

# Youth Leadership Today



December 2011

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## From the President

Welcome to Winter! We've had it all, earthquake, flooding, tropical storm and an unusual winter storm pre-Halloween that left many of us in the dark up to 12 days! Seems like we don't know what to expect these days.

Even at the Forum this past July we had a tornado rumble through during dinnertime. The delegates were terrific about the whole thing, we all were hanging out in an inner hallway waiting for the "all clear" with no panic or worry. Everyone stuck together and followed instructions. A great team effort!

It's not just weather that teaches us to "expect the unexpected." Having a cup of coffee while working on a paper seems like a good idea until the dog runs in and spills it all over, leading to a re-write. Or you're working on a huge email and hit "send" and, you guessed it, nothing happens, but the email is gone anyway.

That's why it is so important to be armed with the best tools you can. First and foremost, a sense of humor! If you can laugh off showing up for a job

interview wearing your coffee it will go a long way to show the person interviewing you that you're flexible, you don't let little things shake you.

Second, if you are worried run through things in your head. What is the worst thing that can happen? How likely is it? What can you do to prevent it, or fix it if it does happen? Armed with some of these answers may not make everything go right, but you will be a lot less stressed if and when it goes wrong.

Lastly, don't be afraid to ask for help or a second opinion if you need it. Some storms are bigger than others and require a team effort, just like a couple of weeks ago when the crews from Canada and many other states stopped by to help Connecticut get the lights back on.

And whatever you celebrate, may your holidays be merry!

*Kathleen Kabara*  
CTYLP President

# Youth Leadership Today

## Youth Leadership Forum 2011 Wrap-Up



The 13<sup>th</sup> annual Connecticut Youth Leadership Forum (CTYLF) was held at the Storrs Campus of the University of Connecticut from July 26-29, 2011. A total of 38 students attended the forum.

The activities conducted during CTYLF 2011 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.



Some of the highlights of the forum were: Keith Jones, President and CEO of SoulTouchin' Experiences, an organization aimed at bringing a

perspective to the issues of access inclusion and empowerment, which affect him as well as others who are persons with a disability in a highly humorous way; a fantastic talent show that really highlighted everyone's flair for music, comedy, poetry and more; a low-ropes course at Camp Hemlocks that helped prove you can do anything as a team and some hands-on fun with assistive technology.

By the end of the week, each of the four teams (eight – ten students per team, divided on a regional basis) had developed a Community Action Plan. With the support of four YLF staff members as follow-up facilitators to assist each of the four teams to implement their Community Action Plans. Each team will have until May 2012 to complete their community projects. Minutes will be kept of every meeting to document team progress. The Teams and their action plans are as follows:

**Team 1** - Greater Hartford area (Team name – Team Progressive) will be raising funds for Make-A-Wish Foundation.

**Team 2** - Greater New Haven area (Team name – San Antillo Coin

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# Youth Leadership Today

## Youth Leadership Forum 2011 Wrap-Up, *cont.*



Boulevard) will be looking to help a local animal shelter by raising money and volunteering their services by trying to help the animals get adopted and having a couple of clean up days.

**Team 3** – Greater Fairfield area (Team name - Assistive Allies) will be raising funds for Make-A-Wish Foundation.

**Team 4** – Eastern Connecticut – (Team name - Peaceful Penguins) will be raising funds for Shriner's International to help children in other countries receive the medical services they need.

Most important, many students leave CTYLF 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. CTYLF does not focus on disabilities, but the abilities of the young adults that attend. Students leave CTYLF with a sense of how they can positively impact their lives and the lives of other people with



disabilities in their school and community.



Some of the delegates put it best, "people with disabilities can do everything to change the world, " "I was able to connect with other students with disabilities as well as comfortably discuss my disability," "I learned I am a part of an amazing community of people," "leaders can be anyone, despite their disability," "I am not alone in facing the challenges that I do" and "there is no one definition of leadership – we can all be leaders in different ways."



# Youth Leadership Today

## Where Are They Now?



### Rose Arrezzini

1. Kate Webster and I finished our YLF project for the Make A Wish Foundation. We raised over \$230.00.
2. I am in the process of completing a research project for my civics class at Greenwich High School which incorporates the knowledge I have gained from my YLF experience.
3. Now that I have completed my YLF project, I am motivated to pursue another leadership endeavor, my Girl Scout Gold Award project. I intend to create a club for teenage girls with special needs called, "special sisters".

### CT Pride Event- Come Make it Happen

**Sarah Rizzuto**, inspired by New Jersey's first ever Pride Parade, wants to make it happen in Connecticut too! She's looking for a steering committee of motivated volunteers to help with a parade, food, vendors, guest speakers, performers etc. People from disability organizations, allies, youth, and educators; anyone who thinks disability pride should be celebrated are welcome to help plan this event.

The Pride Parade will be slated for 2012. Contact Sarah at [sbrizzuto@gmail.com](mailto:sbrizzuto@gmail.com) with questions, ideas, resources, or to get involved!

### Reunion Time!!!

The Reunion is being held Saturday, January 14 at the Crown Plaza Hotel in Cromwell from noon-4 p.m. Come for the food, come for the DJ and dancing, come to see your old friends from the year YOU attended YLF and make new ones from all the other years.

RSVP to John Gentile: [jmgstr1550@aol.com](mailto:jmgstr1550@aol.com)

Kathleen Kabara - [kathleen.kabara@ct.gov](mailto:kathleen.kabara@ct.gov) or 860-424-5068

Or on Facebook :)

# Youth Leadership Today

## Find Us on Facebook!

*submitted by Khampasong Khantivong*



Have you had a chance to find us on Facebook yet? Well there's two ways you can connect with us online!

Delegates looking to reconnect with your old friends from past forums can join us on our group page. Reminder: This is a closed group only open to those who have participated in YLF. You can either search for: Ct Ylp or click on the link: <https://www.facebook.com/ct.ylp>

For those who were not able to attend, or are interested in what CT YLP has to offer, or you're just looking for resources, please take a moment to **LIKE** us on our Fan Page! You can either search for: CT Youth Leadership Project or click on the link: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/CT-Youth-Leadership-Project/125199980828711>

We're always posting all kinds of resources on our pages. For example, did you know last month was National Disability Employment Awareness Month? So for the whole month of October, we posted information on how to find jobs, possible agencies that can help people with disabilities, and information for employers to learn more about what's considered a reasonable accommodation. You will find information for students, parents, educators, and other professionals. Hope to see you soon!



# Youth Leadership Today

## Becoming a YLF Staff Member

*submitted by Heidi Forrest*



Karen Halliday, Kathleen Kabara, Heidi Forrest and our YLF Facebook Page get numerous emails every year from former delegates and members in our communities on how to become an YLF staff member. Becoming an YLF staff member is a very rewarding experience for anyone! We love to hear from people who are interested in joining our team. Here are the answers to common questions we get about how to become staff:

### **How do I get an application to become an YLF staff member?**

We post the YLF staff applications on our webpage around January or February every year. You can go to our website: [www.ctylp.org](http://www.ctylp.org) to print out the application, fill it out, and mail it in for us to review. Please make sure you send in your application before the deadline and include everything that we ask, such as criminal background check form and your resume. We get so many applications, so may not be able to chase you down if you forget something on the application.

### **What staff positions are available at YLF?**

We have numerous positions available every year and provide a full description of each position on the staff application on our website. The positions we hire for each year are: Counselor, Co-Counselor, Program Assistant, Overnight Staff, Personal Care Assistant, American Sign Language Interpreter and Staff Nurse. When applying for a position, please check off all of the positions you are interested in working in, for we may have a need in one position, but not the other.



### **Do I need to have a disability to work at YLF?**

Since we want to provide our delegates with strong role models with disabilities, you will be required to have a disability if you were to apply for the Counselor and Co-Counselor positions. If you do not have a disability, you are more than welcome to apply for the Program Assistant, Overnight, Personal Care Assistant, and American Sign Language Interpreter positions.

### **Do I get paid to work at YLF?**

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# Youth Leadership Today

## Becoming a YLF Staff Member, *cont.*

*submitted by Heidi Forrest*



YLF is a non-profit organization and all program staff are volunteers. YLF provides you with free room and board, tons of food, two staff shirts, and a staff backpack for the week. Only the Personal Care Assistant and Sign Language Interpreter positions are paid.

### **What are the hours and dates I would need to commit to YLF if I were to become program staff?**

YLF tends to be the last week of July up at UCONN. As I write this, UCONN is currently undergoing changes for their summer conferences. With this, we are still uncertain of the dates and location for YLF 2012. Please check back to our website for more information on when and where YLF 2012 will be held.

If you are selected to come aboard as YLF staff, you must be able to commit to Sunday early afternoon until Thursday evening that week. Like any other summer camp or forum, you will be required to work from 7 am through 10 pm with numerous breaks throughout the day and evening, unless you elect to come on as overnight staff. All staff, with exception to some program assistants are required to stay overnight at the UCONN dorms. We also have mandatory staff training on Sunday afternoon, starting around 2 pm, which no staff member can be exempted from attending.



### **How old do I need to be to become a staff person for YLF?**

All staff persons must be at least 18 years of age and out of high school for at least one year. All former delegates must also wait one year prior to applying as staff.

### **I volunteered for YLF as staff last year. Do I need to send in another application to apply for this year's YLF?**

If you have worked as staff for YLF in the past, you will still need to fill out an application to apply again for next year's forum. We have a mandatory criminal background check that we must conduct every year. This form needs to be filled out

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# Youth Leadership Today

## Becoming a YLF Staff Member, *cont.*

*submitted by Heidi Forrest*



and submitted along with the rest of the applications. Please make sure you submit your application by the deadline so that we can get the criminal background checks out.

### **How do you select staff for YLF?**

Like many other summer camps and forms, our application process is very competitive. Once the deadline for YLF applications passes, we screen applicants and set up phone interviews for new staff. During this process, we also send out the criminal background checks to determine that you have not been arrested for a major crime or for harming a child. Applicants are notified by mid-May if they have been accepted for a position.



### **If I'm selected for YLF, will I obtain training?**

YLF has mandatory staff training the Sunday before the delegates arrive. All staff must attend this training. Prior to this training, staff will receive an electronic staff manual to review. Staffs are responsible for reviewing the manual and familiarizing themselves with their responsibilities and what the week will look like. Staff should be prepared to spend at least a few days prior to staff training familiarizing themselves with the manual, schedule, and their responsibilities.

### **Who do I contact if I have any questions about becoming YLF staff?**

You can email Heidi Forrest at [heidi.forrest@ct.gov](mailto:heidi.forrest@ct.gov) regarding any questions you may have about becoming YLF staff.



# Youth Leadership Today

## Strategies to Achieving Success: Part I of II

James M. Ryan



We all want to be successful in life, but we can struggle in achieving it, and sometimes even more so if we have a disability. Over the past 22 years as a Student Affairs and Educational Consultant professional, I have worked with many high school and college students with disabilities and have observed the areas where young adults often stumble while trying to achieve success. Three common stumbling blocks are: the lack of self awareness, situational awareness and confidence.

Hence, I am going to review with you how the development of self awareness, situational awareness and confidence can be valuable and often essential assets in achieving success. I will also provide you with some exercises to develop these skills.

### **Self-Awareness**

Self-Awareness is a term which gets thrown around a lot. So, what is self-awareness? It is an awareness of one's own individuality. Self-awareness is a broad concept and can encompass much. For the purpose of this article, we will focus on two aspects of self-awareness; knowing what you want and understanding your strengths and weaknesses.

One of the first steps towards self-awareness is **knowing what you want**

personally, academically, professionally, socially, spiritually and the list goes on. If you don't know what you want, how are you going to know if you are heading towards success? It would be like your life being a ship at sea with no one at the helm. Every day the current and wind could steer your ship in ten different directions never arriving at a destination. Or, someone else (parent, teacher, guidance counselor, etc.) with good intentions, is at the helm, and you find yourself at a destination for which you are not interested in. If you clearly know what you want, you will be able to focus your energy and manage your environment to successfully reach your goals. You will be at the helm steering the ship to the specific destination you have chosen.

**Exercise:** I would encourage you to make a list of what you want. Don't over think it; just start making a list. Don't get caught up in worrying about the probability or difficulties of achieving a goal, but just write the list in a free flowing manner.

Now that you have listed what you want, you need to **identify your strengths and weaknesses**. This knowledge is imperative in developing your strategies to successfully achieve your

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# Youth Leadership Today

## Strategies to Achieving Success: Part I of II, *cont.*



James M. Ryan

goals. This includes having a comprehensive understanding of your disability and how it impacts you. Being aware of your strengths and weaknesses will allow you to play to your strengths and develop or minimize your weaknesses. With this list, you will also be able to ascertain whether all of your goals are achievable. This is where many people get tripped up so I want to say a few things about what you can achieve.

First, I am not one of those people who will try and sell you on the idea that you can do anything you want. It is just not true. For example, I have a profound hearing loss and I am tone deaf. Therefore, regardless of my desire to do so, I will never be a gifted singer and be discovered on American Idol or America Got Talent.

Secondly, don't make the mistake of letting a weakness deter you from following a dream. Often, with motivation and perseverance, a weakness can be developed into a strength. For example, one of your weakness could be public speaking, the number one fear of Americans. You could take a class on public speaking or joined the Toastmaster organization to practice public speaking. Over time, public speaking could become a strength.

Thirdly, and perhaps most important, while being realistic in your goals, don't ever underestimate yourself or let someone else tell you what you can and cannot do. If you let them, there will be many people with good intentions who will tell you that you are unable to do something due to your disability or weaknesses.

I once worked with a young man enrolled in a radio broadcasting program who was blind. His parents and the professors, career advisors, and academic advisors of the College were all determined to convince him that he could never master the program. Specifically, their concerns centered on the audio board, which had over 70 knobs that he would have to continuously adjust on the fly. This young man stuck to his conviction and understanding of his own strengths and weaknesses. By the end of the semester when he had to master the audio board, his professor proudly ate humble pie and said that this student knew and manipulated the audio board better than anyone else in the class. This student had even helped other students in the class learn the audio board. So again, while you need to be realistic about your goals, be careful not to underestimate yourself!

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## Strategies to Achieving Success: Part I of II, *cont.*

James M. Ryan



**Exercise:** Create a list of your strengths and weaknesses. However, be flexible with your list and keep it updated. Over time, a weakness may be developed into a strength. Also, depending on the circumstances or the situation, a strength for one goal may be a weakness for another goal and vice versa.

### **Situational Awareness**

Situational awareness is just as important as self-awareness as it allows you to identify additional options you might not have otherwise been aware of. So what is Situational Awareness? It is an awareness of environmental elements in relations to self. Again, this is a broad concept, but I will only be focusing on two expressions of situational awareness: knowing your resources and critical thinking.

In achieving success, the importance and value of **knowing and using your resources** bears repeating and cannot be understated. Over the years, I have worked with young adults with disabilities who are stuck and unable to reach their goals; often it is because they are not aware of or using all their resources. Knowing and using your resources can and often is the difference between successfully achieving your goals and falling short

of them. Therefore, take the time to discover them by completing the exercise below. I also want to point out a common misconception that I often notice holding people with disabilities back: the belief that you need to do it all on your own and that asking for help and/or using accommodations is a sign of weakness. This could not be further from the truth. Understanding your weaknesses or challenges and minimizing them is just good strategic sense. If you don't take advantage of resources and use accommodations to manage your weaknesses, they will hold you back and can hinder the level of success you can achieve.

**Exercise:** Ask your teacher/professors, guidance counselor, academic advisors, rehabilitation counselor, etc. two simple questions: "how can you help me?" and "what resources are there for me?" Also, do Internet searches on your weaknesses, whether it is a weakness such as public speaking or procrastination, or a disability like a learning disability or cerebral palsy. The Internet is an excellent vehicle and think tank for identifying resources for any weaknesses or disability you might have.

Next on the list is **Critical thinking**, which is understanding a situation,

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## Strategies to Achieving Success: Part I of II, *cont.*



James M. Ryan

problem or challenge from multiple points of views and then being able to identify and understand the pros and cons of multiple options towards addressing them. Critical thinking is an essential skill in problem solving. In our childhood we generally don't critically question the decisions that are made for us. As you become an adult and become responsible for your own success or failure, you need to start thinking critically. Being able to critically identify and assess multiple options in any given situation, will allow you to pick the best method to successfully manage life's challenges, so they don't prevent you from achieving your goals. As you become more proficient in critical thinking, the more options you will be able to identify that other might miss.

Sometimes the difference between a successful and not so successful person is that when given two undesirable options to choose from, a successful person will find a third more desirable option.

**Exercise:** When people in your life make or suggest decisions for you, start asking questions like the following:

“Why do you think that is the best decision for me?”

“What other options do you think I have?”

“What do you think the pros and cons of that decision are?”

This will help you to start to develop your critical thinking skills and to look at decision making and challenges from multiple perspectives. It will allow you to identify multiple options and armed with this information, discover the action steps needed to best achieve your goal.

This ends part I of Strategies for Achieving Success. I will address confidence and how to develop it in the next newsletter. If you would like to further discuss or comment on issues in this article, please feel free to email me at [jimmryan500@gmail.com](mailto:jimmryan500@gmail.com).



# Youth Leadership Today



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# Youth Leadership Today



## Make a Difference - Donate Today!

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