

Visions of Community 2009 Conference – Workshop # 36

We Are Able: Perspectives of Transitioning Young Adults with Disabilities

Seaport World Trade Center – Boston, MA

~ Saturday, March 14, 2009 ~

- 3:30 Welcome, Introduction to film
- 3:45 Film viewing
- 4:00 Question & answer panel discussion
with members of the MA Young Adult
Advisory Council for youth and young adults
with disabilities and special health care needs
- Carmel Calinda
 - Claire Gauthier
 - Thomas Roberts-
Wierzbowski
 - Manu Thakral
 - Amanda Tyler
 - Amy Walbridge

Thank you for coming!

*Workshop sponsored by the MA Department of Public Health –
Division for Perinatal, Early Childhood & Special Health Needs –
Children & Youth with Special Health Care Needs Program*

~ What is the Young Adult Advisory Council? ~

~ Why make a video? ~

The Young Adult Advisory Council, more commonly and affectionately known as the YAAC, was formed in 2006. The YAAC consists of 19 members. There was an extensive application process to be a part of this group, which is organized by the Department of Public Health and Partners for Youth with Disabilities. Originally 24 participants, ranging in ages from 16 to 26, were selected from an amazing group of applicants.

We now have the core group of 19 ranging in ages from 18 to 28. Each of us brings to the council a unique set of skills and abilities. But mostly we, who are currently going or have gone through the process of transition, bring together our experiences in the healthcare world.

We come from different backgrounds and locations of Massachusetts, and represent a wide array of disabilities, and that is what makes this group unique. Based in both Boston and Springfield, we share our perspectives on healthcare and represent, to the best of our ability, all young adults with disabilities and special healthcare needs.

When we first came together most of us didn't know one another. So, for the first few meetings we got to know each other and shared our personal achievements and struggles in healthcare. We had some guest speakers on the topics of Advocacy and Leadership in the community. We talked about our transitions to adulthood, including what has helped us in our transition, or what could have helped us. We discussed the need for increased education and awareness. These meetings were a vital part to making the future meetings and ultimately to making the video project a success. Since the group meets only five or six times a year we decided to focus on one main project. So this became the goal of the two groups – to make and share a video regarding transition with policy makers, healthcare workers, families, and friends.

We have worked long and hard on this video. I, as well as my colleagues, sincerely hope that you take something away from watching it, and that each person gathered today connect to at least one aspect of the video and learn something. We would like to thank you all for attending and hope you thoroughly enjoy our film.

~ Sarah MacIsaac

(written for the May 31, 2008 premiere of the film in Sturbridge, MA)

~ MA Young Adult Advisory Council ~

Olivia Belofsky (Arlington)
Carmel Calinda (Amherst)
Zipporah Deeble (Maynard)
Suzanne English (Granby)
Claire Gauthier (Watertown)
Erin Gendreau (Springfield)
Greg Getchell (Wilmington)
Ben Kimbrel (Mattapan)
Christian Lalli (Springfield)
Sarah MacIsaac (Lynn)

Alexander Malley (Chicopee)
Eric Riklin (Newton)
Luke Rivers (Chicopee)
Thomas Roberts-Wierzbowski (Amherst)
Manu Thakral (Weymouth)
Sabrina Thomas (Hyde Park)
Kate Thurman (Somerville)
Katie Turner (Northampton)
Amanda Tyler (West Springfield)
Amy Walbridge (Longmeadow)

This film is dedicated to the memory of Luke Rivers (1983-2008),
our friend and fellow YAAC member.

Film Facilitator/Producer/Editor: Julie Polvinen

~ Organizational Sponsors & Funding ~

The MA Young Adult Advisory Council (YAAC) is an initiative of the MA **Department of Public Health (MDPH)** and **Partners for Youth with Disabilities, Inc. (PYD)**

In 2006, MDPH received a grant from the federal **Maternal and Child Health Bureau*** to enhance the system of care for children and youth with disabilities and special health care needs in Massachusetts. As part of this grant ("Moving Forward Together"), which ended in 2008, MDPH contracted with PYD to develop and implement an advisory council comprised of young people with disabilities and special health care needs. MDPH looks to the YAAC to provide input on issues related to young people with disabilities and special health care needs as they transition to adult life.

**Grant # D70MC04497 (CFDA #93.110) from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Health Resources and Services Administration, US Department of Health and Human Services.*

~ YAAC Members Share Their Thoughts ~

“My favorite part of the video was making it and seeing other people’s part in the video. What it means for me to be part of the YAAC is that people with disabilities can make a difference.”

~ Erin Gendreau

“YAAC has taught me to respect all people with any type of disability because everyone has something important to offer. YAAC has also taught me about my own disability and not to be afraid to reach out to resources and also how important and rewarding it is to give back to the community and others with disabilities.”

~ Olivia Belofsky

“Belonging to YAAC taught me about leadership and working with others. Making the video was one of my favorite parts. I hope people will take the message for health care providers seriously.”

~ Suzanne English

“As a member of the YAAC, I have greatly enriched my knowledge of the reasonable accommodations that allow people with various disabilities to participate fully in their transition from childhood to adulthood and in decision making regarding their healthcare needs. My understanding of how one achieves and maintains health has broadened, as I now realize that wellness demands aspects, such as housing, employment and accessibility in the community as a whole, that one does not typically associate with healthcare. Producing this DVD provided us with a creative outlet in which to make our needs, wishes and abilities better understood by healthcare providers, policy makers, as well as the general public. It is our hope that viewers will walk away holding on to our experiences so they, too, are better equipped to make the world a more accessible place for people of all abilities.”

~ Kate Thurman

“One thing that I enjoyed about being in the YAAC program is self-advocacy and learning there is no shame in asking for help.”

~ Sabrina Thomas

“The Young Adult Advisory Council is a creative forum for ideas and thoughts, an agent for change to occur, and a group of familiar friends.”

~ Christian Lalli

“One person is not as easily heard, but a united group can make some noise. With hope to make a difference.”

~ Amanda Tyler

~ Please share your suggestions ~

Please let us know if you have any suggestions for audiences and locations for future viewings, or if you know of particular individuals or organizations who may benefit from receiving a copy of the DVD. Our primary target audience for the video is health care providers and policymakers, but it is also intended for school personnel, employers, advocates, parents, consumer groups and others.

We would also welcome any comments you have about the DVD.

~ To arrange for YAAC members to attend a viewing ~

YAAC members are available to speak to groups viewing the film, and for panel presentations and other speaking engagements. For information, contact Nicole Roos, MA Department of Public Health, nicole.roos@state.ma.us, (617) 624-5478 voice, (617) 624-5992 TTY.

~ To receive a copy of *We Are Able* ~

For information on how to receive a copy of the DVD of *We Are Able*, contact Nicole Roos (contact info above). To access it from the internet, go to www.mass.gov/eohhs and enter **We Are Able** in the search field.

