



NORTH CASCADES INSTITUTE YOUTH LEADERSHIP ADVENTURES

2021

PROGRAM REPORT

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

Youth Leadership Adventures (YLA) offers local teens 8 and 12-day backcountry trips in the North Cascades National Park and Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. Through immersion in an alpine environment shaped by glaciers, these trips inspire our participants to manifest a hopeful, joyful, and sustainable future for the North Cascades ecosystem and the people who are part of it. Through support from individual donors and grants, YLA was able to offer over \$63,000 in scholarships in 2021. YLA encourages young people to be stewards of protected lands and gives them the skills and confidence to continue to recreate outdoors for years to come.

Program Outcomes

Promote **LEADERSHIP SKILLS** and **EXPLORE IDENTITY** through self-reflection and leadership curriculum



“ A YLA trip is not only a backpacking trip, but a physical and spiritual journey that challenges you to know and grow your individual self.

Learn about interdependence by building **CONNECTIONS TO PEERS** and **NATURAL WORLD**



“ I loved bonding with my group through the challenges, joys, and laughter that we experienced together.

Learn about **CLIMATE SOLUTIONS** to **FOSTER HOPE** in the face of an uncertain future



“ I want to help this generation, as well as future generations, have a brighter future, and have them be able to truly experience the natural world.

Put learning into practice through **STEWARDSHIP** and **ONGOING ENGAGEMENT**



“ It has inspired me to possibly go into this field in the future. I hope to study environmental science and I want to go on more frequent outdoor trips.

Participant Snapshot

We provide scholarships, transportation, clothing, gear, meals, family orientations, culturally relevant curriculum, and gender-inclusive camp options. 95% of participants reported that these support systems were crucial for their participation in the program.



Connecting with Communities: Recruitment and Ongoing Engagement

YLA connects the trips to home communities by recruiting students via community partners and offering ongoing programming in student's home communities. We partner with multiple community organizations to reach underrepresented audiences, amplify the work of our partners and support our alumni in continued learning.

One example is our new partnership with the **GEAR UP program** at Burlington-Edison High School (BEHS). GEAR UP is a national program “designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education”. The GEAR UP program at BEHS serves Latinx students in the Skagit Valley. In order to connect the BEHS community to the YLA program, a GEAR UP Mentor reached out to families about YLA in the spring and then came as a trip leader on one of our backcountry courses. Having the GEAR UP Mentor as a trip leader allowed YLA to have a Latinx affinity trip this summer, and helped families and students feel more comfortable signing up for the experience.

“ This trip is and will probably be the best thing I've done in my life. It had everything I wanted, from amazing views to creating never-forgetting bonds. This has formed me into a better person. It had its challenges and that was a great way to grow mentally and physically. The fun is endless and bonds are forever.”

—2021 YLA GEAR UP participant



To support alumni in bringing home their new-found skills from YLA, North Cascades Institute partnered with **RE Sources** to have a Skagit county cohort of the **Youth for the Environment and People program (YEP!)**. This after-school program focused on supporting teens in taking climate action. YEP! participants met weekly for 11 weeks to learn about climate change, choose

a climate action project and then carry out their goals. They explored ways to take climate action through hands-on stewardship projects and learned about different organizations operating in our local communities.

57
YLA
PARTICIPANTS

68%
identify as
PEOPLE OF COLOR

45%
qualify for **FREE**
or **REDUCED**
-PRICE LUNCHES

53%
participants
PAID \$25 OR
LESS DOLLARS

\$63,223
total **SCHOLARSHIP FUNDS** dispersed

77%
of participants
RECEIVED
SCHOLARSHIPS

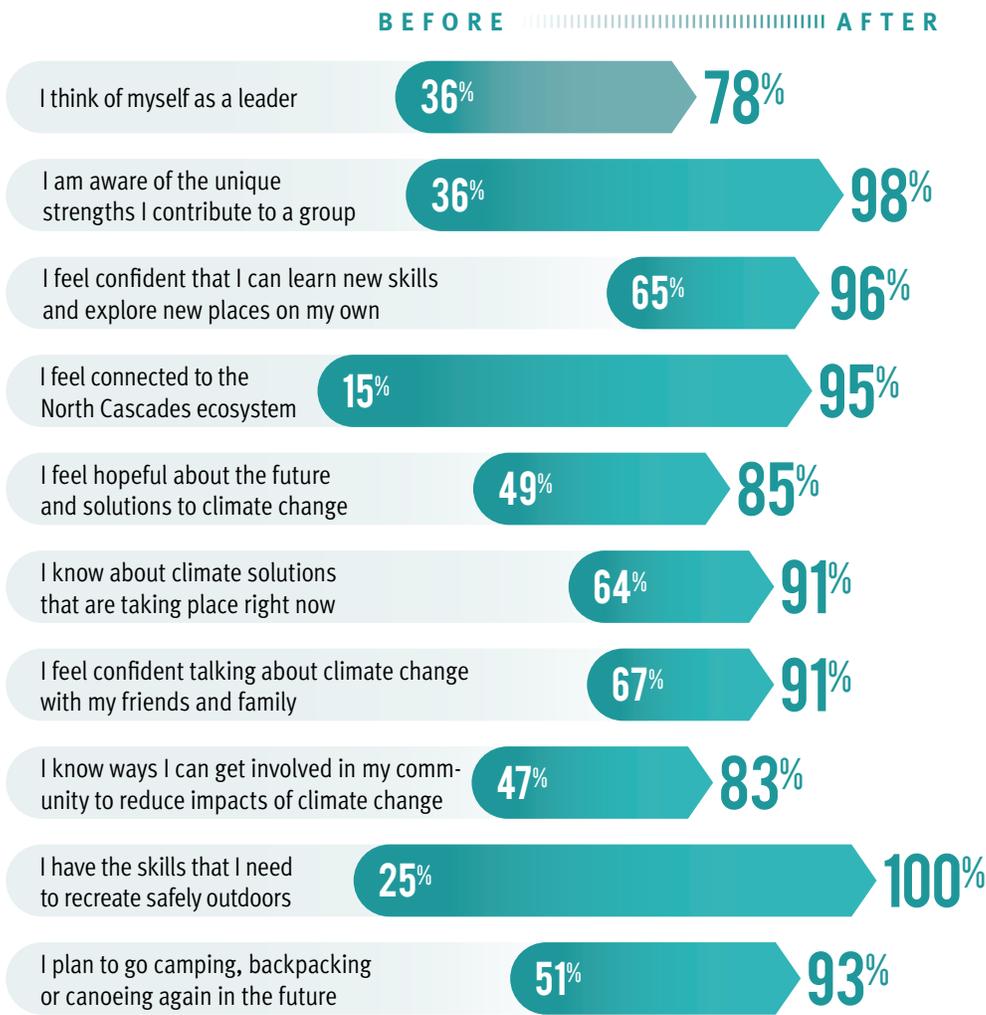
47%
prospective **FIRST**
GENERATION
college students

56%
FIRST TIME
participating in an
outdoor program

784
VOLUNTEER
HOURS in National
Parks and Forests

Evaluating Program Outcomes

Pre- then post-program surveys demonstrate progress towards program outcomes and student transformations as a result of participation in YLA.



YLA Alumni Survey

We can see the results of our continued student engagement in our 2020 YLA Alumni survey. In the fall of 2020, we surveyed program alumni from over 10 years of backcountry programming. We received 71 responses, with alumni ages 13-31, and 25% of students participating more than 6 years ago. The results showed the lasting impact of YLA, and the ways that the program and our outreach efforts continue to impact participant's lives.

- 89%** agreed that participating in the Institute summer youth program improved their leadership skills
- 94%** reported feeling a stronger sense of belonging in the outdoors after the program
- 79%** agreed that the program increased their interest in studying or working in environmental and outdoor sectors
- 39%** reported being employed in the environmental sector post program

“ Since my YLA time I was determined to find work outside. My first job out of high school was with the forest service and I have worked with them for four seasons from recreation to wildland firefighting. And I am currently working with a conservation corps crew!

—YLA program alumni

After a year of staying at home, isolation and stress, YLA was a bright spot in students' lives.

“ Laughing with my new family of friends and being with each other through our trials and tribulations.



68% participants reported **FRIENDS, FUN and LAUGHTER** as their favorite part of the trip

“ The little things we don't see at home are things I feel I've learned to appreciate more. Sometimes I feel I'm going through so much, but it's always important to be thankful for literally everything around us.

Pathways for Youth: Jennifer's Story

When Jennifer Morales met a female National Park Ranger at the NW Environmental Youth Summit in 2017, the seed was planted for her future coursework and career. At this gathering for future conservation leaders at the North Cascades Environmental Learning Center, the ranger explained how Diablo Lake gets its color from the nearby glaciers.



Jennifer found herself thinking “Could I do that? Could a person of color be in that role?” From that moment on, she realized she wanted to educate other people about nature.

Jennifer signed up the next summer for a Youth Leadership Adventures course, an Institute program that takes local high school students with immersive wilderness trips in the North Cascades. She looks back with a smile on some of her experiences—falling out of a canoe, slipping on the trail, working hard with a pack that was almost bigger than she was!

Jennifer went on to participate in another Youth Leadership Adventures course the following summer and another Youth Summit, turning that seed from 2017 into a magnificent forest of diverse career possibilities for her.

In YLA she learned how to set up a tent, cook outside for the first time, and how to work as a group to complete camp chores. This set her up well for two months of

camping with the Northwest Youth Corps in Oregon after graduating from Sedro-Woolley High School. Jennifer did trail maintenance, fuel reduction, invasive plant management and tree planting, and she's proud that she quickly gained her chainsaw certification.

Using what she learned in Youth Leadership Adventures as a foundation, Jennifer has moved forward with her dreams of becoming a park ranger. She now attends Western Washington University, pursuing a degree in recreational management with a minor in environmental education. She's also applying leadership skills she gained in YLA by serving on the Native American Student Council.

“Youth Leadership Adventures was an amazing opportunity for me to branch out and try something I had never done before. I created a new family with memories that will last a lifetime. Being the 'leader of the day' helped me define the leader that I am now—organized and comfortable with being in charge.”



2021 Donors and Supporters

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

PARTNERS

- North Cascades National Park
- Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest
- Ross Lake Resort
- Burlington-Edison GEAR UP
- Skagit Valley College
- RE Sources
- Seattle City Light
- Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission

IN-KIND GEAR DONATIONS

- GearAid
- Smartwool

GRANTS

- Anonymous Foundation
- Chuckanut Health Foundation
- Henry M. Jackson Foundation
- Kate Svidek Memorial Foundation
- National Forest Foundation MAP
- National Park Service
- REI Co-Op
- Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians
- Swinomish Indian Tribal Community
- Summer Search
- Tulalip Tribes Charitable Contributions
- WA Recreation & Conservation Office No Child Left Inside Grant Program

NAMED SCHOLARSHIPS

- Andrew Goodwill Murphy Memorial Scholarship
- Adam Bates Scholarship
- Aguila Scholarship
- Andy Wickstrand Scholarship
- Ann Zwinger Scholarship
- Beau MacGregor Scholarship
- Chuck & Dee Robinson Scholarship
- Cook & Sullivan Scholarship
- Darby Foundation Scholarship
- Guemes Island Environmental Trust Scholarship
- Jeremiah Alexander Scholarship
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- Nancy Oyloe Scholarship
- Schweickart Family Scholarship
- Sheila Holtgrieve Scholarship
- The Skagit Scholarship
- Weisberg Family Scholarship
- WA Native Plant Society Salal Chapter Scholarship