

# YOUTH POWER!

**Equality is a Right, Not a Privilege!**



## **Message from Outreach: YP! Says "Equality is a Right, Not a Privilege!"**

Those of you who attended YOUTH POWER!'s 2011 Statewide Forum in Albany know that the theme of the event was "Equality is a Right, Not a Privilege." YOUTH POWER! (YP!) had chosen this theme because we thought it most clearly represented the attitude behind everything we are doing in 2011. It is a clear and concise definition of how we feel as a network. The goal however, is not to simply state our belief, but

to represent the idea as best we can.

The United States Constitution explicitly states that "all men are created equal," which we now recognize as "all PEOPLE." Is it ok that students with disabilities are not given equal rights in education? Is it acceptable that people who struggle because of our economic system should receive no help? Should oppression, based on *who* or *what* someone is, *ever* be tolerated? YP! says NO! This is NOT freedom, and WE have to do something about it. What better time than NOW?!

Join the Outreach Working Group today (see information on page 7 of this newsletter under 'Ads') and help us spread the word that Equality is a Right, Not a Privilege. We all know this to be true. But before we can fight for equality, we need to have POWER. Help us build YOUTH POWER!

Do you like to write? Poems, short stories, opinion pieces? Are you a good video or photo-taker? Are you a free-hand or computer artist? Do you express yourself through music? If you said yes to any of those things, YP! is confident that YOU can help us represent our idea(s). Are you someone with cool, unique ideas and/or stories, but don't like to write and/or maybe require assistance getting it down on paper? Outreach can and will help you with that, so your thoughts can be known across New York State.

## Equal Educational Opportunities for All

By Zach Garafalo



The current education system, which relies heavily on all-or-nothing tests - is pushing many well qualified students out of classrooms. Rather than relying only on high stakes testing

as the sole way to get a Regents diploma, we need to push for alternative routes for young people to get an equally valuable diploma.

We are in the 21st century. Our "current" educational model has its roots in the age of the Industrial Revolution. I believe looking at testing is part of the larger picture in education reform. Yes, there are basic skills that everybody should be expected to master - such as IL skills, basic math (addition, subtraction, multiplication and division) and the ability to read and comprehend a passage or story. However, there needs to be room for recognizing the unique skills and abilities of every single young person.

Not everyone is going to excel in all disciplines. We need to teach young

people the basics and then help them hone in on what they have a penchant for - with an alternate, but equally prestigious diploma that shows mastery of certain skills and abilities that can then be presented to employers and colleges with the same validity as a Regents diploma. Additionally, for young people who do not thrive in the traditional academic setting, the GED should be an alternative that is encouraged and embraced by mainstream educators. GED graduation should also be counted favorably toward local graduation rates.

There were many occasions where I wished I did not have to go to school.

Sometimes I think that receiving my GED would have been a better path for me. I struggled relentlessly with math and almost did not graduate high school because of it. The bottom line is that ALL students need more options and pathways to receive a high school diploma that shows the hard work they put in for many, many years.



**The following is largely the author's personal opinion, and not necessarily representative of YOUTH POWER!'s values...**

You have to be living under a rock to not know about the "Occupy Wall Street" protests in Lower Manhattan. The movement has spread from coast-to-coast, with similar rallies in major U.S. cities (once again, New York leads the way!). However, what many Americans, of all ages, are wondering is what are they protesting about? What goal do the protestors hope to achieve?

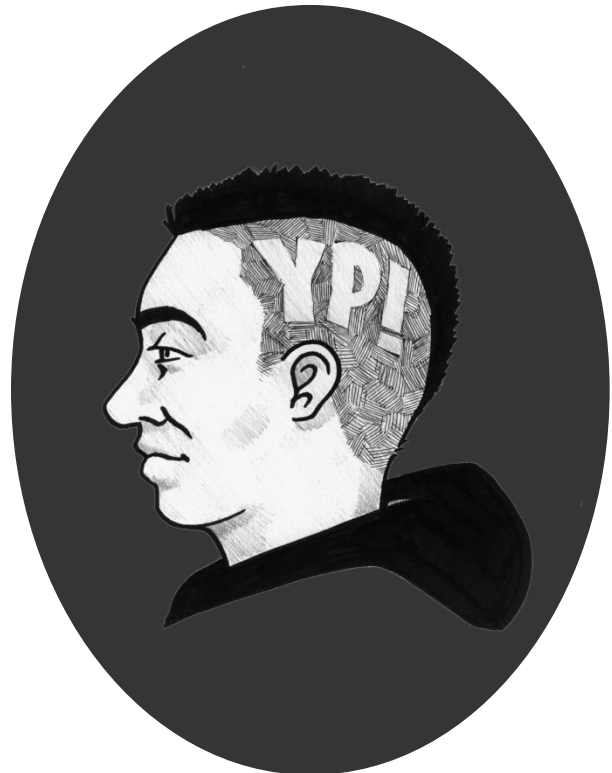
The answer to the first question is something we have all heard in grade school history class: taxation without representation. This nation, like YOUTH POWER!, was founded on the principle that all people are created equal, and furthermore that equality is a RIGHT, not a privilege! Sadly, and largely at the hands of our own government (Federal, State and even local), America has departed from its foundation of FREEDOM and EQUALITY for all.

The U.S. government protects the interests of the top 1 percent of America's richest (you and I are part of the other 99 percent!) by ensuring that multi-millionaire CEOs, their families and top share-holders get their fat paychecks, huge bonuses and major tax cuts. Supporters of the top 1% (most of whom are really part of the 99%) claim that the rich create jobs and spread the money around. Throughout history, we have seen that the rich by-and-large do NOT redistribute their wealth. If you're like me, a young person seeking a stable job, then you know what you see—there are NO JOBS being created, even now, when America's rich are the richest they have ever been! And while money can't buy happiness, it does buy you dinner!

The protests are about the American economic system; the system that spends billions of dollars on overseas business activities, wars, election campaigns and sales pitches, instead of struggling college students, people with disabilities and community-building programs. They throw more money at money and not at the people, which is where the TRUE power lies.

What do the protestors hope to achieve? The same thing as YOUTH POWER!—change!!! As a young person with a disability, who has participated in New York City's Wall Street protests, it inspires me to be a part of something where EVERYONE is accepted. It's all about people setting aside their differences to come together and tell our elected officials that equality is a RIGHT, not a privilege!

We are doing this to force the people in charge to work for us, as we have worked to make our community a place with great potential. Remember that a chant is louder when more people join in. I hope YOU, as my fellow young person, *will* join in.



## OPPRESSION

By John Donnelly



Every minority within the United States of America feels the repercussions of oppression. We know them as individuals labeled with disabilities, a stigma that affects us in many different aspects of life. Some of us are locked up in cages while they run our minds in mazes, as they plague us while putting our insecurities on display on stages. They say the majority helps, yet they separate the different minority groups into different classifications: Black, Hispanic, Disabled, Emotionally Ill. If you take a look at history, we are all the ones with lower graduation rates, incomes, and social status levels, and also have the highest rates of failure and incarceration.

I for one, am sick and tired of being treated like a case. I don't care if it's a medical, psychological, or a court case. I am sick and tired of being treated like a case. I was born a criminal in the minds eyes of the supposed majority, alarming me to the possibility of having a storm for life that never eases to cease. I can't believe a thing told to me, they're molding me, molding us but we can end up keep being stuck on the back of the bus believing that the norm is better than the rest of us. Give us your tired, your huddled masses yearning to be free. Oh statue of liberty say can't you see at the end of the day all we want like everybody else is to simply have it be ok to just be me? It's time to stand up cause we have to while they tell us how to act, and keep pushing forward we can not keep on living as camels while the majority rides upon our back. Drug sentences of cocaine vs. crack. With one third the time, the sentence differentiates who's got the control. Who goes to Harvard and Yale while we end up in jail, if we keep only asking and not going and taking our children's, children's, children's, children's, children will feel our failure to act take its toll. This is getting old, forget the oppression here's a single suggestion cause in end it's the only hand we have but luck, which flips and flops, so now it's time to stand up.

Separately we are all minority groups, yet together we are the majority. YOUTH POWER!, Black Power!, Mad Pride, Latin Pride, we are all in this together. We have two choices: One is to keep letting ourselves be separated by our little issues between each other, fighting so that our group is not the lowest on the totem pole. The other is to work together, fight together, build together towards higher places in this world, refusing to be continued to be oppressed through the name of stigma.



YP! Members at the My Medicaid Matters Rally in Washington DC, Sept. 2011

## Inequality in Standardized Testing

By Adam Fazzone



You could argue that standardized testing is objective, and it doesn't have emotion or moods or biases. When giving more personal assessments, it is very possible that the teacher or person assessing the student can let their emotions or biases affect how they score that student; but still I feel that standardized testing is outdated and overrated. Every person thinks differently, for example if you asked someone to look at a statue and tell you what they were thinking at that moment, I doubt very highly that they would tell you the same thing you were thinking.

So if we think differently, then it is safe to assume that everyone learns differently; and that's without even taking into account disabilities such as ADD/ADHD and dyslexia etc. A lot of school systems hold their schools accountable when test scores do not continually improve. They place a lot of pressure on teachers to raise students' test scores. They are not only pressured to raise student test scores, but to also raise the school average.

Unfortunately, this can lead to **dishonesty** on the part of teachers and principals. They do not want to include the scores of students with special needs and often have them take separate tests called RCTs (regents' competency test). This does nothing but harm the students who need special help. We cannot determine what kind of help they need if we do not know what level they are currently performing at.

Most information in standardized tests is useless information that nobody cares about unless they have a particular interest in the subject and want to pursue it. I think that school should be about pursuing subjects students enjoy because you do not need to know calculus and trigonometry unless you want to be a physicist or something of that nature. College is about studying the things you want to study and yet they accept students based on SATs that have 60% of useless information that nobody wants to learn, so if they score low they will not get into a good school and will not be able to do the things they're good at and cannot reach their full potential.

Based on my research the cons far outweigh the pros and I feel that school and testing should be more real world oriented.



*If the unhappy day ever comes when teachers point their students toward these newer*

*Examinations and the present weak and restricted procedures get a grip on education,*

*Then we may look for the inevitable distortion of education in terms of tests. And that*

*Means that mathematics will continue to be completely departmentalized and broken into*

*Disintegrated bits, that the sciences will become highly verbalized and that computation,*

*Manipulation and thinking in terms other than verbal will be minimized, that languages*

*Will be taught for linguistic skills only without reference to literary values, that English*

*Will be taught for reading alone, and that practice and drilling the writing of English will disappear.*

*-Quote: Carl Brigham (creator of the SATs)*

## Zero Tolerance Equality

By Curtis Grupe



Some schools claim to have zero tolerance policies on bullying, punishments, and other various things. I say different. When I was in school, people were treated differently by people with authority based on a number of things. For example, there were times when people in my class would all get in trouble for trivial reasons but the punishments would be different for the girls and the boys. One of my male teachers in the past always treated girls' punishments as a small matter, but if one of the guys got in trouble for the same thing, he would send us to detention instead of the verbal warnings he would give the girls.

I knew that the schools had policies against this kind of behavior but proving that it is happening is not easy. The adults in our lives should all treat us the same and not play favorites in school but they do anyway. This inequality makes youth feel unheard, and sometimes even helpless. Youth sometimes don't know how to deal with this issue. I believe that we need to begin to take the stairs to better enforcing our zero tolerance policies.

## Article on "Equality is a Right and Not a Privilege"

By: Pauline Gordon



"Equality is a Right and not a Privilege" When I think of this quote it reminds me of the Occupy Wall Street movement. The Occupy Wall Street movement consists of protests of people taking a stand against social and economic injustices. The first protest began in Wall Street also known as the financial district of NY on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011. Through massive media attention the protest spurred a movement which influenced many cities worldwide to demonstrate similar protests as the one on Wall Street. During the protest, protesters waved signs that read in black bold letters "We are the 99%." This statement is a slogan which symbolizes the disproportionate distribution of wealth in the United States. The ratio is an alarming 99 to 1%.

Currently in our society we are facing a huge economic crisis which has resulted to budget cuts in our system. There is a scarcity in jobs and affordable homes. Many can argue over a number of reasons of what may have caused this crisis but the outcomes are visible; people are struggling. People are struggling to provide a substantial living for their families. People are struggling to prevent their homes from going into foreclosure. 99% of people are struggling to meet their financial needs, while the 1% of wealthy corporations and businesses reap the benefits. Due to the disproportionate distribution of wealth in our society, people have lost their rights to an education, shelter, health care etc.....These necessities shouldn't seem as a privilege because it is limited to those who can't afford it. Everyone deserves a right to a good education, affordable health care, and adequate shelter especially as taxpayers. It is unfair that everyone is not equally entitled to these basic necessities.

## YP! Ads

### Join Action-Take Action

YP! needs your help to make our advocacy and activism stronger. We have a lot to say and Action workgroup makes sure we are heard. Join our calls to help fight for Voice, Choice & Power!

**To find out more, contact John at:**  
518-432-0333 x14 or  
Jdonnelly@youthpowerny.org

### Join Outreach!

Help us spread the word about YP!! There are a lot of people out there that know nothing about our network. There are a lot of our members that feel disconnected from the work we do. Join Outreach and help us fix these problems.

**To find out more, contact Curtis at:**  
518-432-0333 x27 or  
cgrupe@youthpowerny.org

### Attend Our Legislative Lunch!

YP! is a part of Families Together in NYS and we are holding a Legislative Lunch at the NY Capitol on **February 14, 2012**. Buses will be coming from around the state. We will have speakers including youth, family members and government officials. There will also be activity stations to help you prepare for advocacy.

Visit [www.ftnys.org](http://www.ftnys.org) to get more info. and to register

### Save the Date!

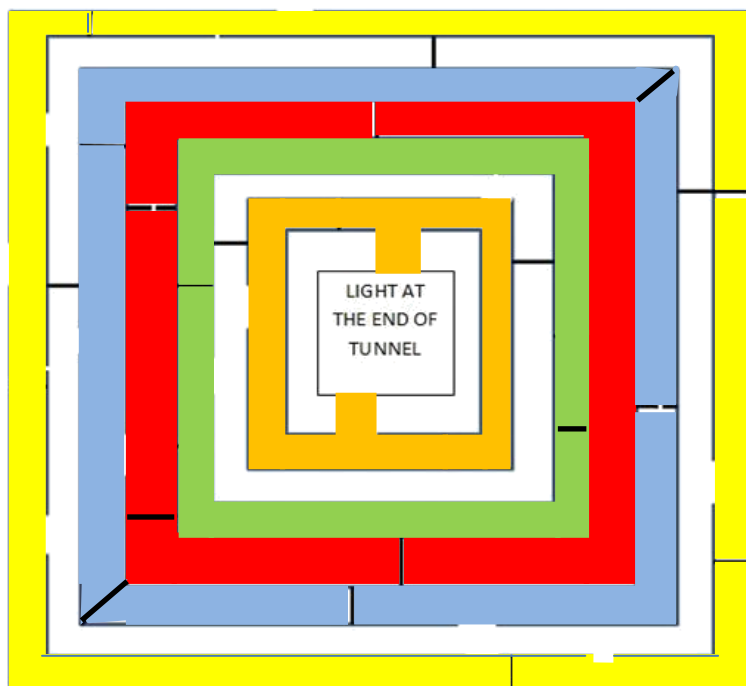
#### 2012 Annual Conference!

Families Together in NYS will be holding the Annual Conference on **Sunday, May 6 – Monday, May 7, 2012** in Albany NY. YP! will be holding our Annual Speak-Out and a series of workshops. A limited amount of scholarships to youth and family members will be available.

Visit [www.ftnys.org](http://www.ftnys.org) to get more info.

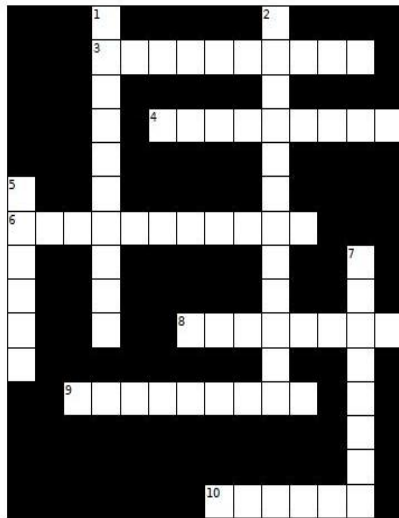
## System Maze

A youth named Johny made some questionable decisions. He got in trouble for shop lifting at the mall. Now Johny is caught in the juvenile justice systems' web and he is trying to get out. Think of yourself as a lawyer. It is your job to help Johny navigate his way through the maze of the juvenile justice system. Can you help Johny stay out of trouble and find his way to freedom and adulthood?



Wow, this looks complicated.





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| <p>Across</p> <p>3 Ability to readily recover from illness, depression and adversity</p> <p>4 Physically restricting a persons movements.</p> <p>6 A meeting of young people to exchange views and ideas</p> <p>8 Speaking on behalf of another</p> <p>9 Lack of similarity or equality, inequality</p> <p>10 Overarching rules or a course of action adopted and pursued by a government or organization</p> | <p>Down</p> <p>1 A change from one stage of life to another</p> <p>2 Helping someone who has been through something similar to you</p> <p>5 A coordinated structure and set of procedures</p> <p>7 Gaining control of your mental health</p> |
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| youthpower | movement           | action          |
| fostercare | youngadult         | changethesystem |
| equality   | nolabels           | endseclusion    |
| change     | government         | rights          |
| culture    | speakout           | voice           |
| choice     | respect            | truth           |
| diversity  | politicallycorrect | juvenilejustice |
| selfhelp   | unity              | mentalhealth    |

**YOUTH POWER!** is the New York State network of young people who have been labeled and are seeking change. Together, we have decided to speak up about our experiences because no one knows what it is like for us better than we do. Through peer-to-peer mentoring, we empower young people to be active citizens that are aware of government operations, their rights and the ability to use their voices to influence policies, practices, regulations and laws. We are young people helping other people, ensuring availability of self-help and peer support while changing systems so that young people get the support they need with the respect and dignity they deserve.

**YOUTH POWER! is a Proud Part of Families Together in New York State and the New York State Partner of the National Youth Leadership Network**

737 Madison Avenue, Albany, NY 12208 • [youthpower@ftnys.org](mailto:youthpower@ftnys.org)  
 Toll Free: 888-326-8644 Phone: 518-432-0333  
[www.ftnys.org/youthpower.cfm](http://www.ftnys.org/youthpower.cfm) • [www.facebook.com/YOUTHPOWER.NY](http://www.facebook.com/YOUTHPOWER.NY)