How old is Young Life?
Young Life was first established in 1941 as an organization and has been in Darien for more than 40 years.

What is your personal background (Where are you from, how did you get involved, etc.)?
As a freshman in high school, I was invited to Young Life by a respected upperclassman. That year, I went on the Young Life summer trip and had an incredible time with my friends and Young Life leaders. As I got to know my Young Life leaders, several of whom were coaches and teachers in my high school, I realized they were dynamic people who I looked up to and called my friends. For my close group of friends in high school, Young Life provided unforgettable experiences that shaped our character and helped us build authentic and trusting friendships. While in college, I was a volunteer Young Life leader at a local high school for four years. For the past four years, I have worked as the Director of Young Life in Darien & Rowayton.

What are you trying to accomplish through Young Life?
Students often say the most significant things about their experience with Young Life were friendships with their Leaders, the fun they had, and the sense of value and purpose that they gained.

Young Life offers all students, regardless of background or beliefs friendships with caring adults who support them throughout life. Young Life events and trips provide incredible experiences with friends and students typically describe them as “unlike anything else.” Many Darien Young Life alumni say their leaders helped them discover the value, meaning and purpose for their lives.

DHS Senior on Young Life “When I go to Young Life, I can think clearly. It’s a different atmosphere than anywhere else. When I’m there I don’t feel rushed. I’m free to be myself.”

Who runs Young Life overall?
Young Life is a global organization that includes a President, Cabinet, Board, and Senior Vice Presidents. In the NY Metropolitan Region, a Vice President oversees the diverse work of Young Life in NJ, NYC and CT. A senior staff member oversees Young Life operations in Fairfield County. Locally, Andy Ward serves as the Area Director in Darien and Rowayton, and directs the growing work, which includes high school Young Life, middle school WyldLife, and Capernaum (Young Life’s program for teens with disabilities).

Why are the meetings held at Chris’ house?
Because Young Life isn’t limited to a single time or place, students say they feel most comfortable and welcomed when they can gather with their friends and leaders in
someone’s home or another desirable place in the community.

Chris and his family expressed interest and excitement in hosting Young Life at their home after returning from the Young Life summer trip this past August, a week that he said was the best week of his life at Saranac Village—a Young Life-owned Adirondack Great Camp on Upper Saranac Lake. I am thankful for their hospitality and will seek to host Young Life in other homes throughout the year.

Local middle school WyldLife events take place at the Darien YMCA.

**Is Young Life affiliated with any specific church/religion?**
At Young Life, students can consider basic information about the Christian faith in a casual and respectful way, and make their own decisions about its relevance to life in high school and beyond. Regardless of their beliefs or background, all students are invited to enjoy Young Life in any capacity.

**Are there other Young Life leaders (Is that what you call them?) for Darien/Rowayton besides you and Mike?**
There are growing teams of leaders in Darien & Rowayton including parents and coaches in the community who serve middle school and high school students.

All Young Life Staff and leaders are screened and trained on both a national and local level. Criminal background checks, codes of conduct, safe-driver accountability are all part of this process. Leaders receive extensive and ongoing training and supervision from Staff. Student safety and well-being are always top priorities. Adults who are interested in becoming a Young Life leader are welcome to contact Young Life.

**You said you wouldn’t call Young Life a youth group, what would you call it?**
Young Life is a non-profit organization, which offers opportunities for high school and middle school students to be themselves, have fun, make unforgettable memories and build dynamic friendship with their friends and leaders.

Most students say they feel honored by Young Life’s approach, that they are comfortable gathering information about God with their friends in an easy-to-understand way. There are no requirements, no "membership" and no exclusions. Everyone is invited to participate in Young Life at any level.

**How is Young Life active besides the meetings?**
Young Life is active throughout the community in a myriad of ways. We focus on ways to serve and positively impact the lives of students, schools and families in the community. Young Life’s work also includes WyldLife, a program designed especially for middle school students, and Capernaum for students with disabilities.

Young Life leaders can be found serving at local school events, supporting the teams at the athletic fields, and showing up to support students in their respective activities.

Young Life offers adventure and service trips throughout the year through weekend and weeklong experiences. Darien High School students are invited to Young Life Winter Weekend December 11-13.
Next summer, Darien students are invited to attend a week of Young Life summer camp, a week from which many return citing as “the best week of their lives”. High school students will also have the opportunity to apply for volunteer positions as a “buddy” at a Young Life camp week dedicated specifically for students with disabilities. As a “buddy,” students are paired up with a student with disabilities and join him or her for a week of Young Life camp, an experience which high school students say is the most rewarding thing they have ever done.

There are opportunities for high school students to become a leader for WyldLife, the program for middle school students. As a WyldLife leader, students build meaningful mentor-relationships with middle school students, go to WyldLife events and summer camp.

As Young Life in Darien grows, we will also be able to offer overseas service projects and “Young Life Beyond” trips including backpacking, hiking and kayaking excursions.

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