

FLORIDA YOUTH LEADERSHIP FORUM

Eighteen-year-old Heather Knight of Plant City has come to terms with her dyslexia and she is determined to become an educator. Her inspiration: the fifth grade teacher who encouraged and pushed her to excel despite her learning disability.

A recent high school graduate, Knight has already earned her license in childhood education. It was because of this determination that Heather was selected to participate in the 2011 Florida Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) with nearly 50 other students with disability from across the state.

The four-day forum was held in Tallahassee and is hosted annually by The Able Trust — a non-profit organization dedicated to ensuring successful employment opportunities for Floridians with disabilities. YLF is designed to teach young people living with disabilities about personal leadership and career planning through workshops, social activities, and mentoring opportunities.

While attending YLF, Knight participated in a career fair with businesses that hire people with disabilities. She also heard words of wisdom during a mentor luncheon featuring Tampa attorney Richard Salem, who despite losing his eyesight as a teenager, went on to open his own law firm and establish Enable America, an organization dedicated to eliminating employment barriers for people with disabilities.

In addition to the career mentoring opportunities, Heather and her peers attended a variety of leadership events — including meetings with dignitaries at the State Capitol.