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# YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN A PHYSICAL ACTIVITY–BASED POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR AT-RISK YOUTH

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## Introduction

- Physical activity-based positive youth development (PYD) programs can serve to empower and alleviate barriers to development for at-risk youth.
- Youth leaders may play an important role in such programs as a mentor to younger peers while also have the opportunity to further enhance their own skills such as leadership, self-direction and communication (Shook & Keup, 2012).
- However, very little research has examined youth leadership in PA-based PYD programming.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to explore perspectives and experiences of youth leadership in Start2Finish's Running and Reading Club, a physical activity-based PYD program targeted for at-risk youth.



## Methods

### Case Study

- Start 2 Finish Running and Reading

### Participants & Procedure

- 16 youth leaders (**junior coaches**)
  - 8 male, 8 female,  $M_{age} = 13.37$
  - $M_{length\ of\ involvement} = 4.25$  years
  - $M_{length\ as\ coach} = 1.56$  years
- 15 youth participants (**club members**)
  - 8 male, 7 female,  $M_{age} = 10.53$
  - $M_{length\ of\ involvement} = 2.9$  years
- Semi-structured interviews:
  - General experiences in the program
  - Interactions with each other and the adult leaders
  - Perceptions of their development.

### Data Analysis

- Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)
- Deductive-inductive content analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994)

## Results

### Junior Coaches Experiences

- Mentoring:** Junior coaches reported receiving support through praise and encouragement from the adult leaders and looked up to them as role models

"[Adult Coach], she kept on pushing me, she kept on telling me, keep going", even when I would tell her "[Adult Coach], 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

- Engagement:** Being able to engage with their younger peers helps create stronger social ties and more enjoyment

"...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...Its just the environment is loving and caring and how like no one judges anyone..." - JCB3

- Becoming a Leader:** Junior coaches perceived that having opportunity to lead led to greater confidence, more respect and more mature attitudes

"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." - JCB2

- Contribution:** Junior coaches felt that they had a positive influence on the club members such as developing life skills

"I think we've helped like all the club members... some of them couldn't even read when they came, so we've taught them to read, and to run better, and have more respect for each other" - JCA2

- Lack of Maturity:** Because of their proximity in age with the kids, some coaches regard themselves as less mature and less qualified to perform as a leader

"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 like the same age as them but unlike the coaches, they're more mature and more adult" – JCA4

### Club Members Experiences

- Support:** Members perceive praise and encouragement from junior coaches

"What I like is it helps you learn how to run faster, and they encourage you which makes you feel better– CBD2

- Enjoyment:** Members find activities more fun when junior coaches engage in them

"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

- Learning:** Members find that coaches help them learn skills, particularly how to persevere when things are difficult

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

- Lack of Maturity:** Some junior coaches are found to detract from the program

"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

## Discussion

- Youth leaders and participants find that receiving support helps motivate them to participate (Adie, Duda, Ntoumanis, 2008)
- Opportunities provided by coaches help youth leaders practice and develop their life skills which in turn contributes to the skill development and enjoyment of members (Chelladurai, 2012).
- However, at times leaders may not fulfill their role as leaders optimally (Fertman & van Linden, 1999)/. Thus, formal training opportunities are needed.

## References

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