

Governor's Council on Disability

2023 Youth Leadership Award Winners and Nominees

Winners exemplify standards of excellence in enhancing life for individuals living with disabilities

The annual Youth Leadership Award recognizes outstanding Missouri youths (age 16-26) with a disability that have demonstrated exemplary leadership by making a positive difference in their communities and beyond.

The Governor's Council on Disability (GCD) selected the following winner and one honorable mention of the **11th Annual Youth Leadership Award** in 2023.

2023 Winners

Winner – Lydia Olmsted, Columbia, MO



Lydia Olmsted has emerged as a vital advocate in Columbia, Missouri and is making remarkable strides in championing the rights of individuals with disabilities, particularly those who are DeafBlind. Undeterred by challenges, she has fearlessly confronted discrimination, educated communities, and ignited crucial conversations about inclusivity.

As a student, Lydia became a powerful voice for equal access. From high school to college, she advocated for reasonable accommodations, demonstrating a strong commitment to inclusion. This dedication cultivated a remarkable network of local, state, and national partners, including the Missouri School for the Blind, Services for Independent Living, Boone County Family Resources, Deaf LEAD, Helen Keller National Center, and many others all working together to advance accessibility and equity.

Building on her advocacy work, Lydia empowers individuals directly. As a peer mentor at the Midwest Transition Institute, she guides fellow individuals with disabilities, helping them navigate life after high school. Through advocacy classes at Services for Independent Living and EnCircle Technologies, she equips others with the tools to become self-advocates, leading to significant changes in their lives.

Lydia's work has garnered well-deserved recognition. She recently received the inaugural Senator Chuck Graham Memorial Disability and Advocacy Ambassador Award from the City of Columbia Disabilities Commission, acknowledging her exceptional contributions to the community. This recognition was followed by an invitation to deliver the keynote address at the Missouri Centers for Independent Living annual conference, where her inspiring message resonated deeply with the audience. Following her impactful speech, the Great Plains ADA Center recognized her talent and offered her a part-time contracting position, where she now contributes to improving digital accessibility. Lydia is a 2019 graduate of the Missouri Youth Leadership Forum.

Honorable Mention – Margot Epstein, St. Louis, MO



Clayton High School senior, Margot Epstein, embodies academic excellence, athletic prowess, and dedication to community service. While navigating the world with visual impairments, she consistently achieves academic success, earning recognition for her work in subjects like Biomedical Ethics and French. Outside of the classroom, Margot thrives as a champion rider, her lifelong passion for horses evident in her achievements. She finds freedom and self-understanding through riding, excelling in local and national events and earning recognition for her skill and determination.

This same passion translates into community service. Throughout her high school years, Margot has devoted countless hours to supporting other children with disabilities through her involvement with the Delta Gamma Center and various other organizations. Margot has also contributed to the St. Louis Art Festival, highlighting her artistic talents while supporting the community.

Teachers and mentors praise Margot's character, resilience, and kindness, recognizing her as a champion for inclusion and advocacy. Her determination to shatter limitations shines through in her willingness to speak up for herself and others, inspiring her peers with her strength. An honor student and role model, Margot actively works to create a more inclusive and equitable world, a mission she intends to carry into her future medical career. Her spirit and dedication to improving lives will undoubtedly leave a lasting impact on her community.

The awards will be presented to the winners at the Missouri Rehabilitation Association (MRA) Conference at Lake Ozark on May 29, 2025.

2023 Youth Leadership Award nominees

The Governor's Council on Disability congratulates the following individuals on being nominated for the Governor's Council on Disability's 11th Annual Youth Leadership Award.

Cheyenne Alexander

From Kansas City, Nominated by Southeast Enterprises Sheltered Workshop for her work as peer role model and her continuous advocacy for herself and other individuals with disabilities.

Cole Leroux

From Doniphan, Nominated by Current River Sheltered Workshop for his volunteering spirit and his dedication to inspiring others in his community.

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