

Picture YOUR Life Academy: Collaborative Effort to Assist Transition-Age Youth with Disabilities to Gain Advocacy and Independent Living Skills

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The “Picture YOUR Life” Academy (PYLA)

- Collaborative effort to assist youth with disabilities and in foster care to develop the necessary skills to transition to adulthood.
- Summer workshop series promoting informed decision making and community involvement through a curriculum inclusive of independent living skills with self-advocacy and self-determination woven through all topics.

Topics covered:

Disability Rights History
Self-advocacy
Empowerment
Voting
Cooking & Nutrition
Take Charge of Your Health

Communication
Coping
Problem-Solving & Decision-Making
Goal-Setting
Transitioning, Options, Your Future



Background

The PYLA was created as part of the “Creating a ‘Picture of a Life’ for Transitioning Youth with DD in Foster Care” (POL) project which helps prepare youth with DD who are about to exit foster care to exercise choice, promote the use of informal and community supports, and to make knowledgeable decisions on community living and work by utilizing person-centered planning in conjunction with self-advocacy/determination and independent living skills workshops.

PYLA has evolved during the last four years to be inclusive of youth not participating in the POL project and multiple partners in an effort to make the program sustainable.



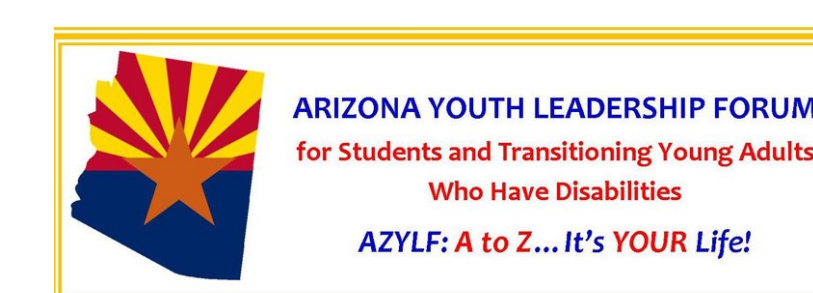
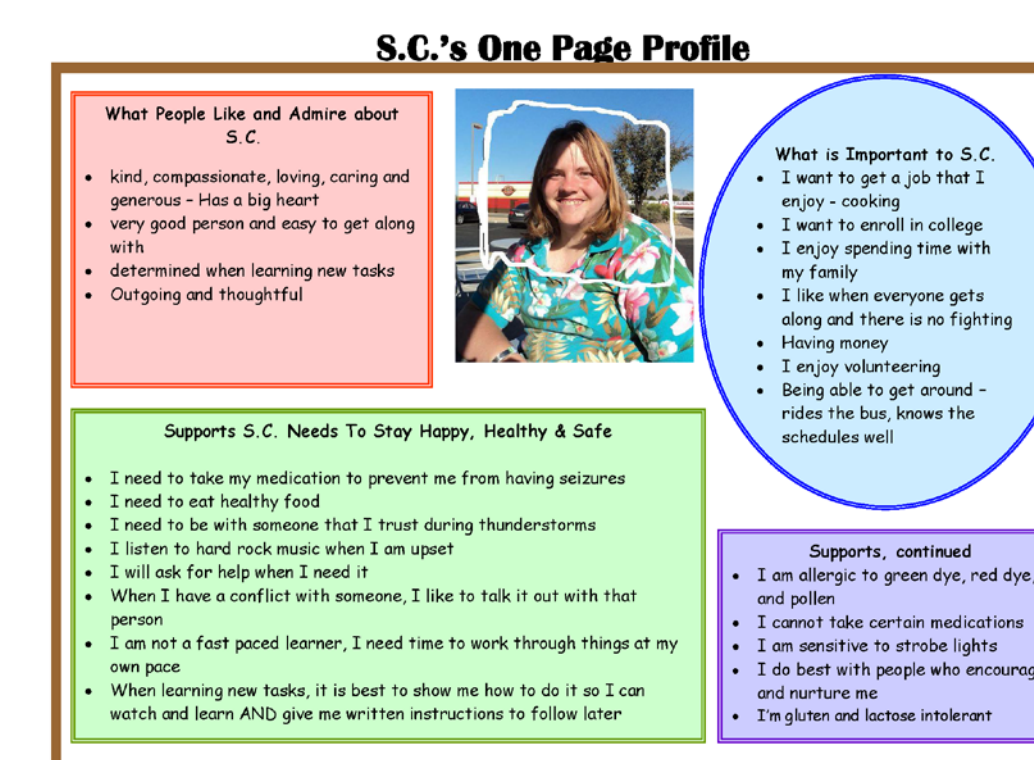
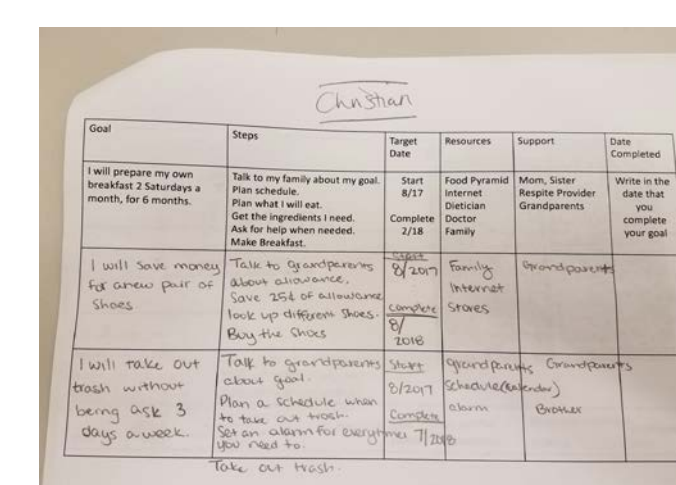
Developed YR2 of POL Project

- Partnering with the 2 AZ ILCs in Phoenix and Tucson
- Utilizes existing “This is My Life” program contract with the AZ Division of Developmental Disabilities
- Scheduled as weekly after-school workshop sessions



Extended beyond POL Project participants to include youth with any disability

- Priority given to youth with DD in the child welfare system
- Summer series lengthened to 6 weeks to cover more topics
- Tucson held bi-weekly sessions & Phoenix continued weekly



Participants

33 youth with disabilities – I/DD, physical, sensory, learning, speech, and psychiatric

22 of youth with disabilities in foster care

Ages 14 – 30 years

10 Females | 23 Males

24% underrepresented racial/ethnic groups

Youth recruitment and outreach through POL project, independent living centers, school transition coordinators, and state agency case managers for DD services, child welfare and vocational rehabilitation.

Partnerships

The POL project received major funding from the Arizona DD Planning Council. The Sonoran UCEDD worked closely with the state DD agency, the 2 largest independent living centers (ILCs) in central and southern AZ, and the state Title V agency to offer PYLA. We leveraged existing relationships to bring in new content and guest speakers from the state child welfare agency, Arizona Youth Leadership Forum, AZ’s protection and advocacy agency, and vocational rehabilitation.

Feedback

100% Satisfied with Workshops attended

92% learned more about Self-advocacy

96% learned more about Self-determination

Discussion

Challenges

- Recruitment - competed with summer full day programs
- Retention & Attendance
 - Support and commitment from important stakeholders – case managers, caregivers, residential placements – for youth participation
- Central AZ metropolitan ILC location (Greater Phoenix Area)
 - Distance, travel time, traffic
 - Ongoing weekly sessions were difficult to maintain
- Specific to Foster Youth
 - Lack of consistency and support from people involved in youth’s life
 - Transportation: Most youth dependent on residential placement and unable to use alternate transportation
 - Many have not been taught or encouraged to learn how to use transit system
 - Many not allowed “alone time” in the community

Lessons Learned

- Start recruitment early
- Changed workshop start times to after most day programs end
- PYLA format and implementation not successful at both locations
- Curriculum enhancements based on youth and partners’ feedback
- Staff and support network critical for foster youth participation

Next Steps

- Explore alternative formats and feasibility for Greater Phoenix Area – number of sessions, time, location, methods
- Seek additional funding mechanisms – billable service through disability service systems, build into existing services/programs, etc.
- Continue to partner with ILCs and AZYL on activities and inclusion of foster youth with disabilities in existing programming

What Youth Liked Most about PYLA:

“learning new things,” “voting workshop,”
“the videos,” “meeting new people,”
“making new friends”

YR1/YR2 Youth wanted to learn more about:

Cooking, money & budgeting, work related topics (e.g., interviewing, “how to get a job”)

“[The workshops] were very helpful and taught me how I have my own voice and should speak up.”



ABILITY360

Built upon YR1 of PYLA by partnering with AZ Title V agency to provide Health Care Organizers

- Worked with youth to better understand their medical conditions to promote health care advocacy
- Assisted youth in creating their own medical information packets
- Sessions offered once per week for 4 weeks during the summer



Additional partnership with the Arizona Youth Leadership Forum

- AZYL director & youth alumni shared in teaching workshop sessions at Phoenix ILC
- All youth created 1-page profiles
- Expanded to 8 weeks, twice per week in both locations



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