

## Peer Groups for Youth with Disabilities



## Peer Groups for Families, Persons with Disabilities and Others



## Resources for Additional Information



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**Transition Tool for Youth with Disabilities and Family Members!**

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## Joel and Neal

Joel and Neal are youth with disabilities who joined SALYD (Self-Advocacy and Leadership for Youth with Disabilities) upon its conception in March of 2005. They have contributed greatly to the group via discussion during regular meetings as well as serving as officers for the SALYD board. They go beyond their officer roles in making sure events sponsored by the SALYD organization go as smoothly and efficiently as possible.

Outside of SALYD, they are both active in extracurricular activities as well as hold after school jobs. They have contributed to their school and community by bringing speaker Norman Kunc to their high school. Both cite SALYD as being crucial in building their advocacy skills and allowing them to network with other youths with disabilities.

*Joel: I didn't know many people within the disability community. I joined SALYD to be part of something where kids with all kinds of disabilities could come together and find resources they may not have known were out there.*

*Neal: Before SALYD, I wasn't connected with any other youth with disabilities. I joined SALYD to meet new people and learn how to speak up about issues. Being in SALYD has been a benefit in building youth into the disability networks.*

## Rachel

Rachel joined Pathfinders Mentoring Program sponsored by the Iowa Department for the Blind with two goals. She wanted to become more involved and increase her network by meeting successful adults who have a visual impairment. She wasn't disappointed. In Pathfinders Rachel found a support group that's available to help her problem solve when needed.

*Rachel: I've had fun, made new friends, and met good role models. The Pathfinders group steered me toward additional training, which I didn't think I needed, but I found that I did and that it was good for me. I'm glad I took their advice. It's really helped build my confidence as an individual and as a blind person to see other successful blind people. Knowing that they are successful, I figured I could be successful too. Opportunities like this are always good. Someday I will probably be a mentor.*

## Nichole

Nichole is a young adult with a disability who has been active in many different advocacy programs as both a student and a staff person. She was a delegate to and then returned as a staff member for Youth Leadership Forum; she was a delegate to College Leadership Forum. Nichole is currently a staff person and board officer for SALYD (Self-Advocacy and Leadership

for Youth with Disabilities). She actively recruits other youth with disabilities for Youth and College Leadership Forums and SALYD.

*Nichole: I think these organizations are great because everyone can get something unique out them. Being involved in these organizations has not only taught me a lot of valuable skills (like self-advocacy), but they have given me the opportunity to give back. As a staff person, I have been able to share all of the things I've learned with other youth.*

## Jason

Jason helped create Iowa Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (IAPVI) which is a parent support group directed entirely by parents. IAPVI provides the opportunity for parents to get support and ideas from other parents who are raising a child with a visual impairment and going through many of the same experiences. It's also an opportunity for the children to get together and share some of their concerns, accomplishments, and advice.

*Jason: Together with a few families, in 2004 my wife, Anita, and I helped create Iowa Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (IAPVI), the Iowa chapter of the National Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments. A colleague and I traveled across the state to recruit members and within a year more than thirty families were participating. Since that first meeting, we have written by-laws, incorporated, started the process for becoming a non-profit group, and produced a newsletter for parents and kids. IAPVI currently supports a mentoring program created by a youth in our group and another youth designed our IAPVI logo.*

## Susan

Susan joined Hands & Voices after learning of her child's hearing impairment. The opportunity to find a true peer group and the philosophy that there isn't one right communication method appealed to Susan. She learned that Hands & Voices values the unique experience of each family and strives to empower each family by encouraging independent thinking. The sensitivity of members toward one another, the belief that what's right for the child is the right choice, and access to information such as how to prepare for an IEP meeting, are a few reasons why Susan actively promotes Hands & Voices.

Currently Susan is coordinating a weekend experience for families with deaf or hard-of-hearing children, one of many programs sponsored by Iowa Hands & Voices. Susan also attends conferences on childhood deafness, assists with sign language classes, and participates in a Centers for Disease Control parent group.

*Susan: Deafness is a low-incident disability. Pair that with living in the rural state of Iowa, and families with deaf children really don't cross paths often enough. Iowa Hands & Voices brings families together regardless of the level of hearing loss, mode of communication, or choice of amplification strategy. Hands & Voices has been good for me, good for my family, and good for my child.*

## Leah

Leah is active in leadership opportunities specific to disability issues. When her family relocated a few years ago, Leah researched their options. Iowa's system of education and support for persons with disabilities and resources such as Iowa COMPASS and the Governor's Developmental Disabilities Council were significant factors.

Most recently Leah organized families and alumni in lobbying to maintain the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School. Participation in leadership opportunities has benefited Leah, her child and families throughout Iowa impacted by disability.

*Leah: I want to affect systems change and serving on the Governor's Developmental Disabilities Council gives me that opportunity. Participating at the state level is my way of having an impact on what affects my child now and down the road. It is important to have the systems in place that allow youth and adults with disabilities to reach their potential. I strongly encourage youth and family members to participate in the various leadership opportunities.*

