

Advance Youth Leadership Power  
Living the Power: Setting Up a Youth with Disabilities Activism Group  
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AYLP wrote this book for potential leaders in the disability rights community. We want them to have the same experiences, confidence and respect for themselves and other people—the people that they are going to work with in the future.

## Mission Statement

Advance Youth Leadership Power (AYLP) is a group of young people with disabilities pulling together to work toward a common goal.

AYLP is guided by its mission to fight for the rights and privileges of young people with disabilities; rights that are violated by society due to discrimination and prejudice.

Staying dedicated to bringing awareness to issues in order to bring about justice is what AYLP is all about.

AYLP strives to be at the forefront of developing new leaders of the Disability Rights Movement.

Our name means that we promote the power of youth leadership in the disability community.

## What is AYLP?

Advance Youth Leadership Power (AYLP) is a grassroots advocacy group. We are run by and for young adults with disabilities ages 18-30. AYLP grew out of a twelve-week youth leadership training at Access Living in the winter of 2004-2005.

A lot of our first members are still with us. AYLP has grown with newer graduates from Access Living's YIELDD the Power! Youth Leadership Project. AYLP is a more advanced challenge for our beginning activists because we ask youth to do hands-on advocacy projects for real. AYLP also asks youth to be more independent. Our members have to learn to travel independently to their meetings.

We do advocacy and leadership skills activities with the support of Access Living Youth Team staff. AYLP meets once a week for two hours at Access Living from 4 to 6 pm. We work to expose problems in our community. This means we bring attention to issues that need to be solved to make better lives for people with disabilities. Sometimes we have committee meetings outside of our regular meetings, when we have a lot of work to do.

Our group advocacy projects have included:

In 2006, advocating and educating on disability awareness at Roosevelt University for disability services staff, because the staff didn't understand the needs of students with disabilities.

Also in 2006, running a direct action campaign to win back funding due to severe budget cuts in special education teachers and aides in the Chicago Public Schools. We won back \$14 million of the \$26.5 million dollars that were cut.

In 2007, winning an agreement with the Chicago Public Schools to provide leadership and self-advocacy workshops to students with disabilities.

In 2008, advocating with a local nail salon to improve its access signs pointing to the accessible door. Our member Sira Rivas said, "I feel a sense of accomplishment from convincing them to put a sign in the window showing people in wheelchairs where to enter the building."

In 2008, reaching out to youth with disabilities in the state of Illinois to encourage the development of more AYLPs.

ALYP members also often attend events as a group to represent their interests in areas such as education, paratransit, autism and mental health.

Our victories have made us stronger. One of our long-time members, Jason English, says, "I feel good and certain that people who are against people with disabilities won't mess with us. Also, it makes me feel like a better person and it feels great to show the world that we don't take crap from people."

AYLP leadership skills building activities have included:

- Planning and hosting community events
- Participating in meeting and campaign skills training
- Fundraising through special events and sales

Also, AYLP members have found individual leadership opportunities. For example:

Christine Wilk attended the Mobility International USA (MIUSA) Women's Institute on Leadership Development (WILD) in Eugene, Oregon, aimed at developing women leaders with the disabilities from around the world

Jose Ocampo was recognized by Progress Center for Independent Living as their 2007 Advocate of the Year

Vincent Smith serves on the Regional Transit Authority (RTA) ADA Paratransit Advisory Committee

Curtis Harris was awarded a scholarship to attend the first Thresholds Conference in 2007. During 2004-2006, he returned to Agassiz and Le Moyne Elementary schools to empower autistic children.

When asked how he feels about AYLP, member Michael Flores said, "AYLP means a life of succeeding higher, when living alone means having more self-confidence every day."

AYLP is the only grassroots youth with disabilities activism group in Chicago. We use direct action and critical thinking skills to solve problems facing people with disabilities. We believe people need the power to speak up for themselves, but we also say, "The people, united, will never be defeated!"

## What is Access Living?

Access Living is a Center for Independent Living (CIL). There are 23 CILs in Illinois. CILs provide services that empower people with disabilities to live the lives they choose to live, and to be free of discrimination.

Most of the people who work at Access Living have disabilities. Most of our managers have disabilities too. We support the dignity, pride, and self-esteem of people with all kinds of disabilities. We believe that society does not need to fix people with disabilities and that we are not “broken.” Instead, we believe that we need to fix society so the world includes everyone, no matter what their differences may be.

Access Living has five work teams that empower people with disabilities to live the lives they choose.

## Civil Rights

Civil rights are your rights according to the law. Your right to vote is a civil right. So is your right to a public education. Your right to safe house to live in is a civil right. Our civil rights team has lawyers and legal staff that work to make sure your rights as a person with a disability are protected. You can also call our Civil Rights Advocate any time you feel your rights may have been violated and you want to find out what to do.

## Housing

A lot of people with disabilities can't afford a decent, accessible place to live. The Housing Team at Access Living works to find affordable, accessible housing. Another big housing problem for people with disabilities is finding a place that does not separate people with disabilities away from people without disabilities. Everyone should have the chance to live with a mix of people.

Our Housing Team staff are available to help you with finding a place to live, making your home accessible, or finding ways to pay for a place of your own.

## Youth and Education

Access Living knows that today's youth with disabilities are tomorrow's disability rights leaders. The Youth and Education Team wants to develop new leaders in the Disability Rights movement. This team has different groups, like a peer support group for girls

and a support group for guys. There is a youth leadership through YIELDD the Power! and AYLP. We also have an Outreach Coordinator who advocates for students with disabilities in Chicago.

The Youth Team also has a website at <http://www.alyouthinfo.org/>.

#### Nursing Home Transition and Personal Assistant Services

Sometimes, people with disabilities get stuck in nursing homes and can't get out. Access Living has helped nearly 200 people with disabilities transition from nursing homes into the community. This team also helps people with disabilities find personal assistants who can help with things they need in every day living, like bathing, eating or shopping.

#### The Community and Economic Development Team

The Community and Economic Development Team aims to bring down barriers to jobs and finances for people with disabilities. This team empowers people in our community to support themselves and to manage their money. The team also helps people learn how to buy their own homes, and reaches out to Spanish speakers.

Access Living is located at 115 W. Chicago Avenue, Chicago, IL 60610. The main line is (312) 640-2100 and it is open Monday through Friday, 9 am to 5:30. The website is [www.accessliving.org](http://www.accessliving.org).

Here is a picture of our staff at the ground breaking for our new building! (image)

## The Disability Rights Movement

It is often said that in order to know where you're going you have to know where you come from. For this very reason we were taught and we continue to teach the history of the disability rights movement. Like other movements people with disabilities fought for equality, independence, autonomy, and full access to society and its resources. Train your youth to advocate for themselves.

The disability rights movement is one of the important civil rights struggles of our times, but a lot of people don't know much about it. People with disabilities got the inspiration for our movement from the black civil rights movement. Our struggle grew right along with the struggles of other groups, such as women and Chicanos/Latinos.

Our movement, the disability rights movement, is about equal rights and equal access. We got started in 1964, when a young man named Ed Roberts became the first severely disabled student to attend a major university, the University of California at Berkeley. Ed was soon joined in his fight for access by other quadriplegic students, who called themselves "The Rolling Quads." The Rolling Quads wanted ramps and services so they could attend the classes of their choice, just like everyone else. When they began graduating in the 1970s, they took their fight with them and started the first Center for Independent Living, with Ed as the director. Before long, other people with disabilities from around the country began setting up Centers for Independent Living around the United States.

The 1970s were a very busy time for the disability rights movement. In 1973, Congress passed the Rehabilitation Act, which affected services for people with disabilities. Section 504 of this Act said that no organization receiving federal money could discriminate against someone just because they had a disability. This was our first civil rights law just for people with disabilities, but there was a problem. Nobody wanted to actually enforce the law. Finally, in 1977, people with disabilities got so angry they organized sit-ins at different places around the country. These sit-ins were led by the American Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities (ACCD). In San Francisco they did a sit-in at the Health, Education and Welfare office for 26 days. The activists created so much pressure on the government that they finally began enforcing the Act.

In the 1970s, America also saw more and more people with intellectual and developmental disabilities trying to leave institutions. Some institutions, like Willowbrook in New York, were awful places to live. The television report Geraldo Rivera exposed these places, and public opinion began to change about sending people to institutions. Until then, parents who had babies with disabilities tried to hide

them by sending them away to institutions to live. After the institutions were exposed, more parents began keeping their children at home and fighting for special education services instead.

Around the same time, a man named Wade Blank was empowering 19 young people with disabilities to escape nursing homes in Denver, Colorado. Together, they started the Atlantis Community. In 1978, the “Gang of 19”, frustrated with the lack of lifts on public buses, trapped a bus in downtown Denver for three days. This was the first action of the group that would later become known as ADAPT.

In the 1980s, our fight grew even stronger. ADAPT fought for getting bus lifts on all the city buses across the country. More and more Centers for Independent Living were set up. The biggest fight of all was for the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a civil rights law that would protect disability rights in areas like jobs and communication. The ADA finally passed in 1990, but only after people with disabilities from around the country marched on the US Capitol.

During the 1990s, we saw a lot of legal challenges to the ADA, but we also saw even more people becoming empowered. The group called Self Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE) started, where people with developmental disabilities began speaking for themselves. The group Not Dead Yet started, which fought to protect people with disabilities from believing their lives were so awful they had to die. ADAPT won the bus lift issue and began fighting to get even more people out of nursing homes. Disability rights activists in the United States began reaching out to other activists around the world.

Today, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities was just made into international policy. Youth with disabilities are fighting for their rights, with more awareness than ever. Education law has been changed to make education more fair for everyone, but we continue to struggle against attitudes and not enough services. Access to public areas such as city streets, public buildings and restrooms are some of the more visible changes brought about in recent decades. A noticeable change in some parts of the world is the installation of elevators, trans lifts, wheelchair ramps and curb cuts.

It is fair to say we are still fighting for our disability rights and that we continue to see new leaders emerge every year. AYLP is very proud to be part of our disability history. As a famous disability rights leader named Justin Dart used to say, “Lead on!”

## Self-Advocacy: When We Experience Discrimination

Self-advocacy means people with disabilities taking control of our own lives, including being in charge of our own care and fighting for issues that affect us. The self-advocacy movement is about people with disabilities speaking up for ourselves. It's about having the right to make your own decisions without other people telling you what to do. The self-advocacy movement seeks to connect people with disabilities and give our community the tools and experience to take control over our own lives.

What is discrimination? Discrimination is treating someone unfairly because of their gender, age, race, religion, family status, national origin, military status, sexual orientation, or disability. In other words, it is about treating someone badly because they are different.

What is discrimination and how does it relate to self-advocacy? The easiest way to describe it is to say that discrimination is the problem and self-advocacy is the solution. Although all people face some kind of discrimination, people with disabilities have to deal with ableism. Ableism is when someone discriminates against you because of your disability.

Since people know their own situations the best, they can often be the best advocates for themselves. When you advocate for yourself, you are taking a stand against mistreatment, prejudice and disrespect.

What is the history of the self-advocacy movement?

The self-advocacy movement probably began in Sweden during the 1960s. There, people with the label of "mental retardation" were supported to form and lead their own leisure clubs. Back in those days, they used that label instead of "cognitive" or "developmental" disability. National conferences for the members of these clubs held in 1968 and 1970. At these conferences, the participants developed statements about how they wanted to be treated.

In 1972 the idea spread to Great Britain and Canada, and in 1973 a group from Oregon attended a conference in Canada that was supposed to be for people with "mental retardation." However, the people from Oregon were unhappy with the Canadian conference, which they felt was dominated by professionals. The people from Oregon went home and formed a self-advocacy group. They called themselves "People First,"

because they felt that their disabilities were second to their personhood. From there, the idea of self-advocacy spread across the United States.

Along the way, they have helped set up international, national and statewide conferences. They formed their own national organization, Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE), which is governed by a Steering Committee made up of 16 representatives. It was formed in September 1991 at a national conference in Nashville, Tennessee, where participants voted to have a national coalition of state and local organizations.

Today, there are many statewide self-advocacy organizations, some having as many as 75 local chapters and some with as few as two or three. Many of these are supported by local or state chapters of The Arc. Many others are independent or are supported by other organizations that assist the group members.

How Does Advocating or Self-Advocating Make You Feel?

Jody said, "When I advocate, I feel like I have control. Helping others with disabilities makes me feel proud."

Jose said, "I feel powerful when I advocate for myself as well as others. When you advocate you feel more determined to get what you want."

Jason English said, "I feel like a superhero because I help people and fight for justice."

## What Are Your Rights?

As society changes, different laws are made to protect all persons in a fair way. These laws often affect people with disabilities. For example, they might say that people with disabilities get equal access to programs and services.

The laws below were made to protect the rights of people with disabilities. We encourage you to review and remember these laws.

The Urban Mass Transit Act of 1970 is an act that is for buses to have wheel chairs lifts, but it took 20 years to enforce.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 defends people with disabilities against discrimination by federal agencies that are run by the government. This act provides disability rights protection against discrimination from federal agencies or places that get federal money.

The Air Carrier Access Act protects you against discrimination on air services, both domestic and foreign.

The Fair Housing Act of 1988 forbids discrimination from landlords and real estate companies towards people with disabilities.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was written on behalf of African Americans to stop segregation in schools, housing and employment. Women were later added to the act. The act opened the door for equal rights for all Americans. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 was partly a result of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The Architectural Barriers Act was passed by Congress in 1968. It marks one of the first efforts to provide access to buildings. The Access Board develops and maintains accessibility guidelines under this law.

Mental Illness Bill of Rights says that people with mental and developmental disabilities cannot be refused services based on their age, sex, race, religious belief, ethnic, origin, marital status and physical or mental disability or criminal record.

Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act helps people with developmental disabilities to participate fully in their communities through full integration and inclusion in the economic, political, social, cultural, religious and educational parts of our society. The DD Act makes sure that individuals with developmental disabilities

and their families participate in the design of and have access to culturally competent services, support and other assistance and opportunities that promote independence, productivity, integration and inclusion in the community.

## A.Y.L.P. Works as a Team

AYLP is an all-member participation group, which encourages the ideals of listening and teamwork. We listen to each other's problems and try to brainstorm solutions. Everyone's opinions and comments are respected and accepted. We set up meetings to work on campaigns. We discuss issues that affect us as a group and the rest of the disabled community. Our group is about teamwork and empowering one another to achieve and reach our full potential.

AYLP is a group that makes change happen. Members realize that if they want to see change happen, they have to make that change happen by protesting and campaigning on issues like accessibility and other things that affect our everyday lives. AYLP is about people power, so we understand that we are more powerful together than we are by ourselves. Together we succeed; apart we fail.

What makes AYLP unique? We are a cross-disability group, which means we include all disabilities. We all have valuable skills and are ready to put them into action and fight for our cause. Because we are a cross-disability group, we all face certain everyday challenges. Our group understands this and we try to accommodate everyone's individualized needs. We know we are powerful because we are different. It is those differences that bond us.

The members of AYLP believe that everyone is a leader no matter what their physical or mental capabilities. We focus on building self-esteem and self-reliance because we understand that a strong body needs a strong mind. Using effective communication to work towards a common goal and sharing the responsibility to see the changes we want to see in our community is what AYLP is all about.

Our strength comes in seeing what is wrong in our community. It empowers AYLP members to find solutions to fix the problems that frustrate us. We know that there isn't an "I" in team and if we want to make a positive, long-lasting impact, we must fight together and not apart to see the changes we want to see in our society.

AYLP's commitment is one that is self-sustaining. It is a commitment that can be seen in each and every member at any given time. We believe in our cause and we believe in change.

## Start Your Youth with Disabilities Activism Group!

The number one job to keep in mind when you are starting a new group is that you need other people. How are you going to find a team of young people to work with you? It's time to recruit! Network to find out if people you know are interested, or if they can recommend other folks to you.

Decide when you will have your first meeting or info session. Think about the place, date, time and possibly having some refreshments. It would be great if you start with introductions, then have an icebreaker activity, then start with discussing what you want to do with your youth group. Some suggestions for icebreakers are on page 21.

To get find your folks, first try making flyers and send out e-mails announcing your group. Be sure to make your flyer accessible as possible. Your flier will help you explain your group to the people you network with. Make sure that you have a mission in mind for your group so that others know what direction or issues will be covered.

Try the public schools and the special education classes. Maybe you know someone who works at a school or the district, or you could simply call the person in charge of students with disabilities and see if they have any youth that may be interested.

Try your local Center for Independent Living. They may work with young people who might be interested in your group. Usually some of these youth may already belong to other groups; but there is no reason why a person can't belong to more than one group.

Get your friends! Recruit your friends or tell your friend's friends about your group. Word of mouth is a great way because people are more willing to go for something if someone they know told them about it. Get the word out there!

Another great idea is to post on boards in your area. Do you know if your local library has a board? Sometimes coffee shops and parks have boards too.

It's really important to make sure people can understand what you are trying to do. Check out the next couple of pages for examples of an accessible flyer and a non-accessible flyer.

A non-accessible flyer has:

Too many words  
The words are too little  
No information about access  
Not enough pictures  
Adult style language

An accessible flyer has:

The basic info  
Clear font that is easy to read  
Information about access  
Pictures so the flier is easy to understand  
Language that is youth-friendly  
Shows that all are welcome

GOOD LUCK!!!

NOT ACCESSIBLE EXAMPLE (TEXT ONLY)!!!!

Chicago Young Women's Coalition

Do you wish that you had a space to be able to get together with other young women to discuss women's rights issues and mutually support one another on the path to empowerment?

Here is your chance!

Join us for the Chicago Young Women's Coalition's first ever  
Young Women's Empowerment Caucus

When: Wednesday, January 17, 6-7:30 pm  
Where: Young Women's Center, 555 W. Roosevelt

What is the young women's empowerment caucus?  
Ultimately you and the other young women involved will determine the course that the Young Women's Empowerment Caucus will take because it will be an autonomous group where everyone's voice will have equal weight.

Here are some broad objectives for the caucus:

Deconstruct myths through sharing experiences  
Build a network of young women who care about women's empowerment including  
gaining recognition of their reproductive rights  
Provide opportunities for collective leadership development and peer mentoring  
Mobilize young women to initiate and implement community education campaigns, and  
advocate on their own behalf for social justice and self determination

For more information about Chicago Young Women's Coalition, check out this website:  
[www.cywc.org](http://www.cywc.org)

CYWC is funded in part, through the generous support of Illinois Young Women's Fund.

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ACCESSIBLE EXAMPLE (TEXT ONLY)!!!

Want to build your skills to be a badass diva for change?

(image of a girl with a disability smiling)

Have some pizza  
Meet other girls like you  
Start scheming together!

Young Women's Empowerment Caucus  
When: Wednesday, Jan 17<sup>th</sup> 2005, 6-7:30 pm  
Where: Young Women's Center  
555 W. Roosevelt St.  
(Wheelchair Accessible)

For more info: Ann Market, email: [amarket@youngwomenscenter.org](mailto:amarket@youngwomenscenter.org), phone:312- 555-0000

[www.cywc.org](http://www.cywc.org)  
LGBTQ friendly

Personal assistance, sign language interpreter, and alternative formats, available upon request.

Chicago Young Women's Coalition

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## Icebreakers

The first challenge you will encounter with your new group is getting everyone to feel comfortable introducing themselves. Sometimes it's difficult to know what to do. You can try a group activity that is commonly called an 'icebreaker.' Using an icebreaker that has laughter and humor is a great way to lighten the mood and relax your group. Here are some examples of icebreakers. You can use these icebreakers, or use your own! Just remember to keep your icebreaker accessible for everyone so no one is left out.

**ICEBREAKER #1:** This is the easiest icebreaker ever. Have everybody find a partner. Tell the group they have five to ten minutes to learn three new things about the other person. When the time is up, have everyone take turns telling the new things they learned about their partner.

**ICEBREAKER #2:** Have your participants think of one word they would use to describe themselves. Have the first person say their name and their word. The next person should say their name, their word, and the first person's word too. The next person should say their name, their word, and the words of the first two people. Continue in this way around the group until the last person is responsible for saying everyone's words! People can help each other remember. You can do this using spoken words or visual signs, depending on your group.

**ICEBREAKER #3:** This game is called the "M&M Game" and it is borrowed from the YELDD the Power! training. It is very popular because it involves candy or sugar free substitutes.

First, find a flip chart and write the following:

- Name your favorite movie of all time...BLUE
- Name the best and worst thing about school...GREEN
- Name some things you like to do for fun...BROWN
- If you have any brothers or sisters or if you own any pets, tell us about them ....RED
- Tell us what you would do if you had a million dollars to spend....YELLOW
- Tell us about your favorite food....ORANGE

Find some cups and make sure you have enough for each person. Take a big bag of M&Ms or another kind of candy that comes in different colors, and put about 10-13 candies in each cup. Give one cup to each youth. Tell them not to eat any yet! Ask

them to figure out which color they have the most of (i.e. red, brown, green, etc).

Then, either go around the room, or as people are ready to share, ask them to answer the questions on the flip chart according to what the main M&M color is in their cup.

**ICEBREAKER #4:** This icebreaker is also borrowed from YIELDD the Power!. Have folks pretend that they have been stranded on a desert island. Ask people to think about the one thing that they think they would need to survive on a desert island. They can only choose one thing, and each thing should be unique, no two alike.

Ask people to go around one at a time, say their names, and then name their objects. On a flip chart, make a list of the different things people choose. Ask them if they could each survive on their single objects alone. Then, ask them whether they could survive if they pool the object together. This can help start a discussion about teamwork.

Be creative about using icebreakers of your own. You can find more by doing Internet research, or by asking people you know if they have ever done any fun icebreakers. The number one goal is to have fun and get to know each other!

## What Makes a Successful Meeting?

Holding a meeting that makes change and does not waste time is a skill that takes time and effort to learn. We think a successful meeting is one where everybody's ideas are heard and decisions are made as a group. In AYLP we try to keep the mood light and stay excited for the projects we take on.

Here are a few tips from AYLP about how to make the most of your meetings. First, ask yourself:

1. What is a Good Meeting?
2. How Do We Plan a Good Meeting?

Go to the next page to start thinking about these questions...

## What Makes a Good Meeting?

AYLP says:

Summarize at the end of the meeting

Organizational skills

Being prepared

Structure

Make goals and meet them!

Listening skills

Decision making

Delegate tasks (share the work!)

Stick to the subject

Agree to disagree

Good leaders

Group rules

Respect!

## What Makes a Bad Meeting?

AYLP says:

Taking control of the meeting and not listening to others

Inappropriate and offensive behavior

Letting your cell phone ring

Swearing

Not being prepared

Not being accessible

Not calling ahead to let people know you can't be there

Leaving in the middle of the meeting and wandering around

## Meeting Planner Checklist

Date Scheduled:

Meeting Title:

Purpose:

Location:

Note Taker:

Meeting Leader/Agenda Keeper:

Scheduled Time:

Actual Time:

Start:

Stop:

Total Hrs.

Group Members Attended

First Name, Last Name

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

Items to be discussed

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

## Follow Up Tasks and Person Responsible

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

## Materials and Preparation Needed and Person Responsible

1. Is your meeting accessible for all?
2. Getting snacks
3. Setting up agenda
4. Interpreters needed?
5. Printing and passing out agenda
6. Copies of all handouts
7. Flip chart and marker

PHONE TREE: Who is in charge of the phone tree to remind everyone to come to the next meeting? Name:

Meeting Notes:

## Problems Vs. Issues

In AYLP, we work together to create change not just for ourselves, but for all people with disabilities. We have power together! Everyone has the power to make change for disability rights. You can make change by yourself or with your group or team.

The very first step to making disability rights change together is to figure out what issue you would like to work on. How do you find an issue? Easy! Just listen to what people in the disability communities are concerned about. This part can be tricky though!

Let's get started...

Can you name some things you would like to change for people with disabilities? Let's make a list together.

### THINGS WE WANT TO CHANGE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

### Why Do People Need to Make Change for Disability Rights?

People with disabilities often experience ableism. Ableism is discrimination against people with disabilities. Ableism can mean an attitude. It can also mean doing things in a way that leave people with disabilities out. It can mean not listening to what people with disabilities need.

Ableism is like other words that mean discrimination against someone because of who they are. Let's think for a minute. Ask yourself: how about racism? Sexism? Ageism? Classism?

### Making Disability Rights Change

It is a lot easier to make change when you KNOW what it takes to make the change. To make changes that will improve our lives as people with disabilities, we need to find some good issues to work on. Finding an issue is often the HARDEST part of making change!

## Problems and Issues

Do these words mean the same thing? What is the difference between a problem and an issue?

Problems are things that everyone complains about, but no one knows what to do. Finding a way to fix them is very hard. Do people with disabilities have problems? Name some problems!

Problems People with Disabilities Have:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

A common example of a problem would be gun violence in the Chicago Public Schools, everyone talks about it but there is no easy solution.

Issues are times when something is wrong and you know what should be done to fix it. Name some issues!

Issues People with Disabilities Have:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

A common example of an issue would be making a public place like a restaurant more accessible for people who are blind.

So, to put it all together...

Problems are things everyone talks about but no one knows what to do  
Issues are something specific and you know the solution

## Getting Ideas for Issues

Where do we find ideas for issues? Let's think....

Personal experience with ableism

TV, radio, the Internet, newspapers

Having group discussions

Talking with your family and friends

**SHARE** your ideas with other folks! Maybe they will want to help!

## Looking at Our Community

Let's break into groups. Each person should take a turn and name one time when they experienced ableism. When your group is done, pick one story to share with everyone in the room.

Which of the stories were about problems? Which of the stories were about issues?

So, What's Stopping You?

Why are people afraid to make change? Do you like to work alone or with a team? Do you have a team? How do you find people to work with you? Make a list of people or ways to find people who can work with you.

People Who Can Work With Us:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Checking In

So, what is ableism? What's the difference between a problem and an issue? Once you figure out an issue that is really important to you, you can make a plan to fix it!

Power to the People! Try using this discussion process to help your group figure out issues they can work on.

## How to Set Up a Campaign Plan

Once your group decides on the issue it wants to change, it is time to make a campaign plan. This step takes a lot of discussion sometimes, but it is worth your time.

A campaign plan is like an umbrella. An umbrella keeps you safe from the rain. A campaign plan helps protect you and keep you safe from the things that can distract you from your fight.

On the next page is a worksheet you can use to create your campaign plan. Remember to give your campaign a catchy name too!

**ISSUE:** What is the issue you are trying to fix?

**TARGET:** Who is the person who has the power to make the change you want? Sometime it is hard to figure out who exactly is the target person. You could try doing research, calling around, asking questions, searching on the web.

**DEMANDS:** Demands are the things that you want changed. Usually three demands is a good number, if you like you can add a fourth demand. Note: the fourth demand should be a “throwaway.” A throwaway is a demand you don’t have to have but it would be nice. Sometimes people give it to you anyway!

**ALLIES AND OPPONENTS:** Who can help you in your campaign? Who will try to stop you?

**RESOURCES:** What skills or things do people in the group have? Can anyone make copies? Does someone have good computer skills? Does someone else like to write or make phone calls? Can anyone drive?

**ACTION STEPS, IN ORDER:** What are some ways you will take action? Rank them from the easiest to hardest. You want a few different action steps so that if Plan A doesn’t work, you can try Plan B and if that doesn’t work, go to Plan C. Always have a plan for creating pressure on your target person.

Remember, the point of your campaign is to WIN your demands as a team. If you find yourselves trying the same thing over and over, come up with a new way to get the attention of your target and get them to meet with you. Be creative, and never give up!

Campaign Name:

Your Group's Name:

Issue:

Target Person:

Demands:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
4. Throwaway

Allies:

Opponents:

Resources:

Action Steps/tactics:

Plan A:

Plan B:

Plan C:

Plan D:

What is an Action?

An action is an event you organize to make change. When your group sets up an action, you must always have the following things:

- 1) A focus on a target person
- 2) A list of your demands---the things you want your target person to do
- 3) A plan of things that you will do during an action
- 4) A list of the jobs different people in your group will do
- 5) A DATE!!!! You need to know what day and time your action starts

An action is about making your target person pay attention to your issue. You could do almost anything, as long as it makes the target person wake up and pay attention to you. Once the person is paying attention to you, then you can ask that they talk with you about your demands.

What are some ways of getting attention to your cause? Well, you could do a protest at your target's place of work. You could organize a phone campaign on a specific day to your target's office. You could hold a press conference and invite the media to learn about why your target person needs to take action.

An action is not writing a letter to your target person asking for a meeting. An action is about a group of people working together to do an event that draws attention to your cause.

Actions have been used by our community since the 1970s to advocate for disability rights. In fact, some of our major laws got passed because the disability community did actions. For example, in 1990, people with disabilities crawled out of their chairs and up the steps of the US Capitol to bring attention for the need for the Americans with Disabilities Act. That was signed into law on July 26, 1990. Actions helped our people make change. YOU can use action to make change too.

Here is a list you can use to plan your action. It sounds sort of like the campaign plan, but an action plan has more details so everyone knows what they are personally responsible for. Take a look at the next page and feel free to change the list as needed...

Basic Direct Action Outline  
Adapted from the Midwest Academy

When you have decided on an issue that needs direct action, it's time to PLAN the action. It's very important to make a checklist of jobs people need to do and supplies you will need to bring. The following is a basic outline for a direct action. Use a real or pretend action situation.

Have one of the trainers write up this outline on butcher paper for the group to see; as a group, work to determine who will do which jobs. In very small groups, some people may need to do more than one job. Remind everyone not to be afraid to try something new.

Tasks	Explanation of Task	Name(s) or Description
Target	The name of the person with the power to make the change you want.	
Demand	What are you asking for? If it is more than one thing, choose the most important one. Consider including one or two "throwaway" demands.	1. 2. 3.
Leadership Team	The person or team who will keep the action's agenda on track and make decisions on unexpected events.	
Negotiating Team	The person or persons responsible for presenting the demands to the target and working to get results	
Sign Holders/Chanters	These people will follow the leadership team's instructions	
Chant Leader	This person will lead the group in chanting, changing the chants up,	

	keeping you ENERGIZED!	
Media Contact	The person who will talk to the press and call them about your event	
Police Contact	This person will talk to the police if they show up and politely explain what your event is. Sometimes the police can help you talk to your target.	
Fliers	Do you need them? Make them. Make lots!!!! Someone will need to pass them out to people who are passing by	
Research	Do you have enough rough knowledge about your issue? Make sure you get it so your demands are more powerful. Some of this information can also go on the fliers.	
Transportation Going In	How and when is everyone getting there?	
Agenda	Do you have a plan of escalation? This way, you can keep up the pressure!	Plan A:  Plan B:  Plan C:

Transportation Getting Out	How will everyone leave?	
Runners	Will you need people to help with things like passing out posters or going on errands?	
Scouts	The people who will visit the action site beforehand and check it out for accessibility and layout. They need to report back to the rest of the team.	
Chants/Slogans	Who will make up chants and slogans for posters?	
Chant Leader	Who will lead the group in chanting?	
Poster Making	Who will gather paper and markers? When will you make posters?	
Meeting Place and Time	Where is everyone going to meet up? What time?	
Action Location and Duration	Where is the action going to be?	
Length of Action	How long is the action going to be?	

Questions to Ask  
Your Action Team  
Adapted from the Midwest Academy

When planning your action, think about these questions....

Will your action be both fun and based on real power?

Is everyone in your group comfortable with the plan?

Will the plan surprise your target?

Are your demands clear and simple?

Do you have several fallback plans? This means, if your first plan doesn't work out, do you have a backup?

Do you have an appointment? Has anyone from your group ever made an appointment before with the target?

Have you scouted the building and made a floor plan? Do you know where to find:

Elevators and stairs?

Bathrooms?

Pay phone?

Parking or nearest transit stops?

The target's office?

Is the site of the action accessible?

Has the group selected who will present information at the action? Are people prepared for their roles?

Has the group selected its spokesperson for the action?

Have you held a dress rehearsal for the spokesperson and participants?

Have you calculated how you will demonstrate your power? Do you plan to have symbols with you (letters, petitions)

Do you have a good turnout plan for the action, including last-minute reminder phone calls?

If you want the media, have they been notified? Have you:

Sent a release or announcement to the press?

Called the daybook a week ahead of time?

Called assignments editors the day before the action?

Prepared a release for distribution on the day of the action?

Assigned someone to talk with the media at the action itself (Your spokesperson may be busy.)

Have you selected someone to take notes during the action and write the confirmation letter to the target? Remember, any promises they make should be in writing!

Do you know who will debrief the action with participants and where the debriefing will occur? Debriefing means getting together to talk about what happened.

## Ways to Take Action/Tactics

Remember, the most effective way to take action is to use a non-violence approach to get your issues out there.

### Set up a Press Conference

A press conference is a media event where you can invite reporters to hear you speak and they can ask questions. Press conferences are great because it lets you get your issues out to a wider audience.

For example, your group can organize a press conference to let the news media know you are starting a campaign to improve access at hospitals

### Forums

A forum is a public meeting or presentation involving a discussion among experts and often including audience participation. Town hall meetings are very similar.

For example, you could have a meeting by inviting a panel of experts/people with disabilities to discuss how a vast number of places in Chicago are inaccessible.

### Debates

Debates are used a discussion involving opposing parties. A debate is very much like an argument.

For example, you could invite opposing parties to talk about poor healthcare or the tragedies within nursing facilities.

### Civil Disobedience

Civil disobedience is a form of protest in which protestors deliberately violate the law, although most people who perform civil disobedience are usually non-violent.

For example, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on the bus and sit in the back. In those days, she was breaking the law, but she broke the law to show how badly racism was hurting her community.

### Sit-Ins

Sit-ins or sit downs is a form of direct action that involves one or more people nonviolently occupying an area for a protest, often to promote political, social or economic change. Walk-outs is the opposite of sit-ins.

For example, in 1977 people with disabilities occupied and refused to leave a federal building for 26 days, to force the US government to follow Section 504 of the Rehab Act of 1973.

### Street Theater

Street theater can mean doing a short skit about your issue. It helps educate the people at your action, and you get to have fun too. This is a good way to take action for people who love acting and music.

For example, AYLP did a skit with a toilet seat in front of the Chicago Public Schools District Office to show officials were throwing special ed “down the toilet.”

### Petition

A petition is a request to an authority, most commonly a government official or public entity. Many people sign it to show their support. The more signatures you get, the more successful a petition will be.

For example, one of our AYLP members had people in AYLP sign a petition to stop budget cuts to mental health programs.

### Protest

Protests are helpful because people can use them as a way to publicly and forcefully make their opinions heard. It is also a way to influence public opinion or government. Also when you protest you can use flyers, t-shirts, banners and signs so that bystanders can see what you are protesting about.

For example, if a clothing store does not have a wheelchair accessible fitting room, and the store has not responded to your efforts to ask for an accessible fitting room, you could do a protest by blocking the door to the store. However do not do this unless you have someone skilled in police negotiations helping you.

### Blog

A blog is an online diary that is open to the public.

For example, Sira’s mom made a blog asking people’s opinions on certain topics.

### Give Testimony

Testimony is a personal life story given to an audience.

For example, Jody told the Board of Education about an experience related to someone discriminating against her because of her disability.

CAN YOU THINK OF OTHER TACTICS? MAKE A LIST!

## Tactics Checklist

Adapted from the Midwest Academy

So you have picked some tactics! Are you sure that your tactic will make sense? Try using this checklist to figure out if your tactic will really help you win.

Can you really do it? Do you have the people, time and resources?

Is your tactic focused on your target?

Does your tactic show the power behind your demands?

Does your tactic meet your group goals as well as your issue goals? For example, if your group is committed to teamwork, will your tactic involve everybody on the team?

Will your tactic show the target person something they have never seen before? Will it surprise them?

Do your group members feel comfortable with the tactic?

Are your leaders experienced enough to make the tactic happen?

Will people enjoy working on it or participating in it?

Will it play positively in the media?

## The AYLP Logo

(image here of a hand drawn eagle and fireworks with the words “AYLP Disability Rights”)

An eagle's head was chosen as the AYLP logo to represent us as being withstanding and strong. Juvenal Calderon and Jason English, both of whom are individuals with disabilities, did the concept and creation. It is to show uniqueness and talent, but also togetherness with society. The bald eagle is a symbol of strength and endurance. We use the head to show our awareness of social issues. The fireworks portray our rights and freedom as being unique individuals.

## Poetic Expressions of AYLP

Advance Youth Leadership Power  
A group of young leaders with disabilities

By Jason Carrington

Advance my chance to do myself better  
I understand that I am better  
Than a day of stormy weather  
If no one really cares about my situation  
Then forever I will live without hesitation  
Youth is the key to a better tomorrow  
If I stop trying, I will live in sorrow  
A try is better than waiting for just a change  
If I give up now, I will always be strange  
Leadership is the way to make the world better  
If I give up on myself I can't fly like a feather  
Chances have come to change the world  
If I don't do it now, I will stay crying and curled  
Power lives in me and fills us all  
To not do better we will always fall  
This is the point in Advance, Youth, Leadership, Power.

By Jason English

Freedom to have a powerful rights,  
Fight with hardcore speech,  
Disability is more then to us.  
Is to the world of rightness,  
Love come with all kind disability.  
AYLP have a dream like the world,  
But is for all people have equal rights.

By Curtis Harris, Jr.

Stupid dumb retard  
Have been called named of my life  
Never had any dreams of independence  
Finding a way to blend with non-disabled youths  
Rejected and shunned by society  
Inferior to non-disabled peers  
Doors of AYLP opened  
Blending my intelligence with AYLP  
Getting along friend of disabled youths  
Standing up to powerful people  
Securing my place in history  
Knowledge is the key.

## Meet Some AYLP Members from Chicago!

Artessa Mitchell

1. How old are you? 23 years old
2. When and where did you graduate from high school? Jones College Prep, 2006
3. What are you doing now? Volunteering to read at nursing homes, working out to improve my health
4. What are your goals? To become a nurse
5. What are your hobbies? Music, reading, learning, to cook and watching medical programs
6. What is the best thing about AYLP? I'm learning leadership skills , also learning about different benefits for the disabled
7. What have you done that you are most proud of? Learn to walk and attending college

Juvenal Calderón

1. How old are you? 21 years old
2. When and where did you graduate from high school? I graduated in 2005.
3. What are you doing now? I'm volunteering and going to school.
4. What are your goals? My goals are to learn more about disability rights, advocate for others, and become a better person.
5. What are your hobbies? My hobbies are listening to music, reading and psychology.
6. What is the best thing about AYLP? The best thing about AYLP is that you get to know more people with disabilities and know more about rights.
7. What have you done that you are most proud of? I'm proud of going to some businesses to get our needs and rights met to get in that place, and learning more.

8. What made you become an advocate? To learn more about disabilities.

Zorytza Rodriguez

1. How old are you? 22 years old
2. When and where did you graduate from high school? Clemente, 2005
3. What are you doing now? I am working at Harold Washington College
4. What are your goals? I want to go to travel. I would like to work at Access Living. I want to go back to school.
5. What are your hobbies? I like to see the Food Network and the New York Yankees.
6. What is the best thing about AYLP? We protest because of disability discrimination.
7. What have you done that you are most proud of? I did the YIELDD the Power training and joined AYLP.
8. What made you become an advocate? Changing the way people good.

Jody Thomas

1. How old are you? 23 years old
2. When and where did you graduate from high school? Delano School and Vaughn High School
3. What are you doing now? I am a peer mentor of YIELDD.
4. What are your goals? To finish YIELDD.
5. What are your hobbies? Go out with friends
6. What is the best thing about AYLP? Good friends and helping people with disabilities.
7. What have you done that you are most proud of? That I am the most proud of is being in AYLP.

Curtis Harris, Jr.

1. How old are you? 31 years old
2. When and where did you graduate from high school? Steinmetz High School, 1996
3. What are you doing now? I volunteer at AYLP and Thresholds Dincin Center
4. What are your goals? 1. Gain life skills attainable for independent living at Thresholds Dincin Center for Recovery (DCFR) Lakeview Club and Peer Success, AYLP, DUDES and Peer Support. 2. Get my own apartment. 3. Return to college.
5. What are your hobbies? Reading books, playing Play Station 2 video games, dancing and partying, and playing basketball.
6. What is the best thing about AYLP? Developing advocating raw skills, organizing grass roots for empowerment and social change.
7. What have you done that you are most proud of? Developing continuing skills for self advocate and working on learning how to defend myself. Most importantly I'm proud of helping AYLP forcing the Board of Education restore \$14 of the \$26 [million] that was taken out from the special education funding and reinstalling 800 of 950 teachers who were cut in June 2006. Also, I was the first autistic student enrolled in CPS at Le Moyne Elementary on January 9, 1984.
8. What made you become an advocate? When CPS Chief of Executive Arne Duncan announced he was phasing out Le Moyne Elementary School closing early Childhood Autistic Program and cutting \$26.5 million from Special Education the following year. I decided to start advocating for social change to give the most vulnerable people tools. It made me feel good.

In addition, I was elected Homecoming King by students on October 13, 1995. I was recognized statewide for my performance and disability awareness during my junior and senior years. I was one of the first Public League Athletes with autism to play in an organized high school football team during the 1994 season.

Jason Carrington

1. How old are you? 29 years old

2. When and where did you graduate from high school? I graduated in 1997 from St. Rita High School.

3. What are you doing now? Right now I spend my time volunteering with AYLP

4. What are your goals? I want to see myself as more than a disabled person. I also want to push my book out and give it the recognition it deserves. Last I would like to see the disabled community stand together.

5. What are your hobbies? My hobbies include writing, using the computer and advocating.

6. What is the best thing about AYLP? AYLP teaches me to teach others.

7. What have you done that you are most proud of? I was able to put out a book of poetry called Sincere.

8. What made you become an advocate? The unfair treatment to myself specifically, and seeing how some people view and treat a disabled person unfairly.

Michael Flores

1. How old are you? I'm 28 years old.

2. When and where did you graduate from high school? I graduated in June of 1999 from Stephen High School.

3. What are you doing now? Right now I started on a program for training to work in an office.

4. What are your goals? My goals are to some day get married and I would like to work and finish college.

5. What are your hobbies? My hobbies include poetry, listening to music, singing and dancing.

6. What is the best thing about AYLP? The people and the issues we work on.

7. What have you done that you are most proud of? I'm most proud of being in a group that I can feel comfortable in.

Damian Ellis

1. How old are you? I'm 28 years old.
2. When and where did you graduate from high school? I graduated in June of 2000 from Southside Occupational Academy.
3. What are you doing now? I work at McDonalds, I baby sit and I'm helping with the Special Olympics.
3. What are your goals? My goal is to help other people. One day I would like to get married and raise a family.
4. What are your hobbies? I enjoy reading the Bible and going to church. I like watching sports and helping in the home; doing things like babysitting.
5. What is the best thing about AYLP? Helps me to be a good leader.
7. What have you done that you are most proud of? Being a good leader and friend and good team captain.
8. What made you become an advocate? I wanted to speak up for myself.

Jose Ocampo

1. How old are you? I'm 26 years old.
2. When and where did you graduate from high school? I graduated from Westmont High School.
3. What are you doing now? I'm working right now.
4. What are your goals? I want to become a better writer and to one day own my own publishing company. Last I want to be the best advocate I can be.
5. What are your hobbies? I write poetry and I like listening to music. In my spare time I like to watch sports.
6. What is the best thing about AYLP? I really like the hands on training.

7. What have you done that you are most proud of? Won the advocate of the year award.

8. What made you become an advocate? I was tired of seeing the oppression people with disabilities go through.

Sira Rivas

1. How old are you? I'm 23 years old

2. When and where did you graduate from high school? I attended Larkin High School.

3. What are you doing now? Right now I work at a Goodwill.

4. What are your goals? I would like to get my own home.

5. What are your hobbies? I like reading romance novels, writing and singing. I also like to draw and go horseback riding.

6. What is the best thing about AYL? I really like the people that I have met.

7. What have you done that you are most proud of? I have become a stronger, more assertive individual.

Jason English

1. How old are you? I'm 29 years old.

2. When and where did you graduate from high school? I graduated from Amundsen Football School yard in June of 1997.

3. What are you doing now? I'm really trying to find a job, but also find a girlfriend.

4. What are your goals? Looking for a job, I would like to travel to a place like Paris. I want to go to other disability pride parades around the world.

5. What are your hobbies? I like to draw, write poems and work on the computer.

6. What is the best thing about AYLP? What I love about AYLP is have the opportunity to make friends, and learn more to help fight for disability rights; that is my dream for the world.

7. What have you done that you are most proud of? I'm proud to be a member of AYLP, to help make the world a better place for all of us.

Krystal Evans

1. How old are you? I'm 23 years old.

2. When and where did you graduate from high school? I attended Crane School and graduated in 2005.

3. What are you doing now? Right now I go to Access Living.

4. What are your goals? I would like to get an apartment.

5. What are your hobbies? I like playing games on the computer and watching television.

6. What is the best thing about AYLP? I like that we help people with disabilities.

7. What have you done that you are most proud of? I'm proud of getting my first job at Jewel's grocery store.

8. What made you become an advocate? I became an advocate to empower my disability.

Christopher Watts

1. How old are you? I'm 21 years old.

2. When and where did you graduate from high school? I went to John F. Kennedy High School and graduated in June of 2006.

3. What are you doing now?

4. What are your goals? I would really like to find a job.

5. What are your hobbies? I like going shopping to buy my own clothes.

6. What is the best thing about AYLP? I like learning about issues related to disability.

What is the best thing about AYLP? I learned how to take the bus.

Jazmine Coates

1. How old are you? I'm 21 years old.

2. When and where did you graduate from high school? I went to Vaughn High School.

3. What are you doing now? I'm in school.

4. What are your goals? My goal is to stay in school.

5. What are your hobbies? I like going to see my friends.

6. What is the best thing about AYLP? The best thing about AYLP is that we get to make friends.

## Want to Learn More?

For more information about AYLP, please contact Juvenal Calderon at (773) 330-9062 or Jody Thomas at (773) 261-6467.

For more information about Youth and Education Team programs at Access Living, contact Rahnee K. Patrick at (312) 640-2127 or [rpatrick@accessliving.org](mailto:rpatrick@accessliving.org).

Check out the Access Living Youth Information Website at [www.alyouthinfo.org](http://www.alyouthinfo.org).