

MY LIFE

Magellan Youth Leaders Inspiring Future Empowerment

Magellan Youth Leaders Inspiring Future Empowerment (MY LIFE) gives youth an opportunity to use their experience, talents and voice to make positive changes in their lives while helping others to do the same.

MY LIFE is made up of youth between the ages of 13 and 23 who have experience with mental health, substance abuse, juvenile justice and foster care-related issues. Through regular meetings, special events and local and national workshops, presentations and performances, the group focuses on important issues affecting youth. **MY LIFE** is turning youth voice into youth action and is playing a vital role in **helping to improve mental health, substance abuse, foster care and juvenile justice systems.**

MY LIFE member responsibilities include:

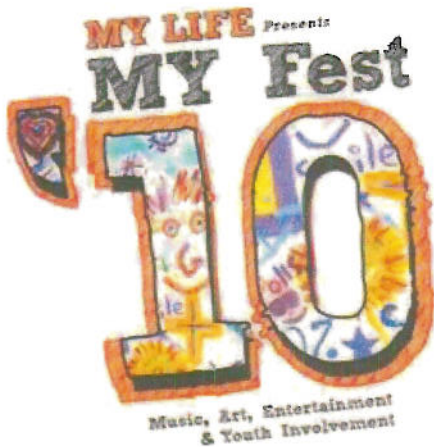
- Advising Magellan Health Services, government agencies and providers of youth services on issues affecting child/adolescent and young adult programs and services.
- Providing the youth leadership and outreach necessary to help reduce the stigma associated with being a young person living with a mental illness and/or substance abuse issues;
- Working with other youth boards and community groups on a variety of community based projects; and
- Performing other duties as determined by MY LIFE members.
- Hosting MY LIFE meetings twice a month to discuss relevant issues and plan initiatives, activities and events.

Focus Areas:

- **MY LIFE presentation team** includes speakers, dancers, entertainment, and workshops to present to youth and adults at conferences, schools, treatment centers, juvenile detention centers and other locations.
- **Transition to adulthood service improvements**
- **Volunteer activities in the community**
- **Education and outreach events for other youth, families, professionals and the community**
- **Advocacy and stigma reduction initiatives**

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The Magellan Youth Leaders Inspiring Future Empowerment (MY LIFE) group has done it again! On Saturday, April 3, they hosted another successful MY Fest (Magellan Youth Festival) event in Tempe, Arizona.

MY Fest is a music, art and entertainment festival established two years ago by Magellan of Arizona's youth leadership team to raise awareness about mental health, substance abuse and foster care issues facing young adults. Approximately 5,000 people from the Maricopa County community attended this year's event, **doubling last year's attendance of 2,500 and nearly tripling attendance from the year before.**

This free community event has become the largest-ever youth led and organized event in the country drawing attention to behavioral health issues. The day was filled with musical performances and activities, such as opportunities to create art projects as well as learn about holistic healing and resources for youth from more than 75 youth-serving organizations that were on hand to share information.



The MY Fest crowd enjoying the festivities

"We are excited about the success of the MY Fest events and are very proud of the work the MY LIFE youth are doing to help transform the behavioral health system in Maricopa County and promote recovery throughout our community," said Greg Dicharry, development manager for Magellan of Arizona.

"The youth work extremely hard to produce this event, and we are seeing tremendous rewards from their hard work as they continue to positively impact Magellan and the community" added Alex Zavala, director

of community reinvestment. **"We're proud to be part of their lives."**

MY LIFE is made up of youth between the ages of 13 and 23 who have experience with mental illness, substance abuse and/or foster care-related issues. Through regular meetings and local and national workshops, presentations and performances, the group focuses on important issues affecting their recovery and ability to lead meaningful lives. MY LIFE provides an excellent opportunity for youth to have an active voice in the planning and implementation of system transformation to improve behavioral health care in Maricopa County.

For additional information about MY LIFE or MY Fest, please visit www.MagellanofAZ.com/MYLIFE.



Willy Northpole, a nationally acclaimed rapper from Maricopa County, performed for MY Fest attendees.

MY LIFE Youth Day at the Capitol

On Feb. 10, members of Magellan of Arizona's MY LIFE (Magellan Youth Leaders Inspiring Future Empowerment)



group participated in "Youth Day" at the Arizona State Capitol. The event, held on the lawn of the Capitol, included dancing and music performances, poetry and essay presentations, and distribution of information and resources to the public on issues of importance to Arizona's youth.

The "Youth Day" event was a great way for MY LIFE to raise awareness of mental health recovery issues in the community, particularly as it pertains to children and young adults. It also gave the youth a unique opportunity to meet face-to-face with Arizona state legislators to share their concerns about the top five issues they feel most impact youth in Arizona—issues they'd like for their state leaders to address. They are:

- **Youth involvement** – to involve youth in the political and decision-making process on laws and systems that affect them.
- **Support services** – to maintain support services and staff who give youth individualized attention and teach them the skills they need to achieve goals and gain independence from government assistance.
- **Youth in foster care** – to help foster care youth transition into adulthood successfully.
- **Education and employment opportunities** – to enable youth to be independent and help their families and communities.
- **Juvenile justice** – to help youth exit the juvenile justice system and teach them the skills that will keep them from returning into the system.



MY LIFE attendees share in a "Big Hug" in front of the Arizona Capitol, along with more than 100 participants representing other youth-serving organizations.

Following their meeting with Arizona legislators, including Eileen Klein, chief of staff to Arizona's Governor, Jan Brewer, MY LIFE youth had the opportunity to tour the Capitol building and be recognized on the floor of the House for their efforts in helping other youth.



MY LIFE participants tour the Arizona State Capitol.

"The entire day was a great leadership development opportunity for Maricopa youth," said Alexandra Zavala, director, community reinvestment and involvement. "It was also a terrific opportunity for Magellan to receive positive visibility and create a two-way dialogue between MY LIFE and the local legislature."

MY LIFE is comprised of youth, ages 13 to 23, who have experience with mental health, substance abuse and/or foster care-related issues. The group gives youth an opportunity to use their experience, talents and voice to make positive changes in their lives, while helping other young adults do the same. To learn more about MY LIFE and the "Youth Day" at the Capitol, go to www.MagellanofAZ.com/MYLIFE.

GLENDALÉ REPUBLIC

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Youth advocacy groups visit state lawmakers

Day at Capitol spent discussing cuts

By Jake A. Harris
THE REPUBLIC
AZCENTRAL.COM

A group of youth activists and youth-focused advocacy groups met with state legislators recently to discuss issues important to them at MY LIFE Youth Day at the state Capitol.

Magellan Youth Leaders Inspiring Future Empowerment is a group of about 75 people ages 13 to 23 who have experienced abuse or neglect through the foster care system, mental health issues or substance abuse issues.

Several live in the West Valley.

"The youth in this age group are

very often a marginalized group — they often have a marginalized voice," said Greg Taylor, spokesman for Magellan Health Services, the group's sponsor.

He said the meeting with legislators "turns what usually is a whisper into a yell."

Adrian Valles, 18, of Glendale, attended to speak about the program's positive effect on his life as he struggled through the foster care system.

He said he's concerned about proposed budget cuts that threaten the programs that allowed him to turn his life around.

Valles was awarded a \$5,000 scholarship and a monthly supplement through state Child Protective Services that has allowed him to pursue an education at Glendale Community



PHOTO COURTESY OF KERI RUIZ

Several teens took part in an event that networks disadvantaged youths with lawmakers at the state Capitol.

College in criminal justice. Without the money, he said, that wouldn't be possible.

Valles said he thought the lawmakers were receptive to the group's concerns.

"I could tell you that things that we were saying, they took into consideration or marinated in," he said. "Hopefully, our voice did get heard."

He added, "If we continue to interact and participate and engage with our legislators and senators — to write letters, e-mails and such — they can see that we want to get

heard. But it's not going to change from night to morning."

Nina White, 20, spent years in foster care. She also worries about proposed budget cuts to programs like MY LIFE.

"The transition from foster care to adulthood is really difficult," the Glendale resident said. "Since they (legislators) are cutting funding in that area, I would like them to come up with an alternative solution and not just leave us hanging."



Emotional OVERLOAD: LIVING WITH A MOOD DISORDER

—Haley Winterberg, Teacher Prep at Phoenix College '10

"In my life, I have been surrounded by mental illness, substance abuse, domestic violence and homelessness. I just thought it was all a part of life. Several people in my family have mental illness. Also, two of my aunts were heavily using drugs throughout my childhood. I grew up in a very risky situation with domestic violence. Due to this my mother and I became homeless on a couple of occasions. All of this has had a big impact on the person I have become.

Even though I had all of that dysfunction going on, I made school my top propriety and my safe place. Because school was one of the only good things I had, I got excellent grades. I skipped fourth and sixth grade. I was in Girl Scouts and cheerleading, and played soccer just to escape from my life at home. With me doing so good in school I never expected I could do something to change that.

Before I was diagnosed as bipolar, I would notice that some days I could sleep all day long and other days I would stay up all night to clean my house spotless. However, I didn't really see this as any sort of issue; I thought it was totally normal. About a year before being diagnosed things got worse. I started ditching school and doing drugs, and I got involved with gangs. I was in a downward spiral, but I thought it was all normal.

One day in eighth grade, I kicked a substitute teacher. As a result, the school considered expelling me. This was my rock bottom. The thought of being kicked out of school made me suicidal and I

told my mother this. Shortly after, I found myself at children's hospital behavioral health unit. I was there a week, during which time I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, and I thought that was it, that I was crazy and that was all I'd ever be.

Once I was diagnosed, I lost several close friends because of the stigma around mental illness. People actually thought that there was no hope, so I began to think that to. It took about six months and then I realized that I wasn't crazy. I realized that I have a mental illness and that I can get better. Even though bipolar disorder doesn't have a cure, I found out that with the right treatment and coping skills, I could be just like everyone else. I'd just have to do some things a little bit differently.

I began getting active in the community. I joined NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) and through that organization I started public speaking. I now am a member of three youth groups: MY LIFE (Magellan Youth Leaders Inspiring Future Empowerment), Ground Zero and Arizona Youth Advisory Council. All of this has helped me get my voice out there and try to reduce the stigma about mental illness for other youth. I have found that there is hope, and now know that having a mental illness is no different than someone having diabetes except that mental illness affects the brain." **az**

MODEL: HALEY KAY BURGESS, GILBERT '13

Magellan Youth Leaders Inspiring Future Empowerment (MY LIFE)

is made up of youth, ages of 13 to 23, who have experience with mental health, substance abuse and/or foster care-related issues. The group gives youth an opportunity to use their experience, talents and voice to make positive changes in their lives, while helping others to do the same.

Recently, the members of MY LIFE came together with the Arizona Department of Health Services/Division of Behavioral Health Services and Casey Family Programs, as well as a multitude of community sponsors, performers, musicians and corporate organizations to carry out MY FEST – a youth-run music, art, entertainment and youth involvement festival. In total, the event played host to more than 1,200 attendees and 58 different exhibitors.

For more information on MY LIFE, visit MagellanOfAZ.com.

BY THE NUMBERS:

Each year, nearly **20,000** teens in Arizona attempt suicide. *(Teen Lifeline of Arizona)*

Symptoms of **bipolar disorder** include dramatic mood swings, from overly "high" to sad and hopeless, often with periods of normalcy in between. *(National Institute of Mental Health)*

At least **one in five** children and adolescents has a mental health issue, difficulty or challenge. *(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)*

About **5.7 million** American adults, or about 2.6 percent of the population, have bipolar disorder. *(NIMH)*

MY LIFE Chairperson Hayley Winterberg Wins 'Mpower' Award

Hayley Winterberg grew up surrounded by mental illness, substance abuse, domestic violence and homelessness. School was her safe haven where she excelled, skipping grades four and six. She participated in Girl Scouts and cheerleading, and played soccer just to escape her home life.

Come eighth grade, Hayley took a turn for the worse and started ditching school and doing drugs. She joined a gang and was almost expelled from school. This hit rock bottom. Hayley started having suicidal thoughts and shortly thereafter, found herself in a children's hospital behavioral health unit.



At the age of 12, Hayley was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. She lost several close friends because of the stigma around mental illness. But six months later, she realized, even though bipolar disorder doesn't have a cure, with the right treatment and coping skills, she could be just like everyone else.

Now, a 16-year-old high school graduate with more than 40 college credits, **Hayley is a strong community leader dedicated to improving the lives of youth and families living with behavioral health challenges.** She is a board member of Youth MOVE (Motivating Others through Voices of Experience), and is actively involved in a number of other organizations, such as the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) of Phoenix and Arizona Youth Advisory Council, to educate youth and improve their lives.

"There are a lot of youth who are going through the same things that I went through and **they need to know that they're not alone.**" Hayley said. "It's important they have the confidence needed to feel that they can overcome their struggles. I have always believed that, in unity, there are strengths, and all youth, whether mentally ill or not, need a place to turn, become organized, be loved, and be recognized for their potential contribution to society."

"What a shame it would be if mentally challenged young people were written off or ignored as outsiders and somehow disadvantaged through prejudice or indifference."
-Hayley Winterberg

Hayley also is the chairperson and a founding member of Magellan of Arizona's MY LIFE (Magellan Youth Leaders Inspiring Future Empowerment)—a group of more than 100 youth, between the ages of 13 and 23, who have experience with mental health, substance abuse and/or foster care-related issues. Under Hayley's leadership, **MY LIFE has an extremely active voice in the planning and implementation of system transformations to improve mental health care** in Arizona and across the country.

Hayley Wins the 2010 Mpower Award!

Due to her great achievements, commitment to advocacy, and inspiring leadership, Mental Health America selected Hayley as this year's national Mpower award recipient. The Mpower award celebrates the life and work of a teen or young adult who has **spoken out about mental health issues to educate his or her peers and fight stigma.** Hayley is traveling to Washington, D.C. tomorrow, June 12, to receive the award and speak to attendees during Mental Health America's 2010 Annual Conference awards banquet.

"I nominated Hayley for the Mpower award because she is, without a doubt, one of the nation's most outstanding youth leaders making a positive impact on youth and families living with mental illness or substance abuse issues," said Greg Dicharry, development manager for Magellan of Arizona. "She is not only a role model to MY LIFE members and the thousands of other youth that MY LIFE reaches; but she is also a role model for many adults, including myself."