

# ALEXANDER STOJSAVLJEVIC SCHOLARSHIP FINALIST



## ALEXANDER STOJSAVLJEVIC

is a junior at Normandy High School in Parma. He is a member of the Parma Law Post, an explorers program for youth interested in law enforcement. Alexander's dream job is to work for the FBI crimes against children or sex crimes unit. He hopes to attend Ohio State University, University of Cincinnati or Bowling Green State University.

Being a teenager is never easy; being an openly gay teenager is even more difficult. Middle school and high school were particularly hard for me, because of crude comments, harassment, and violence. Throughout middle school and my freshman year I constantly heard the words "faggot," "homo," and "queer." I tried to grow used to them, but it's hard to listen to someone constantly berating you. In middle school I had kids push me, spit on me, and, once, even had a rock thrown at me. All of these events led to my attempted suicide in April 2009.

When I was being rushed to the hospital, I realized that every time I got depressed or was afraid to come to school, hatred had won. I was just living my life, being me. The individuals who led their life by acting hateful and cruel were the ones with the problem, not me. After my stay in the hospital I did a lot of reflection; I thought about myself, how I treat people, and what I wanted to see in the world. I realized that I needed to be the change I wanted to see. I couldn't just sit around and wait for the world to change.

I decided to reach out to those students who felt the way I did. I co-created a Gay Straight Alliance at my school. After that I still felt there was more to be done—with the help of my friend, Mark\*, we held a gay rights rally at city hall to show the city our pride. Around fifty people showed up to the rally, and even a news crew came. Some passersby booed, some cheered, but I had never been prouder of myself that in that moment. Later that day I received an email from a student at my school; he thanked me for showing him there are other people out there like him. I felt so wonderful that I could help just one human being.

My next plan is to bring bullying awareness to my school district. I would like to have a "Bullying Awareness" week implemented where students and teachers discuss different aspects of bullying and how it greatly affects students. My hope is also to change the anti-discrimination policy for my school district so that it includes "sexual orientation" in its protected class.

It is my hope to create a world free of hatred and harassment but I know I can not do it alone. It is through the support of friends and family that I know we can change my community and the world. I have high hopes that one day I can look down upon the world and be glad in knowing that I had a part in it. In that regard, I believe I am just an ordinary teenager—I am living my life and creating a world that I would want to live in.

*\* Name has been changed*