

# YouthACT Team Profile



## YouthACT Masterminds

**Youth:** Robel Semere and Ashriya Khadka

**Adult Partner:** Tory Clarke

**Supporting Organization Contact:** Tracie Hammons

**Supporting Organization:** Ability Connection Colorado

### Introductions

#### Youth

My name is Robel Semere, and I am an 18-year-old living in Aurora, Colorado. I am a senior at Rangeview High School, preparing this year to take AP classes and think about college. In my free time, I like to play soccer and am very involved in my church community. I am involved in YouthACT so that I can encourage other youth to speak about current events and the challenges in their lives. I want youth voices to be heard in the community. My short-term goal is to graduate high school. My long-term goal is to become recognized in my community for contributing to something big.

My name is Ashriya Khadka, and I am an 18-year-old freshman in college pursuing an associate degree in Nursing at the University of Colorado, Denver campus. I would like to become a family practice nurse. I work as a health transcriptionist part-time. I am bilingual. I am involved with YouthACT because I want to help people and accomplish something with them. My short-term goal is to do one good deed for others every day in my daily routine. My long-term goal is to become a nurse and help others in a bigger way.

#### Adult Partner

My name is Tory Clarke, and my interest in YouthACT began with my desire to connect youth to local community leaders and community service opportunities. In my work with youth, I have seen how they have a unique and valuable perspective on community issues. I think it's important that local leaders take into account their opinions and viewpoints when considering resolutions to community issues. Teens can and do improve the communities they live in. I have found that participating in community service activities has been a positive part of my personal and professional development; it has forced me to communicate with different people and build new skills in a supportive environment. My short-term goal is to find three mental health organizations available to teens in Denver, CO where I can speak with teens and find out what issues they find concerning. My long-term goal is to be an advocate for youth within an organization and an expert in the field of youth counseling specializing in a particular issue facing teenagers, such as suicide or depression.

#### Supporting Organization Contact

My name is Tracie Hammons, and I am the Director of Employment Works at Ability Connection Colorado. As the supporting organization, Ability Connection Colorado provides support for the youth and adult mentors in YouthACT. This includes assisting with scheduling and facilitating

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times and locations in order to support meetings and identify action items to help the YouthACT process. Because of changes in staff and youth, our short-term goal is to support our new YouthACT team members in their efforts to learn about the YouthACT effort and start their peer network. Our long-term goals are to continue to support youth in advocacy and leaderships skills and provide help with resources for youth and families as they grow in their leadership and advocacy journeys. We also help with research and provide long-term connections for youth to continue their journey beyond YouthACT. We will provide limited resources for materials and supplies to help youth and their cohort, as well as share resources and learning experiences available through our organization and in other capacities.

## Supporting Organization

Ability Connection Colorado's mission is to support Coloradans through innovative and comprehensive Early Education, Employment, and Family Support Programs. Ability Connection Colorado provides inclusive educational opportunities, pathways to employment, and support that helps people thrive to more than 40,000 Coloradans with disabilities and their families each year. We believe that no one is defined by what they can't do. Each of us is defined by our unique abilities. Ability Connection Colorado recognized that YouthACT was an opportunity to support youth in designing their future. By collaborating with youth, we will be able to improve their opportunities for their future and make them better informed about transitions from school to employment and adult life.

## Activities

Because we have a new youth and adult partner and had to restructure our team, most of our activities are forthcoming. Robel has familiarized himself with the supports available to students at his high school. As a student new to his high school last year, he met a lot of new people and learned a lot about the school and the surrounding community. He's hoping to use the information gathered last year to improve services for youth at his school. For example, he would like to collaborate with school counselors this year to help with student outreach.

## Peer Network

We are working as a team to establish contacts to form our peer networks at Rangeview High School, the University of Colorado at Denver, and Ft. Logan Mental Health Center. Robel's peer network will be made up of students, ages 16-18, at his school, Rangeview High School, in Aurora, CO. He will form a network of students with help from his school counselor. He hopes to facilitate meetings with his peers from this group on a regular basis.

Ashriya's peer network will be made up of young adult employees and/or clients at the mental health hospital she volunteers at in Sheridan, CO. She would also like to develop a young adult peer network at the University of Colorado, Denver through the student services center on campus.

## Tips

For young people learning to exercise their voice, we suggest finding something you have a strong opinion about and trying to become an expert on that topic as best you can. Try and find a

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mentor who can teach you things and support your continued learning—it's helpful to have people who can cheer you on.

## TIPS FOR YOUTH VOICE

- Talk to people about what you want to accomplish.
- Find something you have a strong opinion about and become an expert on that topic.
- Find a mentor who can teach you things, support your continued learning, and cheer you on.
- Don't be afraid to make mistakes.

For youth working to develop a peer network, we recommend starting small by talking to people and telling them what you want to accomplish. We find that people are helpful by nature and want to support others in their efforts. Make business cards with your contact information on it so that someone can easily reach out to you. Use these business cards to network with others.

To work together as partners, we recommend that youth and adults start by finding something fun you both enjoy and can do together or something you both can relate to. It will put you both at ease and make you enjoy each other's company. Also, it's helpful when adults can provide resources and guidance to make sure that youth are doing the right thing and going down the right path. Let youth make mistakes, but have the adult be available to help them learn from those mistakes.

For help or advice, we go to our church pastors, friends and family members, teachers, counselors, and mentors. Youth can also seek help from trustworthy adults in their school or crisis phone lines.

## Reflection

Opportunities like YouthACT are important because they help foster communication between youth and adults. YouthACT enables teens and adults to have courageous conversations. By encouraging honest discussions between youth and adults, there is the opportunity to reflect on shared experiences and lay the foundation for more conversations that lead to a better understanding of one another.

As adult partner Tory says, "I have learned that I am not the expert in all situations. Youth can teach me how to do things better and how to approach discussions with other youth so that our conversations are honest and come from a place of care rather than authority." To promote youth voice, she says, "I am encouraging my team to cold call on businesses and professionals in the field of suicide prevention so that they form their own network of professionals. I have created business cards for them so that they are seen as professionals with a positive purpose in the eyes of the community and area businesses."

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## Looking Forward

To continue practicing leadership skills in the future, Robel plans to continue to stay involved in his church youth group this year and support the friends he has met at church. Ashriya wants to become more involved with a student group at her university and be seen as a leader in her job at Target. Tory wants to support various non-profit organizations by volunteering her time to community initiatives.

Ability Connections Colorado plans to continue promoting youth voice by conducting activities that get youth involved, where others expect them to turn up and take part, and where they are supported to achieve something as a group. We hope to connect our YouthACT and Ready to Achieve Mentoring Program (RAMP) youth to help further both groups' development and leadership. RAMP supports youth to pursue successful life transition that include school to employment, independent living, and continued learning opportunities in the community. RAMP classes meet at least once a week in different schools and community centers in Denver. Youth are encouraged to take part in helping each other meet weekly goals and complete a high-tech project together. RAMP is a supportive environment where mentees and mentors work together to establish connections in the community, formulate a plan for post-graduation, and continue to find success by challenging themselves and others to do their best. We hope RAMP youth will join our YouthACT peer network and become involved in YouthACT activities in the coming year so that they can continue their development and leadership opportunities. To learn more about RAMP, you can go to <https://ramp.iel.org>.