



# YOUTH EMPOWERMENT ALLIANCE

ISSUE 5 2007

## Transition Conference

The transition conference held at Martin's West in November was a huge success! The conference "Navigating the Road from School to Adulthood for ALL Youth with Disabilities" is an annual conference held in November. Last year was the first time the conference included session specifically for transition age youth. There were 59 youth who attended the conference this year, up from only 25 last year. Overall conference attendance is usually over 500.

The youth who attended the conference were very excited about the experience. Some comments were "Can I come again next year" and "I liked the one about the clothes and I really liked the food"

If you missed the conference this year, make sure you look for the registration materials next year!



## Recreation: Everyone enjoying life!

*"I can learn more about a person in an hour of play than in a lifetime of conversation."* Plato (philosopher)

### Free Time

Do you like having fun? Who do you like hanging out with? Where do you like to be when you are relaxing? What excites you everyday? Look to recreation for connecting with friends.

Recreation can be anything you enjoy doing that is based on your interest or pleasure. Many times you are with friends who share the same interests, NOT the same disability. Recreation should be participating in the same activities in the community as your neighbors and friends without disabilities. What do you want to do with your free time?

Recreation can be walking in the park, playing basketball, being part of a video game club, or going to a concert. Recreation is voluntary, which means you do it because you want to do it. Recreation is different than attending school, going to work or doing other things that you have to do. Recreation can help you learn new things and have fun at the same time.

### The Joy of Recreation

Do you enjoy laughing and being with friends? If so, recreation is the path to happiness. Recreation can help you relax, be healthy and help you feel good about yourself. You know, have great self esteem! Everyone feels better by hanging out with people that are their age and have similar interest. However, people with disabilities do not always have the opportunity to participate and be included in community recreation activities.

Everyone should have recreation opportunities available to them. Meeting new people allows you to widen your friendship base. Friendship helps get rid of loneliness and makes you feel more pleasure in life. It also improves your health by building self-esteem and decreasing stress.

Recreation helps you find other people with similar interests. Others who will accept you for who you are. It focuses on the enjoyment of the activity not the abilities of the participants.

(continued)



# Recreation: Everyone enjoying life!

## YEA UPDATE

### *Promoting Involvement of Individuals with in School and Community Activities*

## RECREATION SUPPORT PLAN

1. **Gather a team of friends and family to help develop a recreation support action plan.**
2. **Identify your interest - activities.**
3. **Find out where and when these recreation activities are being offered in your community for youth/young adults without disabilities.**
4. **Decide on a recreation activity you want to participate in.**
5. **List your goal(s) for the activity.**
6. **Develop a list of possible supports you may need.**
7. **Write your goals and needed supports for the activity. Share these with the recreation provider.**
8. **Thank your team members for their support!**

### **Making a Plan**

The key to enjoying recreation is planning. One good way to plan is person-centered planning, which starts and ends with YOU! Through person-center planning, other people that know you well can help you develop a plan to get involved in the recreational activities that interest you. Ask your parents, teacher, school counselor, or friends to help you get a group together of people who are important to you. This group can talk about making a plan to get you more involved in recreational activities.

Planning starts with you identifying activities that interest you, the things you like to do. First, make a list of your interest and some activities you might want to be involved in. (e.g. swimming, bowling, hiking, dancing, playing games, sports) You know what is best for you; let the others know what you want. Then let the team help you make it happen.

Next, find out where those activities are being offered in your community. Is it in your back yard? At the YMCA, Community Center, Chess or Drama Club, golf course, or walking in the park? Look at your interest and see where these happen in the community. How can you find recreation in your community? (Check the websites at the end of the article) Don't focus on recreation programs just for people with disabilities. They separate youth with and without disabilities from learning and enjoying each other. *The questions you should ask yourself are:*

- *What recreation activities happen in my neighborhood for young people without disabilities?*
- *When and where do they meet?*
- *Are the activities accessible or can they be moved to a location that is accessible for everyone?*

OK, so now, you know what kind of activities you want to be involved with. You also know where they are being offered in your community. On to the next step—how to make it happen.

### **Making It Happen**

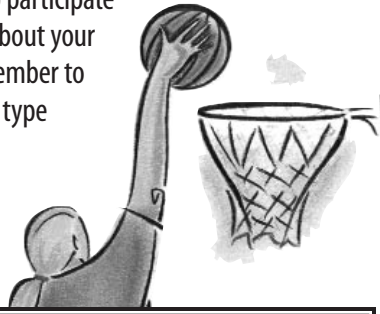
Another important question to ask yourself is what is my GOAL for this recreation activity? If you are taking swimming lessons, is the goal to know how to swim or is it to get some exercise? Depending on the activity and your goal(s) you may need some SUPPORT to be successful.



Support can be any type of assistance. A person that has a visual disability and is snow skiing can be supported by a lead skier. A person creating a picture may need to use a paint brush with an enlarged handle. The support needed is determined by the person's goal when they start the recreational activity. Be sure that your goals are clear to the recreational providers, coaches, PE teachers, parents and others. Use natural supports and keep it as simple as possible. (e.g. use a classmate as a buddy, modify existing equipment, or adjust time restraints for games)

People with disabilities should be included in designing their own recreation support action plans. Your voice should be listened to because you know best. How can support you receive make your life better? What accommodations or assistive technology do you need to be successful in a recreation activity? If you enjoy bowling, and need support, you may use special equipment to assist in holding the ball or throwing it down the lane.

You have already decided on the recreation activity you want to participate in and where it is being offered in the community. Next, think about your goal(s) for the activity and what support(s) you will need. Remember to consider program and physical access when thinking about the type of supports you will need. Finally, you need to share all of this information with the recreational provider.



Now, using your recreation support plan, just MAKE IT HAPPEN!

**PROGRAM ACCESS** means supporting programs being available to every individual. In baseball a person with limited mobility hits the ball. Then the fastest teammate runs the bases. Next, the person that hit the ball goes to the base the teammate is on. Once you have access to an activity you can use your gifts, talents, and abilities to have fun.

**PHYSICAL ACCESS** means supporting every individual the right of admission to activities. This can mean having a ramp at the entrance to the gym for wheelchair access. It can also mean having a zero depth entry in a swimming pool. Or having a lift that takes a person into the pool. People with disabilities should be assisting with solving physical access ideas.

## Become a Recreation Change Agent

How can you make recreation activities in your community more inclusive? Is it easy? Not always, but most of the time it is if you do some of the following:

- Join recreation committees/boards that look at how to better include people with disabilities. Encourage policy and procedures to be more user friendly. Let others know that young people can have good ideas!
- Talk with recreation providers, educators, people with and without disabilities and parents and let them know what you want. Don't be afraid to share your ideas.
- Ask if staff have been trained on how to best work with people with disabilities knowing that each person is different.
- Review materials and websites advertising recreation activities. Let the recreation providers know your opinion.

*Is the material at an accessible reading level?*

*Did it include pictures of people of all abilities?*

*Did they use people first language?*

- Review accessibility issues and let the recreation providers know your results.  
*Are the programs accessible to youth/young adults of all abilities?*  
*Are the facility and activities physically accessible to youth/young adults of all abilities?*  
*Are youth/young adults with disabilities playing an active role in the programs they are involved in?*
- Brainstorm to create inclusive recreation networks including people with and without disabilities, parents, advocacy groups, recreation experts, and interested people.

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:**

**Ann Marie Lane,  
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

# Community Resources

**Maryland Recreation & Park Association**  
(find different Park & Recreation Departments)  
www.mrpanet.org

**Maryland Outdoors**  
www.dnr.state.md.us/outdoors

**Maryland Recreation and the Arts**  
www.portaltomaryland.com/recreation.htm

**Accessibility for All--Maryland**  
www.dnr.state.md.us/accessforall

**National Center on Accessibility**  
www.ncaonline.org/index.shtml

**National Institute for Recreation Institute**  
www.nrpa.org/content/default.aspx?documentId=665

**The National Center on Physical Activity and Disability**  
www.ncpad.org

**National Recreation and Park Association**  
www.nrpa.org

**YMCA**  
www.ymca.net

The community resources listed will help support you, your families and friends, to become involved in a variety of community-based recreational activities and programs. The listed resources can provide technical assistance as well as knowledge on including every individual.

***“ Many of our most meaningful and lasting relationships are developed around the backyard, on the playground, and on the sports fields. ”***

**Matthew Frye**  
(Program Director, Northwest Passages)

As a person with a disability who wrote this article, Mark Ohrenberg has benefited from recreation that has been inclusive. I work at the University of Missouri-Kansas City Institute for Human Development which is part of the University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD). If you have any questions you may contact me at [ohrenbergm@umkc.edu](mailto:ohrenbergm@umkc.edu) and (816) 235-1767.

Federal Grant No. 90DN0193 A Project of National Significance, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Developmental Disabilities, Washington, DC

Maryland DD Council  
217 E. Redwood St. • Ste 1300  
Baltimore, MD 21202

