

Why You Should Attend the NAE4-HYDP Annual Conference and Get Involved with the Association from a Life Member's Perspective

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1. Advice for a first-year educator: Spend your first year getting to know the volunteers, collaborators, other staff, and those that will make your job a success or failure. Building relationships in that first year is more important than starting new and exciting programs. Find out who you can trust to follow through, who will be open to new ideas, who may be a roadblock to anything you want to do, etc. Once you have built those relationships, then you can begin to work on programs. People are the most important thing in your new job.

2. By year five you should be the "leader of your program". You should have attended some NAE4-HYDP conferences and picked up new ideas for ways to build the capacity of your program. Your leaders and others in your community should see you as a key resource in the area of Positive Youth Development. Your role now should be to create a vision for a program that is growing in its ability to serve a broad audience with essential skill building programs. If you are still doing the same things you were doing the first two years on the job, you need to step back and see how your role as the educational leader needs to change.

3. My favorite memories of NAE4-HYDP: By far my favorite memories are of the conferences and the people I met at those conferences. I have attended over 40 conferences and have enjoyed getting to see most of America. I now have friends in nearly every state in the country and I would not trade those friends for anything. Along the way I have learned about myself, my leadership abilities, served on committees, served on the board, and generally had a blast being a youth development professional.

4. Why be involved in working groups or committees: The working groups and committees are where you really get to know professionals from other parts of the country. This is where you build those lasting friendships that will help sustain you in tough times and celebrate with you in the good times. AND the working groups give you a chance to spread your own good work around the country. As a professional all of us are required to help build "the body of knowledge" that makes up positive youth development. The best way to do that is to be engaged with the other professionals in the association, and the best place to do that is through the working groups and their awards programs.

5. Why participating in the Life Member Activities is important for all life members. For some of us, going from active professional to retired member can be hard. Being a Life Member and participating in annual conferences can be a way to make that transition easier. It can also be a way to give back to the association that has meant so much to us. By attending an annual conference, you can mix and mingle with the new generation of professionals, and you can share ideas, techniques, etc. with the next generation of leaders. And for me, one of the most rewarding things about the annual conference is the opportunity to see some of the friends that are still working and some of the other life member friends that I would otherwise miss ever seeing again. So y'all come. It's still a party, and we miss you if you are not there.