

Adventure

Outside of Your Comfort Zone



Adventuring outside, growing within.

For many youth, a canoe trip presents a brand new opportunity to grow through challenge, whether it is a hard portage, meeting new people or disconnecting from technology. Afterwards they see new possibilities in themselves and have a new found pride in what they can do. Take a further look at the impact Project Canoe programs have had this year on our participants as they adventured out of their comfort zones.



Land Acknowledgement

As an organization, the work we do takes place on traditional Indigenous territories across Ontario. With youth, we explore both waterways and land which are significant to the culture, history and teachings of many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples and the existence of the land we adventure through today.

We lead day trips canoeing on the Humber River, which has acted as an important portage route for the Indigenous communities who established fishing camps throughout the Humber Valley thousands of years ago. It helped connect communities in this region to other regions.

Another area we visit frequently is the Toronto Islands. Named Minesing in Anishinaabemowin, the islands are a sacred place, used by Indigenous people long before written history for ceremonial gatherings and as a place of healing, rest and refuge.

Further north, the canoe trips we lead through Algonquin Park are situated on the traditional lands of the diverse Algonquin Nation. This expansive and beautiful wilderness holds immense significance to the Algonquin people, who have been its stewards for countless generations.

As we lead adventures through these areas, we acknowledge our responsibility to honour and respect the Indigenous communities and their connection to these lands. We hope to continue our learning of the places we visit and are committed to actively promoting dialogue, and preserving the environment in collaboration with those who have nurtured these territories for millennia.





Table of Contents

- 1** Program Overview
- 2** Canoe Trips
- 3** Urban Programs
- 4** Year Round Programs
- 5** Our Values
- 6** Youth Experiences
- 7** Staff Observations
- 8** Letter from a parent
- 9** Note from Leadership
- 10** Appreciations

Program Overview

258

Youth
Participants

12

Canoe
Trips

36

Day
Programs

“My son said it was something he could never have imagined and would go again next year and bring others too! He learned what it takes to work as a team, to care for his belongings, and to be organized.”

-- Parent/guardian of youth



Canoe Trips

64

Youth
Served

31%

Returning

69%

New



Program Feature

Local Explorers supports Black and Indigenous girls to foster and cultivate their connection to nature in a meaningful way while building a sense of self, belonging and community. In 2023, Youth participated in the urban program days and completed a 5 day trip in Algonquin Park.



Urban Programs

Partner Organizations

Pathways Regent Park
NeighbourLink North York
YMCA Newcomer Leadership
Development Program
Jewish Immigration Aid
Services
Native Child and Family
Services Toronto

16
Summer Day
Programs

114
Youth Served



Year-Round Adventures

To deepen our relationships with youth and service providers, we increased our urban offerings in 2023. This program expansion has allowed us to provide new experiences for youth throughout the year while building a strong connection to help prepare them for summer canoe trips.

20
Year-round activities

Program Feature

Outdoors Club is a year-round program that offers youth and their families opportunities to take part outdoor activities throughout the GTA. In 2023, we offered 6 Outdoors Club meetings and activities which included hiking, campfires, survival skills, skating, canoeing and rock climbing. Youth who attended an outdoors club meet-up came on a canoe trip this summer with more confidence and assurance.



Our Values

In 2022, we updated our Organizational Values to best reflect our commitments to young people, the communities we serve and the outdoors.

Youth Centered

Recognition of each youth as a unique individual and prioritization of working alongside youth in various aspects of the organization.

Equity

Integration of anti-oppressive and equitable processes, with a focus on addressing barriers for youth and inclusivity within the organization.

Culture of Care

A high level of support and care for community members with emphasis on kindness, respect, and environmental stewardship.

Community

Commitment to listening to and engaging with communities. Teaching youth the importance of community building.

Power of the Outdoors

Utilization of natural spaces for self-examination, celebration, and creating meaningful memories.

Values in Action

41%

of youth were referred by community organizations

96%

of youth received a subsidy this summer

5

Former Project Canoe youth assisted with leading trips

3

Extended program partnerships created with youth serving organizations

Program Feature

Launching this fall, our **Youth Advisory Council** is an opportunity for young people aged 16-24 to take an active role in supporting our programs to continue to improve and grow. Members will be part of building a community with others who enjoy spending time outside in nature through sharing their perspectives, creative ideas, and learning together.





What did you learn about yourself?

Top three categories of youth responses:

1 Perseverance

2 Positive mindset

3 Strength



“I learned that I am very willing to push myself towards improvement and to accept challenges”

- Canoe Trip Participant

“I am brave, I am stronger than I thought”

- Canoe Trip Participant



What was your favourite part of the trip?

“I have a lot but one of them is beating my fear of being in a boat or canoe, in the middle of the lake”

“My favourite part was the portages. Yes they were difficult but it pushed me and made me appreciate Algonquin.”

“Seeing a bird like hawk and lake otters also spending time with the other people was nice”

“I overall loved this trip, and it was an amazing first experience but i think that my favourite part of the trip was my group who were all kind and helpful and all the things i learned (how to set up a tent, how to stern etc).”



Staff Observations



Three main areas of improvement were observed in youth this summer

Adapting to change or set backs

Social competence, ability to get along with others

Self esteem, feeling good about self

Letter from a parent.

MY CHILD'S EXPERIENCE WITH PROJECT CANOE HAS BEEN LIFE-CHANGING. EVERY STEP FROM MY FIRST EMAIL THROUGH TO HIS RETURN HOME WAS SO WELL PLANNED WITH THE NEEDS OF THE YOUTH AT THE CENTRE, AND THE SKILLS AND THOUGHTFULNESS OF EACH OF THE STAFF WE CAME INTO CONTACT WITH WAS INSPIRING. MY CHILD SOMETIMES STRUGGLES WITH ANXIETY AND SOCIAL INTERACTIONS, AND THE SHIFT IN HIS CONFIDENCE FOLLOWING HIS TRIP WITH PROJECT CANOE IS OBVIOUS. HE HAD A WONDERFUL TIME AND IS KEEN TO REPEAT THE EXPERIENCE. THANKS FOR ALL THAT YOU DO, PROJECT CANOE!



Notes from the Project Canoe Team



Sascha Ellis Executive
Director

2023 was a summer of celebrations. As always, we celebrated 12 amazing groups of youth for completing their canoe trips. We celebrated new friendships and appreciation for the environment with young folks in Urban Programs. But we also celebrated conflict by leaning into it and showing youth that it, like the waters of Algonquin, is navigable. We celebrated being tired, bug-bitten, and ready to sleep after a long portage. We celebrated developing skills through challenging yourself and coming out better for that. These celebrations reminded us of the power of resilience and the joy of growth, as we watched our young participants develop into confident and capable individuals. This summer was a testament to the transformative experiences that nature and challenge can offer, leaving us with lasting memories of laughter, learning, and personal triumphs. Thanks to our team, the youth and all of our supporters for making this all a reality.

For us at Project Canoe, the lengthening shadows of autumn have always been bittersweet. We reflect back on the many wonderful experiences we shared with the youth who joined us for the summer wilderness canoe trips and the urban summer hikes and paddles. As we slow down through the long winter, we are thrilled that we are able to continue to connect with returning and new youth all year long.

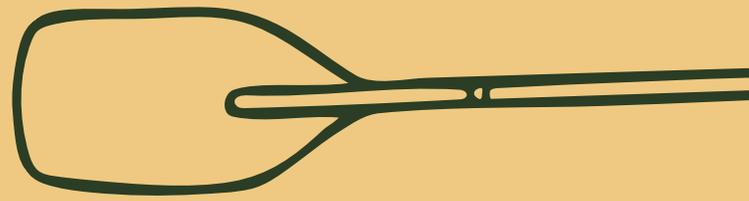
Emerging from the pandemic, we have prioritized expanding our programming to include year-round activities, such as the Outdoors Club and the Youth Advisory Committee, have fostered longer term and deeper connections with our community partners, and are creating stronger pathways for employment at PC. These strategic directions aim to support our vision for young people to be more connected to the environment, themselves and their communities, regardless of what challenges they face.

Thanks to the generous support of our growing community of dedicated partner agencies, donors, staff, and volunteers, our impact this year has grown to levels we've not seen before.



Sara Udow & Peter
Szathmary
Board Co-Chairs

Thank you!



It takes a community of support to make sure we can offer our services in ways that are therapeutic and client-centred. We're so thankful to everyone who makes up that community.

The Alva
Foundation



Service
Canada



The Flavelle
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The Bradford
Family Giving
Fund



The Edith and
Bernard Ennis
Foundation



The Gandy
Charitable
Foundation



The Jean
Wansborough
Leadership
Traning Fund



The Alpema
Foundation



Base Camp

Our Base Camp of 35 monthly donors, form the foundation of our programs. They help to ensure that young people can continue to access powerful, fun, and enriching outdoor activities year-after-year.





project canoe

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