

Governor's Institute of Vermont 2016

Golden Gate High School - Arlette Perez

The Governor's Institute of Vermont is a unique program that brings students together from both in the United States and the world. It focuses on teaching the youth on youth activism and current world issues. It was a fast moving program that gave each and every single one of the participants a lifelong influence. From the day our group arrived at the SIT Institute we immediately felt welcomed, even more so when all the other students arrived. It was a great experience, and impressive that we all had so much fun, and learning in just two weeks. It consisted of Florida, Chicago, Vermont, Bosnia, Germany, Ireland, and Spain.

We were all able to choose our own Issue Groups where we would be in a class for two hours every day. There were the options of Politics, Global Social Change, Youth Identity, Social Justice, Religion, Leadership, and Climate. I chose the Religion class where I was fortunate to have a great professor who taught us the root of religion. Amar was able to incorporate science in and everything. At the beginning of every class we would always start with a meditation or a voice exercise, we read texts on religion and force, and it is because of that class as to why I am now filled with acceptance. On top of our Issue Groups, we also had Forum Theatre, where we learned how to use poetry, music, art, dancing, or even photography as a form of activism. Forum Theatre was everyday as well, and I chose Creative Writing. Out of everything that I did in GIV, creative writing was my favorite; Not only because I am a fan of writing, but in our class everyone was so accepting and supportive of our views. We were all vulnerable, but even in a vulnerable state, we were safe. Our teacher Matt, was extremely helpful and encouraged us further.

Another thing we did was take part in a Mock Congress, where we were put into groups of ten to come to a solution to a bill that was given to us. It was interesting to see how everyone worked together to fix the bill and what solutions we came up with, especially because these bills are popular today. We were also able to take part in a United Nations Security Council Crisis Stimulation, where everyone had a partner and represented a country and how we were going to help with Syria. It was an extremely difficult place to be in, no country wanted to agree, and it was hard to think that these issues are currently happening in reality. Another thing I liked was being able to hear from Feminist activists, from Black Lives Matter, from Climate Change, and from Race, and Gender. One night we even received a concert from a singing activist, Kristen Graves.

Aside all the learning, we had the best time together doing so many fun activities. Everyone went barn dancing, we had dance parties, went fruit picking, went hiking, went out for ice cream, went swimming, went to a ropes course, played lots of sports, went shopping in Downtown Brattleboro and of course the mall in Massachusetts, and we also went out to the movies. But, by far, being part of the Fourth of July parade was the best feeling, being able to show what each of us care about and to yell for what we believed in.

The absolute best thing of GIV, is being able to make so many friends and to be so close to them, even if it was only two weeks. Our program was able to cross with the IYLEP program, which consisted of the Iraqi students, so we also met them. Being able to hear everyone's story was the best part, and to hear about what we all thought on what happens in the world was even more special. I came out being able to say I have friends from Iraq, Germany, Spain, Bosnia, Ireland, Vermont, Chicago, Florida, and I knew every single one of them. The worst part of the program I would have to say was saying goodbye to all the people; Saying goodbye to our professors, counselors, and friends. This program really changed me; it made me feel more welcomed, accepted, and important. This program made me believe that we can all make a change, even if small, and that it doesn't matter who you are, what you look like, who you worship, who you love, because we are all people, and we all have a voice. And when all voices come together, change is possible, and like our Fourth of July chant said... *"Ain't no power like the power of the people cause the power of the people don't stop"*

A huge thanks to the NCWA, because without their help and support, this experience would've never happened, and I wouldn't have been able to meet such great amazing people.