

# MESSENGER

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## Calling all young people

### Conference organizers gearing up for Jan. 25

By **JESSIE FORAND**  
Messenger Staff Writer

**S**T. ALBANS — For the first time, a high school, Bellows Free Academy, will be the host of the Franklin Grand Isle Youth In Transition (YIT) Conference.

This will be the third year that area youth come together for lively and meaningful discussions that help build skills and provide benefits beyond the day's events.

The conference is set for Friday, Jan. 25, from 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. youths from their early teens to early twenties. Attendees enjoy a mix of serious discussion and socializing.

YIT grant coordinator Ebony Nyoni, who is based out of Northwest Counseling & Support Services (NCSS), said it has been difficult to get students involved from the county's outlying towns.

In previous years the conference was held at the Knights of Columbus hall in St. Albans and at St. Albans City Hall.

Nyoni hopes schools outside of the greater St. Albans area will provide busing so students can attend and as of today that appears to be the case, if only in a limited way.

Dr. Ed Grossman, principal of Enosburg Falls High School, said the conference is being advertised at his school and students have shown an interest. A handful of students — roughly three to six — representing different groups as the school, such as High Schools on the Move, will attend and report back on what they learn.

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JESSIE FORAND, St. Albans Messenger  
*Youth in Transition participants, from left: Chris Reynolds, 17, Montana Russell-Greene, 20, Chantal Yandow, 18, and Kayla Messier, 18, meet up at YIT's Lake Street office in St. Albans Wednesday afternoon. Participating in the youth-focused group has given them confidence and joy from helping others, they said.*

## VERMONT POLITICS

### Collins, McAllister get Senate assignments

**S**T. ALBANS — Committee assignments in the Vermont Senate were announced Thursday.

Newly elected Senator Norm McAllister, R-Franklin County, will serve on agriculture and government operations.

Democrat Don Collins, who is returning to the Senate for Franklin County after a four year hiatus, will be the vice chair of education, a committee he previously chaired.

Collins also will serve on economic

development.

In the last session, former Senator Sara Kittell, D-Franklin County, chaired the agriculture committee. That position will now be held by Sen. Bobby Starr, D-Essex/Orleans.

The full committee assignments are:

#### Agriculture

Sen. Bobby Starr (D-Essex-Orleans),

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achieved a lot in running this far, but running is a part of the whole that does

1996-1998) and Hannah Rowe of St. Johnsbury (cross country, 2008, 2009;

Katelyn Billings (softball, 2006), Chelsea Abbott (2011), Charlie Mildrum (soccer,

BFA-Fairfax: Patrick Hakey (baseball, 2000).

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(R-Wash

# YIT

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Attendance at last year's event was between 50 and 65 youth, Nyoni said.

Efforts to reach a Richford High School administrator and the guidance office were unsuccessful.

BFA principal Dennis Hill said, "BFA is pleased to be supporting all students and this is a great opportunity to bring that opportunity actually right into the school system so our kids can participate as well."

More than 40 have registered to attend this year's conference, but that is just a fraction of the 1,100-strong BFA student body. Nyoni is hoping to attract many more. T-shirts, 250 of them, have been ordered as gifts for participants.

They will participate in round table discussions about topics important to them, meet with area service providers including the Dept. of Health, Planned Parenthood, and the Community College of Vermont, to name just a few.

There will be food provided and musical perfor-

mances by those involved in the YIT group, which has recently attained a meeting space on Lake Street in St. Albans and will soon have open hours for participants to drop in on Mondays and Wednesdays from 3 to 6 p.m.

A woman who goes simply by "Carol" will serve as keynote speaker this year. She is leading a youth drug abuse recovery movement in Vermont and New Hampshire. Nyoni said thanks to her own dynamic story, Carol will shed new light on the impact of illegal drug use.

While prevention and recovery are two themes discussed by YIT participants, some of whom make up an executive committee to oversee events, these are just two of the many issues they deal with regularly and talk about. YIT is open to anyone ages 15 to 21.

A group of participants in YIT's youth group New Generations, meeting with Nyoni, explained Wednesday why it is important for people to check the organization out on Jan. 25.

Chris Reynolds, 17, since

it is being held at a school, the conference would likely reach more student. Those who participate, Nyoni said, will be excused from classes.

Montana Russell-Greene, 20, predicted that once people showed up at the conference and saw others they knew, they would feel more comfortable.

YIT Executive Board President Kayla Messier, 16, said she has worked hard to drum up interest, telling those she knows about the conference and meeting with various student groups.

The electronic billboard in front of BFA, used to announce sporting events or plays, will advertise the event as it nears.

Being a part of the group has changed its members for the better. Russell-Greene said he is a more confident public speaker after participating in YIT youth panels around the state. He has met people that can help him later in life as positive references for his work with YIT. The experience looks good

when placed on college and job applications, he said.

Of the four gathered, Messier, Russell-Greene, and Reynolds hope to become teachers, art teachers and a music teacher, respectively. Chantal Yandow, 18, hopes to be a photographer.

Participating in YIT, they said, makes them feel good, knowing they are helping others.

Aside from the conference, YIT has a number of other upcoming events. On Feb. 14, the group will hold a fundraising dance for youth at City Hall in St. Albans.

On March 20 they will participate with agencies again, for Youth Safety Day. This event began last year and offered training for those who work with youth on issues of concern, such as how to supervise in a technology-driven world, trends in substance abuse, and so on, in an effort to identify the connection between the community and area youth.

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# Dance

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ties, and a safe, fun spot for teens to gather.

Wilson said that the group has been working for years to keep teens safe, not by nagging them about the dangers of risky behavior, but by offering a place where they can gather where risky behaviors aren't prevalent.

Before St. Albans's Common Ground Teen Center closed in 2010, Wilson heard that its proponents needed help to stay afloat. However, before he could get involved, manager Colleen Kelley

accompanying articles) and others, fighting to bring a teen center back to the area.

"This is what we do," Wilson said.

He recalled a youth board member saying of youth recently, "They're just walking them down the street. Nowhere to go, nothing to do." Wilson added of that board member, "She sees how youth get into high risk (activities). It's easy to pick up a cigarette or alcohol or something like that, or having risky behaviors"

called them many names. For instance, 'rave,' for us only means fancy lights and techno music."

There will be no alcohol or drugs allowed inside the event and the organizers have hired Green Mountain Security to make sure the event is controlled.

Wilson said that of the more than 400 events sponsored by Service Rendered, Inc., there has never been a high-risk incident.

Wilson noted that many parents view teens music and dance trends alone as risky. His perspective is

their ears, they would hear this is just the music; they would hear this language."

He added, "I would rather see kids bumping and kind of dancing where we can see them, than being in the barn, in the woods, or somewhere else probably having some risky behavior, maybe having sex - unprotected sex. So I'll stick by that forever."

BFA principal Dennis Hill said of the event, "Anything that supports drug- and alcohol-free opportunities for kids in this community certainly

