2013-2014 Youth Leadership Academy Annual Review

Today’s workforce requires young people to have a high school diploma, prior work experience, and in the case of most careers, a college degree. Given these requirements, communities must begin preparing youth to be college and career ready upon high school graduation. One avenue to support this transition into adulthood is to maximize youth experiences in the summer and out-of-school time. The Ohio State University (OSU) Learning in Fitness and Education through Sports (LiFE Sports) Initiative has developed and implemented the Youth Leadership Academy (YLA) to ensure that older youth involved in LiFE Sports are prepared for the next step in their journeys toward post-high school graduation.

The Development of the Youth Leadership Academy

In 2012, LiFE Sports noticed a growing and alarming trend. Youth attending the annual summer camp, which serves over 600 youth from diverse backgrounds each summer, were “aging out” of LiFE Sports. At age 15, youth were no longer able to attend the traditional sports camp but still had a growing desire to be a part of LiFE Sports. Many of these youth expressed their desire to “give back to camp” or “stay involved.” Given this interest, LiFE Sports youth ages 15-18 were engaged as Youth Leaders at the LiFE Sports Summer Camp in 2013.

This initial group of 20 Youth Leaders received educational instruction focused on enhancing workforce preparation skills (such as time management and problem-solving) during the summer of 2012, while they also served as Youth Leaders (i.e., assistant camp counselors) to younger youth. After the initial pilot, a few improvements were made to the YLA during the summer of 2013. First and foremost, LiFE Sports had more youth interested in the program than the 20 enrolled. LiFE Sports would need to expand the program to serve at least 40 youth in order to ensure previous LiFE Sports youth had an avenue to stay involved and connected to LiFE Sports. LiFE Sports also found the need for training and skill development prior to the summer program. Many youth entered the summer excited to work with younger youth, but lacked the leadership skills necessary to effectively engage with the younger youth. There was a need to work with the Youth Leaders prior to the summertime. Finally, many of the Youth Leaders in 2012-2013 expressed a desire and need for additional college and career readiness activities. The YLA curriculum needed to be expanded to incorporate additional content valuable to these youth. Given these needs, the YLA was expanded in 2014. An official year-round curriculum was written and two new partnerships were established (one with the OSU Office of Outreach & Engagement and the other with Huntington National Bank). In 2014, the expanded YLA was offered to 37 youth. The remainder of this document overviews the expanded and improved YLA, as well as highlights outcomes associated with YLA participation from the 2014 LiFE Sports YLA.

“It took a lot of patience and understanding in order for us as leaders to gain respect from our campers because we were also youth. After gaining respect, we were able to assist them into successfully reaching our goals.” – Tyler Patterson

2014 YLA Youth Leader of the Year
Overview of the Youth Leadership Academy

LiFE Sports YLA is dedicated to preparing youth for the workforce, college, and other post-secondary educational opportunities. The YLA seeks to expand on the important skills taught at the original LiFE Sports Summer Camp (i.e., Self-control, Effort, Teamwork, and Social Responsibility; S.E.T.S.) by providing older youth (ages 15-18) with additional educational, leadership, and work experiences that will help them gain the necessary skills to be college and career ready upon high school graduation. The YLA is comprised of three phases: The Skills Academy, the Success Academy, and the Culminating Event.

The Skills Academy, the first phase of the YLA, consists of five themed sessions focused on building job, career, and college readiness skills among Youth Leaders. Each session builds on the knowledge gained from previous LiFE Sports Camp participation, and expands youth skills in areas such as communication, problem-solving, and working with others. The final session includes the “LiFE Sports Combine,” an activity that tests the Youth Leaders’ mastery of skills by working in groups to overcome problem-based learning scenarios.

During the second phase, The Success Academy, Youth Leaders are involved in applied work experiences targeted toward summer college and career readiness. It is in this phase that youth demonstrate their ability to apply the skills learned during the Skills Academy. Specifically, Youth Leaders serve as assistant camp counselors at the LiFE Sports Summer Camp, working approximately 32 hours a week for four weeks alongside LiFE Sports camp staff. In addition, they receive on-the-job training and support in four group-based sessions, as well as participate in Huntington Bank financial management modules designed to improve financial literacy. Many Youth Leaders use this experience to fulfill volunteer service credits needed for high school graduation. Finally, all Youth Leaders participate in a college and career exploration day during camp. This day provides youth with a campus tour, exposure to different majors, and sessions on the process of applying and selecting a college.

During the final phase of the YLA, Youth Leaders design and implement a final culminating experience. This final challenge is youth-led and allows the Youth Leaders to demonstrate the skills needed to be successful at work, college, and in postsecondary experiences (as they work together to give back to LiFE Sports and their communities).

Understanding Personal Finances with Huntington National Bank

In the summer of 2013, all youth leaders gained valuable skills in money management through a partnership with Huntington National Bank. Youth Leaders participated in lessons, led by a Huntington employee, focused on:

- Bank On It
- Borrowing Basics
- Money Matters
- Pay Yourself First

In 2014, new Year 1 Youth Leaders will once again learn these topics, while Year 2 Youth Leaders will be exposed to four new topics, which include:

- Keep It Safe
- To Your Credit
- Charge It Right
- Loan To Own
The Impact of the Youth Leadership Academy

In 2014, 37 youth participated in the LiFE Sports YLA. Twelve of these youth were previous YLA participants in 2013, whereas 25 were new to the LiFE Sports YLA (of which seven were new to LiFE Sports overall). The mean age of YLA participants was 15 years old, for which participants ranged from 14-18 years old. In relation to gender, there were slightly more males (52 percent) than females (48 percent) involved in the program. Participants were from diverse backgrounds. Seventy three percent reported being African-American, 10 percent reported Caucasian, and 17 percent reported multiple races (e.g., Caucasian and African-American, African-American and Asian, Hispanic and African-American). The majority of Youth Leaders and their families (65 percent) were below 200 percent of the poverty line (with 30 percent below 100 percent of the poverty line).

Youth Leaders completed pre-, mid-, and post-program evaluation surveys designed to explore the overall impact of the program in relationship to key outcome areas (such as leaderships, self-efficacy in learning, citizenship, and college intentions/desires). To better understand the program impact, the Youth Leaders were grouped into “rookies” (those students who had never attended any version of the YLA in previous years), and “veterans” (those students who had previously attended a version of the YLA). There were 12 veterans and 35 rookies in 2014.

Figure 1 depicts the positive growth of youth throughout the program, and demonstrates that Youth Leaders (both rookies and veterans) had reported increased leadership, self-efficacy, and citizenship skills. Although veterans entered the program with higher perceived competencies than the rookies, the perceptions of both groups of Youth Leaders improved over the course of the program. Leadership, learning, and citizenship not only help youth leaders perform successfully in school and at home but prepare them to be positive, contributing members of society.

“LiFE Sports also helps us focus on education. As we learn more we become the leaders of our generation, we set the tone for the environment. When we are excited about learning, it makes it easier for our teachers to share knowledge with us.”

Savon Banks
2014 LiFE Sports Youth Leader
Figure 2 showcases the ways in which youth perceived the YLA impacted their feelings about college. As seen in the figure, Youth Leaders completing the surveys increased their perceptions of skills in several areas targeted by the YLA. An impressive 100 percent of youth reported, “There are opportunities for me to go to college,” and 91.6 percent agreed that they “want to go to college” after participation in the YLA. By increasing their awareness and interest in college now, the YLA can increase the likelihood that youth leaders will pursue higher education, which will have positive residual effects.

As previously mentioned, a partnership with Huntington National Bank allowed Youth Leaders to participate in four financial literacy sessions. Youth reported on the surveys that they were “more likely to save my money” and “more aware of why it is important to pay bills on time” as a result of their participation. Results show that 83.3 percent of youth agreed that they now have a greater understanding of how to manage their money. An understanding of financial management increases career and college readiness, as Youth Leaders will be prepared to make informed decisions which involve money, such as saving, investing, and paying bills.
Finally, Youth Leaders also were asked to respond to a number of questions related to other skills learned at the YLA. Figure 4 provides an overview of their positive responses in relation to their YLA experience. The youth leaders’ responses demonstrate that youth believe that their participation in the YLA has increased their overall interest and readiness for a job and/or college (thus supporting the primary objective of the YLA). Additionally, youth perceive the YLA is enhancing valuable life skills which allow them to be successful presently and in the future. These program outcomes include efficacy in leadership, goal-directed behavior, and financial management.

Figure 4. YLA Outcomes: Overall Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>A little true</th>
<th>Somewhat true</th>
<th>Pretty true</th>
<th>Really true</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am more interested in finding a job or college</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more aware of college opportunities at OSU</td>
<td>56.7%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more likely to save my money</td>
<td>56.7%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more aware of why it is important to pay bills on time</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a greater understanding of how to manage my money</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know what it takes to be a positive role model</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have more confidence in my ability to lead</td>
<td>61.3%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more motivated to reach my goals</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ready to Grow

Findings showcase the contributions of LiFE Sports YLA on Youth Leader outcomes. We are, in turn, even more inspired to continue to grow the program. Now in its second official year, the YLA is continuing to expand its reach and impact. With the support and funding of partners, such as the OSU Office of Outreach and Engagement and Huntington National Bank, 20 youth are currently enrolled as first year YLA Youth Leaders (i.e., “rookies”). An additional 20 Youth Leaders have continued from 2014 to become Year 2 Youth Leaders (i.e., “veterans”). An additional 20 Youth Leaders have continued from 2014 to become Year 2 Youth Leaders. Within the next two years, LiFE Sports hopes to serve 20 youth in each year of the YLA for a total of 60 youth annually with the ultimate goal for all enrolled youth to leave LiFE Sports college and career ready. Additional targeted improvements include securing funding for Youth Leader scholarships that would provide resources for these youth as they transition to post-secondary education, enhancing the YLA curriculum as youth matriculate through the program, and connecting Youth Leaders with work experience and/or internships.

For more information about the YLA or LiFE Sports, visit our website: lifesports.osu.edu.