

Genai Odhner & Asja Sever: Seniors at Lower Moreland High School, Pennsylvania

Genai and Asja were interns at Animalearn, and wrote this letter to show other students how one or two students have the potential to make an impact for the benefit of both animals and other students.

Dear Fellow Student Advocates,

We achieved something that even we thought almost impossible. We are Asja Sever and Genai Odhner, two seniors at Lower Moreland High School. For our senior project, we volunteered at Animalearn. Learning about dissection made us realize how hypocritical it would be to stand by while dissection still took place at our school. We quickly decided to go beyond our projects, and try to make a difference by eliminating dissection in our school. We went on our school's website and found out when the school board meetings would be. Working furiously, we collaborated on an outline of what we wanted to say, covering all the different aspects of dissection alternatives. Then we got Humane Educator Packs from Animalearn, and Nicole Green, Assistant Director of Education, wrote a letter that we included.

It was Friday, May 13, and the board meeting was scheduled for Tuesday evening. In order to have a stronger face during our presentation to the board, we thought it was a good idea to meet with Mr. Doviak, our principal, first. We scheduled a meeting with him for Monday. Going into the meeting, we were really nervous. What if he just dismissed what we had to say? Our doubts evaporated as the meeting went forth. His initial response was, "We still have dissection?" When we proposed getting rid of dissection in our anatomy class (the last one to still have it), he said, "I was a biology teacher, and I don't see why not."

He also told us that it was unnecessary to go to the board meeting, because it would be up to him and the director of curriculum, Dr. Hausman, who happened to walk in at that moment. She gave her enthusiastic support to our cause, having seen an undercover report on biological supply companies on CNN. We scheduled a second meeting for Wednesday with both of them, then basically frolicked all the way back to Jenkintown, where the Animalearn office is located.

Our second meeting was perhaps a little sobering. They challenged us to defend our proposal, point by point. Having done research, we were prepared to argue. In fact, going into our first meeting, we were ready for intense opposition, and now was our chance to really make our case.

The meeting ended on a positive note, leaving us a little shaken but optimistic. They told us they were going to speak to the anatomy teacher, then get back to us. We called the school at least five or six times. Finally, we got an answer, which turned out to be much less of an answer than we had anticipated. They wanted to take a survey of the students, and said that they would test out the alternatives. It was a reasonable step to take,

although we were a little disappointed at the lack of immediate change. We were anxious to make a difference, but realized that these things take time.

Mr. Doviak thanked us for “getting the wheels turning,” and we felt proud but perhaps a little vulnerable. This issue that is so important to us was no longer in our hands. We had done our part and made a significant difference, but the ultimate decision would not be ours. If they cut out dissection, we celebrate and our job is done. If not, then we go to the school board and do not stop fighting until the end.

What next? We are planning to talk to other schools in our area – maybe, having made a difference in our own schools; we can expand and change things for others as well. Making a difference is not always as hard as it may seem. All we had to do was ask.