Alabama’s Youth & Young Adults in Transition

Quick Start Orientation Manual

Youth and Young Adults in Transition (YAiT, pronounced “Wyatt”) is a statewide group of students with disabilities who encourage and facilitate the development of self-determination and leadership skills in youth and young adults with disabilities.
“We do not need to be embarrassed about our disabilities or afraid to speak out.”

One purpose of YAiT is to: “become a voice for others who don’t know how or who don’t speak up for themselves.”

“And then I went to YAiT and I learned it was okay to come out of your shell ...and you can share your thoughts and you don’t have to be shy.”

“The vision of YAiT is to guide us [students with disabilities] down the right trail to our futures, by bringing us together with people who have something in common, to learn about ourselves, our rights, and how to speak out for what we need.”
Acknowledgements

YOUTH & YOUNG ADULTS IN TRANSITION STATE ADVISORS

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YAiT is supported by a foundation of collaborative transition systems in place — a well-established state transition conference; ongoing programs initially developed by the state systems change grant for transition; a thriving leadership forum for youths with disabilities in secondary schools; a university-based transition institute; the Alabama Rehabilitation Association, Division of Rehabilitation Counselors and Educators Association; and emerging advocacy and policy-influencing group of young adults.

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*YAiT originated from the My Voice project*  

Quick Start Orientation Manual: Alabama’s Youth & Young Adults in Transition
Foundation of YAiT

Alabama’s Youth and Young Adults in Transition (YAiT, pronounced “Wyatt”) is a statewide group of young people with disabilities who encourage and facilitate the development of self-determination and leadership skills within themselves and peers. YAiT members mentor to other students with disabilities within Alabama and collaborate with other states that share the vision of promoting self-determination and youth leadership activities. In 2008, a group of young adults with disabilities set these goals for their membership to accomplish:

\[(a) \text{ increase communication among service providers; }\]

\[(b) \text{ increase disability awareness in the community; and }\]

\[(c) \text{ increase resources to provide better transition services for the state.}\]

– YAiT Founding Members, 2008

The goals of YAiT are carried out through the enhancement of existing youth leadership activities and the initiation of more student-directed practices. Fulfillment of YAiT’s goals should lead to the improvement of student outcomes according to federal indicators (i.e., 1, 2, 13, and 14). In so doing, YAiT activities support the development of successful Individualized Education Programs or IEPs, decreased dropout rates, improved rates of graduation, increased college attendance, and higher employment rates. Also, in an effort to reach more students and teach them the importance of leadership and self-advocacy, we encourage schools systems throughout our state to develop YAiT groups. In fact, the significance of student advocacy and leadership is exemplified through the development of this manual, which was designed by the founding members of YAiT. The purpose of this manual is to assist local school districts in creating their own YAiT groups.

Quick Start Orientation Manual: Alabama’s Youth & Young Adults in Transition
Students with disabilities have been attending the annual Alabama Transition Conference for many years, with a continued increase of participation. After conference participants (e.g., teachers, parents, administrators, transition professionals, state personnel) observed multiple high school students speaking and presenting about their abilities, despite their disabilities, and planning for their futures, the question arose, “How can we do this at our school?” This manual will share the vision, goals, and purpose of the statewide YAiT group, as well as provide interested transition schools and/or agency professionals with the necessary tools to “Start Your Own YAiT”.

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**Vision of YAiT**

The vision of YAiT is to guide us [students with disabilities] down the right trail to our futures, by bringing us together with people who have something in common, to learn about ourselves, our rights, and how to speak out for what we need.

**Mission Statement**

*Young adults helping other young adults transition to the real world.*

**Importance of YAiT**

YAiT is important for many reasons. One of the most important things about YAiT is the knowledge you will gain about special education rights and services. You must know about these things so that you can advocate, or stand up for yourself. Another important reason to be in YAiT is so that you can meet new people, and more importantly, you meet people who are like you. You will also learn about resources and who to ask for help in school and in your community.

– YAiT Founding Members, 2008

“After being in YAiT, I learned that I can invite who I would like to my IEP meetings.”

*Quick Start Orientation Manual: Alabama’s Youth & Young Adults in Transition*
Starting Your Own YAiT Group

The information and forms included were suggested by existing YAiT members and facilitators.

All YAiT groups must be approved and registered with the lead state advisor, Curtis Gage. Groups must also have a designated, local trained facilitator.

How can I become a YAiT facilitator?

Interested transition professionals should first review this manual to gain knowledge of the foundation of YAiT. They should also gain support from the school’s administrator by communicating the importance of YAiT at your school (i.e., YAiT Information Letter). Once approved, submit a “Facilitator Agreement/Request for Training” form to the lead state advisor. Finally, complete a “Group Registration Form”. All interested professionals should retain a copy of each state advisor form for your records.

Where will the facilitator training take place?

Facilitator trainings will be scheduled at a mutually agreed upon location once all necessary documents have been received, reviewed, and approved by the lead state advisor.

Once the facilitator training is complete, what should I expect?

Trained facilitators will be provided with a YAiT Handbook to include:

- membership details
- student participation agreement
- consent forms
- liability waiver
- sample meeting activities
- suggested group rules and meeting schedule template
- student registration forms
- confidentiality agreement
- grievance policy
- parental agreement
- a list of leadership events to attend
The YAiT Handbook will provide a facilitator with materials needed to “get started”. State advisors will be available for support and sustainability upon request.

**Can you tell me more about the leadership events?**

Below are examples of leadership events. However, this is **not** an all-inclusive list of leadership events and we look forward to expanding these activities as recruitment and development of YAiT groups increases across the state of Alabama.

1. **YAiT members are encouraged to attend and engage in the annual Alabama Transition Conference**, typically hosted in March. This conference allows members to showcase their leadership abilities and interact with other YAiT members across the state.

2. **Facilitators are encouraged to nominate members to be a part of the annual “Governor’s Proclamation Event”, typically held in February, which proclaims March as Transition Awareness Month for Youth and Young Adults with Disabilities.**

3. **Members are also encouraged to participate in the annual Youth Leadership Forum (YLF), typically held in June on the campus of Troy University.**

4. **Nominated members can also serve on Alabama’s State Interagency Transition Team, SITT. Serving on the state level team allows youth and young adults to provide their perspective on state policies and regulations to enhance transition.**

5. **YAiT members are encouraged to provide input and participate in Community Transition Expositions, as they are available in their local areas.**

6. **YAiT groups are encouraged to share stories to be highlighted in the Auburn Transition Leadership Institute’s *Directions* Newsletter. *Directions* is a quarterly newsletter.**

_A Quick Start Orientation Manual: Alabama’s Youth & Young Adults in Transition_
newsletter designed to highlight stories regarding students with disabilities and their transition process. It also serves as a venue to meet transition stakeholders and learn about new programs designed to assist in-service and pre-service professionals in improving transition in the state of Alabama. Directions is distributed to high schools, transition-related agency offices, conferences, and universities/colleges. The newsletter is accessible to online viewers of the Auburn Transition Leadership Institute’s website, auburn.edu/atli.

**How will members from my group be able to attend such events?**

For example, the Alabama Transition Conference, YAiT members are encouraged to submit a conference registration fee waiver application to the Auburn Transition Leadership Institute in order to attend the annual Alabama Transition Conference. A limited number of registration waivers are available and are typically distributed on a first come, first serve basis. Travel and lodging reimbursements are not available at this time. One conference registration fee for a YAiT group’s facilitator may be reimbursed as funding allows. For all other events (i.e., YLF, Governor’s Proclamation Event, SITT involvement, etc.), we encourage facilitators to seek advice from the lead state advisor for further details. During involvement of all leadership events, facilitators are expected to be present.

**I am interested; I’d like to get started!**

Included in this “Quick Start Orientation Manual” are the necessary forms to be submitted to the lead state advisor. Submit completed forms to:

Curtis Gage  
Alabama State Department of Education, Special Education Services,  
3317 Gordon Persons Building, 50 North Ripley Street  
Montgomery, Alabama 36130  
or via email, cgage@alsde.edu

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Alabama’s Youth and Youth Adults in Transition (YAiT) Information Letter

Appendix B: Alabama State Advisor Forms
   -- YAiT Facilitator Agreement/Request for Training Form
   -- YAiT Group Registration Form
Youth and Young Adults in Transition
Information Letter

School/Agency Administrator,

Youth & Young Adults in Transition, YAiT, is a group for young people with disabilities, whose purpose is to promote self-advocacy, independence, and leadership within themselves and peers. The vision of YAiT is to allow young persons with disabilities the opportunity to grow through meeting other students with disabilities. The goals of the group are to teach young people how to advocate for themselves and to expose students to valuable resources through the school and the community. Another very important aspect of YAiT is to inform students about services and rights related to their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and how to play a pivotal role in their own meetings.

YAiT will utilize a variety of activities to teach students with disabilities how to assume a leadership role. Many of the provided activities require the students to create a plan in order to accomplish an overall goal. The students should then take the initiative which will allow them to learn how to self-advocate.

Another great aspect of YAiT is the inclusion of technology in the provided activities. With such a fast paced, changing society it is important that students with disabilities are taught vitally important skills that will allow them to access a plethora of information and resources. By having a YAiT program active in a school system, students with disabilities will be exposed to information that will allow them to become more independent and successful.

By having a YAiT group in our school system, we will be able to provide students with disabilities the opportunity to grow as individuals and learn valuable information that will benefit them while they are in school and after they leave high school. I have read through the provided manual and am willing to be the facilitator. We would like for you to consider approving the organization of a YAiT group within our school/school system. Thank you.

Sincerely,

__________________________________________
Signature
Date

__________________________________________
Signature
Date

Quick Start Orientation Manual: Alabama’s Youth & Young Adults in Transition
Please retain a copy of all state advisor forms for your records.
Youth and Young Adults in Transition
Facilitator Agreement/Request for Training Form

I, ______________________________, agree to be the facilitator for the Youth & Young Adults in Transition, YAiT group. I agree to take my responsibilities seriously and fulfill all of the roles expected of me. I agree to attend all meetings and functions associated with YAiT. I am aware the students need a mentor, and I agree to be available for the students when I am needed. I also agree to allow the students to put their self-determination skills to practice by having them lead the activities provided in the YAiT Handbook. The students will need a guide in order to reach certain goals, and I agree, to the best of my ability, to mentor the students in YAiT in the right direction.

I agree to schedule _______ meeting(s) per month for the YAiT group. I will be prepared for each meeting and with input from members have an activity planned prior to beginning the meeting. I will provide the necessary attention to YAiT during the monthly meeting(s). I will foster a positive environment for the students in the YAiT group. I agree to teach the students how to self-advocate and become as independent as possible to the best of my abilities. Above all, I promise to make YAiT a fun, positive environment for the students so they will feel comfortable and grow as young adults.

____________________________  ______________________________  ______________________________
Printed Name  Signature  Date

Request for facilitating training: (please check availability)

___ Spring  ___ Fall  ___ Summer

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Please retain a copy of all state advisor forms for your records.
Youth and Young Adults in Transition
Group Registration Form

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Submit all forms to: Curtis Gage, cgage@alsde.edu

Alabama State Department of Education, Special Education Services
3317 Gordon Persons Building
50 North Ripley Street
Montgomery, Alabama 36130
Attention: Curtis Gage

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Please retain a copy of all state advisor forms for your records.