



It's been so many years that I can't even remember the number. My name is Nicholas Batley and I'm one of the founding members of the Youth Advisory Team. But like they say, all good things must come to an end, or to me, an end of an era, not because I want to, but because on March 17, 2026, I will be 27 years old and out of the range of YAT. As I look back, it was really cool hanging out with a bunch of youth with different disabilities, first in the Davidson area, but then as we grew, we met more people from all over the county and then the state. Then it was great to meet them in person whether it was at summits or seminars. I really enjoyed sharing my experience and my educational journey, which started in Florida and then finished up in the great state of NC. I was able to help others with their own journeys, help teachers, medical personnel, and care givers to understand disabilities in school, at the doctors, or at home, which advice on how to help and how to advocate. If I were to pick my 2 favorite seminars, it would be the one at ECU, home of the Pirates, and the one at WCU, home of the Catamounts – shout out to my awesome cousin, a WCU graduate. At ECU, we had quite the rainstorm and the best part was Miss Aimee trying to figure out her rental car in the rain! One of my favorite times was when we were talking about post high school options – job, internship, or even going to college, so we gave a plug to ECU!

I've seen YAT grow from just a couple of us sitting around a table at ECAC, to going virtual and gaining more and more youth across the state. I'm not gonna lie, it was hard with so many new people joining each meeting – not because I didn't like meeting new people, don't get me wrong, I'm a friendly guy and love meeting new people, but I did not like introducing myself at every meeting with our name, disability, where we were from, and a random fact. I kept running out of fun facts about myself because it got really repetitive. But one thing I did love during our meetings was when we did North Carolina's Got Talent because I got to see all different youth and their many talents, and I got to be a judge, kind of like Howie Mandel, but with hair!!

ECAC and YAT really did help me as I was getting into the "real" world after graduating high school, and after COVID, of course. The social skills I learned within the group and learning to advocate for myself and speaking in front of people really helped me get my first real job at Academy Sports, then with the Kannapolis Cannon Ballers, and most recently, the NASCAR Hall of Fame. Things have been going so well with the Hall that I was recently nominated for a CRVA (Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority) Employee Awesomeness Award for Customer Service. Fingers crossed, I win – we'll find out on Jan 29th, but win or lose, I'm just happy to be a finalist. It just shows that your disability doesn't have to hold you back from being awesome, or from following your dream. My dream has always been to be a sports broadcaster. And I'm getting

closer to that dream as this will be my 5th season working with the Cannon Ballers, and who knows, I might just be their next PA Announcer at their home games!

Besides the people I met within ECAC, it's been great to meet outside people too. One of the things I'll treasure is helping with Speedway Children's Charities and convincing them to donate to our great organization. Being that I love NASCAR, it's been pretty cool to talk shop with some NASCAR folks, especially the broadcasters like Adam Alexander, Michael Waltrip, and the amazing Chad Knaus. And there was nothing like walking around the track and the fans selling raffle tickets!

So, as I get ready to retire from YAT, I want to talk to the next generation of YAT members. Well guys and gals, I'm a big sports fan, so I'm ready to hand the torch off to you, hoping you're ready to carry it on and give your best at webinars, seminars, summits and whatever else God has in store for you. Remember, don't let anyone tell you that you can't do something, if you getting knocked down, just get back up and keep fighting, cross that finish line, hit that home run and keep chasing your dreams, just like I'm doing. And finally, to everyone I've met, I hope we get to be friends forever. On March 17th, I'll be signing off for the last time as a member of the Youth Advisory Team. Thank you for the memories. I'm Nicholas Batley, signing out, saying see ya!

