

# PEOPLE <sup>IN</sup> PARTNERSHIP

Inspired Teams at the  
YAI and  **Broadview Networks**  
Central Park Challenge

**A Social Program**  
Blossoms from the Heart



**Celebrating**  
20 Years of the  
**Americans with  
Disabilities Act**

Putting the **Care**  
into  
**Health Care**



 Residence  
Nurtures Creativity

**Aging with  
Dignity**



**NEW Opportunities  
for Preschoolers**



**YAI Network**  
Serving People with Disabilities and their Families

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*People in Partnership* is published by the YAI Network, an award-winning network of not-for-profit health and human service agencies serving people with developmental and learning disabilities and their families. The YAI Network has more than 5,600 dedicated staff members and serves over 20,000 individuals daily through more than 450 programs throughout the New York metropolitan area, New Jersey, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

**For more information about our services, contact**  
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*A Message from Dr. Philip Levy*

CEO and President



**A Safe Haven in Stormy Times**

Over the summer, while reading *The New York Times Sunday Magazine*, I came across an interesting “The Way We Live Now” piece. It was called “What the Great Recession Has Done to Family Life” and quoted recent polls that contained distressing statistics. For example, more than 50 percent of working adults have experienced some “work-related hardship” – unemployment, a pay cut, or a reduction in work hours – since the recession began in December 2007. More than 70 percent of Americans over age 40 feel they have been affected by the economic crisis. The net worth of the average American household has shrunk by about 20 percent, the greatest such decline since the end of World War II. And 20 percent of American households’ incomes have declined by 25 percent or more.

These dismal realities stand in stark contrast to the environment here at the **YAI Network**, where the mood is positive and hopeful. Ensuring the high quality of our services, preserving jobs, maintaining staff health benefits and keeping the organization stable and strong are among our highest priorities, and I am proud to be able to say that we are achieving these goals. Morale is high because the staff know and appreciate that they are truly valued. This, in turn, leads to excellent services, as Direct Service Professionals do their best work in a nurturing, positive environment.

Our top priority, of course, remains providing the most progressive services to the more than 20,000 people with developmental disabilities and families we serve. And despite cuts in government funding, we have not only maintained the outstanding quality and comprehensiveness of our services, but are expanding and improving many programs, and even creating new ones, to meet evolving and growing needs.

How have we done it? By maintaining the smart, prudent, fiscal management approach that led to our success in the first place. By meticulously examining and re-examining our costs and methods.

And by making choices, both large and small, that reflect our commitment to excellence. But we haven’t done it alone.

Throughout this year, as every year, our Boards of Trustees, families, donors, supporters, consumers, staff and friends have played a key role in advocating and in increasing our private revenue to make our success possible. We are deeply grateful for these partnerships.

Despite the storms that are raging outside our doors, the YAI Network remains a safe haven for our staff and the people we serve. In this issue of *People in Partnership*, you will read about just a few of the many ways in which we are continuing to provide hope and opportunity for people with disabilities and their families.

Our story about graduations from our **New York League for Early Learning** preschools describes the joy and hope of parents whose young children are embarking on the next exciting chapter in their lives. Another piece presents little girls who, despite their disabilities, are thrilled to wear tutus and ballet slippers at an innovative yoga and ballet program created by the **YAI Autism Center** and **Elahi Yoga**. You’ll meet **Josephine** and **Gwendolyn**, music lovers who, at ages 92 and 98, are truly enjoying their golden years with the help of the **Rockland County Association for Learning Disabilities**. And you’ll be introduced to **Raymond**, a YAI group home resident whose love of drawing helps him create an imaginary world where he is Ruperman, a superhero with a host of powers.

You’ll also read about an amazing journey that **three YAI self-advocates** and I made to Washington in July, to attend a **White House celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act**. This historic occasion was a reminder of the incredible progress that we have helped to achieve in the struggle for equal rights and opportunities for people with disabilities.

For me, personally, traveling with our three consumers and experiencing this wonderful event with them was a

poignant reminder of my earliest days in the disabilities field. More than 40 years ago, as a Direct Service Professional, I discovered the joy and satisfaction of working with people with developmental disabilities.

Sitting on the South Lawn of the White House in July, I wasn’t sure which was more thrilling: hearing President Obama speak eloquently about the American principles of fairness and equality that the ADA represents; or seeing the pride and excitement of my three companions, whose achievements reflect those very principles and values. The day affirmed the profound meaning and value of what all of us at the YAI Network strive to make possible.

The occasion was also a reminder that we should never underestimate the power of hope. For, without hope for a brighter future, the YAI Network would never have achieved the amazing gains of the past 50 years.

It was a great honor and privilege to be a part of the celebration in Washington and, indeed, it is an honor and a privilege to be a part of an organization that makes a difference, every day, in the lives of so many people.

As a partner of the YAI Network, you can play a vital role in helping to make that difference. Financial support is urgently needed so that we can stay vibrant and strong and continue to provide the best possible services. Let your friends know about the mission of our organization and the wonderful work we do. Demonstrate your support by joining us at YAI Network events such as our **Benefit for Hope Gala, Family Dinner Dance** and **Central Park Challenge** (see calendar on back cover for details).

Together we will continue to ensure that the YAI Network is a safe haven and a place of hope and opportunity for people with developmental disabilities and their families.

# Commemorating 20 Years of the Americans with Disabilities Act



YAI self-advocates Fredrick, Erica and Peter traveled to the White House in July with Dr. Philip Levy, CEO and President of the YAI Network, to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

“I am so excited!” said **Erica**, a YAI self-advocate from Westchester, as the train pulled out of Penn Station.

“I am ready!” exclaimed **Fredrick**, who resides in a YAI supportive apartment in Manhattan. “This is going to be great!”

“I can’t believe we are really going to the White House!” said **Peter**, a member of YAI’s Manhattan Self Advocacy Group.

On July 26, exactly 20 years after the **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** was signed into law by **President George H.W. Bush**, Erica, Fredrick and Peter were joined by **Dr. Philip H. Levy**, CEO and President of the YAI Network, in representing the YAI Network at a White House celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ADA.

Later that day, they joined an assembly of more than 600 self-advocates, family members, government officials and other leaders in the field to commemorate the passage of this historic piece of legislation and landmark moment in the struggle for social justice and civil rights.

When **President Barack Obama** appeared at the podium, the great South Lawn grew silent. With the iconic White House as his backdrop, the President spoke about the ADA, “an extraordinary event in the life of this nation,” and reflected upon the long and, at times, arduous journey in advocating for disability rights.

“Equal access. Equal opportunity. The freedom to make our lives what we will. These aren’t principles that belong to any one group or any one political party,” President Obama said. “They are common principles. They are American principles.”

As he scanned the crowd, President Obama reflected upon how individuals with disabilities, their family members, friends and supporters have brought the ADA to life since its inception and will continue to bring it to life into the future.

“To look out for one another. To advance opportunity and prosperity for all of our people. To move America forward,” President Obama said. “That’s what we did with the ADA. That is what we do today. And that’s what we’re going to do tomorrow – together.”

In his remarks, the President also announced an expansion of the ADA to include more government employment opportunities for people with disabilities and greater accessibility to buildings.

Inspired by the President’s riveting speech, the YAI Network delegation headed back to New York, enthusiastic to continue their own work in bringing the ADA to life.

“When President Obama said the focus is ‘Not dependence – but independence. That’s

what the ADA was all about,’ it was a powerful reinforcement of what we at YAI have always believed: emphasize what individuals can do, not what they can’t,” said Dr. Levy. “The passion Erica, Fredrick and Peter all have for their own futures is an equally great reminder.”

On the train home, Erica, Fredrick and Peter were still moved by the enormity of what they had just experienced.

“President Obama’s speech gave me inspiration that anybody that has a disability can go after their dreams and reach their goals,” Fredrick shared.

Peter remarked, “The ADA helps remind the world that we – people with disabilities – are equal and have the same rights as everyone else.”

“I felt very honored to be there to celebrate the ADA, which paved the way for us to speak our minds and be heard,” said Erica, who then captured the spirit of the day by adding, “This was the most amazing experience, ever!”

## What the ADA Means to Me

by Mikhail Shklyarevsky

*Mikhail Shklyarevsky resides in a YAI supportive apartment and participates in YAI’s Manhattan Employment Services program. Mikhail, who has autism, is an English major at Queens College. Here he offers his personal perspective on the meaning of the ADA.*



Twenty years ago, Americans with disabilities were given a new hope for their future by the United States government when it passed into law the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This law was important because it prohibited discrimination against people with disabilities in employment and housing.

The Americans with Disabilities Act required an employer to evaluate his prospective employee’s competence not through fear, but through accommodation and experience. It also created an opportunity for people with disabilities to advocate for themselves.

One example of how the voices of self-advocates have been heard took place in July when New York Governor David Paterson officially changed the name of the Office for People with Mental Retardation and Disabilities to the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities. The department’s name change is a clear example of the success of the national “Erase the R Word” campaign undertaken by self-advocates. The goal of the campaign is to eliminate the derogatory use of the words “retard” and “retarded,” which are very hurtful and stigmatizing to many people with developmental disabilities, from everyday speech and to promote the acceptance and inclusion of people with disabilities.

For me, the efforts of self-advocates and others who bring the ADA to life have meant success in my experience with employment and housing. A YAI employment training program has allowed me to receive work experience and prove my potential abilities. Along with being trained in an employment program, I have benefitted from the ADA in the area of housing. Being able to have my own apartment is no less important than the skills used at my job because I can foster independent living through my self-reliance. My independence is just one example among many of the degree to which the ADA has given people like me a future by nurturing their potential abilities.

## NYL Graduates Take with them Lessons to Last a Lifetime

At age three, **Salvatore**, diagnosed with autism, did not speak. He did not make eye contact, express affection toward his parents, or interact with children his age. Concerned by his delayed progress, parents **Lillian** and **Fred** sought a place that would provide their son with treatments and therapies to help overcome these challenges.

In September of 2008, Lillian and Fred enrolled Salvatore at the **New York League for Early Learning (NYL) William O'Connor Bay Ridge School** in Brooklyn. NYL, a member of the **YAI Network**, provides early intervention and early childhood services to infants and children with developmental delays and disabilities.

"At first, we didn't know what to expect," said Fred.

Thanks to his own determination and with the support of teachers and staff, Salvatore began to develop communication skills. Before long,

Salvatore began to express himself with his parents and socialize with his peers.

"The teachers worked with Sal and the progress he's made is amazing," said Fred. "He's calmer, makes eye contact, interacts with other children and his speech is much clearer. He's a totally different child."

In June, two years after coming to NYL, Salvatore proudly joined more than 700 children graduating from NYL preschools in Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn and the Bronx. Graduates at each ceremony performed songs and dances to the delight of family and friends. Salvatore and his peers received Certificates of Achievement from **N.Y. State Senator Martin J. Golden**. **NYL Clearview School** graduates received accolades from **Queens Councilman Daniel J. Halloran**. Graduates of the **William O'Connor Midwood School** were presented hand-crafted gift bags from participants in **YAI's Brooklyn Day Services program**.



NYL Gramercy School graduate Sadie receives congratulatory hugs from her proud parents.

"Graduation is an opportunity to see what the children have accomplished," said **Dr. Bernadette Flynn**, NYL's Senior Director. "Our staff are truly invested in each child's progress, goals, needs and future."

"Every year, graduation is emotional – but it's also exciting," said **Melanie Schuler**, an NYL Special Education teacher for over five years. "Looking back at each student and where they came from, what they've done and who they've become – it's an incredible honor to play a role in that."

**Dan**, whose daughter **Sadie** was among the graduates of NYL's **Gramercy School** in Manhattan, teared up as he watched his little girl receive her diploma. "Graduation is very emotional because we didn't always know how or when we'd reach this day," Dan said. "We're so lucky to have found YAI."

As for Salvatore, who has moved on to kindergarten at a public school alongside typically-developing children, the lessons that he and his family took with them from NYL will last a lifetime.

With tears of joy in her eyes, Salvatore's mother, Lillian, said, "Having Sal at NYL has been the best experience for our family. The staff dedicate themselves from the bottom of their hearts. This is not just a job to them. They have become part of our family."

*To learn more about the New York League for Early Learning, visit [yai.org/nyl](http://yai.org/nyl), or call 1-866-2-YAI-LINK.*

## New Opportunities through Movement for Preschoolers with Special Needs



Instructors Kristin Davis and Kami Evans, and Erica Pitman, a social worker at the YAI Autism Center, with members of the ballet/yoga class offered by YAI and Elahi Yoga

Little girls dressed in pink tutus and ballet slippers, a balance beam, soothing music and smiles – all the makings of a typical ballet class.

But when **Nicole**, a 5-year-old with a gleeful smile, approaches her classmate and says, "Come on Sophia, swim!" it becomes clear that this is not your average recreation group.

For little girls with special needs such as autism and other developmental disabilities, opportunities to make friends while participating in traditional after-school activities, such as a ballet class, are limited.

The Ballet/Yoga program, a partnership between

the **YAI Autism Center** and **Elahi Yoga**, is opening doors for these children.

"At the YAI Autism Center we feel really excited to be able to offer an increasing number of opportunities to participate in these exciting and effective interventions," said **Dr. Charles Cartwright**, Director of the YAI Autism Center.

The class is led by **Kami Evans**, Founder of Elahi Yoga, whose daughter received services from the YAI Network, and **Kristin David**, a ballet instructor and occupational therapist with the YAI Autism Center.

Kami, a certified yoga instructor, begins the classes with yoga breathing exercises and stretches, which she says allows the girls "to center themselves." The structure of the ballet instruction also helps to increase participants' attention spans.

"While this class is recreational and the children are having fun, it also has a strong therapeutic component," said **Erica Pitman**, a social worker at the YAI Autism Center who helped develop the program.

"We have a unique program with occupational therapists who are trained in understanding child development and physical development," Kristin said. "We're able to look at these children from the perspective of their balance and coordination. We also have yoga instructors who are certified in helping children with developmental disabilities."

"This program is another innovative example of YAI's mission of promoting pride, independence and

new skills for children with special needs," said **Marco Damiani**, Senior Director of Clinical and Family Services for the YAI Network.

According to the girls' parents, the class is not only helping the young ballerinas develop new physical skills, but also provides them with an outstanding opportunity to enjoy a fun activity that is often only available to their typically developing peers.

"The class helps Nicole socialize, learn to follow direction and enjoy what any typical 5-year-old girl would like," said **Miriam**, her mother. "Dressing up in a ballet outfit and dancing around to music is the most normal thing possible. I love seeing her enjoy it."

"I always hoped that they would be in a ballet class, because that's always something you want your little girl to be able to do," said **Tom**, father of 4-year-old twins **Lucia** and **Sophia**. "It's so great that this opportunity is here and they can take advantage of it. They absolutely love it and it has done wonders for them."

According to Kami, whose daughter has cerebral palsy, the program is building the girls' confidence and self-esteem while setting a foundation for future success. "Once you show a child how to do something and they enjoy the success, they want more and more."

*For more information about the YAI Autism Center's Ballet/Yoga Program, please call 1-888-YAI-AUTISM.*

# Inspired Teams Make a Difference at the 2010 YAI and Broadview Networks Central Park Challenge

When staff and participants at YAI's Manhattan Day Services program think of **William Poole**, they think of inclusion and dignity. They think respect and hope. They think "Will" power.

William first came to YAI 12 years ago as an intern. His dedication, work ethic and passion quickly led him to multiple promotions. Loved by all, Will, as he was affectionately called, embodied the YAI spirit.

"Will brought a strong and positive vibe to our program," said **Patrick Piazza**, Supervisor at YAI's Manhattan Day Services. "Our participants were connected with Will. If they had problems, they would rely on him to help."

But when Will was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, it was his turn to lean on his YAI family for love and support.

Sadly, in March, after a courageous battle, Will passed away. Will's friends at Manhattan Day knew they wanted to somehow honor him. They soon agreed that it would only be natural to pay tribute to Will's irrepressible spirit at one of the YAI Network's biggest and brightest events. On June 5, more than 100 staff, program participants and family members joined together as "Team WillPower" at the **YAI and Broadview Networks Central Park Challenge**.

The Central Park Challenge is an exciting day that brings together thousands of people to promote hope and opportunity for individuals with disabilities and their families, and to raise funds for YAI Network programs that enhance their lives.

People from every walk of life gather in Central Park to run in the event's 5K, participate in the 3K walk with friends, co-workers and loved ones, and enjoy children's activities, entertainment and refreshments. Most of all, they come together to make a difference.

In its milestone 25th year, the 2010 Central Park Challenge raised a **record-breaking \$1.5 million** and drew **12,000 people** – more than ever before.

Motivated by love and respect for Will, Team WillPower raised over \$21,000, earning a spot as one of this year's top fundraising teams. Their enthusiasm was contagious.



Dan, who inspired Dan's Fans Team, joyfully crosses the 3K finish line at the 2010 Central Park Challenge.



Will, whose memory Team WillPower honors, was known for his infectious smile.

As they reached out to family, friends and community members to participate in this year's Central Park Challenge, Manhattan Day Services participants and staff not only raised awareness, support and funds, but inspired others to form Central Park Challenge teams of their own.

**Michael**, a participant at the Manhattan Day Services program, spread the word to family and friends. As a result of his excitement and dedication, Michael's mother **Carol**, their extended family members and neighbors joined Team WillPower.

"YAI has a special place in our lives," said Carol, who was thrilled to join her son's team.

Equally motivated to spread the Central Park Challenge spirit was **Meri**, whose son **Dan** also attends YAI's Manhattan Day Services program. On behalf of Dan, Meri reached out to family and friends, who demonstrated their support by forming the "Dan's Fans" team. Together they raised more than \$5,000, and exemplified Dan's generous heart and excitement for the Central Park Challenge.

"The Central Park Challenge is a time when we can all get together, raise funds and advocate for people with disabilities," said Meri. "These services are making a difference."

As Dan's Fans and Team WillPower proudly crossed the 3K finish line, they were surrounded by hundreds of other teams motivated by their own inspiring stories. Seeing the jubilant crowd around



It was all thumbs up from Team WillPower during the 3K walk at the 2010 Central Park Challenge.

her, **Karen Abbe**, Assistant Coordinator at Manhattan Day Services, smiled and said, "Today, I think that Will would be proud of us."

*For more information on day services provided through the YAI Network, visit [yai.org/day-services](http://yai.org/day-services), or call 1-866-2-YAI-LINK.*

## Celebrity Support Shines at 2010 Central Park Challenge



Celebrities **Sherri Shepherd** of ABC-TV's "The View" and the official spokesperson of the YAI Network; **Tina Fey** of NBC-TV's "30 Rock" and "Saturday Night Live" fame; **Diane Neal** of Law & Order SVU; **Bill Ritter**, Co-Ancor, WABC-TV Eyewitness News; **Grizz Chapman** of "30 Rock;" **Stormi Henley**, 2009 Miss Teen USA; and **Jonathan Clarke** of Q104.3 F.M. joined more than **12,000 CPC participants** in Central Park this year and helped the YAI Network raise over **\$1.5 million**.

## Walk. Run. Change Lives. June 4, 2011 [yai.org/cpc](http://yai.org/cpc)

- **Create a team with friends and family.** Encourage your company to create a corporate walk or run team.
- **Become a corporate sponsor!**
- **Donate food, refreshments, raffle prizes and more.**
- **Help us reach new audiences through media and marketing partners.**
- **Join our online community.** [facebook.com/yaihope](http://facebook.com/yaihope); [twitter.com/yainetwork](http://twitter.com/yainetwork); [youtube.com/yainipd](http://youtube.com/yainipd)

For more information, visit [yai.org/cpc](http://yai.org/cpc), or contact **Nicole Aubry** at [nicole.aubry@yai.org](mailto:nicole.aubry@yai.org), or 212-273-6587.

# Gaining Self Confidence, Skills and a New 'Family' through Employment

Two women wheeling carts filled with groceries smiled and waved as they left the ShopRite store on Joyce Road in New Rochelle, N.Y.

"Bye, bye," said **Ayana**, a bagger who has worked at the store since January. "Have a nice weekend."

Ayana is one of four individuals with developmental disabilities who work at the store and receive services from **YAI's Westchester Employment Services program**. After scanning the long row of registers, she starts bagging at lane 16. It's getting busy on a Friday afternoon, but as Ayana welcomes the customers, it's quite clear that working at ShopRite is much more than a job for her.

"I have a lot of friends here," Ayana said. "A lot of the customers know me and it makes me feel happy."

Indeed, Ayana's bright smile and infectious laugh, accompanied by a hearty clap, brighten the days of customers and co-workers alike.

**'I have a lot of friends here. A lot of the customers know me and it makes me feel happy.'**

— **Ayana, YAI Employment Training Program Graduate**



From left: Sean Sweeney, YAI Employment Training Specialist; Damaris Rivas, ShopRite's Shopper Advocate; Ayana; and Theresa Casarella, YAI Employment Training Specialist

"It's her enthusiasm, motivation and the fact that she's always smiling," said **Damaris Rivas**, ShopRite's Shopper Advocate, explaining what made Ayana stand out in interviews. "She wants to work."

"She's doing great," said **Antoinette Muscietta**, a shopper from the Bronx, as Ayana bagged her order.

"It feels like this is a second home and a second family for her," said **Sean Sweeney**, an Employment Training Specialist from **YAI's Westchester Employment Services program**, who has worked closely with Ayana and has seen tremendous changes in her demeanor since she started the job.



Ayana considers her colleagues and customers at Shoprite to be her "second family."

When Ayana first came to YAI in 2008, she was disappointed that a family move from Brooklyn to Yonkers meant leaving behind a job she enjoyed at a Chinese restaurant. She was unsure of herself and shy in her new environment. But after an internship with ShopRite in Yonkers, and then working with teams of individuals with disabilities through a **YAI-BOCES summer program** at Walmart, Pizzeria Uno and Legal Seafood, Ayana was able to connect with her peers. A few months later, she was thrilled when she was hired for the opening of ShopRite's New Rochelle store.

**'It feels like this is a second home and a second family for her.'**

— **Sean Sweeney, YAI Employment Training Specialist**

"Socialization is one of many elements that affect our success at work," said **Michael Kramer**, Senior Director of **YAI's Employment Initiatives Department**. "Our training programs address all of these factors so that our graduates are well rounded and ready for the workforce."

"Ayana is a totally different person," Sean said. "She has great relationships with all the cashiers, has conversations with the customers while bagging and everyone enjoys speaking with her."

**Theresa Casarella**, another YAI Employment Training Specialist who works with Ayana, agrees.

"She takes a lot of pride in her work," Theresa said. "She goes above and beyond. She was much less confident in the beginning, turning to us when she really didn't need our help. Now she's much more independent."

Ayana is proud to be earning a paycheck. She no longer misses her job at the Chinese restaurant. She looks forward to growing in her position. "I'm staying in my job," Ayana said, "because I love it."

*For more information about YAI Network employment programs for individuals with disabilities, visit [yai.org/employment](http://yai.org/employment), or call 1-866-2-YAI-LINK. To learn more about employing reliable, skilled graduates of YAI employment programs, contact Elizabeth Repoli at 212-273-6134, or [elizabeth.repoli@yai.org](mailto:elizabeth.repoli@yai.org).*

# YAI Residence Nurtures Creativity, Friendship and Fun

**Raymond** is seated at a desk with an array of brightly colored pencils laid out before him. As he grabs a freshly sharpened blue one from the bunch, he closes his eyes to visualize the movie characters that he often chooses to sketch. Some days it is Ben Hur, Spartacus or the Lone Ranger.

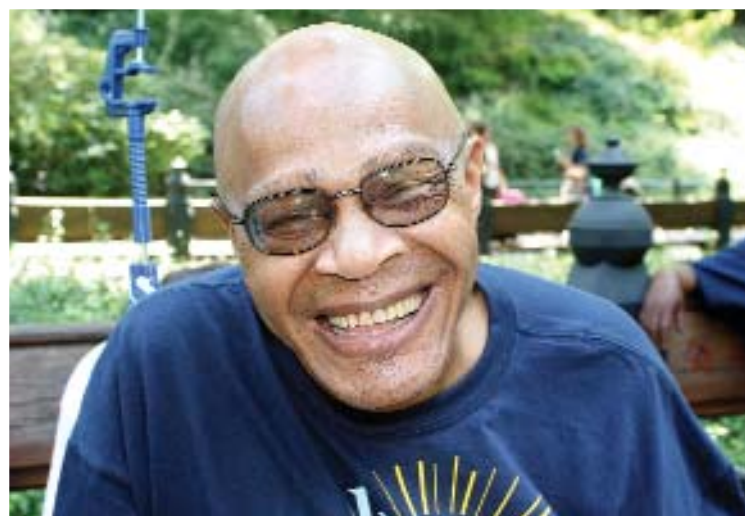
Today, Raymond envisions a new hero: Ruperman. With the superhuman capabilities of Superman and the face of Raymond, Ruperman is the ultimate representation of Raymond's inner superstar. A big smile spreads across Raymond's face as his pencil sweeps across the blank canvas. Ruperman is coming to life.



One of Raymond's favorite characters to sketch is "Ruperman," his superhero alter-ego.

Raymond, who uses a wheelchair and recently celebrated his 67th birthday, has been a resident at YAI's **Tiffany Place** in Brooklyn since its doors first opened on April 16, 2000.

Home to eight individuals, Tiffany Place recently commemorated a decade of milestones for staff and consumers. They invited over friends, family members, former Tiffany Place residents and YAI staff to share their favorite memories while enjoying



Raymond enjoys himself at the YAI and Broadview Networks 2010 Central Park Challenge.

festive food and music together.

Raymond's artistic talents and gentle smile are testaments to the nurturing environment that staff and residents have created ever since.

"Ray envisions himself as Ruperman – out of his wheelchair and flying through the sky," said **Catrin Morgan**, Supervisor at Tiffany Place.

Raymond is not alone in his creative pursuits. Housemate **Jonathan** devotes free time to abstract acrylic painting and writing a play about King Henry VIII. Another resident, **Maria**, loves to burst out in song.

Six of the residents at Tiffany Place use wheelchairs full-time. "Renovations are critical to meet the ongoing needs of progressively aging residents and to ensure that the residence is accessible to all," said **Thomas A. Dern**, Chief Operating Officer of the **YAI Network**.

The house recently benefited from the installation of lift and care systems in bedrooms and bathrooms to help residents maintain a dignified quality of life.

These innovative systems, made possible in part by a generous capital grant secured by **Assemblywoman Joan Millman**, also improve the quality

of service that staff can provide by reducing the intensity of physical labor in assisting consumers.

"As our residents age and deal with declining health, their needs get more

first opened, ensures that YAI residents are offered optimal care and support without compromising their productivity, independence and dignity. "I've watched consumers grow and develop new skills and more confidence," Wilfred said. "When you never hesitate to go into work – that's when you know you're in the right job."

Wilfred has watched Raymond take many positive strides. "Ten years ago, Ray was very reserved and did not trust anyone. But the stable environment Tiffany Place provides helped him develop confidence."

When Raymond finishes his drawing he calls over **Fritz Taylor**, a beloved staff member, to look at his sketch. The paper is bursting with vibrant colors and Ruperman's spirit leaps off the page. Fritz pats Ray on the back and passes the drawing around for all of the guests to admire.



Tiffany Place resident Maria takes a break from singing to pose for a photo with YAI Direct Service Professional Dulls Mengual.

complicated," said Catrin. Staff regularly receive training in areas such as treating insulin-dependent diabetics or helping consumers who require catheters. Catrin continued, "Our staff rise to meet every challenge. They have come together with residents to create a supportive atmosphere and to form a tight family."

The dedication of staff such as **Wilfred Daly**, who has been working the evening shift at Tiffany Place since it

"So now what do you want to do, Ray?" Fritz asks.

Raymond looks up from his seat and answers with a smile, "More paper, please."

*To learn more about aging initiatives at the YAI Network, visit [yai.org/aging](http://yai.org/aging). For more information about residential services available through the YAI Network, visit [yai.org/residential](http://yai.org/residential), or call 1-866-2-YAI-LINK.*

## Day Services: A New Chapter in Life for Young Adults with Disabilities

As her son's high school graduation day approached, **Maria** grew concerned.

"I worried that after graduation he would sit around the house and watch TV all day," she said.

Maria's anxiety stemmed from that fact that her 21-year-old son, **Antonio**, who has a developmental disability, would no longer be receiving the special education services that had enabled him to learn new skills and achieve greater independence. She knew that the transition from school to adult services is often difficult not only for individuals with disabilities, but for their families as well.

Maria sought a place that would enable Antonio to continue to develop and become more independent. She needed the right day services program.

"Day services are designed for adults with disabilities who may not be ready or appropriate for employment, but who still want to learn and be productive," said **Paul Smoller**, Senior Director of YAI Day Services. "Day programs typically combine classroom activities that enable participants to develop new skills and volunteer opportunities that facilitate community integration."



Gilfiynn Jenkins-Massiah, YAI Direct Service Professional, helps Antonio tidy up the community room at the Chapin Home for the Aging in Jamaica, N.Y.

Maria had taken the first step to securing services for Antonio several years prior by applying for Medicaid, getting the proper evaluations – psychological, psycho-social and physical – and obtaining a Medicaid service coordinator. During Antonio's last winter in school, Maria began calling and visiting day programs throughout Queens.

When Maria met with the staff at **YAI's Kew Gardens Day Program**, it didn't take her long to realize she had found the right place for her son.

"When I first visited YAI, the staff seemed so dedicated and the participants were engaged in various activities," Maria said. But what really impressed her was learning that, compared to many other day programs, YAI provided more volunteer options at multiple sites and greater opportunities to learn practical skills such as traveling by taking public transportation to the sites.

During a school vacation, Antonio spent two days participating in the program on a trial basis, part of the process of ensuring a good match. He enjoyed meeting new people and visiting volunteer sites.



Antonio takes great pride in giving back to the community by volunteering through a YAI day services program in Queens.

"I always tell parents that finding the right day program for their child is like buying a good pair of shoes – you have to try them on and make sure there's a comfortable fit," said **Mary Knox**, Coordinator of Clinical Support Services for YAI's Day Services, adding that transition planning should begin at age 15. "This is not only for us to assess whether or not we can serve the individual, but also a chance for the individual to assess us."

Antonio joined the program full-time after graduation, becoming one of thousands of students with special needs who, each summer, transition from Department of Education services to adult services. Since then he has flourished.

"This is his place," said **Petal Morris**, Supervisor of YAI's Kew Gardens Day Services program. "He wants to be here. He's bursting with pride."

Antonio recently joined three members of the more advanced **YAI Planned Readiness Employability Program** on a trip to the Chapin Home for the Aging in Jamaica, N.Y. Donning his New York Mets cap, Antonio followed his peers to the nearby subway station to catch the F train. He struggled with his MetroCard a little at the turnstile, but **Gilfiynn Jenkins-Massiah**, a Direct Service Professional from the day program, was there to assist.

Once at the Chapin Home, Antonio gathered equipment for Bingo. With assistance from Gilfiynn, he distributed Bingo chips to elderly residents playing at two tables. He sat with one of the residents and helped her with her cards. Later, he helped tidy up the community room, approaching each task with a smile.

"Antonio follows instructions really well and has a good sense of direction," said Gilfiynn, who has been with Kew Gardens Day Services for six years.

Maria has noticed some major changes in her son since joining YAI's Kew Gardens day program.

"Before, he was very shy. He would hang his head down and he wouldn't speak much," Maria said. "Now he is coming out of his shell. He's more willing to go out in the community, go to different places and be with different people. I'm very happy with YAI. This was a great choice."

*For more information about YAI day services, visit [yai.org/day-services](http://yai.org/day-services), or call 1-866-2-YAI-LINK.*

## Putting the 'Care' into Health Care for People with Developmental Disabilities

"Every time I need them, they're there for me." Antonette could be describing her friends or family. But she's actually referring to **Premier HealthCare** in Brooklyn, where her 30-year-old daughter **Andrea**, who has Down syndrome, has received an array of services for nearly 10 years.

Going to the doctor or dentist can be daunting for anyone, but especially so for people with developmental disabilities. According to a recent report by the **National Council on Disability**, individuals with disabilities tend to have more complex medical issues.

For the last 13 years, Premier HealthCare, a member of the **YAI Network**, has been easing fear and anxiety for its patients with disabilities and their caregivers by training doctors, dentists and specialists to treat these individuals and to be sensitive to their needs.

The receptionist and other staff greet Andrea warmly with comforting words as soon as she walks into the office.

"Everyone takes time out to talk with her," Antonette said. "She gives everyone hugs. We're trying to teach her to shake hands, but she gives hugs because that's how close she feels to them."

**Jennifer Lawrence**, Senior Medical Assistant at the Brooklyn practice, is Andrea's favorite staff member at Premier HealthCare. Whenever she needs to have her blood pressure or other vital signs tested, Jennifer is there with a smile.



Over the years, Andrea, a patient at Premier HealthCare, and Jennifer Lawrence, Senior Medical Assistant at the Brooklyn practice, have developed a strong bond.

Recently, Andrea had to have a small cavity filled. She was anxious about the procedure. "Jennifer came in and held her hand and sat right with her for the whole thing," Antonette recalled. "They spoil her," she added with a laugh.

"I see it as providing comfort," said Jennifer. "I talk to her and tell her everything is going to be okay. I talk her through whatever we're going to do and let her know it's not going to hurt. I'm here for Andrea and all my patients."

"Our mission at Premier HealthCare is to provide safe, professional, nurturing care so that people with disabilities look forward to going to the dentist or doctor," said **Stephen E. Freeman**, Chief Operating Officer of the YAI Network.

Premier HealthCare was recently designated a **national Patient-Centered Medical Home** by the **National Committee for Quality Assurance**. The Patient-Centered Medical Home is designed to strengthen the physician-patient relationship with coordinated care in a long-term healing relationship.

"The result of this partnership among patients, primary care physicians and staff is improved quality and efficiency of health care," said **Dr. Peter DellaBella**, Premier HealthCare's Director of Clinical Programs. "The team approach goes beyond a typical office visit, and can include further education. We often help patients take an active role in their treatment by utilizing self-management tools, which leads to better outcomes."

At the heart of what makes Premier HealthCare so unique are the bonds forged by the medical professionals and their patients. "We have a special relationship," Jennifer said of the eight-year rapport she and Andrea share. "When she sees me on the street, she says, 'My nurse, my nurse! She takes care of me.'"

Whether it's holding Andrea's hand during a dental appointment, or sitting with her as she is seen by the podiatrist, Jennifer's goal is simple: "I want to make sure our patients are comfortable in whatever setting they're in. I try to make them feel like they're not seeing the doctor, but rather a friend."

*For more information about Premier HealthCare services, visit [yai.org/phc](http://yai.org/phc), or call 1-866-2-YAI-LINK.*

## Aging with Dignity: Providing Support into the Golden Years

**Gwendolyn**, who has a zest for life and loves a good day of pampering, already knows how she would like to celebrate her next birthday. She will start her day with a visit to the beauty parlor to get her hair and nails done, then stop at the mall for a new outfit, and end the evening with dinner out.

To Gwendolyn, it doesn't matter that her birthday is a year away. And to her, age is just a number. Still, what many people find remarkable about Gwendolyn, who has a developmental disability, is that on her next birthday she will turn 99 years old.

Many people relish the idea of living well into their nineties. For individuals with developmental disabilities, who have historically had shorter lifespans, enjoying close to a century of life is an especially tremendous feat. These days, people with disabilities are living longer, more gratifying lives than ever before because of increased access to high quality, community based residential, health care and other services.

Gwendolyn receives service coordination through the **Rockland County Association for Learning Disabilities** (RCALD), a member of the



At ages 98 and 92, Gwendolyn (left) and Josephine (right) are models of a healthy and full life.

**YAI Network**. Because of the excellent services she utilizes, Gwendolyn has been able to enjoy an active, healthy, fulfilling lifestyle that incorporates her favorite things.

Gwendolyn spends her days at the **Northern Metropolitan Adult Day Care Center** in Monsey, N.Y. People there invariably describe her as independent, feisty, sweet and friendly. When Gwendolyn hears music, those around her cannot help but return the irrepressible smile that lights up her face as she dons sunglasses and starts dancing. Her favorites are songs from the 50s, 60s and 70s.

Although they have never met, Gwendolyn has a lot in common with **Josephine**, who also receives Service Coordination through RCALD.

Josephine, who is 92, loves to sing and often volunteers to do so in talent shows at the **Elant Adult Day Care Center** in Newburgh, N.Y. She has a lovely voice, but it is her sky-blue eyes that Sinatra would truly envy. Every outfit Josephine wears matches meticulously, not a hair is ever out of place and she always has a perfectly manicured set of nails. Josephine is also a dedicated bingo player who is admired by many peers with whom she enjoys the game.

"Our philosophy at RCALD, and the philosophy shared throughout the YAI Network, is that individuals with developmental disabilities are entitled to lead fulfilling, dignified lives at every age," said **John Schuckle**, Senior Director of RCALD. "In their enthusiasm for life, Gwendolyn and Josephine truly embody this philosophy and inspire all of us."

*To learn more about the Rockland County Association for Learning Disabilities, visit [yai.org/rcald](http://yai.org/rcald), or call 1-866-2-YAI-LINK.*

# HANKERING FOR MORE: A Social Program Blossoms from the Heart

When **Jennifer Geiling** first met her brother-in-law **Hank**, who has a learning disability, she was struck most by his warmth and optimism.

“With Hank, the glass is always half full,” said Jennifer. “He never complains about anything. He is such a happy person.”

Over time, Jennifer noted the delight Hank took in bestowing gifts and handmade cards upon his mother and other relatives, including Jennifer, at holidays.

“Hank would give lovely gifts to the women he cared about – flowers, jewelry and the kinds of things that a man would give to a girlfriend or wife. I didn’t understand why Hank didn’t have that, or have a network of friends in general. I felt that there was no reason that he shouldn’t have meaningful friendships and relationships.”

Jennifer, a corporate lawyer, set out to find a program that would provide Hank with opportunities to meet and build friendships with other individuals who, like him, have learning disabilities. After extensive research, she did not find the right match.

But that didn’t stop Jennifer.

In the summer of 2002, determined to find a way to help Hank meet friends, Jennifer decided to create her own social program.

Her goal was to enable individuals with learning and mild intellectual disabilities who wanted more out of life to meet each other and have the opportunity to experience fun, culturally enriching activities. She named it **Hankering For More**, after her brother-in-law.

Jennifer designed Hankering For More events based on outings that she planned with her own friends.

“Hank is just like us,” Jennifer said. “So I did not see any reason why he couldn’t have the same multidimensional social experiences and his own friends to enjoy them with. He just never had the opportunity to make friends and create his own social life.”

Most of all, Jennifer’s focus was to introduce people at events, and use these meetings as a launching pad for participants to contact each other and get together independently.



Hankering For More began with Jennifer Geiling’s desire to help her brother-in-law, Hank, build a social life.

‘I felt that there was no reason that Hank shouldn’t have meaningful friendships and relationships.’

— Jennifer Geiling,  
Founder, Hankering  
For More

“Hankering For More is about bringing people together who share similar interests,” said Jennifer. “We help to facilitate friendships and educate members on how to nurture and maintain them. The goal is for every participant to develop and enjoy his or her own social network independent of our scheduled events.”

For almost two years as she was establishing Hankering For More, Jennifer reached out to friends and agencies and spoke at conferences to find people with disabilities who wanted to make friends and could travel independently.

The first Hankering For More event took place in February 2004, when Hank and six others visited the American Museum of Natural History in Manhattan.

Since then, Hankering For More has grown to include 70 members. They enjoy a variety of activities throughout New York City such as visiting museums, dining out to sample

different cuisines and attending concerts and the theater, both through the program and on their own.

When Jennifer decided to partner with a larger organization to expand the reach of Hankering For More, she set out to conduct research once again.

After meeting with staff from YAI, Jennifer knew she had found the right home for the program.

“YAI shares many of the same principles on which Hankering For More is based,” Jennifer said. “We both believe that people with disabilities have the same right to enjoy meaningful relationships and fulfilling lives as everyone else.”

“We are truly delighted to welcome Hankering For More to the YAI family,” said **Marco Damiani**, Senior Director of **Clinical and Family Services** at YAI. “It is a wonderful program that really grew from Jennifer’s initiative and compassion, and our goal is to maintain its spirit and format in creating social opportunities for individuals with mild disabilities.”

Over the years, Hankering For More members have developed lasting friendships, a tradition that the program will continue at YAI.

And, while Jennifer emphasizes that Hankering For More is not a dating program, some romantic relationships have blossomed. One such connection holds a particularly special place in Jennifer’s heart.

“After dating a couple of women, Hank met **Lauren** through Hankering For More,” said Jennifer. “Two years later, he proposed to her at a Hankering For More event at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden.”

Jennifer describes Hank’s and Lauren’s wedding as one of the happiest days of her life.

“It was a beautiful ceremony, with Hank and Lauren surrounded by family and friends,” said Jennifer. “I am so happy that Hank has the happy ending that all of us deserve.”

*To learn more about Hankering For More at YAI, visit [yai.org/HFM](http://yai.org/HFM), or call 212-273-6339.*

# Building Brighter Summers for Children on the Autism Spectrum

**Michael L.** and **Michael Y.**, both age 10, are best friends. In addition to sharing the same name and age, they share books in their 5<sup>th</sup> grade classroom in Staten Island, and a love of swimming, telling jokes, playing outside and watching cartoons. But that is not all they have in common. Both boys have autism.



Michael and Michael, participants in YAI's MAC Autism Pilot Program, are best friends.

For the past four summers, Michael and Michael have attended the **YAI Mainstreaming at Camp (MAC) program**, a collaboration with the **Frost Valley YMCA** in New York's Catskill Mountains. Since 1988, MAC has offered inclusive camping opportunities to children with disabilities like Michael and Michael. MAC campers have their own cabins and the support of specially trained counselors, and enjoy the full range of camp activities alongside their typically developing peers. Throughout the summer of 2010, MAC provided 140 camper opportunities for children ages 6-18 through four, 2-week sessions.

This summer, Michael and Michael were part of an innovative new **MAC Autism Pilot Program**. The program was developed through a collaboration by **Dr. Charles Cartwright**, Director of the **YAI Autism Center**, **Joe Medler**, Assistant Coordinator of **YAI Camping and Travel** and **Becky Lewin**, Occupational Therapist and YAI Clinical Consultant. Through the program, six boys on the autism spectrum, ages 8-12, shared a cabin and enjoyed activities which incorporated clinical interventions and evidence-based best practices for working with children on the autism spectrum.

Becky worked with MAC counselors to emphasize communication, socialization and greater independence within the cabin. She introduced sensory tools such as a squeeze ball, "time timer" and kaleidoscope that helped the boys engage in their environment and learn calming techniques.

"The sensory tools help us better meet the kids' needs in a way that naturally integrates with the structure of camp," said Becky.

"It's all about finding unique ways for the kids to express themselves and grow," said counselor **Clara Flaherty**.

Another unique component of the MAC Autism Pilot Program was a research-based Lego activity in which MAC campers and typically developing campers worked together in small groups. "The Legos offer orderliness, structure and routine," said **Kevin Travers**, Assistant Director of **YAI Clinical & Family Services**. "More importantly, they offer kids an opportunity to probe their creative sides and to express themselves within a comfortable medium."

"The Lego activity works on so many levels," explained Becky. "All kids at this age are learning about sharing, creative thinking, communicating and team building. It's mainstreaming based on a common interest."



YAI Clinical Consultant Becky Lewin assists campers Jason and Marcos in Lego-building, an activity ideal for developing sensory skills and socializing.

Counselor **Ryan Balker** noticed the impact of the Lego activities. "Each day, you can really see a change in thought process," he said. "Campers stop asking for help and begin to problem solve independently. It's remarkable."

But it was not just camp staff who saw changes. Since both Michaels returned home from camp, their parents have seen the positive effects.

"The goal, as a parent with a special needs child, is to give him as many opportunities for independence as possible, and camp provides a chance to develop daily living skills," said **Kirsten**, Michael Y.'s mother. "Michael got to socialize with typically developing kids from other cabins. Since returning from camp, he has been far more open to interacting with other children. The focus on occupational therapy was tremendously supportive in helping both boys develop routines. The program was incredibly effective."

"Going to camp with his best friend creates an immediate level of comfort," said **Mary** of her son Michael L. "There's no stress about being alone, so all of his energy and focus can go into activities and socializing. It's great practice for functioning



YAI's innovative Autism Pilot Program, part of YAI's MAC program, enabled six boys on the autism spectrum to build new friendships and skills.

in society because the kids are coexisting, and that's the way real life is."

Added Kevin, "MAC is a win-win-win. Campers increase self-esteem and learn coping and social skills, families receive respite, and typically developing campers are given the opportunity to interact with and change the way they view people with disabilities. Everyone wins."

"I feel so lucky that my son and his best friend could both be part of this growing experience and I am so hopeful that MAC will continue this autism program in the future," beamed Kirsten.

"From the moment I decided to send Michael to MAC, I've never regretted or doubted it – not even for one moment," noted Mary. "Both boys are already counting the days until next summer!"

*For more information about MAC, visit [yai.org/camping](http://yai.org/camping), or contact 1-866-2-YAI-LINK. To learn more about YAI Network autism services and resources, visit [yai.org/autism](http://yai.org/autism), or call 1-888-YAI-AUTISM.*

## YAI Brighter Futures Society Makes Summer Dreams Come True

The success of MAC would not be possible without the tremendous support from the **YAI Network's Brighter Futures Society (BFS)**, a group of more than 60 young professionals who volunteer with YAI Network program participants. Three years ago, BFS members created the **BFS Camp Scholarship Fund**. The scholarship provides financial aid to families in need who wish to send their children to summer camp through YAI's MAC program. Since the scholarship's inception, BFS members have reached out to friends, family and the community to raise over \$54,000, allowing 49 children to attend camp.

*To learn more about the Brighter Futures Society, please call 212-273-6588.*

## YAI Network Calendar of 2010-2011 Events

- Oct. 2, 2010**     **NIPD/NJ Family Picnic**  
Van Saun Park, Paramus, N.J. For more information, contact Eti Znamirovski-LeMoullec, 845-358-5700, ext. 121, or [eti.lemoullec@yai.org](mailto:eti.lemoullec@yai.org).
- Oct. 23, 2010**     **NYL Annual Luncheon**  
Gargiulo's Restaurant, Brooklyn, N.Y. For more information, contact Alyssa Franklin, 212-273-6551, or [alyssa.franklin@yai.org](mailto:alyssa.franklin@yai.org).
- Nov. 8, 2010**     **Full-Day Autism Conference with Dr. Ami Klin - "Contemporary Issues in Autism and Asperger's"**  
McGraw Hill Auditorium, New York, N.Y. For more information, visit [yai.org/autismconference](http://yai.org/autismconference), or contact Tina Sobel, 212-273-6457, or [tina.sobel@yai.org](mailto:tina.sobel@yai.org).
- Nov. 12, 2010**     **RCALD Dinner Dance**  
The View on the Hudson, Piermont, N.Y. For more information, contact Eti Znamirovski-LeMoullec, 845-358-5700, ext. 121, or [eti.lemoullec@yai.org](mailto:eti.lemoullec@yai.org).
- Nov. 17, 2010**     **YAI Network Benefit for Hope Gala**  
The Pierre, New York, N.Y. For more information visit [yai.org/gala](http://yai.org/gala), or contact JoAnne Kaplan, 212-273-6192, or [joanne.kaplan@yai.org](mailto:joanne.kaplan@yai.org).
- Dec. 1, 2010**     **RCALD's Evening at the Elmwood Playhouse**  
Elmwood Playhouse, Nyack, N.Y. For more information, contact Eti Znamirovski-LeMoullec, 845-358-5700, ext. 121, or [eti.lemoullec@yai.org](mailto:eti.lemoullec@yai.org).
- Apr. 16, 2011**     **YAI Network Family Dinner Dance - NEW LOCATION!**  
Terrace On The Park, Flushing Meadows Park, N.Y. For more information, contact JoAnne Kaplan, 212-273-6192, or [joanne.kaplan@yai.org](mailto:joanne.kaplan@yai.org).
- May 2-5, 2011**     **YAI Network's 32nd Annual International Conference on Developmental and Learning Disabilities**  
The Hilton New York, New York, N.Y. For more information, visit [yai.org/conference](http://yai.org/conference), or contact Tina Sobel, 212-273-6457, or [tina.sobel@yai.org](mailto:tina.sobel@yai.org).
- June 4, 2011**     **YAI and Broadview Networks Central Park Challenge: Walk. Run. Change Lives.**  
72nd Street & Central Park West, New York, N.Y. For more information, visit [yai.org/cpc](http://yai.org/cpc), or call 1-877-YAI-WALK.
- June 13, 2011**     **YAI Network's 20th Annual Golf Tournament**  
Fenway Golf Club, Scarsdale, N.Y. For sponsorship information or to purchase tickets, contact JoAnne Kaplan, 212-273-6192, or [joanne.kaplan@yai.org](mailto:joanne.kaplan@yai.org).