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# YLF ANNUAL REPORT 2025

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*Together We Thrive:  
Building a Unified  
Disability Community*

YLF IS A PROJECT OF THE CALIFORNIA  
COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT OF  
PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN  
COLLABORATION WITH PUBLIC AND  
PRIVATE PARTNERS

# California Youth Leadership Forum for Students with Disabilities (YLF)

*2025 Annual Report*

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## Overview

The statewide California Youth Leadership Forum for Students with Disabilities (YLF) is a week-long educational program for sophomores, juniors, and seniors in high school with disabilities. Concentrated on pre-employment transition services, delegates engage in leadership activities focused on post-secondary education, career readiness, independent living, and self-advocacy. YLF began in California in 1992 and has grown to a national program held in over 30 states.

Activities throughout the week were designed to build delegates' confidence and self-advocacy skills to set goals for their lives, education and training, and employment. During the program, eight to ten delegates worked in small groups, supported by two co-counselors, two peer mentors and two group assistants. Delegates worked on activities that reinforce the key leadership goals and objectives of the program. Each day had a theme, and scheduled activities reinforced that theme. This year's themes included "Learning about Disability History", "Culture and Community", "Discovering Resources to Reach our Goals", "Living Independently", "Engaging in Our Communities", and "Leading On". In addition to small group sessions, delegates participated in large group sessions which feature presentations and discussions from young adults and professionals with disabilities who have successfully transitioned out of high school and have explored post-secondary education, work and career life, living independently, and self-advocacy.

This year's YLF statewide program was held at California State University, Sacramento, July 11-19.

## 2025 Highlights and Outcomes

After a boost in 2024, 2025 saw a continued increase in the number of youth interested in attending YLF with 180 students applying, 60 delegates selected, and 50 attending and completing the program.

Delegates learned shared experiences from established and emerging leaders with disabilities. Delegates also participated in social activities such as a talent show, a college campus tour, a visit to the California State Capitol, and a dance, which offer delegates the opportunity to socialize with fellow delegates and learn public speaking skills and interaction in a fun atmosphere.

In 2025 an additional staff training day was implemented to include sessions on mental health, conflict resolution, and disability culture awareness. Continued improvements were also made to the risk management policies.

Delegates participated in surveys to measure outcomes and growth in key concepts of self-advocacy and understanding of support needed to live independently. Youth completed a before and after survey measuring their growth in areas such as disability history, self-advocacy, resources, career goals and support needed, and independent living skills.

Topic areas with largest growth were with the following statements:

- I know about the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- I know about the disability rights movement and its leaders.
- I know where to get help finding a job.
- I know other young people with disabilities.
- I know what a CalABLE account is.
- I have a strong connection with the Disability Community.
- I know how to contact my local Independent Living Center.
- I know where to find volunteer or internship opportunities.
- I am proud to have a disability.

Additionally, delegates were asked open-ended questions to find what they learned most from the program. Response themes related to gaining confidence with independence and acceptance with being a member of the

disability community, including growing friendships, were very high. Growth in knowledge on resources and advocacy abilities were also high.

## 2025 Demographics

Many delegates shared multiple identities within demographic categories like disability and race/ethnicity. YLF achieved both gender, disability, and race/ethnicity diversity for 2025, with the highest disability and race/ethnicity group identifications being developmental disabilities including autism and/or neurodivergent, and White (Non-Hispanic/Latino), respectively. Although the majority of delegates identified as male, delegates identified as female were closely matched with remaining identifying as non-binary or did not disclose gender. The highest number of delegates were juniors in high school; the remaining were a mix of recently graduated seniors and sophomores. Delegates resided as south as San Diego County and as north as Tehama County. More delegates resided in Los Angeles County than any other county.

In recent years, an effort has been made to recruit YLF alumni and staff closer to the age of delegates for more effective peer mentorship. Of 57 on-site staff members (excluding contracted or state staff), about 79% of staff were in their 20s and 30s or older and the rest of staff were teenagers. Additionally, the vast majority were people with disabilities, and nearly half were alumni of the YLF program.

## 2025 Delegate Testimonials

“I’ve learned to be comfortable in myself for having a disability, and so much about what I can use to help my future. I also met so many amazing people that are now like a second family to me.”

“The week at YLF has been the highlight of my year and I’ll continue to remember it for the rest of my life. I appreciate the opportunity and hope to come back as a staff member one day.”

“YLF was such an incredible time to be away from home and explore more of what’s out there in the world for people with disabilities struggling with their lifestyles sometimes. I loved hearing everyone’s different perspectives about their lives, especially the panel discussions with adults. They made

the experience more enjoyable to learn. I encourage people to apply and come to YLF. You will learn so much about what you need to know for your education and about making good choices for your future.”



*YLF delegates and staff pose outside the California State Capitol’s west steps.*



*YLF delegates and staff pose on the California State Assembly Floor. Thanks to Assemblymembers Bennett and Bryan for the opportunity and tour.*



*YLF delegates and staff pose outside the Sacramento State's Hornet Bookstore during our campus tour. Stingers Up!*

## **Year-Round Activities**

In addition to the statewide program, additional year-round activities have been developed as opportunities to market the program, serve more students and increase engagement with the YLF alumni network. These opportunities include regional events, statewide conferences and presentations on YLF.

Some of the 2025 highlights include attending the California Workforce Association's *WorkCon* presenting on the power of peer mentorship in Youth Programming, attending the Ventura County Government and Disability Summit presenting on the YLF Model, and hosting three regional events. YLF alumni assist in regional events by being on panels discussing their journey to independence and employment or are keynote speakers.

## Regional Events

In collaboration with local regional partners, YLF has started piloting regional YLF events in recent years. These shorter programs include some of the same curriculum topics covered in the longstanding summer program and new topics and activities developed by the local partners. These regional events serve both as an opportunity to develop stronger partnerships and investments with our local partners, increase outreach opportunities to serve more students than just our statewide program, and offer YLF alumni to continue their leadership and self-advocacy skill building and serve as peer mentoring opportunities.



*YLF delegates and staff pose at a regional event.*

For 2025, YLF hosted three regional events including a three-day event in San Diego and two one-day events in Sacramento and Los Angeles.

Additional regional events across California are being developed and new partnerships are being established to continue the great work of YLF.

## 2025 Partners and Sponsors

Thanks to all our YLF partners and sponsors, YLF continues to offer completely free programming for students. Without their commitment, time, in-kind services, and support, YLF could not deliver the amazing work supporting transition age youth. Thanks to the California Department of Rehabilitation (DOR), the California Department of Education (CDE), the California Department of Developmental Services (DDS), the California Employment Development Department (EDD), the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), Anthem Blue Cross, the Association of California State Employees with Disabilities (ACSED), Disability Rights California (DRC), CaABLE, the State Independent Living Council (SILC), and Friends of Californians with Disabilities, Inc.

## 2026 Planning

Planning for the 2026 statewide YLF summer program and regional events are already underway. The 2026 statewide YLF will be held in-person from July 13 through July 18, 2026, at California State University, Sacramento.

California residents with any disability who are high school sophomores, juniors, or seniors during the 2025-2026 school year are eligible to apply. Students who demonstrate leadership potential in school and in the community are best suited for this program.

The statewide delegate application for YLF 2026 and more information on regional event programming is available on the YLF website!

## Contact Us

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