

TSA Youth Ambassador 2011 Training Special Insert



Alyssa (14 years old)
Raleigh, North Carolina

When my mom first told me about TSA's Youth Ambassador Leadership Training, I wasn't quite sure about applying. Even though I like to do oral reports in my high school English class, this would be different since I would have to speak in front of people I don't know. What I didn't know was how much I would enjoy the conference. We (the teens) bonded very quickly, and had fun in the process. Since I've participated in the training, I know it will change my life and even how I feel about my disorder. I don't think of TS as a 'strange' disorder, but it has helped shape who I am today—a person I like. Also, I had to find some courage to talk with my representative and senators about TS. One thing I recognize is that I will need to take more responsibility for preparing myself to make presentations. The materials we received are very well organized, which definitely helps me since I still struggle with organizational skills. With practice, I'll be ready to do my first event as a Youth Ambassador. I want to show kids and adults that we have courage, lots of inner strength and the desire to educate everyone about TS. If you are thinking about becoming an ambassador, you should. I'm a TSA Youth Ambassador for life—and YOU CAN DO IT TOO!



Mitch (13 years old)
Coto De Caza, California

My name is Mitch, and I am a Tourette Syndrome Youth Ambassador. On the recent Trip to the Hill, I had a once in a lifetime experience to meet others with this disability and also speak to my local elected officials. Being in a group full of people who understand what you're going through helped make me feel more comfortable in that setting. Sitting with my new friends, we discussed the struggles and adversities that Tourette Syndrome has brought us. It was really enjoyable to hear other's stories and connect with them and learn that most of us have been through the same situations. After a long day of training and fun, I was ready to advocate! The next morning was the actual Trip to the Hill. When meeting with my elected officials I found it really cool to be able to share my stories and educate people who may know nothing about Tourette Syndrome. After all meetings were done, my dad and I went back to the hotel and enjoyed the rest of our stay at Washington DC. I had just experienced one of the most memorable times of my life, and I am thankful to the association for providing this opportunity for me. I look forward to continuing my role as a Youth Ambassador back home in California.



Brandon (13 years old)
North English, Iowa

Hi! My name is Brandon, and I am 13 years old. I attended the 2011 TSA Youth Ambassador Conference in Washington DC and I had the best time ever! I wished it could have lasted longer. Not only did I meet a bunch of cool teenagers with TS like myself, but I also got to meet Judit, Dan, Sandra, Valerie and Elridge from TSA. Those guys did an awesome job with everything! I learned so much about what it means to be a Youth Ambassador, how to be a Youth Ambassador and how to talk to my peers. When we went to Capitol Hill, I was able to meet Senator Grassley and a few other congressional aides. I was a little nervous at first to meet them, but I was glad I did. We were also able to see a lot of cool things in Washington, too. My mom and I are planning to have a special day of training this fall where we can teach other kids from our state how to be Youth Ambassadors, too. It won't be as much fun as Washington DC, but it will still be lots of fun. I want to also thank Jennifer Zwilling and her family for getting the Youth Ambassador program going. If it wasn't for her, none of us would have been there. Hunter and Ethan, you guys are awesome, too!



Mark (14 years old)
Palo Alto, California

When my mom and I flew over to Washington DC to attend the Youth Ambassador Conference she asked me if I was excited. I actually told her, "No, because this is work," The reason I said that is because a week later I was going to Washington DC again, but this time with my school to do the real sightseeing.

But I was so wrong. Yes, it was not a tourist trip, but I've never in my life met so many people like myself who I could connect with so easily. It was very exciting and fun to meet all the other Youth Ambassadors. Also I learned a lot about giving presentations and standing up for other people who have Tourette like me.

The Trip to the Hill was amazing. I was very nervous to speak to my Congresswoman, but she was so nice and understanding. I had never been to Washington DC before and here I was talking with the people that actually work there in Congress and the Senate.

I am still a bit nervous about giving my presentations. I am practicing hard because I do have some scheduled before the end of the school year. I'm happy I was given the opportunity to be trained for this and hopefully make a difference in somebody else's life with Tourette.



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Marques (15 years old)
Flushing, New York

Exhilarating! Triumphant! Those are the words that best describe my experience attending the TSA Youth Ambassador Program, sharing my story about living with TS with members of Congress and giving a speech at the TSA Congressional Luncheon.

During my speech, I compared being a student with Tourette Syndrome to the game of baseball because starting first period class through to last period class before going home is like starting at first base through third base and getting to home base to score. Home is the comfort zone for most students with TS because home is where you are free to release all your symptoms that you managed to suppress throughout the entire school day and score!

I also compared persons with TS to snowflakes. Just like snowflakes, we are all different in form and design, yet together snowflakes can make mountains. Persons with TS have different symptoms and associated symptoms, yet together we can move mountains! The TSA YA Program taught me how to educate and advocate about TS. We are on the scoreboard and together we are moving mountains!



Joseph (17 years old)
Alpine, Utah

One day, before I knew that I had Tourette Syndrome, I developed a new tic where I would turn my head sideways as much as I could and hold it. I had had a lot of motor and simple vocal tics since I was little, but this was more noticeable than any of my previous tics. My parents then realized something was wrong. When we went into the pediatrician, she knew exactly what I had, and sent us up to a pediatric neurologist at University of Utah. I was diagnosed at age 13 with TS.

This year I had the wonderful opportunity to go to Washington D.C. and get trained as one of the 2011 TS Youth Ambassadors. It was a lot of fun. We arrived on Monday, and went sightseeing on all of Tuesday. On Wednesday we were at the YA conference, and on Thursday we visited the two Senators of Utah and our Representative. We asked them to continue to support the partnership between the CDC and TSA for public outreach and education.

I really enjoyed this trip and am now advocating better for myself, and also for everyone else with TS. I have already given some presentations to my classes at school. I hope to give many more presentations, and not just to my classes at school. I also hope to go to college and become a teacher. I know that I will continue to advocate for myself my whole life.



Link (15 years old)
Dallas, Texas

What an experience! As the plane descended into Washington, I could only imagine what being on The Hill would be like. The Youth Ambassador training was spectacular. Without it, I would have been unable to give knowledge about Tourette Syndrome. The morning of the training, I was

expecting to listen to fact after fact about TS; it was quite the contrary. Jennifer and the rest of the teens and adults teaching us were so great! They showed us how to teach a class about TS, and how to talk to the members of congress we would be meeting. The actual day on The Hill was an experience that I will never forget. Walking through the halls of the buildings and taking in everything was fantastic. Also, meeting with people and telling stories from personal experiences wasn't hard at all.

I thought that I might be shy, but I wasn't. After the training, I was ready to tackle any question with an answer. It is impossible to put this experience into writing. If anyone is considering applying to be a Youth Ambassador ... do it! Don't think that you are fine sitting at home and not helping a cause, because once you get in there hands-on and do work for those who can't be where you are, you will feel great!



Devyn (16 years old)
Springfield, Virginia

Hello, my name is Devyn. I was diagnosed with TS before my 10th birthday. Though I have been involved with local TSA Chapters since then, I have never had a true experience that so directly involved me with others with Tourette Syndrome. The opportunity to

advocate for TS on Capitol Hill was amazing and I will never forget it. Being able to represent Virginia and having the opportunity to advocate to Congress was a dream come true. Not only that, I met fabulous people with symptoms just like me, dreams just like me and ambitions for a better life just like me. We all came together to let the world know about Tourette's and to let each of us know we are not alone. We had one voice that day - and I urge you to stand up with us and have your voice be heard as well. Advocate for those who cannot. Bring awareness of TS to those who are not educated. Make the world a better place for everyone by standing up with your voice - and joining our one voice. I hope to participate again next year and urge all of you to come along for the ride. It was an amazing, life altering experience which I will take with me the rest of my life.



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Justin (14 years old)
Solon, Ohio

On March 29, I was honored to arrive in Washington DC as a Youth Ambassador. The training was a lot of fun. The ice breaker activity was cool because it told me a little about everyone who was there. I learned about how to present to my peers to educate them on the topic of Tourette's.

On Thursday, I got to go to Capitol Hill. I met with an aide from the Senate office of Sherrod Brown and I met with Congressman Steven LaTourette. It was really cool to be a lobbyist on Capitol Hill and to try and get support on issues that mean something to me.

My favorite part of the training was making new friends. It was fun being with people who are just like me. I bet you will never be in a louder room. It was also really cool to meet the people who run our nation.

Currently, I am going around trying to spread the word about Tourette Syndrome and tolerance. Like Jimmy Hendrix said, "When the power of love defeats the love of power, the world will be a better place." I feel this is true because I'm trying to teach kids to accept the differences of their peers. So far, I have spoken to over 100 kids and they have asked great questions.

I encourage you all to become a Youth Ambassador so that you can continue to educate others about Tourette's and inspire tolerance in your communities. When you inspire tolerance, you make a difference and help us all become accepted.



Mike (17 years old)
Cincinnati, Ohio

My name is Mike and I am excited to be a Youth Ambassador for TSA and I am looking forward to sharing the presentation that I was trained for in Washington, DC. Educating others about Tourette's is the main key to building a future of understanding and tolerance from those we come in contact with throughout our lives. It was wonderful to meet so many Youth Ambassadors from around the country, share our experiences, and to also learn from each other. My tics can be very severe and it was very comforting to be in an environment in which I did not have to be self-conscious. I hope to inspire others with TS to never give up, not to let anyone tell you that you cannot achieve something, and to go after your dreams whole heartedly.



Price (18 years old)
Tallalasee, Alabama

My family and I were excited to make the trip to Washington for the TSA Ambassador training for a variety of reasons. Yet, I didn't really know what to expect. I have lived with Tourette's for so long that it is a part of who I am. Until Washington, I had never met more than one or two other kids with TS. The neatest thing for me was meeting the other kids and their parents, hearing their stories and sharing mine with them. Because I was a bit older than most there, I felt like a big brother to some of them. I have adapted and overcome many of the things they are still struggling with. It felt good to be an encourager and I felt blessed to be a part of such a group of great kids.

The trip to the Hill was exciting. We met with senior staff of our two Senators, Jeff Sessions (R-Alabama) and Richard Shelby (R-Alabama) and with a senior staff member for our Congresswoman, Martha Roby (R-Alabama). Were able to present the materials concerning TS and the work of the TSA as well as my personal story of living with and adapting to TS. They were especially interested in how legislation such as the IDEA had provided a level playing field academically for me as I progressed through school. The IDEA especially helped because I was allowed to take the ACT in a better environment the second time around. The result was that my ACT score went from a 24 to a 32. Because of that, I was awarded a \$55,000 scholarship to Jacksonville State University in Alabama.

Since returning from Washington, I have shared my story with a support group in Marietta, Georgia and have been featured in our local newspaper. As I get ready to graduate and head to college, I am sure there will be more opportunities to contribute and share along the way. With a positive attitude and the grace of God, the best is always yet to be for me, or for anyone with Tourette's. Remember, I have Tourette's, Tourette's does not have me.



You Can Become a Tourette Syndrome Youth Ambassador!

TSA's Youth Ambassador Program trains kids and teens (ages 13 to 17) to talk about TS. The program gives young people with TS, their siblings, friends and classmates the preparation they need to speak about TS before their peers.

Learn more by visiting the TSA website here:

<http://www.tsa-usa.org/People/kids/YouthAm.htm>

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Ben (16 years old)
Lindenwood, Illinois

Did you ever think that Rodney Dangerfield might have had TS? In every movie he was in, he was always shrugging his shoulders and twitching like crazy. Sure, he and the media said it was to make people laugh, but I think it was something deeper. Although Rodney Dangerfield did not have TS, he did say

something that I can relate to on a personal level. While on a golf course in the movie "Caddyshack," he is confronted by the owner of the golf club. Suddenly, Mr. Dangerfield screams out "let's dance!" and Mr. Dangerfield, along with other characters, begin a dance break.

I have TS and, like Rodney Dangerfield, I love to dance. I love it so much that I take three hip-hop dance classes a week and I am currently in my studio's highest troupe, which I joined through auditions. Whenever I dance, I lose myself and feel only happiness. I feel that I can release all my stress and express myself in a creative and healthy way.

The best part of dance is that I rarely tic during it. When I am in the middle of a dance, my mind cannot focus on ticcing since it is focused on moving my body to the beat of the song. Don't worry though, I tic like crazy in between dances, and I make sure that I am relaxed enough to not tic during dance by listening to music before the class. There was a time when I was ticcing so much I actually could not dance. So I asked a friend of mine who I met from the recent Youth Ambassador training in DC who also has TS what to do. She recommended that I try to relax by listening to music before the class to loosen me up. Thanks to her I could dance again. It would seem to be hard enough to have TS and dance let alone be the only boy in every class, but I push through these "obstacles" since I know that if I didn't dance, I would be miserable, which would only make my tics worse. I have taken to heart what Rodney Dangerfield said; when I can't handle my tics anymore, physically or mentally, I go dance. This passion of mine basically gives me the ability to let out all of my emotions related to my TS in a way that lets me discover my awesome talents.

Everybody is good at something, no matter if they think they are at a disadvantage like if they have TS. We have to realize that our TS actually gives us a huge advantage. When I went to Rochester, NY a few years ago for an

appointment with a neurologist who specialized in TS, he told me that people with TS have more creativity and are more mature than most people. So why don't we go out, explore our talents, and be the best that we can at them? Not only does a creative passion help us learn who we are as great people, they also give us a way to take our minds off of TS. So stop reading this article, go out, explore your talents, and be the best person you can be. Let's dance!!!



Kenny (13 years old)
Lakewood, Washington



The experience that I had with the TSA Youth Ambassador Training was amazing when I saw all of those kids that were suffering with TS. I said to myself that it was just like home. All of the kids I met at the training were really nice and I made new friends. When I got to meet the lady that started this program, Jennifer Zwilling, I felt it was just a huge honor to be there. After all of the training we then went to speak with our State Senators and Representatives. We talked about what TS is and how we can help these kids and give them more education programs. The really cool thing about speaking with our State Senators and Representatives is that you get to sit in their office chairs!

When I got back from DC, I took my TS training back to a support group that I started for kids this past January. I am trying to help these kids and tell them about my experience with TS. I am looking forward to visiting schools in the future as well and educating even more kids on TS.



Leigh-Andrea (17 years old)
Arlington, Texas



It's an honor to be chosen as a TSA Youth Ambassador representing Texas. I'm excited to now have the tools needed to spread awareness and educate others. Going to Washington, Sharing my story on the Trip to the Hill, learning to become a Youth Ambassador and meeting the other teams is one of the best experiences of my life.

Did You Know? That you can read this issue, and all 38 past issues of "That Darn Tic" on the TSA website by going to this direct link:

http://www.tsa-usa.org/Publications/ChildrensNewsletter/that_darn_tic.html