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From the President

This issue of Youth Leadership Today focuses on many successes in the program over the past years. From this year's scholarship recipients to finding out delegates from all years past are doing now, we want to share personal stories on the achievements of some of the more than 300 delegates that have participated in the Youth Leadership Program over the past ten years.

In Connecticut, the Youth Leadership Forum for High School Students with Disabilities (YLF) has been such a thriving program in large part because of the amazing staff that volunteer their time at the forum every year.

Every principal staff member of the teams must have a disability themselves. The counselors are all adults with disabilities who typically work full-time, have families, volunteer their time for good causes, and are socially active. The co-counselors are usually young adults who attended YLF in the past and are now in post-secondary school or working, or, in many cases, both!

YLF tries to make sure that the staff is made up of people with a wide range of disabilities so the delegates can easily identify with them. This range of disabilities also helps when it's time to do something that is scary, like completing an obstacle course in a wheelchair, or dancing when you can't hear the music. Having a counselor with a disability can be especially valuable for young people with disabilities in these instances, showing the delegates that while they may have a disability, they have many more abilities.

Many times, staff members become unofficial "mentors" even after the forum, staying in touch through email, phone conversations, even Facebook!

As Albert Schweizer said, "Example is not the main thing in influencing others. It is the only thing." I'm pleased that YLF has such terrific people setting examples for high school students with disabilities.

*Kathleen Kabara
President, CTYLP*

Youth Leadership Today

2009 Connecticut Youth Leadership Scholarships Awarded



This year, the Connecticut Youth Leadership Project is awarding four scholarships: the 6th annual Joe Bendoraitis Youth Leadership Scholarship, 2nd annual CTYLP - CT Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) Rehab Council Scholarship, the 2nd annual CTYLP - John Sims Scholarship and new this year, the 1st annual CTYLP Board of Directors Scholarship. All the scholarships are available through a competitive application process to past Youth Leadership Forum delegates who plans to further their education beyond high school.

Joe Bendoraitis Youth Leadership Scholarship

The Joe Bendoraitis Youth Leadership Scholarship is awarded in memory of a former YLF delegate, Joe Bendoraitis, who attended in 1999 as a junior from Lyman High School in Lebanon. He became completely committed to the program. He returned again in 2000 as part of a delegate panel relating his experiences at the forum and its impact on him. In 2001 he returned as a full-time staff member. In 2002, Joe died of cancer, spending one of his last weeks attending as much of the forum as his stamina would allow.

This year's recipient, **Ashley Glorioso**, a senior at Old Saybrook Senior High School is pursuing a degree in mathematics with a desire to teach at the secondary level. She is academically ranked in the top 10% of her class and a National Honor Society member, along with numerous other awards and honors. Also active in the community, she volunteers in an area soup kitchen, participates in fund raising activities for those less fortunate, tutors and is active in her church.

CTYLP - CT Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) Rehab Council Scholarship

For the 2nd year, as part of it's ongoing support of the Youth Leadership Forum, the BRS Rehab Council has provided additional funding for a scholarship grant for a former delegate pursuing their education beyond high school.

The CTYLP - BRS Scholarship is awarded this year to **Gabriel Filer**. A senior at Middletown High School,

Gabe plans to pursue a career in urban planning. He has been a high honors student throughout his high school years with several AP courses under his belt. Gabe has been a long time member of the swim team and also competes in crew. In addition, he is active with the community, having received both a Mayoral Citation from the mayor of Middletown and a Public Service Award from the CT Secretary of State.

CTYLP - John Sims Scholarship

John Sims is a long time staff member at the Youth Leadership Forum. Two years ago, John decided to forgo his stipend for the forum and instead donate it for the purpose of a scholarship grant for a former delegate pursuing their education beyond high school.

This years recipient of the CTYLP - John Sims Scholarship is a senior at Stamford Hand High School. **Julia Katz** is planning a field of study in early childhood education. She is a member of Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Friendship Circle and donates time volunteering to work with special needs children. She, too, has been recognized for her academic achievement and is a member of the National Honor Society.

CTYLP Board of Directors Scholarship

This year, the Board of Directors of the Connecticut Youth Leadership Project, Inc. is also awarding a scholarship to a former YLF delegate pursuing their education beyond high school.

Already accepted at Lesley University, **Jack DeNatale** will major in marine life studies. He is presently completing his studies at Fairfield Ward High School where he is actively involved in a variety of activities. Among them are chorus, cross country, swim and track teams. He has volunteered his time at the Maritime Aquarium and as a camp counselor for Parks & Recreation summer programs.

In recognition of their efforts and achievements, CTYLP is pleased to award these scholarship. Congratulations to Ashley, Gabe, Julia and Jack!

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Connect-Ability

Connect-Ability has taken hold in Connecticut. There are billboards, newspaper, radio and television ads, a website and more. The happy, bouncing yellow circle in the ads and on the website is easy to identify, but what exactly is Connect-Ability?

Connect-Ability began in late 2005 with a federal grant to the State of Connecticut to identify and remove barriers to employment faced by people with disabilities. This five-year, multimillion dollar systems change grant involves a detailed look at the way the State's employment and disability services works in order to identify problem areas and implement lasting solutions. Barriers being addressed include transition services, transportation, recruitment and retention and technical assistance for employers.

There are two target audiences for the Connect-ability program. The first is people with disabilities who are seeking a job, whether it is a new job they are seeking or a career change. Connect-Ability's target population is cross-disability and across the lifespan. This means that people may have physical, sensory, emotional, and/or intellectual disabilities; and may be high school students, people in their 30's or 40's, or people of retirement age.

The second audience is employers, companies of all sizes and in all sectors from manufacturing, government services, high-tech fields, insurance,

entertainment and more.

Many other groups are being "Connected" as a way to create lasting success in the employment of people with disabilities. Chambers of Commerce, the Society for Human Resource Managers and the Connecticut Business Leadership Network have been involved in outreach to local business. They have also assisted in practical issues of getting and keeping a job: how to find workers with disabilities, accessible job applications, creative hiring strategies, strategies for job seekers, and making adaptations to the workplace.

Advocacy groups, nonprofit organizations, and State agencies provide input through the project's Steering Committee and workgroups. Providers of employment services offer input from their perspective of working to assist people with disabilities in reaching their employment goals.

The Connecticut Youth Leadership Project has also become a partner of sorts: past delegates have appeared in advertising segments to share their experiences, and a few have become the authors of the Youth Journal, a blog revealing the true stories of what it's like to be a student with a disability in Connecticut.

Connect-Ability has proven to be a great resource: over 500 inquiries have been answered and the website has had over 28,000 unique visitors.

For more information on how to get connected, visit the Connect-Ability webpage at www.connect-ability.com.

Youth Leadership Today



Where Are you Now?

Matt Cavedon, 2006 Delegate

Matt Cavedon has been quite busy since attending YLF. He is now a sophomore at Harvard University where he is studying religion and government. He is active in the Catholic and interfaith communities on campus and works at a homeless shelter. YLF helped him to engage with other people with disabilities and learn about effective activism, both skills that have served him well in the past few years. He also really enjoyed making friends at the Forum and is still in touch with several of them online

Molly Carta, 2005 Delegate

Molly is a junior at Quinnipiac University and is studying Psychology. She plans to get her Masters in Psychology, most likely in the area of Counseling. Currently she is heading in the directing of Rehabilitation Counseling.

"I remember a lot of things. I really got a lot of help, especially with self-advocacy." Molly stated that she got a lot out of YLF both while she was at the session and after. She stated that all the people there helped and the "group project made me more comfortable to put myself out there and talk to people about disabilities."

Sean Kennedy, 2004 Delegate

Hi my name is Sean Kennedy I was a past Participant of the YLF I attended in it in 2004. I am now a junior at Assumption College in Worcester Mass. I am majoring in human services and rehabilitation studies. Most recently I have had 2 internships one with the Bureau of Rehabilitation services in Bridgeport and just this past winter break I completed an internship with the Mayors office of my home town in Stratford. YLF has had an enormous impact on my life. YLF taught me great self advocating skills that I use in my everyday life now. But most importantly YLF taught me to go after my dreams I can do anything I put my mind to. I think YLF had a great impact on where I ended up in school because after attending it made me really want to be in the human service field. I want to give kids the same opportunity that I had in high school. In my recent internship in the winter I started to work on a disability resource guide for the town of Stratford. I want people to know that there are these services for them and with a little help from these services they can do anything. I feel that YLF also taught me about networking and without these skills I would not have been able to work on this project because there was a lot of calling people to find information out. YLF will always be a part of my life because of the valuable lessons it taught me.

Youth Leadership Today



Where Are you Now?

Bridget Kesling, 2008 Delegate

Three cheers to YLF. Since last year (2008) when I attended the youth leadership forum I have been able to correct some of the errors that I had been making and you made me aware of. I also have been applying all of the new skills that I acquired at the forum to all aspects of my life. The forum is not just an event that happens once a year the forum is a club that only a few are elected into and when you are invited I say you should jump at the chance. The youth leadership forum taught me how important it is not to just give ideas and voice your opinion but it also taught me how important it is to listen and really understand someone else's ideas before you turn it down or accept them. The forum also taught me to fully educate myself to the best of my ability on both side of a story before you take a side or an opinion on something or someone. These are lessons that you are told and told again and you may think you apply them but the forum shows you if you

do or don't. The forum provides different lesson for everyone and I think the key is to keep an open mind and listen and absorb everything you're told and then after it is fully absorbed then evaluate your opinion on the matter at hand and don't be afraid to say I was wrong.

The skills that I learned at the forum have helped me in the past year in achieving my dream of becoming a music therapist. I just had my audition at Anna Maria College last month and past that I then was offered the opportunity to compete for a scholarship where I had to sing a classical piece in which I took a prize of 1,000 dollars per year I attended Anna Maria and then I received a letter in which between grants, scholarships, loans, and financial aid I will receive a 31,000 package for my first year at college. For which I totally believe that the lessons I have learned and the supportive connections that I have made at YLF have helped me with this accomplishment in my life. I only hope that someday I am able to give back at least half as much as YLF has helped me.

Emily Pember, 1999 Delegate

I was a delegate during YLF 1999 – the first year YLF was ever held. I graduated from Cromwell High School in 2000 and graduated from Quinnipiac University with a BA in Social Services, minoring in Journalism.

After college I looked for jobs and finally ended up working as a temp at Aetna. I did that for almost 2 years and finally decided to go back to school. I am now at Hartford Seminary for my Master in Divinity degree to be a chaplain in a children's hospital. Seminary will be about 3 years....I will either finish at Andover Newton or Yale Divinity (it's a cooperative program) and I'm doing Clinical Pastoral Education hopefully in the summers.

What I remember most about YLF is the great students and staff I met. It was fun to be away from home and spend four days on a college campus – great experience for after I left high school!



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Where Are you Now?

Daniel Lenz, 2001 Delegate

Daniel is working daily, 1 day a week at UCONN Medical Center (in the lab), 1 day every other week at ConnectiCare (claim sorting) and the rest of the time as part of an ARC enclave that replaces magazines in Stop and Shop's, CVS's and other stores. He has also just moved in to his first apartment with two other clients of the Farmington Valley ARC. They receive supports daily, but are basically living on their own for the first time. What he remembers most about YLF is going to the Camp Hemlocks and his team's presentation (song).

He believes that Youth Leadership helped him to work with others and in listening.

Alicia Wong, 2001 Delegate

I'm working in Boston doing public health research for MGH, and taking pre-med classes.

The thing I remember most about YLF are the other delegates. I haven't stayed in touch with any, but I remember having a good conversations with them. I also enjoyed the trip to Camp Hemlocks. I was a counselor there that summer, so I appreciated it more as a unique opportunity for a lot of us to participate in this "adventure course" style personal/group development rather than as something I benefitted from (though it had when I was a camper years earlier). There's really no other challenge course that I know of that is that accessible, so it's a very cool and rare opportunity.

I thought YLF was helpful, but I don't think I got everything out of it that I could. There was a lot of information to absorb, and I didn't really digest it until afterwards. That being said, I carried out my leadership plan of joining my local EMS after being inspired by one of the other delegates who was a fire fighter/EMT.



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Links We Like

Board of Education and Services for the Blind - www.ct.gov/besb

Our mission is to provide quality educational and rehabilitative services to all people who are legally blind or deaf-blind and children who are visually impaired at no cost to our clients or their families.

Commission on the Deaf and hearing Impaired - www.cdhi.ct.gov

The Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired was created by the Connecticut Legislature in 1974 to advocate, strengthen and implement state policies affecting Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals and their relationship to the public, industry, health care, and educational opportunities.

Connecticut Council on Developmental Disabilities - www.ct.gov/ctcdd

The Council on Developmental Disabilities is a Governor-appointed body of people with disabilities, family members and professionals who work together to promote the full inclusion of people with disabilities in community life.

Connecticut Department of Developmental Services - www.ct.gov/dds

The Department of Developmental Services (DDS) provides support and services to persons with mental retardation who reside in family homes, independently, in state-operated facilities, in licensed "community training homes" and in over 830 licensed/certified "community living arrangements."

Office of Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities - www.ct.gov/opapd

P&A is an independent State agency created to safeguard and advance the civil and human rights of people with disabilities in Connecticut. Our mission: to create opportunities that allow individuals with disabilities to live and work independently.

Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services - www.ct.gov/dmhas

The mission of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services is to improve the quality of life of the people of Connecticut by providing an integrated network of comprehensive, effective and efficient mental health and addiction services that foster self-sufficiency, dignity and respect.

Department of Social Services, Bureau of Rehabilitation Services - www.brs.state.ct.us

Our mission: to create opportunities that allow individuals with disabilities to live and work independently.

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Pics from the Past



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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

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