

Saturday

October 23, 2010

by Tina Owens, Alliance School - Milwaukee

Dear friends,

I wish I could be with you today, but the battles that we are fighting can sometimes become all-consuming battles, and there are times when we have to honor our promises and give ourselves to our children, our friends, our families and our loves. Today is one of those days for me, but while I am not standing before you today, know that I am standing there with you. I have asked Chelsea to be there with you today, because she has a story to tell that is much like the stories of the young people around the country who have lost their lives because of bullying, but hers is a story of hope.

/ *Chelsea share your story in 2-3 minutes..... /

Six years ago, our community came together to start The Alliance School because we were losing so many of our young people to hate and harassment in schools. We knew then that this was a problem, and we were determined to make a difference for those young people in our community. We were determined to give them spaces where they would know that they are loved and accepted for who they are, and we were determined to see them graduate and find those “better” lives that we have all seen and heard about, thanks to Dan Savage and the thousands of people around the country who have made videos for our young people.

We are lucky here in Milwaukee, because we have places like Alliance and Project Q, for our youth, but this is still not enough.

There are still young people dying in our community, and often those deaths go unnoticed or unspoken. Last year, a young man hung himself in one of our schools right here in Milwaukee. It was not on the news, or in the papers, but his friends in our community knew it happened. I knew it happened.

Too many of us have experienced the kind of bullying that drove Carl, Tyler and this young Milwaukeean to take their own lives. Too many of us have experienced fear on the streets of Milwaukee or in our own homes because of who we are or who we love.

It's not enough simply to wait for the day when things will get better. There are things that we can do now in every school, in every organization, and in every community.

I am hoping that you, both the people who are here to show support for these issues and the people who have the power to affect immediate change in our schools and communities, will work with me and all of the other dedicated individuals in Milwaukee and around the country who are already working to make schools and communities safer for everyone. It will take everyone, and it is hard work, but together we can make it better now, instead of later.

Thank you for your commitment, your energy, and your love. Together we will make it better!

Tina Owens
Alliance School