

SELF ADVOCATES NEWSLETTER

DON'T TALK ABOUT IT, BE ABOUT IT

A JOYOUS DAY JANUARY 7TH

BY ISMAEL NUNEZ

On the night of January 7th, a space at YAI headquarters was dedicated to YAI's Self Advocates. A proud mural was proudly shown to the public completed by the YAI art program participants. The event took place on the 8th floor where the Self Advocate space will be located. George Contos, YAI CEO, stated proudly "This shows YAI's dedication to its people. It also shows people giving back to the agency."

A space at YAI headquarters was dedicated to YAI's Self Advocates.

For the YAI Self Advocates it was also a proud moment: Tom Ott faculty advisor, along with Self Advocates cut the ribbon. Car'Melo Grau-Puig stated proudly "Remember the room is open to everyone!"

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Artists pose with George Contos (center), CEO of YAI

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THE GREEN NEW DEAL

BY MICHAEL HOWARD

The New Deal was proposed by FDR in response to the Great Depression. Ever since March 25 of last year, the Green New Deal (GND) was proposed by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and the Senate did not bother to vote on it. The Senate takes money from the fossil fuel industry and electric and gas.

The GND would be good for energy, transportation, and infrastructure.

The GND would be good for energy, transportation, infrastructure, and it would help get people out of poverty. The reason why we need the GND is there's too many fires in California. New York has its own GND but other states need to follow. I'm disappointed in all these corporations. Sanders also supports this and wants to create a revolution where we can all fix these problems together.



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez speaks about her Green New Deal proposal

CHAT WITH CAR'MELO

INTERVIEW WITH TOM OTT

Comments by Car'Melo Grau-Puig

On January 21st, I had the opportunity and privilege in interviewing one of the most important but successful people that ever graced the agency YAI and I'm talking about Tom Ott. He is so great in working with families of people with I/DD as well as giving back in volunteering his time when the staff needed him in directing to the YAI Central Park Challenge Bandshell and also he discussed his future retirement, doing more volunteer work and...as always being the best of all bestest and all I have to say is that job well done and I'm so proud of you and I'm going to miss you so much and we will continue to succeed in using the proper tools you've given the self advocates and myself to lead a great group!!! Thank you for everything you've done here at YAI and remember this quote: "Don't cry because it's over, smile because it's happening," not a farewell it's a until we cross paths. Until then I wish you the best!!!



WOW, I can't believe you've accomplished in having 3 runs in your career at YAI. What kept you coming back?

The way I measure my success is in the quality of the relationships that I have developed with people that I have come to know. At YAI I have had many opportunities to develop reciprocal relationships with so many wonderful people; people supported through our services and people helping to provide those supports and services. I feel very successful, thanks!

In the last couple of months in the new YAI Headquarters do you see any significant changes to Self-Advocacy?

I think my retirement is a great opportunity for you and other self advocates to really take the lead. I have absolutely treasured the opportunities I have had in supporting individual self advocates, as well as the groups that have evolved over these years. Now is a good time for everyone and every group to further evolve in their role of helping to direct the agency.

How many positions have you held during your lifetime at YAI?

At least 10-15 different positions! In 1977 I began my career at YAI as a "Weekend Houseparent" in Queens. I soon also began working at



Tom Ott poses with Car'Melo Grau-Puig

the Manhattan Day Program when it was located at 229 Park Avenue South. From 1999 through the present I've assisted in developing new homes and apartments through the NYS CARES initiative, became involved in supporting YAI's self advocates, worked for 15 years PT in the Remsen Street Clinic, co-facilitated the Brooklyn Independent Living Program, became POMs Certified and PCP Certified and helped other staff learn about how we can do better in supporting the people we are employed to support.

What tools have the Self Advocates established to help them succeed?

Each and every person has something unique to contribute; each self advocate, each support staff and each administrator. Each of us is always learning and figuring out how we can do even better that we are doing at the moment. This is the same for self advocates.....having a voice, using it and sometimes raising a voice when needed. I hope that each person supported by YAI feels more and more comfortable in voicing what they like, what they do not like and what they think needs to happen to move ahead in our broader world.

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What was your toughest challenge as a staff person that supports people with I/DD? My toughest challenge has been figuring out and managing the sometimes differing priorities, as well as keeping a clear vision of what my role can be in best supporting people. My 2nd toughest challenge has been how to not take away any power from the person I am intending to assist or support. Good intentions are not enough. We need to listen, learn and support, not do for!

What makes you so proud in working at an awesome organization like YAI? I am very proud of my work at YAI and all of the opportunities that have been afforded to me throughout my career here. YAI is an awesome organization and keeping it awesome will be a challenge for everyone (self advocates especially!), as it moves forward. Just keep reminding people....NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US!! and.....YOU DON'T TALK ABOUT IT, YOU BE ABOUT IT!!!

With your retirement coming up what are you going to miss at YAI? PEOPLE, PEOPLE, PEOPLE...SO MANY AWESOME PEOPLE!!!!

What are your retirement plans now that you've paid your dues? Short Term – traveling with Peter, my partner of 38 years and then doing my best to help get the vote out for the upcoming election. Longer Term – doing my best to support friends and family, Volunteering.....continuing my work as a Therapy Team with my dog, supporting people who are immigrants, supporting teens aging out of Foster Care, supporting people who are LGBTQ and who live in countries where they fear for their lives. And also traveling some with Peter, our daughter and our friends!! I have a lot of thoughts...it is an exciting opportunity for me!!!

INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT CARDONA

BY JANICE MCPHILLIPS

Editor's note: Robert Cardona is a YAI Self Advocate and former Newsletter Committee member.

How long have you been in Job Path?

Robert has been in Job Path 21 years for housing.

Who does coaching with you during the day?

Carrol Weeks his supervisor.

How does she work with you?

She does money management and she marks down his medicine in a medication book.

How do they treat you in your housing?

They did not treat him with respect in the beginning but now they respect him in every way.

How did you find your job?

Through a job coach named Amanda Rodriguez from YAI. She got him a place called PricewaterhouseCoopers in East Manhattan.

How many days do you work?

He works as a part-time worker from 9 am to 2 pm Monday through Friday.

How do you feel about the r-word?

It is not in his vocabulary at all.



Robert Cardona, at his workplace

CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS

BY KENNETH YOUNGBLOOD



Christmas ornaments

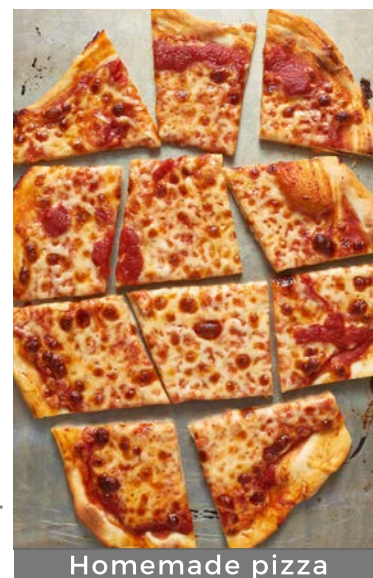
I went to storage to get my Christmas Decorations before Christmas last year. I was checking out the Christmas lights before we put them in the windows and Christmas tree. We decorated my Christmas tree with lights, ornaments, candy cane and bells. I decorated my door with Christmas wrap, wreath and signs. Then, I decorated the windows with the Christmas lights.

Next year, I want to go get the Christmas lights at the 99 cents store in November. My mother put the Christmas light in my mother's room and kitchen at my house apartment. I went to the 99 cents store to get a small Christmas tree last year. I enjoyed the Christmas Decorations with all the family for the holiday season.

PIZZA

BY KENNETH YOUNGBLOOD

I went to the 2 Bros. Pizza Shop on Flatbush Avenue between DeKalb Avenue and Fulton street in Downtown Brooklyn, New York last month. My favorite pizza topping is pepperoni, Italian sausage, green pepper, mushroom, black olives, pineapple, ham, chicken and bacon. My favorite pizza restaurant is called Pizza Hut, Dominoes Pizza, Little Caesar's, Papa John's, Chicago UNO, and Pizza Inn. I saw a commercial called Chef Boyardee pizza on T.V. and YouTube. I went to Little Italy in New York City to get pizza. I went to the supermarket to get the pizza dough, tomato sauce, mozzarella cheese and pizza topping to make my pizza for dinner. My favorite frozen pizza is Tombstone, Ellios pizza, DiGiorno, Red Bagon, Celeste Pizza and Stouffer's pizza. I saw the people in wheelchairs eating their pizza at a YAI Self Advocacy meeting. My supervisor gave us pizza for staff people at my job.



Homemade pizza

BEST BUDDIES FRIENDSHIP WALK

BY JANICE MCPHILLIPS



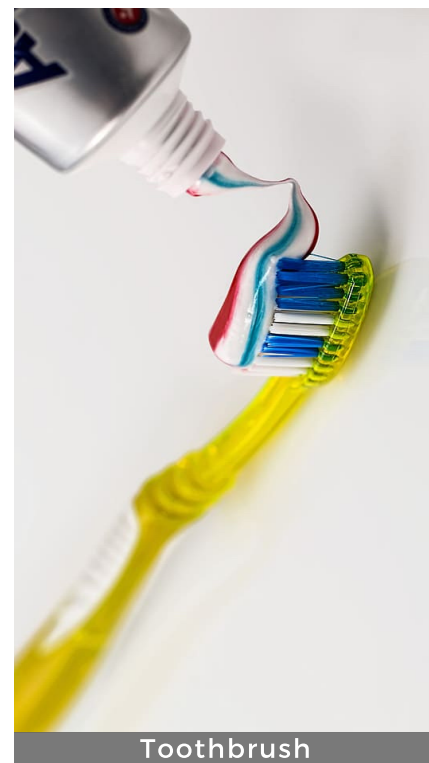
Riverside Park

On Saturday, November 2, 2019 I walked with people who have intellectual and developmental disabilities. The program is Best Buddies. It was at Riverside Park. We raised a lot of money for those who could not make it there. It is important to recognize people who have different disabilities. They are just like us who can stand up and speak on their own. People who have disabilities have a life. I raised \$175.00 for the Best Buddies Friendship Walk.

HOW I TAKE CARE OF MYSELF

BY KENNETH YOUNGBLOOD

I've used my hygiene for 37 years at home. My favorite hygiene is toothbrush, toothpaste, floss, mouthwash, baking soda, lotion, deodorant, body wash, shaving cream, hair grease, shampoo, conditioner, sunblock, cocoa butter, electric shaver, body powder, tissue, laundry detergent, fabric softener and dryer sheets. My mother and sister use their hygiene to by using facial cream to clean their faces and hair relaxer to make their hair pretty and beautiful. My mother washes the white or color clothes with laundry detergent and fabric softener. I went to the supermarket to get the laundry detergent, fabric softener, bar of soap, hand soap, tissue, and body wash. I went to the drug store to get the shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrush, floss, lotion, mouthwash and cocoa butter to floss my teeth and wash my mouth. I enjoy my hygiene with my family at home.



Toothbrush

A HALL OF FAMER ON AND OFF THE FIELD

BY ISMAEL NUNEZ

With February starting African-American history is celebrated: At the same time there's Valentine's Day, President's Day, there's also Dominican Heritage Month! And no person to represent the Dominican Republic and people with disabilities better than Baseball Player and future Hall of Famer Albert Pujols. Pujols's accomplishments on the field are outstanding, yet his biggest accomplishment is his contribution to people with disabilities. His creation of the Pujols Family Foundation.



Albert Pujols

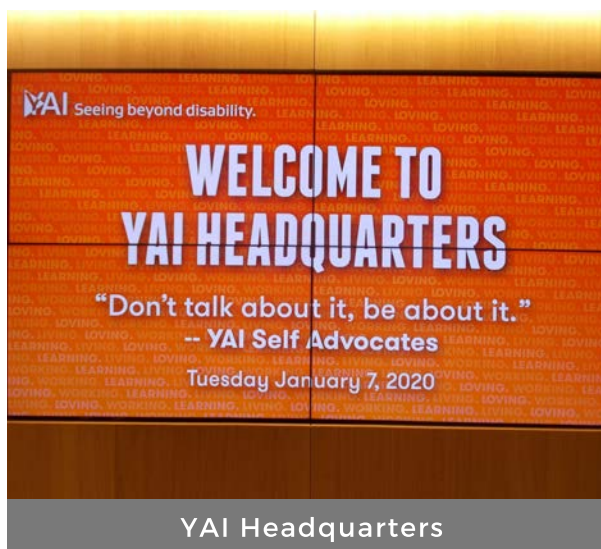
“The Pujols Family Foundation is a national not-for-profit agency that exists to honor God and strengthen families through our works, deeds and examples. Since beginning this foundation in 2005, we have sought to help those living with Down syndrome here at home and to improve the lives of the impoverished in the Dominican Republic.”

For Pujols it's a personal mission: His daughter has Down Syndrome, the creation of this organization is a way of giving back to the community, reminding everyone he's not just a fine athlete yet a person who cares about people and his family. As he says on the website: “Since this is so close to their hearts, this Foundation is dedicated to the love, care and development of people with Down syndrome and their families.” To add it reminds him of his family, friends, and his home country the Dominican Republic. Going back to his website he states proudly “We obviously care greatly about people and families who live with Down syndrome, as well as those impoverished families I left behind in the Dominican Republic!”

OPWDD FUNDING CUTS AREN'T FAIR

BY ALLAN FRASER

It's not fair for staff at YAI to be leaving because of government cuts. I hope all staff can come back. I'm very, very sad about staff leaving because we all miss them. I hope we go to Albany again to fight for our staff from the whole agency. I would tell the government to leave the staff alone and the agency. Or we could go to a rally again and keep yelling to stand up for our rights and staff rights. This is why we go to the Self-Advocacy Association of New York State (SANYS). It means to stick up for yourself and your rights.



YAI Headquarters

FORGOTTEN ONES OF HURRICANE MARIA: SPECIAL ED CHILDREN IN PUERTO RICO

BY ISMAEL NUNEZ

On December 14th, 2019 a demonstration was taking a place: In their press release it was handed out that day “Timon committee of people and families with Special Education Needs, New York Chapter Along with Allied Organizations, are protesting December 14th 2019 in opposition of Puerto Rican Draft Law of 1945 and denounced the treatment of families and children with special education needs in New York City and Puerto Rico.”



A rally for hurricane victims.

This demonstration took place in the right place/city/time. In the area where notable demonstrations have taken place in the past: Union Square in New York City.

Milagros Cancel an educator and one of the organizers of the event stated proudly: “In this city there is a large Puerto Rican population, we are here to connect and support each other. What effects the island effects Puerto Ricans here in this city.” He would go on to add, “Children with special needs/education need transportation, need books, need teachers. The island nation is not getting any sympathy/support from this administration yet they send more money to support wars which make no sense! Ramos is so right!” The Miami Herald posted a video on YouTube describing the situation there “Parents of special needs children in Puerto Rico feel blindsided after school closure.”

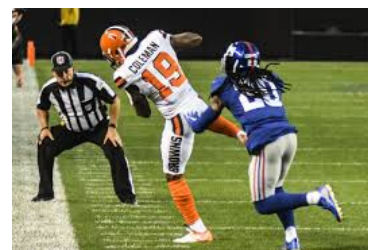
Hearing from the parents: “We learned the closing of the school watching Facebook. We did not get a letter from no one. The closing has an effect on the children. They have not even offered any services of any kind!”

Lorraine Liriano a Teacher/Parent stated “These effects hurt people of color in this country as well. People with disabilities in Education and in general are often ignored. My child who is in Special Ed needs as much help possible. This can be scary and concerning. What happens there affects us.” Milagros Cancel from the Timon Committee in NYC added in their press release: “The diaspora has joined with associations that represent the population with functional diversity in Puerto Rico, in opposing the aforementioned law and in demanding emergency corrective actions in the face of this humanitarian crisis.” [Source: <https://www.struggle-la-lucha.org/2019/12/17/protest-hits-treatment-of-special-education-students-in-puerto-rico-and-new-york/>]

JANORIS JENKINS SAID THE R-WORD

BY JANICE MCPHILLIPS

Janoris Jenkins said the r-word. He was on the Giants team. He got cut from the team when he said it on Twitter. Janoris Jenkins was cut by the giants after the r-word tweet, non-apology. He did not want to apologize after he had said it. He got cut altogether from the Giants team. He is no longer a Giant anymore.



Janoris Jenkins