

# SELF ADVOCATES NEWSLETTER

DON'T TALK ABOUT IT, BE ABOUT IT

## NEW YAI HEADQUARTERS WELCOME RECEPTION

BY JANICE MCPHILLIPS

On Thursday September 19 I spoke at YAI at 220 East 42nd Street. I got to speak about being an Advocate. It was a cocktail party welcome reception for politicians, senior staff, and donors. I heard Gale Brewer speak about people with disabilities and I really liked how she spoke. I also spoke with Jeff Mordos, the Chairman of the Board, and he thanked me for coming. I was a little nervous, but I'd like to do more.

### Being a Self Advocate means to me I can make a difference

I like advocating for the United Nations to speak up for what really matters. I have been an Advocate for more than 4 years. Being a Self Advocate means to me I can make a difference for people who have disabilities, who can't speak up for themselves. In the future they will learn how to speak up with some help.

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Janice McPhillips speaks at YAI's welcome reception

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**RALLYING FOR  
ACCESSIBILITY**

**BY MICHAEL HOWARD**

Back in August, I rallied at the court down by the Financial District with people from the Center for Independence of the Disabled and other disability rights groups. We were rallying because a court case that honored accessibility for every New York subway station was denied.

**In New York, only a quarter of the subway stations have an elevator.**

This is not fair since most transportation stations in Boston and Chicago are accessible. In New York, only a quarter of the subway stations have an elevator. Here I am (back right) rallying with the group.



Michael Howard (back right) rallies with other advocates for accessible transportation in NYC

# CHAT WITH CAR'MELO

## INTERVIEW WITH ELIZABETH ASEN

### Comments by Car'Melo Grau-Puig

*On September 24th, I had the privilege and opportunity to interview another YAI staff member who happens to have great experience in working in the field for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities as well as going from a certified special educator to a now volunteer coordinator. I'm talking about Elizabeth Asen so pay close attention on what she brings to the table at YAI...*



### What is your educational background?

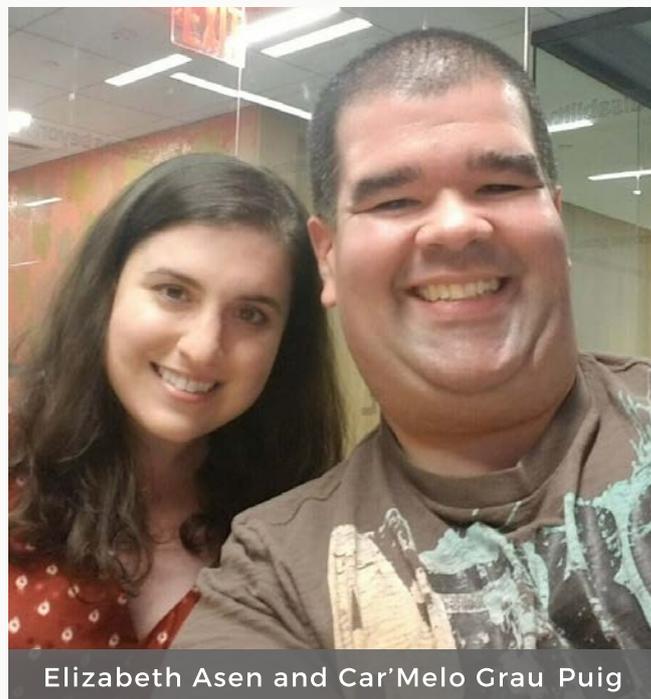
I grew up in Dallas, Texas where I attended the same school for fifteen years. My brother also attended this school as well as my mother, cousins, aunts and uncles. My dad went to the rival school. I loved growing up in Dallas. I am a Texas girl at heart. After high school, I went to college in Waltham, Massachusetts at Brandeis University where I majored in English and Creative Writing. Four years later, I went back to school to earn my Master's Degree. I graduated from Teachers College at Columbia University where I earned my Master's in Intellectual Disabilities and Autism. At Teachers College, I also earned my New York State Teaching Certification.

### What made you decide to work for YAI?

I grew up with my two first cousins, Emily and Jennifer, who had I/DD. From a young age, I wanted to learn more about disabilities and be involved in the field. In college, I was the coordinator of a volunteer program called Brandeis Buddies. The program sought to establish friendships between Brandeis students and adults with I/DD who worked on the Brandeis campus. Working and being with people with I/DD was always my passion and YAI's values aligned with mine.

### What has your career been like at YAI?

In 2013, I moved to New York City and became an Employment Training Specialist in YAI's Manhattan Employment Services. I learned so much as a job coach and had an incredible team. I keep in touch with several of the people who I supported to this day. It brings me great joy to



Elizabeth Asen and Car'Melo Grau Puig

know that the people I placed in jobs six years ago are still thriving. I left the agency to pursue another job and school. I came back to YAI in 2018 as the Supervisor of Project GROW, one of YAI's behavior management programs. In addition to Project GROW, I also had the opportunity to work with LINK to teach social skills and life skills classes in the evenings. I have been lucky in that I have had great supervisors along the way.

### What is your role at YAI?

I am now the Volunteer Coordinator at YAI. I interview and place volunteers throughout the agency. Many people do not know that volunteers undergo the same trainings as YAI staff. YAI volunteers are dedicated and want to make a difference in the lives of the people we support. In addition to my role as Volunteer Coordinator, I still teach life skills classes through our Transition to Independence program.

### What qualities do you look for in a volunteer?

I look for people who are compassionate, honest, excited about the work we are doing, and have a positive attitude.

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### What kinds of things do volunteers do?

Volunteers can do a range of tasks and we offer volunteer opportunities in all regions. Examples of volunteer positions are being a greeter for the clinic, one-on-one visits with a person in a residence, data entry, or teaching a new skill in one of our schools. A volunteer should be an asset to the program. The volunteer can welcome a timid face to the clinic, provide a meaningful interaction in a day habilitation program or serve as constant companion for a lonely resident.

### Are staff and self advocates welcome to do volunteer work?

Anyone who is interested and wants to contribute can apply to be a volunteer! Our volunteers are of all ages, backgrounds and abilities. To apply to be a YAI volunteer go to [www.yai.org/people/volunteer](http://www.yai.org/people/volunteer). If someone is looking for a volunteer they can put in a volunteer request [www.yai.org/volunteer/volunteer-request-form](http://www.yai.org/volunteer/volunteer-request-form)

### With the new building at the YAI Headquarters (formerly Central Office) what do you want to see happening for the people you serve and support?

I hope that the people we support feel as though they have a safe and friendly place to visit. I think our new office is beautiful, but the most important thing is that it is a welcoming place for the people we support. I look forward to seeing art and photographs on the walls made by people with I/DD. That type of personalization will transform the office into YAI and remind us of our mission.

### What do you like to do in your free time?

I am on the Brandeis University Alumni Board. I am also on the board at Challah for Hunger, an organization that seeks to educate and advocate around hunger on college campuses. I enjoy writing for the YAI blog, reading about pop culture, and spending time with my husband.

## ART SPACE AND PEOPLE OF ALL ABILITIES

BY ISMAEL NUNEZ

About no more than 5 minutes from where I live in East Harlem, an event for people with disabilities took place. An organization named Level the Curve had an art and entertainment show at the El Barrio's Artspace PS 109. Level the Curve creates tools that help people with disabilities improve their independence in everyday life. Their show titled *Thisability* focused on art being the universal language for people of all abilities. The show emphasized the belief that people with disabilities are contributing members in an increasingly global network of ideas and cultures. That night people with disabilities showcased their artwork, musical skills, dancing talent, and poetry skills. This wasn't *America Has Talent!*, but there was no shortage of talent and pride at this show. Everyone was a winner, including me.



Level the Curve's art show, *Thisability*

## GRETA THUNBERG

BY MICHAEL HOWARD



Greta Thunberg

Greta is a 16-year-old climate activist from Sweden who has Asperger's syndrome. She really understands how our world leaders accept contributions from the Fossil Fuel industries to let our planet burn, which it currently is. She sailed here to our city with her father a few weeks ago. Last year, she was alone protesting for our world to be better with clear air, clean water & better environment. This past Friday (September 27) I was at the Climate Change Strike March, marching from Foley Square to Battery City Park, but I didn't bother

to stay and meet Greta in person. I hope I get to meet her in person when I get to go to Bryant Park to march to Washington Square Park. Greta is afraid that this climate change problem could explode in 11 years.

## MY TRIP TO JAMAICA WITH BRAGG STREET

BY ALLAN FRASER

In the end of September, Bragg Street took a trip to Jamaica. We took Jet Blue to get there. We stayed at a hotel called Deja. I got to sleep in my own bed and room. I liked how I got the room to myself. My girlfriend Mary Klerese was also there. She lives at Bragg Street. During the day, we went to the beach or to the pool to go swimming. We drank Pina Colodas. We ate a lot of seafood. We went on a nature tour to see the trees of Jamaica. In the mornings, we had a lot of eggs and bacon. At night, I danced with my girlfriend Mary at the hotel beach parties. We were there for 5 days and 4 nights. I had a great time in Jamaica with my friends, girlfriend, and staff at Bragg Street.



Mary Allan's Girlfriend

## THINKING ABOUT SUMMER WITH KENNETH

BY KENNETH YOUNGBLOOD

### Favorite Drinks

I went to McDonald's to get a summer drink. I like drinking milkshakes and sweet tea in the summertime. My favorite summer drink could be anything from milkshake, smoothie, iced coffee, iced tea, lemonade, and soda floats. When it gets really hot outside, I go to Dunkin Donuts and get an iced coffee to stay cool. My favorite kind of milkshake would have chocolate, vanilla, strawberry, peanut butter, and banana in it. My favorite smoothie is when they're made of spinach, strawberries, peaches, berries, banana, mango, and pineapple. This summer I learned how to make a pina colada. I started with pineapple, ice, and coconut milk, then mixed the ingredients in the blender. Pina coladas are perfect summertime drinks. I really enjoy my summertime drinks.

### We All Scream for Ice Cream

Over the summer, I like going to the Mister Softee ice cream truck with my sister. Other times we go to Baskin Robbins to get scoops of ice cream. This is where I get ice cream cake for special occasions like my birthday and Mother's Day. When it gets hot outside, I like to get ice cream cones. My favorite kinds of ice cream brands are Good Humor, Breyers, Haagen Dazs, and Edy's and Nestle. I take trips to the supermarket to buy my favorite ice cream brands. My favorite ice cream flavors are vanilla, chocolate, cookies and cream, mint chocolate chip, butter pecan, and caramel. I recently learned how to make a banana split! Everyone eats ice cream. I remember back in July, I went to a UCP Recreation ice cream party. There were people in wheelchairs and with walkers eating ice cream. I enjoy eating ice cream with my family and friends.

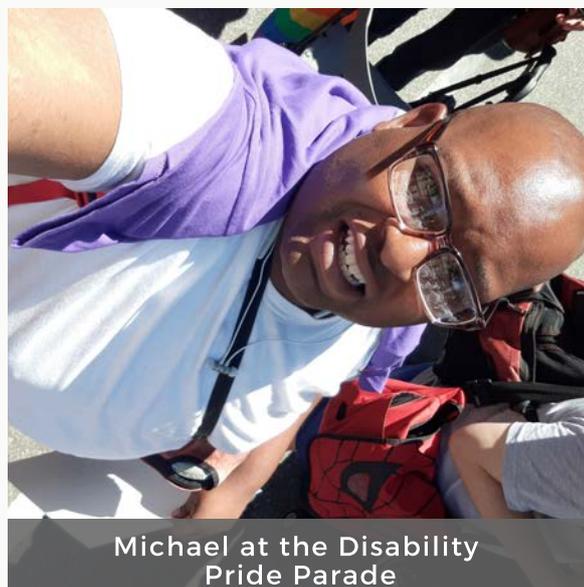


Mmmm...ice cream

## MARCHING FOR DISABILITY PRIDE

BY MICHAEL HOWARD

Over the summer, I went to the Disability Pride Parade. The past four years, I marched with YAI, but this year I marched with Center for Independence for the Disabled, NY (CIDNY). Even though I didn't march with YAI this year, I chose to march with a friend I haven't seen in awhile. My friend Shain Anderson is a part of CIDNY and works for the New York State Transportation Department. He wanted me to march with him this year so I did. Shain is a good worker and has a disability. He recruits people that haven't used Access-A-Ride before and provides them with applications to sign up. Shain once came to a General Self Advocacy meeting and met with some YAI self advocates to promote Access-A-Ride. I had a good time at the Disability Pride Parade this year.



Michael at the Disability Pride Parade

# LATIN AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES SHOWING PRIDE

BY ISMAEL NUNEZ

Here are the latest couple of parades featuring people with disabilities, especially ones where Latin Americans have made a proud appearance.



Jose Feliciano is a Grammy Award winning musician, composer, and song writer. He was honored at the 2019 Puerto Rican Parade for a lifetime achievement award his contributions to the entertainment industry.



Dalila Zapata-Hernandez is a beauty pageant contestant with Down syndrome that was honored at the 2019 Puerto Rican parade. Dalila is a proud advocate for people with disabilities. Here she rides proudly with her mother at the parade.



I met long-time disability pride advocate Ed Delgado at the Disability Pride Parade in July 2019. Ed is a proud supporter of people with disabilities and Puerto Rican independence.



Here is a dance group featuring people in wheelchairs at the 2019 Annual Dance Parade in May 2019. They proudly showed their dance moves at the parade.