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## In the Middle: Let people be who they are

By AYDEN McHENRY - Barker Middle School

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Ayden McHenry

Right now in the United States, even after years of fighting to raise awareness, the LGBTQ+ community is still being attacked. It doesn't even have to be provoked; every day, people who are a part of this community are harassed. Whether it's because of religion or just an unfair bias, it's sickening that in 2019, we still haven't evolved enough to accept people for who they are.

In 2015, nearly 1 in 5 hate crimes in the U.S. were committed because of people's sexual orientation, and 2 percent were because of gender identity. These crimes ranged from bullying to harassment, and in some cases murder. In 2017, 13 women of color were killed just for being transgender.

It's shocking that all states don't consider these things to be hate crimes. Sixteen states (including Indiana) don't specify crimes involving sexuality or gender as hate crimes. Only 13 have laws on hate crimes for sexual orientation, and four states don't have any laws for hate crimes.

Some states also still allow a thing called "gay conversion therapy." This therapy is supposed to change a child's or adult's sexual orientation from homosexual to heterosexual. However, all this "conversion therapy" does is cause more problems. It has been linked to depression, suicide and psychological distress. This damage seems to be worse for children and teens.

LGBTQ+ people experience discrimination, abuse and harassment much of the time, sometimes even by their own family. It's been proven that LGBTQ+ people don't get the same opportunities for housing, pay, healthcare and more. Not to mention that the debate over trans bathrooms has been going on for years now. In some schools, trans students aren't allowed to go to the bathroom by the gender they identify as. It could make sense in some circumstances, but I think that they should be allowed to go to whichever bathroom they want to go to.

So what can be done? I believe we can all try to do better. People need to accept that others are different. It's like racism, except instead of going against someone's skin tone, it's going against who they are as a person. This is just ignorance. Nobody should have to live in fear that others out there just want you dead for being you.

I know that the LGBTQ+ community will keep pushing through these hard times and won't let anyone get them down forever. That's something to be proud of.

Ayden McHenry is a seventh-grader at Barker Middle School. In the Middle is a monthly column by MCAS middle school students.

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