

Jan 25, 2016

Dear Sandra and Outdoor Youth Connections,

Thank you for Outdoor Youth Connections' generous support of Youth Leadership Adventures in 2015. Your contribution provided scholarships to three students who otherwise would not have had the opportunity to participate in life-changing backcountry adventures and leadership training. We are excited to share this report with you about the program's successes this summer, as well as information about and testimonials from the particular students who received your scholarships.

This year **88 Youth Leadership Adventures students** (14-18 years old) and **two apprentices** spent 8- or 16-days in small groups canoe camping, backpacking and completing conservation service projects while developing leadership skills and learning about the local natural and cultural history of the North Cascades region. These students worked in small groups all summer long to contribute over **2000 hours of stewardship work** on public lands. They built and restored trails, campsites, and other recreational infrastructure; controlled invasive species; and restored riparian, alpine and forest habitat at sites across North Cascades National Park, and Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie and Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forests.

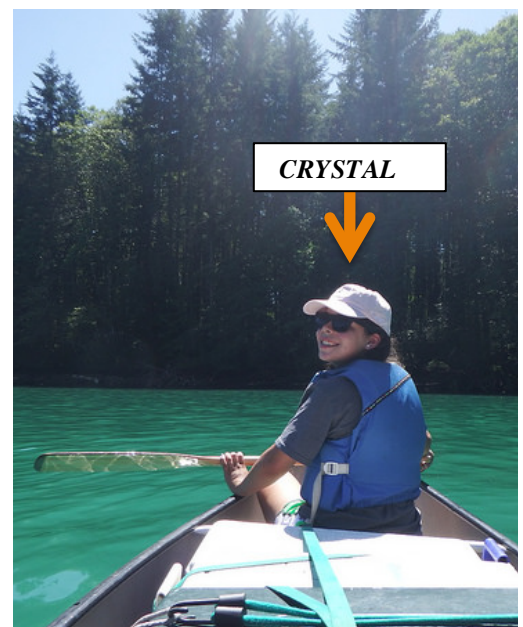
In 2015, **80% of the program's participants were underserved (low-income, minority, or both)**, which is up 4% from 2014. Two thirds of all participants speak a language other than or in addition to English at home, and collectively they **speak 15 unique languages**. Youth came from **33 Washington communities** plus three from out of state; most reside in King, Snohomish, Skagit, and Whatcom Counties. The demographics of our **61 Youth Leadership Conference participants** this fall mirrored our summer participants, but we were also able to extend invitations to youth enrolled in other outdoor leadership programs in the region (Student Conservation Association, US Forest Service interns, and others).

Gifts from Outdoor Youth Connections and other generous donors allowed us to give **individual scholarships to 90% of YLA participants** in 2015. In addition, *all* participants are subsidized in some way since there is no cost to attend the Youth Leadership Conference or Alumni Reunion, and course costs are higher than what students pay for tuition.

New and Notable

We introduced an **apprenticeship program** this year and our two apprentices added much value to the courses. Crystal Sierra, who just graduated from Mt. Vernon High School, is an excellent example of our Path for Youth Initiative, which works to engage students throughout childhood, adolescence, and into adulthood:

Crystal started in our Kulshan Creek Neighborhood program, participated in a YLA course in 2014, told her story publicly in front of 150 adults at an Outdoor Youth Connections event, organized a fun run at her school to raise money for the Kulshan Creek program and returned in 2015 as a YLA apprentice. She is the first person in her family to attend college and continues to motivate others. *"I haven't had the easiest life growing up . . . After this summer I felt like I could do anything. The leadership skills and confidence I gained is something I will never forget."* Read more about Crystal and others at <http://ncascades.org/support/impact-stories>.



We are excited to report that **5 alumni** from previous Youth Leadership Adventures Outdoor Leadership courses **returned to participate in Science and Sustainability courses** in 2015. Additionally, **19 youth** participants had **previously attended our 5th-grade program, Mountain School**.

We tried several new things this year. One Youth Leadership Adventures trip was planned as an **all backpacking course** this year and we also planned **two all-girl courses**. In addition to regular service work on the courses, two courses collected the first set of field observations for several **citizen science projects**, including our own Cascades Ecosystems Observations project (hosted on CitSci.org).

Outdoor Youth Connections Scholarship Recipients

Mia Villaluz is an 11th grader at Mount Baker High School in Acme, WA, and identifies as American Indian/Alaskan Native. Mia has done an extensive amount of hunting and fishing, cares strongly for wildlife and hopes to be a game warden. Mia was a successful wrestler at her school, and is outspoken about things she is passionate about.

Evan Long is a 12th grader at Astoria High School in Oregon. He was really excited to do a longer backpack and work on his senior project hours during his YLA trip. He is well spoken and excited about the possibility of doing trail work in the future.

Jasmine McKay is a 10th grader at Sehome High School in Bellingham, WA. She is a quiet leader and exceptionally creative. She makes a lot of her own clothing and plans to enter the fashion industry in the future. Jasmine participated in one of the all-girls courses this summer.



"I appreciate this scholarship so much. I am so excited to be in this program. It will help me in my journey of becoming a game warden. It will also be an amazingly fun experiment to spend with other kids who like the kind of stuff that I do and maybe have similar career choices. I can't thank you enough for this scholarship. It opens so many doors and opportunities for me now and in the future. I look forward to meeting everyone and spending some fun times in the great outdoors!"
- Mia Villaluz



Photos:

Link to best-of photos of 2015 Youth Leadership Adventures trips:
<https://northcascadesinstitute.smugmug.com/By-Permission/YLA/YLA-2015/>

Link to photos from the 2015 Youth Leadership Conference: <https://flic.kr/s/aHskqmxkH8>

Link to video of the 2015 Youth Leadership Conference (Mia, one of Outdoor Youth Connections' scholarship recipients is interviewed at 2 min 22 sec):
<https://youtu.be/ZqKAOPP2eL4>

Link to photos from Evan and Mia's trip:
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/ncascades/sets/72157656186177579/>

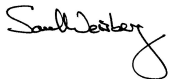
Select digital photos from Jasmine's trip are attached.

Media

Jessie Loerch with *The Herald* came to a Youth Leadership Visitor Day this summer and wrote this story about the program, which highlights student diversity:
<http://www.heraldnet.com/article/20150719/BLOG49/150719334/1172/Adventure-&-leadership>

Thank you again for your ongoing support. We are so grateful for your partnership – it makes a huge difference in students' lives and for our environment!

Sincerely,



Saul Weisberg
Executive Director

Attachments:

Thank you letters from Outdoor Youth Connections scholarship recipients
Photos from Jasmine McKay's trip