

Youth Leadership Today



November 2010

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From the President

I am fortunate enough to have a gorgeous autumn view out my office window right now. Fall is absolutely my favorite time of year, I adore Halloween, pumpkins, cooler weather, Thanksgiving dinner with my family and crisp autumn walks kicking leaves.

Autumn also is the start of a very busy time of year. Congress designated October as the National Disability Employment Awareness month in 1988, and activities and celebrations have expanded greatly over the years. The theme for 2010 was "Talent Has No Boundaries: Workforce Diversity INCLUDES Workers with Disabilities." Disability Mentoring Day is now always the third Thursday in October, and includes activities such as job shadowing, career fairs, and informational tours of worksites. Thousand of people participate in activities across the state. I hope you did too!

We're already thinking of next summer here at the Connecticut Youth Leadership Project. Applications are online at www.ctylp.org (click on the "apply" button). If you loved your time at YLF, please pay it forward by encouraging high school sophomores and juniors with disabilities to apply and experience it for themselves!

Have you joined YLF's Group/Fan page on Facebook yet? Not only is Facebook a great way to keep up with friends, our own Khampasong Khantivong keeps everyone up-to-the minute with links and news about the disability community in general, and YLF in particular.

If I don't see you on Facebook, I hope I see you all in January at the reunion!

Kathleen Kabara
CTYLP President

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2010 Connecticut Youth Leadership Forum Wrap-Up



The Connecticut Youth Leadership Forum for Students with Disabilities completed its 12th annual forum from July 25-July 29, 2010 at the University of Connecticut.

YLF applications were mailed and emailed during October/November, 2009 to all public and private high schools in Connecticut. Forty-nine students with disabilities from across the state applied to attend YLF 2010. A panel met to screen and score each application and all students were interviewed by counselors from the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) or members of the CT YLP Board of Directors.

Based upon the screening and interview process, it was recommended by the CT YLP Board that we accept 43 students to YLF 2010. Due to personal and medical reasons, three students informed the CT YLP Director shortly before YLF that they were unable to attend. Two students did not show up on the first day of YLF, and did not inform YLF staff of their decision not to attend.

Thirty-eight (38) students participated in the week-long forum. Following is a breakdown by gender, ethnicity, and disability:

DISABILITY

LD and/or LD/ADD	14	(38%)
Hearing Impairment	3	(8%)
Physical Disability	4	(10%)
Asperger's Syndrome	7	(18%)
Intellectual Disability	5	(13%)
Traumatic Brain Injury	1	(3%)
Blind/Visually Impaired	4	(10%)

GENDER

Male	21	(55%)
Female	17	(45%)

ETHNIC BACKGROUND

Caucasian	32	(84%)
African-American	5	(13%)
Indian	1	(3%)

Of the five students accepted to attend YLF 2010, but were unable to attend at the last minute, two (2) students were of Native American descent, one (1) student was of African American descent, one (1) student was of Hispanic descent and one (1) student was of Caucasian descent. If all students accepted to YLF 2010 attended, the ethnic/racial representation would have been somewhat more in line with our goal, but clearly lacking in the diverse representation we desire. The CT YLP Board will make a concerted effort to target under represented students to attend YLF 2011. Students attending YLF represented 27 towns and cities in Connecticut

The activities conducted during YLF 2010 focused on disability history, leadership and team building skills and self-advocacy. A heavy emphasis was placed on student acceptance and understanding of their disability, while highlighting each of their personal strengths and capacities. Small group activities allowed students to speak in a safe, comfortable environment to articulate their goals and visions for their future and strengthen their leadership skills. Student evaluations indicated that forum activities were successful in assisting most students to achieve this goal.

Community Action Plan

Each of the four teams (eight – ten students per team) developed a Community Action Plan. Teams were divided on a regional basis to support the convening of the participants after the forum. Four YLF staff members will serve as follow-up facilitators to assist each of the four teams to implement their Community Action Plans. Each team will meet a minimum of six times between August 2010 and May 2011 to

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2010 Connecticut Youth Leadership Forum Wrap-Up, cont



complete their community projects. Minutes will be kept of every meeting to document team progress. A YLF Community Action Plan “celebration” will be held in May to highlight the success of each team.

Teams 1 & 3

During YLF 2009, one team of delegates undertook an extensive project at Camp Hemlocks in Hebron, CT. They worked with Hemlocks staff to identify three stations of the “low ropes course” that needed renovation and walkways to make them more accessible to individuals who use wheelchairs. Members from this team presented at YLF 2010 to explain to the delegates the work, coordination and fundraising that was required to complete this project. Two teams from YLF 2010 decided to join forces to continue their work and renovate additional stations at the Hemlocks low ropes course.

Team 2

Team 2 members will identify an existing Community Center in their region of the state (greater New Haven area), that is in need of renovation. Team members will work with staff from the Community Center to identify the needed renovations (painting, new rugs, furniture). Team members will raise the required funds and identify potential businesses that could donate needed materials and labor. It is hoped this Community Center could be designated as an unofficial site for past YLF delegates to host reunions, social events and other recreational get-togethers.

Team 4

Team 4 members decided to build a wheelchair for a four-year old girl named Anna, so have named the project Anna’s Angels. The team will start off by raising money until they find a contractor to bring to the house to find out what supplies will be needed and figure out the cost of the supplies. Each team member will raise \$200 for a grand total of \$2,000. They will raise money by placing donation cans with

description of what they are doing in their neighborhood stores. Some members will be holding a bake sale, having a car wash or earning money by doing chores. The team has appointed a team leader that will that will make phone calls, send out emails and keep everyone up to date. A Secretary was appointed to write up a letter on CT YLP letter head on what the project is about so they can hand it out to businesses in hopes of getting donations. Once we have collected the necessary amount of money and construction supplies a date will be picked to do the actual construction. The construction will need to take place before the ground freezes so, the group decided to build by mid November. The money raised will also be used to get the building permit and to buy food and drinks for the volunteers on the day of the construction. The team will also consult with an architect who is knowledgeable in ADA requirements to ensure the ramp meets all ADA specifications.

Most important, many students leave YLF with better sense of who they are – not a person with a disability, but a person with gifts, strengths and dreams, just like everyone else. YLF does not focus on disabilities, but the abilities of the young adults that attend. Students leave YLF with a sense of how they can positively impact their lives and the lives of other people with disabilities in their school and community.

Stay in touch and keep up with the latest on Facebook! Go to www.facebook.com and search for CTYLP!

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YLF 2009 Team Completes Community Action Plan at Camp Hemlocks



Submitted by Karen Halliday

Four members of “The Green Power House Gang” completed an impressive renovation project of the Adventure Course at Camp Hemlocks in Hebron, CT. Zack Captao, Nick Emond, Kristina Pasquaretta and Ian Cannon worked for nine months to renovate and improve pathways throughout the course, build new benches and fully renovate two “stations” at the course.

Their project mission was “to use their strengths, talents and leadership skills to develop and carry out a “going green” community service project to improve accessibility at Camp Hemlock’s Adventure Course. Team members met monthly from October 2009-May 2010 to meticulously plan all aspects of the project:

- Visiting Camp Hemlocks to identify specific course improvements;
- Assigning tasks to team members;
- Designing blueprints for course renovations;
- Creating a list of needed materials and funds required, and
- Soliciting volunteers and donations to complete the project.



Seating Area Before



Seating Area After

On May 15 & 16, 2010, team members, their parents and volunteers spend two full days at Camp Hemlocks to clear pathways and lay stone dust, build new benches and re-build the Whale Watch and Nitro Swing stations.



Nitro Swing Before



Nitro Swing After

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YLF 2009 Team Completes Community Action Plan at Camp Hemlocks



Submitted by Karen Halliday

Cont. from page 4...

During YLF 2010, Zack, Nick and Kristina presented their projects to the new delegates. As a result of their excellent presentation, two YLF 2010 teams decided join forces to continue the work they started at Camp Hemlocks.

The Green Power House Gang would like to express their sincere thanks to John Simms, YLF Follow-Up Facilitator, their parents, Camp Hemlock's Director, Jen Person, Home Depot of Middletown, Home Depot of Glastonbury, Marc Browne, General contractor and all of their volunteers.

Congratulations to Zack, Nick, Kristina and Ian for your hard work and commitment to completing your YLF Community Action Plan!



Whale Watch Before



Whale Watch After



Donated Labor and Bobcat



Clearing the area to be worked on

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YLF From a Parent's Perspective

by Judy Grabowicz

Mother of Ben Grabowicz, YLF Delegate



I have had many conversations with Ben over the years about educating and “enlightening” others by the example you set and the success you achieve. Regardless of the obstacle, hard work and determination, and flexibility regarding the exact path you will follow, will bring you success each and every time. His goal was always: “If you do the best you can and give everything you have each and every day, you will have no regrets and be successful and proud of the outcome, regardless of what that outcome may be.”

When we instilled this “mantra”, we really had no idea where his path might lead. To say that there were individuals who presented obstacles along the way is an understatement, but Ben was able to educate others regarding what is possible for disabled students if they are given the equal access and support they are entitled to. Our job as his parents was to make sure the doors were open, but Ben had to make the decision to walk through the door and spend tireless hours of studying in order to be a successful student.

Choosing to go to college and become a teacher was one of the most fearless things I ever saw him do. Courage is not just running into a fire, it is definitely found in the face and heart of every child with a disability who chooses to set high goals and starts each day with a smile, determination, hard work and a spirit that will not give in to fear of failure!

Ben has just graduated with his Bachelor's Degree in Human Development and was recently hired to work as a program assistant with Headstart in Vernon. He will complete his masters degree at the University of Hartford in Early Childhood Education and also complete his teaching certification requirements starting in January. He is committed to working with early childhood students because he truly understands how important it is to lay an early foundation of support and encouragement. His “ultimate goal” is to teach kindergarten or first grade.

This “disabled” young man has more insight and compassion for his students than many of the “non-disabled” peers he works with. On the day he received his degree, I had flashbacks of all of the steps and individuals who were involved in shaping the path of this young man's life. His participation in YLF came at a time when Ben was deciding how high he wanted to set the bar. He returned home confident in his abilities and began to advocate for himself without feeling like he was asking for a “favor”. Having individuals outside his home support group who provided the same advocacy information and guidance gave him the tools to stand proud and believe in his goals.

He completed his degree in 4 years, and not only received his degree in growth and human development, but completed 90% of the coursework for early childhood education and special education certification, including many hours of practical teaching assignments. While he is taking this semester “off” from college, he is taking a sign language class at the American School for the Deaf, obtained his American Red Cross certification and attended a weeklong workshop for the “Responsive Classroom”. When he speaks of his work with his young students, there is a joy that cannot be ignored!

YLF comes at a time when young adults are making decisions about their future. The message of YLF is an important one and inspires and supports those students who dare to dream!



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My Experiences since YLF

Joshua Fairchild



While my experience at The Connecticut Youth Leadership Forum may have been over four years ago, it has certainly had a profound impact on my life. While at YLF, I learned a lot about myself, and how to better exercise my leadership potential. As I have gotten older, furthered my education, and become more exposed to the “real world,” I have had many chances to exercise this knowledge, and it has carried me far. More than anything, YLF helped instill in me a sense of confidence in myself and my abilities to lead others and be successful in ambitious pursuits.

I am now working toward my Ph.D. in Industrial/Organizational Psychology at Penn State, where I am studying innovation and leadership in the workplace. I truly feel that my experiences at YLF have given me a vital perspective on what it takes to be an effective leader, and this has helped my approach to research tremendously. I am currently working in the Penn State Leadership and Innovation research lab, where I supervise a team of talented undergraduate research assistants. The sense of self-efficacy and confidence in my leadership skills that I developed through YLF has certainly contributed to my success in this role. Leading an undergraduate team and helping them generate new knowledge has been so satisfying that I plan to become a professor after completing my doctorate. I am incredibly excited about passing on my experiences, and my passion for leadership and self-improvement, to an eager audience.

**Let us know where YOU are now.
We'd love to hear from you!**

**Contact Kathleen Kabara by email
Kathleen.Kabara@ct.gov and give
us the scoop!**

**Mark your calendars!
Youth Leadership Forum
Reunion
January 8, 2011
Invitations to be mailed soon!**



**Stay in touch and keep
up with the latest on
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search for CTYLP!**

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Where are They Now?

Omar Buddhu



Hello. My name is Omar Buddhu, and I am a 2002 delegate alumnus of the Connecticut Youth Leadership Forum (CT YLF). During that time, I learned a good deal about goal-setting and networking. I shared my own experiences with my peers, and they did likewise, until we developed a communal pool of knowledge that filled each of our own personal cups of knowledge even further than they had been at the beginning of our sojourn. I made a few very close friends during this forum, companions who I will forever cherish and with whom I shall forever remain close.

During the Forum, I declared openly my relatively intermediate goals of earning my black belt in Kenpo Karate and Modern Arnis, two different yet complementary martial arts, as well as earning my M.D. degree. I have practiced martial arts from the age of seven years, beginning my journey in the martial arts with the study of Kenpo Karate. *Kenpo* translates as “fist law” and *karate* means “empty hands,” both of these words being Japanese in origin. Kenpo is the style of martial art with deep roots in both Japan and China. Modern Arnis is derived from the Kali family of Filipino weapons-based martial arts. I enjoyed the feeling of pushing one’s self to the very limits of their physical and mental being; this is the core of every martial art: a way of living whereby one embarks upon the eternal quest to introspectively achieve self-perfection...this quest is never-ending because, of course, no one can be perfect.

My passion for medicine ignited early in life. My parents, two of my strongest role models, both serve in the healthcare profession. My mother is an R.N., with a Masters of Science degree in Microbiology, who works as a psychiatric nursing supervisor at Connecticut Valley Hospital. She is the hardest-working person I know; her work ethic is a paragon of which I aspire to daily. Additionally, she is one of the most emotionally resilient and strong-willed

people I know. My father earned his Ph.D. in organic chemistry from Wesleyan University, and participated in research at Yale University’s School of Medicine before earning his M.D. He is the most intelligent person I know. When I was young, I would listen to their talk at the dinner table (discussions about their work) and be fascinated. I love puzzles...yes, I am one of those nerds who loves to play chess...but I have always found puzzles of the body, where one can help to alleviate others’ suffering, to be the most rewarding of puzzles.

After the Forum, I graduated from Xavier High School in Middletown, CT in 2003. Subsequently, I attended the University of Connecticut (UCONN). It was during this time that I found more concrete inspiration to serve in the medical field: two close friends of mine developed cancer; only one of them survived. Talking with these two individuals’ oncologists, seeing their interactions with their patients, instilled within me a deep desire to help people in this manner.

I chose the major that I felt would prepare me the best for medical school: Physiology & Neurobiology. And so, in May 2007, I graduated from UCONN with a Bachelors of Science degree in Physiology & Neurobiology, with *magna cum laude* distinction, graduating in the top 6% of my class with a cumulative GPA of 3.842 and a class rank of 174 out of 2,983 students. I used my already appreciable skills in goal-setting and organizational skills, which were augmented from my experiences during CT YLF, to maintain a structured scheduling system that allotted my time to maximize its utilization efficiently and economically. I was nominated for membership into several honors societies during my undergraduate career, and was inducted into prestigious societies such as the Phi Beta Kappa Society, the Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi, and the Golden Key International Honour Society. I also used the leadership skills I learned during CT YLF when I co-

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Where are They Now?

Omar Buddhu, cont.



founded the Hartford Muses Literary Society, an outlet for literary expression for UCONN students other than the Long River Review. I was that society's first president, and had to incorporate a lot of my knowledge of leadership in this capacity.

Concurrent with my undergraduate career, my martial arts study blossomed. I earned my black belt in Kenpo Karate on December 15th, 2003. I earned my first-degree black belt in Kenpo Karate on December 5th, 2005, and my second-degree black belt in July 2007. I also officially earned the rank of Antas Apat (Level 4, or High Blue) in Modern Arnis, which is not my goal of Lakan (Level 11, or Black), but is a step in the right direction. I still continue to practice martial arts in my spare time; however, I currently do not have regular spare time to devote to attending classes, most unfortunately.

Immediately after graduating from college, I started medical school at Ross University School of Medicine. It has been a long and arduous journey, but rewarding and gratifying every step of the way. I am currently a ninth semester (ten semesters being the entirety of the curriculum at Ross), an advanced fourth-year medical student with an anticipated graduation date of June 2011. I fully intend on specializing in Hematology & Oncology, blood and cancer medicine, respectively. It's been 8 years since CT YLF, and I am well on my way to accomplishing those goals I laid out during that life-altering experience. I am very proud of the knowledge that one of my best friends, who I met at CT YLF, is also well on his way to accomplishing his goal of earning a Ph.D. in industrial and organizational psychology. YLF taught me one very important thing: never let anything or anyone stop you from realizing your dreams. Thank you.





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Make a Difference - Donate Today!

The act of making a donation to the Connecticut Youth leadership Project will help assure that High School Students with disabilities are given opportunities to increase their leadership potential. As a 501(c) 3 corporation, a donation to the Connecticut Youth Leadership Project is tax-deductible within the fullest extent of the law.

Please accept my contribution to the Connecticut Youth Leadership Project.

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Please make checks payable to CTYLP. CTYLP is a non-profit, 501(c)3 organization. Federal I.D. # 14-1905684

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