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November 14 NJ GSA* Forum builds LGBT youth community through shared experience

The 12th Annual NJ GSA* Forum will be held at Ocean Township High School, 550 W. Park Ave., Oakhurst, NJ 07755, on Saturday, November 14, 2015 from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm. Sponsored by HiTOPS and GLSEN Central NJ, the theme for this year's forum is *Diving into the Alphabet Soup* – a call to the ever-growing acronym LGBTQIA+ and the multi-faceted truth of identity for gender-nonconforming individuals. This grassroots event draws over 400 youth, advisors, and allies from across New Jersey for workshops and panels on legal issues, creative expression, faith, health, youth activism and safer schools. Registration information is at www.njgsaforum.com.

This year's keynote speaker is Skylar Kergil, a 24-year-old transgender activist and recipient of the Trevor Project's Youth Innovator Award for his commitment to saving young LGBT+ lives. Kergil grew to internet fame when he documented his transition on YouTube and gave voice to the struggles and triumphs of many within the transgender community. For the first time, the Forum will showcase and distribute a "starter library" of LGBTQIA+ books donated by award winning and bestselling young adult authors including David Levithan, Libba Bray and Cassandra Clare. Exhibit tables will feature a wide scope of services, resources, and giveaways from HiTOPS, GLSEN CNJ, PFLAG, Southern Poverty Law Center, HRC, and many more statewide and national organizations.

This statewide NJ GSA* Forum has traditionally been known as the Gay Straight Alliance Forum, but is addressing the need for broader inclusion by changing its name to the Gender and Sexuality Alliance Forum. To reflect the diversity of the LGBT community, the organizers chose to adapt the asterisk, commonly used to denote the varied nature of trans* identity, to signify that the Forum is welcoming to all in this rich and varied community.

To that end, no youth will be turned away for lack of ability to pay recommended registration fees: \$10 for students, \$25 for adults. A continental breakfast and bag lunch are provided. For more information, contact Corrine O'Hara at (609) 683-5155 ext 217, or Carol Watchler at (609) 529-1389.

GLSEN, The Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network, and GLSEN Central New Jersey work to educate teachers, students and the public about the damaging effects homophobia and heterosexism have on youth and adults alike. We seek to develop school climates where difference is valued for the positive contribution it makes in creating a more vibrant and diverse community. GLSEN resources can be accessed at www.glsen.org and the local chapter at cnj@njglsen.org and 609-448-5215.

HiTOPS is an adolescent health organization that helps young people make good decisions about their health by connecting them to trusted adults, resources and support programs. HiTOPS provides comprehensive sexual health classes for youth, in-services for schools, and workshops for parents. HiTOPS envisions a world in which youth have the resources they need to live healthy, responsible, and empowered lives. For more information: <http://www.hitops.org> and contact Corrine@hitops.org