



*Ontario Association*  
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**Starting and Staying on  
Track: Youth Motivations  
in Participating in  
Recreation**

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## **Starting and Staying on Track: Youth Motivations in Participating in Recreation**

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A report prepared in association with  
the Provincial Consortium of Youth in Recreation  
for **The Community Sport Opportunity Fund**  
Ministry of Tourism and Recreation

# Starting and Staying on Track: Youth Motivations in Participating in Recreation

## Table of Contents

i   Acknowledgements
iii   Executive Summary
01   Introduction
02   Methodology
03   Research Implications
04   Background
05   At-Risk Behaviour Prevention and Prosocial Recreation
06   The Prosocial Recreation Program Typology
08   Employability Skills Development
10   Youth Motivations in Joining Prosocial Recreation Programs: Survey Findings
10   Race/Ethnicity, Class and Gender
10   Age as a Determinant
11   Motivations for Starting a Prosocial Recreation Program
13   Parental and Peer Influence by Age
13   Staff as Motivator
13   Intrinsic Motivations
14   'Soft-Skills' / Employment Skills Development as Motivators
14   Job and Career Building as Motivator
14   Employability Skills Development
15   Retention: Returning to the Program Next Year
16   Duration of Participation at an Organization
17   Motivations to Continue
19   Employment
20   Conclusion
21   Bibliography
23   Appendix

## Starting and Staying on Track: Youth Motivations in Participating in Recreation

### TABLES

iii | Figure 1: "What were the most important reasons why you want to continue participating in this organization next year?"

12 | Figure 2: "What were the most important reasons that made you decide to start participating in this program at this organization?"

15 | Figure 3: Reasons for Signing Up by Program Type

16 | Figure 4: "Approximately how long have you been participating in recreation programs at this organization?"

18 | Figure 5: "What are the most important reasons why you want to participate in this program at this organization next year?"

19 | Figure 6: "What were the most important reasons why you want to continue participating in this organization next year?"

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For many recreation providers, Leadership programs and other youth engagement initiatives are an important part of their programming for adolescent youth. Efforts to attract and retain teenagers can ensure they stay in programs long enough to benefit from exposure to leadership recreation training. When aiming to achieve these goals, it is important to ask the question: what motivates a youth to join and stay in a recreation program? Knowing the answer to this question can help organizations attract more youth and keep them coming back.

We focused our study on “prosocial” programs ~ those that provide some developmental, social involvement and leadership development skills. We developed a typological breakdown of these programs to understand how they might compare and differ.

We found five major types of prosocial programs:

- Leadership Training Programs
- Youth Advisory Counsels
- Empowerment (meaning self-development or ‘self-leadership’ programs)
- Volunteer Exploration Programs
- Youth-Run Initiatives

We asked 500 youth who participate in these programs why they chose to sign-up and whether they plan to return next year. The youth who responded to our survey generally agree that fun, the chance to do and learn something new and to meet new people are the most important and appealing aspects of recreation. Our findings suggest that youth in all programs respond well to certain aspects of leadership and/or employability training.

Some findings of note are:

- Youth 13 and up are the primary decision-makers when it comes to signing up for recreation programs
- 84% say that they wanted to sign up for the program they are in
- 87% say that they plan to return next year
- 55% say that they make the decision to participate alone while 37% say that they decide together with their parents or guardian
- 77% agreed that participating in the program improves their leadership ability
- 72% agreed that the program makes them feel more self-confident

We were particularly interested in the role of employment skills learning as a motivator in joining and staying in recreation. We found that many youth do see employment skills learning as a motivator for joining recreation and for returning. We found the following significant findings:

- 69% said that participating in the program might help them get a job;
- 54% agreed that the program helps them figure out what they might like to do for a job;
- 59% of 13 to 15 year olds agreed that the program helps them figure out what they want to do for a job while only 49% of 16 to 18 year olds agreed with this statement;
- 43% said that ‘because it might help my resume’ was a very important consideration, while 44% said that it was somewhat important.
- 44% said that ‘because it might help me get a job’ was very important when deciding to start the program and 32% said that it was somewhat important.
- 62% reported not working at all
- 23% hold a part-time year-round job

These findings suggests that employment and career building is a moderately important consideration when youth are deciding to start in the program. Most of our respondents did not rate employment skills as being as important a motivator as options like ‘because it is fun,’ or ‘to learn new things.

Only with employment-related questions to we see a marked difference in the responses between the older and younger youth. We were surprised to find that younger youth (13 to 15) were more inclined than older youth (16 to 18) to choose to participate in recreation programs with their future job prospects in mind.

The following chart is a breakdown of how respondents answered two questions on how their motivation to participate in recreation based on age group.

**What were the most important reasons why you want to continue participating in this organization next year?**

		‘it will help my resume’		‘it might help me get a job’	
	n	<i>somewhat important</i>	<i>very important</i>	<i>somewhat important</i>	<i>very important</i>
13 to 15 years old	197	29%	55%	33%	52%
16 to 18 years old	109	37%	39%	38%	45%

This chart shows that a statistically significant higher number of the younger youth indicate that ‘it will help my resume’ and ‘it might help me get a job’ are very important motivations to continue participating in recreation with an organization. Our findings suggest that these two employment-related motivations are less important as motivations for the 16 to 18 year old age group. All other options have almost identical responses for the older and younger respondents.

This is interesting because we expected to find that youth in the 16 to 18 age group would be more likely to consider employment-related skills building as a motivation in recreation because they are more likely than the younger age group to be of working age. Among respondents to our survey, 33.6% of 16 to 18 year olds were working part-time, year round, compared to 18.6% of 13 to 15 year olds who said they were working part-time, year-round at the time of filling in the survey.



## INTRODUCTION

Most recreation providers acknowledge that it is a challenge to retain adolescents in recreation programs. There are several reasons for this. At adolescence, youth begin to decide for themselves what they will do with their out-of-school time. For many, homework, paid-work and socializing time compete for youth's time in recreation.

For many recreation providers, Leadership programs and other youth engagement initiatives are an important part of their programming for adolescents. There is a sense that activities that involve youth in decision-making, teach them career or life skills or give leadership training is a good way to keep youth interested and involved in recreation into their teenaged years. These programs generally have a prosocial focus ~ that is, they develop in their participants a sense of social good, moral/ethical guidance and/or personal development.

We know that community involvement is an important part of youth development: many studies have been written about the benefits of exposure to prosocial activity early in life. But what do youth themselves think about prosocial activities in recreation? For recreation providers, this can be an important question. Attracting and retaining teenaged youth in development programs can ensure that they are staying long enough to benefit from the activities. The lessons youth learn in recreation provide holistic benefits ~ meaning personal, developmental, community, long-term and short-term benefits. It is therefore important to ask the question: what motivates a youth to join and stay in prosocial programs? Knowing the answer to this question can help program policy makers attract more youth and keep them coming back, thereby making a lasting impact in communities and in youths' lives.

This project, done in partnership with the Provincial Consortium of Youth in Recreation (PCYR), looks at aspects of prosocial programming that attract and retain youth. We asked youth across Canada about their motivation for joining, staying or leaving prosocial programs and, specifically, what role *leadership training* might have in these motivations.

The Ontario Association of Youth Employment Centres (OAYEC) is interested in the type of skills that youth ~ particularly at-risk youth ~ can develop in recreation programs that may benefit their employment prospects in the future. OAYEC is a non-profit, charitable organization that represents 69 Youth Employment Centres in Ontario. We support the work of youth employment counsellors by researching creative ways to help youth find employment and career development experiences.

Our research of prosocial programs in Canada suggest that there are five major types of these programs. They are:

- Leadership Training Programs
- Youth Advisory Counsels

- Empowerment (meaning self-development or ‘self-leadership’ programs)
- Volunteer Exploration Programs
- Youth-Run Initiatives

In general, youth are motivated by how fun a program is, if they can meet new people and learn new things. Youth do tend to respond positively to “leadership” training. Even if adolescents are most attracted to the new and fun aspects of the program, they also appreciate and enjoy developmental, community involvement and leadership development components.

In particular, youth in Leadership Training tell us that they were motivated to join the program because it might help their resume, they wanted to become more of a leader and wanted to meet new people. Those in other programs point more to ‘I like the staff the runs the program,’ and ‘I wanted to meet new people’ as high motivations.

We were particularly interested in the role of employment skills learning as a motivator in joining and staying in recreation. We found that many youth do see employment skills learning as a motivator for joining recreation and for returning. We found the following significant findings:

Most of our respondents did not rate employment skills as being as important a motivator as options like ‘because it is fun,’ or ‘to learn new things.’ This is a positive finding because it means that youth are choosing recreation for the sake of recreation – they tell us that they start and stay in programs because it is fun and they enjoy the opportunity to meet new people.

We also found that building leadership skills, having the opportunity to participate in their community and building employability skills is also an important part of their decision. Though these come second to the ‘fun aspects’ of the programs, youth do consider these development skills building aspects in their motivation to participate.

We were surprised to find that younger youth (13 to 15) were more inclined than older youth (16 to 18) to choose to participate in recreation programs with their future job prospects in mind. When asked to rate the importance of employment-related youth age 13 to 15 indicate that ‘it will help my resume’ and ‘it might help me get a job’ are very important motivations to continue participating in recreation with an organization. Our findings suggest that these two employment-related motivations are less important as motivations for the 16 to 18 year old age group. All other options have almost identical responses for the older and younger respondents.

## **Methodology**

Youth motivation is central to this study. Our methodology centres on the question ‘what motivates a youth to join and stay in prosocial recreation?’ To answer this question, we went to the youth themselves.

We interviewed 30 program coordinators. We contacted participants through the PCYR listserv (SPRYNT) for interviews and survey information those who indicated willingness to participate in

our study and fit the criteria of prosocial program. Through these coordinators, we distributed surveys to 500 youth and received responses from 365. Youth who participated in the survey are between the ages of 13 and 18. Their responses were anonymously collected at their recreation site. Nearly all (96%) of these youth are students. The gender breakdown is 42% male, 58% female. More than one third (37%) self-identified as a member of a visible minority. Three quarters (75%) of the programs target outreach to at-risk youth.

It is important to note that these survey findings are not a representative sample of youth in recreation in all of Canada. Instead, it is a snapshot of youth in a variety of prosocial programs in different communities across the country.

We focused our study on programs that provide some developmental, social involvement and leadership development skills. This means that programs focused strictly on sports or arts were not included. The study consists of comparable programs delivered through the YMCA, the Boys and Girls Club, Municipalities, and independent recreation providers.

The following is a breakdown of organization that participated in our research:

- Boys and Girls Club of Canada programs: 91
- YMCA programs: 120
- Municipality-run recreation programs: 68
- Other/independent programs: 84

Our aim was to achieve representation from a variety of program types to give us a fair representation of youth across Canada. Our analysis takes into account the larger number of YMCA participants in order not to allow this imbalance to weight the findings.

## **Research Implications**

The findings in this report can help recreation providers who run prosocial programs identify whether leadership training encourages youth to enroll and return. Our research identifies how youth respond to other prosocial and youth development components, as well as some challenges that may lead youth to only stay in programs for a limited basis. It is hoped that the information from this study will help recreation program managers design and deliver programs that are more effective at attracting and retaining youth. In particular, we hope to encourage program providers to consider the role of employment skills learning that are both directly and indirectly learned through recreation programming. Leadership programming and employability skills learning can play an important role in reducing at-risk behaviour, encouraging youth to set goals that keep them in school and improving youth's chance for finding meaningful employment in the future.

## BACKGROUND

Prosocial recreation teaches positive social values through life skills training, social involvement and/or personal development. Prosocial programs provide positive social interaction, contribute to community projects, give a sense of political processes or commit to a moral-ethical ideology.<sup>1</sup> They focus on developing youths' self-confidence, their sense of civic engagement and building life skills. The important prosocial and community benefits from these programs are matched by the personal development skills youth gain from these activities.

There are many recreation programs in Canada that aim to develop youth's skills through volunteer work, community involvement, and self-development. A report prepared for the Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation (MCZCR) found that prosocial recreation has a lasting and positive impact on individual and collective social outcomes.<sup>2</sup> They also note, however, that social benefits ~ like tendency for life-long civic engagement, community involvement, and reduction of at-risk behaviours ~ are only evident if exposure to prosocial recreation happens during a person's youth. The lasting impact becomes much less with adult participants.<sup>3</sup>

Several recreation programs make prosocial activities and value development a major component of their curriculum. Leadership programs explicitly target the development of leadership skills and generally teach the following components:

- ◆ The ability to take on roles that help others in their community or in groups
- ◆ self-confidence
- ◆ self-motivation
- ◆ decision-making
- ◆ ability to see tasks to completion
- ◆ being a positive influence over others
- ◆ communication of ideas or feelings
- ◆ taking responsibility for one's actions<sup>4</sup>

Other programs encourage positive body-image, healthy living habits, and positive social interaction while encouraging team-building, life skills learning and community involvement. For this study, we have called these 'Empowerment programs.' Other are specifically geared to teach youth about career development, or place youth in community volunteer positions, or positions of decision-making.

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<sup>1</sup> MCZCR, *Youth At Risk: Resource Needs Assessment* (1998) p. 4

<sup>2</sup> Canadian Institute of Child Health, *Recreation and Citizenship: A Review of Research Trends, Gaps and Future Directions* (2002), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

## At-Risk Behaviour Prevention and Prosocial Recreation

There are several studies that explore the larger societal spin-offs of recreation. Gina Browne, a researcher at McMaster University, has demonstrated in a number of studies how recreation can serve a preventative role in reducing health care costs, alleviating poverty, improving communities and offsetting social spending costs generally.<sup>5</sup>

MCZCR commissioned a study in 1998 that showed that recreation could play a role in reducing youth-related risk factors.<sup>6</sup> This study focused on recreation as an effective means to reduce youth violent or dangerous social behaviours. The Ministry found that a successful recreation system should be based on a vision that encourages:

- good physical health
- a sense of well-being with a positive feeling of self
- skills to make positive life choices
- the ability to establish relationships with peers and adult role models
- a sense of psychological well-being<sup>7</sup>

With these components, the Ministry found that recreation could facilitate healthy development in youth and children. They listed activities that would lead to this healthy development:

- allow for a combination of self-directed and staff-directed activities with plenty of choice
- reflect both assessed and expressed needs
- provide opportunities for active participation and passive reflection
- encourage imaginative play, inquisitiveness, thoughtfulness
- provide leadership opportunities where possible
- incorporate the varied learning styles and development stages
- value and incorporate cultural, racial and linguistic diversity.<sup>8</sup>

The report found that these activities help young participants avoid becoming ‘at-risk youth.’ Social or volunteerism-related recreation has been found to lead to positive individual and social outcomes. Prosocial programs are linked to creating positive educational trajectories and low rates of involvement in risky behaviour. This is not necessarily true for all recreation involvement: participation in sports, for example, has been linked to high risky behaviour.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Gina Browne, “Making the Case for Youth Recreation. Integrated Service Delivery: More Effective and Less Expensive,” in *Ideas that Matter*, 2:3 (2002).

<sup>6</sup> MCZCR, *Youth At Risk: Resource Needs Assessment* (1998) p. 4

<sup>7</sup> MCZCR, *Overview Document: Children and Youth Recreation, Sport and Physical Activity* (1998), p. 10

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3

## The Prosocial Recreation Program Typology

As noted above, there is a range of ways that prosocial development can be imparted through recreation. We developed a typological breakdown of prosocial programs in order to best understand the similarities and differences within this range. We arrived at this breakdown through a web-based review of recreation programs across the country. We found a large number of initiatives that focus on youth development, target at-risk youth and aim to help youth into successful adulthood through prosocial recreation or prosocial value development.

The following section divides prosocial programs into 5 different types, defining some of the major components of each.

**Leadership Training.** A Leadership Training program is “intended to develop participants into leaders.”<sup>10</sup> Two examples are The Boys and Girls Club’s Keystone Clubs and YMCA’s Leaders in Training programs. Keystone Club, for youth 14 and up, is a leadership development program that focuses on leadership, education and career development, economic/political awareness and social recreation. The YMCA’s Leaders in Training is a leadership development program for teens that teaches leadership skills through information sessions, hands-on leadership, and certification opportunities. These programs are designed to teach leadership skills through a combination of lesson and hands-on experience and have leadership development as the central and primary goal. Municipalities and philanthropic organizations also host local leadership training programs. These also promote leadership training for adolescents.

**Youth Advisory.** These programs place youth in positions of decision-making through youth councils. Often, youth are able to contribute to decision-making within the organization by sitting on committees and with guidance from the recreation staff. For example, the Government of Saskatchewan’s Badlands Recreation Association have made their Youth Council a key aspect to recreational programming and planning. In 2003, there were 110 youth in original youth councils. Youth are involved in all Association programming while the staff help secure funding. The Badlands Recreation Association Inc. is a volunteer organization whose purpose is to facilitate the interests of recreation, culture and sport within the boundaries of the Badlands Region. Youth involvement in program planning and development is one of their key strategies for youth retention.<sup>11</sup> Another example is the Boys and Girls Club’s National Youth Council which also provides youth representation to the organization. Youth serve as ambassadors and role models throughout the organization, influencing decision-making at the national level on issues related to youth.

The Youth Advisory programs are in many ways similar to Leadership programs. Many of these also purport to teach youth leadership skills through lessons and hands-on experience and, as is

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<sup>10</sup> J.M. Wood, *Practicing Leadership: Effective Practices in Leadership Development Programs for Youth Aged 10 to 15, Workshop Manual*. (Toronto, 1999), p. 23

<sup>11</sup> For more information about The Badlands Recreation Association, see the Government of Saskatchewan’s Culture, Youth and Recreation website at [www.cyr.gov.sk.ca](http://www.cyr.gov.sk.ca)

the case of the Boys and Girls Club and the YMCA, are often listed together with the Leadership Training Programs. We have categorized them separately because Youth Advisory programs usually have an additional focus or motivation that differ from Leadership Training programs. While still imparting leadership skills in a learning environment, Youth Advisory Councils can also be established in order to improve an organization's connection to its members by involving youth in planning and program development. A youth's motivation for joining these councils could therefore differ from those in Leadership programs if their primary interest is to contribute to the organization. Therefore, we separated these programs in order to distinguish this potential motivation.

**Youth Empowerment.** There are several youth recreation programs that are not called 'leadership training' and do not explicitly aim to train youth to become leaders, but all the same, do impart critical skills like self-confidence, self-motivation, communication of ideas and feeling and so on. The Personal Development Course offered at the Community Youth Network in Happy Valley Goose Bay, Newfoundland, for example, teaches youth 'self-leadership' skills by providing training on nutrition, bullying or self-esteem. Another example is The Municipality of Burnaby, British Columbia, Parks, Recreation & Cultural Services' Girls Groups. These groups provide a safe environment where teen and pre-teen girls learn about body image, healthy eating, safe sex, etc. This category therefore includes a range of prosocial programs where youth development is the central component while leadership skills development plays a less central role.

**Volunteer Exploration.** A fourth type specifically targets job training, volunteer exploration or employment skills development. For example, the 4-H Club of Ontario runs a recreation program that teaches youth about credit-unions. The goal is to introduce youth to skills needed to start a career in credit-union banking. Other programs give youth the opportunity to volunteer in their community. These programs coordinate volunteer placements, help youth contribute to the community and support their volunteer work.

**Youth-Run Initiatives.** A final category of prosocial program is youth-run, or youth-conceived. These are conceived, run and coordinated by the youth themselves, often housed in recreation organizations. Unfortunately, while there are a number of examples of these programs, our research was unable to reach youth in these programs to survey their motivations. One interesting example is Skatepark.org ~ an international network of youth coordinating skate parks in their communities. The network is connected on line. Youth find resources, volunteers and assistance through international chat groups of youth who have successfully established community skate parks. Several communities across Canada have groups of youth who are part of this network, mostly at this point trying to get a park started or improved for local skaters. Other examples include the Laidlaw-sponsored De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig Theatre Group, a youth for youth project in the James Bay Lowlands in Northern Ontario that engages youth in community initiatives. Future research may probe these dynamic programs in detail.

## Employability Skills Development

The skills that are developed through recreation are also critical to developing employability skills. Increasingly, employers are finding that ‘soft skills’ like people skills, team work and communication make up the greatest skills shortage among new hires. An Industry Canada report asked employers across Canada about skills shortages and the types of skills they require from their workforce. Employers mostly identified the types of skills that are developed not through technical training but through exposure to leadership development.<sup>12</sup> Recognizing that employers are asking for non-technical skills as much as, if not more than, technical skills, youth employment counsellors encourage youth to develop and gain experience in problem-solving, leadership, and the ability to work well with others.

Our research shows that all five types of prosocial programs in our typology expose youth to many of these ‘soft skills’ that can help them find work in the future. Often, youth leadership training and employment supports are jointly hosted programs. Newfoundland and Labrador’s Community Youth Network, for example, provides services that are intended to enhance youth opportunities for participating in social and economic development by focusing on learning, employment, community building and supportive services.<sup>13</sup> The Network links employment counselling, school districts, health and welfare services and recreation programs that include the Boys and Girls Clubs, Boy Scouts/Girl Guides and community service programs. The YMCA hosts youth employment centres and frequently links leadership in training programs and employment services. The YMCA-Mississauga in Ontario, for example, is providing a new Leadership Training recreation through its youth employment centre.

The recreation activities that can help build employability skills can vary. As noted above, Youth Advisory Counsels place youth in positions of decision making; Leadership programs provide hands-on learning in these areas; Empowerment programs engage youth in a wide variety of activities that are fun, give them a chance to meet people and provide positive spaces while teaching them responsibility, teamwork and leadership skills; Volunteer Exploration expose youth to the community or potential career fields through volunteer placements. Within each type, there are a variety of activities that are employment-related. For example, one YMCA Leadership Training programmer described this variety as teaching leadership, volunteerism, and self-management. She notes:

We have a lot of discussion here. They volunteer in the resource center. We talk about fundraisers and events. They adopted a park and had to clean it. We also do gift-wrapping for Christmas.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Expert Panel on Skills, *Stepping Up: Skills and Opportunities in the Knowledge Economy, Report of the Expert Panel on Skills Canada*. (Ottawa, 2000) p. 25

<sup>13</sup> For more details, see the Newfoundland and Labrador government website: [www.gov.nf.ca/youth/cyn.htm](http://www.gov.nf.ca/youth/cyn.htm)

<sup>14</sup> OAYEC Interview, July 2003.

There is a recognition among prosocial recreation providers that leadership training, life skills and community volunteer initiatives can proactively reduce a youth's chance of becoming at-risk of poverty and getting caught in cycles of unemployment. Exposure to prosocial activity can build youths' self-confidence and engage them in positive activities that are good for their health and personal development. These attributes have been found to go a long way to improve a youth's outcomes throughout their lives. Most of the programs we researched for this report are part of a strategy to reach out to at-risk youth and help them get the supports they need early in life - this includes employability skills, learning how to find work and/or how to work well with others in team environments.

## YOUTH MOTIVATIONS IN JOINING PROSOCIAL RECREATION PROGRAMS: SURVEY FINDINGS<sup>15</sup>

We asked those who participate in prosocial programs about why they chose to start the program and whether they plan to return next year.<sup>16</sup> The youth who responded to our survey generally agree that fun, the chance to do and learn something new and to meet new people are the most important and appealing aspects of recreation. Our findings suggest that those in all programs respond well to certain aspects of leadership and/or employability training.

Initially, we found some patterns that seemed associated with the organization delivering the program. However, when controlled for program type, these differences tend to disappear. For the most part, there did not seem to be as great a pattern in responses that would, for example, identify that those in Municipal programs held collective motivations that differed from those in YMCA programs.

### **Race/Ethnicity, Class and Gender**

Several studies have found lower levels of minority participation in political and recreation programs. A study on youth recreation participation in the United States found that the effect of race or ethnicity in determinants of participation disappears when socioeconomic characteristics are controlled.<sup>17</sup> This means that class (socioeconomic status) plays a key role in determining participation, and that racial or ethnic minorities tend to be heavily represented in poorer/marginalized socioeconomic groups. For this reason, it is important to consider both class and race as closely intertwined in statistical analyses. Unfortunately, our data from this survey was not able to identify economic status of participants and therefore prevented us from controlling for socioeconomic status.

We also look at gender differences. More girls than boys responded to our survey, with a 58% female response rate. Again, it appears that other factors tend to overshadow gender as a determinant. Generally, program type seems to indicate preferences, satisfaction and motivation more than gender differences.

### **Age as a Determinant**

Age is also a key consideration for our analysis. When considering questions like why a youth signs up for a program, how much parents or peers influenced their decision or whether future career options is a motivator, age becomes a critical factor. Many of these options could come

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<sup>15</sup> See Appendix for complete survey questions and results.

<sup>16</sup> As noted above, we did not receive survey responses from Youth-Run programs. Therefore, we have not included these in our detailed analyses.

<sup>17</sup> Eric Lock and Joan Costello, *Determinants of Youth Participation in Primary Support Programs*. Chapin Hall Centre for Children (2001)

down to the participant's maturity level or their stage of development. Surprisingly though, there are only a few patterns in responses that seem to relate to age. These are explored in more detail below.

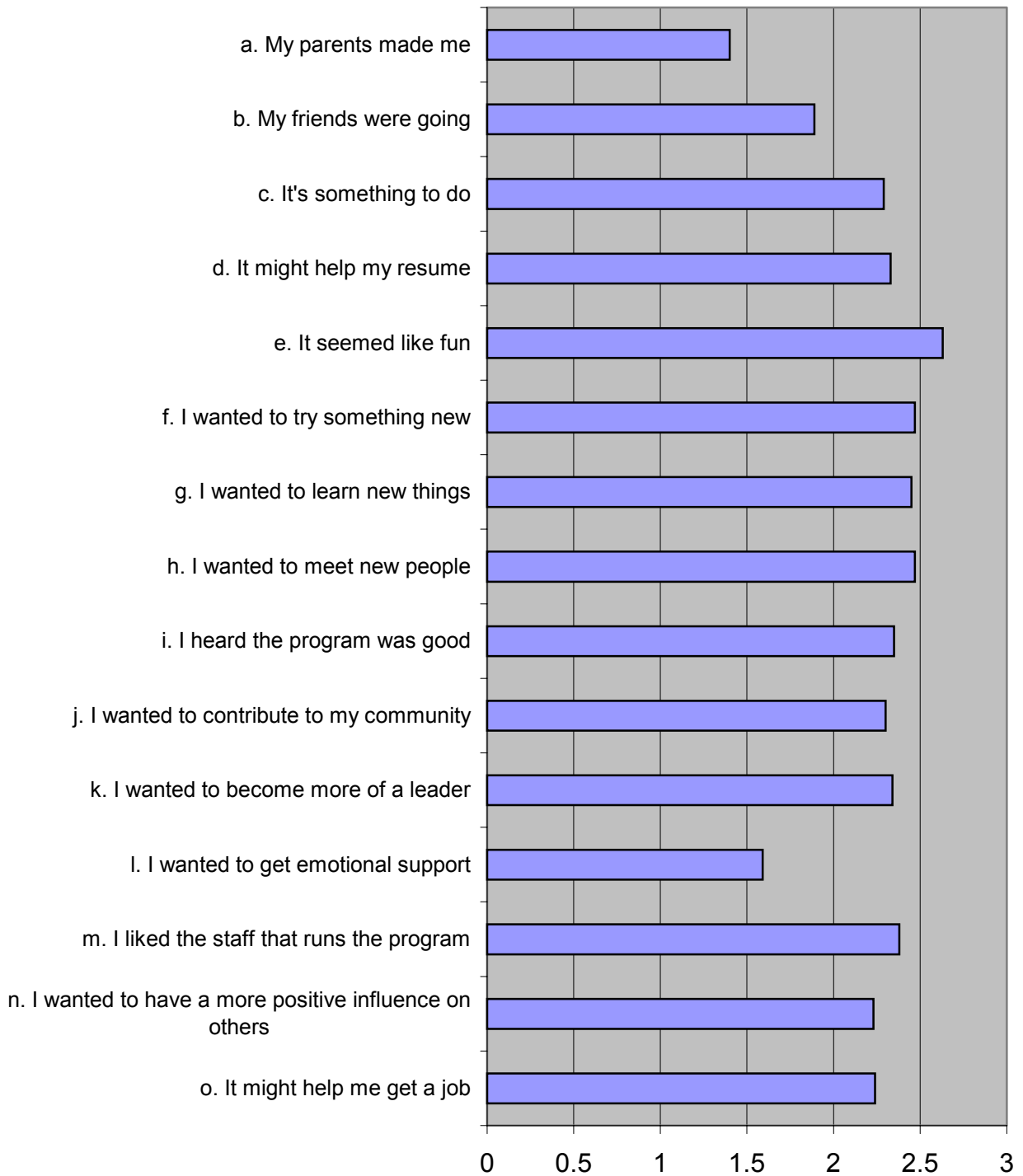
### **Motivations for Starting a Prosocial Recreation Program**

Our research indicates that youth 13 and up are the primary decision-makers when it comes to signing up for recreation programs: 84% say that they wanted to sign up for the program they are in; 55% say that they make the decision alone while 37% say that they decide together with their parents or guardian.

Youth in Leadership and Advisory programs are largely responsible for this high response: 90% of Advisory Council and 88% Leadership Training respondents answered 'yes' when asked if they wanted to sign up for the program while only 70% of Empowerment and 61% Volunteer Exploration respondents answered 'yes' to this question.

The following chart lists the average response to possible motivations for starting the program. Responses are rated out of three. A one indicates that the respondent found the motivation 'not important,' two is 'somewhat important' and three is 'very important.'

What were the most important reasons that made you decide to start participating in this program at this organization?



### **Parental and Peer Influence by Age**

We asked youth in a very direct way whether they joined the program to please their parents. Not surprisingly, the majority gave low agreement with the sign-up motivation ‘my parents made me.’ Only 7% rate this as very important when deciding to sign up for the program. A third of respondents reported that it was not important, 26% say that it was somewhat important.

Respondents reported a relatively low agreement rate that their friends played a role in their decision to sign up for the program. One quarter said that this was very important, 36% report that it was not important and 39% said that it was somewhat important. Peer influence received the third lowest rating overall on a scale of importance.

However, it appears word of mouth plays a role in the decision to start the program. Half of respondents said that hearing that the program was good was very important in their decision to sign up while 37% said that this was somewhat important.

### **Staff as Motivator**

We asked youth whether staff played a role in their decision to join the program. As may be expected, and will be discussed in greater detail below, liking the staff plays a greater role in retaining than attracting the youth. Still, 52% say that ‘I liked the staff that runs the program’ was very important when deciding to start participating. 34% said that it was somewhat important.

There is some variation in the role of staff as motivator between the older and younger cohort: 55% of 13 to 15 year olds said that liking the staff was very important while 47% of 16 to 18 year olds said that it was very important.

### **Intrinsic motivators**

‘Intrinsic’ motivations like wanting to have fun and do new things appear to be the number one reasons why youth start participating in recreation. These motivations are intrinsic because they relate to internal, personal benefits that do not necessarily manifest into external benefits like pleasing other people or leading to a better paying job or job opportunities. Overall, the top reason youth gave for starting in the program was that ‘it seemed like fun.’ One third rated this as ‘very important.’

The following top reasons for starting a recreation program were related to the opportunity to do something new. More than half (57%) of respondents reported that ‘I wanted to learn new things’ was very important when deciding to start participating, 31% said that it was somewhat important. The same number (57%) also said that ‘I wanted to meet new people’ was very important while 33% said that it was somewhat important. ‘I wanted to try something new’ received almost identical rating with 56% rating this option as very important and 35% saying that it was somewhat important. These three options were the top responses for importance in their decision to start the program.

Other intrinsic motivations were not rated as being highly important in the youth's decision to start in the program. Much fewer respondents agreed that they decided to start participating in the program to get emotional support. Only 13% rated this as very important, while 53% said that getting emotional support was not at all important.

#### **'Soft Skills'/Employment Skills Development as Motivator:**

In order to determine leadership skills development in youth motivations, we asked respondents about their level of agreement with several possible 'soft-skill' motivators for starting their program. More than three-quarters (77%) agreed that participating in the program improves their leadership ability, 72% agreed that the program makes them feel more self-confident, and 77% said that participating in the program gets them more involved in their community.

However, 49% said that the desire to become more of a leader was very important in their decision to sign up for the program. More than a third (35%) said that it was somewhat important, 44% said that the chance to contribute to their communities was a very important consideration, 40% said that 'because they wanted to have a more positive influence over others' was very important.

#### **Job and Career Building as Motivator**

There was slightly less agreement that these programs help them get a job. Overall, 69% said that participating in the program might help them get a job. Fewer agreed that the program helps them figure out what they might like to do for a job: 54% overall agreed to this statement. A lower percentage among the older cohort gave high agreement that the program would help them decide on a career path: 49% of 16 to 18 year olds agreed that the program helps them figure out what they want to do for a job, while 59% of 13 to 15 year olds agreed with this statement.

Questions also probed to what extent youth decide to **start** in a recreation program because of career or job considerations. These were rated comparatively lower in importance than other options. Forty-three (43) percent said that 'because it might help my resume' was a very important consideration, while 44% said that it was somewhat important. As well, 44% said that 'because it might help me get a job' was very important when deciding to start the program. A third (32%) said that it was somewhat important. This suggests that employment and career building is a moderately important consideration when youth are deciding to start in the program but it is not as important as the intrinsic motivations, listed above.

Once again, a lower percentage of the older youth rated employment and career development options as very important motivators to start participating in the program. Half (52%) of 13 to 15 year olds said that 'because it might help me get a job' was a very important reason to start the program but only 30% of 16 to 18 year olds rated this as a very important reason. Likewise, 'because it might help my resume' is rated as less important among the older group. Whereas 55% of 13 to 15 year olds say that helping their resume was a very important reason for their decision to start the program, only 40% of 16 to 18 year olds saw this as very important.

It is interesting to note that it is only with these two employment-related questions to we see a marked difference in the responses between the older and younger youth. All other options have almost identical responses for the older and younger respondents.

Anecdotally, we found that youth do think about employment or the possibility of finding a job through the recreation program. We asked program providers whether they felt that job skills learning was important for participants. One noted:

The possibility of a job is exciting for youth. The motivation here is more social, not necessarily economic, since [this] is a fairly affluent area. They do it because it looks good on a resume. Others do it for their 40 hours requirement.<sup>18</sup>

Another found that “they are aware they are gaining skills that will help in the workplace, such as organizational skills, motivational skills, and leadership.”<sup>19</sup> A coordinator of a Volunteer Exploration program noted: “they use it for career exploration and academic exploration.”<sup>20</sup> Another noted that employment does end up playing a role even if the youth do not start off seeing the program as an opportunity to find work, noting “they don’t expect to have a job. Some of them even end up working [here] because they develop their skills.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Retention: Returning to the Program Next Year**

Most respondents (87%) overall say that they would return next year if they could. Three quarters (75%) indicate that they have already participated in recreation at the organization for more than one year.

The high number who say they would like to return tells us a lot about program success when we compare the number to those who said their wanted to sign up in the first place. The overall percentage who wanted to sign up was 84%. Broken down by program type we find the following:

Program Type	Percentage of respondents who answered ‘yes’	
	‘I wanted to sign up for this program.’	‘If it were up to me, I’d sign up for this program next year.’
Leadership	88%	90%
Advisory	90%	79%
Empowerment	70%	73%
Volunteer Exploration	61%	85%

<sup>18</sup> OAYEC interview, August 2003.

<sup>19</sup> OAYEC interview, August 2003.

<sup>20</sup> OAYEC interview, August 2003.

<sup>21</sup> OAYEC interview, January 2004.

**ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF YOUTH EMPLOYMENT CENTRES**  
***Starting and Staying on Track: Youth Motivations in participating in Recreation***

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Note that respondents in Volunteer Exploration programs ~ who had the lowest rate of desire to sign up for the program ~ now have the second highest rate of respondents who would choose to return. Eighty-five (85) percent of this group say they like to come back. The large number who indicated that they did not want to sign up (or were not sure if they wanted to) **and** say that their choice would be to return suggests that the Volunteer Exploration programs that we surveyed are highly successful in appealing their youth.

Only Advisory programs see a decrease from those who wanted to join and who want to continue. Still with a relatively high rate, 79% say that they would choose to return, down from 90% who wanted to join. Because we asked youth to consider their desire for returning and not whether or not they would be able or allowed to return (because of, for example, a maximum number of years for participation), this finding implies that youth in this group are being repelled from the program for some reason.

We asked those who said they did not want to return to rate their agreement with possible reasons for their decision. Unfortunately, too few respondents chose to answer this section of the survey for us to draw conclusions about what specifically made them change their minds. The majority who did not answer 'yes' answered that they 'do not know' if they will return. Only 7 out of 365 overall chose the option 'no' when asked if they want to return. Only 6 filled in the section that probed for their reasons. Popular options among this 6, in were #1: 'I need to get a job instead,' #2: 'it won't help me get a job,' and #3: 'I didn't like the staff that run the program.' With so few responses though it is hard to say whether these answers are representative.

Some program providers did speculate on why youth might not return. One notes: "The double cohort is putting so much pressure on young people, that they're too busy studying ~ or just going back to school ~ to participate."<sup>22</sup> Other interviewees also suggest that school work is an influence, noting that many of their participants simply do not have the time to juggle school work, friends and recreation. Organized recreation programs tend to lose out to these pressures.

### **Duration of Participation at an Organization**

Many have been participating at a recreation organization for a sustained period. The following chart shows the average number of years of participation at *one organization* ~ broken down by provider:

**Approximately how long have you been participating in recreation programs at this organization?**

<u>Organization</u>	<u>Average in years</u>
The YMCA	2.3
Boys and Girls Club	3.8
Municipalities	1.6

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<sup>22</sup> OAYEC interview, December 2003.

Other

2.9

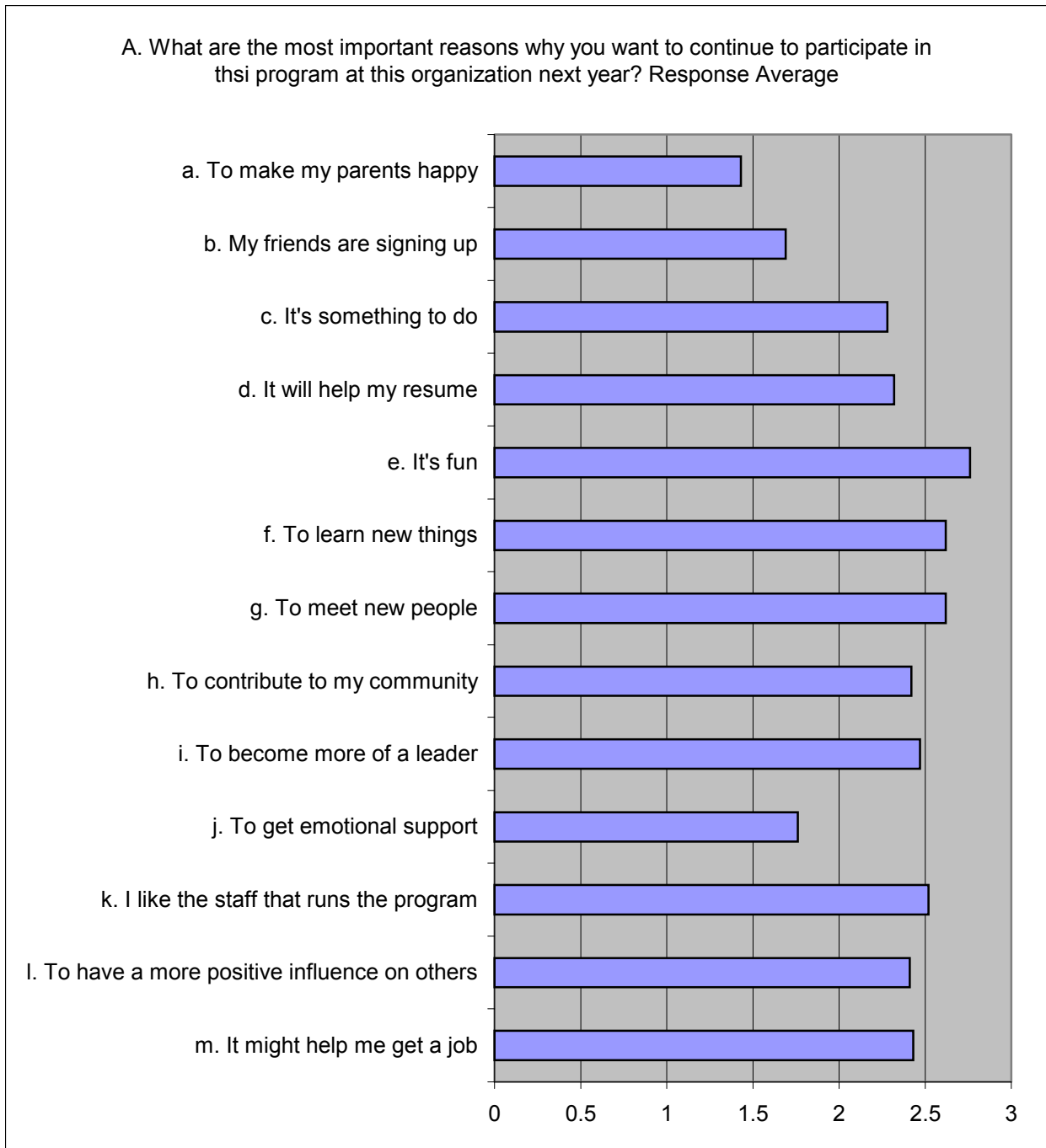
A closer look at the data shows that, in all organizations, there is a mix of youth who have participated for a long time ~ up to 12 years ~ and those who have participated for only a couple months.

### **Motivations to Continue**

In order to test possible changes in motivation, our survey gave respondents the same or similar options for possible motivations for starting and returning. Our research shows that, generally, the reasons why a youth starts in a program matches the reasons they decide to continue. The top options that youth said were very important reasons why they want to continue participating in recreation with the organization next year are:

1. 'because it is fun' (78%)
2. 'to meet new people' (67%)
3. 'to learn new things' (66%)

The following chart lists the average response rate to possible motivations to continue in the program. These are rated on a scale of three, one indicates that the respondent finds the motivation 'not important' as a reason to return to the organization next year, two indicates that the motivation is 'somewhat important,' and three that it is 'very important.'



As with the ‘start motivators’, reasons for continuing to participate ‘to make my parents happy’ and ‘because my friends are signing up’ were rated as low importance in their decision to continue. Two-thirds (67%) said that parental influence was not important and only 11% said it was very important; 48% said that peer influence was not important and only 17% said that it was very important.

**ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF YOUTH EMPLOYMENT CENTRES**  
***Starting and Staying on Track: Youth Motivations in participating in Recreation***

---

For every group, ‘because I like the staff that runs the program’ gets a higher agreement rate as a motivation to continue over a motivation to start the program. Overall, 61% said that staff was very important in their decision to continue participating in recreation at the organization. This is up from 52% who said that it was very important in deciding to start the program.

Many extrinsic motivations and soft-skills development get moderately high ratings as important reasons to continue in the program. More than half (54%) said that ‘to contribute to my community’ was a very important reason to continue participating; 57% said that ‘to become more of a leader’ was very important; 51% said that ‘to have a more positive influence on others’ was very important.

**Employment**

Most respondents report that they were not working at the time of the survey. Two-thirds (62%) reported not working at all, 23% hold a part-time year-round job. This may relate to the age groups that responded to our survey: as noted above only 18% of our respondents are in grade 11 or above. It may be the case that those who do find work also leave recreation. As noted above, our limited responses on why participants chose not to come back do suggest that work plays a role in their decision. ‘I need to get a job instead,’ ‘It won’t help me get a job,’ and ‘It won’t help my resume’ were the top three reasons for not returning among those who filled out this section. A reminder, though, that too few respondents filled out this section for us to confidently draw conclusions that these responses are representative of the whole.

**What were the most important reasons why you want to continue participating in this organization next year?**

		‘it will help my resume’		‘it might help me get a job’	
	<i>n</i>	<i>somewhat important</i>	<i>very important</i>	<i>somewhat important</i>	<i>very important</i>
13 to 15 years old	197	29%	55%	33%	52%
16 to 18 years old	109	37%	39%	38%	45%

This breakdown shows that a statistically significant higher number of the younger youth indicate that ‘it will help my resume’ and ‘it might help me get a job’ are very important motivations to continue participating in recreation with an organization. Our findings suggest that these two employment-related motivations are less important as motivations for the 16 to 18 year old age group. All other options have almost identical responses for the older and younger respondents.

This is interesting because we expected to find that youth in the 16 to 18 age group would be more likely to consider employment-related skills building as a motivation in recreation because they are more likely than the younger age group to be of working age. Among respondents to our survey, 33.6% of 16 to 18 year olds were working part-time, year round, compared to 18.6% of 13 to 15 year olds who said they were working part-time, year-round at the time of filling in the survey.

Although many programs aim to help youth find a job ~ many even aim to hire participants within the organization through Leadership or other programs ~ fewer older youth rated resume building as a very important motivation to continue in the program.

## CONCLUSION

The range of prosocial recreation programs that make up this analysis all engage participants in activities that help them gain the experiences, skills and confidence that can help them contribute to their communities and build important life skills.

Employability skills development plays a complicated role in youth motivations in recreation. Youth do identify that they are thinking about the longer term benefits of what they are learning in recreation. Most indicate that it plays at least a moderate role in their decision to participate. What is critical is that youth are made aware of the additional and long-term benefits of what they are learning. Respondents in all types of programs show some recognition that what they are learning while having fun and learning new things can also be beneficial to their future outcomes. We could ask, however, whether those who are ranking employment skills as a low priority are aware that they can put their recreation experiences on their resume. This is especially relevant to the older cohort. The skills and experience they gain from these programs can make it substantially easier for a young person to convince a potential employer that they have enough experience to do a job. In this case, recreation experience can take the place of work experience on a resume when a youth has not worked before.

It is not a negative finding ~ indeed it may be a positive finding ~ that youth in Empowerment programs and older youth overall largely do not emphasize work and career as a motivation for participating in recreation. It means that many are in recreation for recreation sake, to have fun and meet people and not to impress employers. However, providers should ensure that their participants do leave the program recognizing that what they have learned and the experiences they have gained could one day help them get their first jobs. This could help ensure that what the youth are gaining from the program also helps them find meaningful employment down the road.

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**ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF YOUTH EMPLOYMENT CENTRES**

***Starting and Staying on Track: Youth Motivations in participating in Recreation***

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## **APPENDIX**

The following pages are the survey results summary for overall responses.

What organization delivers this program?

	<b>Response Total</b>
The Boys' and Girls' Club	91
The YMCA / YWCA	120
The City or Town / Municipality	68
Other (please specify)	84
Total Respondents	363
(skipped this question)	2

Are you participating in other recreation programs at this organization?

	<b>Response Total</b>
Yes	188
No	156
Total Respondents	344
(skipped this question)	9

Approximately how long have you been participating in recreation programs at this organization?

	<b>Response Total</b>
years	243
months	85
Total Respondents	325
(skipped this question)	40

Are you participating in recreation programs at any other organizations?

	<b>Response Total</b>
Yes	130
No	222
Total Respondents	352
(skipped this question)	7

**ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF YOUTH EMPLOYMENT CENTRES**  
***Starting and Staying on Track: Youth Motivations in participating in Recreation***

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Please circle the appropriate number to indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
a. Participating in this program improves my leadership ability:	10	9	65	122
b. Participating in this program makes me feel more self-confident:	3	13	86	159
c. Participating in this program makes me feel like I can reach my goals:	8	14	122	132
d. Participating in this program helps me figure out what I might like to do for a job:	19	41	107	106
e. Participating in this program may help me get a job:	12	25	75	119
f. Participating in this program gets me more involved in my community:	6	9	65	123
g. Participating in this program allows me to have a more positive influence over other people:	13	16	78	132
h. Participating in this program improves my ability to solve problems:	15	23	121	123
Total Respondents	361			
(skipped this question)	4			

Did you want to sign up for this program?

	<b>Response Total</b>
Yes	298
No	11
Don't Know	44
Total Respondents	353
(skipped this question)	5

Who decides what programs you sign up for?

	<b>Response Total</b>
I decide alone	197
My parents/guardians decide	12
My parents/guardians and I decide together	133
Other (please specify)	12
Total Respondents	354
(skipped this question)	6

**ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF YOUTH EMPLOYMENT CENTRES**  
***Starting and Staying on Track: Youth Motivations in participating in Recreation***

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What were the most important reasons that made you decide to start participating in this program at this organization?

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>Response Average</b>
a. My parents made me	241	94	25	1.4
b. My friends were going	128	137	90	1.89
c. It's something to do	48	156	151	2.29
d. It might help my resume	59	118	177	2.33
e. It seemed like fun	15	101	239	2.63
f. I wanted to try something new	32	127	201	2.47
g. I wanted to learn new things	42	113	204	2.45
h. I wanted to meet new people	35	119	205	2.47
i. I heard the program was good	50	132	174	2.35
j. I wanted to contribute to my community	49	150	154	2.3
k. I wanted to become more of a leader	56	127	178	2.34
l. I wanted to get emotional support	190	122	45	1.59
m. I liked the staff that runs the program	51	120	186	2.38
n. I wanted to have a more positive influence on others	63	149	143	2.23
o. It might help me get a job	70	131	156	2.24
Total Respondents	361			
(skipped this question)	4			

p. Please add any additional reasons below:

Total Respondents	80
(skipped this question)	285

If it were up to you would you continue to participate in programs at this organization next year?

	<b>Response Total</b>
Yes	312
No	7
Don't Know	39
Total Respondents	358
(skipped this question)	6

**ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF YOUTH EMPLOYMENT CENTRES**  
***Starting and Staying on Track: Youth Motivations in participating in Recreation***

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A. What are the most important reasons why you want to continue to participate in this program at this organization next year?

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>Response Average</b>
a. To make my parents happy	208	68	33	1.43
b. My friends are signing up	149	106	53	1.69
c. It's something to do	47	130	133	2.28
d. It will help my resume	51	106	149	2.32
e. It's fun	7	59	240	2.76
f. To learn new things	12	91	201	2.62
g. To meet new people	16	86	205	2.62
h. To contribute to my community	35	107	164	2.42
i. To become more of a leader	29	102	173	2.47
j. To get emotional support	136	108	63	1.76
k. I like the staff that runs the program	28	91	186	2.52
l. To have a more positive influence on others	31	117	154	2.41
m. It might help me get a job	40	90	170	2.43
Total Respondents	310			
(skipped this question)	55			

n. Please add any additional reasons below:

Total Respondents	32
(skipped this question)	333

B. What are the most important reasons why you do not want to continue to participate in this program at this organization next year?

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>Response Average</b>
a. It's too expensive	2	4	0	1.67
b. My friends aren't going to	3	2	1	1.67
c. It won't help my resume	2	2	2	2
d. It's not fun	2	4	0	1.67
e. I didn't learn anything	3	2	1	1.67
f. Not enough people my age	3	2	1	1.67
g. I didn't feel I contributed to my community	3	3	0	1.5
h. It didn't help me become more of a leader	2	3	0	1.6
i. I didn't get emotional support	4	1	1	1.5
j. I didn't like the staff that run the program	2	1	3	2.17
k. I didn't feel like I had a more positive influence on others	2	3	1	1.83
l. It won't help me get a job	1	2	3	2.33
m. I need to get a job instead	0	2	4	2.67
n. It's too hard to get transportation here	3	1	1	1.6

**ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF YOUTH EMPLOYMENT CENTRES**  
***Starting and Staying on Track: Youth Motivations in participating in Recreation***

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Total Respondents	6
(skipped this question)	359

o. Please add any additional reasons below:

Total Respondents	4
(skipped this question)	361

How old are you?

	<b>Response Total</b>
Under 13	34
13 to 15	197
16 to 18	109
19 or older	10
Total Respondents	350
(skipped this question)	7

What is your gender?

	<b>Response Total</b>
Male	148
Female	201
Total Respondents	349
(skipped this question)	6

Are you a member of a visible minority?

	<b>Response Total</b>
Yes	123
No	207
Total Respondents	330
(skipped this question)	15

Who do you live with?

	<b>Response Total</b>
Both parents	217
One parent	95
Alone	6
Foster care	7
Other (please specify)	18

**ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF YOUTH EMPLOYMENT CENTRES**  
***Starting and Staying on Track: Youth Motivations in participating in Recreation***

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Total Respondents	343
(skipped this question)	10

Are you a student?

	<b>Response Total</b>
Yes	332
No	14

Total Respondents	346
(skipped this question)	6

What level of school did you last complete?

	<b>Response Total</b>
Grade 5	18
Grade 6	18
Grade 7	48
Grade 8	75
Grade 9	71
Grade 10	49
Grade 11	46
Grade 12	10
Other :	5

Total Respondents	340
(skipped this question)	6

Do you have a job?

	<b>Response Total</b>
Yes full-time year-round	8
Yes part-time year-round	80
Yes full-time summer job	9
Yes part-time summer job	35
No	215

Total Respondents	347
(skipped this question)	8