



NORTH CASCADES INSTITUTE YOUTH LEADERSHIP ADVENTURES

2022

PROGRAM REPORT

Empowering local youth to envision and build a just and sustainable future

Youth Leadership Adventures (YLA) offers local teens the opportunity to participate in 9-day backcountry trips in North Cascades National Park. Through immersion in an alpine environment shaped by glaciers, participants are inspired to envision a hopeful, joyful, and sustainable future for the North Cascades ecosystem and the individuals within it. In addition to outdoor skills, the YLA curriculum focuses on leadership skills, team building, and climate change solutions, giving participants the knowledge and tools they need to become stewards of the natural world and engage in community advocacy.

Program Outcomes

INTERDEPENDENCE

Deepened connection with nature and increased awareness of our interdependence with the natural world

“ This trip impacted me with more knowledge on climate change because it was not a topic talked about in school. YLA made me more aware of its effects and what we can do to make a change.



IDENTITY & EQUITY

Equitable access to outdoor engagement

“ The combination of getting to know young people with similar interests and diverse experiences while learning about environmentalism and the natural beauty in my area is so special.



LEADERSHIP & COMMUNITY ACTION

Foster pathways toward community engagement focused on climate solutions, hope and collaborative action

“ I learned so much about the basics of camping, but more importantly I learned about the land I live on and why conservation is so important.



Participant Snapshot

To ensure equitable access to back-country experiences, we intentionally recruit YLA participants through partnerships with diverse organizations and through presentations to high school classes. We provide scholarships, transportation, clothing, gear, meals, culturally relevant curriculum, family orientations, and gender-inclusive camp options to reduce barriers to participation to the greatest possible extent.

\$49,427
SCHOLARSHIP
FUNDS dispersed

Climate Change & Solutions

A primary focus of YLA is climate solutions, with the goal of fostering pathways toward community engagement, hope, and collaborative action for program alumni. Our climate curriculum is grounded in resources from *The Work That Reconnects*, Project Drawdown, and Climate Generation, among others.

The Work That Reconnects establishes the concept that acknowledging emotions is an important part of feeling connected to the world around us and inspiring people to take action. YLA intentionally gives students opportunities to share how they feel about climate change and its impacts, and ensures that they have a supportive space to process those emotions.

“What motivates me is that I'm not alone in my climate action, and my steps as an individual support others' years of dedication to the earth.”

Project Drawdown is a nonprofit organization focusing on existing climate solutions that will move us toward “drawdown,” the point in the future when levels of greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere stop climbing and start to decline. Our instructors use Project Drawdown's solutions to show students how different things are happening all around us to actively solve climate change, encouraging them to think about how they can get engaged with different initiatives.

Climate Generation provides resources for climate educators. One of their focuses is to use storytelling as a tool to normalize conversations around climate change, helping people see different perspectives. Our curriculum engages students in a “Climate Storytelling” activity using questions such as “Ways people in my life have been impacted by climate change are...” and “When I imagine a future where we have solved climate change and communities are thriving, I see...”

Our program participants report that they do not have conversations about climate change in school or at home. Yale Climate Communications research shows that 72% of Americans believe global warming is happening yet only 35% discuss global warming at least occasionally. We are working to change that percentage through normalizing climate conversations, teaching about solutions, and giving follow-up opportunities for empowerment and action.

44
YLA
PARTICIPANTS



64%
FIRST TIME
participating in an
outdoor program

93%
participants
RECEIVED
SCHOLARSHIPS

66%
participants
PAID \$25
OR LESS

61%
identify as
PEOPLE
OF COLOR

47%
prospective
FIRST
GENERATION
college students

55%
qualify for FREE
or REDUCED-
PRICE LUNCHES



34%
had never been to
NORTH CASCADES
NATIONAL PARK

608
VOLUNTEER
HOURS in National
Parks and Forests

25.2
AVERAGE
MILES PADDLED
on a canoe trip

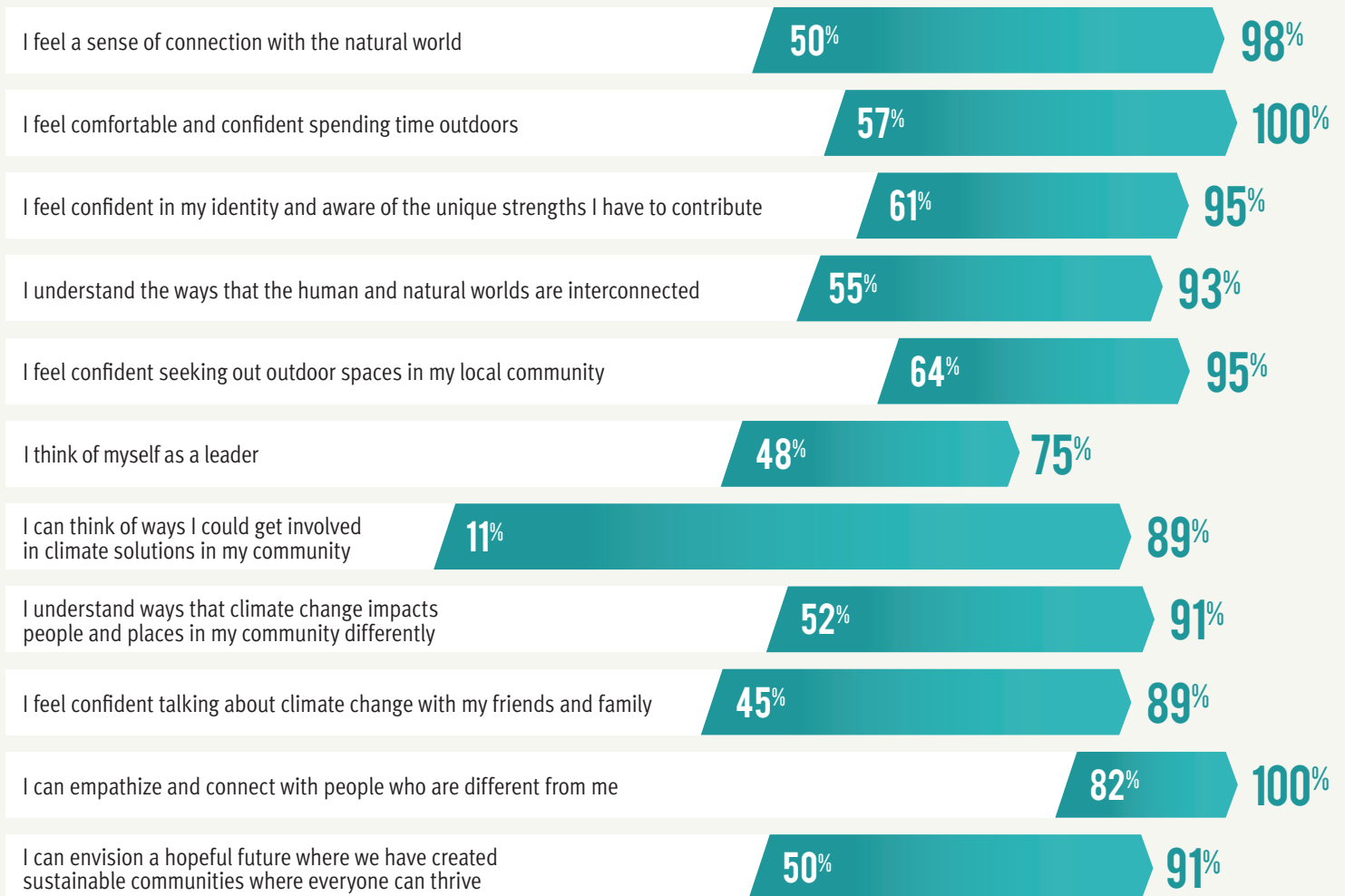


13.9
AVERAGE
MILES HIKED on
a backpacking trip

Evaluating Program Outcomes

To gauge progress toward program outcomes, participants provide qualitative and quantitative feedback through surveys and written impact statements. Their pre- and post-program responses illustrate the transformative experience of participation in YLA.

Percentage of participants who agree with these statements **BEFORE**> **AFTER**



Youth for the Environment and People!

In 2022, we once again partnered with RE Sources to offer a Skagit County cohort of Youth for the Environment and People! (YEP!), an extracurricular program for high schoolers. YEP! is an opportunity for students to extend their climate solutions education and take part in a climate action project, themed this year around reducing food waste.

The Skagit cohort undertook a “Compost Signage and Education” project at Sedro-Woolley High School to improve the existing underutilized composting program. The YEP! students created additional signage and educated fellow students about the program, with the goal of increasing the amount of compost available to the school’s horticulture classes. To educate the broader public, they also wrote an article, “Composting as a Climate Solution,” which was published in several local newspapers.



*Every participant in the Skagit cohort of YEP! reported **increased levels of confidence** in themselves as leaders and having a **better understanding of the connection** between environmental and social justice issues.*

Connection and Leadership: One Student's YLA Journey

When Charles (Chucky) Perez first headed out on a YLA trip in 2021, he was looking to connect with his peers after more than a year of isolation and virtual school due to the pandemic. As it was for many others, YLA was a transformative experience in myriad ways: forming interpersonal connections, developing leadership skills, and restoring social confidence after being isolated for so long. For some, their YLA trip is so meaningful that they return for a second round, as Charles did in 2022.

“I learned that I can make friends really easily,” Charles shared. “The YLA trips really helped me socially. Since school was online, I wasn’t able to connect with anyone. YLA was the first time in a super long time that I got back in the game socially.” Similar feelings were shared by many participants in 2022, as they started



“I didn’t accomplish my goal of making new friends... instead, I made a forever family.”

returning to normal social situations after isolation. Nearly half of this year’s participants listed connecting with people as part of their initial motivation to sign up.

Charles was inspired to go on a second trip after developing close friendships, gaining outdoor skills, and learning about climate solutions in 2021. Expecting similar outcomes the second time around, he was surprised to discover that leadership became his overarching theme in 2022.

“The big takeaway from my second trip was the leadership aspect. I didn’t realize how big of a voice I had.”

As part of the YLA curriculum, participants work on their leadership skills through interactive lessons, taking on responsibilities, and completing assigned roles throughout the course of the trip. As a returning participant, Charles was encouraged to take leadership a step further and he took on a role of mentor or “big brother” to the rest of his trail group. As someone who has needed to take on more family responsibilities than most do as a teen, YLA gave Charles the opportunity to voluntarily take on responsibility and help guide other people through an experience that was really meaningful to him personally.

As he moves on to college with the goal of pursuing a degree and career in environmental science, Charles is grateful for the confidence developed, skills learned, and “truly amazing” experience of YLA.

2022 Donors and Supporters

Youth Leadership Adventures is made possible with the generous support of hundreds of organizations and individuals including:

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- North Cascades National Park
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- Ross Lake Resort
- Burlington-Edison GEAR UP
- Skagit Valley College
- RE Sources
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