



# Youth Leadership Initiative Evaluation Results

*2015 Impact Study*

**AUGUST 2015**

Prepared by:  
Jennifer Valorose

451 Lexington Parkway North | Saint Paul, Minnesota 55104  
651-280-2700 | [www.wilderresearch.org](http://www.wilderresearch.org)

**Wilder  
Research**

Information. Insight. Impact.

# Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Executive summary.....   | 1  |
| Introduction.....  | 3  |
| Youth leadership programs.....                                 | 3  |
| Program background and theory of change.....                   | 7  |
| Short-term results: youth attitudes and skill development..... | 8  |
| Data collection methods.....                                   | 10 |
| Description of alumni.....                                     | 10 |
| Data limitations.....  | 12 |
| Results.....   | 14 |
| Civic engagement.....  | 14 |
| Educational achievements.....                                  | 16 |
| Employment.....  | 19 |
| Health and lifestyle.....                                      | 21 |
| Conclusion.....  | 23 |

# Figures

|   |    |
|---|----|
| 1. Theory of change.....  | 8  |
| 2. Respondents’ involvement in the program compared to all alumni.....                  | 12 |
| 3. Respondent characteristics compared to all alumni .....                              | 11 |
| 4. Participants’ attitudes and skill development, 2010 – 2015.....                      | 9  |
| 5. Unpaid volunteer or community service work .....                                     | 14 |
| 6. Current volunteer work by age.....   | 15 |
| 7. Election participation .....   | 15 |
| 8. High school graduation rates.....  | 16 |
| 9. Postsecondary involvement.....   | 17 |
| 10. Highest degree obtained .....   | 17 |
| 11. Primary major or field of study, of those who have taken postsecondary classes .... | 18 |
| 12. How they pay for college .....  | 19 |
| 13. Employment status .....   | 20 |
| 14. Proportion of adults working, comparison.....                                       | 20 |
| 15. Health insurance .....  | 21 |
| 16. Percentage with health insurance, comparison.....                                   | 21 |
| 17. Self ratings of health status .....   | 22 |

# Executive summary

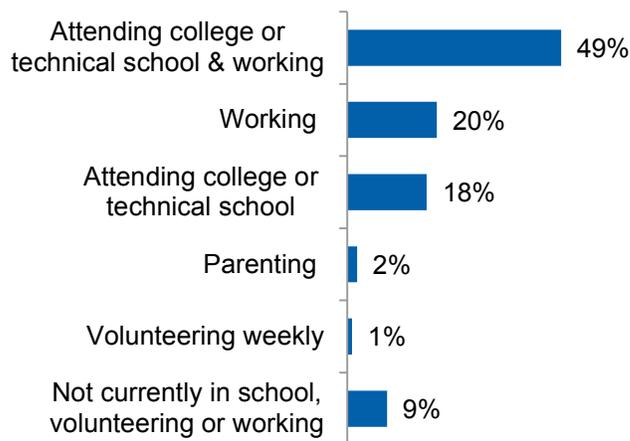
Amherst H. Wilder Foundation’s Youth Leadership Initiative (YLI) is a multicultural youth leadership program that provides young people the opportunity to build skills and qualities needed to be agents of change in their community. The program enrolls youth age 14-18 in a year-long program that includes five core program activities: leadership retreats, cultural sessions, action team meetings, peer mentorship, and the college success initiative. After a year of participating, youth can apply to be “emerging leaders” or “youth mentors” to plan and facilitate activities with staff.

To measure longer-term impacts, Wilder Research designed a web survey to be administered to all previous YLI participants (program graduates from 2007-2014) with primarily close-ended questions related to education, employment, civic engagement, health, and lifestyle. In the first nine years of the program, 311 people participated. The email invitation was sent in February 2015 to alumni for which valid email address were available, and 52 percent responded (101 total or 32% of all alumni).

Some recent alumni were still in high school. Among those who were expected to have graduated prior to 2015, 88 percent were either employed, in school or both. About half (49%) were enrolled in college or technical school and working either full or part time. Another 21 percent were working, and 18 percent were in school full time. Of the remaining, three alumni were either volunteering or parenting, while eight (9%) did not report currently working, volunteering, or attending school.

---

## Current status of YLI alumni that had an anticipated graduation date of 2014 or earlier (N=88)



YLI does seem to have longer-term impact in alumni’s community engagement, a key outcome area. In the Twin Cities, 39 percent of teenagers volunteer, though the rate drops to 25 percent for young adults ages 20 through 24. Comparatively, 39 percent of responding

YLI alumni are currently doing unpaid volunteer or community service work. In addition, two-thirds of YLI alumni respondents who were 18 or older at the time voted in the 2012 national election compared to 57 percent of 18- to 24-year-old Minnesotans.

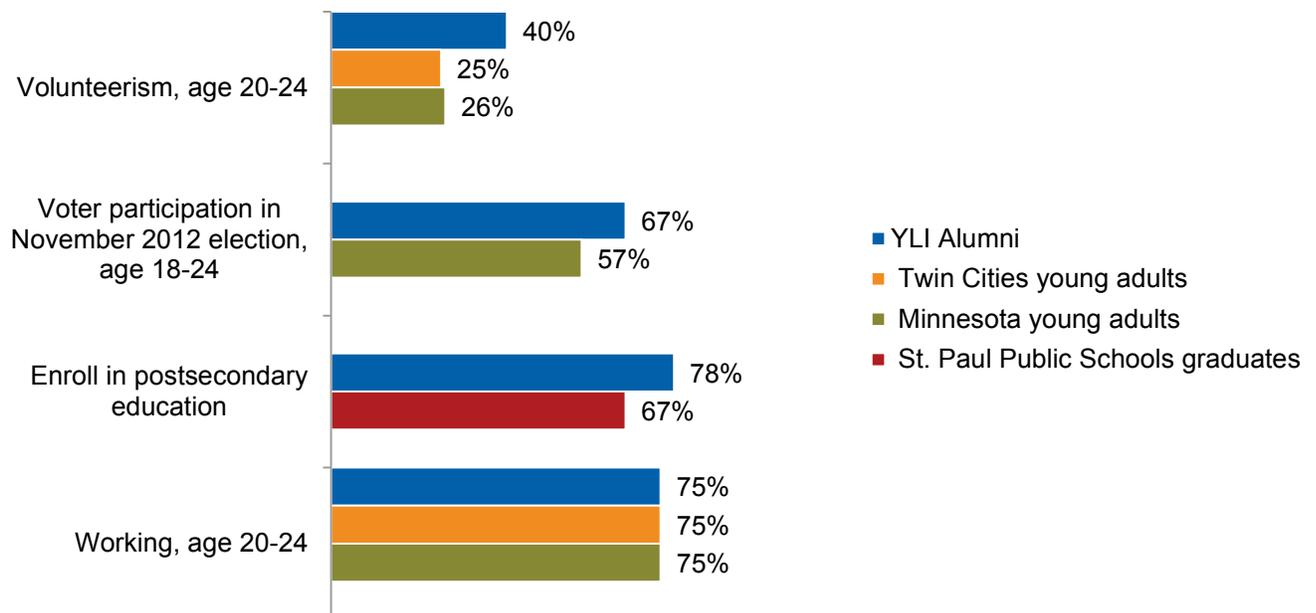
Almost all responding YLI alumni are graduating from high school, and three-quarters are enrolling in postsecondary education; both rates are higher than St. Paul Public School students overall. This may be due, in part, to YLI’s college success initiative, but the program may also attract more motivated students that are less likely to drop out because involvement in the program does require a year-long commitment.

Since the average age of all alumni is 20, it remains to be seen whether YLI alumni obtain postsecondary degrees at higher rates. Eighty percent of high school graduates are either currently in school for or have obtained a postsecondary degree. Social sciences or social work are the top major among YLI alumni respondents.

Younger alumni respondents (age 16-19) are more likely to be working than other teenagers in the Twin Cities. It is difficult to know whether YLI is better positioning youth to obtain jobs, or if these alumni have greater financial need that is requiring them to work. Older alumni respondents (age 20-24) have similar rates of employment to other young adults in the Twin Cities.

---

### Overview of YLI alumni compared to other young adults



Overall, YLI volunteer and vote at higher rates, and are employed at similar rates to the general population in the Twin Cities and Minnesota. YLI alumni are also more likely to enroll in postsecondary than other graduates from Saint Paul Public Schools.

# Introduction

Amherst H. Wilder Foundation's Youth Leadership Initiative (YLI) is a multicultural youth leadership program that provides young people the opportunity to build skills and qualities needed to be agents of change in their community. The program enrolls youth age 14-18 in a year-long program that includes five core program activities: leadership retreats, cultural sessions, action team meetings, peer mentorship, and the college success initiative. After a year of participating, youth can apply to be "emerging leaders" or "youth mentors" to plan and facilitate activities with staff.

Wilder Research has been working with YLI to evaluate post-program outcomes since 2007 using a retrospective pre/post test model to measure change in participants' understanding of self and others, and development of leadership and communication skills. The goal of this long-term impact study was to measure longer-term impacts the program has on YLI alumni's civic engagement, education and employment after they graduate from the program.

## Positive youth development framework

Positive youth development programs like YLI "prepare young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences which help them to become socially, morally, emotionally, physically and cognitively competent" rather than focus on specific problem behaviors.<sup>1</sup>

Experts at the Search Institute have identified 40 developmental assets that are critical for youth to become productive adults, grouped into the following eight categories.<sup>2</sup>

- **Support:** Youth feel cared for by a network of adults, and are able to identify adults in their lives whom they can rely on and refer to when challenges arise.
- **Empowerment:** A sense of security and significance, opportunities to "make a contribution," and be useful.
- **Boundaries and expectations:** Clarity about limits. Consistency related to expectations across the range of youth experiences including family, school, faith, and social environments. Youth have well-defined boundaries.

---

<sup>1</sup> University Health Services, UW-Madison (n.d.). Wisconsin Clearinghouse for Prevention Resources. Youth Development Main Page. Retrieved April 20, 2010, from <http://wch.uhs.wisc.edu/08-Youth/08-YouthMain.html>

<sup>2</sup> Search Institute. (n.d.). 40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents. <http://www.search-institute.org/content/40-developmental-assets-adolescents-ages-12-18>

- **Constructive use of time:** Youth’s leisure time is spent in activities that are structured, purposeful and constructive. Social, cognitive and physical skills are developed through participation in leisure activities that engage their creative, expressive and athletic abilities.
- **Commitment to learning:** Youth are actively engaged in learning activities and are motivated to identify and pursue areas of interest. In order to attain this asset, youth must feel safe and valued.
- **Positive values:** It is important for youth to develop a set of values inclusive of basic “prosocial values reflecting honesty, integrity, and responsibility.”<sup>3</sup> Youth should be engaged in a process of articulating and reflecting on their values with positive adults in their environments.
- **Social competencies:** Social skills should be developed within a context of responsibility and reassurance. Adults in young peoples’ lives should focus on youth’s social strengths and help them to take on chores, responsibilities and problem-solving approaches that facilitate positive social interactions and healthy choice-making.
- **Positive identity:** Not surprisingly, youth fare better if they are confident and possess a positive self-image. Such youth feel a sense of control over their own lives and can identify a larger life purpose or mission. For youth living in a context of instability or trauma, it is often difficult to achieve a sense of mastery over one’s own life, or ability to impact one’s future. Fostering a sense of hope related to the future represents a strong asset as youth make choices about their present.

A 2015 report by the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research synthesized decades of research reporting that youth need the following four “foundational components” to learn and grow: self-regulation, knowledge and skills, mindset, and values. They note that “deciding one’s values is an important task during middle adolescence,” or the high school years, which a program like YLI can help youth determine.<sup>4</sup>

Because youth development programs and their settings vary considerably, it can be challenging to formulate a single framework for successful programming. However, researchers have defined the following eight best practice elements that distinguish effective youth development programs.

---

<sup>3</sup> Rose, H.A. (2006). Asset-Based Development for Child and Youth Care. *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, 14(4), 236-240.

<sup>4</sup> University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (2015). *Foundations for Young Adult Success: A Developmental Framework*. Retrieved on August 10, 2015 from: <https://ccsr.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Wallace%20Four-Page.pdf>

### Core elements and best practices of youth development programs <sup>5 6</sup>

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Physical and Psychological Safety                    | Provides a safe haven both physically and emotionally.   |
| Appropriate Structure                                | Involves youth in creating a structure of clear rules, expectations, and responsibilities.   |
| Supportive Relationships                             | Involves adults in the program's activities and events. Through these activities and events, adults and youth are able to establish trust. |
| Opportunities to Belong                              | Provides activities and events that foster friendships and provides youth with a sense of a positive group experience.                     |
| Support for Efficacy and Mattering                   | Provides youth, both individually and in groups, the opportunity to be useful and to make a difference in their social worlds.             |
| Opportunities for Recognition                        | Sincerely acknowledges the contribution of youth.  |
| Integration of Family, School, and Community Efforts | Communicates regularly with families and schools to ensure similar norms and expectations across settings in a coordinated way.            |
| Positive Social Norms                                | Governs behavior and daily interactions through a culture of conventionally positive social norms.   |

Through peer-to-peer youth mentoring, as is done in YLI, youth develop an encouraging and supportive relationship with a peer to provide support, guidance, and friendship. Overall, studies and evaluations of peer mentoring have found that both mentors and mentees show greater connectedness to school and parents, improvement in social skills and self-esteem, and academic achievement. Mentors also reported improvements in moral reasoning and empathy.<sup>7</sup> Peer mentoring programs is most effective when there is a two-year age difference between mentor and mentee, and when mentors receive sufficient training to mentor, including the necessary skills, attitudes, and knowledge base.<sup>8</sup> As with all mentoring, mentors must have greater social interest than self-interest, and programs should provide sufficient structure to keep the matches actively engaged.

---

<sup>5</sup> Eccles, J. S., & Gootman, J. A. (Eds.). (2002). *Community Programs To Promote Youth Development*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

<sup>6</sup> Weiss, H.B., Little, P.M., & Bouffard, S.M. (Spring, 2005). *More than just being there: Balancing the participation equation*. *New Directions for Youth Development: Enrollment, Attendance and Engagement*. Jossey-Bass.

<sup>7</sup> Karcher, M. (2007). *Research in Action: Cross Age Peer Mentoring*. MENTOR/ National Mentoring Partnership.

<sup>8</sup> Karcher, M. (2007).

## Youth leadership programs

Youth leadership programs, like YLI, are an extension of youth development programs. While youth development programs typically serve youth and focus broadly on preparing youth for the future, youth leadership programs actively engage youth as partners in their own development.<sup>9</sup> Youth leadership programs provide young people with support and opportunities to plan and implement programming for themselves and others.<sup>10</sup> A youth leadership approach allows young people to focus on the positive skills, attitudes, and behaviors necessary for civic involvement and goal-setting.<sup>11</sup>

Research has shown that youth leadership programs provide youth the opportunity to build leadership ability, demonstrate self-sufficiency and initiative, and learn decision-making skills. Youth also learn life skills, including self-motivation, time management, oral and written communication, team work, influencing people, problem solving, and gathering, evaluating, and analyzing information.<sup>12</sup> These participatory programs are also more successful at engaging older and disenfranchised youth, who may be more difficult to target in traditional youth development programs.<sup>13</sup> Finally, youth leadership programs can create a ripple effect of youth lending energy and spirit to their community efforts, which inspires other youth to participate in the community in positive ways.<sup>14</sup>

A literature review in 2010 described these six ways YLI exemplifies many of the best practices for youth development and youth leadership programming.

- **Youth identity and culture.** YLI has a significant focus on culture and identity to the extent that developing youth's understanding and appreciation of culture is one of their four goals. Once a month there are specific sessions in which youth join with other youth of their culture to discuss cultural identity; and culture is the focus of one of the leadership retreats. Youth explore other participants' cultures, and discuss discrimination.
- **Recognition.** Youth who complete the program are recognized through a graduation ceremony each spring, which is important for acknowledging what they have accomplished throughout the program year.
- **Sufficient participation.** In order for youth to learn and commit to taking action, they need sufficient time for leadership training and experience. YLI is a year-long

---

<sup>9</sup> Girl Scouts Research Institute (2007). Exploring Girls' Leadership: Research Review. Girl Scouts of the United States of America.

<sup>10</sup> Sabatelli, R.M. et al. (2005). Outcome Evaluation of Programs Offering Youth Leadership Training. The State of Connecticut Office of Policy and Management.

<sup>11</sup> Girl Scouts Research Institute (2007).

<sup>12</sup> Sabatelli, R.M. et al. (2005).

<sup>13</sup> Girl Scouts Research Institute (2007).

<sup>14</sup> Sabatelli, R.M. et al. (2005).

program that offers over 300 hours of programming, including three weekend retreats. In addition, some youth engage for multiple years, further increasing their exposure to leadership concepts and practices.

- **Sequenced activities.** YLI offers a graduated series of activities – from participant to mentor – which allows youth to become increasingly involved in planning and decision-making as their skills and abilities increase. This models best practices for giving youth leadership opportunities without overwhelming them with responsibility before they are ready.
- **Active participation.** Much of the research indicates the importance of engaging youth in meaningful activities in which they contribute and feel valued. Through weekly action team meetings, youth are given opportunities to actively participate in addressing community issues. Many of the retreat activities are experientially designed to actively engage youth in hands-on learning and reflection. Youth mentors serve as role models for their peers.
- **Connection to caring adults.** Both youth development and youth leadership literature stress the importance of involving adults in young people’s lives and establishing relationships between youth and adults. Through YLI, youth build relationships with staff and adult volunteers, who care about them and whom they can trust.

## Program background and theory of change

Currently, YLI targets high school youth, age 14-18, of diverse backgrounds from across the St. Paul metropolitan area. In earlier program years, middle school and recent high school graduates were also enrolled. Youth make a one year commitment to participate in five core program activities: leadership retreats, cultural sessions, action team meetings, peer mentorship, and the college success initiative. Currently, retreats are held off-site three times a year, and the other program components are held afterschool during the week at Wilder Center in St. Paul. This model has been in place for the past three years. In previous years, cultural sessions were held once a month on weekends, and a college success initiative was a supplemental program for youth who needed additional academic support.

YLI offers a graduated participation track so each student is provided with opportunities to share his or her ideas, skills, and talents regardless of his or her ability. First-year participants are asked to actively participate in all program components as “participants.” Through active participation, youth build their skills and confidence to be a leader. Second- and third-year participants facilitate some activities as “emerging leaders,” a newer track that did not exist in the original program model. Youth who are ready to take on significant leadership and responsibility become “youth mentors” through an in-depth application and interview process. They receive training in facilitation and program design,

and deliver program curriculum during the retreats. Youth mentors also actively participate in other program activities and support the personal and leadership development of participants throughout the year. Early on, some older participants and/or recent graduates started the program as youth mentors having never been participants.

Over the course of the program, YLI aims to increase youth's understanding of self and others, and develop their communication and leadership skills to take meaningful action in the community. The long-term outcomes of the program are that participating youth successfully graduate from high school, engage in postsecondary education, and as adults are employed, and civically engaged as volunteers, voters, and donors.

---

## 1. Theory of change



### Short-term results: youth attitudes and skill development

For the last six years, annual program evaluation has been conducted using an end-of-year program survey, developed by Wilder Research to document short-term outcomes. The survey asks youth at the end of the program how they feel and think about their own attitudes and behaviors and development of leadership skills (see Figure 1 for Theory of Change).

Over the years, results have been very positive, indicating almost all youth feel confident, willing to take risks, value the opinion of others, and feel prepared to be a leader at the end of their program year. Similarly, at the end of the program, across all years, almost all youth reported having learned some or lot about leadership skills, team work skills, project planning or public speaking over the course of the program.

## 2. Participants' attitudes and skill development, 2010 – 2015

| <b>Percent with general agreement (post-program)</b>                  | <b>2010<br/>N=31</b> | <b>2011<br/>N=57-59</b> | <b>2012<br/>N=61-62</b> | <b>2013<br/>N=34</b> | <b>2014<br/>N=36</b> | <b>2015<br/>N=31-32</b> |
|---|----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| I feel confident  | 100%                 | 95%                     | 100%                    | 100%                 | 89%                  | 87%                     |
| I can handle stressful situations                                     | 97%                  | 100%                    | 95%                     | 94%                  | 89%                  | 78%                     |
| I think about what will happen as a result of my decisions            | 100%                 | 98%                     | 97%                     | 100%                 | 94%                  | 97%                     |
| I am willing to take risks and stand up for what is right             | 100%                 | 97%                     | 98%                     | 100%                 | 97%                  | 94%                     |
| I think it is important to listen to and value the opinions of others | 100%                 | 100%                    | 98%                     | 100%                 | 100%                 | 97%                     |
| I know what I can do to help make the community a better place        | 94%                  | 95%                     | 98%                     | 100%                 | 97%                  | 94%                     |
| I feel prepared to be a leader  | 97%                  | 92%                     | 98%                     | 97%                  | 92%                  | 84%                     |
| I have goals for my future  | 100%                 | 98%                     | 98%                     | 97%                  | 97%                  | 97%                     |
| <b>Percent learning a lot or some about the following:</b>            | <b>2010<br/>N=30</b> | <b>2011<br/>N=59</b>    | <b>2012<br/>N=61-63</b> | <b>2013<br/>N=34</b> | <b>2014<br/>N=36</b> |                         |
| Leadership skills/styles  | 93%                  | 95%                     | 98%                     | 100%                 | 92%                  |                         |
| Team work skills  | 97%                  | 97%                     | 100%                    | 100%                 | 97%                  |                         |
| Project planning skills   | 93%                  | 98%                     | 94%                     | 94%                  | 89%                  |                         |
| Public speaking   | 90%                  | 90%                     | 87%                     | 91%                  | 89%                  |                         |

# Data collection methods

To measure longer-term impacts, Wilder Research designed a web survey to be administered to all previous YLI participants (program graduates from 2007-2014) with primarily close-ended questions related to education, employment, civic engagement, health, and lifestyle. Wilder Research looked to the National Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 for potential survey questions and consulted with Wilder's Research Economist to identify indicators that would be useful in a future Return on Investment study. Wilder Research relied on YLI program staff to compile a list of previous YLI participants.

YLI program staff provided researchers with 311 names, 239 of which had an email address. An initial email was sent out on February 25, 2015, followed by four follow-up emails over the next five weeks. A drawing to win one of two \$50 Target gift cards was offered as an incentive to people who completed the survey. Researchers also called non-respondents after the third email was sent, and as a final attempt to obtain responses, text messages were sent to all phone numbers for the people that had not responded. Of the 239 initial emails, 45 were bad addresses and three people opted out/declined to participate. A total of 101 people responded to at least part of the survey – 52 percent.

## Description of alumni

Since its inception, YLI has strived to serve a racially diverse group of youth. Over half of those served (61%) have been Asian. African and African American participants make up about a quarter (22%) of all past participants.

The median age of respondents was 20 compared to 21 for all alumni. Over 60 percent of alumni are women, similar to the survey respondents. The five main high schools respondents attended are: Central Senior High School, Highland Park Senior High, Harding High School, Johnson Senior High School, and Como Park High School, all in St. Paul, Minnesota.

---

### 3. Respondent characteristics compared to all alumni

|  | Respondents<br>(N=101) | All<br>(N=311) |
|--|------------------------|----------------|
| <b>Race/ethnicity</b>                    |                        |                |
| Asian                                    | 69%                    | 61%            |
| Black/African American                   | 11%                    | 12%            |
| African native                           | 3%                     | 10%            |
| White/Caucasian                          | 6%                     | 5%             |
| Hispanic/Latino                          | 4%                     | 6%             |
| American Indian                          | 0%                     | <1%            |
| Multiracial                              | 6%                     | 6%             |
| Arab                                     | 1%                     | <1%            |
| <b>Current age</b>                       |                        |                |
| Mean                                     | 20.0                   | 20.7           |
| Median                                   | 20                     | 21             |
| Range                                    | 15-28                  | 15-28          |
| <b>Gender</b>                            |                        |                |
| Male                                     | 36%                    | 37%            |
| Female                                   | 64%                    | 63%            |
| <b>High school attended or graduated</b> |                        |                |
| Central Senior High School               | 24%                    | 16%            |
| Highland Park Senior High                | 18%                    | 6%             |
| Harding High School                      | 12%                    | 11%            |
| Johnson Senior High School               | 12%                    | 4%             |
| Como Park High School                    | 9%                     | 7%             |
| Roseville Area High School               | 3%                     | 3%             |
| Other                                    | 21%                    | 10%            |
| Unknown                                  | 1%                     | 43%            |

#### *Where are they now?*

A large majority of YLI alumni respondents (93%) are currently living in Minnesota, with 82 percent in the east metro, 6 percent in the west metro and 6 percent in greater Minnesota. Other responding alumni (one each) live in California, Illinois, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, and Utah.

## Data limitations

A third (32%) of all alumni responded to the survey. Given valid email addresses were available for only 62 percent of all alumni, over a third were not provided with an opportunity to complete the survey. Response rates are typically low for this demographic, as the digital generation tends to be less responsive to surveys and interviews of any kind.

As shown in Figure 4, survey respondents are more likely to have had higher levels of engagement in the program relative to all program alumni, in terms of years in the program and their role within the program. A quarter of all alumni participated for two or more years or had been in a leadership role, compared to 35-42 percent of respondents.

---

#### 4. Respondents' involvement in the program compared to all alumni

|   | Respondents<br>(N=101) | All<br>(N=311) |
|---|------------------------|----------------|
| <b>Number of years engaged</b>              |                        |                |
| One   | 58%                    | 75%            |
| Two or more                                 | 42%                    | 25%            |
| <b>Involvement in the program</b>           |                        |                |
| Participant                                 | 99%                    | 95%            |
| Emerging leader                             | 15%                    | 8%             |
| Youth mentor                                | 24%                    | 14%            |
| Youth coach                                 | 0%                     | 3%             |
| Any leadership role                         | 35%                    | 23%            |
| <b>School year first engaged in program</b> |                        |                |
| 2006-07                                     | 6%                     | 15%            |
| 2007-08                                     | 10%                    | 11%            |
| 2008-09                                     | 8%                     | 8%             |
| 2009-10                                     | 11%                    | 9%             |
| 2010-11                                     | 18%                    | 17%            |
| 2011-12                                     | 20%                    | 18%            |
| 2012-13                                     | 17%                    | 14%            |
| 2013-14                                     | 11%                    | 7%             |
| Median                                      | 2011                   | 2011           |

*Not all totals equal 100% due to rounding. Fifteen participants that participated in 2012-13 or 2013-14 were excluded because they were participating during the 2014-15.*

YLI likely had the most up-to-date contact information from past participants who remained in contact with staff, which is likely those program alumni who were more engaged in the program as youth. There is a strong possibility those alumni who have remained in contact with program staff were most impacted about their experience in the program. Due to their ongoing contact with YLI, these participants were likely to have a valid email address and respond to the survey.

Asian alumni are somewhat overrepresented and African alumni are somewhat under represented among survey respondents compared to all alumni (see Figure 2). This may indicate results do not well represent the experiences of alumni who identify as African. The survey also slightly over represents younger respondents from more recent years, meaning they have had less time to obtain degrees or career milestones.

Though comparison data are provided from regional and national datasets, this study did not include a comparison group of young adults from St. Paul who are similar in terms of age and race.

Finally, given the program requires a significant time commitment, youth that commit, stay engaged and graduate from the program may be the ones that are most likely to have more educational and employment success.

# Results

## Civic engagement

A large majority (88%) of YLI alumni respondents are currently or have previously done unpaid volunteer or community service work. Alumni primarily have given their time to school or community-based organizations (44%), and youth organizations, including YLI (41%). On average, those who are currently volunteering do so for 15 hours per month, or 4 hours a week.

---

### 5. Unpaid volunteer or community service work

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| <b>Unpaid volunteer or community service work</b>       | <b>N=98</b> |
| Currently   | 39%         |
| Previously  | 49%         |
| None  | 12%         |
| <b>Type of organization</b>                             | <b>N=86</b> |
| School or community based organization                  | 44%         |
| Youth organization                                      | 41%         |
| Education/museum  | 29%         |
| Community centers, neighborhood or social action groups | 28%         |
| Church-related groups                                   | 22%         |
| Hospital or nursing home                                | 8%          |
| Political organizations                                 | 6%          |
| Environmental groups                                    | 6%          |
| Other   | 15%         |
| <b>Frequency of volunteering</b>                        | <b>N=85</b> |
| Less than once a month                                  | 25%         |
| More than once a month, but not weekly                  | 47%         |
| Once a week or more                                     | 28%         |
| <b>Hours per month, of those currently volunteering</b> | <b>N=38</b> |
| Range   | 2 – 100     |
| Median  | 10          |
| Mean  | 15          |

Rates of volunteering among the younger alumni respondents are similar to all youth age 16-19 in the Twin Cities (38-39%), whereas older alumni respondents are currently

volunteering at higher rates than all young adults age 20-24 in the Twin Cities (40% compared to 25%).<sup>15</sup>

## 6. Current volunteer work by age

|           | YLI Alumni<br>2015 | Twin Cities<br>2010-13 |
|-----------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Age 16-19 | 38%                | 39%                    |
| Age 20-24 | 40%                | 25%                    |

Less than half (41%) of YLI alumni respondents who were old enough voted in the most recent election. However, two-thirds (67%) of those respondents who were old enough voted in the 2012 national election, a rate higher than the statewide voter turnout for young adults (57%).<sup>16</sup> The survey also did not ask citizenship status, so it is possible the percentage of eligible voters participating in election may be higher.

## 7. Election participation

|                        | YLI Alumni                      | Statewide                       |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
|                        | (Age 18-28 at time of election) |                                 |
| Voted in November 2014 | 41%                             | N/A                             |
|                        | (Age 18-26 at time of election) | (Age 18-24 at time of election) |
| Voted in November 2012 | 67%                             | 57%                             |

In their open-ended comments, participants noted that because of YLI they have become more civically engaged, being active in their communities and taking on leadership roles:

*YLI has helped me be more active in the community and take on leadership roles that I usually won't try.*

*YLI has taught me to be a citizen who challenges themselves, goes forth and actively takes part in my community(s), and leads by example and from example(s).*

*YLI has had an immense impact on my life. Because of YLI I am more confident in my ability to be a leader and an activist in my community.*

*I like to give back to the community more because of the leadership skills I inquired in YLI. It was the best experience ever. I've even still encourage more people to join.*

<sup>15</sup> Minnesota Compass. (n.d.). Residents (16+) who volunteered in the past year by detailed age Twin Cities 13-county region, 2010-2012. Retrieved from <http://www.mncompass.org/civic-engagement/volunteerism#7-4309-g>

<sup>16</sup> Minnesota Compass. (n.d.). Voting-age Population that Voted, by Age, National Election Years, 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.mncompass.org/civic-engagement/voter-turnout#1-10407-g>

They also noted how YLI helped them build cultural sensitivity and awareness and how they are applying those skills:

*YLI has helped me define mentorship and social change, specifically a national unity of multiculturalism. I am currently now considering on international and global immersions to open my mind and come back to impact, create and share with my community.*

*YLI has also made me more aware of diversity and because of this I am very culturally sensitive. Another long term effect that YLI has had on me is that I am able to believe in myself and my ability to connect with people to build positive relationships.*

*YLI had inspired me to become culturally aware, both in the diversity of my community and in my own Hmong community.*

## Educational achievements

Among those alumni respondents who were expected to graduate, based on their grade level when they participated in the program, between 2007 and 2014, 99 percent graduated from high school. In comparison, the four-year graduation rate in St. Paul Public Schools ranged from 62-74 percent in that same time range.<sup>17</sup>

### 8. High school graduation rates

|  | Total<br>N=101 | Graduates<br>N=88 |
|--|----------------|-------------------|
| Graduated in 3 years   | 3%             | 3%                |
| Graduated in 4 years   | 32%            | 36%               |
| Graduated in 5 years   | 2%             | 2%                |
| Graduated, unknown number of years   | 49%            | 56%               |
| Did not graduate   | 1%             | 2%                |
| Not expected to have graduated yet, based on grade level and year in the program | 14%            | NA                |

A large majority (85%) of YLI alumni respondents have obtained at least a high school diploma. Of those that have not (15), all but one person would not be expected to have graduated from high school yet. Eight alumni have completed post-secondary degrees. Over three-quarters (78%) of those alumni respondents who graduated from high school are currently working towards or have obtained a post-secondary degree. In comparison,

<sup>17</sup> St. Paul Public Schools, Department of Research, Evaluation Assessment (2014). 4-year Completion Rate Trend. Retrieved from: [http://datacenter.spps.org/sites/2259653e-ffb3-45ba-8fd6-04a024ecf7a4/uploads/2013\\_spps\\_grad\\_rate\\_by\\_trend\\_by\\_year.pdf](http://datacenter.spps.org/sites/2259653e-ffb3-45ba-8fd6-04a024ecf7a4/uploads/2013_spps_grad_rate_by_trend_by_year.pdf)

from 2008-2013, 61-67 percent of St. Paul Public Schools' graduating seniors enrolled in post-secondary education.<sup>18</sup>

## 9. Postsecondary involvement

|  | Total<br>N=101 | Graduates<br>N=86 |
|--|----------------|-------------------|
| Currently attending 4-year college or university                       | 40%            | 47%               |
| Currently attending community college, technical, or vocational school | 19%            | 22%               |
| Obtained associate degree  | 1%             | 1%                |
| Obtained a bachelor's degree   | 6%             | 7%                |
| Obtained a master's degree   | 1%             | 1%                |
| Previously took postsecondary classes                                  | 11%            | 13%               |
| Has not taken postsecondary classes                                    | 8%             | 9%                |
| Has not yet graduated from high school                                 | 15%            | NA                |

Good comparison data for the age range of program alumni (ages 16-28) are not available. Given a lack of data for this age range, comparison data of an older age range is provided. In 2013 in the Twin Cities, 47 percent of adults age 25-34 had a bachelor's degree or higher.<sup>19</sup> Given the 8 percent that currently have degrees, and the additional 47 percent that are currently attending a 4-year college or university, YLI alumni are on track to meet or exceed their Twin Cities peers.

## 10. Highest degree obtained

|                              | Total<br>N=101 | Of those expected<br>to have graduated<br>N=88 |
|------------------------------|----------------|--|
| High school diploma          | 77%            | 89%  |
| Associate degree             | 1%             | 1%   |
| Bachelor's degree            | 6%             | 7%   |
| Master's degree              | 1%             | 1%   |
| Professional/doctoral degree | 0%             | 0%   |
| None                         | 15%            | 2%   |

<sup>18</sup> St. Paul Public Schools, Department of Research, Evaluation Assessment (2014). Post-Secondary Education Enrollment Rates (2008-2013) by Ethnicity. Retrieved from: [http://datacenter.spps.org/sites/2259653e-ffb3-45ba-8fd6-04a024ecf7a4/uploads/postsecondarybygroups2013\\_2.pdf](http://datacenter.spps.org/sites/2259653e-ffb3-45ba-8fd6-04a024ecf7a4/uploads/postsecondarybygroups2013_2.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Minnesota Compass. (n.d.). Percent (age 25+) with a bachelor's degree or higher, By select age groups, Twin Cities 7-county region, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.mncompass.org/workforce/educational-attainment#7-10753-g>

YLI alumni respondents who have taken postsecondary classes have most frequently majored in Social Sciences or Social Work (26%), science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields (20%) and health-related fields (18%). YLI alumni respondents appear to be more likely to major in social sciences and social work fields than national comparison data.<sup>20</sup> In addition, 26 percent had double majors across disciplines.

### 11. Primary major or field of study, of those who have taken postsecondary classes

| Field   | Duplicated for multiple majors<br>N=80 | Unduplicated for multiple majors<br>N=80 | National comparison |
|---|--|--|---------------------|
| Social Sciences or Social Work (e.g., Psychology, History, Political Science, and Economics)          | 26%                                    | 15%                                      | 9%                  |
| STEM fields (e.g., Natural Sciences, Mathematics, Engineering, Computer or Information Sciences)      | 20%                                    | 10%                                      | 15%                 |
| Health (e.g., Medical Technology, Nursing, Pre-Med)   | 18%                                    | 10%                                      | 17%                 |
| Business or Marketing   | 16%                                    | 10%                                      | 15%                 |
| Don't know/Undecided  | 10%                                    | 10%                                      | 7%                  |
| Humanities (e.g., English, Philosophy, Foreign Languages) and Fine Arts (e.g., Music, Theater, Dance) | 9%                                     | 1%                                       | 7%                  |
| Education   | 8%                                     | 4%                                       | 7%                  |
| Communications/Journalism   | 4%                                     | 0%                                       | 3%                  |
| Architecture, Design, or Urban Planning   | 0%                                     | 0%                                       | 2%                  |
| Other   | 20%                                    | 14%                                      | 18%                 |
| Double major across disciplines   | NA                                     | 26%                                      | NA                  |

*Other includes: General Education, Vocational Programs (Cosmetology, Automotive Technology), Criminal Justice/Law Enforcement, Environmental Studies, Interpretation and Translation, Recreational and Leisure Studies, and Youth Studies and Leadership.*

<sup>20</sup> U.S. Department of Education. (2007). Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS:2002): A First Look at the Initial Postsecondary Experiences of the High School Sophomore Class of 2002. Retrieved from: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2008/2008308.pdf>

A large majority (85%) of YLI alumni respondents received grants or scholarships to help pay for post-secondary education. Over half (60%) have taken out student loans, and just under half (45%) have worked to pay for their education.

---

## 12. How they pay for college

| Field   | Of those who have taken postsecondary classes<br>N=80 |
|---|---|
| Grants or scholarships  | 85%   |
| Student loans   | 60%   |
| Your savings or job earnings (other than from College Work-Study) | 45%   |
| College Work-Study  | 29%   |
| Contributions from parents, guardians, or relatives               | 24%   |
| Parent loans (loans taken out by your parents)                    | 13%   |
| Employer assistance or tuition reimbursement                      | 6%  |

In their open-ended comments, participants noted how YLI contributed to their educational achievements:

*YLI have helped me endure many challenges in my post-secondary education by using all the skills I have learned.*

*They have made me become an open-minded person in college! Thank you!*

## Employment

Two-thirds (68%) of YLI alumni respondents are currently working for pay, most of whom are working part-time. Finances are the primary reason alumni are working: to pay bills (34%), explore a career option (26%), and save for school (19%). Most have low incomes (made less than \$30,000 in 2014). Those that are not working are primarily focused on volunteering, school, or sports (46%).

### 13. Employment status (N=98)

|                                       |             |  |             |
|---------------------------------------|-------------|--|-------------|
| <b>Working</b>                        | <b>68%</b>  | <b>Not working</b>                           | <b>32%</b>  |
| Full-time (40 or more hours per week) | 25%         | Currently serving in the military            | 3%          |
| Part-time (35 hours per week or less) | 75%         |  |             |
| <b>Reason for working</b>             | <b>N=65</b> | <b>Reasons not working</b>                   | <b>N=30</b> |
| A way to pay the bills                | 34%         | Volunteering instead of working              | 23%         |
| A way to explore a career option      | 26%         | Have not found a job you want yet            | 23%         |
| A way to save money for school        | 19%         | School/sports                                | 20%         |
| A way to earn spending money          | 12%         | Family responsibilities/ stay at home parent | 13%         |
| A career position                     | 9%          | Do not need to work                          | 10%         |
|                                       |             | Unable to find a job                         | 10%         |
| <b>2014 Income</b>                    | <b>N=65</b> | <b>2014 Income</b>                           | <b>N=29</b> |
| Under \$30,000                        | 91%         | Under \$30,000                               | 97%         |
| \$30,000 to \$44,999                  | 9%          | \$30,000 to \$44,999                         | 3%          |

Compared with the general population of youth and young adults in the Twin Cities, a higher proportion of younger alumni respondents (age 16-19) are working (60% vs. 38%), whereas a similar proportion of older alumni respondents (age 20-24) are working compared with other young adults (75%).<sup>21</sup> Given repeating YLI alumni were excluded, this is not an exact comparison, as some YLI alumni under age 20 participated again for the 2014-15 school year. However, the higher rate of working youth may be related to the fact that the program serves lower income youth whose parents are less likely to have college savings accounts and need help paying the bills.

### 14. Proportion of adults working, comparison

|           | <b>YLI Alumni<br/>2015</b> | <b>Twin Cities<br/>2013</b> |
|-----------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Age 16-19 | 60%                        | 38%                         |
| Age 20-24 | 75%                        | 75%                         |

In their open-ended comments, YLI alumni noted how they are using skills they learned in YLI in their work and career choices.

<sup>21</sup> Minnesota Compass. (n.d.). Proportional of Adults Working by Detailed Age Group, Twin Cities 7-county region, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.mncompass.org/workforce/proportion-of-adults-working#7-6793-g>.

*It has made me who I am today and paved the way for my current career goals.*

*YLI has helped me gain leadership skills. I've applied in my work and church.*

*YLI helped me become more opened minded and excelled my communication skills of working with others when I was in college and at my job now.*

## Health and lifestyle

A large majority of YLI alumni respondents (90%) currently have health insurance, primarily through their parents (52%) or Medicaid or Medical Assistance (22%).

### 15. Health insurance

| <b>Has health insurance</b>    | <b>N=96</b>   |  |
|--------------------------------|---|--|
| Yes                            | 90%   |  |
| No                             | 10%   |  |
| <b>Type of insurance</b>       | <b>Duplicated, multiple types of insurance<br/>N=86</b> | <b>Unduplicated, one type of insurance selected<br/>N=86</b> |
| Parents                        | 55%   | 52%  |
| Medicaid or medical assistance | 24%   | 22%  |
| Employer                       | 7%  | 7%   |
| School                         | 7%  | 5%   |
| Privately purchased            | 5%  | 3%   |
| Spouse/partner                 | 2%  | 1%   |
| Multiple types                 | NA  | 5%   |

Of those alumni respondents who are age 18-24, 89 percent have health insurance similar to the percentage of young adults in the Twin Cities overall with health insurance (85%).

### 16. Percentage with health insurance, comparison

|           | <b>YLI Alumni<br/>2015</b> | <b>Twin Cities<br/>2013<sup>22</sup></b> |
|-----------|----------------------------|--|
| Age 18-24 | 89%                        | 85%                                      |

<sup>22</sup> Minnesota Compass. (n.d.). Residents under 65 without health insurance by detailed age group Twin Cities 7-county region, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.mncompass.org/health/health-care-coverage#7-7155-g>.

Over half (55%) of YLI alumni respondents rated their health excellent or very good, and another third (33%) rated it good. Similarly, 57 percent rated their mental and emotional health excellent or very good and another third (34%) rated it good. Three respondents reported having problems with alcohol or drug abuse in the past.

---

### 17. Self ratings of health status (N=97)

| In general, how would you rate . . . | Excellent | Very good | Good | Fair | Poor |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|------|------|------|
| Your physical health?                | 29%       | 26%       | 33%  | 11%  | 1%   |
| Your mental and emotional health?    | 31%       | 26%       | 34%  | 8%   | 1%   |

Six respondents (6%) reported being married or living with a partner; they are between age 19 and 23. The remaining 94 percent are single, never married.

Eight YLI alumni, six women and two men, reported having children; half of these respondents are married or living with a partner. One respondent, a woman, reported having a child at age 16, about one percent of alumni. In comparison, the 2008-10 average rate of births to teens in Ramsey County was 19.5 per 1,000 women age 15-18 or about two percent.<sup>23</sup>

Many alumni noted in their open-ended comments how YLI has impacted them personally, their self-confidence, outspokenness, and relationships with others:

*For me being in part of YLI, it inspired me a lots, such as overcame my quietness and started to speak up more and take every possible shot that I could.*

*YLI has taught me to be confident in myself and never to give up on my dreams.*

*YLI has had a big impact on me. I say that because after I was in YLI I was never the same. I am more outgoing, not shy anymore and confident.*

*YLI has given me an opportunity to work toward a goal of becoming more mature with life and reality. During this program I was able to meet with many other students who had big dreams and it influenced me in my way of thinking about my life. I was able to improve the family bond I had with my parents and was able to improve my own leadership skills in many ways, such as building confidence in order to do practically anything when I have a team to work together with.*

---

<sup>23</sup> Kids Count Data Center. Children Born to Teen Mothers (3 year average; rate per 1,000). Retrieved from: <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5236-children-born-to-teen-mothers-3-year-average-rate-per-1000?loc=25&loc=2#detailed/5/3827-3913/false/38,35,18,17,16/any/11716>

# Conclusion

Youth Leadership Initiative (YLI) has been providing a youth leadership program to youth age 14-18 in Saint Paul and the east metro for almost 10 years. A 2010 literature review demonstrated how YLI is a model program by offering a sufficiently intensive program that provides youth an opportunity to explore identity and culture, actively participate in addressing community issues, connect with caring adults, and be recognized for their achievements.

Annual evaluations have demonstrated the program's short-term success at improving youth's self-confidence, willingness to take risks, leadership and skills, project planning and public speaking over the course of the program. This long-term impact study conducted with alumni indicates some promising results in alumni volunteering and engaging in postsecondary education at higher rates than their peers.

Future evaluation studies would seek to further assess YLI's outcome by comparing education and employment outcomes for YLI alumni with the status of peers who do not engage in youth leadership programs, but are otherwise similar in terms of age, race, gender, household income, and high school education.

These additional data could then be used to estimate the economic value or return on investing in YLI, by analyzing the cost of providing YLI programming relative to its benefits. For example, people with postsecondary degrees have over double the lifetime earnings of those with only a high school diploma. In addition, taxpayers benefit from the increased tax revenues on those higher earnings and communities benefit through volunteering.