

# Cedar Ridge GSA students lead gender identity Teach-In

By Dorothy Potter Snyder and Heather Ahn-Redding/ Special to the News of Orange | Posted: Tuesday, May 9, 2017 3:45 pm

Students representing the Gender and Sexuality Alliance at Cedar Ridge High School gave a teach-in at Hillsborough United Church of Christ that was open to the community and sponsored by Hillsborough Progressives Taking Action.

The four students who led the session explained concepts relating to gender, sexual orientation, sexuality, and gender identity and expression. They also shared their personal experiences, their vulnerabilities, and their hope for a future in which non-binary, non-conforming identities are normalized, understood, and treated with dignity. The students encouraged participants to ask questions, and to speak freely without worrying “about offending anyone or making mistakes.”

The GSA of Cedar Ridge is a youth leadership organization that offers peer support, leadership development, and training. The GSA seeks to create a safe environment in Cedar Ridge for students to support each other and to learn about homophobia, transphobia, and other oppressions; to educate their schools and the wider community about homophobia, transphobia, gender identity, and sexual orientation issues, and; to fight discrimination, harassment, and violence.

Saturday’s teach-in began with participants being asked to write their names and the pronouns they would prefer others to use when addressing them. Normalizing the process of asking a person their preferred pronouns (he/him, they/them, she/her, etc.), they said, is an important step in learning not to assume gender based on physical appearance.

The students defined the difference between gender (the psychological experience of identity) and sex (the biological component), and offered an extensive list of terms that are used to correctly identify the many people who fall outside of cisgender male-female heterosexual identity, as well as highlighting terms that are either inappropriate or insulting.

The student leaders, who represented a spectrum of gender identities themselves, shared their own and others’ experiences of painful and difficult encounters, and expressed deep concern about the situation of their peers in some other North Carolina counties where there is less tolerance and support for gender fluid students than in Orange County.



## Cedar Ridge GSA

Cedar Ridge Gay Straight Alliance Student Workshop Leaders, left to right: Natalie Monson, Grace Barger, Gabe Simpson (back), Lilla Duffy, and Colin Davis.

Among the top wishes the student leaders expressed were: greater access to gender-neutral bathrooms; a facilitated name-changing process within the school system; and a student body that is more aware and conscious of LGBT issues. Says Cedar Ridge GSA Co-President Lilla Duffy, “The GSA’s purpose is to create a space in which students can organize and advocate for themselves and their community.”

These young movers and shakers are paving the way for inclusiveness in Orange County by publicly fighting oppression, even when it’s not always safe for them to do so. The GSA of Cedar Ridge promises to hold more public trainings in the future. Civil, church or business groups interested in scheduling a teach-in with them can contact the organization at: [gsacedarridge@gmail.com](mailto:gsacedarridge@gmail.com).