



# Youth Empowering Parents (YEP): A Social Return on Investment (SROI) Study

**\$12 OF SOCIETAL BENEFIT IS GENERATED FOR EVERY \$1 INVESTED INTO YEP**

Youth Empowering Parents (YEP) launched in 2010 to provide meaningful volunteer experiences for youth and innovate within the adult and senior literacy space. YEP facilitates the one-on-one tutoring of adults by youth in the topics of English, computer skills and various life skills.

In many immigrant households, children regularly assist parents. They translate mail, teach digital technologies, and help their parents in many ways. YEP brings this household dynamic into a formal classroom. Pairs are assigned by family relationship (i.e. a child teaching a parent) or language similarities (e.g. a Somali youth teaching a Somali adult). A YEP “Academic Coach” observes and evaluates each pair, continuously giving teaching tips to youth to improve their teaching ability. This program is designed to unlock the leadership potential of any youth by enabling them to convey knowledge that is second-nature to them.

Ten youth and ten adults joined a twelve-week pilot program in September 2010 where English and computer skills were the main focus of the curriculum. Since then, the program has grown to benefit over 3,000 people from more than 50 nationalities, and address a broad array of life skills and development. Lessons now include conversational English, advanced computer skills, environmental literacy, health literacy, financial literacy, navigating the school system, locating neighbourhood resources, resume building, applying for jobs, and much more. Any concept that young people can grasp, and that adults or seniors need assistance with, is easily turned into one of YEP’s award-winning lesson formats, which feature easy to follow instructions and images that enable youth to teach with ease.

The YEP model is one which works efficiently and is easily replicated, operating in over a dozen locations across four countries (Canada, Spain, Ethiopia and Niger). The overall societal impact the YEP program has is one that provides long-term results and benefits, such as a decreasing government spending in key areas, increasing community volunteering, and an overall increase in engagement for both younger and older generations within a community.

## Quick Facts

- The YEP program has expanded from 20 participants in 2010 to over 500 participants per year
- The average investment required is only \$225 per person
- Over 8,000 volunteer hours are contributed by YEP youth volunteers annually
- Youth participants range in age from 10 to 20. Adult and senior participants range from 28 to 71
- The program operates in 4 countries: Canada, Spain, Ethiopia, and Niger
- 90% of participants return to the program for multiple semesters
- In 2011, YEP received the United Nations’ Innovation award, given annually to only 10 organizations from around the world.
- In 2014, YEP received Canada’s top annual literacy prize given by ABC Life Literacy Canada: the Great-West Life, London Life and Canada Life Literacy Innovation Award

## The Youth Empowering Parents program accomplishes:

- Improved English, technology, and other functional literacy in adults and seniors, better integration into Canadian society and/or reduced social isolation
- Build bridges between different generations (youth, adults and seniors) for stronger communities
- Improved dialogue among different cultures
- Foster good citizenship and volunteerism among youth to grow future leaders

## What is Social Return on Investment?

A Social Return on Investment (SROI) study places a dollar value on program outcomes. It finds the financial benefit of a program by:

- Examining program benefits;
- Using research to assign a dollar value to cost and benefits; and
- Calculating the overall return on every dollar invested into the program.

YEP became interested in SROI because of a desire to start measuring beyond the standard outcome and impact metrics. It was known that the program attracted a lot of participant interest, had low turnover, and high satisfaction among participants, but the full extent that YEP was having on the beneficiaries was uncertain. How did participation in YEP make them feel at a deeper level? What effect did it have on their lives? And most importantly, to what extent is YEP responsible for impacting a person's life, versus other programs they are simultaneously involved in? SROI could help reveal the 'full story' of what is happening.

## Methodology and Results

Survey data of 545 participants (273 youth and 272 adults) from the 2013-14 program year were analyzed. Comparison data and financial proxies (i.e. the dollar value of an outcome) was gathered from secondary sources. The study was focused on benefits gained by participants during the 2013-14 program year, as well as estimations about the future benefits that participants will experience. A very conservative approach was applied:

- very low attribution to YEP was assigned for nearly all metrics; and
- the lasting impact of each benefit was limited to between 1 and 3 years, rather than potentially several decades as is common in other SROI studies.

Despite this conservative approach, the resulting SROI calculation was **\$12 of societal benefit for every \$1 invested** into the program.



## Four categories of differential life outcomes were examined:

### Employment

- (Youth) Higher grades
- (Y) Strong feelings of accomplishment
- (Y) Valuable personal development
- (Adults) Improved digital literacy
- (A) Increased language proficiency
- (A) Success in YEP leads to enrollment in higher learning programs

### Mental health and well-being

- (A) Faster & less expensive integration into society
- (A) Better ability to communicate
- (A) Reduced social anxiety & isolation
- (Y) Reduced 'Parentification' as parents become more self reliant

### Relationships

- (Y) Better role models
- (Y) Improved self-esteem

### Volunteerism

- (Y) Increased likelihood of volunteering in the future
- (Y) Completion of youth volunteer hours

## Conclusion

Millions of dollars are spent every year for basic adult literacy programs. Youth are a great resource to reduce this expenditure, and YEP enables them to teach the same material at far less the cost of traditional government funded classrooms. In addition to relieving pressure on social services, the program's reverse-mentorship model provides essential support to

youth during formative development stages while enhancing community volunteerism and engagement.

This framework for this study was developed by Boston Consulting Group; research and attribution labels were completed by external volunteers and by Community Seed Consulting. Further details of the findings are on the subsequent pages of this report, and the full data set is available on our website, at [www.yepeducation.com/sroi](http://www.yepeducation.com/sroi)

Today’s inner-city youth are not gaining enough workplace ready skills or experience. Youth unemployment in Ontario is high, at 18% (27% for recent immigrant youth), and poor volunteerism in low-income communities means nearly half are losing opportunities to gain employment readiness skills. A 2014 study by the Canadian Council of Chief Executives (CCCE) ranked the top-10 attributes hiring managers look for when assessing post-secondary graduates for entry-level positions.<sup>1</sup> Employers prioritize people skills/relationship-building, communication skills, problem-solving, analytical abilities, and leadership, more than industry-specific knowledge and experience. In our increasingly demanding workforce, a failure to develop and understand these skills will significantly impact young people’s current and future employability.

All the essential skills outlined by the CCCE study are taught to youth in YEP. Their participation equips them with tools that will help them graduate from high school, succeed in post-secondary, and have an edge when entering the workplace. Following their YEP experience, youth are able to describe, using specific examples, how they demonstrated these skills at YEP – an ability which will surely come in handy when being interviewed for jobs.

### YEP youth report higher grades following YEP program participation and their increased ability to perform academically leads them to strive for higher education

*What the research says:* Students who achieve higher grades early on are more likely to pursue post-secondary education. The better the academic performance, the more likely they are to aspire to university studies. Given that students have reported an increase in grades through their experience with YEP, youth participants may feel more inclined to further their academic credentials at university rather than college.

### YEP youth report improved feelings of accomplishment and personal development after completing the program

*What the research says:* Children from low-income families with higher self-esteem during adolescence earn \$7,000/year more compared to those with poor self-esteem.<sup>2</sup>

OUTCOME	% PARTICIPANTS IMPACTED	# YEARS IMPACT LASTS	\$ VALUE OF METRIC	% ATTRIBUTION TO YEP
YEP youth report higher grades following YEP program participation and their increased ability to perform academically leads them to strive for higher education	85% of youth in program	1	\$13,111 per person	3%
YEP youth report improved feelings of accomplishment and personal development after completing the program	90% of youth in program	1	\$7,000 per person	5%

# EMPLOYMENT [Adults]

YEP provides adults with free private tutoring, individually tailored to each person's learning needs. Moreover, some are paired with their own child, allowing for high-quality learning to continue at home. Learning from someone of same cultural background, who has a firm understanding of both their native culture and Canadian culture, accelerates the speed at which adults become accustomed to their new surroundings.

For many, YEP acts as a "gateway program" that teaches adults basic skills and then transitions them into higher learning opportunities. Adult participants are not only newcomers and seniors, but also immigrant adults who have been in Canada for many years but have struggled to integrate. In fact, for more than 80% of them, YEP is the first program they have regularly attended regularly.

## Improved digital literacy of adults leads to increase in earning power

*What the research says:* Increased digital literacy fosters a more innovative and creative workplace, and enables an employer to safely conduct business online. The national productivity gain is \$1,600 per worker.<sup>3</sup>

## Increased language proficiency of adults leads to increase in earning power

*What the research says:* Improved language proficiency makes adults competitive in the Canadian workplace, leading to higher earnings. The difference in mean earnings between a worker who uses English at work and one that uses neither English nor French can be up to \$12,000 per year.<sup>4</sup> Unlike digital literacy, basic to moderate proficiency in English takes far longer to achieve. Education research estimates that the number of hours of tutoring required to develop some level of English proficiency is 360 hours.<sup>5</sup> When adjusted for the length of time an average adult spends in YEP, the potential increase in mean earnings is reduced to \$3,600 per person.

## Further enrollment in community-based education programs following participation in YEP program

*What the research says:* In 2003, the average income level of individuals with level 2 to 3 literacy skills was \$32,850, compared to \$20,692 of those with poor (Level 1) literacy skills - an increase of \$12,158 in wages.<sup>6</sup> Due to overlaps with the value of increased English proficiency and digital literacy outcomes, this increase has been adjusted to approximate the benefits of improved quantitative literacy.

OUTCOME	% PARTICIPANTS IMPACTED	# YEARS IMPACT LASTS	\$ VALUE OF METRIC	% ATTRIBUTION TO YEP
Improved digital literacy of adults leads to increase in earning power	100% of adults in program	3	\$1,600 per person	10%
Increased language proficiency of adults leads to increase in earning power	100% of adults in program	3	\$3,600 per person	10%
Further enrollment in community-based education programs following participation in YEP program	30% of adults in program	3	\$4,052 per person	10%

# MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL BEING [Adults]

In 2015, there was, for the first time ever, more Canadians age 65 and over than age 15 and under, according to Statistics Canada. 1 in 6 Canadians are above the age of 64.<sup>7</sup> Family members are living further apart from each other and are losing their natural intergenerational composition.

Migration accounts for over 60 per cent of Canada’s population growth. Immigrants face a difficult task with a unique set of challenges in a new and unfamiliar society. A lack of English ability often means seniors and newcomers minimize the frequency at which they leave their homes. If their technology skills are also nonexistent, they are further unable to communicate digitally (e.g. sending a Skype call to family back home, texting with grandchildren).

Immigrants and seniors may struggle with their changing abilities and roles in a new or rapidly changing society.



## **Faster integration into society (less reliance on social support programs).**

*What the research says:* Social workers spend 5-10% of their time on new immigrant cases. Reduced social workers’ time spent with immigrants means that time can be allocated to other needs (there is a shortage of social workers in Canada)<sup>8</sup>

## **Ability to effectively communicate the national language reduces immigrant social anxiety and reduces social isolation, resulting in reduced government spending (e.g. direct and indirect costs to government for anxiety disorders in Canada)**

*What the research says:* The Canadian government spends \$7,428 per person who suffers from anxiety (direct and indirect costs) on anxiety disorders each year.<sup>9</sup>

Participation in YEP helps adults reduce the number of hours spent asking family for help with language (e.g. translating, interpreting).

OUTCOME	% PARTICIPANTS IMPACTED	# YEARS IMPACT LASTS	\$ VALUE OF METRIC	% ATTRIBUTION TO YEP
Faster integration into society (less reliance on social support programs).	30% of adults in program	1	\$286 per person	25%
Ability to effectively communicate in national language reduces immigrant social anxiety and reduces social isolation, resulting in reduced government spending (e.g. direct and indirect costs to government for anxiety disorders in Canada)	25% of adults and seniors in program	1	\$7,428 per person	2%

# MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL BEING

## [Youth]

Often in immigrant families, parents possess language barriers and rely on their children to perform basic tasks. Youth, when beginning at YEP, indicate spending more than 2.5 hours per week helping parents with family-related administrative tasks. They translate mail, accompany parents to doctor visits, complete important government forms, and more. Consequently, these children find less time for homework, and less time to engage in recreational activities that support healthy social development. This phenomenon is known as Parentification, the process whereby a child is obliged to act as a parent to their own parent. It can result in increased feelings by children of emotional instability, including depression, suicidal thoughts, shame, envy of others and social isolation. This may result in increased conflict within the home.

**Feelings of parentification lead to social anxiety. When parents participate in the YEP program, their children reap the benefit of being able to spend less time helping with administrative tasks**

“ I have lots of responsibilities at home. It gets hard sometimes, like the roles are reversed -- like I'm the one taking care of my parents. But this program is cool. It turns a negative into a positive for everyone. When I teach my mom at YEP, it doesn't feel like a chore anymore. Instead, it feels like I'm learning how to teach. Any my mom learns how to do so many things on her own. Now, she barely asks me for help with a computer.”

Fatema Akbar, age 13  
Tutor in Youth Empowering Parents

OUTCOME	% PARTICIPANTS IMPACTED	# YEARS IMPACT LASTS	\$ VALUE OF METRIC	% ATTRIBUTION TO YEP
Feelings of parentification lead to social anxiety. When parents participate in the YEP program, their children reap the benefit of being able to spend less time helping with administrative tasks	25% of youth in program	1	\$7,428 per person	14%

# RELATIONSHIPS

## [Youth]

Children of immigrant parents are vulnerable to several risk factors, primarily during adolescence, that diminish the influence of their parents in the acculturation process. The risk factors include: language issues including a linguistic separation between parents and children which becomes symbolic of a profound emotional separation.

YEP youth learn the leadership skills to help increase likelihood of becoming better role models in their communities and staying out of trouble. Research indicates that youth involved in intergenerational mentoring programs are 46%

less likely to begin using illegal drugs, 27% less likely to begin using alcohol, and 52% less likely to skip school.<sup>10</sup>

Interacting with older adults enables youth to develop social networks, communication skills, problem-solving abilities, positive attitudes towards aging and a sense of purpose. Young children who interact with older adults in a classroom environment experienced higher personal and social development by 11 months compared to those in non-intergenerational facilities.<sup>11</sup>

### Increased likelihood of becoming better role models in the community

**What the research says:** 13% of children who do not participate in volunteer activities are likely to partake in delinquent behaviour compared to only 7% of children who participated in volunteer activities.<sup>12</sup>

The government spends an average of \$3,740 per youth on at-risk programs, therefore we expect a reduction in government spending on such programs due to youth involvement in YEP.

### Improved self-esteem due to improved family relationships

**What the research says:** 41% of YEP Youth report improved family relationships following program participation.

Children from low-income families with higher self-esteem during adolescence earn \$7,000/year more than those with poor self-esteem.<sup>13</sup>

OUTCOME	% PARTICIPANTS IMPACTED	# YEARS IMPACT LASTS	\$ VALUE OF METRIC	% ATTRIBUTION TO YEP
Increased likelihood of becoming better role models in the community	35% of youth in program	1	\$3,740 per person	7%
Improved self-esteem due to improved family relationships	41% of youth in program	1	\$7,000 per person	5%

“ (That student) had a lot of behavioural challenges, particularly during unstructured time – lunch and recess. He’d continuously get into conflict with students and was defiant towards teachers. He was a regular in my office. I was surprised he joined YEP; he only did so because his mother was in the program. Since then, I can’t remember the last time I’ve seen him in my office. He’s changed quite a bit, and I don’t think he realizes what kind of impact the program has had on him. It allowed him to take on some leadership and demonstrate a skillset that he obviously had – one which I didn’t even know he had. It gave him a certain level of confidence, and someone looking at him for support or guidance allowed him to see himself as a leader. He enjoyed getting that positive encouragement. And, having been put into the role of a teacher, he’s become a lot more focused in class, and he’s a lot more respectful to teachers... that’s a big growth piece. I can confidently attribute much of that growth to his involvement in the YEP program.”

Ainsworth Morgan, 2015

Vice Principal at Nelson Mandela Park Public School (Located in Regent Park)

# VOLUNTEERISM

YEP makes good utilization of community space. Programs operate in existing spaces during nonpeak hours, resulting in the prevention of unnecessary spending. Moreover, YEP programs operate in various neighbourhoods and, very often, within youths' own schools during school hours (i.e. lunch time) or immediately after (i.e. after-school), making it very convenient and simple for them to volunteer.

**YEP youth learn the benefits of volunteering. YEP youth report increased likelihood of volunteering again in the future. There are future community benefits via increased likelihood to volunteer as adult.**

*What the research says:* The value of volunteerism to the community is \$3,599.<sup>14</sup> More than 80% of YEP youth cite they would volunteer again in the future.

**Completion of youth mandatory volunteer hours vs. falsification.**

*What the research says:* There are over 700,000 high-school students in Ontario, and each is required to volunteer 40 hours to graduate. A study by the Canadian Education Association on the effectiveness of mandatory volunteerism found that a shocking 46% of low-income youth forge or exaggerate their required hours. By comparison, less than 5% of youth from high-income communities do this.<sup>15</sup>

All YEP locations are in low-income communities. In each, there are waitlists for youth, often double the size of the program capacity. Over 80% state a desire to return to YEP, and YEP youth are 70% more likely to volunteer again than their peers who volunteered elsewhere. Studies indicate there are three primary reasons that YEP has this effect.

First, it appeals to young people. To quote 13-year old Selam, "At home I take instruction from my mom. Here, I get to be the boss. It's cool!" This is the first time in the youths' lives they feel valued for their knowledge and they are thrilled to share and mentor adults. On exit surveys, it is near unanimous that youth state their favourite thing about YEP is they appreciate being given a high degree of responsibility and trust, with tangible outcomes attached to their success. No other initiative permits youth to be directly responsible for the development of another person's skillset and independence.

Second, it allows any youth – extroverted or introverted, able-bodied or disabled, and regardless of academic standing or challenges – to become a leader. The program is simply leveraging the existing skills of children and youth—such as English language and computer literacy—to position them as mentors and gives them a clear sense of "I am an important person." YEP has never turned away a child.

Third, they do not need to wait long to see an impact. They can see *instantly* that an adult is learning new skills and that *they* are responsible for it. It makes them want to help adults more and more.

OUTCOME	% PARTICIPANTS IMPACTED	# YEARS IMPACT LASTS	\$ VALUE OF METRIC	% ATTRIBUTION TO YEP
YEP youth learn the benefits of volunteering. YEP youth report increased likelihood of volunteering again in the future. There are future community benefits via increased likelihood to volunteer as adult.	80% of youth in program	1	\$3,599 per person	60%
Completion of youth mandatory volunteer hours vs. falsification.	26% of youth in program	1	\$830 per person	100%

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