

San Fernando Valley Bar Association severs ties with Learning for Life Law Exploring.

July 2010, Woodland Hills, CA – In 2008, the San Fernando Valley Bar Association (SFVBA) chose to begin an effort to reach diverse teenagers in the San Fernando Valley, to inspire them to seek a future career in law and/or government.

To do this, the SFVBA chose to partner with Learning for Life and to participate in Learning for Life's Law and Government Exploring program. The SFVBA thus became the sponsor of Law and Government Explorer Post 1926, the Post number alluding to the SFVBA's own year of formation as a Bar Association.

A project of the SFVBA's Diversity Committee, the Post's salutary goals attracted adult volunteers committed to increasing diversity in the legal profession and exuberant high school students from nearly every walk of life, comprising a microcosm of the racial, cultural, religious and socio-economic diversity of the San Fernando Valley, who were interested in learning about the legal profession.

The youth led SFVBA Explorer Post took guidance from Exploring's five areas of emphasis -- career opportunities, life skills, citizenship, character education and leadership experience -- to create its program and support its goals of youth development, leadership, diversity and fun.

For two years, the SFVBA lauded the program, until controversy arose within the Bar Association. In July, 2010, the Trustee Board of the SFVBA voted to sever ties with Learning for Life.

Controversy swirled in the months before the vote. The prevailing argument went like this: Notwithstanding the fully inclusive membership policies of Learning for Life, and the Bar Association's own Explorer Post, Learning for Life is nevertheless affiliated, however remotely, with the Boy Scouts of America (BSA). BSA has a policy (repugnant to many, including the author) that precludes avowed homosexual adults from registering as volunteer Scout Leaders. Therefore, the SFVBA must divest itself from all ties with Learning for Life.

Opposing views included maintaining the program, which the teens and their parents adored, and utilizing the relationship between the SFVBA and Learning for life to seek to effect change in BSA's policies from within. The Bar Association did not find this persuasive.

Now, with the severance from Learning for Life, two questions remain for the Bar Association: "What has it achieved for itself, for its teens, and for its goals, by this decision? And what will be the result for each?"

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The author, David I. Karp, was a Co-Advisor of Exploring Post 1926, and has for many years worked as a volunteer for change in BSA's policies from within. Karp has since retired from leadership in the Post.