



# Northern Virginia Independent Living Newsletter

## March 2010



“I like the dreams of the future better than the history of the past.” -Patrick Henry

### In This Issue:

- Project LIFE
- Upcoming Events
- Training Opportunities
- Food for Thought
- Wow!

## Let's Take a Drive Down the YOUTH-DRIVEN Highway...

Project LIFE has adopted a new attitude, one that many of us have been practicing for a long time...LISTENING TO OUR YOUTH! Our youth feel at times that they have no control over what happens to them and really can't find the reasoning behind what does happen to them. Project LIFE has decided to take on a new perspective and start taking what our youth have to say about their lives into account when deciding on policy, procedures, and even simpler things, such as asking, "What do you need?"

The youth-driven approach has many beneficiaries, including youth, adults, and an organization. Many of those benefits cover the span of all beneficiaries such as: stronger relationships, clearer understanding, and a more effective outcome. Youth, specifically, will begin to feel empowered and realize that the world they live in can be effected by their views and thoughts in positive ways. For adults, when we begin to think with a "youth-driven" approach, we become reenergized by the youth's desire and we begin to see that the path that is paved by the youth, is more likely to be traveled and end with a more positive outcome.

When we start to think about this principle, we often ask ourselves, "How can we get them involved and stay involved?" A few ideas to get you started: get the youth participating in the decision-making process, promote youth leadership, be active listeners and respect what they say, and finally believe that youth have the control and ability to make positive decisions, lead, plan, and implement activities and events.

With all of this, it is a challenge to change our thoughts from, "I am here to help and this is what I think is best" to "What can I do to help you gain this empowerment?" I encourage you to think of the following things when you are starting the new journey down the "youth-driven highway": maintain an open mind and be flexible; avoid taking control of the project or event, just so that it is done "quickly" or "correctly"; make sure that the youth involvement is meaningful; and remember that the process is just as important as the product.

## Upcoming Events

### Virginia Youth Advisory Council Spring Conference

**WHEN:** Friday, March 26 through Sunday, March 28, 2010

**TIME:** Check in: 3-5 p.m. (3/26) & Pick up: 10 a.m. (3/28)

**WHERE:** Comfort Inn, 3200 West Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23230

**WHAT:** This event is for youth ages 15-20 who are currently in foster care or in an IL arrangement. This spring conference is titled "Healthy Living—Balancing Work and Play." The youth will participate in team building activities, group events, independent living skills workshops, as well as discussions on how the STATE-WIDE advisory council will be developed. Youth will participate in a formal etiquette dinner as well!

**COST:** \$50/youth

**DEADLINE:** March 15, 2010

### Websites to Know!

[www.vaprojectlife.org](http://www.vaprojectlife.org)

[www.umfs.org](http://www.umfs.org)

[www.dss.virginia.gov/family/fc/vyac/](http://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/fc/vyac/)

Continued on page 2

## Training Opportunities

### **VDSS—CWS1021: The Effects of Abuse and Neglect on Child and Adolescent Development**

You will learn new information and techniques, or refresh your existing knowledge and skills, in basic child and adolescent development theory, with a focus on how maltreatment impacts normal development.

**WHEN & WHERE:**  
6/3-6/4/10, 9 am-4 pm; Warrenton Police Department

### **Project LIFE Offered Trainings: Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment (ACLSA) Training**

This training can be attended by foster care social workers, private provider employees (case managers, in-home counselor, mentor, mental health supports, therapeutic foster parents), and LDSS foster parents. During this training you will become familiarized with the ACLSA tool and the process that occurs after the assessment has been complete. This training will help develop a transitional living plan for the youth. The ACLSA will allow for youth input and a team approach for the most effective plan.

*Please note that in order to get the most out of the training, a time frame of 7 hours, including a lunch break, is needed. At this time there are no open training dates, but if you are interested in learning more about this training please let Heather Wines know by contacting her at hwines@umfs.org or 540-905-5299. She will be able to set up training dates and times as well as assist in finding appropriate training facilities for this specific course.*

## Virginia Youth Advisory Council Spring Conference (cont.)

### **FAQs: What funding stream can be used to pay the registration fee?**

You may use your Independent Living Funds.

### **When and where can I access my registration form?**

Registration forms will be available on the website, [www.vaprojectlife.org](http://www.vaprojectlife.org), beginning on February 15.

### **When are the registration forms and fee due?**

Both are due by March 15, 2010. Please note that for a registration form to be accepted, payment as well as the additional forms must be mailed at the same time.

### **How and who do we make the payments to?**

Payments at this time can only be made with checks. Please make the checks payable to UMFS. Please note: in the memo section identify "Project LIFE-V-YAC." Mail checks to UMFS, Attn: Makon Fletcher, 3900 W. Broad St, Richmond, VA 23230.

### **Do I need to stay with my youth during the event?**

No. The youth can be dropped off and picked up at the designated times. However, if you are interested in being a volunteer, please visit our website and fill out appropriate forms.

### **Who do we send the registration forms to?**

Please send the registration form and accompanying forms to UMFS, Attn: Makon Fletcher, 3900 W. Broad St, Richmond, VA 23230.

### **What forms need to be included?**

- \* Registration form and payment
- \* Medical Authorization form
- \* Photographic Release form
- \* Youth Character Information Sheet

## Fairfax County Department of Family Services Foster Care Life Skills Group

### **RELATIONSHIP SMARTS**

#### **A life skills group for teen girls**

**DATE:** Tuesday, March 16, 2010

**TIME:** 6:30-8:30 p.m.

**PLACE:** Fairfax County Department of Family Services  
12011 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax, VA 22035  
2nd Floor Training Room

**RSVP:** Please call 703-324-7726; TTY 703-222-9452 to reserve your spot by March 10, 2010.

#### **This life skills group will talk about:**

- \* Is jealousy a sign of love?
- \* What is a healthy relationship?
- \* Is some violence okay?
- \* But he never hit me...
- \* What is dating violence?

The Northern Region wants to begin to have some region-wide events. Ideally, we would like for our youth who are invested in the Youth Advisory Council, begin to implement and lead the way for these events. At this point we are having our first meeting with this core group of youth on March 6. Since we are at the beginning stages of the Northern Region's Youth Advisory Council's creation, there is still a need for adult leadership for these events.

Many agencies, private and public, are already holding life skills workshops on a regular basis. This is very commendable! As a region, we would like to start having the same progression of events. Some past events that have been held are still being talked about; "the Real World" simulation is an example.

To start the ball rolling below are two activities that seem to be recurring themes of interest for region wide events. Please put some thought into these two themes and let Heather Wines with Project LIFE know if you are interested in being on the planning committee for either event. If your agency has had success with either event ideas, please forward any information or thoughts as well. Any resource to help the event to be successful is always wanted!

**\* Job Vendor Fair**

With this event it would be ideal to have the morning be dedicated to resume writing and interview skills. The afternoon would be open to employers, in a job vendor fair fashion, to allow those youth to fill out real applications and have possible real interviews. (To be held in May/ June)

**\* Real World Simulation**

Since this seems to have been such a huge success, it would be nice to have the event repeated. (To be held in July/August)

Please contact Heather Wines @ [hwines@umfs.org](mailto:hwines@umfs.org) or 540-905-5299 with questions or the desire to be part of the planning team.

**Editor's Note:**

If you would like to add any information to this monthly newsletter or if there are any corrections to be made, please contact Heather Wines, Northern Region Independent Living Consultant Project LIFE, at [hwines@umfs.org](mailto:hwines@umfs.org).

## Wow!

In February 2009, Fairfax County DFS initiated an opportunity for youth in foster care to work side by side with adults on improving service delivery to teens in foster care. The YOUTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE has been meeting monthly, and is made up of seven teens who are currently in foster care, two foster care staff, three community partners, a Mentor Home provider, and staff from Fairfax County's Community and Recreation Teen Services, and Office of Partnerships. This group was initiated to develop ideas that would lead to improving outcomes for teens in foster care, and working together on projects that all teens could benefit from. In the first two meetings the group developed a "wishlist" of services and ideas that would enhance service delivery. The teens have also identified the topics for our monthly life skills workshops that are offered to all teens.

We have accomplished some of the things on our wishlist and are in the planning stages of developing services to address others. Having partners from the outside sitting around the table, has helped to educate the community and build stronger commitment to our teens. Youth have had leadership and advocacy opportunities as they are expected and encouraged to actively participate as equal partners on all discussions and decision making. One of the things that the youth identified as important was to have more opportunities where they can interact with social workers, family, and foster parents in a more relaxed and social way.

So, we have rounded out our year by planning together a huge social event for the teens on February 26..."An Evening of Gratitude." This event is being held at a local banquet hall and is focused on expressions of gratitude. Most of the expenses have been picked up by our community partners and IL funds. The teens on the committee chose the theme and have been instrumental in every detail of planning the event. We look forward to celebrating our achievements, our reasons to be grateful, and ourselves!