

**carya's Sirius Program:**  
2017-2018 Evaluation Results



# What is carya's Sirius Program?

**carya's** Sirius Program (Sirius) was initiated in 2014 with the intention of supporting high school students who identify or present as female in building confidence and in uncovering strengths through action and learning. Recruitment for the Program focuses on students who may be more vulnerable in terms of background (e.g. family situations) and behaviours (e.g. skipping school).

The Program has two components:



1. Intentional Social Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum-based activities
2. Youth-directed Service Learning activities



During the Service Learning component of the Program, youth are connected with trained volunteers from the community who support program participants as Allies in their self-discovery and confidence-building journey. Together, participants and Allies work towards youth-directed learning directions while developing deep and meaningful connections that act as natural supports for participants.



Through Sirius, participants are not only supported in self-discovery, confidence-building, and connections with positive adults – they also receive one-on-one outreach support from the Program Facilitator who works holistically with participants and their families to build inherent resiliencies and natural supports so that participants can truly thrive.



Sirius has been rigorously evaluated since its inception. Evaluation results have repeatedly revealed that the program has significant impact on participants' resiliency and confidence. The current report describes the learnings from the 2017-2018 Sirius Program evaluation.

# carya's Sirius Program is Evidence Informed

**A Social Emotional Learning (SEL) focus supports youth in achieving positive outcomes that enable them to engage in education and successfully navigate transitions out of high school.** SEL is the process through which individuals acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. Research has shown that when adolescents are engaged through an SEL approach they experience positive outcomes such as:

- Increased ability to pay attention in class and persevere with tasks
- Increased problem solving abilities
- Increased ability to work well with others
- Decreased stress, anxiety, and experiences of depression (improved mental health)
- Decreased anger and aggression
- Increased critical thinking
- Increased independence and positive autonomous decision making
- Long-term positive outcomes related to employment, decreased criminal activity, decreased substance abuse, and improved mental health



## **School is the right setting for vulnerable youth.**

Research has shown that creating an inclusive and 'safe' program space within a school setting can provide a connection point for youth who might otherwise feel disconnected or marginalized at school. School connection through social programming has been shown to:

- Increase school attendance
- Improve academic achievement
- Decrease social isolation at school
- Create a better school environment for marginalized youth.



**Healthy adult relationships are critical for vulnerable youth.** Allies are people who recognize the unearned privilege they receive from society's patterns of injustice and take responsibility for changing these patterns. Research has shown that connection to a positive adult Ally can lead to:

- Long-term supportive relationships (natural supports)
- Decreased feelings of isolation
- Support for education and career advancement



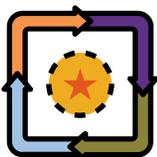
**Service Learning enables deep learning by participants that can be applied to real life situations and supports youth in making connections with their community.** Research has shown that Service Learning approaches result in:

- Development of confidence
- Development of new skills
- Application of learned skills
- Increased academic engagement
- Greater leadership capacity
- Increased interest in volunteering



# Evaluating the Sirius Program

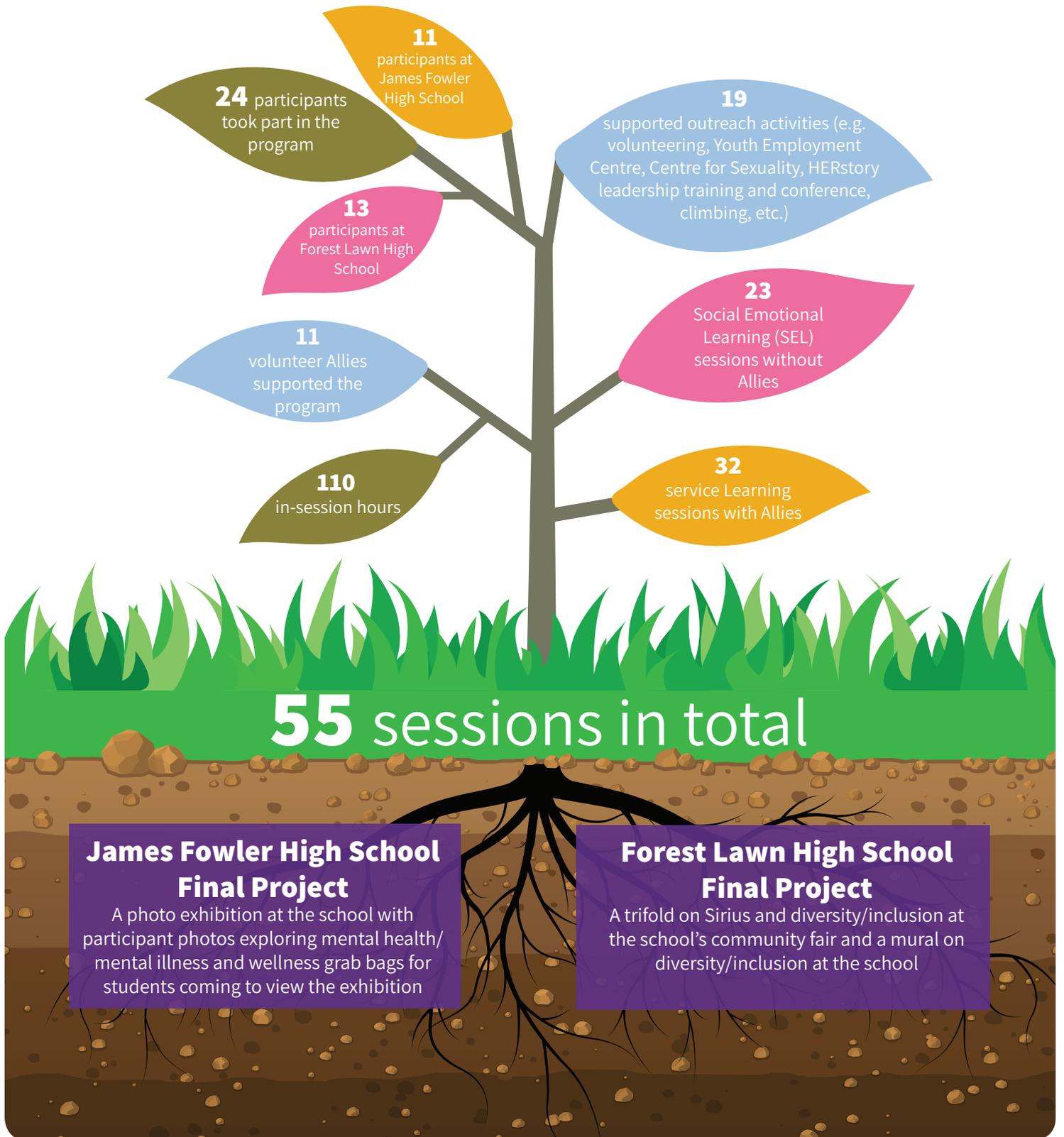
Since its inception in 2014, the Sirius Program has been rigorously evaluated to understand the outcomes being produced by the program. Evaluation methods are continually re-assessed to ensure relevance and, where possible, are replicated year-on-year to enable comparison of results. In 2017-2018, the evaluation methods included:



- The standardized and validated Resiliency Initiatives pre-post survey completed by participants (this survey measures changes in internal and external resiliency factors as well as core competencies that have been shown to contribute to youth success)
- A post-program focus group with participants at each school
- A custom-designed post-program survey for participants' parents
- A custom-designed post-program survey for volunteer Allies
- A post-program interview with the Program Facilitator

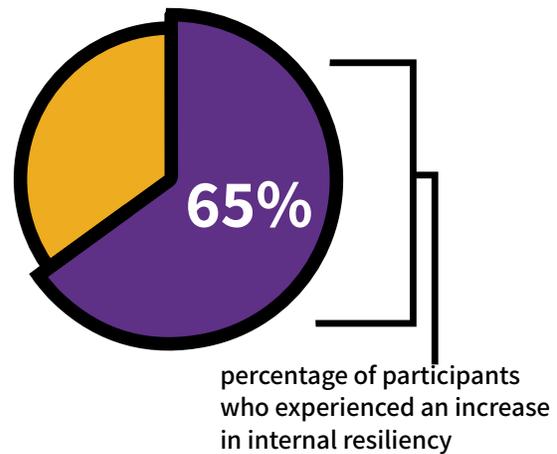


# This Year in the 2017-2018 Sirius Program

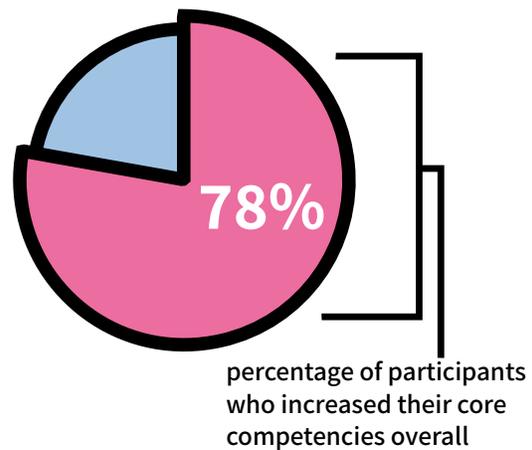


# Program Outcome for Participants

While research has shown that many high school students experience decreased self-esteem, confidence, and other contributors to internal resiliency, 65% of Sirius participants in 2017-2018 experienced an increase in internal resiliency.

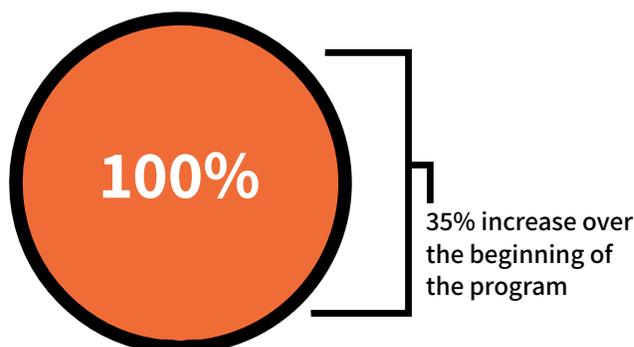


Through the Sirius program's focus on Social Emotional Learning (SEL), participants also increased key core competencies that support participants' ability to navigate positive transitions from high school to long term thriving in the community. This year, 78% of participants increased their core competencies overall, including important increases in social competence, emotional competence, and adaptability.

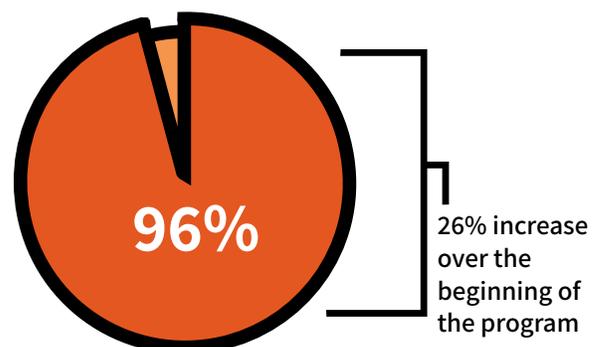


Natural supports that can support youth beyond program hours are key for ensuring youth can thrive in the long term. This year, 100% of students indicated that at the end of the program they felt they had friends they could rely upon (a 35% increase over the beginning of the program). Further, 96% of participants indicated that at the end of the program there was an adult in their life that they felt could support them in achieving their goals (a 26% increase over the beginning of the program).

**Participants who felt they had friends they could rely on**

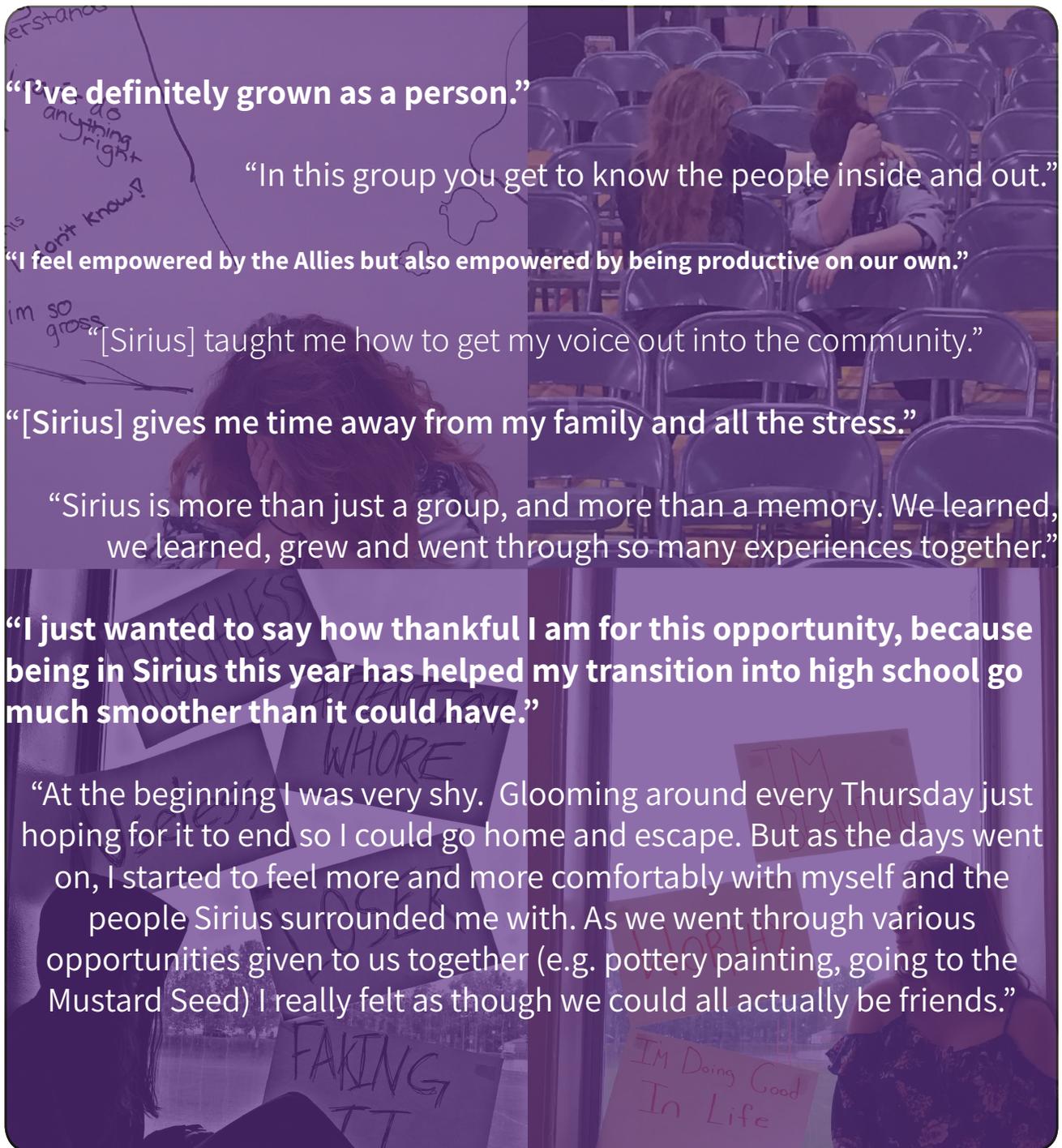


**Participants who felt they had an adult in their life who could support them in achieving their goals**



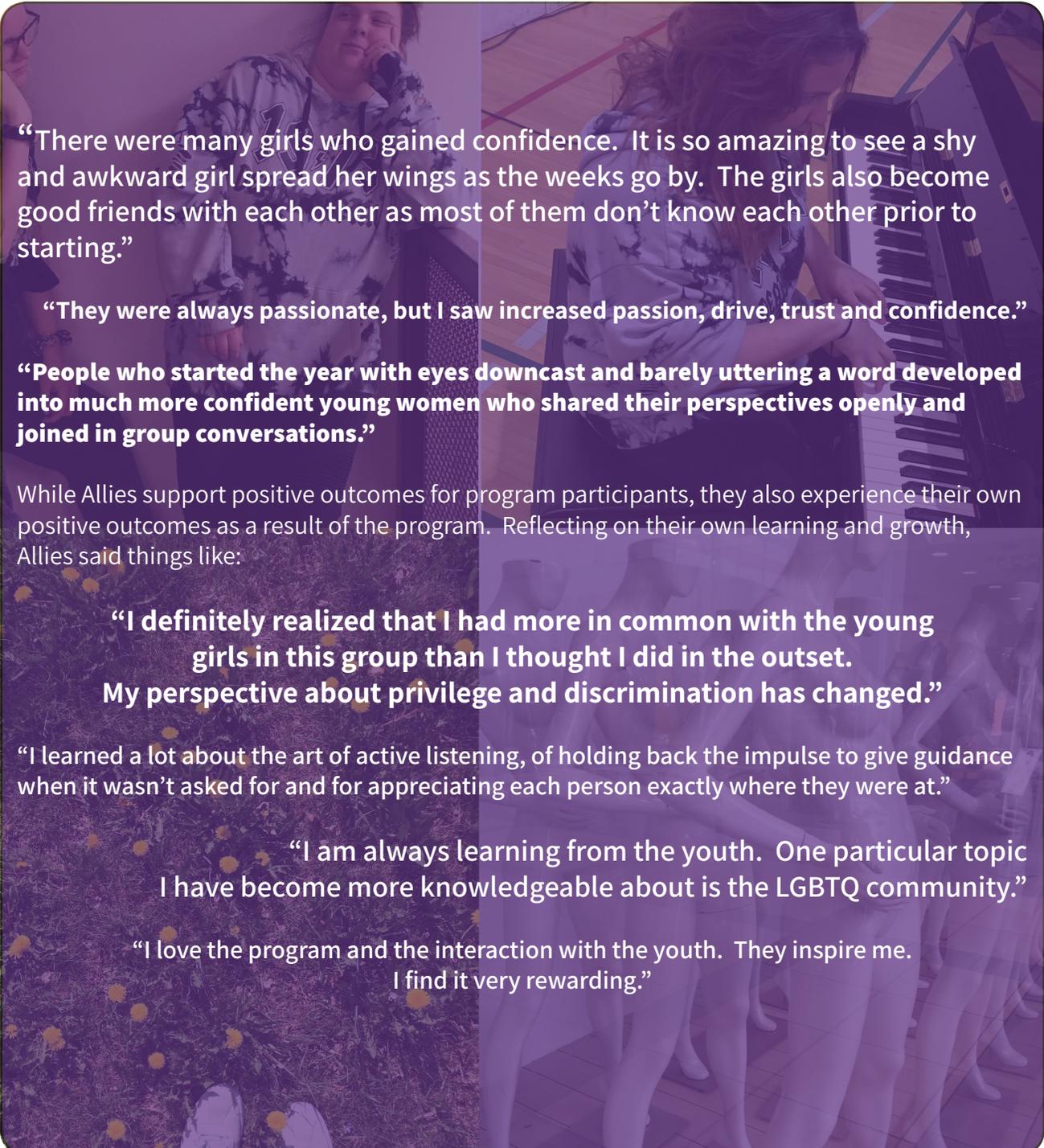
# In Their Own Words: Participant Perspectives on the Sirius Program

Reflecting on their experience in the program through a post-program focus group with the program evaluator, participants spoke about the positive impact participation in the group had had on their lives. They spoke about the friendships they had made and the skills they had developed in expressing themselves and advocating for themselves. They also articulated positive personal changes they had experienced that increased their confidence, self-esteem and sense of empowerment. Most participants said they had developed supportive and inspiring connections to their Allies. In their own words, participants said things like:



# Ally Perspectives on the Sirius Program

Sirius volunteer Allies recognize their own privilege and seek to support youth by sharing that privilege, 'walking alongside' youth through their high school journey. As part of the program, Allies receive training to better understand the dynamics of privilege and oppression and to enable deep listening and the ability to support youth in their youth-directed Service Learning projects. Reflecting on the changes they had observed amongst participants in the group, Allies said things like:



**“There were many girls who gained confidence. It is so amazing to see a shy and awkward girl spread her wings as the weeks go by. The girls also become good friends with each other as most of them don’t know each other prior to starting.”**

**“They were always passionate, but I saw increased passion, drive, trust and confidence.”**

**“People who started the year with eyes downcast and barely uttering a word developed into much more confident young women who shared their perspectives openly and joined in group conversations.”**

While Allies support positive outcomes for program participants, they also experience their own positive outcomes as a result of the program. Reflecting on their own learning and growth, Allies said things like:

**“I definitely realized that I had more in common with the young girls in this group than I thought I did in the outset. My perspective about privilege and discrimination has changed.”**

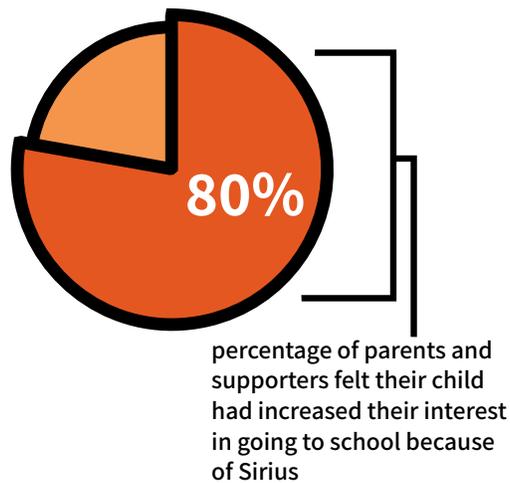
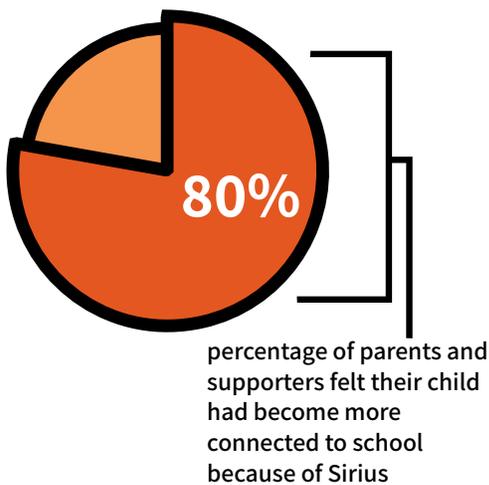
**“I learned a lot about the art of active listening, of holding back the impulse to give guidance when it wasn’t asked for and for appreciating each person exactly where they were at.”**

**“I am always learning from the youth. One particular topic I have become more knowledgeable about is the LGBTQ community.”**

**“I love the program and the interaction with the youth. They inspire me. I find it very rewarding.”**

# Parent and Supporter Perspectives on the Sirius Program

The parents and closest supporters of participants act as natural supports beyond the time participants spend involved in Sirius. They witness the day-to-day changes experienced by participants because of the program and are able to access support through the program when needed (e.g. foodbank referrals, counselling referrals, etc.). At the program graduation, parents and supporters were invited to complete a survey reflecting on their family's experience with the program. They indicated:



of parents and supporters felt their child had increased their confidence because of their involvement in Sirius



of parents and supporters felt their child had learned new things through Sirius



of parents and supporters said they would recommend the program to other participants

# Learnings and Opportunities for Improvement

While the Sirius Program demonstrated significant success in 2017-2018 there were, nevertheless, challenges that emerged over the course of the year, presenting opportunities for learning and new directions moving forward.



**Attendance:** One challenge this year was youth and Ally attendance. At times, participant attendance was low while at other times Allies missed key group sessions. Moving into next year, there is an opportunity to more clearly articulate the expectations of the group to ensure both participants and Allies are committed to coming to the group consistently and, if they are not able to attend, they respectfully explain why to their colleagues.



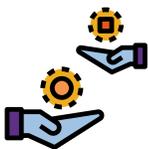
**Service Learning Project Timing:** Another challenge that emerged this year was the timing of the Service Learning projects. With both participants and Allies having busy schedules in the month of June, simultaneously working to complete Sirius Service Learning projects can be difficult. In the future, there is an opportunity to adjust the program schedule so that Service Learning is more evenly spread throughout the program year. An opportunity to have funds available to support Service Learning projects has also been highlighted, and may contribute to decreased time spent finding donations and greater ability to focus on completing projects.



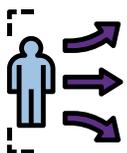
**Ally Connection:** Sirius Program volunteer Allies have repeatedly indicated that they would like to have greater opportunities for connection with one another. This year, Allies have self-organized to create a meet-up group that is open to Allies from both Sirius groups with the intention of creating a space for greater Ally connection. Moving forward into next year, this group presents an exciting opportunity for new and returning Allies, and may create additional positive outcomes for these volunteers.



**Program Timing:** Program timing is always a challenge for both Allies and participants. While some Allies suggested that it would be helpful to have the groups start later in the day so that they can join after work, some participants indicated that the timing of the program works well, as it happens at a time when they would otherwise be home alone. Other participants suggested that it would be better to have the program offered during school time, possibly for school credit, however Allies indicated this would be a challenge for their work schedules. Going forward there is an opportunity to continually assess program scheduling options and ensure the program is offered at a time that engages both participants and Allies, while maintaining the program structure.



**Supporting the Growth of Alumnae:** The program has been continually challenged in finding ways to build on the trust and connection fostered through Sirius to continue enhancing the strength and resilience of participants after their first year in the program. Moving into next year, the program will seek to provide additional outreach activities and opportunities for returning participants and Sirius alumnae, so that they are supported in their transitions through and beyond high school and so that they can leverage the confidence built through their Sirius experience towards supporting other students (including Sirius participants).



**Outreach Activities and Group-to-Group Connection:** This year, participants highlighted that they significantly enjoyed the outreach opportunities offered through the program (e.g. volunteering opportunities, climbing, etc.) and that next year they would like to see these activities continue and possibly expand. They also suggested that they would enjoy the opportunity to have more connection between participants in the two Sirius groups.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

The 2017-2018 evaluation of **carya**'s Sirius Program revealed that the program is positively impacting participants' resiliency and social emotional competence using research-informed Social Emotional Learning and Service Learning approaches. Through the program, youth are making important connections with inspiring adults from their community and are moving towards successful transitions through high school and beyond. At the same time, volunteers from the community who are involved with the Sirius Program as Allies have indicated that they are learning about allyship and how to best support youth in their unique journeys so that they can thrive in the long term. These connections are fostering important natural supports for youth, while outreach activities with families bolster the existing natural supports participants may have. Overall, the evaluation has demonstrated that carya's Sirius Program is creating positive outcomes for vulnerable youth in high school.

Based on the evaluation results and learnings from this year, the following recommendations are put forward:

- 1 Continue the program and seek opportunities for expansion.**  
Based on the demonstrated success of the Sirius Program it is recommended that the program continue and that opportunities are sought to continue to grow the impact of the program.
- 2 Support opportunities for alumnae to continue building their resilience and leadership.**  
Based on feedback from program participants and the demonstrated success of the program in creating positive outcomes for participants, it is recommended that participants graduating from the program (or participating for more than one year) are offered constructive activities to continue to build on the growth fostered by their involvement in the program and share their learning through leadership opportunities.
- 3 Support Allies in connecting and developing their own networks.**  
With Allies beginning to connect beyond the time spent in the program, it is recommended that the Sirius Program intentionally support Allies in developing their own networks to further leverage the benefits of volunteering with Sirius.
- 4 Set clear expectations about program commitment and attendance.**  
Although participants and Allies are very busy and have multiple commitments in their lives, the success of the program is built on the development of consistent and trusting relationships. This means that a high level of program commitment and attendance is needed, which should be clearly communicated to both Allies and participants at the outset of the program.
- 5 Seek opportunities to further enable the success of Service Learning projects.**  
While both Sirius groups made important progress on their Service Learning projects this year, it was recognized that completing the projects in June may add additional stress for participants and Allies who are very busy at this time of year. It is recommended that additional resources or a modified Service Learning schedule are sought in order to address challenges related to the Service Learning project timing.

