



GCD: Governor's Council on Disability



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[Governor's Council on Disability](#)

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GCD AWARDS LEADERS IN INCLUSION AND YOUTH LEADERSHIP

by Claudia Browner

On April 4, the Governor's Council on Disability (GCD) presented its annual awards for Inclusion and Youth Leadership at the Power Up Assistive Technology Conference in Columbia. More than 500 conference attendees and exhibitors witnessed the awards presentation to the 2022 Inclusion and Youth Leadership Award winners, and enjoyed hearing a musical performance by the 10th annual Youth Leadership Award winner.

In its 31st year, the annual [Inclusion Award](#) recognizes individuals, agencies, employers or organizations that exemplify best practices in the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in one or more of these aspects: education, employment, housing, leisure activities, transportation, universal design, and website accessibility.

2022 Inclusion Award winner: Tim Lewin, Embassy Suites St. Louis – St. Charles



Embassy Suites St. Louis – St. Charles and General Manager Tim Lewin have demonstrated excellent inclusive practices for many years by creating a dynamic, supportive culture that welcomes individuals with disabilities to the hospitality industry. Through partnerships with local programs, individuals with disabilities learn hard and soft skills of working at a hotel. These experiences give students an up-close look at competitive employment. Embassy uses a simple mentor model to welcome individuals with disabilities and reports that inclusion has naturally become part of its culture.

The business has gone above and beyond to mentor and hire employees with disabilities, which has led to adults with disabilities comprising 25% of the total staff. Lewin models kindness, understanding, and a work ethic beyond reproach, which leads everyone on his team to do the same. He is an inclusion champion in every way.

Honorable Mention: Brock Sousa, Hannibal Public High School



Brock Sousa is a teacher for the Hannibal Public High School, but other titles include coach, advocate, mentor, friend, and jack-of-all-trades. Sousa embodies inclusion and employment first in a rural area. He has been helping others see the importance of a diverse workforce, inclusive practices, and community outreach opportunities. This started with the BEST Program (Basic Employment Skills Training) in 2017. In the first BEST year, four students
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applied for jobs and began working at Hannibal Regional Hospital during the school day through the school year. Today, the program has grown to 16 students, 4 community job sites, and many continued agency partnerships.

Sousa strives to give students every opportunity possible to gain work experience and access to their local communities so that they can be included and involved.

The **Youth Leadership Award** recognizes young individuals with disabilities for their leadership and advocacy efforts that positively impact the lives of people with disabilities in their communities. The winners of the 10th annual Youth Leadership Awards for 2022 are:

Youth Leadership Award winner: Holly Connor



Holly Connor is senior at Clayton High School in St. Louis, who is an aspiring singer, actor, and musician. Holly plans to attend Webster University this fall to pursue a degree in Vocal Performance and piano, and she is working toward to becoming a voice over actor for animated films and cartoons. Holly hopes to continue to create and expand awareness, acceptance, and inclusion, especially within the Arts, as she wants arts for all.

Holly has extraordinary music skills, and her passions are performing live musical theater, singing opera, and playing instruments. She plays piano, tap dances, studies ballet, composes original music, loves telling stories, and has a natural gift of voice and comedic timing. Holly is an award-winning Braille user and has done disability awareness presentations to enlighten others. Holly does not let her disabilities interfere with sharing her message that people of all abilities can be included. Throughout her life, Holly has spread story of awareness, acceptance, and inclusion with others as she also strives to improve the quality of life of other people with disabilities.

Honorable Mention: Samantha Keeney



Samantha (Sam) Keeney is a senior at Van Buren High School, and a graduate of the 2022 Missouri Youth Leadership Forum. Sam is a very outgoing young woman. She enjoys being a member of her high school's Quiz Bowl team, and has achieved the all-conference title for two years. Sam is also a very active member of the Senior Beta Club. She does not let her disability define or limit her future. Recently, she provided a presentation at a transition conference to share her experience at the Missouri Youth Leadership Forum.

Sam plans to attend Three Rivers Community College in the fall, before attending Missouri State University in Springfield to study history and become a teacher. Her goal is to make history fun for all of her students.

Sam advocates for others, and provides support and encouragement for her peers. She is very studious about knowing the laws and regulations when it comes to having any disability. She wants everyone to be treated fairly and respectfully, and sees everyone as equal.

Congratulations to all of our winners! Read more on how you can participate in the GCD Awards programs by visiting our website at disability.mo.gov/gcd and click on [Inclusion Award](#) and [Youth Leadership Award](#).

APRIL IS AUTISM ACCEPTANCE MONTH

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are a group of developmental disabilities defined by significant delays in social interaction and communication.

Read about the Missouri Autism Guidelines Initiative at autismguidelines.dmh.mo.gov and visit the Missouri Department of Mental Health—Office of Autism Services' website at dmh.mo.gov/dev-disabilities/autism to find information, resources, and programs for individuals, parents, families, caregivers, and providers.



DISABILITY RIGHTS LEGISLATIVE DAY A GREAT SUCCESS

by Laura Mueth

Disability Rights Legislative Day (DRLD) was held March 1. The day was outstanding. It is estimated that more than four hundred people filled the Capitol Rotunda and surrounding areas, and one hundred eighty-two (182) joined virtually to hear from self-advocates, a parent, legislators, First Lady Teresa Parson, and Treasurer Vivek Malek.

After the hour long rally concluded, those at the Capitol were encouraged to visit with legislators to share their personal experiences around employment, transportation, the caregiver crisis, or anything else they wanted to discuss with legislators with the goal of helping them understand the needs of Missourians with disabilities. Fifty-four percent of participants met with at least one legislator.



For those who joined virtually and/or were unable to meet with a legislator during the afternoon, breakout sessions were held via Zoom. Nicole Noblet, a self-advocate, and Brianna Lennon, the Boone County Clerk, teamed up to discuss accessible voting. Drawing from a topic focused on at the rally, there was a session on universal mobility and advocacy presented by Enjoli Dixon. To provide an opportunity for virtual attendees to speak with legislators, the last offering was a legislator mixer with Representatives Bridget Walsh Moore and Travis Smith.

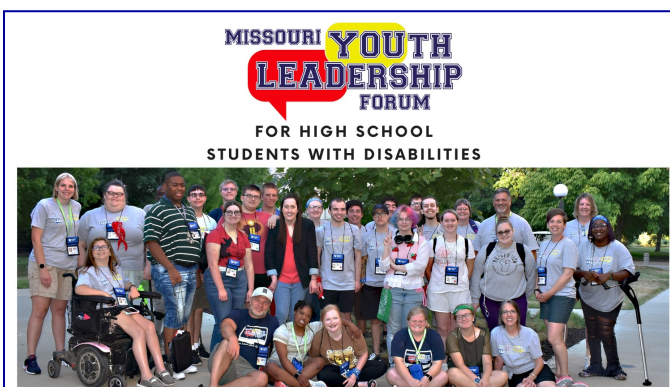
If you attended the event and have not already completed the [Disability Rights Legislative Day survey](#), please do so. The information will assist the planning committee in making next year's event even better.

If you were unable to attend the event, you can view the recording of the rally and get additional information on the [DRLD website](#).

APPLY FOR THE 2023 MISSOURI YOUTH LEADERSHIP FORUM BY THE APRIL 15 DEADLINE

by Rachel Rackers

As a reminder, the dates for the 2023 Missouri Youth Leadership Forum (MO-YLF) are July 18-22nd and the event is held at the University of Missouri in Columbia, MO. While at MO-YLF, the delegates will gain leadership skills, knowledge, self-confidence, and much more.



Each year, the MO-YLF provides high school students with disabilities (ages 16-21) a week-long college setting experience, where they learn about disability history, advocacy, the legislative process, transition to employment or higher education, adaptive technology and adaptive sports. It is important for students with disabilities to learn skills by example and interactions with others who share similar experiences, which is what MO-YLF provides. In addition to leadership skills, the student delegates learn to set life goals, advocate for their needs, and give back to their community. There is no cost for accepted delegates to attend the program. The program is funded through sponsorships and donations.

The application deadlines are April 15, 2023 for delegates and May 1, 2023 for staff. Applications for delegates, staff, and volunteers are now available on our website.

For more information or to apply, visit <https://disability.mo.gov/gcd/yf.htm> If you have any questions about the GCD's youth programs, please contact Rachel Rackers at rachel.rackers@oa.mo.gov or 573-751-2600.

Please help us share this exciting leadership training opportunity with students, parents, teachers and colleagues!

Missouri Governor's Council on Disability— Council Members

- Ronald Hack, Council Chair, St. Louis
- Joan Bergstrom, Ed. D, Lee's Summit
- Charles Comstock, Kirksville
- Wayne Crawford, Marshall
- Betty Davidson, Ph.D., St. Louis
- Chip Hailey, Joplin
- Rosemary Hendon, West Plains
- Katie Jones, St. Charles
- Kim Lackey, St. Louis
- Elijah Mayfield, Jefferson City
- Susan Orton, Creve Coeur
- Traci Ritter, Cape Girardeau
- Andrew Sartorius, Jefferson City
- Lesia Shelton, Buffalo
- James Trout, St. Louis
- Robert Wallace, St. Louis

Missouri Governor's Council on Disability— Staff Members

- Claudia Browner, Executive Director
- Laura Mueth, Senior Program Specialist
- Rachel Rackers, Senior Program Specialist
- Jennifer Pettit, Lead Administrative Support Assistant

YOUTH PARTICIPATE IN VIRTUAL LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

by Rachel Rackers



The Governor's Council on Disability has hosted its third annual [Virtual Leadership Summit](#). On Saturday, March 4th, thirty-three high school students who represented seventeen different Missouri counties, met virtually to learn about career development, leadership, goal setting, self-determination, self-advocacy, independent living, and more.

To kick off the event, participants heard from keynote speaker, J'den Cox about the importance of setting goals and staying positive despite barriers you face in life. They also learned a lot of valuable information from four of our Missouri Youth Leadership Forum (MO-YLF) alumni and Vocational Rehabilitation about employment and college. The alumni shared their personal experiences in both and provided great tips and tools for self-advocacy and leadership. They also spoke about the importance of mentors, asking for accommodations, utilizing the disability services on campus, and how the MO-YLF impacted their lives. Participants then learned about self-determination, self-advocacy and independent living during a session facilitated by Jill McClintock.

A special thank you goes to Paraquad, MU Pre-Employment Transition Services, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and MOCIL for their involvement in the planning and staffing of the event. Also, thank you to the many panelists and MO-YLF alumni that participated in the third Virtual Leadership Summit.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- **May 2-4, 2023**
Annual Charting the LifeCourse Showcase, Kansas City
<https://www.lifecoursetools.com/events/showcase-2023>
- **May 15-16, 2023**
Aging with Developmental Disabilities Conference, St. Charles
<https://www.agingwithdd.org/conference/>
- **May 21-24, 2023**
National ADA Symposium, Kansas City
<https://adasymposium.org>
- **June 5-7, 2023**
Missouri Rehabilitation Association (MRA) Conference, Osage Beach
<https://www.mo-rehab.org/conference>
- **June 26-28, 2023**
Transition Training Institute, Columbia
<https://dese.mo.gov/media/pdf/2023-missouri-transition-training-institute-gear-future>
- **July 18-22, 2023**
Missouri Youth Leadership Forum
<https://disability.mo.gov/gcd/ylf.htm>
- **August 27-29, 2023**
Real Voices—Real Choices Conference, Osage Beach
<https://www.missourimhf.org/real-voices-real-choices-conference/>

If you know of other events you would like us to share with the disability community, please contact our office.