

Youth Leadership Forum



Wanted! Young Leaders to Take Charge of Their Futures!

What is the Youth Leadership Forum?

"YLF" is a unique training program for high school students with disabilities. It provides student "Delegates" with opportunities for learning, sharing, and developing the skills to become leaders in their schools, at work, within their families, and in their communities. YLF believes that young adults with disabilities learn best from role models who have successfully met the challenges of their own disabilities. By presenting these leaders in an atmosphere of encouragement, YLF offers Delegates the opportunity to learn from one another and skilled facilitators through shared problem-solving and teamwork.

What Happens at YLF?

YLF is a life-changing experience for Delegates. They participate in leadership training, explore career and life goals, network, develop informational resources, and explore state-of-the-art assistive technology. They hear first-hand the real-life experiences of successful adult leaders with disabilities and develop Personal Leadership Plans. On "Capitol Day", they tour the State Capitol, present "testimony", and meet with legislators and other senior state officials. They make new friends and enjoy social activities and entertainment created just for them. As alumni, they are expected to follow through on their Personal Leadership Plans and become leaders in their communities.

Who Participates?

Each July, approximately 25 rising high school juniors and seniors with disabilities who have demonstrated leadership potential and motivation gather from all across Virginia at the campus of Christopher Newport University. Typically, classes are split evenly between young men and women, and members of minorities make up one-third of all attendees. About three-quarters of Delegates have intellectual or learning disabilities; about one-third have sensory, mobility, or other physical disabilities. Since its start in 2000, Virginia's YLF has "graduated" over 180 new community leaders.

Who Sponsors YLF?

Based on the success of the first YLF, created by the California Governor's Committee on Disabilities, the National Office of Disability Employment Policy endorsed its replication throughout the country. Today, state sponsors include Governor's Committees and state Developmental Disabilities Councils such as the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities.

What Does it Cost to Attend?

It's free! As Virginia's sponsor, the Virginia Board currently covers the entire cost for Delegates to attend YLF, including transportation, room & board, instructional materials, activities, interpreters, personal care assistants, and individual medical care as required. Core funding for YLF is provided by the federal Developmental Disabilities Act. Additional funding comes from state sources, including scholarships from the Virginia Department of Education, and corporate and private donations.

**Visit YLF on the Commonwealth's
YouTube Channel!
Go to
www.youtube.com/viriniagovernment,
then search for
"Virginia Youth Leadership Forum".**

How are Delegates Selected?

Interested students submit an application form, personal essay, and letters of recommendation during a specified application period each school year, typically between November and late February. Delegates are then chosen through a competitive process that includes careful review of their applications and personal interviews coordinated by local Centers for Independent Living. Each year, YLF strives to ensure that Delegates represent Virginia's geographic and demographic diversity.

Apply Today!

For more information and to download an application, go to:

www.vaboard.org/ylf.htm,
or contact the Board at

info@vbpd.virginia.gov
or **1-800-846-4464** (Toll-free
Voice & TTY).

**Application deadline:
April 15, 2009**

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What just a few YLF alumni are up to...

Choose your own Path, Lead the Way! 2004

John Motley (YLF 2004) achieved his goal of joining the U.S. Army and hopes to inspire all through his actions and service. During his deployment in Iraq, "Ranger John's" MySpace headline read, "The adventurous may not live for long, but the cautious do not live at all."

Leaders of Tomorrow, Rise to the Challenge! 2005



Charles Pierce (YLF 2005) is now in the masonry/plasterer apprentice program at UVA Facilities Management. He is working forty hours a week and attending school at CATEC. "This program is a great," Charles says, "I make a great pay check to learn my field and get full benefits."

Believe, Imagine, Achieve, Succeed 2006



Governor Tim Kaine and the Class of 2006



Jenny Holden (YLF 2006): "YLF helped me learn to speak up for myself... I am more confident. I came home and worked helping little kids with disabilities in Fairfax County's Summer Recreation program. YLF helped me to reach my goal of helping kids."

Learn – Empower – Achieve – Demonstrate – LEAD 2007

Adam Amick (YLF 2007) has been involved in state and federal advocacy with the Self-Determination Summit. "I continue to advocate every day with a bigger push towards making things better for myself and others! YLF motivated me to do more because of the closeness of the group... It is a VERY STRONG bond."

Alexander Snyder (YLF 2007) served as a YLF staff member in 2008. "I was able to mix and mingle with other people with disabilities...and learn about disabilities, including my own... YLF also helped me become more comfortable with myself and my disability."

Charlotte Woodward (YLF 2007): "By participating in YLF, I learned... how to advocate for myself and others... YLF continues to inspire me to live up to my full potential!"



LEAD, The Future is Now 2008

Blanca Alas (YLF 2008): "YLF... was a great place where I met people like me. I am naturally a shy person, but all the people I met there got me to just be myself... YLF opened my eyes. Now, let YLF open yours."

Joseph Ragland (YLF 2008): "What was most memorable about YLF was the trip to the General Assembly building... being able to share my testimony... Thank goodness there are organizations such as this one... that fight for abilities rather than disabilities... It was an experience I shall not forget."