

ROOKIE LEAGUE LEADERS IN TRAINING PROGRAM REPORT 2019





“LIT has prepared me by showing me how important it is to be a part of the community. I understand how that everybody wants to be treated nicely and that nobody should feel unsafe.”

-LIT Youth Participant

26

Youth participated in the Rookie League Leader-in-Training program

Why Does Rookie League LIT Program Exist?

According to Columbia University's National Center for Children in Poverty, youth living in poverty are more likely to experience poverty as adults without considerable intervention and support. For the past 31 years, Jays Care Foundation has partnered with TCHC, to offer free, reliable, safe and fun programming for low-income children through our signature Rookie League program. This 7-week sport-for-development program provides children ages 6-12 with a nutritious lunch and an active environment surrounded by well-trained and inspiring local role models during the summer months. Rookie League also provides employment training and practical work experience for youth (age 15-19) who serve as staff, many of whom are also TCHC residents.

Yet, there exists a gap; little to no such programming is available for young adolescents between the ages of 13 and 15. The Toronto District Public School Board's 2006 Student Census found that students in this age range from lower income brackets had significantly fewer opportunities to participate in sports or recreational activities outside of school than more affluent peers. Furthermore, low-income students spent more time watching TV or playing video games. This disparity in opportunity manifests in diminished self-concept, eating habits, and school performance for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

The lack of constructive opportunities for low-income youth directly corresponds to detrimental behaviour. According to the Toronto Community Foundation's 2009 Toronto Vital Signs report, middle-school aged students unsupervised outside of school were more likely to engage in gang-related or delinquent behaviour or become victims of crimes.

In 2017, a group of 12 year old campers attending Rookie League for their last year advocated for Jays Care to create a program that enabled them to stay involved in Rookie League while also building the required skills to make them viable employees when they turn 16.



What is the Rookie League LIT Program?

In response to these Rookie League youth, and to address the discrepancies of services provided, Jays Care created the Rookie League Leader-in-Training (LIT) program, a free five-week leadership development course for youth age 13-15. The program provides a supportive and active environment, positive role models, nutritious meals and life-skills training for youth who, by virtue of their age and socioeconomic condition, lack access to any other structured summer programming.

Using significant research regarding the skills that youth need to be successful in the workforce, a team of long-standing Rookie League staff (including teachers, social workers and community development workers) drafted the pilot curriculum. The five week program seeks to enhance the following skills/assets:



SOFT SKILLS

- A Deloitte study reports that 99% of employers rated soft skills as a critical priority.
- Only 34% of employers feel that youth are adequately prepared for the workforce.



MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

A study conducted by Boston Consulting group found that compared to non-mentored peers, youth who had mentors are:

- 17% more likely to be gainfully employed and earn 13% more on average, leading to an earnings increase of approximately \$15,000 over their lifetime.
- 50% more likely to volunteer and 13% more likely to give to charity.
- 60% more likely to support feeling consistently happy and 45% more likely to report feeling consistently confident.
- 50% more likely to have a strong social network.



SELF-CONFIDENCE

- Studies show that low self-esteem is a risk factor for developing mental health problems, and positive self-esteem is a protective factor against it.
- Negative self-esteem amongst youth plays a crucial role in the development of mental and social problems including depression, anxiety, anorexia nervosa, bulimia, violence, substance abuse, high-risk behaviours and borderline personality disorders – along with feelings of hopelessness, and suicidal tendencies.



How Does the LIT Program Work?

Each group of LITs is assigned LIT staff who help to plan and lead the program curriculum, but also meet with them regularly to help them reflect on their successes in the program, their goals in life and their hopes for the future. Each week of the program focused on specific skills as listed below:

WEEK 1 - WHAT IT TAKES TO SUCCEED.

This week focuses on developing group and program norms and introducing the group to the 5 C's of the program:

CHARACTER: Challenge yourself to step outside of your comfort zone to experience individual growth that will enhance your leadership capabilities. Give yourself the opportunity to discover all the desired leadership characters that will assist you in being the best version of yourself.

COLLABORATION: Take advantage of this opportunity to build life-long relationships with others and work collaboratively with peers and community members, while demonstrating the qualities of a positive role model.

COMMITMENT: Establish an unstoppable commitment to one's self that enables you to learn, set, design, implement and achieve personal goals that will encourage you to adopt self-fulfilling traits for future endeavors.

COMPETENCE: Highlight your leadership capabilities. Focus on the ones that will increase your competency in gaining future employment, decision-making, and problem-solving. Take time to build a sense of belonging and pride in our LIT community and in your community as a whole.

COMMUNICATION: Encouraging yourself and your fellow LITs to have a stronger voice and presence within Rookie League. Speak up about the goals you have for Rookie League, the goals you have for yourself and become an unstoppable advocate for your own future.

WEEK 2 - COMMITMENT - TO THE PROGRAM, TO OUR PARTNERS AND TO YOURSELVES.

Week two challenges youth to step up their dedication and commitment to the program and to themselves. They are assigned specific self-reflection and leadership tasks to accomplish throughout the week. At the end of the week, youth travel to visit our partners at Centennial and Humber Colleges to partake in workshops on cover letter and resume writing as well as how to succeed in a job interview. It is during this week that youth are divided into smaller groups and challenged to begin considering what their community-impact project will be for their summer.



WEEK 3 - COLLABORATION - TEAMWORK MAKES THE DREAM WORK!

Youth are introduced to a variety of team-building challenges. These include opportunities to collaborate with Youth In Policing as they plan and implement activities for younger children, and as they challenge themselves to win in group initiatives hosted by the Toronto Fire Services. With each opportunity to meet new partners, the LIT program facilitators take time to ensure that youth begin to learn more and more about the variety of meaningful work experiences that exist in the city through each partner.



WEEK 4 - COMMUNICATION - VERBAL, NON-VERBAL AND EVERYTHING IN-BETWEEN.

This week is designed as an application week where LITs return to Humber and Centennial Colleges with their updated and revised cover letters and resumes and participate in a series of mock interviews to practice all of the skills learnt during week two of the program. Upon completing the mock interviews, LITs conduct a self-assessment on their performance and practice asking for and receiving feedback from the interviewers.



WEEK 5 - PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER.

To conclude the program, LITs work in small teams to complete a community project that combines all five goals of the program. This spans from building a small community garden, to working with hundreds of children to perform a flash mob. The last day of the program involves a city-wide team challenge followed by a graduation ceremony in Rogers Centre. LITs receive a certificate of completion, a letter of reference and specific awards for their hard work. 4 LITs are invited to attend an overnight leadership experience in northern Ontario to commend them on their exceptional leadership throughout the summer.



The program is awesome. It really helped me with my leadership and interview skills and pushed me outside of my comfort zone. If it wasn't for this program I would just be sitting around doing nothing and not feel confident to apply for jobs or in myself. Now I feel like I can do so much for myself.

- LIT Youth Participant

What is the Impact of the Program?

Jays Care has had significant experience working with youth aged 16 to 21 through our Rookie League program. Now operating in 30 sites across Toronto, Rookie League has a proven record of success. In 2018, 92 percent of youth staff agreed that being a member of the Rookie League program helped them become a better leader, and a further 92 per cent reported feeling proud of their contribution to the Rookie League program. 87 percent of parents believed that throughout the summer, their child displayed more confidence.

This summer, Creative Development Unlimited, a research and evaluation consultancy, conducted an external evaluation specifically to assess the efficacy of the Rookie League program in promoting soft skill development, positive mentoring relationships, and self-confidence among staff; attributes highly correlated with gaining employment and which marginalized youth most often lack. Preliminary results suggest the program is highly effective; 97 percent of youth staff demonstrated high development in leadership and life skills as rated by the validated Youth Leadership Life Skills Development Scale. Youth staff further reported statistically significant improvements in problem-solving, leadership, creativity and self-confidence.

In 2019, when we pilot tested the Leader-In-Training (LIT) program for youth age 13-15 at two Rookie League sites: Humberline and Gordonridge, Creative Development Unlimited found encouraging results:

Rookie League LIT Impact and Statistics

83%

of LITs reported the program had a positive impact on their ability to work in teams.



96%

demonstrated high development in leadership and life skills as a result of the program.



80%

of LITs showed an increase in self-efficacy and in their belief to reach their goals, according to the Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale.



