

Youth Leader Talks About Advocacy and Personal Growth | CPD

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08/29/2014



Matthew Huskinson

Matthew Huskinson wants to be a leader.

And a ninja.

He is well on his way toward both.

Matthew is in his early 20s and has an intellectual disability. He works part-time at Utah State University's Center for Persons with Disabilities for Gordon Richins, the consumer liason.

He has participated in both the 2013 and 2014 NINJA (New Ideas to Network Junior Advocates) Youth Leadership Conference, sponsored by the CPD and the Utah Statewide Independent Living Council (USILC).

"I had a good experience the first year," he said. "This time, it was fun being able to have the opportunity to

present about a topic I feel strongly about. It felt good to do."

With the help of Jeff Sheen, CPD policy analyst and one of the organizers of the NINJA conference, Matthew developed a presentation on goal setting.

"I'm not really a person who likes to speak in front of people," he said. "I was out of my comfort zone, but if we never leave our comfort zone we will never be able to reach our true potential. It's good to have someone like Jeff to help you get out of your comfort zone and grow."

In addition to planning the goal-setting session and presenting it, Matthew is a member of the USILC youth subcommittee and was in on many aspects of planning the conference.

"I participated in conference calls, and I did help in talking about the youth conference and things that should be happening," he said.

After the NINJA conference, Matthew participated in Youth Adventure Leadership Program (YALP), presented by Common Ground Outdoor Adventures in Logan.

"It has been a good program for me, and it should be for a lot of people," he said. "Many people with disabilities don't have the services to be able to be out in society, and not all have a sense of worth or ability. First we've got to see who out there is not in the community and see how you can get ahold of them and then invite them, first seek them out and then invite them.

"I would like to teach a class on disability awareness, on how to treat people with disabilities with kindness," he said. "People need to be able to have that understanding of what it takes to treat people with disabilities kindly and respectfully and still be out in society."

Matthew's future plans include preparing to take the ACT and SAT college entrance exams and then getting into college. He would also like to serve an LDS mission. His career goals include disability rights advocacy and lobbying.

"I want to advocate not only at the state level, but national and international," he said. "People with disabilities do not deserve to be put away for the rest of their lives, knowing that they're not treated like other people. Everyone deserves to be treated the same. We need to go beyond our abilities and see beyond what we can see.

“We need to teach people like myself to stand up for themselves and to believe in themselves,” he said. “We need the impossible to become the possible, and the possible to become the inevitable. I can be more. We never know what our abilities are until we try. I can learn to become a leader and hopefully be a good example and change lives for good.”