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Thank you so much to the American Jewish Committee and the Rosen Family for this honor. I appreciate the recognition of my work, and am humbled to be a Rosen Student Human Relations Scholar.

I've been asked to speak today about what inspires me towards community organizing and activism. Although I can identify many people who instilled in me values of service, most notably my parents, I find the greatest inspiration for my work in the people that I care about. One of the greatest things I've learned from my Jewish heritage is that community is everything. Seeing people face obstacles is difficult for me, and that is why I organize. Simply put, I am motivated by the desire to inhabit a better world, one of more equity and tolerance. Initiating change is difficult and requires commitment on the part of all those involved, but I believe that small actions can result in larger impacts.

I am guided by the Jewish value of *Tikkun Olam*, or repairing the world. I don't see myself as someone who has devoted her time simply to helping people, although it's undeniably a good thing to do. Values like *Tzedakah* and *Gimilut Chasadim* tell us, as Jews, that to help another through difficult times is our duty. However, it is my firm belief that many people, given the tools, resources, and opportunities, are quite capable of helping themselves. We as a society are often complicit, perhaps unknowingly, in various forms of discrimination that bring people to a place where they are unable to access the resources they need to thrive. I believe that a deeper level of repairing the world is empowering people to help themselves. Thus, I conceptualize *Tikkun Olam* as a responsibility to facilitate systemic change. Bettering the world, in the service of each individual.

Student human relations is a broad field. The majority of my work has been focused within Seattle's gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender, or queer youth communities. High schools tend to be unfriendly places for queer youth, and my goal has been to collaborate with others to provide education about the effects of our dominant heterosexual culture on these minority populations. I believe that creating a positive, inclusive and empowering environment for all young people is an issue of human rights and respect, the embodiment of *Tikkun Olam*. I have seen kids being beaten up because they don't conform to gender norms, friends scared to hold hands with people that they care about because they might be harassed by strangers on the streets, and students rejected by their parents and communities for something as fundamental as their identity.

I've worked with youth from around Seattle to provide trainings to Seattle Public Schools teachers and staff on how to respond to homophobia in their classrooms. I sit on the committee that advises the School Board on issues of sexual orientation and gender identity, and I've met with Senior District Staff, to make them aware of the unique barriers that queer youth face in schools. This February, I wrote curriculum about gender, sexuality and harassment at my high school, taught 30 Gay-Straight Alliance members to facilitate this curriculum, and presented the 2 hour interactive workshop to every freshman science class.

It is easy to feel powerless at the hands of those who spew hate speech, but a lack of education is something that I can directly address, and I have worked to educate those around me school. This has been a long-term goal of mine, one inspired by personal experiences of harassment, and I have seen some fruits of my labors. For example, last June, Garfield High School was visited by the Westboro Baptist Church, a hate speech group from Kansas, in protest of the active Gay-Straight Alliance that I chair, and our diverse student body. With a week's notice, I mobilized the student community towards counter demonstration, resulting in a 700 person community celebration at 7:30 in the morning. Standing on 23rd Avenue across from 7 church members holding signs with messages like "God hates Jews," and "God hates fags," it was empowering to hear the school song ring out in the defense of all those whom Westboro targeted, and we began to forget they were even there.

This year, my main focus has been to establish a brand-new community initiative called "Queer Youth Space." In Seattle, there is a lack of supportive space for youth of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. The result can be a series of unsafe and unhealthy situations and experiences. Queer Youth Space is a youth-led, constituency-owned community initiative to create a physical space that provides safety and empowerment to this population. I'm a founding member of this group, and last night I presented a grant proposal to the Seattle Department of Neighborhoods City-Wide Review team, requesting \$100,000 to make this physical space a reality.

My community work is small and locally based, but it is my attempt to repair the world. I believe that each person has a role to play. As it is written in Pirke Avot, "You are not required to complete the work, nor are you free to ignore it." Thank you again to the AJC and especially the Rosen family, for supporting me in my efforts. I truly appreciate your encouragement, and I will hold my Jewish values near to my heart as I head off to college in the fall. I will look for new opportunities to learn and to be of use.