

Governor's Council on Disability

2024 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 **12th Annual Youth Leadership Award** in 2024.

2024 Winners

Winner – Arabel StandingBear - Neosho, MO



A dedicated advocate for individuals with disabilities and rare diseases, Arabel StandingBear has turned her personal experience with hereditary angioedema (HAE), a rare genetic condition, into a powerful force for change. Arabel's advocacy spans local, state, and national levels. She has worked with state senators and representatives to advance legislation supporting individuals with disabilities, including a childcare bill aimed at providing critical resources for families. Her efforts have taken her to forums in Florida, California, and Washington, D.C., where she amplifies the voices of marginalized communities and champions inclusivity and accessibility.

Beyond policy work, Arabel co-runs a small art business with her mother, who also lives with HAE. Together, they raise awareness about disabilities and rare diseases, demonstrating resilience and the importance of strong support systems. Arabel also engages in workshops, community events, and global platforms, advocating for respect, dignity, and equal opportunities for all. A dynamic student and community leader, Arabel serves as

President of her school's Environmental Club and Secretary of the Theatre Club. She has been active in Key Club, Robotics, FCCLA, National Honor Society, Show Choir, and Art Club.

Her accomplishments include but are by no means limited to acting in the film Killers of the Flower Moon, working for the Osage Nation Tribe, and contributing to a nationwide blood and plasma donation campaign with over 1.7 million views. Arabel's volunteer efforts are equally impressive. She dedicates time to the Lane Apartment Center for the Elderly, participates in mural projects for the American Legion, and supports local tree planting initiatives. Her accolades include first-place ribbons at the Crowder College Art Show, the Rare Disease Youth Advocacy Award from the HAEA, and recognition as her school's Student of the Month.

Arabel's leadership and advocacy embody the spirit of the Youth Leadership Award.

Honorable Mention – Lucas Fritsche - Perryville, MO



Lucas Fritsche's dedication to inclusion and accessibility has made a profound impact on his community. His journey began in the 3rd grade when he noticed a friend in a wheelchair couldn't fully enjoy recess due to the playground's lack of accessibility. Determined to make a change, Lucas met with his teacher, principal, and eventually the Mayor of Perryville and City Council to advocate for an inclusive playground.

His vision grew into the Lucas and Friends Backyard Adventure project, a fully accessible playground where children of all abilities can play together. Through relentless advocacy and community engagement, Lucas raised nearly \$500,000 to fund Phase 1 of the playground, which opened in 2021. He continues to lead efforts to raise an additional \$250,000 for Phase 2, currently under construction and set to open in early 2025.

Lucas's initiative has not only transformed his community but also inspired others to prioritize inclusion and accessibility. A high school student, Lucas excels in academics and extracurricular activities. He serves as Vice President of his local 4H chapter, participates in FFA, and is a member of the National Honor Society and High School Choir. Lucas also volunteers as a summer camp counselor for 4H and at the Hope Therapeutic Horsemanship Center, where individuals

with disabilities receive therapy through horseback riding. Lucas, who is also on the autism spectrum, continues to encourage others to embrace inclusion and be the change they wish to see in the world. His leadership and determination demonstrate that even the youngest voices can create meaningful, lasting change.

2024 Youth Leadership Award nominees

The Governor's Council on Disability congratulates the following individuals on being nominated for the 12th Annual Youth Leadership Awards.

Bryce Edwards – Fulton, MO

Nominated by Julie Edwards, for his leadership and advocacy in promoting inclusion for individuals with disabilities. Bryce, who has Cerebral Palsy, supports peers through his involvement in cross country, marching band, and Camp Wonderland. He champions accessibility and demonstrates how determination and kindness can create meaningful change for the disability community. Bryce is an alumnus of the 2024 Missouri Youth Leadership Forum.

Lily Womack – Billings, MO

Nominated by Spencer Hunley, for her leadership and advocacy. Lily has reinvigorated the MO-YLF Alumni Association and volunteered several times for the Youth Leadership Forum. A self-advocate and valued community member, she champions fair wages for disabled workers and works tirelessly in everything that she does to create inclusive, supportive communities for individuals with disabilities. Lily is an alumna of the 2017 Missouri Youth Leadership Forum.

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