

Start2Finish Running and Reading Club Research Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines the two studies conducted with the Start2Finish Running and Reading Clubs of Toronto. The purpose of the first study was to gain an understanding of how youth leadership is experienced in youth programming. The purpose of the second study was to gain a better understanding of youth program quality. The studies were conducted with consenting club members and junior coaches that were involved in the club, collecting data through face-to-face interviews and surveys filled out by the participants. For the first study, junior coaches and club members were asked about their general experiences in the program, their interactions with each other and the adult leaders, and perceptions of their development. Findings indicated that through their interactions with the club members, as well as mentoring and guidance that they received from their previous junior coaches as well as previous and current adult coaches, the junior coaches have developed greater confidence in themselves, and attained life skills (e.g. leadership, communication, responsibility). Junior coaches also perceived that they had an influence on youth, by helping, teaching, and supporting them to develop new skills at the club. Club members led by these junior coaches perceived that their leaders helped to facilitate a more engaging environment, however, they attribute their development more to engagement in the activities themselves and the support of their adult leaders. Furthermore, both the junior coaches and the club members expressed how their involvement in the club and their positive interactions with one another helped them develop strong and trusting relationships. The second study involved measuring youth's perceptions of the quality of the Running and Reading club, the support they receive, their satisfaction of their needs, and their development of positive outcomes. Results indicated that the program provided opportunities for youth in skill-building and building relationships with one another, that youth perceived they received strong support and satisfaction for their psychological needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy, and the development of positive outcomes such as developing goal setting skills, initiative, and a stronger sense of one's self. The final section of this report provides recommendations based on the findings from the two studies, such as providing formal training for junior coaches, ways to provide leadership and mentoring opportunities to coaches, strategies to help encourage life skill development and life skill transfer, and strategies to encourage youth voice.

INTRODUCTION

Physical activity-based positive youth development (PYD) programs, such as the Running and Reading Club, can serve to empower and alleviate barriers to physical and psychosocial development for at-risk youth. Youth leaders can play an important role in fostering the development of youth in these programs, while mutually benefiting from the program as they foster and apply skills such as leadership, communication, and self-direction. Attempting to understand the importance of youth leadership in these programs is critical to help gain insight on how to alleviate barriers to development and help youth fulfill their potential.

This project was comprised of two studies to further examine the psychosocial development of youth and the role youth leaders can play in this process. This report presents the methods and findings of both studies. The purpose of the **first study** was to explore perspectives and experiences of youth leaders and program participants in Start2Finish's Running and Reading Club. More specifically, from the perspectives of youth leaders, this study sought to understand the general experiences of youth leaders, what they perceived as facilitating their development as a leader, their interactions with adult leaders and youth program participants, and their perceptions of their impact on youth in the program. From the perspectives of youth participants, this study sought to understand their general experiences, how they perceive the support they receive from their leaders, and how they perceive the youth leaders as facilitating their personal and social development.

Research questions

1. What factors are perceived by youth as facilitating their development as a leader?
2. How does being a youth leader impact their own development?
3. How do youth leaders perceive the impact they are having on program participants?
4. How do program participants perceive the youth leader's support in their development?

The **second study** outlined in this report focused on program quality of Start2Finish's Running and Reading club program. Program quality is a joint interest of researchers, policy makers, and practitioners in the youth-serving sector. Researchers are interested in understanding the impact youth programs are making on the development of youth. Policy and decision-makers want to ensure that resources are allocated to effective programs. At the practical level, organizations are constantly seeking resources that will help integrate best practices and allow them to assess and improve their programs. Specifically, understanding program quality within the sport and physical activity context is critical as sport and physical activity programming is the most popular extra-curricular activity for youth across Canada. The purpose of this second study is to understand youth perceptions on the quality of their programming.

Research questions

1. What are youths' perceptions of program quality?
2. Do youth feel they receive support from the program and their coaches for their basic psychological needs?
3. Are youth's basic psychological needs satisfied as they pertain to their sport?
4. Have youth attained positive outcomes from participation in the program?

This report is designed to provide your organization with feedback that we believe will help you continue to develop and implement effective programming to the youth you serve. This report will go over the two studies done with this club with data collected during the May-June 2016 clubhouse sessions. Each study will discuss the steps we took in completing the evaluation, and an overview of the findings which is further broken down into specific sections. The final section of this report will discuss program recommendations.



Study I: Exploring Youth Leadership

PURPOSE

To gain an understanding of how youth leadership is experienced in youth programming

METHODS

Program

Start2Finish Running and Reading Clubs of Toronto

Clubhouses

- Queen Victoria Public School
- Pauline Johnson Junior Public School
- Lord Dufferin Junior and Senior Public School
- North Kipling Junior Middle School

Participants

16 youth leaders (junior coaches)

- 8 male, 8 female
- Age range = 12 to 17 years old (Average = 13.37, SD¹ = 1.36)
- Length of involvement in Start2Finish = 1 to 7 years
- Length as a coach = 1 to 3 years (Average = 1.56, SD = 0.72)

15 youth participants (club members)

- 8 male, 7 female
- Age range = 9 to 11 years old (Average = 10.53, SD = 1.12)
- Length of involvement in Start2Finish = 1 to 7 years (Average = 2.90, SD = 1.44)

¹ SD: Standard Deviation. How measurements for a group are spread out from the average (mean), or expected value. A low standard deviation means that most of the numbers are very close to the average. A high standard deviation means that the numbers are spread out.

Procedure

Semi-structured interviews with all participants were conducted at the clubhouses in May and June of 2016 once consent procedures were completed. Interviews were focused on general experiences of youth in the program, their interactions with one another and the adult leaders, and their perceptions of their development. An appendix with the main interview questions asked to the junior coaches and club members is attached.

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed word-for-word and then read over at least twice. Analysis involved exploring the transcripts for patterns, ideas, and themes that could describe the phenomena that the participants were experiencing. This process was conducted by multiple researchers. Any quotations from the transcripts that were judged as significant or important by the researcher, were coded under a certain category that helps describe them (e.g. “the coaches would motivate me to keep running” would be classified under “encouragement”). Other quotations that were similar or relevant would also be classified into this category, forming a category group. This category group would then be compared with other category groups, where quotations within those groups could be transferred across category groups, and category groups could be re-defined (e.g. “encouragement” and “praise” were grouped together into “positive feedback”), until groups were relatively distinct from one another. Category groups that were similar to one another were then grouped into subthemes (e.g. “positive feedback” and “guidance and advice” were grouped into the subtheme “support”) and then these subthemes were grouped into a major theme (e.g. “support” and “role modelling” were grouped under the “mentorship” theme). These themes, subthemes, and category groups helped comprise the thematic map of analysis, to adequately the describe the experiences of youth leadership in this program.



FINDINGS

The findings from this evaluation have been separated into two sections. The first section focuses on the Junior Coaches Experiences and outlines the main themes that emerged from their experiences described in their interviews. Similarly, the second section focuses on the Club Members Experiences and outlines the themes that emerged from this group of participants. In each main theme, significant subthemes are sometimes included to further outline and provide insight into the participants' insights, perceptions and experiences. All themes and subthemes are supported by relevant quotations. All participants' names were coded to ensure anonymity.

Junior Coaches' Experiences

Junior coaches were asked about their general experiences, their development as a leader, their interactions with the adult coaches, their junior coaches, and the club members that they lead. Junior coaches varied on several different factors: gender, age, length of involvement in the program, length of involvement as a coach, background/ethnicity. Some coaches had previous experience as club members, while others entered the club as junior coaches. Some coaches had varying roles – as assistants/helpers, or as leaders of their own group of youths.

1. Receiving Mentorship

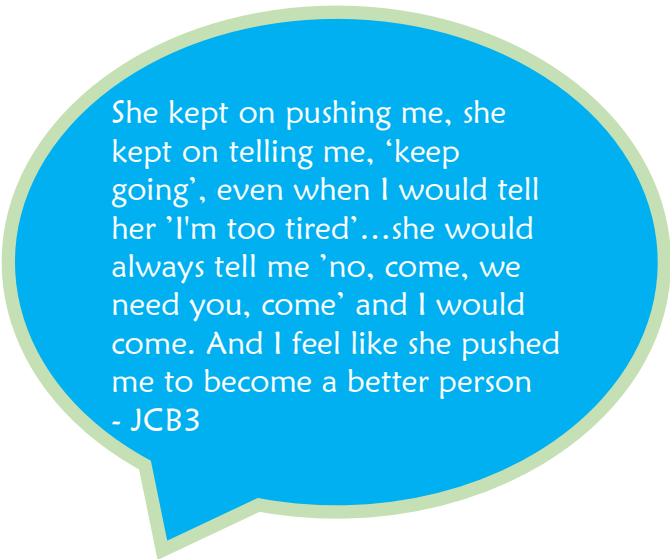
Junior coaches reported experiences centering around mentorship that they received from their previous junior as well their previous and current adult coaches.

The junior coaches perceived support for their **need for autonomy and competence** – one's sense of free will to act out of their own interests and values, and one's perceptions about their abilities – from their coaches.

Junior coaches regarded their coaches as **role models** to look up to and learn positive behaviours from them. With these role models being **approachable and open** to them, junior coaches felt free to express themselves and could benefit from a positive emotional climate. Their coaches were there as guides and advisors to them, providing them direction about how to fulfill their role effectively.

Autonomy and competence support

Junior coaches expressed that their coaches offered them choices in making decisions, demonstrated their confidence and trust in them to perform tasks, provided them with positive



She kept on pushing me, she kept on telling me, 'keep going', even when I would tell her 'I'm too tired'...she would always tell me 'no, come, we need you, come' and I would come. And I feel like she pushed me to become a better person
- JCB3

feedback (in the forms of encouragement, motivation, constructive criticism, and praise), and allowed them opportunities to work independently.

Role modelling

Mentorship also manifested in indirect ways. Junior coaches learned by watching their previous junior coaches, or their now current adult coaches. By having those coaches act as leaders, the junior coaches learned how to contribute to others.

"When we were just kids, there [were] other junior coaches that we saw them do this [lead activities], and then first we just knew them as friends, they were older than us but still friends. But we see them help us, and help others, and we see them doing good and we want to do something good as well, like give back." - JCC6

"I kind of learned from the experiencing with the other junior coaches when I was like in the program helped me. I was learning from them and now I'm doing what they're doing, so I got experience from them, like looking at them, you know how all the kids look at the younger kids, so it'll be like I looked at them because I was younger than them, so I looked up to them, so now I have people looking up to me so that's how it feels." - JCA2

Approachability

The junior coaches perceived their coaches as positive, friendly and open. Their coaches would acknowledge them as people and make themselves available to them to talk to about anything – their personal life, and issues they may be facing in the program or outside of it.

"it's the same way that the little ones look up to me, I can go up to any of them [the adult coaches] and talk to them about any of my problems. And they're always so involved with my education life, my personal life... I talked to [an Adult Coach] about my home life and my work life, and I can talk to [another Adult Coach], about my social life and my personal life. And they're really nice and friendly people that you don't even have to think about talking to, there's no restrain or anything and I can't hold anything back, I tell them everything and they understand it." - JCD2

Along with showing interest in youth about their personal lives, they were also available to them for any advice on how to handle situations that youth are involved in:

"[the youth] approach me if someone's being mean to them, like bullying; they approach me about that, and I approach another [adult] coach to ask them what should I do to help them." - JCA3

In this way, junior coaches felt comfortable in approaching their coaches for guidance on how to fulfill their role as a junior coach effectively, such as handling a bullying problem.

2. Developing Relationships and Trust

Through their open interactions with one another, the junior coaches were able to develop strong social ties with their junior coaches, adult coaches, and club members. By getting to know and understand one another, the program members trusted one another. Everyone's involvement and openness with one another helped lead to enjoyment.

Openness

Junior coaches expressed that they helped develop relationships with their youth by being open and friendly with them, so that youth feel free to approach and talk to them:

"Most of the kids know me and I've been in the program for a while now, and it's not just because I get to tell them what to do. It's like we're friendly with them, and we're mostly caring, and they're curious to know "oh what's going on?" – JCC6

Familiarity

The club helped provide opportunities for youth to get to know one another, and over time, be more familiar with one another and relate to one another's values and interests. The processes of developing familiarity or attempting to understand how to relate to one another helped the coaches foster positive interactions:

Everyone's involvement makes it fun, like the whole club put together, it all has its bits and pieces, like running with the kids, that aspect is fun with them. Having snack with them is fun. The word of the day with them is 'fun'. Its just the environment is loving and caring and how like no one judges anyone. You just come and spend two hours with us and just you know, have fun - JCB3

Well there was this new kid, [Club Member], he moved to a different school last year, but he would follow me EVERYWHERE. Like every single week he'd ask me to read with him, he'd ask me to run with him, and everywhere. he was basically like the main kid I focused on... he was like a little brother. That's how I feel to all of them, they're like a family.– JCA3

"Well it made it easier so if I pretend that those other kids are someone that I know, I try to get them to know me well, I get to know them well so then I know what to do with them how to handle them in situations" - JCC3

In this quotation, the junior coach described how they would approach other youth as if they were someone that they know. In this way, they help establish a familial and friendly relationship with youth, and gain an attempt to understand them better.

Familiarity also helped facilitate trust between the junior coaches and their adult coaches. By understanding their adult coaches, and sharing experiences with them, this helped influence trust in them:

"It's hard to say, but their personality would say a lot about them, just their personality, and you would understand they're caring they're loving, all the etcetera's. And then you would trust them more, and having experience with them you would trust them more. Cause you've been with them longer, so you trust them more" – JCA2

Developing stronger social ties helped junior coaches understand and trust one another with tasks. Junior coaches described their understanding of one another's abilities and competencies:

"The junior coaches, we are pretty close you can say. We don't feel uncomfortable talking to each other if there's a problem or anything. So when a kid just says "there's a problem here" we'd be like "oh that coach is really good at talking to him about stuff, they're close so you can just call each other like that" - JCB2

Here the junior coaches described how they trusted another junior coach to handle a situation for them.

Enjoyment

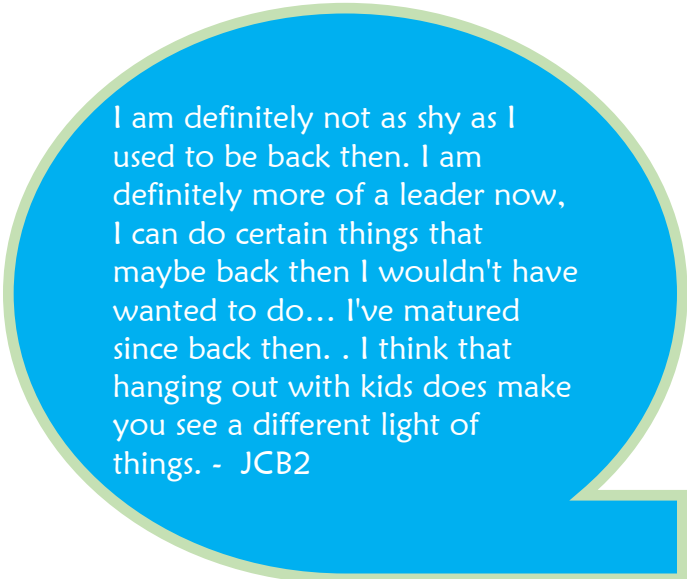
With strong social ties, familiarity with one another, and developing trusting relationships, the club was more enjoyable. The club helps foster a sense of positivity and safety through its activities and the openness of their members, which helps lead to positive interactions and enjoyment of youth.

3. Building Leaders

Junior coaches spoke in great deal about their experiences surrounding leadership. They described how they learned how to be leaders, and how having opportunity to lead led to greater confidence, a greater sense of responsibility, and more mature attitudes. Being a leader also helped them to develop skills that they can carry with them beyond the program.

Learning by doing

Junior coaches in their leadership role would help facilitate activities for the youth at the club. As opposed to being explicitly taught how to be leaders, many of the junior coaches described a development of



I am definitely not as shy as I used to be back then. I am definitely more of a leader now, I can do certain things that maybe back then I wouldn't have wanted to do... I've matured since back then. . I think that hanging out with kids does make you see a different light of things. - JCB2

leadership abilities through their experience of 'doing' their role.

“At first I can say I was a bit on and off I didn't really know what to do. I was just like sort of following everybody else around here. But after that, with experience, like I knew where to be, what to do, how to do it, when to do it and all this stuff. So at first I was like ‘ugh I have to do this, like ugh’, but now I really quite enjoy doing it and being here.” – JCB2

This junior coach may have experienced some frustration with their role at first, during the learning stage, but as they progressed and gained experience in their position, they began to enjoy it more.

Confidence building

Through their roles as leaders, junior coaches developed more confidence in themselves and their abilities. This helped them to execute tasks without fear of making mistakes, as they are confident in their ability to handle these situations.

“Even though I may stutter sometimes... I do feel confident and I know what's right and what's wrong sometimes, and I may slip and do like some dumb stuff, but as long as I know what the consequences are, and how I'm going to fix it, then I feel like I know I'm very confident in that aspect.” – JCB3

Handling situations and problem solving

Junior coaches were a go-to person if youth ever had problems. When youth would approach them with problems or issues, the junior coaches felt equipped to handle the situation:

“If they [the club members] need something they always approach me like 'ooh I have a problem with him or her'. I'm like 'oh' and I just bring the person over, they talk to each other and eventually they say sorry to each other and then they makeup again” – JCC6

In this situation, the junior coach attempted to solve the problem by being the mediator between the two youth in helping them reach a resolution.

Role modeling for club members

The junior coaches found that it was important for them to be modeling positive actions, because the youth were always watching and observing them. One way this would be done was by engaging in the activities themselves to set an active example for youth to follow:

“A lot of the time I try my best to be active and do most of the activities. More to keep kids active, cause if you're just standing there going 'oh keep running keep running', they're not really gonna do it if you don't do it. Why should they do it if you aren't doing it?” – JCC1

The junior coaches recognized the importance of their role as leaders, to indirectly teach the youth that they lead:

"I think it's just nice that someone looks up to you. It's just important. It's just important I guess, for kids to look up to you, to set an example and everything... it's just in the same like big brother-little brother kind of way, you have to be their role model, you have to be their teacher, to teach them what's right, what's wrong, and everything else." – JCA3

Skill-building

Through their opportunities at the club, junior coaches built upon life skills pertaining to leadership such as communication and decision-making, and felt that they had gained skills that would be able to be transferred beyond the program:

"I like everything apart of it really. Just I like helping other kids, and problem solve. It's helpful in the future, especially when you get older and there's things you need to do, it kind of helps, it's also useful for high school as well... It can help you for some jobs, when it comes to daycare you need to know how to manage kids. You can't try to tell someone what to do, and you need to know how to make them listen to you." - JCCI

In this example, the junior coach felt that their experiences in the program would help them develop skills with youth that can be used in future work-related opportunities.

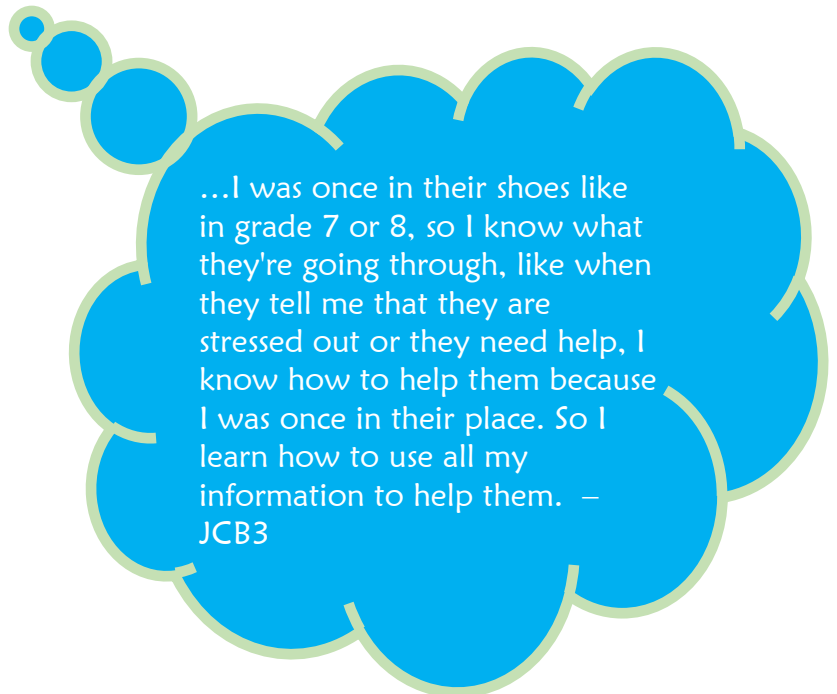
4. Contribution

Junior coaches felt that they had a positive influence on the club members. This involved helping youth in their activities (e.g. helping them learn to both run and read), supporting youth by encouraging them and motivating them, as well as teaching and guiding them with advice. Some coaches expressed that their influence had lasting effects on the children's learning and positive well-being.

Helping youth

Junior coaches found that one way they contributed to youth was by helping them with their activities in reading and running:

"I helped them improve their reading and their running. Cause there's this girl, she's like my family friend, so whenever we do laps, when she runs, I run. She always gets tired, but I keep telling her to run and her marks always improve when I run with her" – JCC4



Another way junior coaches would help these youth is by engaging them in activities, effectively helping youth get involved in activity planning:

“Well most of the time we trade weeks, so we get them to help us too. So sometimes we choose a kid, and they also get to become a junior coach for part of the day. Especially for the skits, me and [other junior coach] bring the kids up to do the skits and help us. So they help us plan the skits and help us make it more interesting for them. So it's not just us planning, they think it's funny, we also get them to help us too.” – JCA3

In this way, the junior coaches themselves helped provide the youth ‘voice’ – in which their input was valued and utilized to help facilitate activities for the other youth.

Supporting youth

Along with directly helping them, the junior coaches would support the youth by providing words of encouragement and show them that they have confidence in them.

"It's mostly at the end but even during the program, when we're doing the program, even us junior coaches, we encourage the younger kids, say if they didn't want to run, and then you'd be like "oh you can do it, you can do it" and stuff like that, and they encourage them and help them read, and they start reading like a book or something, and we tell them oh can you read this, can you read that, and see what that is, and yea" – JCA2

Here the junior coach supports the youth through encouragement, to help develop their confidence in themselves.

Teaching youth

Junior coaches also contributed by directly teaching youth. This was executed by relating to youth and teaching them in the language they understand – by simplifying words to help with comprehension.

*“We just like teach the same kind of [way], but like in different words, cause like our language - if they don't understand it... ours is more like **kid version** of what they're saying. If they don't get it, we'll explain it, because we have a sort of language that kids understand, we understand; cause we're like two natures we used to understand that language. So we talk in less words, less experienced words, and come up with little words that they know and experience.” - JCA2*

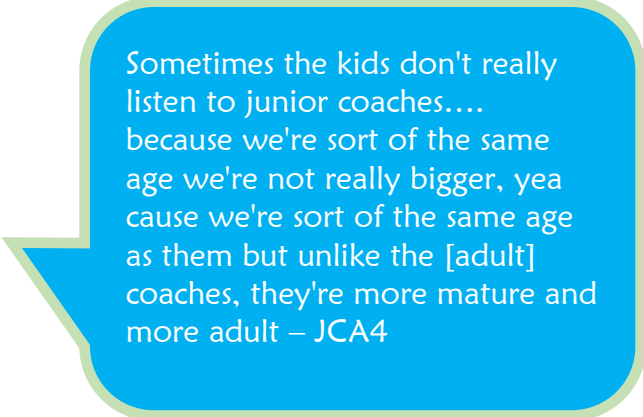
5. Difficulties and Negative Experiences

Some junior coaches expressed difficulties with their roles (or other junior coaches in their roles). This may be due to lack of maturity of many of the junior coaches, who have not developed the skillset to perform tasks at the club well, or have not fully developed a sense of responsibility for their behaviours. The junior coaches expressed troubles with leading the youth (e.g. getting the youth to listen to them, getting the youth involved in activities).

Lack of maturity

Because of their proximity in age with the children, some coaches regard themselves as less mature and less qualified to perform as a leader. This may have been recognized by the club members as well, who treated them differently than older coaches:

Junior coaches also mentioned that peers in their position may not be suitable for certain roles because of their irresponsible behaviour:



Sometimes the kids don't really listen to junior coaches.... because we're sort of the same age we're not really bigger, yea cause we're sort of the same age as them but unlike the [adult] coaches, they're more mature and more adult – JCA4

“I just feel like they don't run with the kids, or they're on their phones. It's just irresponsible, you know what I mean? It's just a lack of trust in case something does happens and they're unaware of it... - to the ones that I don't really [trust as much], I trust them in handing out snacks, but I don't really trust them when it comes to running with the kids, because I'm mostly running with the kids and playing with them. But I trust them in the aspect of like, when others are around, they will do their job, but if there is no one around they will slack off.” – JCB3

Fooling around in the club, or demonstrating apathy towards their role may have led some junior coaches to garner distrust from others.

Lack of awareness toward development

Some junior coaches also did not recognize that they had changed or developed in any way during their involvement in the club. This may be due to not gaining any significant skillset if their roles were in supportive/assisting capacities, or not being old/mature enough to be aware of gaining any skills.

Club Members' Experiences

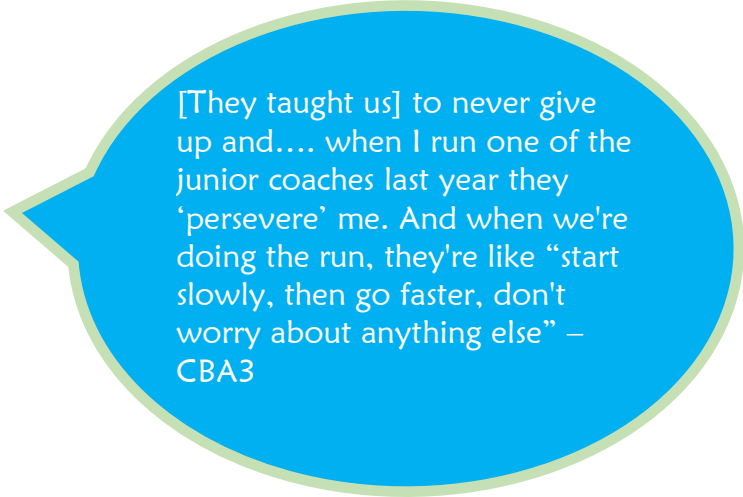
Club members were asked about their general experiences in the program, their interactions with their peers, junior coaches, and adult coaches, and how they felt about their development. Club members varied on several different factors: gender, age, length of involvement in the program, and background/ethnicity.

For many club members, junior coaches served largely the same purpose for them as adult coaches - as facilitators of the club. They recognized both the adult and junior coaches as positive, respectful, trustworthy, and helpful. Major differences recognized by the club members were that the junior coaches were generally younger, and would generally adopt more supportive roles than the adult coaches. In some cases, the club members identified the junior coaches as less mature and capable than the adult coaches.

1. Support

Club members spoke about how they received support from their coaches, such as encouragement, and praise, which helped motivate them to continue participating in the program.

"They're very encouraging... I don't know how you say that. They're very... if you give up on them they'll still ... they're still behind you and pushing you to go forward and not backing down." – CBA4



[They taught us] to never give up and... when I run one of the junior coaches last year they 'persevere' me. And when we're doing the run, they're like "start slowly, then go faster, don't worry about anything else" – CBA3

They also described how they kept feedback positive, refraining from saying any negative or demotivational:

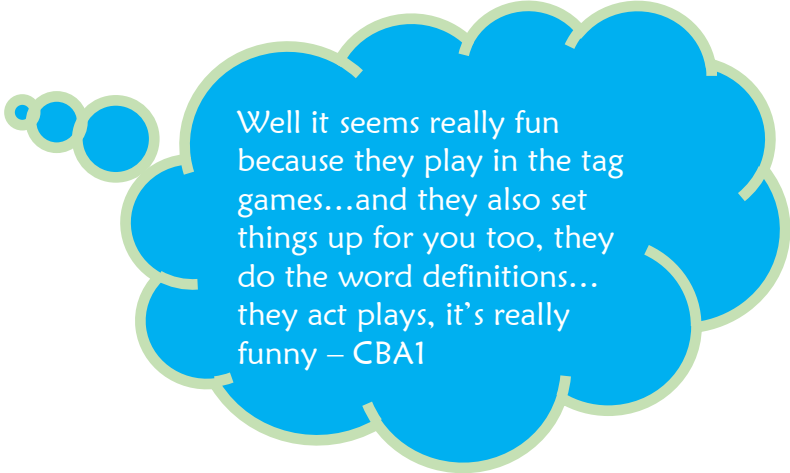
"If we have a mistake they don't get really pushy and say 'why you're wrong' and say negative things about us, they say positive, like 'keep trying' – CBA3

The youth also reported being offered feedback on how well they've been doing, being offered choices for what games or activities they want to play, and opportunities to work independently.

2. Enjoyment

One of the primary motivations for members' attendance in the programs was 'to have fun'. Club members found that junior coaches would help make activities more fun:

"When something is not that fun - like some people don't like to run that much. They [the junior coaches] always encourage us to run and they say 'You wanna race?' and so in a way it motivates everyone including me" – CBB4



Well it seems really fun because they play in the tag games...and they also set things up for you too, they do the word definitions... they act plays, it's really funny – CBA1

As well, the positivity of the coaches helped make the program more enjoyable. When asked what makes the program fun, this participant said:

"The coaches...they always use positive words. They always have a smile on their face... they never, they're not mean. They're funny..." – CBC1

3. Learning and Building Skills

Members found that the junior coaches helped them learn about reading, by facilitating the word-of-the-day activity:

"I like that it improves your mental health, like when they do the word-of-the-days, they try to improve your mind. So they say definitions and you're supposed to guess or know the word. And we say if we are pretty sure about the word." – CBB4

Along with helping enhance their reading skills, the junior coaches also helped teach them positively-associated behaviours:

"[They taught us] to be honest, respectful, not treat anybody different, treat everybody the same way you would wanna be treated" – CBA2

Youth developed a more positive and respectful attitude from being in the program:

"I learned how to sometimes control my acts, like before I almost got kicked out, but now over the years, like I think it was in when I was in grade 3, now over the years I got less and less trouble. and this year "I'm gonna get even better" – CBB4

4. *Lack of Maturity*

Similar to the some of the junior coaches experiences with fellow junior coaches, some club members found that junior coaches may detract from the program, if they are fooling around, being unsupportive, or not being involved in the activities. These experiences may have led to some distrust of the junior coaches.

The junior coaches, some of them aren't really on task, doing their job, like sometimes they're just fooling around.... They should be like participating in the group. – CBA4



Study 2: Examining Youth Program Quality

PURPOSE

To gain a better understanding of youth program quality.

METHODS

Program

Start2Finish Running and Reading Clubs of Toronto

Participants

- 29 participants
- Age range: 9 to 17 years old (Average = 11.59, SD = 1.74)
- Length of involvement: 1 to 6 years (Average = 2.80, SD = 1.62)

SD: Standard Deviation. How measurements for a group are spread out from the average (mean), or expected value. A low standard deviation means that most of the numbers are very close to the average. A high standard deviation means that the numbers are spread out.

Procedure

The youth completed four different questionnaires.

- The first questionnaire is titled “Adolescent Program Quality Survey” and asks youth questions about their perceptions of program quality.
- The second is the Learning Climate Questionnaire and asks youth about how well they believe the coaches are meeting the psychological needs of autonomy (sense of choice and freedom), competence (ability to develop skills and feel confident in this skill development) and relatedness (ability to develop positive relationships in the program).
- The third is titled Basic Needs Satisfaction in Sport and asks how satisfied youth’s needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are, in relation to their sport experiences.
- The fourth and final questionnaire is titled “Youth Experience Survey for Sport” which measured positive youth development outcomes (e.g., development of skills).

FINDINGS

Program Quality

The youth completed the Adolescent Program Quality Survey (APQS) which examines program quality from the perspective of youth. This survey was specifically designed to assess Eccles and Gootman's (2002) eight setting features proposed to foster positive development in youth programming. These eight setting features are:

Program Setting Feature	Definition
Physical and Psychological Safety	An environment that allows youth to feel both free from being physically harmed and accepted and respected
Appropriate Structure	Clear and consistent rules and expectations, including behavioral guidelines and age-appropriate monitoring
Supportive Relationships	The presence of adults and peers who demonstrate concern and support for youth
Opportunities to Belong	Providing experiences that allow youth to develop a sense of belonging; feelings of value as an individual and part of a group
Positive Social Norms	Fostering clear, healthy, ethical standards, beliefs, and behaviour guidelines that promote prosocial behavior & minimize health risks
Support for Efficacy and Mattering	Providing opportunities for youth to develop leadership, efficacy, autonomy, mattering, and responsibility
Opportunities for Skill-building	Opportunities for youth to develop physical, intellectual, psychological, emotional, and social skills that will prepare them for the future
Integration of Family, School, and Community Efforts	Incorporating family, school, and community to increase opportunities for synergy and positive relationships

Source: Adapted from Community Programs to Promote Youth Development, by the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2002, Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

The APQS is measured on a 5-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Below are the average scores of elements of program quality based on youths' perceptions within the Running and Reading Club.

Adolescent Program Quality Survey

Subscale	Average	SD
Adult Structure and Support	3.89	1.09
Empowered Skill-building Opportunities	4.10	1.10
Expanding Horizons	4.07	1.12
Negative Experiences	2.98	1.66

Note: Questionnaire scale ranged from 1: Strongly Disagree to 5: Strongly Agree

Overall, youth rated their program high on most subscales of program quality. The highest scale was "Empowered Skill-building Opportunities" which means that the environment fostered

opportunities for skill-building, which includes the facilitation of program-specific skills (running and reading), and life skills (e.g. responsibility, goal setting). Youth also noted that the environment helped expand their horizons, which is related to connection between their peers, the organization, and the broader community. This component of program quality is critical and coaches can still strive to continue to create these connections.

Youth scored between 'neutral' and 'agree' in regards to the support and structure they receive from the program and their coaches. This component is related to how valuable the youth feel their input is, the approachability of the coaches, and whether the activities were clear, appropriate for their age, and promoted healthy habits. While this score is leaning toward 'agree', more work may need to be done to ensure that youth are receiving the support they need from their junior and adult coaches, and ensuring that the program is providing a structure that is clear and understood.

Psychological Needs Support

The second group of findings relates to psychological needs. Psychological needs were assessed as research has shown that fostering these three needs will result in enhanced psychological development and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2000b). Ryan and Deci (2000a) outline three basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness). In this evaluation, psychological needs support was measured using the Learning Climate Questionnaire (LCQ). The LCQ examines youth's perceptions regarding the degree to which their program coaches supported these three psychological needs and is measured on a 7-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).

Learning Climate Questionnaire (completed by youth participants)

Subscale	Average	SD
Autonomy Youth having the ability to make choices and act in accord with their sense of self, such as setting and working towards goals	5.20	1.69
Competence Youth's need to feel a sense of mastery within their environment such as the feelings experienced when one achieves a goal	5.49	1.62
Relatedness Youth having a sense of belonging both with other individuals (youth and coaches) and with one's community; caring about and being cared for by others	5.56	1.58

Note: Questionnaire scale ranged from 1: Strongly Disagree to 7: Strongly Agree

Results from this questionnaire indicate that the coaches did a good job at fostering a sense of relatedness with the club members, by creating an environment in which connections between coaches and youth were made, creating a psychologically safe environment. Youth also reported a high sense of competence, as it relates to beliefs in their own personal skills and abilities within the club. Results also show that the youth felt a high sense of autonomy as part

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of the program, whereby they felt their voices were heard, and had a choice in skills learned during the club activities. Please refer to the recommendation section on strategies to further increase a sense of autonomy within the club context.

Basic Needs Satisfaction in Sport

The third group of findings again relates to the three psychological needs, this time youth's satisfaction of those needs. This involves the degree to which youth feel their needs have been satisfied during their involvement in the program. In this evaluation, basic needs satisfaction was measured using the Basic Needs Satisfaction in Sport Scale (BNSSS). This measures satisfaction of the three psychological needs on a 7-point scale ranging from not true at all (1) to very true (7).

Basic Needs Satisfaction in Sport Scale

Subscale	Average	SD
Competence	5.57	1.43
Autonomy		
Choice The degree to which youth have decision-making flexibility to choose what to do within in activity	5.41	1.62
Internal perceived locus of causality (IPLOC) The degree to which a youth feels that their actions and decisions are driven by their own interests	5.04	1.63
Volition The degree to which youth feel they perform activities based on their own unpressured willingness	4.81	2.17
Relatedness	5.89	1.56

Note: Questionnaire scale ranged from 1: Not True at All to 7: Very True

Youth scored fairly high on most scales, particularly higher on the relatedness and competence scales. The high scores on relatedness demonstrates that youth developed close and trusting relationships with others in the club. The high scores on competence demonstrates that youth felt they were good/skilled at running and had the capacity to overcome challenges that came with running. The autonomy scales were scored lesser by the youth. This reveals that while youth felt that they had many choices available to them within their running activities, they did not feel that their decisions were based on their own willingness and personal interests; rather, their decisions were determined by others. Please refer to the recommendation section on strategies to further increase a sense of autonomy within the club context.

Positive Youth Development Outcomes

The fourth questionnaire that youth completed was based on perceived positive developmental outcomes. Perceptions of developing life skills from program participation was assessed as research has shown that sport has been identified as a favourable environment in which to

promote the development of youth because it is a highly valued social activity that youth are generally motivated to engage in (Gould & Carson, 2008). Thus, there has been an extensive body of literature examining the impact of sport participation on youth development. In this evaluation, psychosocial development was measured using the Youth Experience Survey for Sport. This questionnaire is intended to measure levels of positive youth development as an outcome of youth development programs. The YES-S measures youths' perceptions of outcomes related to: 1) Personal and Social Values, 2) Goal Setting, 3) Initiative, 4) Identity Experiences, 5) Adult Network, and 6) Negative Experiences and is measured on a 4-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4).

Youth Experience Survey for Sport (completed by youth participants)

Subscale	Average	SD
Personal and Social Values	3.52	0.92
Goal Setting	3.53	0.85
Initiative	3.65	0.66
Adult Network/Social Capital	3.07	1.26
Identity Experiences	3.32	1.06
Negative Experiences	2.05	1.23

Note: Questionnaire scale ranged from 1: Strongly Disagree to 4: Strongly Agree

Overall, youth in the club rated the program relatively high across the six subscales measuring youth developmental outcomes. It is evident that youth involved in the program perceived higher levels of various outcomes, specifically related to initiative and goal setting.

Initiative, was the highest rated indicator, which means that the youth demonstrated high levels of attention and effort as a result of the program. Goal setting was also rated highly, where youth had opportunities to learn how to set goals and understood its importance for their development. Personal and social values were also perceived highly, showing that the program context aligns with many of what the youth hold valuable to themselves personally and socially. On the lower ends, Identity experiences were perceived lower than the other scales, where the youth perceived the program context as aiding them with the opportunities to think about who they are as a person, and about their futures. However, more opportunities can be given to allow youth to reflect upon themselves on a more consistent basis. Fostering a positive adult network can also be improved by having coach(s) frequently use youth's names and ask individual questions, enabling each participant an opportunity to speak and contribute to the group during every session. Negative Experiences were perceived to be low in the program, demonstrating that the youth felt that they belonged within the program, as well as accepted and supported by their coach(s) and fellow peers.

DISCUSSION

This study sought to understand the experiences of junior coaches in the program. It was important to understand why junior coaches chose to become leaders, how they perceived their own development, how they perceived their influence on the club members that they lead, and how those club members perceived the junior coaches influence on them.

The junior coaches expressed two predominant motivations to continue their participation in the program and become leaders – the **mentorship** they received, and the **relationships** they developed. Their previous (or current) junior coaches and adult coaches helped support their sense of confidence in their abilities by providing them positive feedback, as well as supporting their ability to make their own decisions. Through participation in the program, the open nature of the club and the approachability of the coaches with one another helped develop stronger, trusting relationships and social ties, which helped lead to enjoyment. This is in line with the basic psychological needs theory, which posits that satisfying one's needs for autonomy (free will to make decisions out of own interests), competence (sense of one's abilities), and relatedness (need for close relationships with others), can help lead to enjoyment and positive outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The club and its coaches helped support these needs for the youth, which led them to continue as leaders.

When it came to understanding their development, the junior coaches discussed how being offered different opportunities to practice being a leader, helped them develop as one. This included facilitating activities for youth, working with them one-on-one, and being the go-to person for when they have a problem. This helped them with building their confidence, developing life skills such as decision-making, communication, and responsibility, and a positive identity (as a role model). The junior coaches found that they would influence youth by helping them with their activities, supporting them with positive feedback, and teaching them skills related to running and reading. The club members in turn found that these coaches helped them with learning, provided them support, and most of all, helped make the activities more enjoyable for them.

Recommendations

Provide formal training to help junior coaches develop skills that enable them to be confident as leaders

At the beginning of their involvement as a junior coach, many receive guidelines that outline what is expected of them. However, most junior coaches expressed that they were limited on knowledge about what it takes to be a leader. Many did not recall what was in the guidelines, or felt that they were adequately trained on how to perform tasks. As a result, some junior coaches did not feel they were able to develop as leaders right away, or garner the respect of

the youth. As well, some club members had trouble recognizing junior coaches as leaders, or recognized them as less capable or mature relative to their adult coaches.

It is recommended to include a formal training session(s) prior to initiation into the program as junior coaches, to understand the day-to-day activities that coaches will have to undergo, what is expected of them, and how to foster positive interactions with youth that they will lead/supervise. This will help address some of the maturity issues that some junior coaches identified with, as well as for club members to recognize junior coaches as leaders.

Continue to provide leadership and mentoring opportunities to junior coaches

It is evident that the program fostered a safe and supportive environment in which leadership was sometimes initiated and supported; however, it would be recommended that coaches provide more intentional opportunities for all junior coaches to practice and develop leadership skills.

Junior coaches expressed that a 'learn by doing' approach to becoming a leader. This was especially prevalent for those junior coaches who had opportunities to lead activities, such as 'word-of-the-day', leading the 'pizza game', one-on-one journal time with a club member, or being responsible for their own small group of club members. These are recognized as explicit and intentional opportunities for youth leadership. Having these opportunities demonstrated to the junior coaches that their leaders have confidence in them to carry out tasks, and provided them opportunities to practice and learn in more demanding roles. This is contrast to junior coaches who operate primarily in more assisting roles, such as handing out snacks, or watching over youth. Many of junior coaches in these roles did not express any change in their development or were unable to recognize attaining life skills during their time in the program. It would be beneficial to provide more opportunities in leadership roles for these coaches to help them build their life skills.

Continue to focus on life skill development and life skill transfer

It was recognized that junior coaches received guidance and mentoring from their adult coaches about how to become a leader, which could have involved learning how to make strong decisions and communicate effectively to youth in the club. For the club members, they expressed building skills in how to work as a team, how to effectively communicate with one another, working hard, and building confidence. The climate of the program was conducive to positive youth development outcomes, by encouraging supportive relationships (e.g. greeting youth at they enter, checking in with youth, exercising respectfulness), providing opportunities to belong and inclusiveness (e.g. social and team-building activities), and providing constructive activities that involve teamwork, decision-making, and demonstrating skills learned in the program (e.g. word-of-the-day, pizza game, journal activities).

However, for some junior coaches and club members, they were unable to recognize a change in their development or the attainment of life skills, or how to apply these life skills outside of

the context of their program. The following recommendation emphasizes the importance of teaching life skills through running and reading, and provides some suggestions to further improve and increase opportunities for life skill development beyond the club context.

Life skill development should not be seen as a natural by-product of sport participation. Previous research stresses the importance of intentionally teaching life skills as this fosters greater likelihood that youth are able to transfer skills (Danish et al., 2004; Gould & Carson, 2008). Danish and colleagues (2005) argue the true value of sport falls within the application of these skills to other areas of youth's lives beyond sport. Therefore, integrating the teaching of life skills has become common within the sport environment. Integrating and explicitly discussing skills such as teamwork, emotional regulation, goal setting, focus, perseverance, and sportspersonship would be beneficial for youth's psychosocial development, yet it is critical for coaches to communicate to youth how such skills can be applied and translated to other life contexts (e.g., school, home, work, peer group, community).

It is important to understand that some life skills are more inherently developed through sport participation (e.g., teamwork, respect, communication); however certain skills need to be more intentionally integrated/taught in order to be developed by youth (e.g., goal setting, emotional regulation). Integrating these skills into one's practice needs to not only discuss how these skills are important in the specific sport context, but also how these skills can be applied beyond sport.

It would be beneficial to provide training to adult coaches on how to intentionally teach life skills throughout the school year. Two major ways in which this can be manifested in the club context:

1. **Skill transfer:** Have adult coaches take on a deliberate approach to teaching life skills, and emphasize how these skills can be used in other domains. For example, if discussing the importance of managing emotions (like relaxation techniques, anger management), adult coaches can provide examples that apply in other situations (e.g. before a math test or before a job interview, take three deep breaths)
2. **Debrief:** An effective time to discuss life skills is at the end of the program and only needs to take 2-5 minutes. Some of the clubs already hold these at the end of their sessions, as a time to discuss how the day went, and what next steps are to be taken for next week. This time can be immensely valuable in helping the youth reflect on what was learned during the session and how it can be applied in life. Researchers argue that there is a greater likelihood of life skill transfer if it is explicit (Bean et al., 2015; Turnnidge et al., 2015). It is recommended that the coaches use more time at the end of a practice to discuss life skills with the youth to ensure explicit life skill transfer beyond the Running and Reading context.

Increase opportunities for youth input and voice

Providing opportunities for youth input and voice is critical for fostering a sense of autonomy in individuals. The adult coaches did a very good job of providing athletes with opportunities for Shaikh, Bean, & Forneris, 2017

small choices during the program, such as running warm-ups, preparing word-of-the-day skits, choosing books for youth to read, etc. However, additional opportunities can be provided. Oftentimes, adult coaches outline not having enough time for facilitating youth input during the program. It would be useful to take more time before or after the program as an opportunity to gauge youth input, such as asking what activities would the junior coaches want to run each club session, or what areas junior coaches want to take a lead on. This could be asked as part of the debrief/reflection (mentioned above), thus allowing the adult coaches to attain feedback on certain components as well as time to take what the youth said into consideration and integrate into future programming.

Junior coaches who discussed that they were involved in mentoring sessions every week found that they engaged more and had their voices heard. This led to more investment into the program, more learning opportunities, and more enjoyment of the program. It is encouraged for adult coaches to work with the school to incorporate these extra-curricular mentoring sessions for those junior coaches that still attend the same school or are nearby (e.g. during youth's lunch time). This way junior coaches also feel valued outside of the program and receive more opportunities for engagement and skill-building.



Questions?
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