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**Table of
Contents:**

*Letter from the
Network
President
Page 4*

*Members'
Circle
Page 5*

*Op-Ed: Service
Dogs
Page 8*

*International
Corner
Page 11*

Learn. Teach. Grow. Become.

By Betsy Valnes
NYLN Executive Director



Learn. Teach. Grow. Become. This was the simple motto for a disability rights group I launched on my college campus. Students with disabilities got together once a month to talk about specific topics, interact with one another, and communicate with a guest speaker (either a fellow student or a professional with a disability in the community). We often talked about issues that were naturally appealing to young people who were in a learning environment. We talked about communicating with professors about accommodations, time management, utilizing campus programs and peer supports like the Writing Center and the Computer Help Desk.

With young people it's instinctual for us to want to learn about things. Not only is it appealing, but also it's the social norm for people our age to be in the position of the student. We often don't fight this because it's something we know we have to do. We are excited to gain information and communicate with our peers. We recognize that learning is part of what makes a good leader. However, what we usually forget is an equally important word: teach.

You are in the position to be an expert in the humblest form of the word. You know what you need. You know what works for you. You know what you want to become. But how often do you get

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credit for teaching others the things that they could get from no one other than you? Who should organizations come to when identifying youth priorities/goals for the year? YOU! Who should teachers come to when trying to find the accommodations to make things successful in a classroom? YOU! Who should policy-makers come to when talking about at least some of the efforts behind transition services, higher education, and a fully inclusive classroom? YOU!

Each year South Dakota holds a Youth Leadership Forum (YLF). We bring in approximately 40 young, emerging leaders with disabilities together for five days of leadership training. These young leaders are all under the age of 21 and most are under the age of 18. During YLF we talk about education and employment. We talk about transportation and policy. But most importantly, we talk about advocacy and personal POWER.

During this same time, a partnering program through the South Dakota Department of Education holds a five-day teacher in-service. This training is open to all teachers across the state, but specific recommendations are given to those teachers who need additional training in affectively working with students with disabilities. National presenters are brought in to update the teachers about laws and policies. Employees of the state Department of Education are brought in to remind them of how to fill out their paperwork and maintain student records. But most importantly, delegates from our YLF take the spotlight and teach the teachers how to teach.

Our students stand in front of a classroom of men and women anywhere from 5 to 45 years older than they. They talk about struggles they have experienced. They talk about how much a teacher can influence a student in his/her classroom—both positively and negatively. They talk about how frustrating it is to not be heard because they are young, and how empowering it is when that one special teacher recognizes what a student needs to be successful. Our delegates leave the room and at least half the teachers have red eyes and a tissue in hand.

These teachers were educated by the experts...the YOUTH experts. This training has taken place for the last five years. And

each year in the teachers' evaluations, the youth have received some of the highest reviews for leading the most powerful and the most influential session. Young leaders, whether they realized it or not, left their mark. They learned what it meant to be an expert...but more importantly, they learned what it felt like. They taught those who teach on a daily basis. They grew as young leaders and got one step closer to knowing how valuable their knowledge really is. And they became a social equal for one exciting day, regardless of their age, regardless of their formal credentials. NYLN hopes that you recognize the opportunity to learn, teach, grow and become. And, when we talk about education, hopefully you can be empowered by the fact that you are not the only one being educated.

The President Says...

By Josie Badger



Dear NYLN Members and Friends,

I hope that this letter finds you well. My name is Josie Badger and I am the President of the NYLN. Being president has been exciting and challenging. During this past quarter, there have been many changes and new additions to the Network.

We have recently opened up membership to the NYLN for all youth with disabilities in the United States. This is an exciting step for the Network. Now, individuals who want to become a part of the NYLN, but never had the chance to attend a conference or institute, have the chance to become a member.

Another exciting addition to the Network is having “Quarterly Themes.” Every quarter the NYLN will have a broad topic that will be the focus of Network activities. The theme for January – March is education. The following themes will be employment, healthcare, and disability awareness. I’m looking forward to the advances these themes will help us make as a unified Network.

One final issue I wanted to address is the importance of involvement. I know that we are all busy with jobs, school, volunteering, or other commitments. These activities can seem overwhelming at times. At times, we may consider dropping out or pass on opportunities to contribute. It has been said that a person will never find time to do something; they have to make the time to do it. Getting involved with NYLN committee can be very rewarding. Sometimes people are afraid to speak up or volunteer. Some feel their opinions do not matter or seem “stupid.” These unspoken ideas or that uninvolved person could have made the difference. Your experiences, ideas, and work are important and will make NYLN a continuing leader for youth with disabilities.

If you have any questions about the National Youth Leadership Network or want to get involved, please contact me at josiebadger@hotmail.com.

Members' Circle

By Kristen Jones



Movie of the Month

Emmanuel's Gift (2005)

Oprah Winfrey narrates this movie. Emmanuel Ofori Yeboah was born with a deformed right leg. This African nation has over 2 million citizens with disabilities. Emmanuel dedicates his life to making life better for people with disabilities. He rides his bike across the country to open minds and change lives. This young leader's work has motivated the King of Ghana to pass several laws to protect the rights of people with disabilities in Ghana.



Book of the Month

The Memory Keeper's Daughter by Kim Edwards (2006) Penguin.

During a blizzard in 1964, Dr. Henry delivered his own twins. While his son was born healthy, he realizes that his daughter has Down's Syndrome. Dr. Henry does not think his wife can handle this news. He makes a choice that will change their lives forever. He asks his nurse to take the baby to an institution. The nurse cannot leave the infant. She disappears to another city to raise the child herself. Here, the story begins.



Website Highlights

- Audacity Magazine www.audacitymagazine.com
- Disability Rights & Education Defense Fund <http://www.dredf.org/>

Quotes Quotes Quotes!

“When you jump for joy, beware that no one moves the ground beneath your feet.”
~Stanislaw Lec



Hillary Jorgensen
NYLN Conference Participant

Hi, I am Hillary Jorgensen. I received my degree in English Literature from the University of Colorado in 2005. Now, I am a second year law student at Seattle University. My experience as a person with a disability motivated me to attend law school. I plan to use my law degree to improve the rights of people with disabilities.

I was very active during my time as an undergraduate college student. I started the first student organization for people with disabilities at the University of Colorado. I also led a Disability Ally Training Program. This program taught others about important disability issues. Students with disabilities still give these training programs to different groups on campus. I was also on the Women's Resource

Center Advisory Board, Underrepresented Student Group Council, and the President's Accessibility Committee. I was the Chair of the University of Colorado's Diversity Commission.

Life as a law student does not give me much time to be active in many disability groups. I am an intern with the Washington Protection and Advocacy System, a disability rights organization in Seattle. I have learned more about the issues that face the disability community. I have a better understanding of these issues in the context of laws. I get the chance to speak with other members of the community on a regular basis. I really enjoy having the chance to work on issues that affect my life and the lives of other people with disabilities. Please feel free to contact me at hillaryjorgensen@gmail.com.

Opportunities for Input

- NYLN is seeking youth between the ages of 16-28 to **join our network**, please visit www.nyln.org to fill out an application.
- Would you like to **recommend someone** for the Members Highlight section of the newsletter? Please contact Kristen Jones at lilkit@aol.com.
- Public Information committee is seeking **writers for the newsletter!** If you think you have writing talent, good ideas or stories to share we want to hear from you! If interested please contact Kara Sheridan at karasheridan@bellsouth.net.

Spotlight Committee

The funding committee of the NYLN is responsible for seeking out funding opportunities to keep the network alive. We need your help now more than ever! Would you be willing to seek out individuals and organizations to make a tax-deductible donation to NYLN? Can you assist us with seeking out large grant opportunities that match the needs of NYLN? If your answer is YES or if you have another funding idea, please contact Kristen Jones at LILKIT@aol.com.

Opinion Editorial

Opinion Editorial

No Dogs Allowed

By Josie Badger

John Clave is a 14-year old boy from Princeton, Massachusetts. John has a hearing impairment. He uses a service dog to help him be aware of things like traffic and fire alarms. John's service dog, named Simba, is banned from his school because school officials will not allow the dog into the building. John's parents argue that the school district is breaking the law. They are in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act. This law says that educators must provide anything that is a "reasonable accommodation" to a student with a disability. The school district says that John does not *need* Simba to attend school.



Caption: Josie smiles with her service dog, Vito.

I received my own service dog, Vito, from *Paws with a Cause* during my junior year of high school. It took a few weeks for everyone to get used to him. There were never any major issues with him being at school. A few teachers and administrators were worried about a dog being in school. Some had questions about safety, distraction and allergies. The school district offered to make reasonable accommodations for other people, like changing a schedule for anyone who was afraid of dogs or had an allergy. Service dogs are very well trained and tested. It is very unlikely that they would ever be aggressive. After the first few weeks of Vito attending school with me, the only distraction was when he fell asleep and snored during French class. Vito quickly became a normal part of the school.

Having a service dog at school was beneficial to me and a positive experience for the student body. Vito was able to help me become more independent, gain more confidence, and break down walls between my non-disabled peers and myself. His presence at school taught students about disabilities, acceptance, and the importance of working animals. Vito has been my service dog for the past five years. Now we attend college together.

I believe that the position taken by the New York School Board is legally and ethically wrong and is based on false assumptions about service dogs. Although the school may be accommodating John, they are not encouraging his independence. The Americans with Disabilities Act mandates that all public places allow the use of

service dogs. The school district needs to look at the reason behind the ruling again. They should consider the benefits of having the service dog in the school for John and his classmates.

Accessible Avenues

By Claire Stanley



One major accessibility issue I have faced in high school has been the lack of accessible Braille materials. Several of the textbooks I have needed over the four years of high school have not been available. This year, as a senior, two of my books were not available in Braille. Because of this, they have had to be Brailled as we go, causing me to fall behind in both math and biology. Another problem I have faced has been my textbooks not being sent in until a month or more after the school year has started. My Spanish textbook was not sent to my school until November this year, forcing me to do a lot of makeup work. Some of my books have been available on tape, but using books on tape makes it more difficult to do my homework assignments. Also, several of the handouts and other materials from my classes have not been in Braille. I have had to be extremely dependent on other students to read me the assignments. The hardest part about this problem is that it is very hard to find a solution. I have made complaints and tried to change things, but the problem is the textbooks and materials simply do not exist. The publishers have not produced them. So even if my school district was completely behind me, the problem starts at a much higher level.

Accessible Avenues will feature what youths have to say about accessibility issues. This column is written by the Access for All Committee. If you would like to respond to Claire's experience or have something to share about accessibility challenges that you have encountered, please e-mail Peter Squire at psquire@gmu.edu.

If you are a student and feel that you have been denied accommodations from your school, you have several options. If your school refuses to provide services (interpreters, Braille format documents, and tutoring), alternative test taking approaches, or similar modifications, you may consider doing the following:

- 1) Contact your school's support service department. If you are in High School, you may consider contacting the Special Education Teacher/Provider to discuss your Individualized Education Plan (I.E.P). Be involved in deciding what accommodations are best for you. If you are in college, you may want to contact the university's Disability Resource Center to discuss the types of services you need.
- 2) Contact your local Independent Living Center (ILC). Each state has their own ILC. These centers can connect you with resources on advocacy, empowerment, and accessibility. A good website to find your local ILC would be <http://www.ilusa.com/links/ilcenters.htm>.
- 3) Contact the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) at <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/> to see what type of services you are eligible to receive under the United States educational laws.
- 4) If you feel that these services are not helpful, you may consider filing a complaint with the Department of Education. This is free. Information on how to file a complaint can be found at <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/howto.html> .

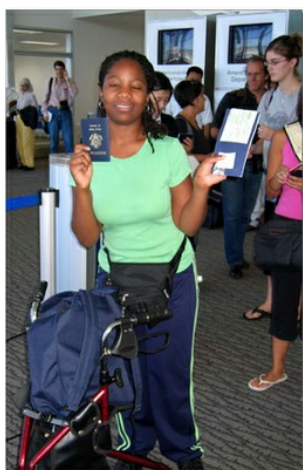
Contributed by: Tommy Horejes

International Corner

A Brazilian Twist: Studying Abroad as a Student with a Disability

By: Jenobia Pitts

I definitely have the travel bug. Right after coming back from a leadership program in Japan, I was ready to pack my bags again! I wanted to see another part of the world. I needed to take a foreign language in order to meet my degree requirements. Living in Florida, we have a strong cultural influence from central and South America. Learning Spanish seemed an obvious choice, but I was ready for a challenge. I chose Brazilian Portuguese instead of Spanish.



As I started to study Portuguese, I thought about going to Brazil. My dreams were answered one day after language class! A representative from the University of Florida International Center visited my class to talk about a summer program. It was offered through the university in Rio de Janeiro, the capital of Brazil. I had fallen in love with the language and culture already, and this was my chance! I jumped at the opportunity to apply, and I was determined to be one of the students selected to go to this amazing country.

Caption: Jenobia smiles with her passport before getting on the plane.

I was selected and was very excited, but I had a lot of work to do. I would be living with a Brazilian family, attending a daily language class, and participating in cultural seminars and trips for six weeks during the summer. What about my classroom accommodations? These were essential to my success. I immediately requested services from my disability services office on campus. I was relieved by how quickly they acted. Because the program was associated with the university, all classroom accommodations would be provided just as they were on campus. All requirements were followed, but with a bit of a Brazilian twist.

What was that twist? The Brazilian instructors had little experience with disability-related classroom accommodations or students with disabilities. Some of the adjustments were unfamiliar to them. I had to advocate for myself and educate my teachers about my needs. Although my accommodations such as uninterrupted

exam times and having an informed proctor in the room were followed, the quality and consistency of services was not as good as I would have liked. However, I still had an incredible experience.

Transportation was definitely a challenge in Brazil because I use a walker most of the time. In the city and nearby areas, I often found myself stumbling with my walker. The sidewalks in the busy Rio de Janeiro streets are in poor condition. I had to be more alert and aware. I wasn't the only one struggling with rough sidewalks! I witnessed many of the locals having a hard time too!

The cultural field trips were a highlight of my time abroad. The staff helped by arranging tourist buses, which were accessible, instead of public transportation. We also used the public train system and local taxis, both of which are very accessible to people with disabilities. Like in the U.S., I did encounter a couple of difficult taxi drivers who wanted to either charge me more or not take me at all because of my walker. I looked at both of these incidents as typical tourist moments, which can happen to anyone, anywhere.

You never know where a bump in the road or a bend in the path will take you. I had many twists and turns while studying in Brazil and living with a local family during my six weeks there. My advice for others traveling internationally is to, take the challenge, make others aware of your needs, and learn to be your own advocate. Though traveling to another country may not always be easy, especially for a person with a disability, there is nothing more rewarding when you meet those challenges.

Studying Portuguese and living in Rio de Janeiro was an experience that I will never forget. I am already thinking about packing my bags again. Where will my love for Portuguese take me next?

***Jenobia Pitts** is a student at the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida. She is pursuing a degree in political science. Jenobia has been involved in the University of Florida chapter of Model United Nations, the Gator chapter of the NAACP, the Esquire Pre-Law Society and the Delta Sigma Omicron service fraternity. She has participated on international exchange programs to Japan and Brazil. Jenobia has cerebral palsy and uses a walker. She is a member of the National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange's Peer-to-Peer network.*

For free information on international exchange opportunities or disability accommodation tips, visit the National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange website at www.miusa.org/ncde.

If you want to **go abroad on a cultural exchange, stay with host families, learn a language** or **study abroad in another country**, the National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange, which is sponsored by of the United States Department of State and administered by Mobility International USA, provides free information on international options available, lists of scholarships and funding, and how to best prepare to go abroad including the book “Survival Strategies for Going Abroad: A Guide for People with Disabilities” available at www.miusa.org/publications or by contacting 541-343-1284 (tel/tty) or clearinghouse@miusa.org.

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