

Young Life Capernaum® Handbook

Building a ministry with teens
with disabilities



You were made for this.®

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Our Vision and Objectives

THE VISION

The vision of Capernaum (kuh-per-ney-uhm) is to provide relationships and activities through which young people with disabilities have the opportunity to experience God's love and explore a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

OBJECTIVES

- Minister to the whole person, being aware of and responsive to each individual's needs (physically, mentally, spiritually and emotionally).
- To start or grow Capernaum one may invite students with disabilities to attend the Young Life club that is already meeting at the local high school, being sure that there are adult leaders and/or high school buddies who are recruited and trained to be welcoming and inclusive of these students at club. One may also offer a Young Life club specifically designed for teens with intellectual and developmental disabilities at least once every two weeks.
- Plan a monthly activity for fun, recreation and building relationships with each other,

adult leaders and high school aged buddies.

- Provide a Young Life-type camping experience made accessible for teens with disabilities.
- Encourage able-bodied high school students to join in all activities and encourage adults with disabilities and able-bodied adults to serve with our Capernaum friends as volunteers, speakers, and supporters.

- Establish a committee of adults to lend support to this ministry spiritually and financially, as well as to advise in program direction and promote community awareness of the program.



Special ministry is Christianity with its sleeves rolled up.

— Joni Eareckson Tada



The mission and call to the church by Jesus Christ is to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20).

How well we know this as Christians. Yet, even though “all nations” includes physically, intellectually and/or developmentally challenged people too, we see little, if any, evidence of this in most Christian enterprises today. So we start here as a reminder that Jesus’ call in Matthew 28 is a call for the body of Christ to seek out all people. Everyone is invited to the party. To people with disabilities, this is especially good news, for they rarely are invited and welcomed anywhere.

Introduction

You hold in your hands a special key. This key unlocks the door into an amazing world of discovery and adventure, colorful characters and challenges that will thrill your soul. Like Lucy in Narnia, you will be transported — and you may never want to return! In fact, you may never be able to return to the world you knew before you ventured into this handbook. People will look different, buildings will look different, simple tasks like taking a shower or closing a door will look different. That's because you will see differently. You will begin to look at life through a different lens, the lens of teens with disabilities who need to know Jesus Christ. So consider yourself forewarned!

You're still reading, so you've considered the risk and decided that you're ready to be transported. In that case, welcome to the world of teens with disabilities in Young Life! On the pages that follow, you'll discover who we are in Young Life and how we adapt our methods and our ministry to best fit our friends with disabilities. You'll discover the qualifications for working with these amazing young people, and you'll get a glimpse of the profound payoff that makes this ministry so rich and rewarding. You'll discover a wealth of resources to help you get started as well as step-by-step instructions for building a healthy ministry in your area. And you'll discover some basic helpful hints and guidelines for day-to-day ministry with these youth.

Jesus offers us the keys to His kingdom if we are willing to follow Him. If He is leading you to care for young people with disabilities through Young Life, this handbook might be one of those keys. It will unlock the door to some of the most meaningful ministry in our midst. It will unlock the door into a world from which you may never want to return. A world where teens who have often been labeled by a diagnosis of Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, or Autism are transformed before your eyes by the love of Jesus Christ. Proceed with caution. You may never be the same again.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this most important opportunity to experience and share the love of Jesus with these most important people.



Anyone who hears God's call to follow Him into Capernaum struggles with the fear of stepping far outside of one's comfort zone. Most Capernaum leaders have wrestled with doubts about whether this is truly the right place for them in ministry. Capernaum Founder Nick Palermo has been sharing Christ with teens with disabilities for more than three decades, and he offers his perspective on the process of letting God be strong in the midst of weakness:



A Word From Nick Palermo

Welcome to Young Life Capernaum. What is Capernaum? It is a group of people taking their friends with disabilities to the feet of Jesus, like the friends in Mark 2. It is a group of people committed to doing this at any cost — even tearing a hole in a roof and risking embarrassment and ridicule. It is a group of friends willing to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. It is a group of friends who does this because they realize these are teens who happen to have disabilities, not disabilities who happen to be teens. It is a group who recognizes, as Jesus said in John 9:3, that neither his parents nor friends sinned but he has been made this way to show the glory of God. Capernaum is a group of people who recognize that God's power is best perfected in weakness.

Most of the time this group of people is like me when I first started Capernaum in San Jose in 1986; most of us have had no formal training or family members with disabilities. We simply answered God's crazy call to enter the world of young people with disabilities, and to our surprise, we found Jesus there in a profound way — what a privilege! This group of people now includes you. Come on and join our band of brothers and sisters who love Jesus, love teens with disabilities and want to tear a hole in the roof to join Jesus and teens.

“And Jesus, seeing their (the four friends’) faith, said to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven’” (Mark 2:5). Yes, Jesus sees our faith on behalf of young people with disabilities and changes their lives as well as ours. Thanks for coming with us. There are so many more teens to carry, and your hands, in Christ's name, are joyfully needed.

On the roof with you,

Nick Palermo

Nick Palermo
Founder of Capernaum



Part One: Young Life Capernaum – An Aerial View



PURPOSE AND CONTENT OVERVIEW

What is the purpose of this handbook?

The purpose of this handbook is to provide introductory and practical information regarding starting, leading and sustaining a healthy Capernaum ministry.

This handbook is the result of a combination of wisdom and experience from thousands of adults who have dedicated themselves to serving teens in Young Life, including our friends with disabilities.

This handbook will:

- Assist in the process of developing a healthy ministry with youth with disabilities.
- Offer wisdom and information from Capernaum leaders around the mission.
- Highlight similarities and differences between Capernaum and traditional Young Life.

Who is this handbook for?

The Capernaum Handbook was written with area directors, volunteer leaders and committees in mind. The area director is the person who will be leading and developing a plan (under the guidance of the Young Life regional director) to begin a Capernaum ministry to reach teens with disabilities. In some locations, there will be an area-wide Capernaum club, while in other areas there will be multiple ministries.

How is it meant to be used?

This handbook is meant as a guide, not law. As with every ministry, your location, resources, demographics, economics and, of course, the types of disabilities some of your Capernaum friends have will determine the specifics of what you need. Read through the entire handbook, making note of what does and does not pertain to your particular place of ministry. For what does, celebrate that you don't need to reinvent the wheel.

HELPING YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES EXPERIENCE LIFE

In Mark 2, Jesus encountered a man with disabilities as he was lowered through the roof into the crowded room where Jesus was teaching. This man would not have come to Jesus if not for the faith of the friends who carried his mat there and made a way for him to experience the healing and hope of Christ. Capernaum, a Young Life ministry begun in 1986 and named for the city where that healing took place, exists to continue that legacy of introducing teens with disabilities to the powerful, loving presence of God.

Jesus looked at the man on the mat and said, "Your sins are forgiven." If the people were shocked before, this must have sent them further into frenzy. Some may have laughed, "Hey, big deal forgiving his sins, but I don't think this is what he came here for. I think he wants to walk." Others may have looked at Jesus with contempt and thought to themselves, "Who is this man to



forgive sins? Only God can do that” (Mark 2:7).

Both of these groups of people were about to have their doubts and questions answered. After Jesus said, “Get up, take your mat and walk,” (Mark 2:11) this man simply rose from his mat and walked out of the crowded room — observers were likely speechless. His friends, still on the roof looking in through the hole, must have been hugging and rejoicing.

Embedded in this story are several lessons that have inspired the Capernaum ministry:

- **Spiritual needs come first** — Christ first looked at the man’s spiritual needs. Christ saw right through the man’s disability and recognized his greater need for forgiveness and salvation.
- **Physical needs are addressed** — Christ did not overlook the man’s physical disability. In Capernaum, we often need to care for the physical needs of the teens, including grooming, going to the bathroom, lifting and bathing. Caring for these physical needs ministers to our friends.
- **Friendship fosters faith** — The man’s salvation was based on his faith and the faith of his friends. When Jesus saw their faith, He said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.” Similarly, the faith of Capernaum leaders will bless our friends with disabilities. Often, leaders need to be the arms, legs, eyes or ears of teens who have disabilities to enable them to experience Christ.
- **Creativity is key** — Like the paralytic’s friends, who found a way to bring him to Christ’s feet, we will often need to think of creative ways to help our friends with disabilities experience

Christ. Sometimes this will take the form of carrying a teen in the pool or finding a way to include his or her wheelchair in a relay. Leaders will need to go out of their way to make sure that students can participate.

In Capernaum, staff and leaders provide opportunities for these teens to experience Christ. Whether that’s done by pushing their wheelchairs, reading the Bible to them, singing with them, caring for their

his servants first with a general invitation for those with health and good fortune, but they all offered excuses as to why they couldn’t attend.

So, next the king instructed his servants to “go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.” GO and BRING! Jesus knew that He was issuing a high calling with these two words, that those with a willingness to go



The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.

— Luke 4:18-19



physical needs or doing our best to communicate with them, Christ is modeled to them through actions, words and prayers.

The mission and call to the church by Jesus Christ is to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20a, NIV). So these verses serve as a reminder that Jesus’ call in Matthew 28 is a call for the body of Christ to seek out all people. Everyone is invited to the “party.” To our friends with disabilities, this is especially good news for they rarely feel as though they are invited or belong anywhere.

Throughout the Scriptures there is more evidence that God pays attention to people whom society tends to overlook. In Luke 14, Jesus tells a parable about a king who planned a grand party. He sent

and bring would be carrying out His command to include people with disabilities at the great celebration.

Verses in 2 Samuel 9 provide a tremendous picture of God’s desire to include people with disabilities around the Great Banquet table. In honor of Jonathan, David takes Jonathan’s son Mephibosheth, who is crippled in both feet, to live in his house and dine with the king daily.

When Mephibosheth heard David’s invitation, he said, “What is your servant that you should notice a dead dog like me?” But David treats him as royalty. Is this not a parable and call for believers to treat those who are overlooked as royalty instead? They too need to be brought to Jesus the King, where they can dine at His table.

FAITH AND FUN THROUGH FRIENDSHIP

In Capernaum, we can bring friendship, fun and faith into the lives of youth with disabilities. Just as in traditional Young Life, Capernaum staff and volunteer leaders share the love of Jesus Christ through relationships that help meet some of the universal and unique needs of our Capernaum friends. Their basic needs are not unlike those of their able-bodied peers. They have the need:

- To belong.
- To exercise independence.
- For adventure and fun.
- For purpose.
- For friendship.

But they also have unique needs as well. They have the need:

- To be understood by able-bodied people.
- For opportunities to enhance their socialization skills.
- For transportation.
- For hope in the face of premature death and suffering.

Think of it this way: First, they need Jesus Christ just like any other teenager. Second, they benefit from becoming part of the mainstream of life. Jesus Christ came not only to tear down walls between God and people, but to also tear down the walls people put up between one another. Teens with disabilities face a mammoth wall in our culture, built by ignorance and misconceptions. Our Capernaum friends need to experience relationships with their able-bodied peers. Third, students with disabilities simply need to get out of their homes. They are often limited by others' misconceptions of them, and they're also limited in their abilities to experience life outside of their homes. They need to go to a dance, concert or a movie. These teenagers have the same feelings, desires and dreams as other young people their age, and they want to experience the

things that their able-bodied peers do. But unless someone transports them, they don't go places or get out. Few people have proper vehicles equipped with the hydraulic lifts necessary to transport teens with power wheelchairs. These wheelchairs weigh hundreds of pounds. It can take a lot of effort and planning to bring Capernaum youth outside of their homes, but it makes a big difference to them.

Through the genuine friendship of staff and volunteer leaders, we can reach youth with disabilities. These relationships help our friends explore the world around them and experience Jesus Christ.

Early in the process of getting to know them, it seemed God was saying to me, "Be comfortable with being uncomfortable." This was a new concept. I was able to take the posture of learning from the youth rather than saving them. I found that I could say, "I've never been around someone with a disability, please teach me." A beautiful building process and an eye-opening relationship with these teens had begun. I began to learn who they were and what they were about just by being with them.

As you begin your ministry, remember these two principles. Be comfortable with being



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BECOMING COMFORTABLE WITH BEING UNCOMFORTABLE

Before God called me into Capernaum, I never had any professional training with people with disabilities. The growth and success of the ministry is proof that you don't need to be a professional. You need only God's call, a deep love for youth and a willingness to learn. The first days were uncomfortable; teens drooled, had food on their faces and their efforts at communication were difficult to understand.

uncomfortable, and be committed to spending time getting to know the youth. Additionally, be honest about your own hang-ups in dealing with those who are different. As I listened and learned, I was overwhelmed by what their world was about. Three words seemed to sum it up: isolation, loneliness and boredom.

Another thing that has helped me is to view young people with physical disabilities as sacramental reminders of the broken body of Christ on the cross. His body, so sacred, was crushed for us. I can imagine Joseph and Nicodemus taking Him down

from the cross with the utmost care, and as they wrapped Him in the shroud, they did so gently.

We can care for teenagers with this same humility and respect because this is the example Jesus Christ set for us. May we treat them as Jesus does! Jesus lived His life touching them. The first time a teen with disabilities put his crooked and stiff hand out to mine, I withdrew in fear. I have since learned the importance of lovingly touching those no one wants to touch. May we care for their bodies with grace and love!



JUST ONE

I never look at the masses as my responsibility.

I only look at the individual.

I can only love one person at
a time.

I can only feed one person at a time.

You get closer to Christ by coming closer to each other.

As Jesus said, "Whatever you do to the least of my brethren, you do to me."

So you begin ... I begin.

I picked up one person —

Maybe if I didn't pick up that one person

I wouldn't have picked up 42,000.

The whole work is only a drop in the ocean.

But, if I didn't put the drop in, the ocean would be one
drop less.

Same thing for you.

Same thing for your family.

Same thing in the church where you go.

Just begin ... one, one, one.

— Mother Teresa

Part Two: Embarking on the Capernaum Adventure



HOW TO GET STARTED

As you prayerfully consider starting a Capernaum ministry, take a look at your community. Investigate where teens with disabilities are found and what resources are available to them. The Young Life committee in the local area will need to be aware of these resources when considering starting Capernaum. The Capernaum ministry will integrate with and come under the leadership of the local area director and existing Young Life committee. Recruit a team of people who will pray with you for clarity and confirmation before starting Capernaum. You will want to make some calls to community organizations that would be potential partners of yours, think through your church relationships and who might be on board to help start this ministry.

Especially key to this process is finding the right person to lead. This person can be part time or full time depending on the size of your area and your vision for starting one club or multiple clubs. They might come on staff as a staff associate, or be a volunteer who has a heart to give her time. Take your time in looking for this person, and use your committee and leaders to think through people they know who might be a fit for this role.

One of the challenges to starting any new ministry is funding. There are resources available to Capernaum that are harder for traditional Young Life to acquire – church missions support, grants, foundations and donors who have a heart for kids with disabilities and have not given to Young Life before. Think through the contacts

you have, and places you might look for support not available to you previously. Capernaum draws new people and new financial support to an area because of the unique audience it reaches.

Identify who is working with and supporting teens with disabilities within your community. Seek to collaborate with community organizations and ministries to work together to meet the needs of teens with disabilities. Work to identify and build relationships with churches that have a heart and passion to reach out to this specific population. You'll need their resources to build your volunteer teams, and you'll be providing them with a new and exciting way to reach out into their community.

Healthy Capernaum ministries are started with a team of people who are passionate about walking alongside teens with disabilities. Recruiting, training and investing in these people are some of the most important roles of Capernaum staff. This team will be built through the people you and your committee know, the church relationships you build, and your connectedness to the community. To have this team in place before starting contact work is a strategic way to start. This team of leaders and buddies will be the most essential piece to the longevity of Capernaum.

The next step in your process involves building your strategy for reaching the teens with disabilities in your community. Do your homework in figuring out the most effective place for you to start. It might be a school specifically for

kids with disabilities. Your local high school might provide special education programs. You might find your best places are through community partnerships, Special Olympics or other recreation programs. Initiate relationships where you can work alongside people who are already seeking to care for kids with disabilities. Be creative in thinking about how you will approach the administrator or director to collaborate and earn the right to befriend teens with disabilities.

As with any Young Life ministry, leaders are the key to successful Capernaum ministry. The foundational piece to Capernaum club is the intentional contact work being done throughout the week by leaders with teens with disabilities and their parents. Whether one on one, or in small groups, this time spent investing in, building trust and helping meet physical needs is the basis for all further ministry.

Once you've recruited and trained your leader team, your staff person will spend time getting to know them and will enable them to start contact work either individually,

with several kids, or at the school you have targeted.

As with any Young Life ministry, club is essential. After contact work has been established, and leaders are meeting with kids, work toward starting club. You can work to integrate kids with disabilities into your existing Young Life clubs or begin a new club specifically for Capernaum. Either is like traditional Young Life club in many ways – music, games, skits, and message – but with a few extras added in to meet the unique needs of this audience. Capernaum club is typically longer than traditional Young Life club due to time allotted for transportation and meals.

Many Capernaum ministries also do another organized event during the month to give leaders more opportunities to do contact work and build community in the group. Game nights, movie nights, scavenger hunts, zoo trips, meeting at the park, scrap booking, cooking meals together and more. This is also a great avenue to collaborate with a local church - youth groups make great buddies during these events.

After club is up and running, or after returning from your camp trip, you may begin to have kids who are ready for Campaigners. Campaigners generally meets once or twice a month rather than weekly, and again, transportation and meals are key elements to helping kids attend regularly. You may consider this time being by invite only, as every parent would love for their child to be a part of another night of Young Life.

MINISTRY SUPERVISION

A Capernaum ministry has a dedicated Capernaum sub-committee that serves as part of the local Young Life committee and also helps with specific Capernaum needs. These may include transportation needs, planning Capernaum-specific fundraisers, providing dinners and crafts for club, caring for leaders and supporting the staff.

The Capernaum staff person reports directly to the Young Life area director. In the case that there is no local area director, the regional director will serve as the direct supervisor. The Capernaum regional coordinator (if there is one in your



region) and divisional coordinator act as advisors and support for Capernaum ministries, but do not offer direct supervision.

There are many benefits to working together to reach every kid in an area:

- The area director and Capernaum staff can work together to set vision and goals.
- Donors are approached by a united ministry rather than by separate programs.
- New churches, foundations and individuals will be interested in donating to an area that includes ministry to kids with disabilities.
- Young Life will gain a larger reputation and more advocates in the community because of the increased volunteer base and their added work with kids with disabilities.
- Churches and other community programs will be exposed to several different ways of collaborating with Young Life.
- Administrative responsibilities can be shared.
- Young Life leader training can include both Young Life leaders and Capernaum leaders.
- Although the supervisor of a Capernaum ministry may not have direct Capernaum experience, he or she is still the Young Life specialist in the area and has extensive training and expertise to offer to a new staff person or volunteer leader. We recommend that the supervisor visit the Capernaum club regularly and also set up a regular time to meet with the Capernaum staff for training, questions, accountability and establishing vision. The supervisor plays a vital role in coaching the staff in areas including:
 - Service Center resources.
 - Young Life philosophies.
 - Recruiting and training volunteers.
 - Building a committee.
 - Making church and community connections.

- Establishing a budget.
- Fundraising techniques.
- Administrative responsibilities.
- Doing contact work.
- Running a healthy club.
- Planning a camp trip.
- Setting up Campaigners.
- Making a plan for ongoing training.
- Reporting on GPS.

In addition, it is helpful for a new staff person to go with the supervisor to visit local clubs, meet school administration, network in the community and speak to churches. Not only does this provide a model for the staff person of how to network in the community, it also provides a united ministry front to the community. We can impact more kids with the gospel if we work as a team chasing after all lost kids together.

Is God Calling You to Start A Capernaum Ministry?

Capernaum can be a challenging ministry to lead. Being confident of one's calling to lead this ministry will help when perseverance is necessary. Therefore, it is essential to pray and discern God's direction.

Ask the Lord if He is calling you to establish and lead a Capernaum ministry. Leading a Capernaum ministry requires a strong and healthy personal relationship with Christ. You will be leading teenagers and young adults at various points in their spiritual development. Your leadership must be focused on the ways you can serve them and help them grow in their faith as they serve the Lord.

Be aware of your motivations. Are your aspirations for leadership free from selfish ambition or a desire for an increased sense of self-worth? Or perhaps you are worried that you don't think you have what it takes. Remember, when God seeks out His



people for leadership positions, He is able to fully use them despite their shortcomings.

Questions to Consider

As you consider your calling, take some time to think and pray through the following questions:

- Why do I believe God has called me to this particular group of people?
- Do I have the amount of time needed to make the commitment to build a Capernaum ministry?
- What life experiences, skills and spiritual gifts do I have that will enable me to lead this ministry?
- How has God uniquely equipped me?
- Do I have the support of my family and friends?
- How has God used circumstances and others to confirm that this ministry is a fit?
- What are my strengths and weaknesses?
- How well do I communicate with others?
- What life changes would I need to make in order to give my best?
- Does my life reflect dependency on God in prayer?
- Can I build a team around me to help carry the load of this ministry?
- Do I have people committed to praying for me on a regular basis?

LOOKING AT THE BIG PICTURE

The First Phase in Establishing a Capernaum Ministry is:

1. Understanding Young Life as a mission.
2. Understanding Capernaum as a Young Life ministry.
3. Assessing your community's suitability and readiness for Capernaum.

This first phase will lead to a better understanding of the mission of Young Life and help you clarify your vision as you begin to develop a clear working plan to build a Capernaum ministry in your area.

This process may take anywhere from three months to one year and involves a considerable amount of time, prayer and dialogue with your Young Life regional and/or area director, as well as the Capernaum coordinator in your division. They will help you to:

- Establish a working relationship with your Young Life supervisor.
- Understand the various facets of the Capernaum director/coordinator.
- Consider the commitment required to lead this ministry.
- Assess your personal call and spiritual gifting.
- Research and determine the community's need for this ministry.
- Learn about the disability community in your area.

First and foremost, prayer must precede this entire process. Although the prospect of this ministry is exciting, it can be filled with trials you've never imagined. God calls us to walk by faith while following Him! Good news! He has gone before you. Your job is to continue to seek Him to follow His guidance.

BUILDING A CAPERNAUM MINISTRY TEAM

Building your Capernaum ministry team is an exciting adventure in and of itself! Without a committed team of volunteers walking with you, you will be unable to carry the load. Again and again in the Bible, God chooses a leader, and much of that leader's role is to seek out others to join him or her. In the same way, God will provide you with an energized committee and dedicated volunteers who will bring many gifts and talents.

It is no secret that Capernaum requires more volunteers than the average Young Life ministry. It will take faith on your part as well as prayer, patience and persistence. Remember, this is God's work; He will be faithful to provide who you need in His time.

Safeguarding the Ministry

It is vitally important that you take all the necessary precautions to safeguard this ministry. While we must be careful with all teenagers and those who volunteer with them, teens with disabilities are particularly vulnerable. For this reason, we cannot afford to be negligent when screening our volunteers.

In order to provide high standards for Capernaum volunteers, Young Life has a volunteer packet. You must be diligent in ensuring that all volunteers complete these required forms prior to having any contact with teens with disabilities.

TRANSPORTATION: A MINISTRY ESSENTIAL

Jesus treated people with great dignity, and so must we. The issue of transportation can be the crossroads for a group of people wanting to grow a special ministry. It is an indicator of how serious you are. It is a sign to those with whom you minister that you are serious about meeting their needs. It is not an option. Transportation has always been one of the biggest obstacles in ministry with students with disabilities. Existing sources of accessible transportation are few and not very reliable.

At this point, many people want to take short cuts. They ask, "Why can't we carry the teens from cars into the church? Why do we need a ramp? We can carry them."

First of all, most power chairs do not fold up. They are heavy pieces of equipment, highly expensive

and important to someone with a disability. Aside from this, the greater issue is one of dignity. If you had a disability, your power chair would be a crucial source of your independence and mobility. Would you want people to carry you simply because they were not willing to acquire a vehicle or build a ramp to properly transport you?

How costly is this in financial terms and human resources? It is very costly. A van that could be converted into a vehicle to transport four to six youth could cost \$35,000 to \$45,000. But again, transportation is a necessity, not an option.

Class-two licenses are not needed, but training in operating the vehicle, the hydraulic lift and the tie-downs for wheelchairs is required. A basic knowledge of disabilities and first aid is also essential. A log book that includes mileage forms, maps, addresses, emergency numbers and medical histories for each participant are necessities.

Transportation is vital. Do not underestimate this aspect as you begin your ministry. And before any leader gets behind the wheel, remember to become familiar with Young Life's policies concerning drivers.

TIPS FOR LAUNCHING A CAPERNAUM MINISTRY

If God has called you to work with teens with disabilities, congratulations! Jesus has chosen you and He equips those He chooses. Your burning question might be, "Where do I begin?" Here are some tips for getting started. Remember, there isn't just one way to reach out to youth with disabilities in your area, but these may give you some ideas.

- **Pray:** Gather a team of people to pray!

- **Contact Young Life:** Contact the area director and/or regional director for the location and dream with them about the need and interest for ministry with students with disabilities at their schools. Look at the Capernaum section of the Young Life website (capernaum.younglife.org) for more information.
- **Visit:** Schedule a visit to a Capernaum club or event near you. Participate and experience this ministry firsthand.
- **Get involved in the schools:** Sign up as a volunteer in the Special Education classrooms or find other places where students with disabilities may be (e.g., sports leagues, Special Olympics, disability-specific support groups, the ARC). You are there to serve and begin building relationships. You can learn about how to be with teens with varying abilities by watching the leaders/teachers/coaches.
- **Earn the right to be heard:** Volunteer for at least three or four months before you even mention your agenda. You are there to serve, not to grow your program.
- **Recruit:** During the first three to four months, start recruiting leaders to do contact work with you. Remember that leaders don't need prior experience working with people with disabilities. It's all about relationships and being willing to learn.
- **Talk to friends:** See what else is going on with our friends with disabilities at churches in your area; talk to Young Life folks in your area.
- **Train:** Start having leader meetings to begin training and developing your team. Training materials, events and speakers are available through Young Life.
- **Continue contact work:** Schools, Special Olympics, and Parks and Recreation programs are great places to meet young people.
- **Plan events:** The first few planned events should be FUN, possibly only once a month before you start to meet weekly or every other week. Pizza nights, game nights or movies all work well for getting to know teens and parents.
- **Distribute student packets:** Put together information about your club — welcome letter, permission forms, calendar and flyers to hand out to potential participants. Get permission from a teacher or principal to hand these out at school.
- **Get to know parents:** They are connected with other parents and will spread the word. Building trust with parents is essential! Teachers can be helpful in meeting key parents.
- **Remember the key to growth:** God's power and genuine relationships with teens, parents and teachers will keep the ministry going.

Part Three: Essentials for the Journey

THE BASICS:

The Five C's of Young Life and the Capernaum Twist

Since 1941, Young Life has been reaching kids with the simple and profound truth of the Gospel. Over time, we've learned and refined methods that make a difference in the lives of kids around the world every day. The "five C's" provide a quick summary of the basics of Young Life's outreach to kids around the world. Also included in this section is a brief look at how those methods will look in Capernaum ministries. More specifics on each of the five C's in Capernaum are discussed in later sections of this handbook.

Young Life C's	Traditional Young Life	Capernaum Variations
Committee	The backbone of every Young Life area is its local committee — a group of adults charged with supporting its staff and volunteers through fundraising, event planning, prayer and other encouragement. Where there's a healthy committee, there is usually a dynamic and effective Young Life ministry.	May be a sub-committee of an area committee or it may be a stand-alone committee for several areas or a region.
Contact Work	For a Young Life leader, the arena of ministry is any place where a teenager might be found: the school lunchroom, the athletic fields, the mall. It's a principle Jesus modeled thousands of years ago and has been followed by Young Life leaders since the mission began. Leaders meet kids in their own world and model unconditional love in a culture that often values style over substance.	Contact work can include volunteering in a classroom or coaching a team for Special Olympics. Consistency with teens is key, as well as with teachers and parents in order to earn the right to spend time with youth.
Club	The most common descriptor of Young Life club is, "You have to see it to really understand it." The ingredients are lively singing, wacky games and skits, and the sharing of a message of Jesus Christ in terms kids can understand. The result is a safe place where teenagers can drop their masks and consider God's design for their lives.	Capernaum club meets weekly or biweekly, possibly for more than one area or school district. Transportation may be provided as needed, and handicapped-accessible vehicles are essential. Games, songs and skits are tailored for the needs of our friends with special needs. Able-bodied high school students can serve as buddies. Whether joining in a traditional Young Life club at their high school or attending Capernaum club, our Capernaum friends participate in club alongside their peers.

<p style="text-align: center;">Camp</p>	<p>Every year, Young Life leaders invite teenagers to camp by promising them “the best week of their lives.” And Young Life’s camps deliver — with excellent facilities and food, creative programming, and high-adventure activities. Throughout the week, teenagers also hear about God’s love for them presented in ways to which they can relate. As more than 145,000 high-schoolers and middle-schoolers a year can testify, no one does camping like Young Life.</p>	<p>Capernaum Camps — These camp weeks are paced for youth with disabilities. Camp has the adventure and fun of traditional Young Life camp but is designed with their needs in mind. A discipleship component allows able-bodied high school students and Capernaum Campaigners kids to serve and assist the other Capernaum campers.</p> <p>There are currently three Capernaum camping options:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Inclusion Camping — Campers who are able to go to camp and handle the rigors of a typical Young Life camp attend with able-bodied kids from their high school or area. 2. Capernaum/Discipleship Camps — These camps are paced for our friends with disabilities. Camp has the adventure and fun of traditional Young Life camp but is designed with their needs in mind. The discipleship component allows able-bodied youth and Capernaum Campaigners teens to serve and assist the other Capernaum campers. 3. Alternative Camping — This is camping for Capernaum friends who are not able to do an overnight camp at this season of their lives. These opportunities are designed to fit the needs of a particular area’s campers. To order <i>The Alternative Camping Handbook</i>, go to the Resources and Supplies section on the Staff Resources Site.
<p style="text-align: center;">Campaigners</p>	<p>Picture a Young Life leader and a small group of teenagers gathered on a living room floor, discussing the lessons of the Bible and how it applies to their lives. This is Campaigners — the place where kids who have been touched by the message of Jesus grow their spiritual roots and learn what it means to follow Him.</p>	<p>Campaigners may take the form of Bible study, leadership training or something else, depending on the age and abilities of the participants.</p> <p>Transportation may be provided as needed; handicapped-accessible vehicles are essential.</p>

COMMITTEE: THE INDISPENSABLE FOUNDATION

Committee is the foundation on which to build all healthy and successful Young Life ministries. The committee provides ministry stability as well as spiritual, financial and emotional support for local leaders. The individuals on committee are the servants who enable Capernaum ministry to happen and are not typically known by the youth they serve. A stand-alone Capernaum committee or sub-committee is focused on establishing and growing Capernaum in a respective area or region. Committee support provides the foundation for a healthy overall ministry and should be in place prior to starting direct ministry with teens with disabilities. The stand-alone Capernaum committee or sub-committee will focus its efforts on helping staff fulfill the vision to reach every teen with a disability in its community. As with all ministries, the committee will share ownership of the ministry with local staff and will be responsible for supporting Capernaum leadership and ministry development.

Capernaum Committee Structures

The following are two different ways Capernaum committees may be structured, depending on the existence and structure of Young Life in the area or region, the demographics of the region, and whether or not committee leadership is part of your job description:

1. Capernaum Sub-Committee of the Young Life Area Committee

This structure is developed out of the local Young Life area director and committee's vision to reach our friends with disabilities within their area.

Those on the Young Life area committee with a heart for Capernaum youth will often form a Capernaum sub-committee that supports the Capernaum initiative.

The Capernaum staff may recruit several of their own committee members as part of the local Capernaum sub-committee and may lead the sub-committee alongside the Young Life area director.

2. Stand-Alone Committee

This structure is implemented in the more unusual situation when a Capernaum staff person is responsible for recruiting and leading his or her own Capernaum committee or when there is no existing Young Life ministry within an area where Capernaum is being established. In this case, the Capernaum staff person and committee would be leading alongside the regional director.

Capernaum Sub-Committees

Starting and growing Capernaum in an area can feel overwhelming, to say the least. Sometimes it seems like there are endless amounts of people, businesses, groups, churches or organizations that you could be meeting with to invite them into the story of Capernaum. A Capernaum sub-committee can be an extremely helpful resource in praying for, promoting and, eventually, providing for your Capernaum ministry. Here are a few small tips about starting a sub-committee in your own area:

-Subcommittee "Chair" – One member of your sub-committee should be a member of your greater area committee. Ask someone who is excited about your Capernaum ministry to serve as co-chair of the sub-committee with you. They will also be able to make reports to the greater committee.

Who to invite? A sub-committee



made up of a diverse, well-rounded group of people will be the most helpful. You'll want parents of guys and girls, parents of kids with varying abilities, business-minded people, Young Life Alumni and people who are involved across a broad spectrum in your local community. Before you invite people to be on your sub-committee, make a list of all the people you think would be great (including who they are, how they're connected, what their passions are), and from there select four-five people to invite onto the sub-committee. A group of four-five people, meeting quarterly is a great place to start.

Purpose – Broadly speaking, the sub-committee will pray for your ministry, promote Capernaum, and help raise funds to provide for your ministry. Within those areas of purpose, a sub-committee can help you brainstorm creative ways of meeting new kids and families, of promoting Young Life in your area, of inviting others into the story, and of ways to raise money. They can help you love, celebrate, and encourage your volunteer leaders and recruit new leaders. They will be helpful in connecting you to influential people, introducing you to people at churches and helping you to plan for the growth of your ministry in years to come. The sub-committee can help you network with area churches and nonprofits to find a place for your friends who are older than 22.

Determining Your Structure

Discuss with your Young Life regional or area director which committee structure is best suited for your area or region and what committee leadership role you will play.

A great committee doesn't forget ...

- To pray.
- To care for staff and volunteers.
- To experience the ministry firsthand.
- To work outside of the meeting.
- To divide and conquer — work in their areas of giftedness and improve in those areas that challenge them.
- That events are not the core of fundraising.
- To introduce five new people to the ministry this year. Solicit their involvement.
- To help to organize the ministry; have roles divided appropriately between staff, committee and volunteers; help staff delegate; committee members should understand and use the components of Taking Donors Seriously™. The *Taking Donors Seriously Handbook* is available to purchase from the Resources and Supplies section on the Staff Resources Site.

Ways to Involve Your Committee

Prayer Team

- This person/team serves as prayer warriors for Capernaum locally and throughout the mission, regularly seeking out the needs of the ministry and communicating those needs to prayer partners monthly.

Leader Care

- This person makes sure each leader has specific people praying and caring for him or her regularly by dropping notes of encouragement, remembering birthdays and providing meals for their family when needed. This person may plan team-building events such as a Christmas party, summer barbecue, night-on-the-town and other activities.

Club Care

- Area/Ministry Care, Prayer Team and Leader Care are the main ways in which the committee supports the Capernaum ministry. Depending on the size of your committee and the volunteer resources available to the ministry, Club Care may or may not be a function of the committee. If you, however, have individuals gifted in coordinating or if you are short on volunteers, don't hesitate to ask your committee for help in the following areas:

Transportation Coordinator

- Transportation is often a major issue in the lives of teens with disabilities. Some of them may be unable to attend without a stable, safe form of transportation. The transportation coordinator recruits drivers and finds substitutes when regular drivers are unable to serve.

Snacks or Meals for Club

- This person is responsible for coordinating a rotation of people to provide food. Some clubs offer food because schedules are tight, and without this option, some teens would not eat until getting home late that night. It is also advisable, depending on the needs of your teens, to have snacks on hand. In particular, some teens are on medications that require food to be readily available. Finally, be certain that you obtain information from every student and his or her parents/guardians regarding allergies. Pay close attention to these and create a list to give to all leaders and committee members.

A Must-Have Resource for Effective Committees

The *Young Life Committee Handbook* is a must-have resource for each of your committee members. Be sure to read through this handbook in its entirety as it provides essential details about the formation and management of committees.

To order the *Young Life Committee Handbook*, go to the Resources and Supplies section on the Staff Resources Site.

CONTACT WORK: ENTERING THEIR WORLD

In Young Life we believe in following the model of the incarnation: “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood” (John 1:14, *The Message*).

Is contact work, as we call it, any different for those who are in ministry with teens with disabilities? The core of contact work is the same — going where youth are. But it will take different forms because of the unique circumstances of our friends. We must do everything we can to learn about this unique subculture of our society. This obviously means getting to know teens, asking questions and reading. One excellent way to absorb the details of their world is to go to a public place for an afternoon in a wheelchair.

In traditional Young Life, we go where teens are and enter their world. We can find able-bodied adolescents just about anywhere; we must look much harder to find adolescents with disabilities. Some students will be mainstreamed in public high schools, but others will be in special education schools, institutions, hospitals and homes. Another place you will find these students a great deal of the time is in their own homes, as they don't get out very much. We will have to go looking.

Wherever we find them, we still have to painstakingly earn the right to be heard not only by the teens, but also by the institutions and the people who care for them. There is a strong wall of protection around these youth and a deep suspicion of religious groups (which is, in many cases, justified).

You can gain the trust of teens by sharing in their lives through Capernaum. But before you get involved, it is important to determine whether your commitment is for the short term or the long haul. Many students with disabilities have had scores of people in and out of their lives. They attract people who feel sorry for them and who often volunteer out of the wrong motives. When they get to know these students and see what is involved, they run away. If God has called you to be there for the long haul, it is God's call that will keep you there.

It may seem easier to think of things to do with able-bodied kids, but you can make an incredible difference in the lives of teens with disabilities by:

- Sending them notes in the mail, because they rarely get mail.
- Calling them, because they rarely get calls.
- Visiting them at school and at home.
- Taking them out with a lift-equipped van, because they rarely have opportunities to get out.
- Driving a kid home from school with parental permission.
- Going to get ice cream together.
- Going to their sporting events (Special Olympics is a great opportunity).
- Going to see them at school during lunch.

Doing Contact Work to Pave the Way for Starting Club

When you pinpoint a school with a number of teens with disabilities,

your contact work will blossom once you gain trust and access at the school. An important beginning step is to get people to pray. Pray for the school, the youth and the parents. Pray that God would grant you favor in the school, with the school staff and in the eyes of the parents.

In traditional contact work, leaders go to campuses, get to know teens and invite them to club. For our Capernaum friends, you not only need to get to know the students, but the parents and teachers as well. Trust is a key issue here. Youth, parents and teachers need to know they can trust you before teens are able to come to club. This means we need to go to the school with the attitude of a servant. Asking to volunteer in a special education class is a good way to get to know students and teachers. Go to campus at least once or twice a week and be willing to help teachers in any way you can.

Once you have gotten to know teachers, talk to them about this “club” you want to start. Start with activities in the community (e.g., movies, scavenger hunt at the mall or a ball game). This seems to be less threatening to a parent, especially at the beginning when they are still trying to get to know you.

Another issue arises when leaders try to distribute information to the parents. Typically, leaders are not allowed to hand out information at school, and teachers cannot give out personal information such as phone numbers. However, once teachers are excited about what you are doing, it is easier to hand things out to students. If you can, hand out a student packet with information that explains who you are, what you have been doing at the school and Young Life's ministry with students with disabilities.

CLUB: A SAFE PLACE

In the early days of Capernaum, leaders were familiar with traditional Young Life club and were convinced that they wanted a similar meeting for teens with disabilities. But often the students Capernaum was trying to reach lived all over the community, and their disabilities made it nearly impossible to arrange transportation to and from club in the evenings. Founder Nick Palermo

In addition to weekly club meetings, it's helpful to meet periodically (once a month to once a quarter) and do something fun. This is a good time to invite teens who wouldn't typically come to a regular club, but would come to a movie or scavenger hunt.

For a Capernaum area to have an effective club ministry, it needs an extraordinary commitment from the leaders who will transport our

metropolitan area during rush hour. The miracle to me is the number of God's people involved with this who give of their lives in a sacrificial way to make it happen."

The Recipe for an Effective Club Music

- Use a projector so kids won't have trouble finding pages or struggle with print that is too small in a songbook. If you have songbooks, try to have a leader sitting close by to hold it open for the teen.
- Try to sing popular songs they know.
- Have someone play the guitar who can play loud or use a microphone.
- Be repetitive with the songs each week. Don't introduce too many new songs. This allows youth the chance to learn the songs and memorize them.
- Leaders need to sing loud and be excited about the music. This helps get our friends involved.



Teens with disabilities are our prophets. They are the ones in whom we can see Jesus. They slow us down corporately in our journeys. They help us refocus our ministry priorities. They keep us dependent on the Lord and not our methods and ideas. They keep us true to our commitments to reach 'every kid.'

— Capernaum Founder Nick Palermo



explains how they adapted one of the central Young Life features for this special population:

"We came up with the idea of a club meeting after school for our friends with disabilities," Palermo said. "We recruited able-bodied kids as well. This would prevent the isolation we were trying to avoid. This idea was a success from the beginning."

For a teen with a disability, club may be the only social event in his or her life. It's often the only time these students gather with friends outside of school and may be the only place where friendships can be explored and grown. Club may be the only place they hear the Good News of Christ and His love for them. Club may be one of the only times parents of a person with a disability get a break. Club is a powerful experience of Jesus Christ in many ways for Capernaum teens.

friends to and from the meeting. Palermo addresses the logistical challenges of pulling off one club:

"What it takes in resources for a one-hour club meeting is phenomenal," he said. "Youth are picked up in our specially-equipped vans after school and driven to a church for the club meeting. It's a great hour for kids as they laugh, sing, relate to each other outside of school and discover there is a God who loves them and remembers them. For 18 kids we have about 20 volunteers in that hour to help them hold songbooks, get involved in games and take care of their physical needs such as going to the bathroom and feeding. It's a draining hour.

"Then our three vans drive a collective six-to-eight hours transporting our friends to their homes spread out all over the

Skits and Games

- Try to involve everyone when playing games.
- Introduce a game with excitement and energy in your voice; this helps get them excited and involved.
- Have supplies ready before club starts.
- Have the youth get involved leading a game; this makes them feel like they have something to offer.
- Refer to game/skit list on the Staff Resources Site for ideas.

Club Talks

- Use the school year to talk about the entire Gospel message.
- Use Scripture, reading directly from the Bible.
- 10-15 minutes maximum.
- Present one or, at the most, two major points in a talk. It's difficult for our friends



- with intellectual challenges to process too much information.
- Use visual objects that relate to the topic.
 - Use humor.
 - Use movie, TV or music clips.
 - Don't use Christian lingo, e.g., "Jesus in your heart."
 - Use simple language that everyone can understand. Define words that they might not know.
 - Challenge them at the end to do something or think about something from the club talk (application).



CAMP: AN ADVENTURE LIKE NO OTHER

Camp with our Capernaum friends is probably going to be the hardest, most draining, depleting, overwhelming way to spend a week of your life. It's also probably going to be the most beautiful, heart-stirring, magical, joyous and life-changing week you'll ever have. Here are a few observations and tips to make your week successful.

Leader/Camper Ratios

If you are bringing teens in wheelchairs, bring two leaders for every camper. It sounds like a lot, but you may regret it if you don't. This allows leaders to take much-needed breaks and ensures the maximum participation and inclusion of youth at camp. Don't go to camp shorthanded.

If you are bringing campers with developmental disabilities only, a one-to-one ratio is sufficient. Some won't need constant supervision, but others may have behavior challenges or may tend to wander off and get lost.

Many Capernaum leaders have found it helpful to have campers sign a leader/camper contract before the trip outlining behavior expectations, consequences of misbehavior, and rewards and requirements. A sample contract can be found in the Capernaum section on the Staff Resources Site.

Activities

Young Life camps are filled with high-energy activities and programs that are designed to challenge and entertain campers of all abilities. Generally, each of these programs can be adapted to serve our friends with disabilities. **The first guiding principle should be to look for activity restrictions from physicians, parents or guardians on the health form (6007) or the**

Parent/Guardian Interview Form (6054). For those with no medical or parent restrictions, there is no "catch-all" set of guidelines for inclusion in these events, but the ideas listed below should assist leaders in assessing the best plan for their campers:

- **Mountain Bikes:** This is the one program that cannot be used with people in wheelchairs, for obvious reasons. However, campers with developmental disabilities and our friends who are hearing or visually impaired can really enjoy riding mountain bikes. It is best to do the bike ride on a grassy area at camp. If necessary, leaders can hold onto the sides or handlebars and run alongside to help campers maintain their balance.
- **Ropes Course:** If campers are ambulatory, they can complete the entire ropes course. We often send one or two leaders with each teen to help him or her with balance and confidence as he or she crosses the course. Non-ambulatory campers can also complete the course by using the boot-e-bag available at most Young Life camps or can be hoisted up to the bar of the tower at the end of the ropes course and then be lowered down. For campers with little upper-body strength, it is advisable to use a chest harness.
- **Zip Line:** Most campers can do the zip line. Some teens who have spina bifida, muscular dystrophy or cerebral palsy may have back problems that would be compromised when hitting the water. It is advisable to consult a doctor regarding these situations. Also, youth who have poor upper-body strength may have difficulty supporting themselves, and may have a very unpleasant landing. Finally,

weight can be a factor; those who are heavy may fail to clear the ground as they come down on the line.

- **Horses:** All campers can participate in the horse rides. One could walk the horses around a loop on the camp property. If teens have some upper-body strength, but poor balance, leaders can walk on one or on both sides of the horse.
- **Go-Karts (both on-track and off-road).** All campers can participate in the go-karts. Often, the wranglers will ride on the outside of the car, ready to hit the "kill switch" if necessary. Smaller youth can ride with their leaders. The main concern with this activity is that many campers with disabilities may have poor motor skills or judgment and may drive very dangerously if left alone.

Pre-Camp Checklist

1. Meet with all potential campers long before camp. Start talking with them as soon as you are able. Some students with disabilities have a greater sense of anxiety and fear about entering new places or experiences or taking on new challenges. This allows them to ask questions as they come to mind.
2. Meet with parent(s) or responsible caregiver(s) using the Capernaum Parent or Guardian Interview Form (6054) about the following:
 - **Medical Questions**
 - a. Any medical needs current or past that may come up?
 - b. Is he or she taking any medications?
 - c. Are there any side effects that we should look for?
 - d. What happens if a dose is missed?
 - e. Does he or she have a shunt? Where? Concerns?

- f. Foods he or she should not eat?
- **Travel Questions**
 - a. Is he or she able to travel on a bus, plane or car?
 - b. Are there any special aids used at home or school that he or she does not use at Young Life that we need to take with us when we travel?
- **Cabin Questions**
 - a. Is he or she able to dress and shower on his or her own?
 - b. Is he or she able to sleep in a bunk bed?
 - c. Is he or she able to cover small distances?
 - d. Is he or she able to walk up or down hills to get to the cabin?
- **Behavior and Discipline**
 - a. What events or situations may make him or her angry?
 - b. How is that anger displayed?
 - c. How have you diffused the anger in those events and situations?
 - d. What does a typical confrontation look like?
- e. What discipline works and what does not work?
- f. What do you do to redirect his or her behavior?
- **Activities and Games**
 - a. What physical activities or games should he or she not take part in? Make sure these are indicated specifically on the health form.
 - b. How do you encourage him or her to take part in a new event that he or she has not done before?

A Personal Experience

Nick Palermo writes of his first experience taking Capernaum friends to camp.

After a long day of transporting the teens to Woodleaf and helping them through the camp relays and settling into the cabin, it was 2:30 a.m. before they settled down to bed:

“At that point, I walked out of the cabin and deserted my fellow leaders. I walked out weeping. I was exhausted. I was angry. I was

overwhelmed. I yelled out to God through my tears in the cold, dark night. All I could think of was that I wanted to quit when I got home on Monday. This was my mistake to bring youth here and it was God’s mistake to choose me to direct this ministry! Firmly planted in the soil of self-pity, I made my way back to the cabin and into my bunk. It was quiet and dark. Finally, everyone was down for the night. And finally, I too laid my body down with a discouraged spirit.

It couldn’t have been more than an hour when I heard my name from the bunk below in barely audible tones, ‘Nick. Nick. Turn me.’ I awoke like one coming out of a coma. Was I dreaming? ‘Nick. Nick. Turn me, please,’ the voice repeated. It was Antwon, who was sleeping in the bunk beneath me. ‘Turn you? What are you talking about?’ I asked, impatiently. The reply came back like ice water in my face. ‘I can’t turn myself.’

I couldn’t believe it. I climbed down from my bunk to turn Antwon because I had to. Just when I thought



it couldn't get worse, it did. I had to care for Antwon and his friends even in the middle of the night. Again I was overwhelmed. Never had I experienced the literal pouring out and emptying of my life in ministry to teens like I did with my friends who had disabilities. As I began to climb the ladder back to my bunk, all I could think of is that I had to get up again in two hours. I thought to myself, 'I just can't take anymore.' I can't do this. God, why did you choose me for this?'

And then came God's reply. I will never forget it. His voice was not audible, but I know for certain God spoke to me in that moment. I froze, motionless on the ladder as the bright moonlight streamed onto my face from the window by my bunk. In that suspended moment God said, 'Nick, it was Me you turned. It was Me you took to the bathroom. It was Me you included in the games. It was Me you brought here. It was Me.'

CAMPAIGNERS: DIGGING DEEPER TOGETHER

Capernaum Campaigners groups typically meet once or twice a month, and they provide an opportunity for teens and young adults with disabilities to go deeper into Scripture and to open up about what God is doing in their lives. These groups take many forms and the materials are as varied as the groups themselves.

The *Young Life Campaigner Handbook* provides information that can be adapted or modified for use by Capernaum leaders. There are also lessons that can be adapted on the Staff Resources Site in the Campaigners section. Vision New England, another ministry to people with disabilities, has a curriculum called Beyond Limits, which is designed especially for those with disabilities. Find out more on their website: www.visionnewengland.org.

PARENTS: YOUR GREATEST RESOURCE

What happens to a family who has a child with a disability? The first and most disturbing answer is that many parents with a child with a disability end up getting a divorce. The task of parenthood feels overwhelming when both parents are in the picture; now imagine one parent with a child with disabilities. Imagine the lack of resources, inadequate transportation for a child in a wheelchair, constant physical exertion and caring for the child as he or she grows. Imagine a myriad of hospital stays, near-death experiences and insensitive remarks from people.

This is a ministry for the long haul; it is a marathon, not a sprint. Over time, staff and volunteer leaders can earn parents' trust through faithfulness and care. How hard do you think it is for parents of young adults with disabilities to find caregivers? If you want to earn parents' trust, offer to watch their son or daughter for a few hours at their home while they go out. You can work your way up to a trust that will encourage parents to let you take their child on outings or to Capernaum activities.

Capernaum can have an impact on the family, not just the young person with a disability. Seek to make your ministry family-inclusive. Find out their unique needs and pains, and find a way to meet them. Ultimately, the unconditional acceptance and love for their child and your efforts to give their child experiences of inclusion and belonging is the greatest thing you could do for parents.

THE INSIDE WORLD: WHAT TEENS WITH DISABILITIES FACE

Death: Teenagers and young adults with disabilities deal with death

much more than most teenagers, especially a youth with a disability that is terminal, such as muscular dystrophy. It is important for volunteers to be with their friends, hold their hands, listen and show them they care. It's important to help the teens affected by a friend's death. Help them grieve and go through the grieving process with them.

Illness: Young people with disabilities are in and out of the hospital and visit the doctor for a variety of reasons. Many of our friends deal with corrective surgeries, seizures, special diets, physical therapy and other challenges. It's very common for adolescents with disabilities to see doctors routinely. If one of your friends with disabilities is in the hospital for any length of time, leaders need to visit them.

Healing: Our attitude toward healing and disabilities is important. A great example from the Bible is the story of the paralytic and his four friends. Jesus first forgave the man's sins, and then showed He had the authority to forgive by healing the man. Our attitude needs to be one of love, service and commitment. We are there to love and serve our friends with disabilities. We should be more concerned about their spiritual well-being with Christ; to be healed, in a sense, from the inside out. This does not mean that we completely ignore physical healing. At times this is a huge issue for our friends. For some, this can keep them from coming to Christ. When teens hear about Jesus healing people in the Bible, some think we want them to be healed or are trying to change the way they are. Other times it becomes an issue for them because they struggle with why they have not been healed.

We need to be open to God's healing power and pray about this. Ask God if He would heal any of the youth. Be careful, though. Consider what

it might do to a teen's beginning faith if he or she is not healed. It's best to pray about it on your own unless someone specifically asks you to pray for his or her healing. That might be a good time to discuss what this means and look at examples in the Bible. **Rule of thumb: Don't mention praying for healing to a teen unless he or she mentions it to you.**

Dating, Sex and Marriage: Like everyone else, a person with a disability still has the desire for intimate relationships. Teens with disabilities want to have boyfriends and girlfriends and go out on dates just like other youth. Sometimes, when appropriate, two people with disabilities might marry and live in a situation where they can receive the support they need.

Family: Divorce rates for families with a child who has a disability are extremely high. Often these youth grow up in a single-parent home or in a group home. Their parents are exhausted much of the time because they are caring for their child's needs.

SOME HINTS FOR HELPING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

- Be vigilant regarding matters of health and safety. Learn as much

as possible from parents, school personnel and other adults. Ask the questions that come to mind.

- Check positioning of young people in wheelchairs, especially on outings or at camp; teens who cannot move themselves can easily develop pressure sores.
- Find ways to keep our friends hydrated; in the heat and outdoors at camp, it is easy to become dehydrated.
- Know how wheelchair brakes work and be sure that they are engaged when the chair is not in motion; learn to disengage the battery in a power chair so you can push it.
- Be aware of the sun and how quickly people who aren't accustomed to it can burn; keep sunscreen handy and encourage them to wear hats.
- Be sure that a person who uses a wheelchair has a pack or bag for his or her chair; keep some emergency supplies there (transfer belt, wet wipes, sunscreen, paper towels, gloves, plastic bags).
- Protect those who need to lift our friends by training correct body mechanics (find a friendly physical therapist, occupational therapist, nurse or

chiropractor).

- Feeding needs vary greatly; be sure to follow instructions carefully, position correctly and proceed with care; lots of small bites are generally better than a few large ones.
- It is always OK to seek help.
- Obtain advisory information on any medications our friends need. Some medications may cause reactions to sunlight. This is particularly important in camp settings.
- If you are considering transporting a student for any reason, talk with parents and gather information about medication and allergies. Always have phone numbers with you where the parent or caregiver can be reached if needed.
- Terminology about how to refer to people with disabilities can vary. Learn and use the lingo in your community.

DO'S AND DON'TS WHEN MEETING A PERSON WITH DISABILITIES

- Offer assistance as you would to anyone else; most individuals with disabilities will ask for help and will be specific about what to do.



Our attitude toward healing and disabilities is important. A great example from the Bible is the story of the paralytic and his four friends.



- Always communicate with the person with a disability rather than with the caregiver or assistant.
- Don't be concerned about the use of words such as "walking" or "running" when talking to a person who uses a wheelchair, or "do you see" when talking to a person who is blind. People with disabilities use these terms themselves.
- When talking to a person who uses a wheelchair for any length of time, it is better to sit down so that you are at his or her eye level; people with disabilities will have a difficult time looking up for long.
- When going somewhere with a person who uses a wheelchair, check to see if the place is accessible before you go. This saves time and embarrassment.
- If a person does not turn around in response to a call, it could be that he or she is deaf or hard of hearing; a light tap on the shoulder to get the person's attention makes sense.
- When speaking to a person who is deaf and reads lips, be sure that the light is on your face and not behind you; remove gum and speak slowly; use gestures, pantomime or written communication if necessary.
- Some people with disabilities may have difficulty talking or walking; be considerate of the extra time it may take the person to say or do things; let the person set the pace for walking or talking.
- When talking to a person who has difficulty speaking, it is appropriate to politely ask the person to repeat himself or herself if you don't understand what was said.
- You may notice a lack of motivation and poor self-esteem. Encourage participation, use sincere praise and help find satisfying activities.



God has called us to be faithful, not successful.
— Mother Teresa



Part Four: Exploring Deeper

SO YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE?

If this handbook has left you wanting more information, or if you have questions about your potential involvement with Capernaum that are still unanswered, go to capernaum.younglife.org. There you will find more information on how to get involved, as well as frequently asked questions.

If you are already a volunteer leader or committee member, you can access Capernaum information and resources on the Staff Resources Site. You will need a username and password to do this. Ask your local staff person if you don't yet have access. Navigate to the Capernaum section, where you will find links to information like the following:

- A detailed reference guide with information about most of the disabilities and diseases that affect our Capernaum friends, complete with symptoms and causes of each and links to websites that deal specifically with each condition.
- Tips for safe and effective wheelchair transfer techniques.
- A collection of "Capernaum Stories," with accounts of leaders and teens who have been transformed by Christ through this ministry.
- Detailed club ideas like a message schedule and game and skit ideas.
- Resources for your camp trip, like a complete packing list, ideas for cabin time and a copy of a leader/camper contract you can sign together before you go.



GLOSSARY: YOUNG LIFE TERMS

Adult guest: Adult friends of Young Life, often committee members, donors or potential donors, who spend up to a week at one of Young Life's camps in the adult guest lodge. Adult guests participate in rides and camp events alongside the campers.

Area: The organization of Young Life in local communities. Areas range in size, number of schools, and number of staff and volunteers.

Area director: A full-time paid staff person who is responsible for all aspects of Young Life in an area. Reports to a metro or regional director.

Assigned team: The Young Life staff people who are assigned to work at a Young Life camp during the summer, usually for three or four weeks. Assigned team roles include camp speaker, program directors, head leaders, work crew bosses and summer staff coordinators.

Camp speaker: Usually a Young Life staff person, this individual is responsible for proclaiming the Gospel in a series of talks at the daily club meetings throughout a week or weekend camp.

Committee member: An adult who serves on the primary support group or team for Young Life in an area. The committee is responsible for planning special events, fundraising, and supporting volunteer leaders and staff.

Staff associate: A Young Life staff person who is just beginning full-time ministry, usually just out of college. Staff associates participate in a two- or three-year, full-time intensive program designed to equip staff for long-term ministry in Young Life.

Program: The organized activities, entertainment and personalities that make Young Life camp fun, surprising and unforgettable. The ultimate purpose of program is to support the unfolding proclamation of the Gospel at camp.

Regional director: A full-time paid staff person who oversees the areas within his or her region. A region might be a state, several states or the metropolitan area of a large city.

Say-So: On the final night at every week-long camp on a Young Life property, teens are given a chance to stand up and "say so" if they have begun to follow Jesus Christ during the week.

Service Center: The Service Center, located in Colorado Springs, Colo., functions as Young Life's administrative core. While most positions within the Service Center do not have direct contact with teens, Service Center staff provide administrative and technical support to Young Life field staff in the United States and around the world.

Student staff: College students who serve as part-time Young Life staff. Student staff raise their own support, and they spend their time working with a local Young Life club and often helping in the office as well.

Summer staff: A team of volunteers, college-aged or older, who spend three or four weeks serving at a Young Life camp. Typical summer staff jobs include the ropes course, horses, lifeguarding, cooking and working in the camp store.

Volunteer leader: Volunteer leaders are adults — ranging from college students to retirees — who give their time at the schools, lead club and Campaigners, and take teens to

camp. They are followers of Christ whose hearts are fixed on teenagers, and who give their time and energy to becoming friends who can point high school and middle school youth on the path to a fulfilling life.

Volunteer team leader: The person responsible for encouraging and managing the team of volunteers who leads the Young Life club at a particular school. Team leaders can be staff people or volunteers.

Work crew: A team of high school students who volunteers to serve at a Young Life camp for three or four weeks during the summer. Typical work crew jobs include washing dishes, serving food, cleaning bathrooms and washing camp laundry.