

# Genders & Sexualities Alliance Network (GSA Network) – Los Angeles, CA

# SNAPSHOT

## Overview

GSA Network helps LGBTQ students and straight allies organize GSA clubs focused on activism to create safer schools. GSA Network's resources empower students to advocate for safe school policies, mobilize their peers to stand up for safety and equality, and train teachers to stop bullying. By providing in-depth leadership and activist training for youth, GSA Network is building a generation of leaders for LGBTQ rights and social justice. As a youth-driven organization, GSA Network brings the voices and perspectives of youth to the forefront of the LGBTQ movement. GSA Network's successful youth-led organizing in California is a national model that is accelerating the growth and impact of the GSA movement nationwide.



## Constituency

- LGBTQ youth in high school
- Youth 13-18 who haven't graduated from high school or obtained a GED

## Mission

*GSA Network is a next-generation LGBTQ racial and gender justice organization that empowers and trains queer, trans and allied youth leaders to advocate, organize, and mobilize an intersectional movement for safer schools and healthier communities.*  
– GSA Network website

## Local Conditions & Critical Issues Impacting 0-5 Childhood Health in Los Angeles

### Gender Norms

*“For children 0-5, [this is] when a lot of initial development around gender happens...I think a lot of folks in our constituency and population have experiences with the ways in which trauma around gender or enforcing gender norms happen and impact people as they're growing up.”*

### Access To and Quality of Neighborhood Resources

Including housing, green spaces, and other neighborhood resources.

*“Young people are spending much of their time growing up with a possibility of mold or other environmental toxins and things like that... I see that as directly contributing to poor health. Access in the community to green spaces, to healthy foods. That's something our partners work on in terms of food justice stuff and street access in schools, healthy food in schools that impacts children zero to five.”*

### Educational Equity Concerns

### Systems of Power

### Criminal Justice System and the Criminalization of Young People

### Lack of Reliable Childcare

*“A lot of the young people that we work with, they are the childcare, they provide childcare. A lot of high school students that I work with are providing childcare for their family, in ways that might impact their access to leadership programs and other things like that. To me I think that speaks to the availability and accessibility, affordability of daycare or preschool options for a lot of children zero to five.”*

*“We focus on the systems of powers we identify, particularly: white supremacy, capitalism and patriarchy as our big systems of power, in which a lot of other -isms stem, [and] how that impacts folks in the LA community that we work in.”*

– Cathy Chu, Southern California Regional Manager

1. Children's Hospital Los Angeles. (2016). [Children's Hospital Los Angeles: Community Health Needs Assessment](#).
2. Biel, M. (2016, September 21). 2016 Community Health Needs Assessment. Retrieved from <https://share.kaiserpermanente.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/KFH-LA-CHNA-Final-5.23.16.pdf>
3. Los Angeles County Department of Public Health. (2017, January). Key Indicators of Health by Service Planning Area. Retrieved from [http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/ha/docs/2015LACHS/KeyIndicator/PH-KIH\\_2017-sec%20UPDATED.pdf](http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/ha/docs/2015LACHS/KeyIndicator/PH-KIH_2017-sec%20UPDATED.pdf)

## Current Wellness and Safety Efforts

### Improve School Climate

"We support school GSAs, with the understanding that some research has shown that the top thing that a school can do to make a school safer for LGBTQs is to have GSAs in schools. Within the GSAs we do a lot of skills building to help them identify what they would like to see improved in their school climate. Whether that's teacher training, educating students on their campus...to make sure that they're not being harassed in school. Having that safe space in their GSAs to talk about stuff like that. Access to bathrooms so that trans and gender-nonconforming students aren't facing harassment in bathrooms and also not holding their pee until they get home."

### Advocate for Comprehensive Sexual Health

**Education**—Making sure that LGBTQ and all youth receive access to sexual health education (i.e., skills that are useful in terms of sexual health and healthy relationships).



### Community Defined "Best Practices" to Improve Childhood Health

#### Youth-led and Youth-driven Framework

"We have a youth leadership and empowerment framework where young people are developing skills, building their capacity, and being leaders of our work. A lot of the trainings that we do with other young people in terms of organizing, political education, and advocacy training...are peer-led. I think that's been a huge benefit for us in terms of building out our youth base."

#### Building Allies

"The practices of alliances...[it's] right in our name, 'Gender and Sexuality Alliance.' The concept of both building alliance and working in coalition with other folks is definitely a key strategy for us. We are involved in a lot of educational justice coalitions. We're actually one of the only queer or trans organizations. That's both because the work impacts queer and trans young people...[and] because we believe that there's a lot to be gained strategically in building relationships in alliance and coalition."

## Key Indicators of Childhood Health in Los Angeles

# 15%

15% of children ages 0-17 consume fast food 3 or more times per week (2014).<sup>1</sup>

14.4% of teens and 13.1% of children in Los Angeles County were **overweight** (2014).<sup>1</sup> Among 2-4 year old WIC participants, 16.6% are **obese** (2014); 13.1% of children ages 2-11 are overweight (2016).<sup>2</sup>



Only 28.5% of children ages 6-17 years obtain the recommended amount of aerobic exercise per week (≥60 minutes, daily).<sup>3</sup>

### GSA Accomplishments in Wellness & Safety

#### Include the Whole Family

"We have been growing out our work with parents of LGBTQ children in general and/or parents who want to be allies, even if they don't have LGBTQ children. I think that impact extends beyond the LGBTQ children who are 13 to 18. I think zero to five is definitely a formative time for [instilling] self-worth...When I hear the young people talk about their siblings, they want to help in raising them and help them challenge these things that they're learning about."

#### School Success and Opportunities Act in California

We helped to pass a bill that affirms trans and gender-nonconforming students' rights to access the facilities and programs in school that match their gender identity (i.e., sports teams, bathrooms, other certain sex segregated programs and facilities).



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