

## Amplifying the Next Generation of Disability Rights Leaders



**AMPLIFY-NY**

### WHAT IS YLF?

The YLF, or Youth Leadership Forum, is an innovative, four-day training program for individuals with developmental and other disabilities ages 14-24. It includes career awareness and leadership development information to assist young people with disabilities in reaching their full potential. The training is presented in a fun, entertaining, and educational format with the support of peers/coaches along the way.

Attached to the YLF is Foundations for Leadership: A Parent/Caregiver Workshop Series. This workshop series brings together the family and youth perspectives and takes place on the first and last days of YLFs. It provides caregivers of individuals with developmental and other disabilities the tools they need to support the young people in their care as a vital part of their transition team by focusing on teaching, modeling, and support. Additional workshops take place in the community following a YLF.

### WHO CAN PARTICIPATE IN THE YLF?

Youth people between the ages of 14 and 24 with developmental and other disabilities are eligible to participate. In order to be selected, individuals must demonstrate leadership potential, community involvement, and the ability to interact effectively with others.

Caregivers of youth with developmental or other disabilities, especially those of selected youth participants, are encouraged to participate in the Foundations for Leadership workshop series. Additionally, caregivers who have experience with self-advocacy, NYS systems and resources, involvement in systems change, and a commitment to self-advocacy and self-determination for youth have the opportunity to serve as trainers.

### WHAT SPECIFICALLY HAPPENS AT THE YLF?

- **We bring together young people with disabilities who demonstrate potential leadership qualities and share information with each other.** The program includes small and large group discussions, evening activities, a formal leader's dinner with community/state leaders, a graduation ceremony, and continued supported leadership activities.
- **Parents and caregivers participate in the Foundations for Leadership Workshop Series** on the first and last days of the YLF with a few joint opening and closing activities.
- **We provide education and activities which touch on topics such as** disability history, rights, culture, pride, etiquette, and self-awareness, self-determination, self, peer and systems advocacy, leadership and communication skills, financial literacy, adaptive sports, networking and public speaking, resources, assistive technology and accommodations.
- **Presenters who meet with the participants may include disability community leaders,** legislators, celebrities and numerous other professional role models who have disabilities.
- **Participants identify existing barriers to personal and professional success** and develop plans to deal with those barriers.
- **Participants have the opportunity to meet with state leaders at our Leaders' Dinner** and speak candidly about real life issues youth face while in state systems or accessing services. It is intimidating for young people to speak frankly with government leaders and this dinner gives youth the chance to communicate in a relaxed setting.
- **Coaches assist each youth/young adult in developing a "Personal Leadership Plan"** which includes specific action items for when they return to their communities.
- **Youth are connected with their Regional Youth Partner and an advisor** to assist them with their leadership project after the YLF.

## **WHY HAVE YLFs?**

Young people with disabilities have both more opportunities and more challenges than at any other time in our nation's history. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has created unprecedented opportunities for these young people to fully develop as positive, contributing members of our society. However, many need encouragement to develop as leaders in their communities. The title of this project, "AMPLIFY-NY," was created to reflect the importance of giving young people opportunity to speak-up so that they can value their own voices and can be heard. Through our forums, we will amplify the voices of young people and the opportunities they have to take on leadership roles. YLFs also enable them to learn from each other and from successful adults with disabilities who are recognized leaders and role models. YLFs benefit not only the participants, but all young people with disabilities, our communities in general, and the adults who assist in producing the forum.

## **HOW DOES THE FORUM HAPPEN?**

Leading the way in planning these forums is a peer-run statewide planning group. Youth and young adults with developmental and other disabilities ages 14-24 are invited to join this group to help design and carry out YLFs across the state. Approximately 10 young will be selected to attend through a competitive process. The event successfully integrates participants who represent the ethnic diversity of our state.

YLFs take place across the 5 Office for People with Developmental Disability (OPWDD) regions of New York State at different times during the year depending on the region. Please refer to our YLFs per year document on our website for more information.

## **WILL THERE BE MORE FORUMS IN THE FUTURE?**

The first-ever Forum was held in 1992 in California and subsequent Forums have been held every summer since then. California developed a curriculum that allowed other states replicate this unique project and many states and territories currently have Forums. YOUTH POWER! has been funded by the New York State Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (DDPC) to replicate the model here in New York and to roll it out regionally across the state with parallel parent/caregiver workshops through the year 2021. YOUTH POWER! is developing a Sustainability Task Force to sustain this initiative past our current funding.

YOUTH POWER! has considerable experience in implementing these activities as their first YLF was held in 2008. Since 1992, hundreds of participants across the United States have graduated through this program and thousands of adults have been positively affected by participating as YLF volunteers.

## **HOW MUCH DOES THE FORUM COST?**

Participants are not charged to attend the Forum. Our cost is approximately \$1000 per student, not including thousands of dollars for services and goods provided in-kind by volunteer supporters. The majority of costs are covered by grant funding, however we also seek private and corporate donations. Major partners include the Developmental Disabilities Planning Council, Families Together in New York State (FTNYS), INCLUDEnyc, Parent to Parent of New York State, and Cornell University.



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