FACT SHEET

YOUTH LEADERSHIP FORUM (YLF)

A Unique Program for Future Community Leaders

# What is YLF?

The California Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) is a week-long career and leadership training program for high school sophomores, juniors, and seniors with disabilities. The training provides students with resources to choose and reach their education, employment, and independent living goals. YLF is presented in an entertaining and educational format while students get the opportunity to live on a college campus in Sacramento, California.

# Who participates in YLF?

Young people with disabilities who demonstrate leadership potential, academic success, involvement in extra-curricular activities, community involvement and the ability to interact with other students are welcome to apply to YLF. Students with disabilities from every public and private California high school are eligible. Students with all types of disabilities are welcome at YLF.

# What happens at YLF?

* The program includes small and large group educational discussions, a talent/variety show, a college campus tour, a dance, a formal luncheon with community leaders, meetings with State Officials and a tour of the California State Capitol Building.
* Topics include life after high school, self-advocacy, career development, how to live independently, resources to help you succeed in your personal goals, and discussion of disability identity. Presenters are disability community leaders, legislators, YLF alumni, and other adult role models who have disabilities.
* The students identify existing barriers to personal and professional success, resulting in a “Personal Leadership and Advocacy Plan." Students create goals to help them reach their career and independent living goals when they return to their communities.
* Students meet with legislative staffers, and state government leaders to provide policy recommendations or share their thoughts on issues affecting them.
* Many of the staff are former YLF alumni and provide mentorship and offer youth the opportunity to ask about challenges and opportunities. Thus, broadening their horizons of what is possible when becoming an adult.

# Where does YLF take place?

The Forum is held annually, this year, in the State Capital, Sacramento, and at California State University, Sacramento. Approximately 50 high school students are selected to attend through a competitive process.

The first-ever YLF was held in Sacramento in 1992 and successful forums have been held every summer annually since then. Additionally, California has trained more than 30 other states and Puerto Rico, and they now annually produce the California Model YLF in their states and territories. In late 2022, plans to expand YLF through regional events launched with the first regional event occurring in late 2023 and future events planned for 2024 and 2025.

# How much does YLF cost?

The cost is approximately $5,000 per student delegate, not including the many services and goods provided in-kind by volunteer supporters. All costs are covered by public agencies and private and corporate donations. There is no charge for student delegates to attend the Forum.

# Who supports YLF?

Private donors have included: California Endowment, Wells Fargo Foundation, Sutter Health, Molina Health Care, Elevance Health (Anthem), Northrop Grumman, Southern California Edison, Mission San Rafael Rotary Club, Lockheed Martin, Golden 1 Credit Union, California Foundation for Independent Living Centers, Inland Empire Health Plan and Friends of Californians with Disabilities, Inc.

Major governmental partners have included the California Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, Employment Development Department, Department of Rehabilitation, California Department of Education, California Workforce Development Board, State Council on Developmental Disabilities, State Independent Living Council, Department of Developmental Services, California Department of Social Services, and the California Health Incentives Improvement Project.

# Why is YLF so important for young people with disabilities?

Young people with disabilities still face barriers to independent living and employment even though the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was enacted in 1990. In addition, young people with apparent and non-apparent disabilities face stigma and need role models and encouragement to develop a positive self-identity as a person with a disability. YLF was created in 1992 to foster and grow the potential of youth with disabilities.

More than 1,500 California YLF alumni are now pursuing higher education, gainfully employed, developing as local, state, and national leaders, and living independently in our communities. Many have graduated from such prestigious universities as Santa Clara University, UC Berkeley, UCLA, and Stanford and have successful careers in fields from accounting to acting. Alumni of California’s YLF have become leaders in their fields and credit much of their success to their participation in the forum.

# YLF Alumni Experiences

*“YLF was the first time I was ever exposed to positive role models with disabilities, which completely gave me a new perspective of my life.”*

*“I have gotten so much information, enlightenment if not more. I am grateful to have this experience because I know it is super competitive. I am honored. My parents and family are proud. I am grateful to the staff that helped me. I have soaked it up like a sponge, and I will squeeze it all out when I get home!”*

*“I came to YLF, and I was like, what am I getting myself into? I was not aware of this community and how closer we all are. YLF is a family, we are a family. I had no idea that there are so many different ways and different programs to be involved in. I am inspired to take charge and try to get things fixed and done right in my community. I will not let my music stay inside me; I will let it out!”*

*“The lessons I have learned at YLF and continue to learn through the [alumni network] have allowed me to develop and succeed, not just as a person, but as a person with a disability.”*

# Where can I find more information about YLF?

If you know a student candidate eligible for YLF, you can contact us in the following ways:

**Website:** <http://www.dor.ca.gov/Home/Ylf>

**Email:** [ylf@dor.ca.gov](mailto:ylf@dor.ca.gov)

**Phone:** 855-894-3436

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/official.ca.ylf>

**Instagram:** <https://www.instagram.com/calylf/>