



# *Taking Control of Your Life!*

## **MDDC/YEA – Youth Leadership Training**

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# Introduction

The leadership program “*Taking Control of Your Life*” is designed to engage youth and young adults with disabilities, as emerging leaders, in activities that will help them transition from school to the adult world.

By participating in the different units of the program, youth will improve their social and academic outcomes. They will do so by strengthening their skills and competencies in person-centered, responsible decision-making and by increased involvement in their IEP development.

In addition, youth and young adults with disabilities will learn to speak up for themselves to get the supports and services they need within their communities and at their places of employment. Through this program, they will move towards independence as they acquire self-advocacy and leadership skills.



## Goals for the Program

*To provide youth and young adults with disabilities the opportunity to:*

- participate in activities to build self-awareness and confidence.
- learn and use skills of self-advocacy and self-determination.
- understand and use the process of choice, informed decision-making, and problem solving.
- identify their strengths, challenges, and interests.
- learn about disability disclosure.
- understand their disability and how it affects their life at school, at home, and in the community.
- develop and share their vision for the future with the IEP Team and have that vision become the basis for the goals on their IEP.
- understand how community services/resources are important to being successful in the adult world.
- select and access appropriate services/resources/activities to meet their current and future needs.
- identify work skills and abilities.
- begin career planning.
- learn strategies to find and apply for a job.

# Overview

Each of the four units is organized around a set of questions. Each lesson in a unit involves discussions and activities that will help increase the knowledge and develop the skills and abilities that the youth/young adults will need to answer the questions.

## **Unit 1 – Self-advocacy/Self-determination and Leadership**

- How Do I Understand Self-advocacy/Self-determination?
- How Do I Learn More About Myself?
- How Do I Use These New Skills?

## **Unit 2 – Developing a Vision Through the IEP Process**

- How Do I Choose MY Vision?
- How Do I Shape MY Vision?
- How Do I Make MY Vision Come True?

## **Unit 3 – Identifying and Using Community Services/ Resources**

- How Do I Become an Informed Consumer of Community Services/ Resources?
- How Do I Use Community Services/Resources?

## **Unit 4 – Learning About Employment**

- How Do I Plan for Employment?
- How Do I Get Employed?
- How Do I Stay Employed?

## How to Use This Guide

The leadership program “*Taking Control of Your Life*” contains four units, each consisting of nine or ten 1-hour lesson plans. Each lesson clearly outlines materials needed, suggested time for each activity, accessibility tips for diverse learners, and goals and objectives for each lesson. The activities include background information, detailed directions, handouts, and resource materials.

Instructors are encouraged to adapt the material to meet the unique needs of the students and/or setting in which the training will take place. They may also substitute material or activities as appropriate. A list of extra resources appears at the end of each unit.

### Instructors

This program is designed to be, and will be most effective, co-led by a professional, a youth with a disability, and a youth without a disability. It has a dual purpose:

- 1) to promote the leadership skills of the youth/young adult instructors, and
- 2) to highlight these instructors as peer models for the students involved in the training.

Peer influence is very strong in the age group we are trying to encourage to become emerging leaders. What better way to show the students how to become more self-determined!

Before the beginning of the training sessions, the adult/professional instructor should have ample time to train the youth instructors in basic teaching methods. Some examples:

- How to encourage students to participate in discussions, rather than to just lecture the class:
  - Introduce topic and give some background information.
  - Ask a question of the group.
  - Be patient. Count silently to 10. Give the students time to think and volunteer.
  - If no response, give a little more information or rephrase the question and try again.
  - If still no response, try giving two answers to the question and asking a volunteer which one is better.
  - Don't give up. Once the group feels safe, people will begin to participate!

- How to conduct a brainstorming session – no more than 3- 5 minutes!
  - Have the students offer as many ideas as they can think of, as quickly as they can. Just list the ideas—no discussion. The class can discuss them later.
  - Explain the ground rules to the class before beginning. Then keep things moving as quickly as you can!
    - Think of as many ideas/thoughts as you can on the subject.
    - We will have no debate or discussion.
    - All ideas/thoughts will be accepted—no matter how strange they sound!
  
- How to use the “think, pair, share” method
  - Set a time for each person to think about or write an answer.
  - Have the students discuss their answers with one other person.
  - Have some students share their answers with the whole group.
  
- How to work with small groups
  - Give the group clear directions for the task.
    - Define roles, if appropriate (e.g., recorder, timekeeper, and reporter).
  - Set a time limit for the task.
  - Check that the group understands the task.
  - Provide needed supports (scribe, reader, facilitator, etc.).
  
- How to work effectively with a diverse group of individuals
  - Provide information, demonstrations on various supports, or modifications that students might need. (Review general accessibility tips in this section and specific tips listed in each lesson plan.)

Youth instructors should have as much opportunity as possible to assume leadership/training roles within the training sessions. It is also important to ensure that students have opportunities to model effective leadership. They need to be able to build upon their strengths and achieve success in a safe, supporting environment.

## Creating a Learning Community

Discuss with students the need to develop a list of agreements for learning and working together as a community/class. Introduce the idea of brainstorming and sharing information about themselves or ideas in a safe, caring, and positive environment. Brainstorm agreements such as these: all ideas are accepted; make positive, helpful comments only; talk one at a time; keep information shared confidential.

## Pictures/Symbols

Use pictures/symbols along with words whenever possible to increase understanding. The following symbols are used throughout this training program:



Beginning of activity or material needed



Anticipated time of session



List of possible accommodations needed for the lesson



Goals and objectives for the lesson

## General Accessibility Tips

### Working with Students of Diverse Abilities

A primary goal of this program is to increase self-esteem and leadership skills of youth with disabilities. It is essential to structure all aspects of the training sessions to promote active participation of all. Each lesson plan offers accessibility tips for that specific lesson.

Instructors will need to assess the needs of individual students and provide any needed supports to help each student be successful. The most effective way to do this is to ask the students!

Here are some additional tips to think about before getting started:

- **Consider the students' differences in ability.** Some examples are:
  - Visual/Reading – share information aloud. If you want someone to read aloud, ask for volunteers. Provide a reader for individual or small group work, as needed. Use large print (size 18 font), highlight and/or background color, or Braille, as needed by students.
  - Writing/Copying – provide scribes for lessons as needed. Use chart paper or chalk board to write materials for students to copy. Provide opportunities for discussion before asking students to write/give answers.
  - Directions – use written/visual directions as well as verbal directions. Avoid multi-step directions; provide one-two step directions.
  - Flexible Workgroups – use whole class, small group, pairs, and individual approaches.
  
- **Provide visuals/demonstrations/examples as much as possible.**
  - Pictures/drawings/symbols
  - Charts/videos/audio tapes
  - Demonstrated directions before you ask students to complete an activity
  - Instructor-generated examples before you ask for students answers
  
- **Structure activities so that students can communicate and participate in a variety of ways.** Remember that communication is more than speech: it can happen through art, relationships, interactions, and gestures. Allow for different forms of participation. Be creative! Some examples are:
  - Think, Pair, Share strategy
  - Role-play
  - Games
  - Group discussions
  - Brainstorming
  - Problem-solving activities
  - Art and/or crafts projects
  - Drawings



- ***Provide positive feedback to students.*** Support and encourage all students' attempts to participate. Be patient. Some students need extra time to formulate and share their ideas.
- ***See the environment as students do,*** and understand why it is sometimes hard to stay in chairs. Plan sessions so that students can move around or escape if necessary.
- ***Be aware that some people are environmentally sensitive.*** Here are some examples of accommodations you may need to make: Hold meetings in rooms with as much natural light as possible so that you can turn off florescent lights that make distracting noises. Provide a choice of chairs for a meeting. Sometimes cushy chairs are just too soft, or they may be too uncomfortable or distracting if they have slats in the back.
- ***Locate resources in your area for producing material in alternate formats,*** such as Braille, audiotapes, etc. Many area Independent Living Centers have resources for alternate formats or can identify vendors locally. You can easily make Large Print by using 18 or larger font and double spacing materials.

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### **Additional Information:**

Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council – [www.md-council.org](http://www.md-council.org)  
MSDE – Division of Rehabilitation Services – [www.dors.state.md.us](http://www.dors.state.md.us)  
Administration of Developmental Disabilities – [www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/add/](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/add/)

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### **Unit Authors:**

LaVerne Buchanan  
Ann Marie Lane  
Denise Marshall  
Marianne Mooney

Content Editor – AM Lane  
Editor – Joyce Lipman  
Cover Graphics – Tracy Smith  
Content Layout – Anne Bennett

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### **Youth and Young Adult**

Candyce Atherley  
Adams Barba III  
Cory Barnhord  
Alvin Bennett  
Courtney Butash  
Jen Cook  
Eboni Cook  
Edith Daniello  
Chris DeLong  
M. Carolina Dena  
Antoine Diggs  
Hirsh Feierstein  
Tzipora Frager  
Isaac Garris  
Monet Gaskios  
Trey Griffin  
Michael Henry  
Demika Hicks  
Jaclyn Hoglund  
Joanna Jason  
Jenelle Julien  
Jessica Miller  
Quintanna Moody  
Caitlin Munro  
Daniel Nicolas  
Audra Nobles

Andrew Pegg  
V.J. Piscano  
Jennifer Ramirez  
Jason Reed  
Micah Robinson  
Brilliant Semenoa  
Ashley Stilson  
Alex Tenaglio  
Kenyon Turner  
Steven Voudouris  
Justin Walker  
Wesley Waters  
Amber Wojciechowski  
Jeremy Yarkshire

### **Community Members and Professionals**

Joseph Anastasio  
Marta Bohorquez  
Nancy Brugh  
Angela Castillo-Epps  
Anne Cerruto  
Melonee Clark  
Brian Cox  
Meg Gregal  
Michelle Hart  
Barbara Koeneke  
Sharon Kros

Karen Kunkle  
Sandy Kyle  
Kim Lewis  
Michelle Lucas  
Cathy Lyle  
Gregory Lynch  
Kim Marchment  
Sherril Moon  
Kathleen Moore  
Ori Natividad  
Mitch Neiburger  
Kelli Nelson  
Linda Nelson  
Robin Nemser  
Debra Neubert  
Naomi Ortiz  
Paula Parrish  
Mary Lynn Pegg  
Susan Rattman  
Jane Schuler  
Joyce Serio  
Oma Gail Simmons  
Yvette Snowden  
John Stem  
Ginny Toy  
Lyndee Waldbauer

### **Groups**

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