

How The ACLU Helped Me Find My Voice

By Ashleigh Ewald



Apache Junction, Aug 20, 2020 (Issuewire.com) - The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) sponsors a summer program each year in Washington, D.C.

By Ashleigh Ewald

This year the ACLU made the 2020 program virtual due to the coronavirus, instead of in-person. Instead, the attendees would be participating in the events from Zoom and an app tt. This was a week-long program from July 19th to the 24th. Our schedule consisted of homeroom, social issues electives,

affinity groups, and then keynotes. Each participant chose what electives they wanted to be in based on the social issues they were most passionate about.

Then the electives were listed out in the app and students chose which sessions to attend. On the first day of the program, the staff introduced us to the ACLU. It stands for everyone in America having equal rights to the Constitution, fights for human rights regardless of immigration status, and is about raising the next generation of young advocates.

There were 1,700 high school and college students from all across America participating in the ACLU National Program. I am proud to say that I was a part of the thousand students admitted to the institution. This institution has changed me more than I expected it to. When entering the ACLU National Program, I thought it would be lecture-style learning instead of activities. But I was wrong because it resulted in being more than obtaining new information and listening.

The institution was more of a learn and grow together movement. All participants would listen to the keynotes about social justice and then later have the chance to break into affinity groups in discussing what we learned.

The affinity groups were categorized into Black, disability, Latinx, AMEMSA (Arab, Middle, Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian), LGBTQIA+, Jewish, and Indigenous people. Inside an individual's affinity group they could address any issues they wanted. The groups were designed to be a safe space for sharing with others who have similar backgrounds. I was a part of the AMEMSA group and we shared experiences of racism during the pandemic.

The terms “model minority” and “whitewashing” were mentioned throughout the sessions because many of us have struggled with the temptation of trying to change our physical appearance to look white. It was reassuring to be surrounded by people who have the same struggles and understand what it is like to not be white. I learned that it's better to be yourself and embrace the culture.

The ACLU National Program has changed my perspectives on social issues and helped me to be more confident about my views. I used to hesitate to stand up for my beliefs or argue against opposing views. Being involved in a community that shares a common understanding has made me more confident.

I've gained The confidence to not be afraid of standing my ground on what I believe is right and pushing for change. I don't feel the need to agree with every person that I come across because of the fear of being evaluated as a “radical left” or “liberal”. Before participating in the ACLU National Program, I was always hesitant to announce my political views because I was worried about how people would react or think of me.

I didn't want to be viewed as a democrat. I thought they were portrayed in a negative way by the media. Then I learned from the sessions in the ACLU National Program that social equality, voter suppression, LGBTQIA+, and immigration rights, and caring about other lives is not a political party issue, but a human rights issue.

I believe in fighting for social equality, LGBTQIA+, immigration rights, environmental protection, and that each individual has the right to live in pursuit of happiness. The ACLU National Program has inspired me to strive for liberty, justice, and freedom for all. That being said, there are certain actions I can no longer do which are being silent, ignoring, hiding, and most of all, being fearful.

Now I will speak up: to speak up when there is injustice, advocate for LGBTQIA+, social justice,

immigration rights, and keep fighting for a more accepting, safe society. I may never have learned about cash bail, voter suppression, social inequality, and politics on a deeper level without the ACLU National Program.

It's time to use our voices because, more than ever, we need all hands on deck. I am proud to say that I am a part of the new generation and it's astonishing to see what the youth brings to the table. The ACLU National Program has the intent to help young leaders learn about current social issues, what they are, and how as a team we can solve them.

This summer institution has changed my life and how I view the world. It was an honor to be involved with a thousand students who all have unique cultural perspectives and backgrounds. Not only has it helped me become more educated but also confident about advocating and what it means to be an advocate. The ACLU National Program is a phenomenal experience to take part in because of the activities, learning, training, and community.

Media Contact

Ashleigh Ewald

deton2001@yahoo.co.uk

Source : n/a

[See on IssueWire](#)