The 2016 Legislative Education Project (LEP) is off to an early and fast start.

LEP on the Road
Rob Honan and Laura Mueth have already presented at three centers for independent living in December, helping staff and consumers become more knowledgeable about the legislative process and ready for the upcoming legislative session.

We would like to thank The Whole Person in Kansas City, Services for Independent Living in Columbia, and West-Central Independent Living Solutions in Warrensburg for hosting us. The LEP on the Road training may still be requested once the legislative session begins. If your organization is interested in hosting a training for your staff, consumers, families, or advocacy organization, contact Laura Mueth at 800-877-8249 or Laura.Mueth@oa.mo.gov.

Pictured below is a group of LEP on the Road participants displaying signs about legislative topics that are important to them.

Videos about hearings and testimony, building a relationship with legislators, and voting are also available.

LEP at the Capitol
The Governor’s Council on Disability staff is still offering a training at the Capitol in Jefferson City for those who are interested in receiving a legislative training “in the heart of the action.” We have already had one school group schedule. There are no pre-set dates as in the past. If you would like to discuss bringing a group of advocates, contact Laura Mueth at 800-877-8249 or Laura.Mueth@oa.mo.gov.

LEP Online
Two of the learning modules: Understanding How a Bill Becomes a Law in Missouri and Your Elected Officials and General Assembly have been updated. The learning modules are available on the Legislative Education Project web page at http://disability.mo.gov/gcd/LEP.htm.
Service Animal Fraud

The Governor’s Council on Disability has received many calls over the last few months from people concerned that their business is letting in fraudulent service dogs. Many individuals express concern about the inability to ask for some type of identification that the dog is a legitimate service dog. Many of them state they have no recourse under the current laws. Some comment that it is being abused by individuals who know they can get by with it. The State of Missouri and the federal government do not have a law penalizing someone for impersonating a service dog, or that works to deter service animal fraud. Several states have enacted laws making the act a crime. Organizations such as Canine Companions for Independence are making efforts to alert the U.S. Department of Justice to the severity of the situation on a national level in hopes that it may bring about future changes.

Business owners or individuals with disabilities can help to educate individuals and legislators by talking to their friends and family about the issue, signing the Canine Companions for Independence pledge, and talking to your state representative or senator and the U.S. Department of Justice.

The Governor’s Council on Disability is available to assist individuals or groups with crafting a message to share with your legislators.

MYLIFE Alumni Association

Did you know that the Alumni of the Missouri Youth Leadership Forum have formed their own organization called the MYLIFE Alumni Association? There are now 244 graduates of the Missouri Youth Leadership Forum (MO-YLF) who are role models and mentors for youth following in their footsteps. MYLIFE’s mission is to support and sustain the MO-YLF though alumni engagement in promoting continued educational and leadership opportunities. Within the past couple of years a variety of Alumni have stepped out of their comfort zones to serve as keynote speakers and participate on panel discussions sharing messages on self-determination, advocacy, personal transition experiences, and outreach for the Missouri Youth Leadership Forum. Many have volunteered at organizations and initiated their own community projects including holding a holiday party for a day program in Kansas City in December. Every year, Alumni return to the Missouri Youth Leadership Forum to serve as volunteer staff and mentors. The Missouri Youth Leadership Forum is what it is today because of the involvement of its Alumni. If your organization is interested in a MYLIFE Alumni speaking or volunteering for an event at your organization, contact Rachel Baskerville by emailing wheelsrkb5@aol.com.

MYLIFE Alumni Association Officers are:

Chair: Rachel Baskerville, 2005
Co-Chair: Sarah Schwegel, 2011
Treasurer: Brian Chao, 2007
Secretary: Kaitlyn Thompson, 2009
Board Member: Colton Rich, 2014
Win a MacBook Pro: Play the MO-YLF Raffle

1st Prize: MacBook Pro with Retina display
2nd Prize: iPad Mini
3rd Prize: $100 Target Gift Card

For contest rules and details, or to purchase raffle tickets, please visit https://rallyup.com/mo-ylf-fundraiser2016.

The money raised from this fundraiser will be used to help provide opportunities for 30 high schools students from across the state to attend the 14th Annual Missouri Youth Leadership Forum for Youth with Disabilities (MO-YLF) on July 12 - 16, 2016 at NO cost to the student or their families.

If you know of a student with disabilities who has leadership potential, please share the information about this exciting program with them. GCD is looking for applicants from all areas of the state. The application is available online at http://disability.mo.gov/gcd/ylf.htm

For questions, please contact the Missouri Youth Leadership Forum at (800) 877-8249 or (573) 751-2600.

Save the Date: MO-YLF July 12-16, 2016 by Dawn Evans

The Missouri Youth Leadership Forum (MO-YLF) is a unique 5 day training program for high schools students with disabilities, ages 16-21, designed to cultivate leadership, citizenship, social, and career development skills. The Missouri Youth Leadership Forum is hosted by the Governor’s Council on Disability and Paraquad. This program is not funded by state revenues. All funding is handled through Paraquad, a nonprofit, 501(c)3. Donations are tax-deductible.

If you know of a student with disabilities who has leadership potential, please share the information about this exciting program with them. GCD is looking for applicants from all areas of the state. The application is available online at http://disability.mo.gov/gcd/ylf.htm

For questions, please contact the Missouri Youth Leadership Forum at (800) 877-8249 or (573) 751-2600.

GCD publishes 2015 Annual Report by Claudia Browner

Per statute, the Governor’s Council on Disability (GCD) is required to publish an annual report each year.

Compiling this report provided opportunity to reflect on the goals we have accomplished in 2015, and focus on the tasks that lie ahead for 2016.

Some of the highlights for 2015 were:

- Linda Baker retired from GCD after more than 19 years with the agency
- Rob Honan was rehired as the Executive Director
- Yvonne Wright was appointed as the Chair for GCD
- A record number of 27 delegates attended the Missouri Youth Leadership Forum
- GCD began publishing the quarterly newsletter

GCD and partnering agencies hosted the Hands Around the Capitol event
GCD introduced LEP on the Road

To read the entire annual report, please visit our website at http://disability.mo.gov/gcd/files/2015_AnnualReport.pdf
GCD names 2015 Award Winners

2015 Inclusion Award Winners

The Governor’s Council on Disability (GCD) has selected the award winner and honorable mention of the 24th Annual Inclusion Award.

The Inclusion Award and one Honorable Mention are presented annually to recognize private and public employers, individuals, and organizations that have successfully included people with disabilities in education, employment, housing, and leisure activities. Individuals are also encouraged to nominate state and local government divisions or employees they truly feel excel in inclusive practices.

The 2015 Inclusion Award winner is the THRIVE program in Warrensburg.

Transformation, Health, Responsibility, Independence, Vocation, Education (THRIVE) are the goals of any college student. At the University of Central Missouri (UCM), they are the foundation of THRIVE. This two-year certificate program prepares students with disabilities for independent living, personal interaction, and employment fitting their goals and abilities. THRIVE provides improved academic abilities, interaction with age peers, computer skills, job skills, and career-focused internships. THRIVE partners with UCM’s Communication Disorders, Kinesiology, Social Work, Counselor Education, and others to develop the knowledge of their own students for the benefit of the THRIVE program. Students in peer organizations of fraternities, sororities, intramurals, and other UCM groups embrace the THRIVE students and will ultimately become employees who hire persons with disabilities. THRIVE graduates have achieved results equivalent to other college students.

The Honorable Mention for 2015 goes to Kelsey Mack of Blue Springs.

Kelsey’s dream was to create and operate her own business, to assist other individuals with disabilities, to be more fully included and explore their talents through employment. As a result, Kelsey created The Bird’s Nest in November 2014.

Located in Blue Springs, The Bird’s Nest is a gift shop which sells items handcrafted solely by individuals with disabilities. Kelsey’s secondary goal is to hire these same individuals to work within the shop. During 2014 and 2015, Kelsey signed 27 crafters, bakers, and artists to sell their creations, and has employed an adult with a traumatic brain injury to create her logo. Kelsey has demonstrated excellence in leadership and advocacy within The Bird’s Nest.

2015 Youth Leadership Award Winner

The Governor’s Council on Disability (GCD) has selected the winner of the 3rd Annual Youth Leadership Award. The Youth Leadership Award is a program to recognize an outstanding Missouri youth (age 16-26) with a disability that has demonstrated exemplary leadership by making a difference in their community.

The 3rd Annual Youth Leadership Award winner is Caitlin Bartley

Caitlin recently graduated from Lincoln University (LU) with a double major in Psychology and Social Work with Magna Cum Laude honors, and has been accepted into the Masters Program at the University of Missouri, where she will continue her quest to help others through social work. Caitlin’s disability is severe, but she has yet to let this be an obstacle to her accomplishments. Attributes like self-awareness, proactive involvement, perseverance, goal-setting, and the use of effective support systems have led her to a successful and rewarding life. On LU campus, Caitlin initiated changes in two of the main buildings to make them accessible.

Her achievements and honors include: MDA Goodwill Ambassador for central Missouri; Missouri Youth Leadership Forum graduate; Speaker for Children’s Miracle Network Radiothon, Women’s Rights Conference, Transition Summit, and Power Up Assistive Technology Conference; Assistant Secretary to LU’s Student Government Association, and member of the Women’s Leadership Academy at LU.

For additional information, please contact GCD at 573-751-2600 or by email at gcd@oa.mo.gov

Web: http://disability.mo.gov/gcd/youthleadershipaward.htm

The awards will be presented at the Missouri Assistive Technology’s Power Up conference at the St. Charles Convention Center in St. Charles on April 19, 2016.