



# NEWS

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## **Blind Lawyer Shares Message of Leadership**

*Richard Salem Speaks at 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Youth Leadership Forum*

**TALLAHASSEE** – Sometimes the path to success begins with a huge leap of faith. That’s the message Tampa Attorney Richard Salem shared with a captivated audience of youth with disabilities who gathered for the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) in Tallahassee.

As a high school junior, Salem was struck in the head by a baseball. The accident caused his eyes to hemorrhage, ultimately causing him to lose his eyesight. Following the accident, Salem spent many days alone and dejected, unable to accept his newfound circumstances. Then late one night, some of his close friends issued a challenge: they dared him to jump out of his bedroom window - and trust that they would catch him.

Salem took the leap – and walked away with renewed faith not only in the promise of his friends, but in his own ability to succeed. He shared his story to illustrate the importance of being a leader and being there for others when they may need a little encouragement, just as his friends had done for him.

“When people don’t want to take that first step, you’ve got to build their trust as a leader to help them become leaders as well,” Salem said.

More than 40 high school students from all over the state with wide ranging disabilities attended YLF, along with 25 returning young people with disabilities who participated in previous years. Hosted by The Able Trust, the forum is designed to teach young people living with disabilities about personal leadership and career planning through workshops, leadership activities, and mentoring opportunities.



“Taking a leap of faith and believing in your capabilities and those of others embodies what the Youth Leadership Forum is about – taking risks,” said Dr. Susanne Homant, president and CEO of the Able Trust. “We encourage students to address the challenges of their disability head-on and learn how to advocate for themselves in the process.”

Salem discussed the topics of leadership, managing a disability, and his initial struggle with coming to grips with the onset of his own disability – and encouraged YLF attendees to be leaders among their friends and in their everyday lives.

“Leadership is all about taking the first steps in realizing that managing a disability is a feat that is never fully accomplished,” he said. “Don’t think that we ever have it conquered. It’s a daily proposition.”

He continued his message by praising the leadership efforts of the Forum’s Junior Staffers – students that return to YLF for a second year to help guide first year attendees though the four-day event. Salem explained that an indication of a true leader is someone who chooses to get out and make their community better.

“The sign of a leader is getting out and doing something,” Salem said. “Instead of being the teacher or the student, you’re the doer.”

Salem has been practicing law for 30 years and is the founding partner of the Tampa-based Salem Law group. The lawyer also founded Enable America, an organization dedicated to eliminating employment barriers to people with disabilities.

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### **About The Able Trust:**

*The Able Trust, also known as the Florida Endowment Foundation for Vocational Rehabilitation, is a 501c(3) public-private partnership foundation established by the Florida Legislature in 1990. Its mission is to be a key leader in providing Floridians with disabilities successful opportunities for employment. Since its establishment, The Able Trust has awarded over \$27 million to individuals with disabilities and nonprofit agencies throughout Florida for employment-related purposes, enabling thousands Florida citizens with disabilities to enter the workforce each year. The Able Trust youth programs provide career development and transition to thousands of students with disabilities annually, helping to reduce the dropout rate and prepare young adults for life beyond high school. For more information about The Able Trust, visit [www.abletrust.org](http://www.abletrust.org) or call 850-224-4493.*