

What is the Youth Leadership Forum?

The Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) for High School Students with Disabilities is a unique career leadership-training program for high school juniors and seniors with disabilities that began in Washington State in 2000. Students serve as delegates from their communities at this six-day, five-night event. Young people with disabilities cultivate their potential leadership, citizenship and social skills.

Why is the YLF Only for Students with Disabilities?

It is critical that young people with disabilities growing into adulthood learn to identify themselves with pride as individuals and members of the very accomplished disability community. By providing a framework of history and an atmosphere of encouragement, YLF offers peers with common challenges and experiences, the opportunity to learn from each other.

Delegates gain access to vital resources related to assistive technology, community support, and civil rights. Successful men and women with disabilities serve as role models in helping youth realize their ability, right, and obligation to pursue meaningful employment and contribute to society.

What is the YLF All About?

This educational and motivational Forum involves an intense schedule. Throughout the training, small “work groups” explore personal leadership and career plans. Social and recreational activities are included, as these are part of a well-rounded life.

Guest speakers address such topics as advocacy, employment, disability rights law, innovations in technology and community resources, access to higher education, etc. Other activities may include: accessible sports equipment, YLF Alumni presenters and often a meeting with the Governor or representative.

On the last night of the Forum, a talent show and a farewell dance is held to celebrate accomplishments with new friends.

The key to the YLF is leadership by example. The Leadership Luncheon brings together the delegates and adults with disabilities who have traveled the same path the young people are facing. To help make the program a success, many volunteers, some with disabilities and some without, donate their time to the YLF.

YLF Alumni take with them an obligation to follow through on goals outlined in their “personal leadership plans” that they have written for themselves. YLF Alumni will be encouraged to return to the YLF in later years as part of the volunteer staff.

How are Delegates Selected to Attend?

The delegates are chosen through a statewide competition that seeks students with disabilities who are *leaders* or have leadership *potential*. Each applicant submits a standard application, a short essay and letters of recommendation. The delegates are interviewed and the YLF Application Committee makes its recommendations. The group of students that is selected is representative of the state in terms of geography, gender, race, ethnicity and types of disability.

Is There a Cost to Attend the Forum?

NO! The commitment of the YLF is to enable youth with disabilities to grow personally, socially and academically, and to fulfill their potential in their work and other aspects of their lives. No student should be denied this opportunity because of an economic hardship. All costs, including housing, meals, interpreters, personal care assistants, transportation, meeting space, etc., are paid for through fundraising, state agencies and corporate donations.

Youth Leadership Forums for High School Students with Disabilities were developed by the California Governor's Committee on Employment of Disabled Persons in 1992. The Office of Disability Employment Policy in Washington, DC encouraged that this program be implemented throughout the United States.

Washington State's YLF is directed by the Washington Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment.

In collaboration with the following Washington State government agencies and other organizations with the commitment of many individual volunteers:

*Governor's Committee on Disability
Issues and Employment
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
Liberty Mutual Insurance
NW Fisheries Center/NOAA
Department of Services for the Blind
Individual Donors
YLF Alumni Parents*

The Youth Leadership Forum is held in late July or early August at a State University.

This publication is available in alternate formats upon request.

For more information or to receive an application package, contact:

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WASHINGTON STATE

***YOUTH LEADERSHIP
FORUM***

For

***High School Students
with Disabilities***

