

TSA Youth Ambassador Update



Josh Ertter

The TSA Youth Ambassadors (YA) have been very busy making presentations to a variety of audiences including schools, civic associations and community organizations. Many of the ambassadors have been featured in their local news media and are becoming adept at spreading awareness in new and creative ways.

Josh Ertter of Florida is among the Youth Ambassadors to have been singled out for community recognition. His pastor nominated him for the 'Do the Right Thing' Award Program and he was among the winners. His mother describes Josh as having been reluctant to talk about TS, but that "paving the way" for his younger brother, who also has TS, has become his compelling motivation for going outside his comfort zone.

"I have a passion to stick with the TSA YA Program in hopes of involving other youth in my area to join forces, bringing us that much closer to spreading more awareness and making Tourette Syndrome a household name. Because at the end of the day, tolerance and understanding are the key ingredients to 'paving the way' for other Touretters," Josh said.

Audiences are responding well to YA Kevin Kardon of Georgia. "I enjoy making a difference for other kids with TS. I have gotten some really good questions from people in the audience. At one school they told me that one of the kids in the audience started to cry. You have to go out there and talk about it. It's the only way to make a difference," he said.

Dara Fuhrman, a YA from Long Island, New York, is also eloquent on the subject. She was the closing speaker at the Community Health Charities Annual Meeting.

"Attending the leadership conference in Washington and being a Youth Ambassador has been an empowering experience for me. As an ambassador, I have the opportunity to go into schools and classrooms to educate and promote tolerance and understanding of the difficulties that TS presents for us every day. Dealing with our tics and trying



Dara Fuhrman

to blend in with our classmates is always a challenge. I explain to other kids how important it is not to make fun of children for something they cannot control. This understanding will make a difference in all our lives. As a YA and by speaking out, hopefully I will make a difference for mine and future generations that are affected by TS," Dara said.

Youth Ambassadors Making News

Ariel Small was featured in the *Chicago Tribune*: "Highland Park Athlete Details Struggles and Triumphs with Tourette Syndrome"; Tim Johnson in the *Metro West Daily News*, "Ashland Teen Becomes Ambassador for Tourette Syndrome"; Tyler Phillips in the *Chattanooga Times Free Press*, "Phillips Seeks to Spread Awareness of Tourette Syndrome"; Aaron Buncher in

the *Richmond Times Dispatch*, "Teen Strives to Educate Others about Tourette Syndrome"; Jackie Staffer in *The Mansfield News and Enterprise*, "Mansfield Teen Trained as Tourette Syndrome Youth Ambassador" and Anthony Meinert in *The Pine Creek Journal*, "Teen Participates in Tourette Syndrome Youth Ambassador Training." Other YAs have written articles including Zach Pezzillo who wrote for his school newspaper in Hawaii, *The Seabury Hall Spring 'Ohana*.

Since April 2008, the 40 Youth Ambassadors who participated in the Leadership Training Programs in 2008 and 2009, have gone on to do nearly 160 Ambassador activities including making presentations, appearing in the news media and training other teens to be Youth Ambassadors. They have spread awareness of TS to nearly 3.5 million people.

In Other YA News...

Leanne Fischler of Illinois visited her local congressman and asked for his continued support of funding for TS research. She also volunteered for the 'Run for the Roses' event in Roselle, Illinois. Holly Hitchcock of Tucson, Arizona was "belled" by Ben's Bells, honoring her for her work with TSA. ●

To learn more about local Youth Ambassador activities or invite a Youth Ambassador to speak at your school or organization's event, contact your local TSA Chapter. To find the Chapter nearest you, visit: <http://www.tsa-usa.org/TSANatLLocal/Chapters/usachapters.html>.