

NATIONAL YOUTH LEADERSHIP NETWORK



Building power among young leaders with disabilities!

WHAT IS NYLN?

The National Youth Leadership Network is an organization led by disabled youth for disabled youth. Our members are people with disabilities between 16-28 years old and our allies. We work to build power among disabled youth by promoting youth leadership and education. We teach youth how to speak out. Our goal is to make sure that young people have the chance to set and reach their own goals.

WHAT IS REAP WHAT YOU SOW?



The logo for Reap What You Sow

NYLN is excited to unveil our new curriculum. It is called Reap What You Sow: Harvesting Support Systems. A curriculum is a set of learning activities to teach a group of people something. Our curriculum was created by disabled youth educators and supported by adult allies. It is designed for youth with disabilities, family members, and allies. The curriculum teaches learners how to set goals, build support system (a network of people in your life that support you), and find community and power.

WHY?

We believe that if youth with disabilities and their families come together, we can all learn how to build great, interdependent support systems. Our idea of 'family' and 'support system' is broad: it includes people we may be related to or it may be people we choose. Many of us learn to follow our desires by building a support system that works to help us have a voice and make our own choices. We want to teach other young people how to create these support systems, too.



A friend holding up a soda bottle for his friend. They both look happy.

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WHAT DOES REAP WHAT YOU SOW LOOK LIKE?

On the next few pages, you will find an outline and example of the curriculum.



A group meeting together. They are doing an activity with hats and gloves.

The curriculum comes in three parts: Looking at the Lay of the Land, Discovering What You Want to Plant, and Planting the Seeds to Grow Support Systems.

This curriculum takes approximately 25 total hours to complete. It can be completed over several months or in several days. It is entirely hands-on and interactive. It consists of group activities such as role-plays, videos, group brainstorming and discussion, games, art exercises, and more. We see family groups, youth groups, faith-based groups, classrooms, after-school programs, summer camps, and training sessions as just a few places that will be able use this curriculum.

We ask that facilitators interested in leading the curriculum work with NYLN to be certified to implement it. Certification includes participating in the curriculum, learning how to organize accessible spaces, and being trained in popular education. Certification includes possibilities for continued education credits.

Section One: Looking at the Lay of the Land:

Before we can talk about the personal agency [power to affect something] we have, we must talk about institutional power and the self-determination our communities have (or do not have). Many of us come from communities that are marginalized. As disabled people, we experience injustice and people's limiting ideas of us. This section focuses on learning about what ableism is and the way it works to separate us from each other and police what is "normal."



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A man with a vision impairment reading Braille.

Some examples of training tools in this section:

1. *Story Circles*: Storytelling can be a way to see how our experiences are connected to other's experiences and to larger issues. This activity is designed to get the group thinking about self-determination. Participants divide into small groups to share stories. Each person tells a story about a time they were held back from doing something. The next tool builds upon this activity by connecting stories to themes of institutional power.

2. *Getting to the Root: What is Ableism?*: This activity starts with a video clip that explains what Ableism is by breaking the concept down and explaining it in a simple, accessible way. Next, the group is split into partners. Partners work together to create a body statue demonstrating what Ableism can look like.

3. *Pulling Out the Weeds: Breaking Down Disability Stereotypes*: This activity deconstructs [take something apart to understand it] stereotypes society has about disability. It asks learners to think about the ways different kinds of disabilities are typically portrayed in movies. The facilitator then leads a discussion with the group about ways stereotypes-whether positive or negative-can be harmful for the people that they are about.

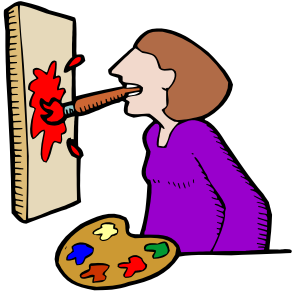
Section Two: Discovering What You Want to Plant:

Here we begin discussing what support systems are and what people can do to support each other. Themes of interdependence, identities, relationships, and problem solving are woven throughout this section. This section includes a lot of video tools, movement exercises, and art activities. The purpose of this section is to think about who we are and the kind of support we want to give and receive.



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Examples of training tools in this section:



A woman paints with a paintbrush in her mouth. This is her passion.

1. *Who Am I Collage*: During this activity, participants use art supplies to create collages that represent who they are. The purpose of this activity is for participants to explore their passions and identities first, to begin thinking about how to connect to others.

2. *Support Statues*: The purpose of this activity is for the group to explore what different kinds of support feels and looks like. Participants are divided into small group and each group is assigned a different kind of support (“interdependent support”, “overbearing support”, “nurturing support”). Groups discuss what that kind of support looks like and then use their bodies to create a statue demonstrating that kind of support.

3. *Unity Tower*: In building support systems, we must think about what role we want each person to play. This activity asks teams to create a tower out of straws and marshmallows. If it wasn’t already hard enough, each person has a role assigned ahead of time (for example, an encourager or a builder) and must only operate in that role. When the clock goes off, the team with the tallest tower wins.

Section Three: Planting the Seeds to Grow Our Support Systems:

Often times, youth with disabilities do not have the chance to really think about what skill sets, dreams, or talents we have. We also do not have the chance to create goals for ourselves, especially goals that we choose. This section creates space to discover what skills and talents we have to build our support systems and what we still need to learn. The purpose of this section is to create goals and a plan to achieve these goals.

Examples of training tools in this section:

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1. *Choosing the Seeds to Plant:* Setting and reaching goals is important to building the future we want. For this activity, participants come up with goals they want to accomplish in the near future. Later, participants work with small groups to help each other develop action steps for each goal.

2. *Skills Bingo:* This activity builds on an earlier tool where we compiled a list of our skills. The facilitator passes out bingo cards with skills written on them. Participants then find people around the room to create a team of people that have different skills to offer. The first group that creates a bingo row of people with different skills wins. The purpose of this activity is to show how interdependence can work. It also demonstrates that we are most successful when working with people with a variety of skills.



A group of friends forming a circle. Half of them are on a rock, the other half are flying.

3. *Our Community:* Our communities are rich with resources. Sometimes it's hard to know what is available. We can be experts for each other in learning what our

community has to offer. This activity asks everyone to be resources for each other in sharing resources and ways to get tapped in. Participants use art supplies to create models of the places in the community that they are involved with and the community resources they use. At the end of the activity, the group creates a big, collective model of the community with everyone's resources.

Example of a tool from the Reap What You Sow: Harvesting Support Systems Curriculum packet:

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THE SELF-ADVOCACY RAP

Introduction:

We've talked a lot about injustice and Ableism, but we haven't yet talked much about what to do about it. The purpose of this tool is for the group to discuss how to build self-determination through self-advocacy.

Materials Needed:

- Pens or pencils

Time Allotted: 30-40 minutes.

- Self-Advocacy Rap Audio Clip- 5 minutes
- Small Group Work-15 minutes
- Group Report Back- 10 minutes

Description of Activity:

Divide the room into three groups. Pass out the handouts to the groups. Each group will get a different Self-Advocacy Rap handout. You will then play the Self-Advocacy Rap Audio Clip.

Tell each group to pick someone to be a reader, a note taker, and group reporter. Ask the groups to study their section of the lyrics aloud and discuss answers to the discussion questions on their handouts. Allow about 15 minutes for the groups to get through as many discussion questions as possible.

Next, each group reporter will first share their section of lyrics to the large group and then recap on what was discussed in their small group.

Facilitation Notes:

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As the facilitator(s), make yourself available to the small groups for support. Make sure the groups are on the right track and that everyone is included in the discussion.

If you have a group with youth and adult allies, try to encourage the groups to pick a young person to report back on behalf of the group.

Resources:

Handout # 3: Self-Advocacy Rap Verse 1, Handout # 4: Self-Advocacy Rap Verse 2, Handout #5: Self-Advocacy Rap Chorus