

Youth Leadership Today

November,
2008

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

So many decisions are made *for* youth, rather than *by* youth. Whether being made by their family, school, or government agencies, much in daily life is dictated for young people on a daily basis.

That doesn't mean you just have to go with the flow, or that things will never change. Things will ALWAYS change; the question is, do you want to be part of the change or have things changed for you?

There are many ways to get involved in topics and agendas of interest to you. Get involved in your community, write letters and make phone calls to your local, state, and federal representatives, run for office in your school, write letters to the editor of your local paper on topics that concern you, register to vote as soon as you are old enough. Be an advocate for yourself and causes you believe in. Andy Warhol, pop artist, made this

observation, "They say that time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself."

More than any other time in history, youth is becoming involved with a myriad of causes; child abuse, disability advocacy, homelessness, famine and disease in the world. The internet is making it easier to find like-minded people, get information and join a cause. The "Links We Like" section has websites to help you do just that.

As Ghandi said, "Be the change you wish to see in the world".

Kathleen Kabara

CTYLP President



Youth Leadership Today



Save the Date!

What: The 10th Annual YLF Reunion

When: January 10, 2009, 12:00 p.m.- 4:00 p.m.

Where: Crown Plaza Hotel, 100 Berlin Road, Cromwell, CT 06416

Keep in Touch!

Yahoo!

Want to keep in touch with your fellow Youth Leadership Forum delegates between reunions? Right now there is a Yahoo! group available - <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/CTYLF/>. Membership is by invite only, which all past delegates who share their email in the Directory get after the forum. Email changed? Never got an invite? No worries, simply email Kathleen.Kabara@ct.gov with your email address to sign up for the group, and you will be added.

Facebook!

The Youth Leadership Project has a new presence on the web - on Facebook! Join in the fun, become our friend (Ct YLP) keep in touch with staff and delegates from all ten years of YLF!



Youth Leadership Today



Where Are You Now?

I am a freshman at Assumption College in Worcester, Massachusetts. I am majoring in Education. Hopefully elementary or special education. I am also part of the women's rowing team here at Assumption.

Ali Nassimos

Where has the time gone? It seems like just the other day I was at YLF! Since I have had the great opportunity to be a participant in YLF, I am now a senior at Springfield College in MA. I am studying Therapeutic Recreation with a concentration in Child Life. My goal is to become a Certified Child Life Specialist at a renown children's hospital. As a Child Life Specialist I will be providing emotional support for children and families, encourage continued development, promote effective coping through play, preparation, education, and self expression activities for children undergoing the stresses of hospitalization. This past summer, I completed a 480 hour Therapeutic Recreation at Gaylord Hospital in Wallingford, CT and this January, I will be doing my Child Life internship. YLF has helped me to become a self-advocate, leader and has shaped me into the individual I am today. I have enjoyed all the things that I have participated in thus far, and greatly looking forward to what the next stage of my life has to bring.

Olivia Astle



Youth Leadership Today

Youth Leadership Forum Celebrates its 10th Anniversary!



This past summer the Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) celebrated its 10-year Anniversary hosting the week-long educational and leadership forum for high school students with disabilities.

A brief history of YLF – In 1998, John Gentile and Karen Halliday flew to Sacramento, CA, to attend a training hosted by the California YLF. California was the first state to develop and implement this type of leadership forum for high school students and was interested in replicating the forum across the US. John and Karen came back to Connecticut with a wealth of information and a desire to find a way to implement YLF in our state. How to even begin this huge endeavor was the first challenge! A small group of committed adults and high school students with disabilities held their first meeting in the Spring of 1998 at Simsbury High School, and the rest is history! Somehow we raised the needed funds during the first year, modified the “California model”, found staff and most important, young adults to attend the forum. During the summer of 1999, we hosted our first YLF at the University of Connecticut for twenty-five young adults with disabilities.

During the past ten years, over 350 students have had the opportunity to participate in YLF and its follow-up activities. Many of our past delegates have now graduated from college, are working, living independently, and yes, even married! A number of past delegates now serve as counselors or co-counselors, giving back to YLF and strengthening their own leadership skills even further.

In 2004, YLF became a non-profit 501 (c) 3 organization, known as the Connecticut Youth Leadership Project, Inc (CT YLP). In addition to YLF, CT YLP serves as the fiscal agent for Connecticut Kids As Self Advocates (CT-KASA). Our twelve-member Board of Directors meet bi-monthly to oversee the initiatives and ensure that each year we bring a stronger program to the students we serve.

We have been very fortunate during the past ten years to receive consistent financial support from a number of state agencies – The Department of Education, the Department of Social Services, Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, the Department of Developmental Disabilities, the Board of Education and Services for the Blind and the Department of Labor. Without their on-going commitment to YLF, we simply could not have afforded this wonderful opportunity, at no cost, to all of the young adults who have attended YLF. In addition to state agency funding, we have received financial support from Connecticut corporations, foundations and individuals.

As we start to plan for YLF 2009, we continue to strengthen our program, seek new young adults interested in participating and broaden our outreach to the corporate and business community for their financial support. The CT YLP Board of Directors sincerely welcomes the input from anyone who can assist us in maintaining this wonderful program in Connecticut.

Karen Halliday, YLP Executive Director

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Community Action Plans

During YLF 2008, each team developed a Community Action Plan that describes what they plan to do during the school year to assist other individuals with disabilities or work on initiatives that raise awareness of individuals with disabilities within their community.

- Team 1:** Team 1 delegates will locate several individuals with disabilities in their community who they can assist in any way identified by the individual. In addition to utilizing funds allocated for their project, they will host several fundraisers to increase the amount of money available for assistance. As they are performing these activities they will film the process and make a video to raise awareness about overcoming a disability and becoming active in their communities. Delegates are hoping to publicize these ideas throughout the state on television and through newspapers.
- Team 2:** Team 2 delegates will host a Silent Auction to raise money to assist a child with a disability, under the age of 18. Delegates will go to places of business in their town to seek donations for the Auction. The Auction will be held in one of the student's towns, at a church or community center. Once the recipient is identified, the delegates will compile a background of the student to use in fundraising and awareness efforts.
- Team 3:** Team 3 delegates are planning to "Go Green". In each of their schools, they will investigate the current recycling efforts that are in place and will develop a plan to increase recycling initiatives. This effort will require contacting the Superintendent, members of the Board of Education, the PTA's, teachers, principals and environmental agencies and groups. If any funds are raised through their work, materials will be purchased for their schools.
- Team 4:** Team 4 delegates decided to help the Library in the town of Brooklyn by raising the funds to purchase a new computer. The money raised will also be used to ensure that assistive technology programs are on the computer, so all individual will have access to the information available on the web (JAWS for example). Each member of the group will raise a minimum of \$75.00 to accomplish this task. To raise the money, each delegate will do odd jobs, fundraisers and tag sales. In the end, they hope to make a difference for people with disabilities in the town of Brooklyn, CT.

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LINKS WE LIKE

www.freechild.org - a website on social change led by young people.

www.unicef.org - Provides a global platform for communicating, networking, and problem-solving international issues for young people.

www.un.org/youth - Updates on youth policies and initiatives around the world.

www.iyp.oxfam.org - The International Youth Parliament is a network of young leaders in 150 countries with a vision of "youth building an equitable, sustainable and peaceful world."

www.girlsrights.org - dedicated to promoting the rights of girls in all areas and stages of their lives, advancing the rights and status of girls and assisting them to develop their full potential as women.

www.ncwd-youth.info - is your source for information about employment and youth with disabilities.

www.ctdol.state.ct.us/ctbln - Our mission is to improve recruitment and retention of qualified persons with disabilities, establish an inclusive work culture, and promote the adoption of best practice initiatives.

www.ctylp.org - a youth leadership program that empowers youth with disabilities to realize their leadership potential.

www.ckasa.org - a national grassroots network of youth with special needs and their friends, speaking on behalf of themselves. We are an organization for youth, run by youth. We help kids with disabilities, their siblings and peers, learn how to be self advocates through information and support.

www.iel.org - The Institute for Educational Leadership's (IEL) mission is to improve education — and the lives of children and their families — through positive and visionary change. Definitely check out the National Consortium on Leadership and Disability for Youth.

www.myvoicemyvote.org - My Voice, My Vote is for young adults with disabilities who want to make a difference. You can make your voice heard by voting and by getting involved in issues you care about. Though based in Minnesota, this website has good information for young people across the country.

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Youth Leadership Forum 2008

YLF Celebrates Its 10th Anniversary

The Connecticut Youth Leadership Forum celebrated its 10th Anniversary this summer. During the past ten years, approximately 400 students have participated in and benefited from the activities of YLF.

In addition to the Forum, during the past 6 years CT Youth Leadership Project, Inc. (YLF's sponsoring organization) has awarded 8 scholarships to past YLF participants continuing their education beyond high school totaling \$14,000.

YLF 2008

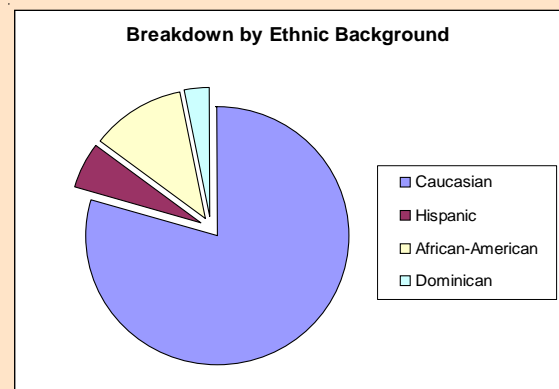
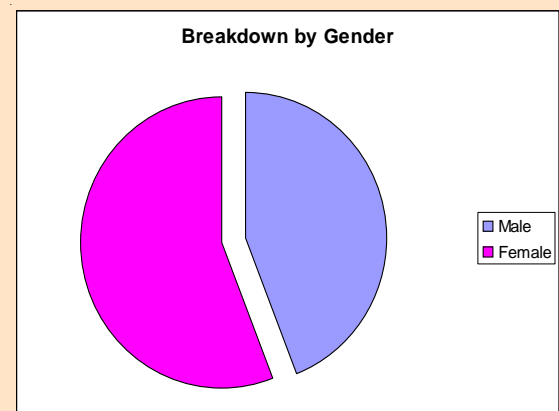
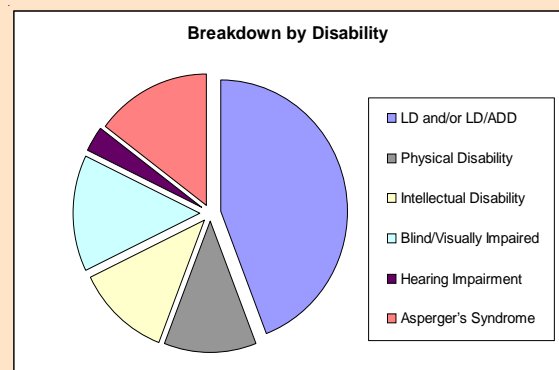
The process began in the fall of 2007 when YLF applications were mailed/emailed during October/November to all public and private high schools in Connecticut. This year 44 students with disabilities from across the state applied to attend YLF 2008. A panel met to screen and score each application and all applicants were interviewed by counselors from the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS). 41 students were accepted to attend YLF 2008, but due to personal reasons, seven students were unable to attend, resulting in participation by 34 students. The number of students who were unable to attend at the last minute is highly atypical of past YLF's.

The activities conducted during YLF 2008 focused on disability awareness, 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 Demographics:

Thirty-four students with disabilities attended the weeklong forum. Students attending YLF represented 26 towns and cities from across Connecticut.

Following is a breakdown by disability, gender and ethnicity:



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Scholarships 2008

For the sixth year, the Joe Bendoraitis Memorial Scholarship was awarded to a past YLF delegate. Joe was a delegate in 1999, during our first YLF. He remained active throughout the following four years, as a delegate and eventually a staff member. Joe passed away of colon cancer in August 2002. The YLF Board of Directors is committed to ensure that Joe's memory, dedication and commitment to YLF is not forgotten. All past YLF delegates who are currently seniors in high school and planning to pursue their education beyond high school are eligible to apply for this one-time, \$2,000 scholarship. In addition to the Joe Bendoraitis scholarship, two additional, \$1,000 scholarships were awarded to past YLF delegates. (These funds were made available by individuals and were to be earmarked for these scholarships).

Thirty-three past YLF delegates were eligible to apply for the Joe Bendoraitis Youth Leadership Scholarship, the John F. Sims Youth Leadership Scholarship and the BRS State Rehabilitation Council Youth Leadership Scholarship. Fourteen students completed the application process. All applications were scored by four members of the CT YLP Board.

- Travis Williams, a delegate from YLF 2006 received The Joe Bendoraitis Scholarship. He is attending Wesleyan University in the fall 2008.
- Jennifer Koschmeider, a delegate from YLF 2007 received the BRS State Rehabilitation Council Scholarship. She is attending Johnson and Wales in the fall 2008.
- Ali Nassimos, a delegate from YLF 2007 received the John F. Sims Scholarship. She is attending Assumption College in the fall 2008.

So, why do we do this?

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.

Many of the benefits are intangible. This forum is often the first time these young adults are in an environment where differences are celebrated and strengths are emphasized. Lasting friendships are made that never would have occurred if such a forum did not exist. Many students with disabilities are isolated from the social activities in their high schools – this forum gives them an opportunity to be in a safe and supportive environment, where their disabilities are not looked upon as a liability. In addition, many student delegates and parents have noted that their self-esteem and self-advocacy skills have increased. Many of the students (more than we can ask to return) want to remain involved in YLF as program assistants and staff, participating in future forums. YLF delegates are also asked throughout the year to sit on youth panels for numerous disability-related workshops held throughout the state.

Some feedback from some of this year's participants:

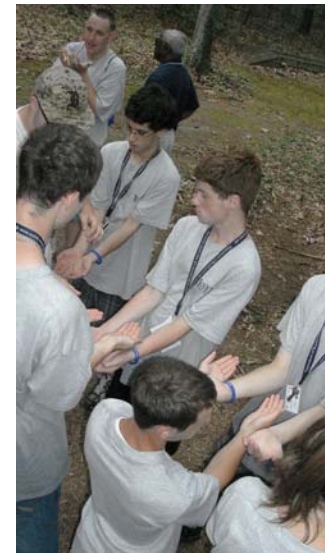
"I wanted to take the time and say Thank You, Thank You, Thank You times a thousand. I think that even if I said Thank You every day of my life it still would not be enough. You have no idea how much fun I had along with learning lessons that will carry me through out my entire life."

"As the summer draws to a close, I look back on what I did to make it (this summer) fun, exciting, enjoyable, and successful. The best four days of my summer were spent up at UCONN at YLF There couldn't have been a better place to get involved, learn about others, and teach them about myself than YLF."

John Bendoraitis, YLP Treasurer

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2008 Youth Leadership Forum A Few Snapshots



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Thanks to our Sponsors



First and foremost, YLF could not have occurred without the financial support of our sponsors. Without their continued support YLF would cease to exist. THANK YOU!

2008 Event Sponsors

Board of Education and Services for the Blind

DSS – Bureau of Rehabilitation Services

Department of Developmental Services

SDE - Bureau of Special Education

2008 Silver Sponsors

American Legion

American Legion Auxiliary

Department of Labor

2008 Bronze Sponsors

Hartford Sales Office

UConn Center for Students with Disabilities

2008 Gold Sponsors

CWA-1103

Outback Steakhouse

Ronald McDonald House Charities

State Rehabilitation Council – BESB

State Rehabilitation Council – BRS

Vicevich Interactives

Friends of YLF

Mr. & Mrs. Andrew Barylski

The Bendoraitis Family

Mr. & Mrs. Frazier Brinley

Mr. & Mrs. Menachem Elimech

Capri Kaufold

Susan Kostin

New Alliance Foundation

Northrop Grumman Corp.

Collaboration and cooperative efforts affected the outcomes for YLF on numerous levels:

The Connecticut Youth Leadership Project, Inc. Board of Directors, which meets bi-monthly to plan YLF, is comprised of individuals from five state agencies, the business sector and individuals with disabilities;

The major task of interviewing each YLF applicants is supported by the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS). Twenty-five BRS counselors across the state interviewed one or more applicants, depending on their location.

The thirty-two staff members that spent the week at YLF are also comprised of individuals from the public and private sector. Without the in-kind support of their employers, staffing for YLF would be extremely costly and difficult to achieve.

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**Connecticut Youth
Leadership Project
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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.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____

Zip _____

Phone Number _____

Email _____

Increase your donation through matching funds. Many employers will match your personal donations. Check with your company for more information on matching gift programs.

Mail this form and your donation to:

**The Connecticut Youth Leadership Project
c/o John Bendoraitis
370 Levita Road
Lebanon, CT 06249**