

# ASSOCIATION OF YOUTH LEADERSHIP FORUMS

October 2011  
Volume 1, Issue 1



## Represent Nationally through the NYLN

State youth leadership forums are just the beginning. For interested alumni there is another step. That step is called the National Youth Leadership Network (NYLN).

## DON'T MISS

1 Ongoing  
Business

2 YLF 2011

Welcome to the first edition of the AYLF Newsletter! This marks a great achievement for the association. It will be exciting to read the successes of young adults across the United States attend their state's YLF.

Since this is our first newsletter, let's look at the history of the YLF. In the late 1980's the state of California took a lead in an effort to promote the employment of people with disabilities by doing more to inspire and prepare young people with disabilities to overcome the barriers to employment and social participation they confront more fully as they become adults. In 1992 California held their first Youth Leadership Forum (YLF). Since that time as many as 27 states have implemented a YLF under the principles and guidelines that California set forth.

In the late 1990's California provided a training of their model at a national training in Washington, D.C. where more than a dozen states had the opportunity to receive the tools to begin a YLF. Since that time as many as 27 states or territories have held a YLF. There are thousands of alumni all across the country! However, the impact of the YLF on lives has yet to be tracked at the national level.

You can stay connected to the AYLF!

Our website: [www.aylf.net](http://www.aylf.net)

Our fanpage: <http://www.facebook.com/AssociationYLF>

Our discussion board: [www.aylf.proboards.com](http://www.aylf.proboards.com)

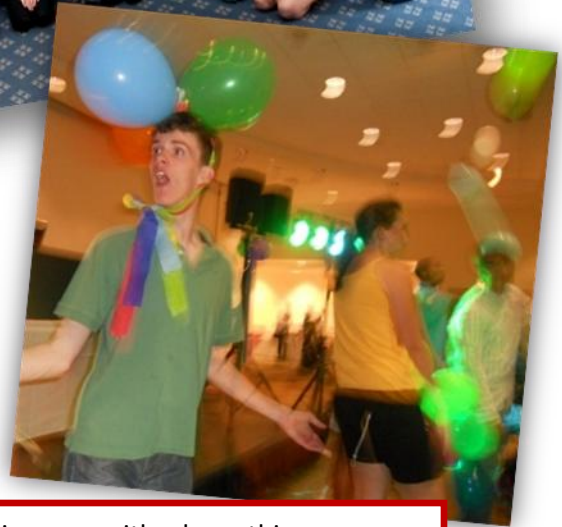
Contact us: [aylf2010@gmail.com](mailto:aylf2010@gmail.com)

If you have an article, photo, poem, recipe, etc that you would like printed in the next newsletter, email it to [aylf2010@gmail.com](mailto:aylf2010@gmail.com)!

# YLF 2011 HIGHLIGHTS

## OKLAHOMA CLASS 2011

The eighth annual **Oklahoma YLF** has now finished, graduating 21 young men and women from across the state. We met in Chickasha, discussing ways to better advocate for ourselves and others. The photo shows the 2011 Graduating Class during "YLF Capitol Day." We had several legislators visit us: ODDC Chair and former Representative Mark Liotta; Senator Johnson, Representatives Nelson, Pittman, Dank, Russ and Motivational Speaker Michael Allen.



## VIRGINIA YLF 2011

**The Virginia Youth Leadership Forum** celebrated its 11<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a bang this summer with the theme Dream it, Be it, Do it, Lead! After taking a year to revamp the program 23 fantastic Student Delegates experienced upgrades that will keep VA's YLF at the cutting edge and serving as a constant role model of the importance of change and progress. They heard from speakers who engaged them like LeDerick Horne who gave examples of leadership styles (Promoter, Supporter, Analyzer, Organizer) and shared his gift of poetry; Scott Dickens who emphasized the importance of maintaining a good reputation even in social media "Don't say anything on Facebook you wouldn't say to someone in person"; Dr. Victor Pineda, a California YLF Alumni who encouraged Delegates to "travel the world with a purpose"; Judith Rische "No IEPs in College". Delegates had the honor of meeting their state governor, Robert "Bob" McDonnell who took a group photo with them and shared the importance of getting involved in their communities and in politics. Delegates had access to computers and technology during the forum. Delegates created team videos with a message, and for the first time, parents and other guest were invited to the graduation ceremony.

## KANSAS YLF 2011

“Believe More. Do More. Be More!” is the theme that rang out at the eleventh annual **2011 Kansas Youth Leadership Forum (KSYLF)**. Twenty-six up and coming youth leaders set out on a path to BE MORE while at the Forum this year. The KSYLF week was full of empowerment, great memories, and growth amongst the participants. Speakers touched on topics such as leadership, disability awareness, disability heritage, goal setting, advocacy, and assertiveness. The delegates were able to enjoy the yearly activities of a barbecue, wheelchair basketball demonstration, talent show, and dance. They also debated a mock bill in the Senate Chambers of the State Capital. The alumni panel returned for a second year as five alumni shared their life experiences. The “Real Life Affair” and Resource Fair provided the delegates with community resources to survive in the “real world.” The theme for the 2011KSYLF was, “Believe More. Do More. Be More!” All delegates were challenged to have high expectations for themselves, as well as not only live, but really get involved and be proud of who they are as people with disabilities. By week’s end, the youth were ready to go back to their communities and do just that!

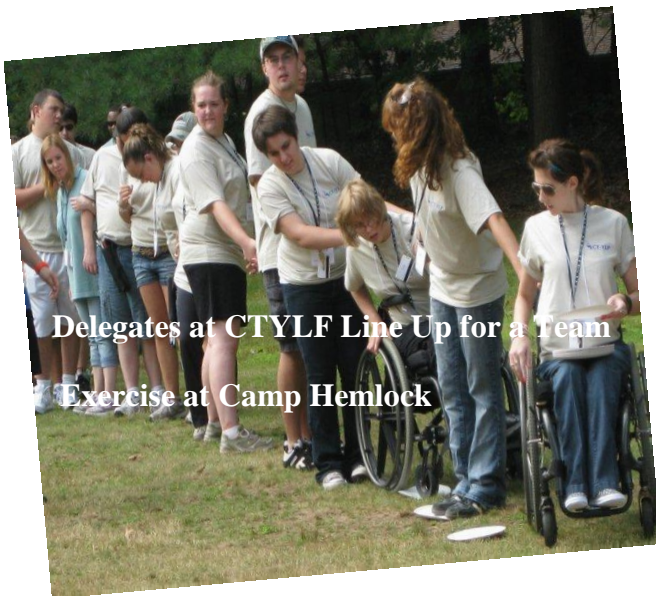
Kansas YLF Meets Governor



## CONNECTICUT YLF 2011

A total of 38 students attended the 13<sup>th</sup> annual **Connecticut Youth Leadership Forum (CTYLF)**. Some of the highlights of the forum were: Keith Jones, President and CEO of SoulTouchin’ Experiences, a fantastic talent show, a low-ropes course at Camp Hemlocks, and some hands-on fun with assistive technology. By the end of the week, each of the four teams developed a Community Action Plan. Each team will have until May 2012 to complete their community projects. Most important, many students leave CTYLF with better sense of who they are. Some of the delegates put it best, “people with disabilities can do everything to change the world,” “I was able to connect with other students with disabilities as well as comfortably discuss my disability,” “I learned I am a part of an amazing community of people,” “leaders can be anyone, despite their disability,” “I am not alone in facing the challenges that I do,” and “there is no one definition of leadership – we can all be leaders in different ways.”

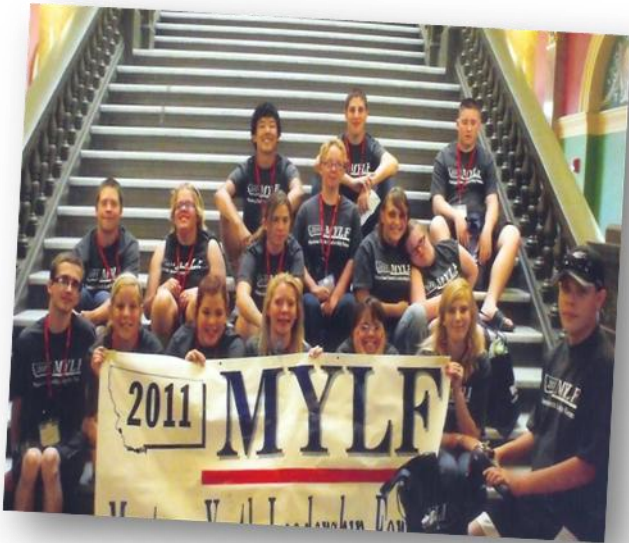
Delegates at CTYLF Line Up for a Team Exercise at Camp Hemlock



## ALABAMA YLF CLASS 2011



**Alabama's YLF** was once again a great success!! 29 delegates from across our state attended this year's YLF. During the week the delegates learned a great deal about self-advocacy, career exploration/planning, working as a team, developing life goals, and leadership skills. We traveled to Montgomery where we were able to learn about the legislative process by touring the Alabama State House and then touring the Capitol. While at the Capitol, we were able to spend a good amount of time visiting with our Governor, Dr. Robert Bentley. This was followed by a mentor luncheon, sponsored by The Alabama Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. We ended our week with a graduation luncheon/ceremony. During our graduation luncheon we have "open mic" to give anyone the opportunity to speak. I heard one delegate mention that YLF had given her a voice. That's what it's all about!!!

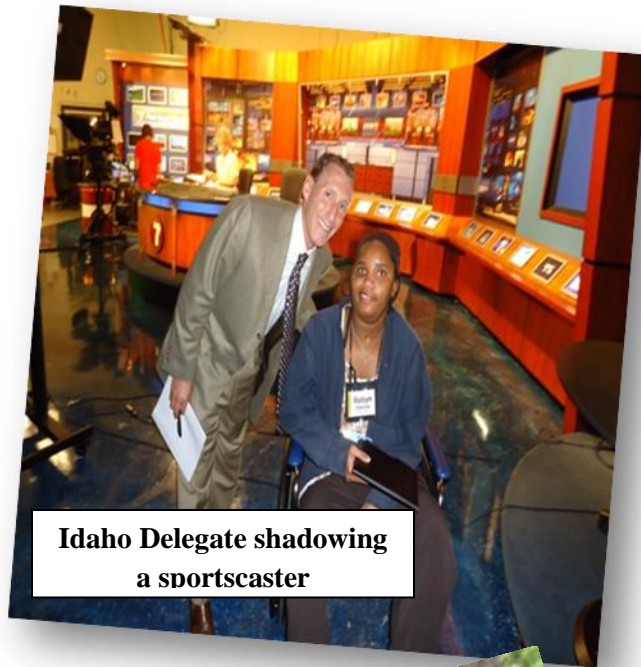


## MONTANA YLF CLASS 2011

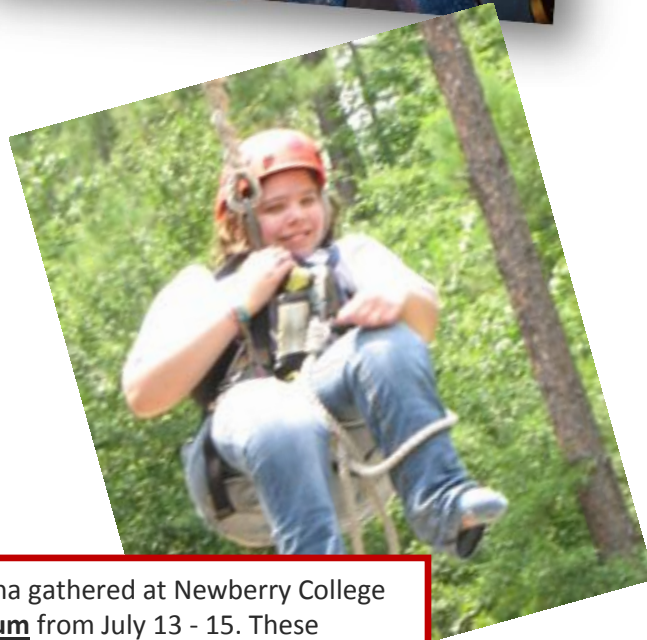
The 12<sup>th</sup> annual **Montana Youth Leadership Forum** was held on the campus of Carroll College in Helena July 18-22. Keynote speaker for the Forum this year was Kevin Connelly author of Double Take. Delegates had an opportunity to get autographed books and pictures with him. New components added this year was a recreational partnership with Special Olympics and a section on "Relationships". The 2012 Montana Youth Leadership Forum will be held July 16-20.

## IDAHO YLF CLASS 2011

Some highlights from the 2011 **Idaho Youth Leadership Forum** are the Mentor Luncheon and Job Shadowing where Delegates spent an afternoon on the job site shadowing a professional working in their career field of interest. A couple of this year's high points were helping to prepare a TV sportscast from beginning to end (see image) and taking the controls in the cockpit while flying with a professional pilot. The delegates learned about themselves and how to work together as a team through activities and wheelchair sports with rugby champion and paralympian, Mark Zupan. Delegates met with the Lt. Governor and a panel of policymakers at the Capitol statehouse. They prepared questions in advance about issues important to them and covered many topics including education reform, employment opportunities and effective ways for them to become involved in policy discussions. They also had a chance to practice debating legislation sitting in their Representative's chair in the House chamber.



Idaho Delegate shadowing a sportscaster



## SOUTH CAROLINA 2011 YLF

25 outstanding young leaders in South Carolina gathered at Newberry College for the **South Carolina Youth Leadership Forum** from July 13 - 15. These delegates enjoyed three days of fun and fellowship. They attended sessions on leadership, communication, self-advocacy and civic responsibility. On Thursday July 14th, these delegates traveled to Columbia, SC to participate in a ropes course at the Will Lou Gray Opportunity School (see picture above) where they cheered their fellow delegates as each reached personal goals on high ropes elements. The culminating activity was a Mentor Luncheon on Friday where students spent time with adults from across South Carolina learning about careers of their interest.

Twenty-one delegates attended the 9<sup>th</sup> annual **Missouri Youth Leadership Forum (MYLF)**. The youth delegates learned about career development and leadership skills that provide a successful transition into post secondary education/employment. The outcome is to become their own self advocates and be a positive model for others in their schools and communities. Some topics addressed at MYLF were the high unemployment rate among people with disabilities, interacting with local human resource professionals about resume writing, social networking and interviewing skills. Youth delegates had the opportunity to interact with mentors and staff who are successful adults with disabilities that share similar challenges. This year's keynote speaker Greg Smith, "The Strength Coach", left the youth with a message of perseverance against all odds. As part of the legislative advocacy training, delegates participated in a mock legislative session at the State Capitol in Jefferson City with Senators Scott Rupp and Robin Wright-Jones, and Representatives Jeff Grisamore, Eileen McGeoghegan, Genise Montecillo, and Jeanette Mott Oxford.

### MISSOURI YLF CLASS 2011



### FLORIDA YLF CLASS 2011

The 12th **Florida Youth Leadership Forum (YLF)** was held from July 20 – 24 in Tallahassee, Florida. With help from public and private partners, nearly 50 students with disabilities from across the state of Florida participated in four days of leadership and social training at no cost. The primary goal of the Forum is to develop a network of young adults with disabilities who realize their ability to pursue meaningful employment and societal contributions. In doing so, these individuals help break down the barriers to independence for others with disabilities. YLF 2011 took place at Southgate Campus Centre, a private residence hall on the campus of Florida State University. Events highlights such as a mock session in the House Chambers of the Florida Capitol, career fair and mentors' luncheon and business and formal dinner etiquette filled the schedule as students learned about state and local disability resources, college resources, disability history, and advocacy. Luncheon keynote Richard Salem, founder of Enable America, and State Representative Marti Coley addressed students on the importance of leadership and overcoming obstacles in pursuit of their dreams.

## IOWA YLF 2011

**Iowa** had its largest YLF ever with 31 students in attendance from July 10<sup>th</sup> to July 15<sup>th</sup>. Everyone learned so much and had a great time interacting, listening, working and playing around. We added a problem solving exercise facilitated by a local Community College that proved to be a lot harder than we thought but it was still entertaining and purposeful. We had a visit by one of our partners from Vocational Rehabilitation who stayed and observed several presentations by employers and employment professionals and they gave us a big thumbs up! We were also fortunate to have a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor join us for our Saturday staff training session and we arranged for her to stay with us until Tuesday. She was extremely impressed with all of the activity provided and was somewhat shocked at how well the clients she recommended to the forum really came out of their shells, so to speak and took part in the activities. Iowa YLF is so privileged to have the partner interaction that we have from both the Department for the Blind and the Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services.



Discussion on what their disabilities are

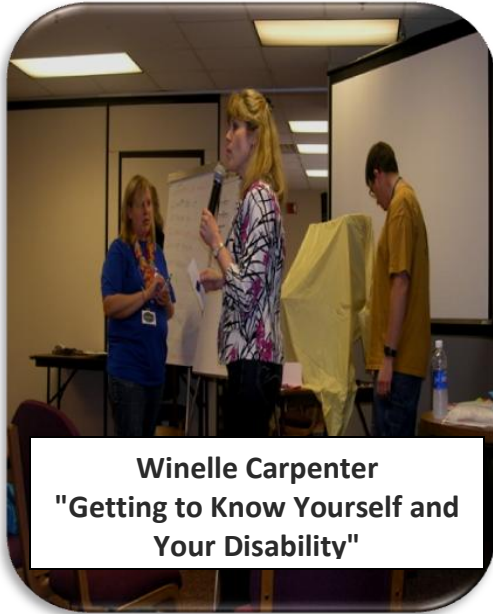


## MASSACHUSETTS YLF CLASS 2011

High school students from throughout the state recently attended the 2011 **Massachusetts Youth Leadership Forum**, a program for teenagers with disabilities who show the promise of one day becoming leaders in their communities. The forum helps students in their final two years of high school make the transition to higher education or work and provides them with resources that will be useful to them as adults. The 31 delegates attended workshops and discussions on a wide range of subjects, including assistive technology, independent living, employment, college and higher education, advocacy, the disability rights movement and community leadership. A group of 13 peer leaders who are either working or in college helped in the planning process, acted as mentors and assisted the delegates during the forum. The three-day event was held July 13 through 15 at Bridgewater State University. An annual event, the forum is organized by Easter Seals in collaboration with the Boston Center for Independent Living, Partners for Youth with Disabilities and the Center for Human Development. It is funded by the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission.



**Flushing the "I can't" attitude**



**Winelle Carpenter  
"Getting to Know Yourself and  
Your Disability"**

**SOUTH DAKOTA YLF CLASS 2011**



**Grady Kickul presented  
Dillon Haug with the  
Richard and Pat Hicks**



**Derek Johnson a SDSU  
student with a prosthetic  
leg spoke to the delegates  
about setting goals.**

**OHIO YLF CLASS 2011**



**CALIFORNIA YLF CLASS 2011**



**Ohio's YLF**

The 13<sup>th</sup> annual Ohio Youth Leadership Forum for high school juniors and seniors with disabilities was held July 18 – 21 at the Embassy Suites Hotel – Columbus Airport. Fifty-one students (delegates) from all over Ohio attended our four day event. Delegates arrived on Monday afternoon and the next two days were packed with informative presentations by government officials, advocates, professionals and community leaders. The evenings were packed with fun events like wheelchair basketball (indoors because of the rain), swimming, a dance and a talent show.

On the last day, the delegates were bused to the Statehouse for a tour of the historical “people’s house” and to hear presentations on how to become involved with their community. After a quick group photo, the delegates returned to the hotel for the mentor luncheon. This year, former Ohio State University football player Tyson Gentry gave the keynote address. He delivered his message of overcoming adversity to approximately 160 people and helped to end the 2011 YLF on a successful note.

Dates for next year’s YLF will be July 16 – 19, 2012.



## **California's YLF**

During the last week of July 2011, 60 delegates from across the state of California converged at California State University Sacramento for the 2011 Youth Leadership Forum. The first state to develop the Youth Leadership Forum model, California marked a milestone event with its 20th YLF! In an effort to celebrate this landmark anniversary, California made extra efforts to include even more alumni speakers and performers throughout its daily program.

The first day of the 2011 Forum welcomed the delegates with an icebreaker BINGO game followed by an incredible sign-song performance of Lady Gaga's "Born this Way". This was followed by an opening ceremony presentation by Sarah Triano, alum from the first YLF in 1992. Sarah's memorable presentation served to welcome the delegates and ease their apprehensions, emphasizing what they can expect to learn from their experience at YLF. The evening ended on a high note with Sarah performing her original rap song on disability pride.

The following day kicked off with the delegates participating in a group activity called "Maze of Change", challenging the delegates to assist each other in getting through a checkered path full of obstacles, emulating the unpredictable nature of life. Next was a presentation on Disability History and Culture, exposing delegates to the powerful history of the disability rights movement and the "Social Model" of disability. After this, Mark Goffeney, who was born without arms, treated the delegates to an inspirational and comedic performance as he played guitar with his feet and sang.

Day three began with a Technology and Resource Fair featuring various state agencies, postsecondary educational institutions, adaptive equipment, and other resources designed to encourage independent living. Delegates then watched a video featuring youth with disabilities providing tips on how to successfully transition to adulthood. Information was also provided on California's Youth Transition Toolkit, a website containing valuable resources on employment, independent living, social and recreational opportunities, post-secondary education, and more. The day ended with a Talent Show giving delegates an opportunity to share their unique talents (including solving a Rubik's cube in less than 90 seconds)!

On the fourth day, delegates had the ultimate treat of a visit to the State Capitol building. After an inspiring welcome from important leaders of the Department of Rehabilitation and Employment Development Department, the delegates met with Secretary of the Health and Human Services Agency, Diana Dooley. After a poignant question and answer session with Dooley, the delegates were prepared for a visit with state legislators. Following this empowering experience, the delegates moved on to the YLF luncheon which featured guest speakers Rich Pimentel, and performances by songwriter and YLF alum Brooke Fox. During the luncheon, a video was shown highlighting the successes of several YLF alumni, emphasizing the powerful impact YLF has on the youth who attend (plans are also in the works to utilize the video for fundraising purposes). That night delegates celebrated their week with a dance, always a highlight of YLF!

As the 20th anniversary Forum came to a close on the final day, delegates took part in the closing session which encouraged them to join the YLF Alumni Alliance and other organizations which encourage their newfound passion for advocacy and the disability movement. The ultimate surprise of the week was the premiere of the YLF video, featuring the all the experiences the delegates had during their week.