

YouthACT Team Profile



YouthACT YO! Up & Down

Youth: Alexa McBride and Tangikina MoiMoi

Adult Partner: Christina Mills

Supporting Organization Contact: Teresa Favuzzi

Supporting Organization: The California Foundation for Independent Living Centers (CFILC)

Introductions

Team YouthACT YO! Up & Down may seem like a strange name, but it represents that our members have connections all across the state of California. We are a group of women dedicated to the amplification of disabled youth voices. We come from different backgrounds and different experiences due to our variations in disability, but we are joined together by a greater cause. We the youth, Alexa McBride and Tangikina (Kina) Moimoi, are so lucky to have the guidance of our organization contact Teresa Favuzzi and adult partner Christina Mills.

Youth

I, Tangikina (Kina) Moimoi, am currently 27, but I've only been disabled for the last five years. I realized that the way people treated me after I became disabled was a lot different. Even the people that I've known for years stopped expecting that I would accomplish my goals; they began to baby me. I play a part in YouthACT because it is critical to keep the fire burning in our young people today, especially during transition years. It's difficult living your life alone. While everyone was telling me to be careful, life still went on, despite how many times I fell. I want to offer help I never had. It's hard but possible. I just happen to be very independently inclined, so it took me a while to realize it's okay to need help sometimes.

I take one day at a time and try to stay focused on the now. I want to make something of myself and help my community as much as possible so, right now, along with my advocacy work, I am also attending community college. While I am learning so many new things, I'm also learning the difference between being a non-disabled student and now being a disabled student. I also want to work while I am attending classes as a way to make sure that I am maximizing all of my potential.

Hello, my name is Alexa McBride, and I'm 26. I got involved with YouthACT because I wanted to be there to support youth with disabilities and help them through their transition because I never had someone to guide me. That is not an experience that I wish on anyone. I am so glad to have the chance to make a difference in the lives of youth with disabilities. When I was growing up, transitioning young people with disabilities into adulthood wasn't even talked about. My short-term goal is to get into a teaching program because I want to be a special education teacher. My long-term goal is to be working at a school as a special education teacher. Right now, I have a part-time job at an afterschool program. I am also attending community college to raise my G.P.A. to get into a teaching program. I hope to use my areas of expertise to achieve my goal. My strengths include organization, facilitating meetings, and organizing events.

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Adult Partner

I am Christina Mills, adult partner for the YouthACT YO! Up & Down team and deputy director of the California Foundation for Independent Living Centers (CFILC). I have been an active member of the disability rights community since my involvement in the California Youth Leadership Forum for Students with Disabilities in 1995. Born in San Diego, California, I began my post-secondary education while simultaneously pursuing my career in independent living. In 1999, I began working for the Independent Living Center of Orange County, the Dayle McIntosh Center. I went on to work for Access 2 Independence in San Diego and served in a number of positions over the five years I was there.

As a young professional, I also served as chair of the National Council on Disability Youth Advisory Committee and was a project consultant for the National Family Voices, Kids as Self Advocates (KASA) program. In 2006, I left San Diego to work for the California Foundation for Independent Living Centers as the statewide community organizer of the Systems Change Network. I have led the organizing and planning of Disability Capitol Action Day for seven years and am the co-founder of CFILC's youth organizing program, Youth Organizing (YO!) Disabled & Proud. I am an advocate, an activist, a wife, a mother of two young children, a part-time blogger, a novice photographer, and a serious scrapbooker, and I proudly identify as disabled.

Supporting Organization Contact

I am Teresa Favuzzi, and I am the supporting organization contact for the YouthACT YO! Up and Down team. I currently serve as the executive director of the California Foundation for Independent Living Centers (CFILC). CFILC is excited to be a supporting organization for YouthACT! It provides us with an opportunity to be connected to a national youth-driven initiative that increases the leadership of California youth and provides opportunities for our youth program, Youth Organizing! Disabled & Proud, to learn and grow.

Our goals are three fold—we want to connect, educate, and organize youth with disabilities around social justice issues that impact our lives. We also want to offer paid volunteer opportunities for youth within Independent Living Centers and to build the capacity of Independent Living Centers to serve youth.

Supporting Organization

The California Foundation for Independent Living Centers (CFILC) is a non-profit disability advocacy organization made up of Independent Living Centers (ILCs) in California. CFILC is invested in building a sustainable disability rights movement. To do so, we recognize that youth with disabilities need opportunities for leadership development within a disability positive environment like ILCs! Our YO! program was developed to connect, educate, and organize youth with disabilities. YO! offers year-long paid volunteer placements within ILCs. Youth have an opportunity to see a variety of people with disabilities in the workplace. Youth also get a sense of the many types of assistive technologies there are to help people with disabilities succeed in the workplace and how to request accommodations. Finally, youth learn about the disability rights movement, advocacy, and disability identity all while getting both hard and soft job skills. Our broader mission is the increase access and equality for people with disabilities by building the capacity of Independent Living Centers.

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Activities

Team YouthACT YO! Up & Down does it all. We do one-on-one speaking engagements with disabled young people we feel would benefit from learning about our program. We also create resources on a larger scale. One of our main goals is to create a series of videos around transition, self-advocacy, and why youth should go to Centers for Independent Living for support. Our team has created a script, and we have young people to be actors in the videos. We are working on the video production now and are also looking into ways to make our video completely accessible by including audio and visual captioning.

We are most proud of working on this video series. It is extremely intricate and detailed and requires a lot of work, but once properly completed, it will become a resource that young people can understand and relate to because it was created by young people who have been in similar situations. That being said, we don't want to diminish the impact that the one-on-one conversations we've been lucky to have with all the families and youth we've met have had on us and them. Kina, in particular, has an amazing knack for connecting with anyone she meets.

Peer Network

We have added at least 30 youth to our peer network. We predominantly work with youth ages 16-28, but of course, we will answer any questions that loved ones may have about helping youth transition successfully. We are also lucky to have access to all of CFILC Independent Living Centers that are members of the organization, so we have a large network we can recruit from.

Kina developed a plan of reaching out to as many youth as she could find at public events. She always brings business cards for others to take. When they reach out, she makes a clear point to tell them about YouthACT. Kina has been going out to community gyms, schools, and conferences to share YouthACT recruitment materials. She has also found peer network members from Long Beach Community College and Asians and Pacific Islanders with Disabilities of California. Alexa provides invaluable connections to local schools through her work in afterschool programs.

Kina and Alexa's people skills are extremely helpful when it comes to growing our peer networks. Kina has found success by relating to others through sharing the story of her diagnosis, something that YouthACT has helped her get comfortable with. Before YouthACT, Kina says, "I would not be able to bring as many people together through my advocacy as I can now."

Tips

The best advice that we give other young people is don't be afraid. Get out there and make your imprint on your community. Do not conform to society's standards on what you as a person with a disability should be like; only you can decide that. As far as working with an adult partner goes, listen actively. However, use your voice. They are there to support you, not tell you what to do. We're all lucky enough to have a lot of family and community support. Our Independent Living Centers have become a hub of mentors, and we couldn't have done this without them.

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We recommend peer networks and mentors the most for advice. Alexa finds that the YouthACT structure has helped her become a stronger advocate in the disability community and learn how to rely on her peers and adult partner for help or advice, because they have shown her that there is benefit in working together.

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TIPS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

- Don't be afraid. Get out there and make your imprint on your community.
- Do not conform to society's standards on what you as a person with a disability should be like. Decide for yourself who you are.
- When working with adults, listen actively and use your voice.
- Look to peer networks and mentors for advice.

Reflections

As for me, Kina, I've learned leadership for me started locally, within my community but has expanded to the county, state, and now national levels. It began when I was at school for a couple years as an able-bodied college student and now as a disabled student advocate. YouthACT gave me the opportunity to exercise my leadership skills on a broader platform. It brought out the possibilities! Start small, and it'll start building.

Looking Forward

We are looking forward to continuing our work by being present. There is nothing we want more than to see a youth change their "CAN'T" into "CAN." We keep going because there's so much disbelief in oneself in our society. It really all starts with you.

Kina says, "Recently I was told, 'stop dimming your light so other people can shine.' That blew my mind. I wanted everyone to rise—with that I forgot everyone wasn't there during my times of struggle. So I have to put that belief back in myself and stop worrying about everyone else. If someone has to want it, it's you! It all starts with you."