“There is power in numbers:” Rise Up, Band Together, Stomp out Hazing

By Natalia Corwell
Volcano Vista High School, Albuquerque, NM

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said during his “Keep on Moving” speech given in May of 1963, “There is power in unity, and there is power in numbers.” While this quote is inspirational in nature, it can be dangerously true for groups who pride themselves on the embarrassment, harassment, ridicule, or harm they cause to others – the very definition of hazing according to HazingPrevention.org. No matter the size of the group or the importance individuals place on the process, hazing is not bonding. At its worst, hazing causes the unnecessary death of many individuals who are just trying to fit in. While looking to belong, to find brotherhood or sisterhood, innocent people lose their lives at the hands of their friends.

It’s human nature to seek companionship because, in essence, no one wants to be alone. The feeling of belonging is part of what makes us human, what makes us willing to do things we wouldn’t normally do. According to psychological studies, people have a basic need to feel closely connected to others, but how far are we willing to go just to satisfy that need? How do we even know if we truly belong?

My mom, once a willing participant in hazing, knows this all too well. In her junior year of high school, she excitedly joined a team. The team’s captain, followed by an entourage of “faithful servants,” took my mom to an initiation, a rite of passage, held at midnight. To this day, my mom recalls the endless hallways she bear crawled, the silly outfits she had to model, and the blindfolded games of duck-duck-goose she had to endure to become a team member.

“And for what purpose?” I asked her.

“To belong,” my mom replied.

Is it worth it? For those who are considering joining a group, the answer might be an obvious no, but to those who are willing participants, they could consider belonging their only option. This is the thinking that must be stopped, not just because of its ridiculousness, but because of the potential it has to cause harm and/or death. Dr. King’s quote is certainly true for the victims, families, and the communities that rise and come together to become a powerful force for change. When people work together, they are much more powerful than they would be apart, and that is what creates change. We must come together to inspire that change.

It’s a scary and intimidating thing to work at something alone. This I know firsthand. One thing I’ve learned in the three years I’ve participated in Mock Trial is the power of teamwork in order to get our voices heard and present our case before the court. Before each trial, my team gathers in a circle to channel everyone’s chi – a positive energy flow that brings the team together and makes us one. It has worked every single time! I couldn’t imagine going before the court without my team’s support behind me. Even though we were a small group of six, we were a strong, united voice.

Now, imagine what the voices of thousands of united individuals could do to affect change. We don’t have to just imagine it. In 2018 alone, we have witnessed this power, such as the Women’s March to advocate for human rights and the March for Our Lives to spur gun law reform. A vocal mass creates power – there is strength in numbers.
Let the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. remind us that in times of pain, suffering, and loss, we must rise, band together, and unite to stomp out hazing.