

June 28, 2019

“The Benefits of Being LGBTQ”

Appreciating all the beauty life has to offer is to recognize the absence of suffering, and so our tribulations demonstrate how blessed our lives really are: our collective legacy exceeds the sum of the parts. Trailblazers, artists, iconoclasts, progressives, and revolutionaries throughout history have been associated with our cause, and their triumphs are our own. Their stories teach us to adjust our perspective, find humor, seek acceptance, overcome adversity, and celebrate our differences. Today, we can follow those examples by using our unique benefits to brighten the future for people who have been left out.

Per the essay directions, submissions were asked to *“explore the joys, advantages, wonders, and positive benefits of being a member of this fabulous community.”* In this order, my essay will draw connections from our past to present, and explore opportunities to improve the lives of people everywhere.

As a gay person in 2019, I’ve been welcomed into a diverse community that encourages self-expression. In turn, I want my impact to reflect the values of all those who have sacrificed and struggled for equality before me; I honor those lives by volunteering for LGBTQ+ political campaigns, holding hands with my partner in public, or relying on Legacy Community Health’s grant-funded healthcare. Joys are abundant where the community has converged to pave a way forward together, for everyone.

It hasn’t happened overnight. And the privilege of these liberties has not been equally distributed over the course of our progress. But the ability to inspire social change is our characteristic trait. In his book released the year I was born in 1992, Trans rights activist Leslie Feinberg illuminated the potential for marginalized people within the LGBTQ+ community. Ze explained, “We are pitted against each other in order to keep us from seeing each other as

allies. Genuine bonds of solidarity can be forged between people who respect each others' differences and are willing to fight their enemy together. We are the class that does the work of the world, and can revolutionize it." 26 years later, we can applaud the strides made by our allies banding together to demand respect. Institutionalized support systems resulting from visionaries like Leslie provide a professional *advantage* where there once was persecution.

LGBTQ+ people know the value of compassion. Bittersweet as it is, all of us have experienced some level of discrimination based upon our identity, so we can comprehend what it is like to disappoint societal expectations. The schema that construct our reality shift with each rejection, enabling us as humans to adapt our perspective. An obstacle in my personal development was religious conviction; doubts I overcame by objectively comparing the bible to society, realizing LGBTQ+ activists who have devoted their lives to service embody Jesus' teachings. Finally able to question the norms I had been raised to believe as fact, life became full of unexplored, *wonderful* possibilities.

Thought leaders who foresaw an inclusive future were able to reframe their unwelcoming circumstances and inspire others to do the same. Not long ago, something as intuitive as marriage equality was unthinkable to most; nevertheless, the LGBTQ+ community normalized the conversation. Now the obligation falls upon us to prosper the next generation. The potential of our impact is unlimited, and together we can tackle systemic issues like inequality, poverty, and climate change that will affect everyone. Sharing the *positive benefits* of our influence will continue to positively shape cultural trajectory.

LGBTQ+ values are deeply personal for me because of the acceptance I've found. Despite being born into disadvantaged circumstances, social inclusivity programs provided me with opportunities to get ahead. Support from a chosen family encouraged me to define and realize my purpose. Now as an adult, I express gratitude by paying that kindness forward.

Consequently, a desire to empower others motivates me as a product designer. In pursuit of my passion for systems that will benefit people and the environment, these scholarship funds would further our cause: shining light on people who need love.