

# Vigil in Belmont Shore hopes for end to bullying of gay youth

By Phillip Zonkel, Staff Writer

Posted: 10/20/2010 08:33:15 PM PDT

Updated: 10/20/2010 11:43:43 PM PDT



Katherine Harris of Long Beach throws a flower in the ocean in remembrance of a friend who committed suicide twenty years ago because of the pressures of being gay. She was one of approximately 150 people who came to Granada Beach in Long Beach for a vigil to remember gay teens who have committed suicide. (Steven Georges/Press-Telegram)

## Photo Gallery

LONG BEACH - About 150 people gathered in Belmont Shore Wednesday night at a vigil

calling for an end to the bullying and harassment of gay-lesbian-bisexual-transgender youth in middle and high schools.

The vigil was held in memory of gay teens across the nation who have committed suicide following tormenting and abuse at school.

"We should be hugging our children, not burying them," said Danielle Nava, president of the board of the Orange County chapter of the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN), which works to end bullying of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students.

The event was held near the Granada Boat Launch at sunset.

First District Councilman Robert Garcia said bullying and abuse of GLBT teens is part of a bigger problem, a lack of equality.

"This bullying won't end until there's equality everyday for every child," he said.

Most of the people gathered wore purple, one of the six colors in the gay pride rainbow flag. Purple represents spirit. The other colors are red (life), orange (healing), yellow (sunlight), green (nature) and blue



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(harmony).

Nine out of 10 GLBT young people experience physical or verbal harassment, Nava said.

GLBT youths are four times more likely to attempt suicide as heterosexual young people, said Laura McGinnis, a spokeswoman for the Trevor Project, a national organization focused on suicide prevention for LGBT youth.

The Trevor Project's hotline is 866-488-7386.

Ron Sylvester, president of the board at The Center Long Beach, said he hoped the event will open the door on dialogue to expand the Long Beach Unified School District's bullying and harassment policy as it pertains to protecting GLBT youth.

Nava said it's important for school districts to have a comprehensive policy that not only

protects students and tells them what to do if they are bullied but also informs teachers and school personal how to address GLBT bullying.



Six-year-old Chole Monley of Long Beach holds onto her mother, Christine Monley, at the start of the sunset vigil. (Steven Georges/Press-Telegram)

"It's important for students, teachers, school employees and parents to have a written policy," Nava said. "When something is on

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paper, people can be held accountable."

At the end of the vigil, a solemn procession of the 150 people - each person carrying a white flower - walked through the sand toward the ocean's edge.

When the group reached the water, each person tossed his flower into the ocean. Some people stood a few minutes and watched the flowers float, while other people hugged one another. A few people wiped tears from their eyes.

The vigil was in memory of several gay youths who have killed themselves, including Billy Lucas, 15, of Greensburg, Ind.; Tyler Clementi, 18, of New Jersey; Asher Brown, 13, of Houston; Seth Walsh, 13, of Tehachapi; Zach Harrington, 19, of Norman, Okla., and Justin Aaberg, 15, of Anoka, Minn.

The remembrance was organized by The Center Long Beach, the Long Beach Lambda Democratic Club and Garcia.

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