS AND YOURSELF DURING YOUR SERVICE:

SIGNATURE AND COMMENTS FROM YOUR SUPERVISOR:



“ I think if they changed it instead of [having] to do it in the semester that you’re taking civics, to maybe forty hours over your entire high school thing, it would be a lot easier then for students to get it done. Because then they wouldn’t feel pressure to get it done at a certain time, they could just do it gradually.”

Jacob Kleitman
Senior

MOUNTAIN VIEW-LOS ALTOS UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

Mountain View High School
3535 Truman Avenue
Mountain View, CA 94040 4595
(650) 940 4600



CIVICS COMMUNITY SERVICE RECORD FOR: _____
(Your Name)

ACTIVITY: _____

PLACE, DATES, AND TIME OF SERVICE:

HOURS SERVED _____

DESCRIBE WHAT YOU DID DURING YOUR SERVICE: _____

DESCRIBE WHAT YOU LEARNED ABOUT OTHERS AND YOURSELF FROM
YOUR SERVICE:

SIGNATURE AND COMMENTS FROM YOUR SUPERVISOR:

Issue One: Community Service Hours

"Fifty-nine percent of teenagers ages 12 to 17 in 1996 volunteered in the past year. These 13.3 million teen volunteers gave an estimated 3.5 hours per week, totaling 2.4 billion hours of volunteer time."

Facts like these and others show that teens are indeed volunteering across the country, but how is it that teens in our area are so against these hours? Community service is something that all seniors in this area hear about quite often. Though, more often in the form of complaints. When I interviewed several teens at my school, asking them what they thought about the ten hours of community service required for graduation, most of them told me that they disagreed with the mandatory hours, stating that:

"I don't think that community service should be mandatory to graduate, maybe for teachers to give you extra credit ... but I don't think graduation should be based on whether or not you do community service" (Abir, age 18)



"Honestly I don't think it's needed, a lot of kids do community service anyway, like Boy Scouts, or, my friends had Eagle Scout projects, and they needed a lot of help with it, and even though it didn't technically count, it was still just a lot of community service done." (Jacob, age 17)

Responses like these, as well as others similar to these are not uncommon at all. Teens don't like being forced to do something, especially something that, as Genny DiLeonardo stated, "just needs to be done". By making something like community service mandatory, the school district has taken most of the goodwill out of the equation. Now it's not to be said that the required hours are all bad, but that they, perhaps, were a bit misguided, as Mountain View High School Civics teacher, Dave Blasquez explains,

"Community service is a good idea, if the student is committed to a program. I don't think that forced community service though, is the best way of going about doing it ... It's a district policy. I think the district had a good idea, in encouraging students to commit themselves to the community. Because when you commit yourself to the community, you get a better understanding of the people that live in your community and the needs of your community"

The mere fact that Blasquez, someone, most people would assume to be for the hours, is against them means that something must be wrong with this picture. How, as teens, are we supposed to be driven enough to complete these hours, when even the people giving them to us don't agree? I'm sure that I'm not alone in the thought that there must be a better way. There has to be a better solution, a better alternative so that teens will actually be motivated and inspired enough to want to help their community, rather than being forced to. Teens like senior Jacob Kleitman, have come up with different possibilities to make the hours less painful,

"I think if they changed it instead of [having] to do it in the semester that you're taking civics, to maybe forty hours over your entire high school thing, it would be a lot easier then for students to get it done. Because then they wouldn't feel pressure to get it done at a certain time, they could just do it gradually." (Jacob)

Not to state the obvious, but the fact that teens like Jacob take the time to conjure up additional ways to get the hours means that it's not the service that they dislike, but the manner in which they're forced to serve them. Teens like Genny DiLeonardo and Evie Ortiz agree that community service is something that should be done, not because you're forced to, but because you feel passionate about helping others. Genny expressed the fact that she volunteers because it helps the community, and it helps her, because the community can help her better by providing things that teens really want to do.

"I think it's really important, I think it makes the community more [oriented] for them. For example, I'm in YAG, and if we didn't ask the community for help to do dances, then they wouldn't give them to us and we participate in all sorts of things and you just have to mix it up" (Genny, age 18)



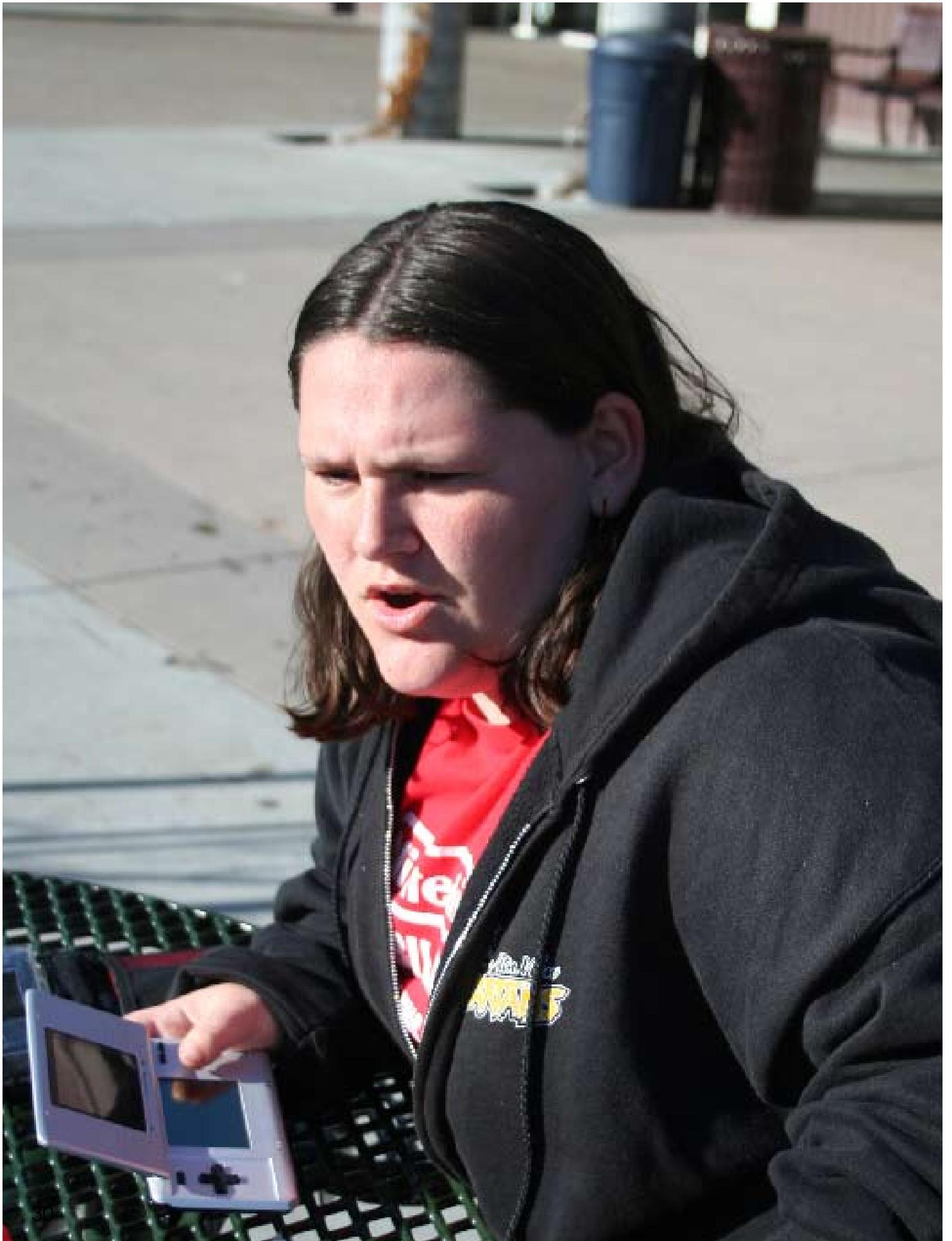
In order to solve this problem of distaste towards community hours, teens need to do one of two things. The first thing is they need to find a way to make the hours more enjoyable for them. This can be done by either, completing the hours with friends, or possibly searching for a group to help before the deadline approaches. This way, the hours won't seem as long, since, as we've all heard before, "Time flies when you're having fun". The second suggestion is to think of another way to get in the community service. If teens form plans that are reasonable for both teens and the administration, then perhaps the district might be able to change its policy to better help the students to help the community. Jacob's suggestion of more hours, over a larger period of time, would benefit everyone involved in the situation. Teens would get credit, the community would get help, and the administration wouldn't be met with such resentment over the idea of community service.

“There’s certain words that shouldn’t be said, and if you hear someone using them, you should say something.”

-Abir Abi Abboud’
Senior



Sketch drawn by Michael Aguinaldo



Issue Two: Derogatory Words

Although community service is an activist topic brought up quite often in conversation between seniors, the topic of derogatory speech, though used often, is not. Walking through the halls, derogatory words cannot be escaped. It's a constant barrage of words constantly flung around, regardless of people's feelings and regardless as to who's listening. As one student from a New York high school stated,

"If I hear someone use the word 'faggot' in the hallway I will say something to them, especially if it's a freshman or a sophomore," said one Baruch student. "But I will say that that's not an appropriate word to use. I definitely hear a lot of 'that's so gay,' or 'you're a fag,' and that's wrong because they're using it in a derogatory way. They're using it as if it's a bad thing. 'You're so stupid' is the equivalent of saying 'you're so gay' or 'that's so gay.'"

High school students, although commonly thought of as irresponsible, indifferent people, are aware of what's right and what's wrong. When I asked several teens in our area whether they speak out against these words, most of them said that they did. How then does that explain the number of words that are still heard in the halls?



"There are certain words that shouldn't be said, and when you hear them, you should say something. But there's other words that are passable I guess, like certain curse words are just part of the language"(Abir)

But should these words really be used in everyday language? As stated by a member of a morals forum, even a word like "bitch" can offend people due to its gender specific nature.⁷ When asked what the thought of use of the words, Jacob stated that he does use them, but can see how it can be annoying if someone uses words in an offensive manner.

"I've been told by random people before, "Can you not say that around me?" and that's totally cool, I [won't], I don't do it to piss people off."(Jacob)



This is where these words come from in the halls. If more people were to speak out against these words being used, then people like Jacob, wouldn't say them because they don't want to have people get mad. One possible solution: Whenever you hear a word that may be offensive or hurtful to someone, ask the person who said it not to say it. They may not respond in a polite way, but then that shows that they really don't care about other people's feelings. Speaking out against negative things is a right that in this country we are promised, and it'd be a shame for something as small as seeming nit-picky to hinder us from using that right.

Bibliography

DiLeonardo, Genny. Personal interview. Mar. 2007.

America's Teens Volunteer. Metropolitan Life Foundation.

Abi Abboud, Abir. Personal interview. Mar. 2007.

Kleitman, Jacob. Personal interview. Mar. 2007.

Blasquez, Dave. Personal interview. Mar. 2007.

Jacobs, Timothy. "Gay Teens Leaving the Closet for the Classroom." Columbia News Service (2003). 6 Apr. 2007 <<http://www.jrn.columbia.edu>>.

"Morals: Homosexuality." SciForums. 5 July 2002. 5 Apr. 2005 <<http://SciForums.com>>.

"Day of Silence: April 18, 2007." Day of Silence. 24 Apr. 2007 <<http://www.dayofsilence.org/>>.

"Keystone Club." Keystone Club. 24 Apr. 2007 <<http://www.437services.com/Family/youthprograms/keystone.htm>>.

"Youth Advisory Group." City of Mountain View. 24 Apr. 2007 <http://www.mountainview.gov/city_council/bcc/youth_advisory_group.asp>.

