



**ARIZONA YOUTH LEADERSHIP FORUM**  
**For Students Who Have Disabilities**  
**AZYLf: A to Z... It's YOUR Life!**

**Summary Report 2015**

Arizona Youth Leadership Forum (AZYLf) For Students Who Have Disabilities 2015 was held at Arizona State University in Phoenix, June 21-26, 2015. Representatives from 14 agencies, including several that have statewide service responsibility, 5 AZYLf Alumni, 2 AZYLf Alumnus parents, and 8 AZYLf staff members participated in the planning of AZYLf 2015. Comprehensive staff training for 17 volunteers, 94% of which were people who have disabilities, 29% of which were AZYLf Alumni, 53% of which were returning staff, and 18% of which were new staff, was held on June 20, 2015.



**AZYLf 2015**

*"I learned about disability history. I also learned about public transportation.  
It was nice to be recognized for my hard work."*

*C.J., AZYLf 2015 Graduate*

Throughout the course of AZYLF, 22 youth, referred to as Delegates, completed a personal discovery curriculum, designed to raise self-awareness and lead to goal setting in the areas of personal development, disabilities awareness, and leadership. Delegates participated in small groups of 4-6, with consistent staff present to assist with ensuring that Delegates received their accommodations and were supported throughout the process. Two full time ASL Interpreters were present during all educational components of AZYLF. Delegates and staff were housed in the dormitory at ASU in Phoenix. In addition to the curriculum, presentations were given on the following topics, by the following presenters:

- “Making the Most of AZYLF” by Audra Paletta, AZYLF Alumni
- “Envisioning Your Version of You” by Eva E. Kovacs
- “History of Independent Living and Disability as a Culture” by Larry Wanger
- “Making the Most of Advancements that Enhance Life” by Mellowdee Brooks, Donna Powers, David Carey, Lea Marie Laffartha
- “Maricopa Skill Center: Education that works!” by Matthew Castner
- “Build Your Resume and Nail That Interview!” by Katy Mendoza
- “Campus Wide Compliance in Higher Education” by Judy Dusell
- “Employment First: The Expectation and Beyond” by Nicholas Love
- “What in the World is Vocational Rehabilitation (and how can it help me reach my career goals)?” by Betty Schoen
- “Project Vote” by Katie Griffith, Jolene DeTiege, Monica Cooper, Bill Lucero, Renaldo Fowler
- “Accessible Elections: Rights and Responsibilities” by Maricopa County Elections, Renaldo Fowler
- “Preparing for Your Transition to Adulthood” by Vicky Rozich
- “I Have A Disability, But It Doesn’t Have Me!” by Melissa Ann Santora
- “Coping with Stress” by James Hinckley Wade and Melissa Ann Santora
- “Disability History in the Making” by Audra Paletta and Mica Stewart, AZYLF Alumni

*“I learned how to vote. How to care for others. That it is okay to give someone a hug for comfort if someone is in despair. I learned how to live comfortable with people and friends around me. I learned how to take advantage of my disabilities. ”*

*E.B., AZYLF 2015 Graduate*

AZYLf provided several field trips in 2015, which all featured educational and experiential components. First, a full day was spent at the Disability Empowerment Center of Arizona, where Disability History, Empowerment and Leadership were the focus. In addition, Special Olympics Arizona Youth Activation Committee and Project UNIFY athletes joined AZYLf at the Virginia G. Piper Sports and Fitness Center for structured activities. Delegates and Staff also spent time working out and swimming at this state of the art accessible fitness center.

Further, AZYLf spent a day at the Maricopa Skill Center, learning about higher education and career opportunities, as well as supports and resources available following high school.

After a morning spent learning about the power of advocacy, the right to vote, and accessibility in voting, AZYLf enjoyed a trip to the Arizona State Capitol, which was punctuated by a highly entertaining and informative tour, conducted by Representative Andrew C. Sherwood.

Service was emphasized at AZYLf 2015, and Delegates were asked to perform and document a minimum of 5 hours of service in their respective communities prior to attending. Additionally, as a group, AZYLf spent a morning at the St. Mary's Food Bank, sorting and packaging approximately 8,000 pounds of food.



*"I learned that people with disabilities can do anything anyone else can do. Also that having a disability isn't a bad thing and you shouldn't let it own you."*

*S.W., AZYLf 2015 Graduate*

Ten Delegates campaigned for the AZYLF Class of 2015 Leadership Team to represent the voice of their peers in matters related to disability in Arizona, and the three elected were announced by members of the 2014 AZYLF Leadership Team at the AZYLF Commencement Ceremony and Recognition Banquet, which was held on the final evening of AZYLF. Planning and Delegate Selection Committee members, AZYLF partners and supporters, and presenters were in attendance. Nine AZYLF Alumni led the Ceremony by providing the Welcome Address, formally recognizing Supporters, Presenters, Staff, and by giving the Keynote, and Alumni Address, in which they announced the formation of the AZYLF Alumni Association. The evening was rounded out by Presentation of the 2015 AZYLF Graduates, 16 of whom who shared a testimony of their AZYLF experience. There were many laughs, many tears, and many fond memories made by all. The ceremony was followed by a celebratory dance.

Delegates received a comprehensive binder containing the AZYLF curriculum, supplemental materials from all presenters, and an AZYLF t-shirt. In addition, an AZYLF Staff member will serve as a Mentor for each Graduate throughout the coming year. The mentoring relationship is designed to provide support to each Graduate as they pursue their Personal Leadership Plan and personal development goals.

Photographs and comments can be found on [www.azylf.org](http://www.azylf.org), and on Arizona Youth Leadership Forum Facebook.



*"I've learned that people can do amazing things if they set their mind to it and with someone to help start their journey. Just because you have a disability doesn't mean there's anything holding you back."*

*K.M., AZYLF 2015 Graduate*

Pre and Post AZYLF Surveys were completed by the 22 Delegates. The following is a summary of the data collected:

**Demographic Information:**

A total of 22 youth who have disabilities participated in and completed AZYLF 2015.

The Gender composition of the youth was as follows:

Male=64%                      Female=36%

The Current Grade or Level of Education reported by the youth was as follows:

Sophomore=14%              Senior=14%  
Junior=22%                      High School Graduate=27%  
GED/Post-Secondary Transition Program=18%  
Some College=5%

The Ethnicity or Ethnicities per self-report of the youth was:

American Indian=14%                      Asian/Pacific Islander=5%  
Black/African American=0%              Caucasian/White=64%  
Hispanic/Latino=32%

The Disability or Disabilities per self-report of the youth is as follows:

Learning=40%                      Cerebral Palsy=5%  
Mental Health=5%                      Cognitive/Developmental/Intellectual=5%  
Vision=5%                              Hearing=5%  
Musculoskeletal=5%                      Autistic Spectrum Disorder=9%  
Neurological=5%                      Acquired=18%

The Arizona County representation was as follows:

Greenlee=9%                      LaPaz =5%  
Maricopa=50%                      Pima=18%  
Pinal=5%                              Yuma=13%

Prior to AZYLF 29% of the youth who participated in AZYLF 2015 had never made an overnight trip without their parent, while 33% have done so rarely, 29% have done so once in a while, 9% have done so fairly often. In addition, 32% of the youth had never visited a college campus, while 68% had visited a few times.

## **Findings:**

According to self-report, 33% of the youth who participated in AZYLF 2015, receive benefits from Social Security Administration, 17% receive services from Department of Rehabilitation, 17% receive Community Education and Training, 17% receive Mental Health Counseling, and 8% receive Child Protective Services.

In regard to Employment, 73% of youth who participated in AZYLF 2015 are currently going to school and not working, 23% are engaged in service, and 9% are working with a Job Coach or other Supported Employment opportunity.

In regard to Transportation, 77% of youth who participated in AZYLF 2015 usually travel with Parent/Friend, 22% usually walk, 5% use transit for people who have disabilities, 9% use public transportation, 9% bike, 9% take a school bus, 5% drive, 5% car pool, 5% use taxi service.

In regard to use of community services, 36% of youth who participated in AZYLF 2015 independently access recreational facilities, 31% independently access stores, 9% independently access banks, 5% independently, and 36% do not access any of these community services independently.

In regard to post high school plans, 36% of youth who participated in AZYLF 2015 plan to attend community college, 18% plan to attend a four year college, 18% plan to attend vocational or technical school, 18% plan to engage in employment, 9% plan to pursue an advanced college degree, and 5% plan to participate in adult education. In regard to career plans, 77% of youth who participated in AZYLF 2015 have identified an area of interest, while 23% have not.

In regard to social support, 45% of the youth who participated in AZYLF 2015 indicated that their friends are both people who do and do not have disabilities, while 41% indicated that most of their friends do not have a disability, and 14% indicated that most of their friends do have disabilities. In addition, 50% get together with friends more than once a week, 23% get together with friends once a week, and 27% rarely get together with friends. Further, 36% of the youth reported participating in social activities more than once a week, while 32% reported participating once a week, 9% reported participating less than once a week, and 23% reported rarely participating in activities such as dances, movies, and sporting events.

*"I learned that the staff who has disabilities are the same like us."*

*K.C., AZYLF 2015 Graduate*

The following is a comparison of Pre and Post-AZYLf Survey results:

QUESTION	Pre-AZYLf Response	Post-AZYLf Response
How familiar are you with the Americans with Disabilities Act?	I know a lot: 0% I know a Little: 41% I don't know much: 59%	I know a lot: 77% I know a Little: 23% I don't know much: 0%
How familiar are you with the Federal Rehabilitation Act?	I know a lot: 0% I know a Little: 5% I don't know much: 95%	I know a lot: 41% I know a Little: 59% I don't know much: 0%
How familiar are you with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act?	I know a lot: 14% I know a Little: 14% I don't know much: 72%	I know a lot: 36% I know a Little: 64% I don't know much: 0%
How familiar are you with Centers for Independent Living?	I know a lot: 0% I know a Little: 23% I don't know much: 77%	I know a lot: 36% I know a Little: 64% I don't know much: 0%
How familiar are you with Rehabilitation Services/Vocational Rehabilitation?	I know a lot: 9% I know a Little: 36% I don't know much: 55%	I know a lot: 45% I know a Little: 55% I don't know much: 0%
How familiar are you with Higher Education/Career Development?	I know a lot: 9% I know a Little: 41% I don't know much: 50%	I know a lot: 100% I know a Little: 0% I don't know much: 0%
How familiar are you with Leadership?	I know a lot: 36% I know a Little: 36% I don't know much: 28%	I know a lot: 100% I know a Little: 0% I don't know much: 0%
How familiar are you with Advocacy?	I know a lot: 19% I know a Little: 24% I don't know much: 57%	I know a lot: 86% I know a Little: 14% I don't know much: 0%
How familiar are you with Disability History/Culture?	I know a lot: 5% I know a Little: 36% I don't know much: 59%	I know a lot: 81% I know a Little: 19% I don't know much: 0%

*"I learned that we don't want to allow history of disabilities to repeat itself and there are many resources out there to help us."*

*E.W., AZYLf 2015 Graduate*

QUESTION	Pre-AZYL F Response	Post-AZYL F Response
How familiar are you with Transition to Adulthood?	I know a lot: 18% I know a Little: 41% I don't know much: 41%	I know a lot: 64% I know a Little: 36% I don't know much: 0%
How familiar are you with the American Legislative Process?	I know a lot: 14% I know a Little: 18% I don't know much: 68%	I know a lot: 45% I know a Little: 55% I don't know much: 0%
How familiar are you with IEP/504 Plans?	I know a lot: 23% I know a Little: 41% I don't know much: 36%	I know a lot: 55% I know a Little: 45% I don't know much: 0%
How familiar are you with Disability Services in Arizona?	I know a lot: 18% I know a Little: 23% I don't know much: 59%	I know a lot: 41% I know a Little: 59% I don't know much: 0%
How familiar are you with accommodations for disability?	I know a lot: 13% I know a Little: 27% I don't know much: 60%	I know a lot: 64% I know a Little: 36% I don't know much: 0%
How many people who have disabilities that you know do you think of as leading successful lives?	Many: 23% At least one: 32% Several: 36% No one: 9%	Many: 86% At least one: 0% Several: 14% No one: 0%



*"I learned how to calm myself down from getting stress, and about cyberbullies."  
D.L., AZYL F 2015*

AZYL 2015 Delegates completed a survey of topics they may have learned more about while at AZYL. There were affirmative responses to each topic given, and below is a summary of those responses:

Topic	Response
Information on Living on my Own	82%
Help with Money Management	32%
Recreation/Leisure Services	14%
Where to find Financial Assistance for College	45%
Employment or Job Training Service	59%
Assistance in finding a Place to Live	41%
Help to get Adaptive Equipment	18%
Medical or Health Care Services	14%
Information on Housing	27%
On-the-Job Support	68%
Legal Services	14%
Home Living Skills	41%
Higher Education/Military	82%
Transportation	36%
Technology/Assistance for living independently	82%



*“I learned how to stand up for myself. How to do public speaking. How to advocate.  
How to be more social. How to dance!!”  
S.L., AZYL 2015 Graduate*

Prior to the close of AZYLF 2015, a meeting was facilitated by AZYLF staff for supporters, including parents, guardians, grandparents, siblings, and professionals, who assembled on behalf of 82% of the AZYLF 2015 Graduates to learn more about the AZYLF experience, and how to support Graduates following their participation. AZYLF staff recapped the event, encouraged supporters to review the curriculum with the Graduate they support, introduced the AZYLF Alumni Association and opportunities that Graduates may have to become engaged in activities and learning opportunities, and provided insight into the process and expectations of the Mentoring component of AZYLF. Those in attendance asked questions, offered comments about the positive experiences their Graduates had already shared with them, and expressed their gratitude for this opportunity. The time was then turned over to Arizona's Parent Training and Information Center, Raising Special Kids, who conducted a Transition Focus Group with these supporters.



AZYLF 2015 Leadership Team

*"I learned not to be embarrassed of my disability."*

*M.D., AZYLF 2015 Graduate*