



# YOUTH EMPOWERMENT ALLIANCE

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## Self-Determination

### What is self-determination?

Have you ever heard the term *self-determination*? Maybe you have heard the word *determination*? If so, has anyone explained what it means? Self-determination is when someone knows themselves, makes their own decisions, solves problems, sets goals, or speaks up for themselves even if they need support to do it.



### Why is self-determination important to me?

When you have these skills, you have more control over your life and are empowered to do things you want to do. You can decide what to do with your free time, if you want to continue your education after high school, what kind of job/career you want, where you want to live and much much more! Being self-determined means knowing what you want and knowing how to get it. If you are interested—keep reading!

### How can I become self-determined?

First, read this article and use the listed resources to learn the basic skills you need to become a self-determined person. Next, practice these skills at home, in school and in the community!

(continued)





## YEA UPDATE

### CALLING ALL YOUTH!

YEA stands for YOUTH Empowerment Alliance. We are looking for MORE YOUTH INVOLVEMENT in our project, here are *two great opportunities!*

### SHARE YOUR STORY

*Do you have a story you can share?*

Our website at [www.mdtransition.org](http://www.mdtransition.org) has stories about youth and young adults, ages 14- 25, who are getting ready to move from school to the adult world. We would like to share your story so others can learn from real life experiences. If interested gives us a call or send an e-mail and we will contact you.

### **Want to Earn Some Money Writing About Transition Issues?**

We are looking to contract with youth and young adults or small teams to write additional articles for this newsletter. The articles are to be of interest to youth and/or young adults with disabilities moving from school to the adult world. If you are interested or would like more information please contact Ann Marie Lane at [AnnMarieL@md-council.org](mailto:AnnMarieL@md-council.org) or call 410-937-4957.

**1. Knowing yourself** means, you know your strengths, your needs, and what your interests are. Maybe you are good at drawing or you are good at solving math problems. If you already know these things, then that means you know your strengths. But, not everybody is good at everything and there are things that we may not be so good at. Maybe you are not good at spelling words or maybe you are not good at finding items in the grocery store. It is important that you know what you are not good at so that you can ask for help from others.

**Knowing what interest you have and sharing that information with others is important!**

*What do I like to do with my free time?*

*Do I like working with people or alone?*

*Do I want to continue with my education after High School?*

If you want to learn more about your specific interest check out the websites, listed at the end of this article, for information about Interest Inventories. You can also ask your counselors or teachers.

*John was talking with his parents about his next IEP (Individual Education Program) meeting at school. His parents thought it would be a good idea for the school to help John with preparing for work and to help him get a job next year. John really liked that idea. His parents wanted John to get a job at a nursery, since he liked to be outside a lot. John said no he would not like that. He liked to be outside but did not like plants or working in the yard! He said he really would like to think about working with animals.*

**2. Making decisions** means you are able to think about a situation and make the choice that is best for you. To make an informed decision, first, identify your choices. Next, think about, and maybe discuss with a trusted friend, family member or teacher, the good and bad points of each choice. Then, decide on the one choice that best fits what you want. Later, review your decision and see if it worked out the way you wanted. If it did not you can go back and make some changes!

*John talked with his teachers and parents about his interest in working with animals. John said he would like to work with animals and the IEP Team came up with some choices for him to consider. First choice was Petsmart. They needed someone to assist in the store, working in the fish department stocking shelves, doing general cleaning and helping take care of the fish. Second choice was a doggy day care center, cleaning cages and helping to exercise the dogs. The last choice was a veterinary office, working at whatever was needed, like cleaning the examination rooms, working with the animals that were staying overnight, and doing some office work.*

*John didn't like to clean, but all of the jobs involved some cleaning. He also wasn't interested in fish, so Petsmart was out! John decided on the vet's office because he would get to work with many different kinds of animals. The team understood and wrote some goals in John's IEP to work on office skills to help prepare him for his job.*

# Self-Determined!

**3. Solving problems** means you are able to think about a problem and choose a way to fix that problem. Then, deciding if what you chose worked in fixing the problem. Maybe it has been hard following directions in class or finishing a task at your job. Using problem-solving skills could help you fix that problem.

*Last week, Jane was hired to work on the weekends at her favorite clothing store. Since Jane doesn't have her driver's license and her job is too far to walk, she would need to take the bus. On Jane's first day of work, Jane did not hear her alarm ring and missed the bus making her late for work. Jane knew that if she waited for the next bus she would be late to work and knew that she needed to think of a way to fix the problem. Instead of waiting for the next bus, Jane decided to call her father and ask him for a ride. When Jane arrived at work, she was on time and knew that by asking her father for a ride she made the right decision because she was not late.*

**4. Setting goals** is very common and most people set goals everyday of their lives. A goal is something that a person wants to do or achieve. Sometimes people need a plan to help them reach that goal. It is important that once you set a goal for yourself that you map out how you will complete that goal. Transition Planning, at your IEP meeting, is how your long and short-term goals are developed to help you successfully move from school to the adult world. These goals are the map to your future!

**5. Self-advocacy** is when you speak up for yourself and understand your rights and responsibilities. As a person with a disability, you have basic rights and it is important that you know what these are so that you know that they are being met. For example, all students with disabilities have the right to a "free appropriate public education," until you exit high school. That means that you have the right to go to school and receive the services and supports you need to get an education at no cost.

It is important to make decisions and speak up for yourself so that you can make your life what you want it to be. If you do not make your own decisions, then everyone else will make them for you. Keep in mind that most people talk with trusted friends, family members and teachers before making important decisions. Getting advice helps you make good decisions that are right for you.

*Alex has a disability and sometimes has a hard time reading his textbook in his history class. One day, Alex's teacher asked everyone to read chapter one silently to themselves. Once Alex began reading, he saw many words that he didn't know and had a hard time understanding the chapter. Instead of Alex pretending to read the chapter, he knew that he could ask for help. So, he spoke up for himself and asked to be paired with a reading partner. Alex and his partner finished reading the chapter together in the back of the classroom.*

The **Youth Empowerment Alliance (YEA)** is a project of the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council which promotes independence and leadership skills in youth<sup>1</sup> and young adults with disabilities.

The **YEA** seeks to engage youth and emerging leaders with disabilities in activities that will enable them to define a vision for themselves and their communities. The result will be a successful transition and a higher quality of life for each individual.



Any youth or young adult interested in participating in YEA Project activities, please contact:

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YEA Project Director  
410-937-4957

[AnnMarieL@md-council.org](mailto:AnnMarieL@md-council.org)

(1) Refers to youth at least 14 years of age

# Resources: Learn more about being a self-determined person

## [www.youthhood.org](http://www.youthhood.org)

"The Government Link" will give you great information about your rights in school, home, work and the court system.

## [www.fvkasa.org](http://www.fvkasa.org)

"Kids as Self-advocates" will give you information about leadership and self-advocacy.

## [www.nyln.org](http://www.nyln.org)

"National Youth Leadership Network" will give you information about leadership opportunities for youth with disabilities.

## [www.md-ylf.org](http://www.md-ylf.org)

"MD Youth Leadership Forum" provides youth preparing to exit school with training and experiences, role models, and mentors to assist them in becoming tomorrow's leaders.

## [www.thearcmd.org/programs/people\\_on\\_the\\_go.html](http://www.thearcmd.org/programs/people_on_the_go.html)

"People On the Go" of Maryland is a group of self-advocates who believe all people with challenges should be included in school, work, and independent living.

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