

Mounting Horizons Inc.



How to Start a Young Adult Advocates Leadership Club



CONTENTS

Introduction

Introduction to Y.A.A.L. Club program..... 3

What is the Y.A.A.L. Club?

Overview of program components..... 4

Partnering with Youth

Building successful relationships..... 5

Planning the Program

Steps to get your club started..... 6

Designing the Program

How to design an effective program..... 11

Lesson Resource

Lesson example to get you started..... 13

Accomplishing the Work

Selecting and implementing ideas..... 17

Evaluation

Methods to assess knowledge gained..... 19

Participant Feedback

What are participants saying..... 20

Appendices

Resources and sample projects..... 21

Contact

Let us help you get started..... 24



INTRODUCTION

The resource was developed by staff and Y.A.A.L. Club participants to:

- Provide a “how to” guide to starting a Young Adult Advocates Leadership (Y.A.A.L.) club.
- Share resources and lessons learned.
- Empower and inspire others to start a club in their area.

This guide is for schools, centers, and organizations, that serve young adults with disabilities any ages, but we trained young adults ages 14 - 22 year old. We created this resource from the lessons we learned by facilitating youth advocacy and leadership programs.

Freely modify these ideas to create a program that is specific to your circumstances.

We recognize that the ideas presented here are unique to us and our Center’s processes, but we know these ideas can be a springboard to creating, supporting, and improving leadership programs across Texas.



Y.A.A.L club creates an opportunity to build leadership and self-advocacy skills, foster positive group dynamics, and increase civic and community engagement. We believe that young adults serve as agents of change in their community.



This project is supported by the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities (TCDD) through a grant from the U.S. Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C., 20201. Grant number available by request. Grantees receiving government sponsorship are encouraged to express their findings and conclusions. Opinions do not necessarily represent official TCDD or ACL policy.



What is the Y.A.A.L. Club

Program Components:



Goal: Increase the number of youth with the ability to advocate for themselves and others and are engaged in leadership roles and public advocacy.



- **Monthly meetings** to learn leadership and self-advocacy skills, participate in exploration activities, and work together to advocate for change in their community.



- **Quarterly policy-making meetings** to see leadership in action and learn that their voice and experiences are valued and heard.



- **Annual forum** to share how they are advocating for change in their communities to increase civic and community involvement and train other youth how to become self-advocates.



PARTNERING WITH YOUTH

Adults are essential partners with young adults for the success of the Y.A.A.L. club.

To ensure young adults are ready to lead and feel confident in their self-advocacy efforts, adults should:

- Provide coaching
- Act as a liaison
- Help organize
- Build relationships
- Empower and inspire
- Provide consistency

Partnerships are an effective way to engage young adults in meaningful activities that contribute to positive youth development. Through this experience, young people build skills such as reasoning, decision making and self-regulation. Authentic youth engagement not only helps young people build their self-esteem, leadership, and advocacy, it also increases their influence and personal stake in the community.



PLANNING THE PROGRAM

The following steps will help in planning all aspects of the program.



Recruitment



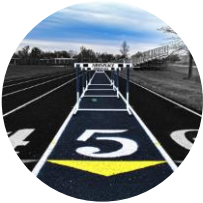
Audience



**Program
Objectives**



Topics



**Teaching
Methods**



Time Frame



Location



Budget



PLANNING THE PROGRAM

Recruitment

- A sponsor who is vested in the goals of the Y.A.A.L. Club is vital. Their guidance is essential for creating structure, support and assistance with resource gathering. This person will be instrumental in working with youth leadership to get the club organized and assist with membership recruitment. Their guidance is essential for creating structure, support and assistance with resource gathering. This person will be instrumental in working with youth leadership to get the club organized and assist with membership recruitment.
- Recruit the help of youth and young adult advocates and leaders who have an interest in leadership and advocacy development when forming the committee to help develop, plan, conduct and evaluate the training program.

Determine Audience

- The second step in planning an advocacy and leadership training program is to decide on the audience your program will reach. Will the program be for all age youth or only for teens? Your program will be more effective if you have age-appropriate goals and activities. MHI Y.A.A.L. Club was designed for ages 14- 22 years old.



PLANNING THE PROGRAM

Determine Program Objectives

- Writing measurable program objectives is the next important task. Using a system of testing objectives called SMART, (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely) can help you in writing your objectives.
- Objectives may include statements such as:
 1. 100 percent of the participants will write an advocacy goal by the end of the training session.
 2. 100 percent of the participants will be able to list five positive characteristics by the end of the training session.
 3. 90 percent of the participants will be able to list three active listening techniques by the end of the training session.

Select Topics and Activities

- Once objectives are written, decide what topics you want to feature in each session. Examples include:
 1. Self-esteem
 2. Self-development
 3. Communication
 4. Ethics and values
 5. Understanding advocacy
 6. Understanding leadership
 7. Goal attainment
 8. Group dynamics
 9. Teamwork
 10. Problem solving
- There are many sources of information that feature activities and lesson plans on advocacy and leadership. When engaging in



PLANNING THE PROGRAM

activities, think of your audience. What are their hobbies and interests? Do you have a lot of visual learners in the group and do some individuals have specific accommodations they need, like interpretive services?

- When meeting in-person is not possible, online resources can be effective. Having an engaging virtual meeting requires implementing fun and immersive activities, that ensure that everyone can participate to their fullest ability. Check out the list in Appendix A and see if any tools listed could benefit your own Y.A.A.L. Club Meetings.

Determine Teaching Methods

- When deciding which method to use remember that greater learning takes place when people see, hear, and do something. Based on the age of participants and length of program, you will need to decide what methods you use to teach the selected topics.

Methods may include:

1. Group discussion
2. Role playing
3. Lectures
4. Group activities



PLANNING THE PROGRAM

Determine Time Frame

- Based on objectives written and topics selected, determining the length of your training program is the next step. Try not to cover too many topics in a short length of time. Programs can be scheduled for a day conference, a weekend retreat, or a series of one-hour sessions.

Select Location

- When selecting the location of your training program, select a location that will provide the type of environment that is favorable to learning. Youth typically prefer an informal environment rather than a formal classroom setting. Consider a more relaxed setting, such as a camp site or an attractive meeting room.

Set Budget

Allocate funds to cover the following costs:

1. Resource materials
2. Supplies
3. Speaker fees
4. Food for snacks & meals
5. Room or site rental fee
6. Accommodations if staying overnight

Sources or funds may come from:

1. Participant fees
2. Donations/Sponsorships
3. Grants
4. Combination of resources
5. Activity fees



DESIGNING THE PROGRAM



When designing an effective advocacy and leadership training program consider the following:

Know Where Youth are Developmentally

Young adults experience a range of social, psychological, and physical transitions that prepare and shape them for young adulthood. They are also developing the ability to see things from another's point of view and developing a commitment to a system of values. Their peers are becoming more important and family ties are weakening. As they are learning to make more decisions and take on more responsibilities, they lack experience in dealing with this new independence. Know where your participants are developmentally.

Build Self-Esteem

Young adults are experiencing increased levels of anxiety and perfectionism. Encouraging them to develop their strengths and see beyond themselves can help boost their self-esteem. Help them develop a positive self-image so they will have the confidence needed to meet the demands of leadership and advocacy.

Provide a Non-Threatening Atmosphere

Youth need to feel comfortable in participating in scheduled activities and in voicing their opinions. One of the first activities should allow members of the group to get to know one another. Youth should understand that being good



listeners is a vital component of creating a non-threatening atmosphere. This will help set the pace for the rest of the training program.

Help Youth Build Social Skills Through Group Activities

Leaders need to know how to communicate with their followers. This includes talking with the group members, listening to their ideas and concerns, and reading their reactions through nonverbal communications. Youth should be given opportunities to practice these communication skills.

Provide Opportunities for Youth to Emerge as the Leader

When providing advocacy and leadership training for youth, each individual needs to have the opportunity to experience the leader/advocate role. At times, you may find that one person in the group may dominate and not let others have the experience of leading the group. Program planners should ensure that each participant has his or her turn at being the leader.

Provide for Planning and Decision Making

Invite youth to be a part of the program and give them tasks that are relevant. Having ownership of roles in the program and in the facilitation process will help them understand how to utilize their newly developed skills, preparing them for future advocacy and leadership roles within organizations, schools, or their community. Also, give youth participants an opportunity to provide feedback on decisions relating to the program. Give their suggestions and comments as much consideration as you would program staff and facilitators. Allow youth to serve as catalysts for change in their personal lives, the organizations in which they belong and communities in which they live. Once they have achieved success, they will continue to strive for more demanding and difficult roles in adulthood.[1]

*Information modified from **Designing Youth Leadership Training Programs from KSU***



LESSON RESOURCE

Lesson resources about advocacy and leadership can be found online, bookstores, university leadership programs, etc. Be creative and create your own lesson and/or project based on your community needs. On the next few pages we have shared a sample advocacy lesson.

Advocacy Lesson

Introduction

Read aloud to participants:

Advocacy active promotion of a cause or principle. Advocacy involves taking action in order to achieve a selected goal or outcome. Here is an example to help you understand the difference between advocacy and being a volunteer. An example of being a volunteer is joining a with and without an intellectual disability during recess. An example of being an advocate is organizing an extracurricular activity to take place during recess (such as a kickball league, craft club, etc.) that is available to all of your classmates, independent of their skill level. As an advocate for individuals with intellectual disabilities you see all your peers as equals and try to create an environment where everyone has a role to play regardless of their skill level.

Advocacy is important because there is still a lot of unfairness, exclusion and misunderstanding within our society. People are not all treated fairly and equally. As such, it is important that we have advocates in our community that support and stand up for their own rights and the rights of their peers and neighbors.

Lesson excerpt from Re:Action4Inclusion Curriculum www.reaction4inclusion.com



Activity #1: Identifying and Articulating your Message

PART A: Identifying your Message (Total time: 40 minutes)

Materials:

- Cue cards
- Pens
- Flipchart paper and markers
- Participant Worksheet



Directions:

1. Divide the large group into smaller groups of 3-4 people.
2. Give each group 4-5 blue cue cards and ask them to brainstorm different issues/causes that they would like to be advocates for (5 minutes).
3. As the participants are writing down their answers, collect the filled out cue cards and tape them onto chart paper at the front of the room.
4. As a large group read through all of the issues/causes and have each group select two that they would like to explore further (5 minutes).
5. Give each group a worksheet and 3 green cue cards and ask them to work through the following questions (20 minutes):
Thinking about your issue/cause, answer the following questions (on the worksheet):
 - a. Who is affected by the issue?
 - b. Who is your target audience and how will you engage them?
 - c. How does the issue link or divide different people within your community?
 - d. What are the impacts of the issue?
 - e. What is/are the goal(s) of your advocacy campaign?
6. Debrief the exercise by asking a representative from each group to share what they wrote (10 minutes).



PART B: Articulating your Message (Total time: 10 minutes)

This part of the exercise will provide participants with the opportunity to identify the key message(s) associated with their campaign from Part A and think about how they would articulate this to their target audience. An example of a campaign and three key messages is outlined below, but you are encouraged to replace this example with your own project. This is the perfect time to introduce your project to the group and outline 1-3 of your key messages.

Read aloud to participants:

Now that you have defined the goal of your advocacy campaign and identified the target audience, it is time to articulate your message. Think about what you want to tell people about your campaign. What do you want people to remember and react to? What can you tell people that will encourage them to act in a manner that will help you achieve the goal of your campaign?



Campaign: Organizing a waste program that provides parks with garbage bins, recycling bins and compost binds

Key Messages:

1. **Recycling saves the earth!** Recycling helps to preserve natural resources, such as trees, because new products are made from recycled produces instead of raw materials.
2. **Recycling reduces pollution!** Factories that make new products put greenhouse gases into the air. By recycling our products, not as many new products are needed.
3. **Sorting waste helps to reduce the size of landfills.** Sorting your waste in the three appropriate bins will reduce the amount of waste sent to landfills which have social and environmental impacts.



Activity #2: Moving from Advocacy to Action

After completing Activity #1, participants will have gained a better understanding of what advocacy means and why it is important. This second activity will have participants brainstorming tools that can be used to move from advocacy to action.

Barriers to Advocacy

- Not understanding the importance of advocating for yourself, your peers, the environment, etc.
- Feeling uncomfortable or worried about what others will think.
- Not knowing how you can make a difference or steps you should take to put your idea into action.

Read aloud to participants:

The second step is actually creating a plan to take action to solve the issue or improve the experience of your target audience. We will now start to think about the ways you can engage people to participate in your campaign and achieve your goal.

Here are some examples of traditional advocacy tools:

Rally - A gathering intended to inspire enthusiasm for cause

Sit-in - Any organized protest in which a group of people peacefully occupy and refuse to leave an area

Demonstration - A public meeting or march protesting against something or expressing views on an issue.

Petition- A formal written request made to an authority or organized body (such as a court).

In the age of the Internet, many advocacy campaigns are using online tools, such as: emails, websites, social media, podcasts, blogs and electronic newsletters to name a few. Other modern advocacy tools include the development and distribution of fact sheets, brochures and posters as well as hosting special events and information sessions.

ACCOMPLISHING THE WORK

Setting Up Meetings

In order to maximize attendance, it is important to get youth input on meeting days and times. You may have to go through a trial and error phase in order to find a time that's the best fit for the group. Once you find that fit, stick with it and be consistent!

Determining a Mission/ Goals

In order to establish a firm foundation for your club, consider working with your youth to develop a mission statement, goals, and/or bylaws. Each of these pieces will help to bring clarity to the purpose of the Y.A.A.L. club and guide the group through projects and meetings.

"Young Adult Advocates with Different Abilities advocating for themselves and others, to make changes in their lives and the community, and educate themselves about what they can achieve."



Projects

Projects are a great way for the Y.A.A.L. members to advocate, show leadership, and relay positive messages. Whether you do one, two, or ten projects per year, providing the opportunity for youth to collaborate and create a finished product will help them to feel a sense of belonging and a sense of purpose, both as individuals and as a group.





Planning Meetings

Ideally, Y.A.A.L. meetings are led by youth. Meetings may be led by the group's president or vice president, co-directors, or a youth with particularly strong facilitation skills. It is likely that this will not be the case in the very beginning stages, but as soon as it's possible, the coordinator and youth leaders can work towards a model where youth set the agenda and facilitate meetings.

Sample Agenda

- Ice Breaker (student led)
- Topic lesson
- Reflection
- Eat food & socialize

Leadership Selection

If your Y.A.A.L. club decides to create leadership positions within your club the next step is to determine how youth will be selected for those positions. It is important that this process is consistent, fair, and transparent.



Building Community within the Y.A.A.L. Club

Establishing a sense of community is necessary in creating and maintaining a high-functioning Y.A.A.L. club. Adolescents may feel pressure to fit into social groups in school or to act a certain way, but many Y.A.A.L. members indicate that they enjoy the Y.A.A.L. club because they can be themselves there.

Shaping Roles/Responsibilities

Setting a foundation for a thriving Y.A.A.L. club requires a balance between adult support and youth voice. Outlining the responsibilities of both the youth members and the Y.A.A.L. adult coordinator helps everyone understand expectations.

Example Roles

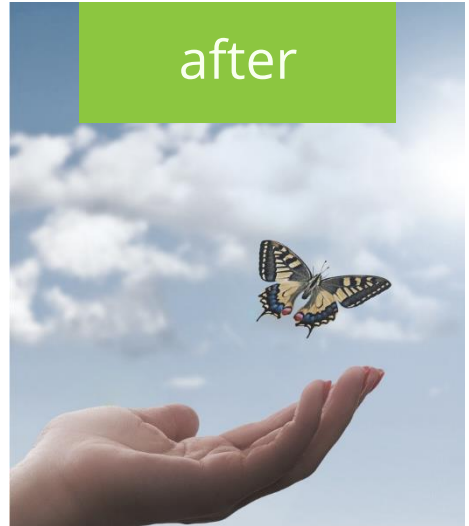
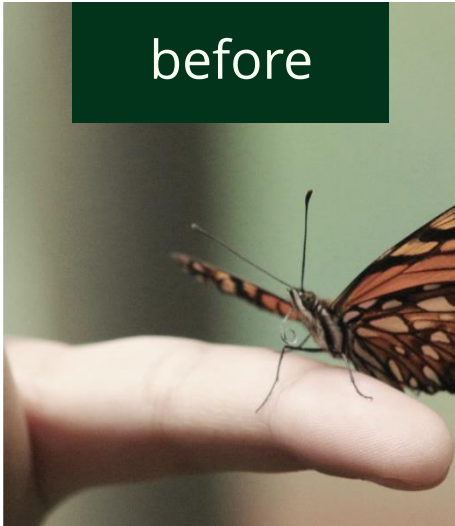
Coordinator:

1. Have consistent meeting
2. Provide food and snacks
3. Conduct the short lesson

Youth:

1. (Co)Faciliate meetings
2. Openly voice opinions
3. Carry out activities/projects

EVALUATION



Use varying methods to assess the knowledge gained by participants of the program. This will help determine if the objectives of the program were achieved. This will also help you know if the participants of the program gained the advocacy and leadership skills that were the focus of the program. Methods of data collection can include:

- Using a pre- and post-test to measure differences in knowledge before and after to indicate the understanding of concepts.
- Observation following the training, using a checklist of key skills or practices demonstrated to indicate that skills were enhanced.
- Self-assessment a year following the training to indicate active involvement in new advocacy and/or leadership roles.
- Complete evaluation at the end of the program. Evaluations provide valuable information to use in planning future training programs.



PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

Ku'Mario: "I enjoy the games and lessons that we learn about ourselves and others and I love the wonderful people."

John: Joined to see what it was like
Keep coming back for self-advocacy
Joined for social skills
Keep coming back because self-advocacy is better

Gabriel: I joined Y'all because I was informed about the program for individuals with disabilities like myself. I thought it would be a great opportunity for me to grow as an individual with disabilities. I keep coming to Y'all because I enjoy the company and I learn important information that pertains individuals with disabilities. I also enjoy participating in the activities that Y'all club provides.

Devyn: shared that she has a goal of becoming a public speaker and wants "to be confident enough to advocate for my Blind and Visually Impaired Community, especially like here in the League City Area. (Truncated domes needed)".

DeTaurus: has a firm focus on his goals, saying that "(1) Give back to the City of Dickinson where I live by starting a Food Drive for those in need a few times a year. (2) Also, give back o DHS in some way as the teachers and staff have done a lot for me. (3) To be an entrepreneur and create my own clothing line."

Nick: shared that "I advocated for myself/others in regards to COVID-19 and the importance of wearing masks and taking the vaccine" and that "I learned more about advocacy and leadership by attending our meetings, committee meetings and the Texas Advocates Conference."



APPENDIX A:

Resources for Engaging Meetings Online

- <https://www.icivics.org/>
- <https://www.rusnakcreative.com/>
- <https://www.gamesforchange.org/>
- <https://www.mentimeter.com/>
- <https://myfreebingocards.com/>
- <https://quizlet.com/>
- <https://jeopardylabs.com/>
- <https://www.quandarygame.org/>
- <https://texaslre.org/games/>
- <https://myfreebingocards.com/virtual-bingo>
- <https://www.triviaplaza.com/movie-general-quizzes/>
- <https://wheelofnames.com/>

APPENDIX B:



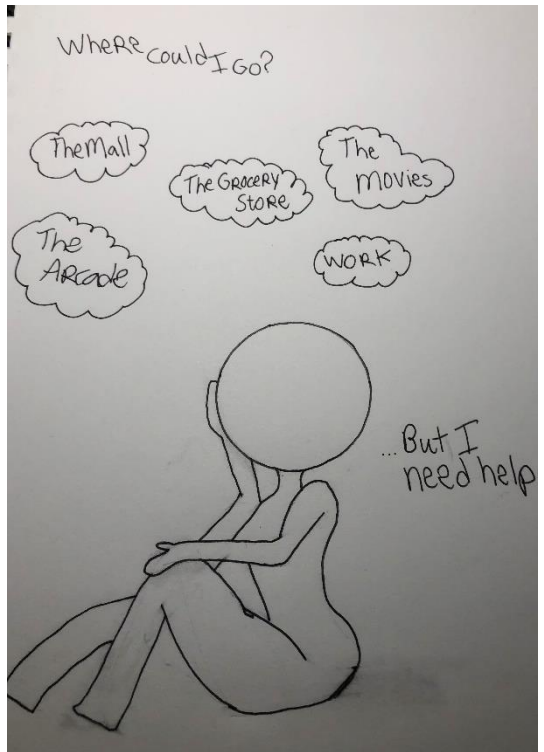
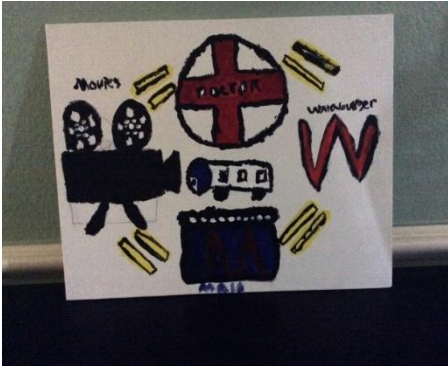
A Seat At the Table: A project focused on the topic “Representation”, with each Y.A.A.L. Participant determining how they want to be represented in society and painting a glass plate with their vision to stand in for their “seat at the table”.



Community Rocks: A project to spread awareness of advocacy goals and positivity throughout our communities, while staying socially distant during the pandemic. Each member painted a rock with their chosen messages and placed out in public in their local area for others to find.



Art of Advocacy: Each participant painted their own transportation needs and barriers, advocating for increased access to public transportation and for sensitivity training for drivers, in regards to transporting individuals with disabilities.





OFFICE LOCATIONS

Mailing Address

18062 FM 529, #151
Cypress, Texas 77433

Mounting Horizons South

951 FM 646, Unit A5
Dickinson, Texas 77539

Mounting Horizons North

17302 House Hahl Road #222
Cypress, Texas 77433

Toll Free: 1-888-307-9639

Fax: 713-422-2546

<https://mountinghorizons.org/>

follow me

 [@MHI2003](https://twitter.com/MHI2003)

 [@mhi2003](https://www.instagram.com/mhi2003)

 [@MHI2003](https://www.facebook.com/MHI2003)