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**“GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY”:**

**YOUTH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AS SPORT AND  
RECREATION LEADERS AT THE BOYS AND GIRLS  
CLUB OF OTTAWA**

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## INSTIGATION OF LARGER RESEARCH PROJECT: “GIVING BACK”

This report is part of a larger research project exploring the experiences of young adults who “give back” to their communities. It stems from previous research on Francophone games across Canada illustrating the distinct conditions of possibility in minority contexts that modulate the impact of sporting programs on youths’ integration in the community, creating in some a desire to “give back” to the community (Dallaire, 2014; Dallaire, 2003). Indeed, Francophone organizers underscore the capacity of their events to elicit a long-term community or organizational engagement among participants as one indicator of the games’ success. They tell the “success stories” of former participants who return as coaches, chefs de mission, organizers or volunteers out of commitment to youth, the community and sport. The **sport** program thus **becomes a space** where youths/adolescents are invited to reinforce their sense of belonging, and **where young adults** invest personally as they **contribute to community development**.

Through this project, we hope to broaden the analysis of youth community engagement beyond Canada’s Francophonie to understand how and why other young adults that have benefited as participants from diverse youth sporting initiatives return and make a personal investment as leaders.

The goal of the larger project is thus to:

- undertake a comparative analysis of the experiences of young adults (18-35 years old) who invest in sport leadership roles as a form of community engagement
- explore how these young adults define and conceive of the community they wish to contribute to, how they think youths in different minority situations fit within the community they wish to contribute to and how they make sense of their community engagement through sport programs.

The case studies (4 in total) focus on community partners that run sport programs for youths and that attract former participants as volunteers or employees. The different case studies explore how the young adults involved as leaders of these programs conceive of the “community” they wish to contribute to and how it motivates their engagement, whether the community in question is a cultural, immigrant, local/neighborhood, organizational (i.e., school, YMCA-YWCA, Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa) or other “community.” The analysis also pays attention to how they make sense of the responsibilities and actions of their leadership role, beyond a dedication to sport, as an expression of their commitment to youths, the community and/or the community partner.

### CASE STUDY #1 – THE BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB OF OTTAWA (BGCO)

Our first case study, and the one detailed in this report, explores the “community engagement” experiences of young adult leaders working with the BGCO. Community organizations like the BGCO operate in a shifting landscape that, in recent decades, has begun considering children and youth as community assets who represent potential, rather than a societal problem in need of management (how they were viewed in the past). Within these organizations, some children and youth are becoming engaged in their communities as leaders. This can take a variety of forms. For some, this means working and/or volunteering in roles that directly involve them with day-to-day organizational programming while others “are increasingly sitting at the governance tables where important decisions are made. They are serving as members of boards of directors and key advisory groups and collaborating with adult staff in key functions such as program design, budgeting, staffing, community outreach, public relations and assessment” (Zeldin, 2004, p. 75).

While other children and youths who serve in these organizations may not necessarily become “community leaders,” they are still being groomed to become “good citizens” in their communities. While the definition of “good citizen” is fluid and constantly shifting (see Pykett, Saward & Schaefer, 2010), and while children and youth often have their own citizenship vocabulary (see Thorson, 2012), an intentional, prosocial approach that attempts to engage children and youth and help them acquire qualities Canadians feel represent “good citizens”<sup>1</sup> is positive youth development (PYD). PYD:

seeks to promote a variety of developmental competencies that young people need at individual, social, and system levels to become productive, contributing members of society. Rather than a pathological focus, PYD adopts a holistic view of development by emphasizing the strengths, resources, and potentials of youth, and holds positive expectations regarding young people’s growth and development and the contributions they can make to society (Iwasaki et al., 2014, p. 321).

As Mahoney, Vandell, Simpkins and Zarrett (2009) suggest, a key factor for successful PYD is activity/program participation (e.g., out-of-school time activities). Through after-school and weekend programming, including recreational and competitive sport, the BGCO staff (paid and voluntary, administrators at the management level and young leaders who are usually “on-the floor”) use PYD to prepare children and youth for their role as “good citizens” and “community leaders” in the Ottawa community (BGCO, 2018b). According to the BGCO Vision Statement (BGCO, 2018b), they do this by “enhancing life skills through the strength of their programs [based on four pillars which include education, physical activity and healthy lifestyle, leadership and social skills and creative arts] the physical environment they create and the community network they help develop within the communities they serve.”<sup>2</sup>

Importantly, many of the BGCO staff are former club members who continue their involvement in the BGCO as employees or volunteers to “give back” to the BGCO and the greater Ottawa community. In other words, these young people return to work as “community leaders” for the organization that helped them become “good citizens.” There is a body of work exploring the experiences of youth and/or young adult volunteers and staff working in community organizations (e.g., Cordeaux, 2017; Shannon, Robertson, Morrison & Werner, 2009). However, research discussing the experiences of youth and/or young adult volunteers and staff working to design and implement physical activity, sports and recreation initiatives is limited to a few studies discussing the young leaders’ experiences working at summer camps (e.g., Halsall, Kendellen, Bean and Forneris, 2016; Kendellen, Camire, Bean and Forneris, 2016), implementing after school physical activity programs (e.g., Zarrett, Skiles, Wilson & McClintock, 2012), assisting with sport through a state-funded volunteer program (Storr & Spaaij, 2017) and working for the Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) movement (e.g., Darnell, 2011, Chawansky, 2015, Thorpe & Chawansky, 2016, 2017). More research is therefore required to understand the requisite conditions and the experiences of/possible outcomes for young adults working in community organizations offering sports and recreations programs. With this in mind, this case study of the BGCO explores young adult community engagement through sport and recreation programming.

This report contextualizes the case study by first outlining the BGCO mission, vision and history, as gleaned from BGCO informational materials (e.g., website, employee handbook, etc.). Next it explains the research questions and methodology. The results are presented and discussed; and administrators and young adult workers explain how they see the BGCO, including what “community” they perceive the BGCO to serve. The analysis then turns to the young leaders’ (aged 17-36) experiences at the BGCO. We attempt to explain how these leaders make sense of their responsibilities and actions in their leadership roles as an expression of their commitment to children and youth in their “communities” – in other words – the essence of their motivation to support and help others. To contextualize these experiences and help explain how and why the BGCO young adult leaders continue their involvement with the club, recruitment and training processes are discussed. We conclude by examining the positive impact that the BGCO is having on its members and young leaders and by asking the BGCO to explore a few ideas we believe might help them continue to

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<sup>1</sup> These include obeying the law, active participation in the community, helping others, showing tolerance for others, respecting different religions – see Environics Institute, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> While sport and physical activity represent an important part of the BGCO’s programming and constitute the primary focus of our larger research project, we acknowledge that all BGCO programming plays an important role in the BGCO member experience.

encourage youths to transform themselves as “good citizens” and as “community leaders” within and beyond the BGCO.

## BGCO - MISSION, VISION AND HISTORY

The BGCO is governed by the Boys and Girls Club of Canada (BGCC), a national, non-profit organization whose mission is

*to provide a safe, supportive place where children and youth can experience new opportunities, overcome barriers, build positive relationships and develop confidence and skills for life*  
BGCC, 2018b; BGCO, 2018b

The BGCC states that each club is tailored to suit the needs of the communities they serve. Each club thus has its own vision. The BGCO’s vision is

*to develop good citizens and community leaders by enhancing life skills through the strength of our programs, the physical environment we create and the community network we help develop within the communities we serve*  
BGCO, 2016

The club was established (under the name of the Ottawa Boys Club) in 1923 by Fred McCann, a social worker from Montreal who wanted to support boys in the Ottawa area. In the postwar era, many fathers did not return from war, which left mothers as single-parents. Boys often roamed the streets and McCann’s goal was to help these children and youth (and their mothers) by providing a safe and supportive place for them to go. In the early years, the Club was housed in various locations, mostly in the inner city, along with an overnight summer camp (Camp Minwassin) built on land donated by the Kiwanis Club. Programs consisted mainly of sports, such as boxing, and creative activities, such as woodworking. Over the years, the club expanded and changed in significant ways. Now, for example, the Club has seven locations in addition to its camp (known as Camp Smitty), includes girls in all of its programming, offers programs open to all children and youth regardless of sex, gender, race, ethnicity, ability, address, family situation or socioeconomic status, and membership is free (with a sliding scale fee for Camp Smitty).

The BCGO is a significant community organization in the City of Ottawa. The Club serves over 4,500 children and youth between 6-18 years of age each year through afterschool, weekend and summer programs. In 2016, the organization recorded an all-time high of 114,000 visits (BGCO, 2018b). It relies on community organizations such as United Way Ottawa, the City of Ottawa, Ottawa Police, Youth Services Bureau, Ottawa Community Housing and countless other agencies, corporations, donors and community groups for funding, program support and advocacy (Employee Handbook – Community Partners section). The BGCO also runs six events each year, including the Charity Skiathon, the Annual BGCO Breakfast, Ringside for Youth, Camp Smitty Golf Classic, Tremblant Charity Golf Classic and Glow for Kids. Additionally, hundreds of community and third-party groups run events each year to raise funds for the BCGO.

Clubhouses and programs are managed and run by paid staff and by volunteers. In 2016 alone, 866 volunteers donated 30,000 hours of their time (BGCO, 2018b). Paid staff include the Executive team (which

oversees many (if not all) activities at the various locations, such as implementing the mission, measuring and evaluating programming, raising funds, etc.), managers (at the senior manager and manager levels) of specific locations, some in charge of other portfolios such as facilities, community outreach, Camp Smitty, etc.), part-time and full-time youth workers at the junior, intermediate and senior levels (usually young people working their way up through these levels who staff the front desk, develop and manage programs, referee and/or coach sport competitions, etc.), and camp counsellors (junior, intermediate and senior, who work at Camp Smitty in the summer).

A Volunteer Board of Directors governs the BCGO. Board Members lend their skills in areas of “governance, programs, fundraising, communications, legal, IT, community development, strategic planning, finance, and human resource development” (BGCO, 2018a). Volunteers, whether youths who are currently members, community members or college students completing placements for their programs, take part in many other aspects of the club’s programming. Other youth obtain paid placements at BGCO but their salaries are funded by third-party organizations such as Youth in Police Initiative (YIPI) and Youth Services Bureau (YSB).

This research project on youth engagement sought to explore the engagement experiences of youth workers (part-time and full-time) and youth volunteers alike.

## METHODOLOGY

This report, the **first phase** of data collection for the larger project, highlights key findings from interview data with:

- six Managers and/or Board Members – BGCO (subsequently referred to as “administrators”)
- ten Youth Workers and Volunteers – BGCO (subsequently referred to as “young leaders”)

### Interviews with Administrators

Six semi-structured interviews were conducted with BGCO administrators. Two interview participants identified as women and four as men. Some had pursued undergraduate studies and some had either completed a master’s degree or a graduate certificate. Participants worked in a range of roles with primary responsibility for hiring and managing staff and volunteers, fundraising, managing programs, managing facilities and communication. All participants held full-time, permanent positions except for one, who was elected to their position. Three of the six administrators were former members who attended the BGCO as children and/or youth and have a long history with the organization. Participants were recruited by the Director of Programs. One semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant. Interviews were conducted in person and averaged 70 minutes.

### Interviews with Young Leaders

Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with young leaders – nine with BGCO Youth Workers and one with a BGCO Volunteer. Interview participants ranged in age from 17 to 40. Three identified as women and seven as men. All but one were either pursuing or had completed a college diploma, undergraduate or graduate studies. Many were studying social work, youth work, criminology or variations of these disciplines. Participants worked in a range of roles and at various locations, with their primary responsibilities including program design and management, staff and volunteer management and the front desk. All participants held part-time positions as youth workers except for one, who was a volunteer. All interview participants were former members of the BGCO (many attended Camp Smitty as well) and also had a long history with the organization. Participants were recruited by the administrators. One semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant. Interviews were conducted in person and averaged 75 minutes.

All interviews were conducted by Christine Dallaire between October 2017 and December 2017, and were digitally recorded and transcribed. Pseudonyms were assigned to each interview participant.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) **What discourses of “community”** do the administrators and young leaders draw on to describe the BGCO and their place within it?
  - What is the BGCO?
  - What community are they working with? The BGCO? The neighbourhood? The City of Ottawa? A specific group?
  - How do they situate themselves in this community? What is their sense of belonging?
- 2) **What are the young leaders’ motivations** for working at the BGCO?
  - How have the young leaders’ experiences sparked their desire to “give back”?
  - Do they conceive of their work as community engagement? How?
- 3) **What meanings do young leaders ascribe to their sporting responsibilities as practices of engagement towards youth and the “community”**, beyond a love of sport?
  - Are the young leaders’ modelling the “good citizen” and the “community leader” they expect the members to become?

The interviews were analyzed for content that would provide answers to the research questions outlined above in an effort to understand the young leaders’ community engagement through their work in sport and recreation programming. Steph MacKay analyzed the information gathered by listening to the audio recordings of each interview to immerse herself in the feel and context of each interview and gain a better sense of how participants conveyed their answers. She then continued the analysis by working with the transcripts. She wrote the first full draft of this report, to which Christine then contributed, before it was submitted to the Director of Programs for further comment.

### **Advantages and Disadvantages of Methodology**

The interviews with administrators and young leaders provided us with rich data and interesting findings presented in this report and in academic articles (in progress). The depth and relevance of the data collected is a direct result of a recruitment procedure where interview participants were hand-picked by the administrators and were employed or volunteering with the BGCO at the time of the interview. This purposeful recruitment served the overall research project’s objective of gaining a better understanding of youth engagement by exploring the experiences of young adults currently involved in community development through their leadership roles in youth programming. However, the focus on former BGCO participants considered “champions” of civic engagement within the organization means that their views may not be representative of all young leaders who have worked or who are currently working at the Club. This research report does not offer an overall assessment of all BGCO youth worker and youth volunteer experiences. Another disadvantage of the recruitment strategy privileged for the overall research project is our lack of data to demonstrate or assess the extent to which the BGCO actually impacts youth engagement outside the organization. Indeed, its members and former members are also engaged as young leaders in activities, associations, school programs and other organizations beyond the BGCO because of the leadership training they gained as members and because they embrace the overall values of the BGCO to become engaged citizens. The limitations of our methodology prevent us from addressing the broader impact of the BGCO in fostering youth engagement in the community at large.

## KEY FINDINGS

### RESEARCH QUESTION #1 - “WHAT IS THIS THING?”

The website and other informational material provide the public with formal descriptions of the mission, vision, history, members, funding structure, staff structure, governance structure, programming and other aspects of the BGCO. Social media platforms provide the public with news updates and stories about members and events. In this research project, administrators and young leaders were asked to describe, in their own words, what they understand the Boys and Girls Club to be. As Christine put it to one interview participant, “what is this thing?”

**Administrators** had a lot to say on this question. The Club prides itself on being “barrier free” and administrators stressed that while there is no financial transaction between member and club, there is a moral transaction – i.e., members pay with their character and promise to uphold the Club’s values and mission. This creates an environment where children and youth are expected to be helpful, caring and inclusive towards other members from the time they walk in the door for their first visit. They are expected to strive to be the “good citizen” and the “community leader” outlined in the club’s vision statement. Additionally, all administrators stated, in a variety of ways, that the BGCO is a safe, supportive place to be.

Furthermore, while BGCO documents and administrators unanimously suggest that the BGCO welcomes all children and youth, ultimately, according to KD:

*the Boys and Girls Club is about creating opportunity. So opportunity for kids who wouldn't otherwise have those same opportunities as perhaps other kids in their class at school maybe. . . we are strategically located in vulnerable neighbourhoods, so we are reaching the kids who need us most*  
KD – Administrator

Therefore, administrators describe the BGCO as an organization that attempts to level the playing field for children and youth in a city confronting discrepancies in developmental health at school entry (measured by physical health and well-being; emotional maturity; social competence; language and cognitive development; and communication skills and general knowledge), high school diploma completion and socioeconomic status, depending on the neighbourhood (Ottawa Community Foundation, 2018). This echoes the BGCC’s public service announcement message indicating that “privilege is not just for the privileged” and their claim that “at our Clubs, every kid is a Kid of Privilege” (BGCC, 2018a).

Furthermore, in line with the larger societal shift towards seeing young people as potential rather than a problem, the mission is no longer to get boys off the street, as it once was. As BL suggested:

*. . . it's more about empowerment and leadership and team building and communication and developing skills for life through activities. It's through arts and crafts and through art leadership and through physical activity and through education and giving them the options and choices to do whatever they want to do when they're older.*  
BL – Administrator

Administrators thus described the BGCO as a safe, supportive, inclusive **place of opportunity** with a **diversity of programs and services** that help young people become productive members of civil society (i.e., “good citizens and community leaders” [see vision noted above]).

Interestingly, while sports was once the “hook” used to get boys to come to the club, the “hook” today is the healthy snack (which follows Homework Club) that gets children and youth through the door. Therefore, while life skills<sup>3</sup> are the focus, helping members with their formal education is a significant part of the club’s work.

According to TD,

*. . . instead of bribing kids with recreation, the main tool we use to bribe them is food. So the homework club makes up the greatest number of visits that we have. Out of 114,000 visits last year 53,000 of them were homework club. And if you come and do homework club you get access to the healthy snack program. So we give you food in order for you to study. It’s a pretty basic connection. And after you do your homework, then you can go and do basketball, or ball hockey, or dance, or arts, or any other music program. There’s lots and lots of programs. So recreation is a much smaller chunk of it now because education and help around education is the most important thing.*

TD – Administrator

More than one administrator stated that while help with formal education is a key focus of the club, many of the children and youth are not explicitly aware of this. Instead, many members consider the club a place to go to have fun, see their friends and participate in programming (including sports and physical activity). They do not directly associate the club with school, education and learning. This helps make “Homework Club” a best practice program, and a deep source of pride to the club.

Interestingly, **young leaders’** responses to this question varied but reverted to the same themes. For example, according to KC, the club is a safe, welcoming **place** where members can come and be themselves at work (i.e., homework) and at play, without worrying over stressful aspects of life outside the club, such as challenges in school, at home and in the community.

*In general, I feel the important message is that we have a positive welcoming environment for anyone and everyone to come in and participate with what we have to offer. . . . You can be yourself.*

KC – Young Leader

Like KC, a number of the young leaders spoke about “being yourself” at the club, which suggests that they perceive that the Ottawa club successfully provides their members with a sense of “**belonging**” and with “**encouragement and support**,” two of the national organization’s five core values (BGCC, 2018b).

When asked about the backgrounds of BGCO members, young leaders often responded that children and youth from socioeconomically disadvantaged families were the organization’s target population. One young leader troubled this assertion by suggesting that all youth are “at-risk” and suggested that the club is an important place for everyone.

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<sup>3</sup> Gould and Carson have defined life skills as “those internal personal assets, characteristics and skills such as goal setting, emotional control, self-esteem, and hard work ethic that can be facilitated or developed in sport and are transferred for use in non-sport settings” (Gould & Carson, 2008a, 60). They also differentiate between PYD and life skills. They suggest that “while all life skills focus on positive youth development, not all positive youth development efforts focus on the development of life skills” (Gould & Carson, 2008a, 60).

Young leaders also commented on the **opportunities** the club provides and what that means for members. For example, BP discussed opportunities for outings while NV discussed overall personal development through opportunities provided by the BGCO:

*I think the biggest thing, as a kid, was opportunity, a place of opportunities, that's what the Boys and Girls Club was for me. So I know every time when you'd come back from summer, so you go back to school, they'll all say: What did you do over the summer? And everyone's like I went to a cabin, I went to Florida, I went to... Everybody's just saying elaborate things. And then me and my other friends who were from a lower-income community would just be looking at each other like: We watched TV, we went to the movies, you know? So stuff that are not as big. But when you come to the Boys and Girls Club, you'd go, like we'd have special trips every now and then. . . And even though they might seem like immaterial, but as a kid when you get to see those events, it's huge. So it's something you can brag about, you know? So it makes you feel like you're normal. Where before I did Boys and Girls Club, I don't get to do these things. So I feel like it's a major place for opportunity*  
BP – Young Leader

*That you really develop yourself as a person, and there's not really a limit on who you can be or who you want to be, and there's something for everyone to do here or to learn or to be a part of.*  
NV – Young Leader

Others, such as TC, stated that the **diversity of programs and services** is crucial to a description of the BGCO.

*And what it means to be a member at the Boys and Girls Club is a million things because they do so much for you*  
TC – Young Leader

Sometimes, as in the following example, a young leader would speak about all three elements:

*I would say the mission would be to give the kids the tools to find and become their own person. It's so hard to find out who you are, who you want to be, what you want to do, and I find Boys and Girls Club has so many different things going on that you're able to find out who that person is, or even able to find out what track you want to go on. And I find the Boys and Girls Club, by coming here, you're here in a non-judging safe area where you can express yourself completely.*  
BN – Young Leader

The fact that the young leaders describe the BGCO in these terms suggests that they see the club in much the same light as its administrators. Importantly, both groups' descriptions of the BGCO mirror the national and local organizational mission (as noted above). This suggests that the BGCO has either been successful at achieving its mission or successful in getting staff to accept and reproduce their organizational message by describing the meaningful actions they strive to accomplish to help children and youth in the Ottawa community. That both administrators and young leaders spontaneously mentioned the same purpose and similar values when describing the BGCO certainly plays a significant role in the success of the organization, not only in terms of reaching its objective but also in ensuring the stability and consistency over time of the principles that continue to guide staff and members towards a shared vision. For the purpose of this study, it shows the organization's efficiency in instilling its values in members who stay on as staff or volunteers and then share these same values with new members, creating a circular process that promotes and institutionalizes the core organizational values. Not only can they explain what the BGCO is about, they are committed to the club's purpose and preferred strategies for achieving it. In this way, they can get on with the business of working with children and adolescents, with a clear framework and guidelines for their role and purpose in place. The extent to which administrators and young leaders actually embody the BGCO values is impressive and noteworthy.

### **Young leaders' perceptions of community**

When asked how they see the community to which the BGCO belongs and to which they contribute, administrators almost unanimously cited Ottawa as the "community." They described their impact on neighbourhoods, but also its reach across the National Capital Region.

Young leaders, by contrast, had varied responses. For example, according to one young leader, BG, the "community" is the Ottawa community.

*So the kids growing up, they get a sense that Ottawa loves them and all these sponsors and everybody loves them, writing them cheques. The biggest super stars in Ottawa, which is the Senators, saying we love you so much that we'll give you a league under our name because we trust you and we know that you're not going to play with our name, and we'll give you money to run it. So once you see that, then you realize, hey, Ottawa has welcomed our organization. If they have welcomed our organization, the youth is going to think, yeah, they also love us, right?*

BG – Young Leader

Another young leader (TB) stated that the neighbourhood s/he lives in and where the BGCO is located represents the "community."

*. . . it's a neighbourhood community. We are so lucky to have this Boys and Girls Club in this neighbourhood because if it was over the bridge or if it were somewhere else, we wouldn't go. So we are blessed to have this building in our community, and the community I'm giving back to is a really good community, full of single parents, it's a very low-income, high-risk community because there still is the stuff that goes on that people say about this. It's the truth. It's a reality. It still happens. . . So I'd like to say, and it's been said before, it takes a village to grow a child. The village is the Boys and Girls Club, and the child is every single child in each single parent home in this neighbourhood.*

TB – Young Leader

This interview participant spoke specifically about the large number of single parents living in the neighbourhood. Just as suggested by the administrators, the BGCO is perceived by this young leader to be located where children and youth need the most support.

For seven other young leaders, the “community” is the BGCO itself.

*. . . no matter when you walk into the Boys and Girls Club, it doesn't matter what's going on in your life, they're there to accept you and treat you just like any other kid who comes into the Boys and Girls Club. . . And it's five days a week, right? So if you're a kid who's avidly coming here then it's a family, right?*

BP – Young Leader

The fact that a majority of the young leaders see the BGCO as the “community” to which they are contributing, rather than a neighbourhood or the City of Ottawa, suggests that they perceive the BGCO as a “community” itself. As BP put it, “a family” where members have access to loving, caring helpful adults outside their homes and schools. This is significant, as Zeldin, Krauss, Kim, Collura and Abdullah (2016) report that youth are increasingly disconnected from their communities; one measurement pertinent to this report is the decline in perceived support from non-familial adults. Additionally, according to the 2018 Status of Mental Health in Ottawa report, only two-thirds of people 12 years and older reported a very strong or somewhat strong sense of belonging to their local community (Ottawa Public Health, 2018). The BGCO seems to be creating a “community” where members feel they “belong” – this has the potential to create a significant impact on the children and youth that the BGCO serves, and the City of Ottawa at large.

Interestingly, throughout the interviews, “community” was rarely if ever defined along racial or ethnic lines, despite the perception (of a number of young leaders) that the majority of members belong to visible minorities. It was only when Christine explicitly raised issues of race by asking direct questions that young leaders discussed it. This was also true of the interviews with the administrators. When asked why they did not spontaneously speak about issues of race and visible minority status in the City of Ottawa context to describe the BGCO or the community (neighbourhood or city), the administrators and young leaders said that they were not trying to avoid the topic, but that race did not enter the equation when they thought about the BGCO community. The unanimous agreement on the “irrelevancy” of race among all interview participants, especially the young leaders, was most striking. As KC put it:

*I think it's irrelevant because the kids, when they go to school, maybe there's race there or they're being singled out there, but when they come to Boys and Girls Club, there's a diverse staff that come from all different backgrounds. So I don't think staff really look to race or look to gender when it comes to dealing with kids. Obviously, maybe some kids listen to a female staff more than a male staff and they're aware of that; but when it comes to opportunities and when it comes to interactions, race is irrelevant and gender is irrelevant.*

KC – Young Leader

This suggests that staff of the Ottawa Club treat members with “respect”, another of the five core values of the national organization, and receive the same in return. The BGCO writes that respect means they “ensure that everyone—children, youth, families, volunteers, staff—is heard, valued, and treated fairly” (BGCC,

2018b). Children and youth are not “othered” by administrators or young leaders, which makes the Club an attractive gathering place for people of all backgrounds.

### **Young Leaders’ Sense of Belonging**

After being asked how they would describe the community to which they contribute, the young leaders were asked about their sense of belonging and what identities they embody in their roles as young leaders with the BGCO.

The responses were diverse. However, six young leaders felt a strong sense of belonging with the BGCO. In fact, most of the young leaders felt that the BGCO was very much a part of them now and in the future. For example, according to UR and BP:

*I built a connection with the Boys and Girls Club, that’s for sure, 100 per cent. I do have a sense of belonging and it is a part of who I am.*

UR – Young Leader

*I feel like I’m rooted in the Boys and Girls Club. This is where I was raised essentially, so it’s like my family, so I can’t really leave them, you know? Even if I have school or if I have other things, I’ll still try to find my way back here.*

BP– Young Leader

Others felt a sense of belonging to society in general, faith groups, neighbourhoods and their ethnic identity.

The fact that over half of the young leaders felt such a strong sense of belonging to the club confirms the notion that some of the administrators (many of whom were members as children and youth) and young leaders expressed concerning the Club’s lasting impact on people.

What is significant here is that the community the young leaders identify with most closely and feel they belong to most strongly is the BGCO. Despite the organization’s efforts to demonstrate to its young members, through programming and activities (i.e., visits to Parliament, professional sport events, participation in a city-wide basketball league, etc.) that their citizenship extends beyond the walls of the clubhouse to the City of Ottawa, and despite its success in encouraging and training members for engagement outside of the BGCO, those we interviewed spontaneously discussed their strong attachment to the Club. Although some of them explained that they also identify with cultural or faith groups, they all expressed a sense of belonging to the BGCO because of the Club’s positive environment and the outcomes in their lives. This ultimately fuels their desire to “give back” to the Club and to incoming young members.

## RESEARCH QUESTION #2 – EXPERIENCES AND MOTIVATIONS

### Experiences sparked the young leaders' desire to “give back”

To explain how the young leaders view the responsibilities and actions of their leadership roles as an expression of their commitment to children and youth in their “communities,” they were asked what they liked and disliked about the BGCO as members and staff.

When asked about their past experiences as members of the BGCO, the young leaders unanimously stated that they always felt safe, supported and included (in terms of gender identity and expression, race, ethnicity, ability, socio-economic status, food practices, etc.) by the staff at the Club. Furthermore, the young leaders noted that the diversity of activities (including the varied levels of competitiveness in the sport programs) and enthusiasm of the staff (especially for a member's first visit) were among their favourite things, in addition to , “just being here” (NV – Young Leader). The idea of **place** was repeated in different words by a number of the leaders. Many young leaders claimed that the BGCO gave them so much as children and youth that the Club had shaped their lives. For example, according to BG,

*It's like that's one place that when I got in, I felt like a second home practically where, and I played sports which I liked, obviously. But then I felt safe that adults were looking for my benefit. Actually, looking after me in a fair and consistent manner. And, I don't know, the same feeling I had when I left. It's like our motto is this is a great place to be, and I think that's what every employee should actually go for is make every kid to think that this is the best place to be. . . .*

BG – Young Leader

Other young leaders were grateful for the mentorship they got from youth workers and the stability that the club provided, especially for kids who move frequently.

Many of the staff members started becoming the “community leaders” they are now through their involvement in programs at the club, including sports programs like the Sens Sports and Leadership League (SSLL), leadership programs, Leaders 4 Life, Youth Council, Leaders In Training at Camp Smitty, etc. Their experiences as members taught the young leaders from an early age how to be the kind of person – the “good citizen” and “community leader” – the BGCO strives to produce.

When asked what they did not like as members, the young leaders consistently came up blank. While they may have disliked certain things at the time, these things were not easily recalled by the young leaders. They may not have felt comfortable discussing the matter during an interview, although Christine sensed from the discussion that they had genuinely enjoyed and appreciated their time as members and had no specific suggestions about something they wished had been different. Compared to previous research on Francophone Games where participants could identify at least one thing they would improve, despite thoroughly enjoying the event and feeling a sense of attachment to the Francophone community as strong as the young leaders here felt to the BGCO, it seems surprising that they could not mention areas they disliked. This may be an artifact of the recruitment strategy considering that we interviewed the most committed young leaders, who might have enjoyed their experiences as members the most. Still, this positive assessment of the club points to BGCO's significant beneficial impact, on these young adults, then and now.

When asked what they liked the most about being young leaders, many interview participants stated that they liked the opportunity to lead. They commented on how good they felt in giving, helping, being a confidante for and connecting with younger people. They also enjoyed getting to know and mentor the children and youth – not just run the programs. One young leader called this “being in the zone” and two administrators suggested

that a crucial quality of successful BCGO young leaders is mindfulness – truly enjoying being with the members and constantly engaging with them rather than simply managing them. The young leaders commented on the opportunities their roles afforded them, such as learning from older staff and mentors and acting as ambassadors outside the BCGO through speaking engagements in the Ottawa community. One young leader most enjoyed the non-hierarchical staff structure at the BCGO. This interview participant felt that their input was truly valued by members and staff. They also felt that this non-hierarchical approach encompassed members as well as staff, considering that members are expected to start contributing to the community while quite young.

*So around, they're like what, 10, 11, so we'd be like, okay, you get to help but you're not only going to be there to watch. You're going to help clean up, you're going to help manage the kids, help them sit on the bench. And giving those kids a sort of leadership role makes them feel good about themselves and makes them actually participate more. You can see their behaviour starts to mature more. So that's how I find that we grow more.*

BP – Young Leader

The BCGO thus seems to be successfully fulfilling a fourth BCCC core value, that of “**working together**”, by encouraging young leaders to connect deeply with members and the community outside the BCGO and by treating their youth workers (and members) as active agents in the organization.

All of these comments suggest that the BCGO exhibits many of the essential aspects of Youth-Adult Partnerships (Y-AP) outlined in Zeldin, Christens and Powers’ (2013) working definition:

*Youth-adult partnership is the practice of: (a) multiple youth and multiple adults deliberating and acting together, (b) in a collective [democratic] fashion (c) over a sustained period of time, (d) through shared work, (e) intended to promote social justice, strengthen an organization and/or affirmatively address a community issue. (p. 388)*

Furthermore, research has shown that when young people have meaningful roles in intergenerational networks and actually feel as though they have power and influence in these roles, their feelings of community connectedness increase (Zeldin, Christens and Powers, 2013). Therefore, when “**working together**” in a “**respectful**”, “**encouraging** and **supportive** way”, **belonging** increases.

When asked what they enjoyed less as young leaders, the young adults interviewed identified challenges specific to working in an environment that deliberately provides children and adolescents with unstructured “free” time, allowing them to decide how they want to be involved and when. There is certainly a purpose in the BCGO’s intent in creating this type of space at clubhouses where members can just be themselves. Nevertheless, allowing members to decide if and when they participate in different activities poses a challenge for youth workers. As opposed to the commitment required and favored in other forms of extracurricular programming like organized sport to ensure programming continuity and success, BCGO cannot necessarily rely on the sustained and regular participation of members for some activities (except for programming that requires participants to commit for the duration of the season). Such a context encourages the young leaders to be innovative and creative to maintain members’ interest and commitment while still recognizing the importance of fostering a clubhouse environment where participants can be kids and just hang out with their friends.

A second type of challenge raised by young leaders concerned their role “on the ground” with the children and adolescents and the ongoing need and difficulty of teaching and instilling in members the values and rules of the BCGO, such as respect, punctuality, commitment to team members and appreciating, rather than taking for granted, the opportunities offered by the BCGO.

Thirdly, the young leaders shared their continued thoughts on ways to improve the BGC0 to reach more youths. Because of their belief in the values, benefits and impact of the club, they want to enhance access by more children, adolescents and young adults. They spoke of a desire for more one-on-one time to mentor members as well as the need to close the gap in older youth programming to bring more value to the community, and the need to open on weekends and perhaps offer more field trips (areas of improvement that also emerged in interviews with administrators).

Finally, the interviews also highlighted a challenge common to involvement in community associations related to the extra “unpaid” work that youth leaders provide to the BCGO. While all but one of the young adults interviewed were involved as employees rather than volunteers, like other young people involved in community engagement, the youth leaders contribute extra unpaid hours, specifically through their commitment to the BCGO’s purpose. Their involvement in the association extends beyond a mere “job” to the point of sacrifice and selflessness seen in community engagement (Willemez, 2013) and other youth associations (Dallaire, 2017)

### **Working at the BGC0 as a form of community engagement**

When asked about their motivation to work for the BGC0, many of the young leaders stated that they wanted to “give back” to the organization that gave them so much. They wanted to be that caring adult that would support members the way they were supported and show them how to be “good citizens.”.

*. . . I think as I was growing up I began to acknowledge the effect it had on me when I reflected on the influence other Boys and Girls Club staff on me. I can give you names, honestly, of staff that I had situations with, and I learned so much from them, and they were my age. They were only 20 years old, and they taught me such an amazing life lesson. So I think whenever I look back at my childhood, the Boys and Girls Club played such a huge role and such a positive role especially. So I think it's that. Knowing that, hey, if he can have an effect on me, why can't I have an effect on the next generation coming up.*

BK – Young Leader

Indeed, the young leaders can be loosely compared to young adults working in the Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) movement. Kidd (2008) described Sport for Development and Peace as both a national and international endeavour. He explained that SDP programs are “part of a rapidly mushrooming phenomenon, the use of sport and physical activity to advance sport and broad social development in disadvantages communities” (p. 370). As noted earlier, many of the interview participants perceived that the BGC0 targets children and youth from disadvantaged backgrounds and, indeed, many of the young leaders claim to have come from such backgrounds. Therefore, these young leaders do not carry an equivalent to the “First World guilt” that Darnell (2012) suspects of workers in the SDP movement. However, like the workers involved in the SDP movement, many of the young leaders approach their roles with the expectation that they are “saving” people (Chawansky, 2014) who are having a hard time at home or at school, and have therefore chosen to “give back” to the BGC0. Furthermore, as with the SDP workers, the young BGC0 leaders had complex feelings about why they wanted to engage in their work. In the interviews, they alluded, among other things, to the enjoyment they derived from their engagement and the sense of responsibility that fuelled their engagement.

For example, one young leader explained that it was not just about wanting to “give back” but about needing to “give back.” Therefore, while the young leaders did not explicitly discuss feelings of guilt, they did talk about their work based on a concept of obligation. When asked: What’s the obligation part? The leaders responded:

*I don't know. I just felt like I still owe something to them. I felt they gave me a lot, they gave me so many opportunities. I just got a huge scholarship paid for my whole tuition this year from them...and so I feel they've given me so much, I just have to give back. I feel like I can't leave them. There's so many kids there that need that. And I don't know. I just feel like I have to be part of it.*  
BR – Young Leader

## HOW DID YOU GET HERE? RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING

### Recruitment Strategies

In order to explore the young leaders’ community engagement, we had to determine how they came to be employed by the BGCO. For example, did they seek out jobs at the BGCO on their own or were they recruited by BGCO administrators? If recruited, were they recruited because they were former members who performed the “good citizen” role while attending the club or had administrators been looking for another quality?

When asked “who are you recruiting? And when you pinpoint somebody . . . what are you looking for in those people,” one administrator explained:

*Well, there's two things that you want to look at right away, and one is character. So you want to make sure the person is a good role model in their community, good role model to others, and you can tell that very quickly. The next thing is they have to have something I like to call the “it factor.”*  
BL - Administrator

A number of the other administrators used variations of “character” and the “it factor” to describe the intangible qualities that they looked for when recruiting staff. They felt that staff should embody the values they would like kids to live by (i.e., as good role models or “community leaders” and have the “it factor,” which we suggest partly translates to being a “good citizen”) and recruit BGCO members with this capacity. Often, this meant “floating opportunities” (as stated by one administrator) to members they saw helping out on a day-to-day basis (e.g., filling water bottles during sports programming). They also suggested that the BGCO grooms members for these leadership roles, some from an early age. They recruit kids as young as 11-13 for Torch Club (a program where they learn what it means to be a leader), Leaders 4 Life (a leadership program for 14 to 18-year olds that focuses on understanding themselves, identifying their place in the family, school and community and working in those spaces) and the Leaders in Training program at Camp Smitty. Furthermore, they often recommend members who show promise for YIPI and then have them come back to work at BGCO.

When the young leaders were asked whether they were recruited for their role and if so, how they were recruited, many responded that a BGCO staff member had directly encouraged them to apply for their job or for a placement with a community organization, such as with YIPI or YSB programs. Many of them discussed how instrumental it was that they were approached directly, as they would not have self-identified for the position.

*It was actually interesting. I was aware that there was a job opening for a youth worker, junior youth worker, and I was 15 years old, so in grade 10. Still young. It has been two years since I came back, and I'm still enjoying myself as a volunteer and everything. And becoming a staff never occurred to me so early, but the clubhouse manager at the time, he approached me. And I had no intention of really applying, but he said: Hey, the deadline was 12:00 that night, 12:00 like midnight, and I was at the Boys and Girls Club playing, you know, I had no thought of that in my mind. And then at the end of the day the clubhouse manager came up to me and was like: Hey, you're applying for that job, right? And I'm like: uh, I didn't know what to tell him. I didn't want to tell him no, but I didn't really think I was going to. So I went home and pondered over it and I said: Hey, give it a shot. I've already written a résumé and go for it. And then next thing you know I'm getting an interview, and then here I am today.*

BK – Young Leader

However, it appears as though all of the young leaders interviewed did have some self-awareness as well as the ability to take appropriate action to realize their leadership potential. For example, some young leaders explained that they had received assistance from BGCO staff with their applications and to prepare for interviews, but had to take the initiative themselves to get the job.

Others explained that they were recruited because a staff member believed in them despite their personal self-doubt, and they put a great deal of effort preparing for the interview. Still others stated that once they had proved themselves as volunteers, they were told that a part-time contact would be waiting for them if they wanted it.

The interviews with administrators and young leaders clearly show that young leaders hired at the BGCO are frequently recruited from the membership or camper base, as was the case with all but one of the young leaders interviewed. Furthermore, of the six administrators, three were former members, which suggests that the BGCO accomplishes its vision of “grooming” members to take on roles as “community leaders” and specifically to stay involved in ensuring the organization’s continuity and, more importantly, that it continues to foster the positive development of children and adolescents who most benefit from its services. While this has been observed as well as a strength in other youth organizations (Dallaire, 2017) and is positive for the BGCO, Karagianni and Montgomery (2017) caution that selection bias can come at a cost. For example, in this case, if the BGCO is grooming children and youth who display the “it factor”, but if the “it factor” overlooks a wide range of personal qualities, they might not be reaching certain young people who would make great “community leaders” but lack these BGCO-defined qualities. Once again, we should underscore that we interviewed a select group of “champions” specifically dedicated to the BGCO’s mission and committed to instilling shared values in new generations of children and adolescents. Had we interviewed or surveyed a wider sample of the organization’s youth workers and volunteers, we may or may not have encountered greater variation in the qualities distinguishing these young adults. In fact, a large number of youth workers and volunteers are needed to run programs at clubhouses and Camp Smitty. We can postulate that young adults who choose to work in youth programming and community organizations rather than other areas offering youth employment (i.e., retail, restaurants) share common values such as dedication to children and adolescents, a desire to work with and for others and genuine enjoyment of contributing to children and adolescents’ development. However, some youth workers may lack the same intensity of commitment to youth programming and may be involved mostly “for the paycheck.”

## Training Strategies

To determine how the young leaders learn the task of helping members become “good citizens” and “community leaders”, we asked the administrators and young leaders about BGCO training processes. Interview participants stated that all volunteers and staff are expected to complete formal training modules, including HIGH FIVE, Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHIMIS), First Aid and CPR, etc. Training happens twice a year, for a week in June and a week in September. Lifeguards have mandated training and camp counsellors get specialized training as well. For example, Camp Smitty is an accredited Ontario Camps Association camp and must abide by Association policies and regulations. Young leaders are also required to engage in some job shadowing before they take up their role at either a clubhouse or at camp. When an administrator was asked: “What’s the main objective of this [more formal] training,” s/he replied:

*It's just to develop the skills because they already have the character and they already have... It's just to make sure that they feel comfortable with their skills for the actual work. So I know that they have the “it factor” to go and do the work, but it's to provide them some extra skills or support past and above and beyond the management support that they're receiving, for the day-to-day work and operations that we do.*

BL - Administrator

While most administrators focused on the course-based training components, a few mentioned documents that the young leaders are required to read and uphold. For example, the Employee Handbook emphasizes respect (for the BGCO buildings, staff, volunteers, members) and teamwork in the workplace and outlines explicit expectations concerning staff conduct in their roles at the BGCO and outside the workplace. In other words, the BGCO handbook describes certain behaviours they expect of staff as “good citizens” and “community leaders” while working at the club.

Therefore, young leaders are explicitly trained (in non-theoretical language) through formal courses, job shadowing and the employee handbook about many of the facets of PYD. Where PYD stresses providing youth with meaningful opportunities to promote competencies leading to positive youth development outcomes, another framework, social justice youth development (SJYD), allows youth the opportunity to think critically about the social, economic and political conditions that impact their lives and then engage in actions to address these conditions (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 327). The leaders are also trained (implicitly) to apply many facets of SJYD. However, according to administrators, these young leaders often already know how to act as “community leaders” in order to achieve the club’s vision of producing “good citizens” because they already have the “it factor,” i.e., the character and ethos sought. Some of the young leaders developed this “it factor” from their own experiences as members and were thus trained from the time they began attending the BGCO as children or youth. Others may have had this quality before they joined the club as members. Regardless of how they developed the “it factor,” interview responses from both the administrators and the young leaders suggest that it is one of the most important qualities in young leaders working at the BGCO.

What is the “it factor”? Our reading, based on our analysis of the interview data, is that the “it factor” is similar to the concept of servant leadership first proposed by Greenleaf (1977). While the theory has been used in many fields, including education, business, management and economics, its application in SDP (see Welty Peachy & Burton, 2017) is what led us to consider it for this case. The antecedent qualities (virtuous traits) required for servant leadership behaviour include humility, altruism, gratitude and forgiveness (Welty Peachy & Burton, 2017). We contend that the BGCO fosters these qualities in its members. However, as young leader DG suggested, the young leaders may also have had these qualities before joining the BGCO. The behaviours of a servant leader include empowering and developing people, authenticity, providing direction and stewardship (Welty Peachy & Burton, 2017). According to van Dierendonck and Patterson (2015), empowerment “stands for giving autonomy to followers to perform tasks, developing their talent and letting

them engage in effective self-leadership” (p. 126). Authenticity refers to “being true to oneself, accurately representing— privately and publicly—internal states, intentions and commitments” (p. 126). Providing direction is when “leaders make sure that followers know what is expected of them” (p. 126-127) and stewardship is an awareness of the responsibility for future generations and the contribution of an organization to society and the greater good (p. 126). Servant leaders thus help leadership grow by sharing power with others in the organization, showing self-awareness and fostering the same quality in others, thinking critically about their actions and encouraging others to follow suit, providing support to others and showing them that they are part of something much larger than themselves.

Upon returning to what we perceive as the BCGO institutional moral code,<sup>4</sup> whereby staff promise to uphold the values<sup>5</sup> and mission of the Club and are expected to model the “good citizen” and “community leader” in their work, we found links to the qualities and behaviours described in the servant leadership framework.

Based on our analysis, the “it factor” is best described as an embodiment of the institutional moral code of the BCGO (which also bears similarities to applying the servant leadership framework and PYD and SJYD frameworks). Young leaders who have the “it factor” seemed to be deciding voluntarily to follow the BCGO’s moral code (i.e., to buy into it, to experience it and to live by it) rather than conforming to a moral code to meet expectations. This conscious reflection about the moral code and decision to follow it is what Michel Foucault (1986) refers to as becoming an “ethical subject.”

The young leaders interviewed did speak about performing many of these behaviours.

Furthermore, according to both the administrators and the young leaders, on-the job training accounts for the most significant part of the training process. When asked: “What do you tell them, and then how do you do your own training or supervision to make sure that they can be the type of employees and volunteers you’re looking for?” one administrator responded:

*I try and really focus on the day to day coaching rather than the formal okay, we’re going to sit down for your annual performance review or the monthly staff meeting because if you’re not correcting things in the moment or giving feedback, positive or negative, in the moment, they’ve already forgotten about that interaction, right? . . . there’s always the formal training, the staff training with the HIGH FIVE, yada yada yada, but it’s that constant feedback that shows them that you are watching, there are expectations here, and it gives you a chance to reinforce some of the things that we are looking for.*

LU – Administrator

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<sup>4</sup> Michel Foucault (1986) suggested that moral codes, one of three aspects of morality, consist of discourses, which are the historically relevant ideas and statements that dictate the ways in which people understand and navigate their daily experiences as well as how they view and understand themselves within the world. The other aspects include ethics, which refers to ‘the manner in which one ought to “conduct oneself”--that is, the manner in which one ought to form oneself as an ethical subject acting in reference to the prescriptive elements that make up the code’ (p. 26) and the ‘morality of behaviours’ which refers to ‘the real behavior of individuals in relation to the rules and values that are recommended to them’ (i.e., complying, resisting conduct, a prescription or set of values) (p. 25).

<sup>5</sup> Core values include: inclusion and opportunity, respect and belonging, empowerment, collaboration and speaking out (BCGO, Employee Handbook, p. 8).

In fact, young leaders consistently said they did not consider what they had learned from experience in their roles as “training” in the usual sense. They saw the on-the-job training as modelling “good” behaviour and they tried to emulate it. According to DG:

*. . . I was fortunate enough to meet great positive role models and staff that were able to show me the right direction, and I think that really helped me even now, to this day, continue to bring leadership and help and really support other people.*

*QUESTION: How did they show you?*

*I think it's by how they conduct themselves. Like I said, leadership is a great skill to have for sure. And if they were doing the right thing, I would follow their direction. I think leading by example is one thing that is hard to do because obviously not everybody can do the right thing at the right time, and I think my positive role models were able to do the right things and show me the right things, so I was able to bring that to the table anywhere I was.*

DG – Young Leader

Therefore, while the young leaders are working to help children and youth become “good citizens”, they are perpetually learning to be “good citizens” as well.

## RESEARCH QUESTION # 3 – GOOD CITIZENS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

### Modelling the “good citizen” and the “community leader”

In the interviews, questions about the motivation among young leaders to work for the BGCO were followed by questions inviting them to reflect on the kind of person they wanted to be.

While responses to the question, “What type of person do you want to be?” were diverse, almost all of the young leaders interviewed explained that their experiences as members of the BGCO had a significant impact on their journey to becoming the “good citizen” and “community leader.” Many participants suggested that being a person who “helps people” represents an important part of their identity (in congruence with literature and reports that explore reasons young people work in non-profit organizations – e.g., see Cordeaux, 2017) and claimed that the BGCO mentored them, as members and staff, to express this aspect of their identity. For example, when asked, “What kind of person do you want to be?” one young leader stated:

*I want to give back in some sort. Help people. I believe in second chances. I always wanted to help improve people, whether it be children, adults, just make a difference in the person's life pretty much, yeah.*

UR – Young Leader

When asked: “Where does that come from?” UR responded:

*Maybe the Boys and Girls Club I'd say. I'd say that. It's a good question. I think it comes from my family, my mom, seeing her as a hard worker, and never really want to disappoint her after all what she's been through. And I think the Boys and Girls Club as well really shaped me to a positive person helping other people and doing as much as I can.*

UR – Young Leader

One participant credited the BGCO with teaching them to become a helpful person as a member, but then complicated things by questioning whether they were drawn to the BGCO because they were already on the path to becoming a “good citizen.” When asked: “Is that the kind of person you want to be, a person that helps others . . . ?”

*I would say that's me. I think obviously it happened just by joining the Boys and Girls Club because who knows, if I didn't come to the Boys and Girls Club who I would be. But I would definitely say that's why I'm... maybe I had that, maybe I decided to come here because I had that. Like who knows? At this point I would say it's more in me.*

DG – Young Leader

Therefore, while the BGCO certainly played a significant role in inculcating the civic values of engagement for this young leader, perhaps the “champion” young leaders we interviewed, including DG, were predisposed to adopting/reinforcing these values because they confirmed what they had learned at home or matched their own beliefs. In this quote, DG demonstrated an awareness of this complication, which leads us to believe that s/he is thinking critically about her/his situation.

Further demonstration of this reflexivity is evident in the following example, where one young leader claimed that they had already become the “good citizen” and, once again, credited the BGCO for getting them there. For example, when prompted: “You say I found out who I am. What do you mean by that?”

*I think who I am is I'm a good, young person. I'm a hardworking, loving, caring person, and I just want the best for everyone around me, and I think I got a lot of my values from the Boys and Girls Club. Obviously I got it from the Boys and Girls Club. I'm just a young person who is in the process of doing something good with their life. I'm slowly building who I am right now, and it's in the process. It's loading, quote unquote, but I'm a work in progress and I'd like to say I'm a young leader. I do a lot of volunteer work with the police service. I meet a lot of really cool people. I don't know, it's hard to say who I am.*

TC – Young Leader

Therefore, these young leaders are reflexive about their own identities and the ways that the BGCO contributes to these identities. While it is possible that young leaders were reflexive people prior to their involvement with the BGCO (as suggested by DG) and potentially defined by administrators as having the “it factor,” it seems likely that the BGCO further grooms members to develop this reflexivity from the time they step through the door. Indeed, the Club promotes community engagement by encouraging youth to be “good citizens” and “community leaders.” Members are for instance expected to stop in mid-activity to deconstruct disagreements, with the assistance of staff and “give back” by contributing to daily activities (including from a leadership perspective) from a young age. Like other programming that trains youth to be productive citizens, the BCGO implements a normative project (Levine and Higgins-d’Alessandro, 2010; Willemez (2013)) by instilling a certain set of values that reflect a particular approach to citizenship and community engagement. Notwithstanding the normative dimension of the BCGO’s purpose, it does offer a space where youth can think about who they are and their relationship to the community. Why does it matter? This opportunity for critical reflection on one’s civic action has been identified as one of the conditions of success of youth community engagement (Finn and Checkoway, 1998; Quintelier, 2008) While the BGCO’s vision is to produce “good citizens” and “community leaders,” and expect as much from their young leaders, it is important to know whether the young leaders are deciding for themselves to embody the institutional moral code or whether they are simply conforming to an obligation imposed on them by the BGCO. If they are simply conforming, the BGCO’s staff is arguably performing (and modelling) the role of productive and tolerant people unable to produce real change in the world around them, rather than deeply self-aware actors who think critically about their actions (required of servant leaders and practitioners promoting social justice in youth development). Regardless of why the young leaders are reflexive about their place in the BGCO community, their role modelling of the “good citizen” through their work as “community leaders” is important for the continued success of the BGCO.

## DISCUSSION

### HOW TO BUILD ON THE CURRENT BEST PRACTICES OF THE BGC0

Based on the interview data, evidence shows that the BGC0 is achieving its mission, which is *to provide a safe, supportive place where children and youth can experience new opportunities, overcome barriers, build positive relationships and develop confidence and skills for life*. Hard-working young leaders claim to be fostering PYD within their membership and providing children and youth with a **place, opportunities** and a **diversity of programs and services** that allow them to connect with peers and non-familial adults. The comparison of interview with administrators and young leaders reveals consistency with respect to what the BGC0 represents. This suggests that BGC0 administrators and young leaders share the same values, which are to produce “good citizen” and “community leaders.” Furthermore, while the young leaders are acting on these values, they also embody them by reflexively becoming “good citizens” through their work as “community leaders” at the BGC0. The BGC0’s work is thus cyclical – young leaders with the “it factor” (which we liken to servant leadership) plausibly gained many of their leadership qualities through their experiences as Club members and are now working to foster these qualities in the younger generation. While doing this work, they continually grow and learn and get closer to becoming the type of people they expect the members to be. As Young Leader TC put it above, *“it’s loading, quote unquote, but I’m a work in progress.”*

While we laud the BGC0 for its apparent success in achieving its mission and vision, we wonder whether other avenues are open to the organization to improve its work. The following list details the new directions we believe the BGC0 can explore (if they are not already doing so) to find new ways of working with members and training their young leaders.

1. Continue to involve members along with Administrators, Young Leaders and Youth-Adult Partnerships (Y-AP) in decision-making within the clubhouse.

In order to promote positive youth development, increase civic engagement, and support community change, Zeldin et al., (2016) and others (e.g., Zeldin, Christens and Powers, 2013) call for adults to partner with young people in what is dubbed, youth-adult partnerships (Y-AP). According to Zeldin et al., (2013), “youth-adult partnership is the practice of: (a) multiple youth and multiple adults deliberating and acting together, (b) in a collective [democratic] fashion (c) over a sustained period of time, (d) through shared work, (e) intended to promote social justice, strengthen an organization and/or affirmatively address a community issue.” (p. 388). The BGC0 seems to be doing this through its youth council and, as illustrated, in the way that young leaders described the non-hierarchical structure of the organization and the value placed on their input. We encourage the BGC0 to continue this process of encouraging members and staff participation in enhancing programming and broader policy directions, and to think about new ways to involve them in decision-making, and particularly in efforts to improve the experiences of current members and increase adolescent and young adult participation.

2. Continue to encourage reflexivity in members and staff.

To achieve this, we suggest reaching beyond PYD frameworks and drawing more heavily on SJYD frameworks. Iwasaki et al. (2014) explain that SJYD focused on three levels - the self, community, and global awareness – to encourage critical thinking and awareness in youth. They explain the three levels as follows:

- Awareness of self “involves developing a critical self-awareness of how power and privilege intersect with sex, gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, etc. that create or constrain their life opportunities” (p. 322).
- Awareness of community “involves developing awareness of oppressive forces in their community (e.g., how social and economic conditions that contextualize young people’s lives

contribute to the fracturing of their identities), including racist policies and procedures, fracturing of identities” (p. 322).

- Awareness of others (global) “involves looking at both oppression and opportunities for solidarity at a global scale” (p. 322).

Where PYD stresses providing youth with meaningful opportunities to promote competencies leading to positive youth development outcomes, SJYD enables youth to think critically about the social, economic and political conditions that impact their lives and then to engage in actions to address these conditions (Iwasaki et al, 2014). SJYD involves looking at both oppression and opportunity for solidarity, which does fit the BCGO’s purpose of producing “good citizens” and “community leaders.” It may be worth engaging further with the first two levels of SJYD to enable greater awareness and consciousness among young leaders.

- a. In Leader programs and training for new staff, engage in ongoing conversations that allow participants to define what constitutes a leader for themselves.

The interview data suggests that the BCGO is having an impact on the Ottawa community. Therefore, it is important to define “leader” as a malleable concept and to invite constant reflection by members, young leaders and administrators on this concept could be beneficial.

- b. Explore whether the principles of servant leader frameworks (Greenleaf, 2077; Welty Peachy & Burton, 2017) would enhance discussions about leadership with members and staff.

As discussed above, the BCGO’s institutional values are reminiscent of qualities and behaviours described by the principles of servant leadership and may help inspire or guide staff in the training of young leaders.

In closing, we must concede that devising suggestions to help the BCGO enhance youth engagement among its members and young leaders has been a challenge. As the first case study in a larger project, it became apparent early on that the organization has invested considerable thought and effort in encouraging young people to contribute to the community through programming for participants and the recruitment and training of youth leaders, reminiscent of successful processes observed in other youth associations (Dallaire, 2017; Dallaire, Prévost & Houle, 2016). After all, the BCGO’s declared purpose is to produce “good citizens” and “community leaders”. Therefore, as researchers investigating the conditions of possibility that foster young adults’ participation in community development, we have learned much from this case study examining youth engagement “in action.” The larger research project has greatly benefited by starting with an analysis of the BCGO. As early indications from the analysis of subsequent case studies indicates, we expect that the forthcoming comparative analysis with other case studies will allow us to better outline the specific conditions of the BCGO that sustain its success. This analysis will expand on how we can learn from BCGO best practices to inform other organizations that offer youth programming by recruiting among former participants, and to better advise the BCGO on the key conditions and practices they should maintain and enhance.

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