Delivering Youth Development Outcomes, the Award Canada Way

Position Paper – Program design considerations adolescent and teen youth development
The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award – Canada: Award Canada Research 2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Building on more than 60 years of practical experience, Award Canada has optimized and simplified its program framework to meet the emerging and future needs of Canadian youth. This program update builds on historical and recent developments in youth development research, while honoring the International framework built off Kurt Hahn's original design premises. Developments in neuroscience in particular, as well as longitudinal studies on youth development, and specifically the adolescent brain, have enabled a sharper focus on key program interventions, supported by data, that are proven to work. While legacy interventions focused on delinquent behaviours, modern thinking has supported the need for strength's based reinforcement and more recently the role of the student voice, and student empowerment and recognition of peers and adult mentorship. Key programmatic components centre around: six thematic areas: (1) youth program control and choice, (2) adult youth partnership and mentoring, (3) progressive development and longevity 'stickiness', (4) competency and confidence development, (5) individual choice, equity, and inclusion, and (6) community involvement and volunteering. In addition, there is an increasing drive towards the partnership of formal and non-formal education, the increasing role of experiential learning and the accreditation of prior learning – recognizing the network ecosystem of youth and specifically adolescent development. This has led to a stronger desire to integrate the Award into cocurricular learning within the public-school system that not only supports youth learning but further reduces the recognized socio-economic and inclusion barriers to youth development. Award Canada's simplified framework – the '**Award Canada Way**' – is based off seven elements that, when integrated within a formal or non-formal education setting, increase the likelihood of youth success. Young people in high school and college today, are preparing to enter post-secondary in a time of profound economic, social, and technological change. The distinction between hard and soft skills is blurring as the workplace demands more holistic competencies and socio-economic differentiation is widening the opportunity gap for youth. The Award Canada Way provides an additional support for educators and youth development organizations to provide access for youth, creating a bridge that ensures a catalyst for youth engagement, student achievement, future employability, and mental health and well-being.

INTRODUCTION

Award Canada, with more than 60 years of experience, is part of an international award operating in more than 130 countries designed for young people that equips them to be **#WorldReady** through facilitation of their strengths to deliver **#InfinitePotential**. The Award empowers young people between the ages of 14 and 24 to learn and grow through non-formal education & learning, working towards a globally recognized accreditation. The Award supports more than one million youth worldwide annually and is one of the 'Big 6" global youth organizations that collectively directly impact more than 250 million youth and have contributed to the empowerment of more than one billion young people during the last century.

The Award makes an impact; young people, especially teenagers, benefit from the structured and diverse framework that has been developed from decades of youth development and program research. This report provides a short synopsis of the work of professional educational researchers in the fields of youth development and the associated outcomes and attribute development that are required for program design and associated interventions. This report includes a summary of the extensive research and literature review documented in **Youth that thrive** Khanna et al., 2014., with 2 specific summaries focused on teenage youth: **Teen Voice: The Untapped Strengths of 15-Year-Old** Peter C. Scales et al (2019) and **American Camp Association: National Camp Impact Study** (2021-2022) Final Report, Spielvogel et al. (2023).

These 3 areas of research provide an excellent entrance point to both the scientific and interested community in an accessible way to learn more regarding the science behind why youth development program is important and how it can be best applied for outcome delivery. These 'marker' papers were selected as representative of the vast literature on youth and adolescent development which started in earnest in the 1960s, building off established youth program work from the 1900s, and became the subject of more significant research from the 1980s onwards with a change from at risk / deficit behavioural research to strength's-based research. An extensive research listing is provided, largely made available from the literature review of *Youth that thrive Khanna et al., 2014*.

BACKGROUND / PRIMER

A fundamental principle in all of the Big 6 and other youth development organizations, is to build a better world through the non-formal experiential education of young people. Generally speaking, this is associated with positive attribute development, a purposeful commitment to participation in and contribution to modern society and a collective responsibility and connectedness.

Youth programming has been a focus since the turn of the 20th century in North America referred to as the "Progressive Era" (1880-1920). This coincided with the establishment of many of the youth serving associations, charities and foundations that still exist today, many of which defined the first core components of what we now term "youth development".

Early 20th Century (1900s): Natural Process: The concept of youth development was closely tied to child and adolescent development, focusing on the natural unfolding of a young person's potential in relation to their environment, strongly influenced by heredity and environment. *Hamilton et al. (2004)*

Early 20th Century (1900s): Character and Moral Education: Philosophers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau emphasized character development. Rousseau believed that children learned best through sensory experiences and should remain principled and honorable even in an imperfect society. *Buckley & Budzyna (2023)*

Early 20th Century (1910s-1950s) – Scouting: Often considered one of the earliest organized programs specifically aimed at youth development, first published in 1908 (Scouting for Boys), Baden-Powell's ('BP') scouting movement was perhaps the first at-scale program to introduce youth development. The program originally for boys only, converted to all access in 1972 in Canada, promoted outdoor experiences, teamwork, and practical skills; core principles that continue to shape youth development worldwide. The principles remain relevant today, guiding youth development programs and emphasizing holistic growth, responsibility, and adventure.

- **Adventure**: The model incorporates the belief that young people should experience exciting challenges, explore the outdoors, and learn through **real-life experiences**. Adventure fosters resilience, courage, & personal growth.
- **Collaboration** and **Responsibility**: Emphasis on **teamwork** and **responsibility**. The concept of the "patrol" encouraged young people to work together as a natural friendship group or small teams. In doing so, youth learned responsibility, leadership, and cooperation.
- **Self-Sufficiency**: BP encouraged **independence** and **self-reliance**. Scouting taught practical skills, such as camping, cooking, and first aid, empowering young people to be self-sufficient in varying situations.
- **Learning Through Doing**: BP was deeply suspicious of rigid curricula. Instead, he championed "learning through doing." Scouts actively participated in **hands-on activities**, **problem-solving**, and **experiential learning**. This approach allowed them to develop practical skills & character traits.

Early 20th Century (1910s-1950s) – Youth Organizations: At the same time that Scouting was established, many other youth organizations progressed similar youth development methodologies. These programs, along with Scouting, have played significant roles in youth development by providing opportunities for learning, growth, and community involvement. Each has its own unique approach and focus, contributing to the diverse landscape of youth programming. Some examples: *Marten, 2021.*

- **YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association)**: Established in 1844, the YMCA has a long history of programs and services for young people, focusing on spiritual, mental, and physical development.
- **Boys' Clubs of America (now Boys & Girls Clubs of America and BGC Canada)**: Founded in 1860, the Boys' Clubs of America aimed to provide a safe and constructive environment for young boys, offering various programs and activities to support their development.

- **Junior Achievement (JA)**: Founded in 1919, Junior Achievement is dedicated to educating students about workforce readiness, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy through experiential, hands-on programs.
- **4-H Clubs**: Established in the United States in the late 19th century, 4-H Clubs initially focused on agricultural education for rural youth but later expanded to cover a wide range of topics, including leadership, science, and citizenship.

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For Award Canada specifically, Kurt Hahn, a visionary German educator, introduced an alternate perspective of youth development from the lens of the potential **declines of modern youth**, that became the basis for the framework still used today, in both The Duke of Edinburgh's Award and Outward Bound.

1930s and 40s: Kurt Hahn "Six Declines of Modern Youth" and Outward Bound: Established at Gordonstoun School in Scotland in the 1930s with the framework based off the 'Six declines of Modern Youth' and the reciprocal 'Four Antidotes to the Declines of Modern Youth'. These were:

1. Decline of **Fitness** due to modern methods of locomotion (moving about).
2. Decline of **Initiative & Enterprise** due to the widespread disease of 'spectatoritis'.
3. Decline of **Memory & Imagination** due to the confused restlessness of modern life.
4. Decline of **Skill & Care** due to the weakened tradition of craftsmanship.
5. Decline of **Self-discipline** due to the ever-present availability of stimulants and tranquillisers.
6. Decline of **Compassion** due to the unseemly haste with which modern life is conducted, or as William Temple called it, "spiritual death"

The Four Antidotes to the Declines of Modern Youth:
1. **Fitness Training**: to compete with oneself in physical fitness; in so doing, train the discipline & determination of the mind through the body,
2. **Expeditions**: via sea or land to engage in long, challenging endurance tasks,
3. **Projects**: involving crafts and manual skills; and
4. **Rescue Service**: e.g., surf lifesaving, firefighting, first aid.

1956: The Duke of Edinburgh's Award was launched in the United Kingdom in 1956 by Prince Philip, The Duke of Edinburgh at the instigation of Kurt Hahn.

It could be reasonably argued that Kurt Hahn was one of the early adopters of a more modern approach to youth development and specifically adolescent development theory. Up until the 1960s, perhaps as late as the 1990s, child and youth development models focused almost exclusively on ways of preventing and treating negative or developmental "deficits" or risk behaviours (such as poverty, family dysfunction) and problem behaviours (such as anti-social behaviour, teen pregnancy). The four antidotes and the following program interventions were an early youth program designed to address and focus on positive reinforcement or strengths through an individual's potential.

1950s: Significant focus on at-risk or delinquent behaviours – largely reactive. Literature from the mental health and criminal justice models tried to address the issue of delinquent behaviour (Damon, 2004). Policies based on those approaches have been effective in reducing juvenile crime (Eccles & Gootman, 2002) and have extensively expanded in an attempt to address issues such as substance abuse, graduation rates, and teenage pregnancy (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004).

1960s: Emergence of strength's-based focus and beginnings of positive reinforcement – still largely focused on reactive not pro-active. Community psychology emerged in the 1960s by emphasizing strength development (Trickett, Barone, & Buchanan, 1996).

Early 1980s: Shift in research towards contributing factors and a further step to positive youth development: The focus moved from the "causes" of delinquency to the development causes or contributing factors that influence social development (Hawkins & Weis, 1985).

Mid 1980s: Shift from single factor to multifactor predictive behaviours: While early preventative literature was often concentrated on a single measurable behaviour, the focus has shifted from single factors to the co-occurrence of predictors of multiple behaviours (Catalano et al., 2004).

1990s – Present: Introduction of muti-component youth development frameworks
Over the past 30 years, contemporary youth development research has created a more comprehensive view of youth development (Eccles & Gootman, 2002) through the emergence of numerous frameworks proposed by foundations, youth-serving organizations, and practitioners to promote youth success:

- **Social development model**, "factors directly relating to family (attachment to parents) or indirectly relating to family (moral order) influence delinquent behaviour" (Hawkins & Weis, 1985).
- Longitudinal studies in the 1980s represent the beginning of another line of research on **resiliency** (Werner, 1982). Instead of focusing on the inhibitors of youth success,

resiliency research focuses on the factors that foster "flourishing in spite of every prediction to the contrary" (Damon, 2004, p. 16).
- **Resiliency research** was successful in focusing the discussion on **positive attributes**, but did not develop further into a model of universal youth development.
- Benson (1997) at the **Search Institute** extended the field by creating "**developmental assets**": a model that includes internal and external components that represent what youth require to thrive.

The most widely utilised youth development frameworks:
- The **Developmental Assets™ model** has been used for the development of comprehensive approaches to program by focusing on the unique talents, strengths, and potential of each individual. **40 assets for thriving**, equally divided between **internal** and **external** assets.
- The **Five Cs Model** focuses on five core internal principles: **competence; confidence; connection; character;** and **caring/compassion** (contribution is sometimes added as a sixth C when the previous five Cs are satisfied; Armour & Sandford, 2013; Lerner, et al., 2005). Youth with higher levels of the five Cs tend to have better outcomes (Bowers et al., 2010).
- **Self-Determination Theory** (SDT) outlines three innate psychological needs (**autonomy, relatedness,** and **competence**) to explain youth thriving (Deci & Ryan, 2000).
  - **Autonomy** relates to the extent that an individual feels that their circumstances and behaviour is regulated and under control (Deci & Ryan, 1985).
  - **Relatedness** concerns constructive relationships with others in one's environment.
  - **Competence** is a critical factor for being effective, it is based on self-appraisals of ability to achieve desired outcomes.

In their extensive literature review, *Youth that thrive: Khanna et al., 2014* analyzed the critical factors that support youth, ages 12 to 25, and adapted the most salient theoretical premises of **Developmental Assets™**, the **Five Cs Model**, and **Self-Determination Theory** to create an integrative fourth youth developmental framework, "the Youth Thriving **ARC model**" – based on the three critical factors that consistently recurred: **Autonomy**, **Relatedness**, and **Competence**. While not materially different, this model provides an interesting comparison and further recognises that the three types of model focus: assets, youth development (competencies) or resiliency each provide unique strengths for different situations. They noted that the "**optimal challenge occurs when the challenge of an activity is highly balanced with an individual's abilities to successfully perform the task.**" Satisfaction of all critical factors is associated with success in a range of environments and greater personal achievement (Jang, Reeve, Ryan, & Kim, 2009).

2000s - Present: Adolescent Brain Development

One of the earliest research studies, Geidd 1999, provided evidence of declining Pre-Frontal Cortex grey matter volume in adolescents. This is a key part of the brain responsible for executive function: abstract thinking, analysis, regulating behaviour; in essence, the decision and risk-management part of the brain. Geidd attributed the loss of grey matter to the role that experience plays in sculpting the brain during this developmental period. A theory that today is coined "**use it or lose it**".

Neuroscience and especially the role of adolescence is a rapidly evolving science, but with the help of brain imaging, and studies, it is known that adolescence is a period of brain development – a time in which the brain is demonstrating plasticity, constantly reforming in 2 separate actions of 'pruning' – the removal of unused parts of the brain and 'myelination' or 'integration', in essence locking in the often-used parts of the brain and making permanent connections. This scientific insight has significant and meaningful value for the interventions on youth development and the role of formal and non-formal experiences that can shape the "use it or lose it" developmental period of a young person's development.

Research in developmental cognitive neuroscience is showing that what was previously seen as immaturity is actually a cognitive, behavioral, and neurological flexibility that allows teens to explore and adapt to their shifting inner and outer worlds. There's a growing recognition of the developing brain as malleable, flexible, and promoting many positive aspects of development in adolescence. Studies are increasingly considering the influence not just of peers but also of parents, the wider environment, and influences – consistent with the findings of (positive) youth developmental frameworks.

Romer, et al., 2017, provided a challenge to the generally accepted view regarding the teenage brain as more of a burden than an asset: adolescents are risk machines who lacked the decision-making powers of a fully developed prefrontal cortex—and liable to harm themselves and others as a result. Research continues to propel the theory of 'use it or lose it' but with a focus on the brain developmental phase as a time of cognitive, behavioural, and neurological flexibility with a focus on **exploration** as teens navigate and adapt to shifting inner and outer environments. With this knowledge, it is possible to create social and environmental opportunities for youth to thrive and support their exploration.

YOUTH PROGRAM INTERVENTIONS

The role of youth development organizations, like Award Canada, in shaping the lives of youth continues to receive increased attention – especially with the increased value recognition of the role of non-formal education and learning (NFE&L) as an extension and partner for formal education. The OECD for example, has recognized the importance of non-formal and informal learning, particularly in relation to youth development. They reference two key areas pertinent to Canada:

- **Recognition of Learning Outcomes**: An OECD review in 22 countries explored the advantages of recognizing non-formal and informal learning outcomes – linked to Sustainable Development Goal on Education (SDG 4). The report takes stock of existing policies and practices and recommends how to organize recognition of these learning systems. *Werquin, P. (2010), Recognising Non-Formal and Informal Learning: Outcomes, Policies and Practices, OECD Publishing, Paris*
- **Lifelong Learning**: The OECD has endorsed strategies for "lifelong learning for all," which includes formal, non-formal, and informal learning. This approach is aimed at ensuring that learning opportunities are available throughout all stages of life, from cradle to grave.

Young people spend as much time, or more, out of school as they do in it. What young people do out-of-school hours has significant implications for development of cognitive/learning outcomes (Lauer et al., 2006), behavioral/social outcomes (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007), and psychological/emotional outcomes (Armstrong & Manion, 2006). *Khanna et al., 2014* summarised the literature on interventions for youth development into the following five elements: (i) **direct intervention**s; (ii) **program design** aspects; (iii) **program components**; (iv) **measures of impact**; and (v) **applications to programming** moving forward. Key considerations applicable to Award Canada are:

Interventions addressing Autonomy – with a focus on the 5 Cs model: *Busseri, et al. 2006*
- Ensure youth feel in control of a program (**youth agency** and **youth voice**), including decisions about participating in the program and decision-making within the program
- Support by **coaches**, **mentors** and other non-parental adults in programs makes an important contribution to young people's subjective well-being.

Interventions addressing Relatedness – focus on the Development Assets model
- Create a strong bond established between an **adult** and a youth participant
- Aim for **sustained program length** and program attendance. The contact time within the program is vital for greater success.

Interventions addressing Competence
- Competence approaches to intervention can be based on any one of a number of competences – **not limited to formal education or formal skill**.
- Developmental, cultural, and contextual elements may be particularly important to consider in designing competence interventions.
- It is noted that a program beneficial for one young person is not helpful for a seemingly similar young person – **variety, diversity, and youth decision making** is key.

Interventions addressing program design
Eccles and Gootman (2002) recommend eight program features for positive development of youth participants:

1) physical and psychological safety
2) appropriate structure
3) supportive relationships
4) opportunities to belong
5) positive social norms
6) support for efficacy and application
7) opportunities for skill building
8) integration of family, school, and community efforts.

Intervention duration and diversity of activity
Although there is debate about the exact amount of time required and the optimum level of participation (Lerner et al., 2011), extracurricular participation, especially across a number of activities (Busseri, Krasnor, Willoughby, & Chalmers, 2006), is beneficial.

Conclusion and application to Award Canada
From its inception, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award framework, based on Kahn's Four Antidotes to the Declines of Modern Youth, has utilized program interventions that largely mirror modern studies, specifically:

- Youth program control and choice
- Adult youth partnership and mentoring
- Progressive development and longevity 'stickiness'
- Competency and confidence development
- Individual choice, equity, and inclusion
- Community involvement and volunteering

With more intentional alignment with formal education, school environments and activity, it will further enhance, through reinforcement and continuity, the approaches, and outcomes from intentional positive youth development activities.

NEUORSCIENCE RELATED INTERVENTIONS
Brain research provides us with several researched principles and key behaviors for supporting youth that thrive:

1) Always empower never disempower
2) Give unconditional positive regard
3) Maintain high expectations
4) Check assumptions/observe/question
5) Be a relationship coach
6) Provide opportunities for meaningful participation

Additional design considerations for both formal and non-formal education environments:

Promote Neurological Flexibility:
- Encourage a **variety of learning experiences** to stimulate different parts of the brain.
- Integrate **cross-curricular activities** that blend subjects and skills, *Wolfe, 2001*.

Leverage Sensitivity to Rewards:
- Use **positive reinforcement** to motivate students.
- Create a **system of incentives** for achievements. *Wolfe: Brain Matters, 2001*

Foster a Supportive Social Environment:
- Build **strong relationships** with students to provide a sense of security and belonging.
- Encourage **peer collaboration** and **group projects** to enhance social learning. *Loschert et al., 2019*

Incorporate Meaning and Emotion in Learning:
- Design activities that are **relevant to students' lives** and **interests**.
- Use **storytelling and real-world problems** to engage students emotionally. *Wolfe, 2001*.

Support Identity and Empowerment:
- Allow students to **explore their interests** through elective courses and clubs.
- Provide **opportunities for expression** so students can express themselves and their values.

Create Opportunities for Choice and Autonomy:
- Offer **options** and let students **choose their projects**.
- **Involve students** in setting rules and policies. *Armstrong, T., 2016*

Develop Self-Awareness:
- Implement **reflective practices** like journaling or mindfulness exercises.
- Encourage students to **set personal goals** and track their progress. *Armstrong, T., 2016*

Ensure Psychological Safety and Inclusivity:
- Create an environment where **students feel safe** to take risks and make mistakes.
- **Celebrate diversity** and **promote inclusiveness** in all activities.

Conclusion and application to Award Canada
It is evident that there is clear alignment between the neuroscience-based program interventions and the sociological-, educational- and psychological-based program design implications. For Award Canada there are some areas that could be further enhanced / reinforced:

- Benefit of variety while not stifling passion
- Increase the use of the community or Adventurous Journey components to enhance cross-curricular
- Provide increased incentivization or gamification
- Increase the use of friends and peer collaboration
- Increased use of activities that are relevant and apply to real-world application after school
- Maximise the use of strengths, passions, interests.
- Offer more options, choices, and examples
- Make self-reflection easier and supportive
- Continue to extend diversity, equity, and inclusion

The following are two case studies (of many) that have applicability and relevance to the Award in Canada and provide real-world application and data insights beyond the more academic and theoretical longitudinal studies.

CASE STUDY: Teen Voice: The untapped strengths of 15-year-olds - *Scales et al. 2009*

Based on a national study of 1,817 fifteen-year-olds, this study offers a unique, positive look into the lives of today's teens. It explores three interlocking concepts: "sparks," "teen voice," and "relationships and opportunities." The authors postulate that, when these strengths work together, they have tremendous potential to set or keep 15-year-olds on a positive course in the midst of this critical time in life.

Sparks: Growing Up from the Inside Out
- "Sparks" is a metaphor for describing how young people experience talents, interests, or strengths that make them feel really happy, energized, and passionate, and that give them real purpose, direction, or focus.
- Fewer than half of the kids who know their spark say that anyone at school (48%), a coach, mentor, or other youth worker (43%), encourages their spark.
- Among the 15-year-olds surveyed, 28% describe their strongest spark as sports, athletics, or other physical activities, and 24% describe it as creative activities such as art, dance, drama, music, or writing.
- Teens who know their sparks are more likely to report higher levels of initiative, sense of purpose, and desire to make a difference. They are also more likely to value being civically engaged and serving others.

Teen Voice: Finding Their Own Voices
- The Teen Voice Index (TVI) provides a snapshot of teen engagement in social issues and civic life.
- Overall, just 18% of youth scored high on the TVI. But the greatest difference is that the higher their parents' education, the higher teens score on the TVI, revealing some of the barriers teens face in fulfilling their potential.
- Fifteen-year-olds with high TVI scores are at least three times as likely as those with low scores to see civic engagement as important, hold pro-social values, and have a sense of hopeful purpose.

Relationships and Opportunities Index: People and Places that Make a Difference
- Sparks and Teen Voice flourish with the help of relationships and opportunities that recognize, encourage, and guide teens. This study highlights three elements that significantly help teens: **Being valued** and treated fairly; having **access** to and being involved in high-quality opportunities, such as after-school programs; and having **people who help nurture their sparks**.
- Teens with high ROI scores are at least three times as likely as those with low scores to have a sense of hopeful purpose, express caring values, be actively engaged in school, and take on leadership roles.

- A critical issue in this gap between high and low scorers on the ROI is the quality of the programs in which they participate.

Sparks + TVI + ROI = Strength @ 15
- Though each of these factors matters, teens who experience all three of these strengths are better off.
- Thus, the challenge becomes clear when we put the pieces together: Only 7% of America's 15-year-olds experience high levels of all three of these critical strengths

What Gets in the Way?
- About one-third of teens are unable to identify a talent, interest, or hobby that they are deeply passionate about.
- Once teens identity their passions, many don't know how to develop them.
- About one in five teens indicate that someone has actively discouraged them from pursuing their passion or interest.
- Economic disparities, racial discrimination, and quality of community opportunities and programs all get in the way of teens experiencing these strengths.

Conclusion and application to Award Canada
Young teenagers want to make the best of their own lives. They need more safe chances to explore the things that might capture their energized attention and enrich their lives and the lives of their families, schools, and communities. Adults working alongside young people can help them find and follow their **passions**, enriching themselves, their families, and their communities as a result.

When done right, Award Canada's model and framework directly addresses many of the key components:
1. **Teens select things that interest them**. Encourage young people to do projects related to their sparks and interests. Tap their creativity, gifts, leadership, and commitments to strengthen the school and enrich its climate, knowing that young people who are actively pursuing their sparks and who feel they have a voice in their school are more likely to be engaged and do well academically.
2. **Teens can work with their friends, peers, or the wider community**. If they are deeply concerned about an issue e.g. climate change, or passionate about music, the Award connects them through skill, service, or adventure.
3. **Mentors reinforce their confidence, even when they may not believe in themselves**. Stretch SMART goals enable them to challenge themselves – while also meeting them where they are at – adaptable and flexible to the environment and situation.
4. **Structure and templates supports them to problem solve and figure out the next step for moving forward**. Youth may not know what to do next,

nurture their spark, or find an opportunity that they would really enjoy. Award Canada and leaders help them think through the options and next steps.

5. **Help them prioritize and focus**. Sometimes they can get caught up in trying so many things or tackling so many issues that they get overwhelmed or discouraged. Learning to make choices and focus is an important life skill.

6. **Volunteering can help to connect teens with people of multiple generations**. They may seem to only want to be with friends their own age (and sometimes they do). But they also can appreciate a broader web of relationships, both with younger children as well as with older adults (who may have lots of experience in their area of spark).

7. **Encourage teens to develop and pursue multiple interests** that are exciting to them, not just one.

CASE STUDY: American Camp Association: National Camp Impact Study - *Spielvogel et al. 2023*

The five-year American Camp Association (ACA) National Impact Study began in January of 2017 with the primary purpose of understanding the long-term impacts of organized summer camp experiences for youth participants and young adult staff members. At the inception of the Impact Study, the primary goal was to evaluate whether participation in summer camp shaped youth and young adults' development over several years. Four setting-level variables were identified as central to the camp experience: engagement, sense of belonging, adult-youth relationships, and experiential learning.

Conclusion 1: High-quality camp experiences are linked to youth and staff development

- Youth who reported high levels of engagement at camp generally also reported high levels of belonging, supportive youth-staff relationships, and opportunities for action-based and – to a lesser extent – reflection-based experiential learning.
- Youth who had higher quality camp experiences across waves reported higher levels of affinity for nature, willingness to try new things, social awareness, independence, and grit than youth who had lower quality camp experiences across waves.
- Having a high-quality camp experience at the start of the study was connected to improved outcomes in the short-term and several years after camp attendance, with the most enduring effects emerging for affinity for nature, willingness to try new things, grit, and child friendships.

Practical Takeaways for Award Canada

- The feature that differentiates great and exceptional experiences at camp, pr related experiential team-based, or outdoor challenge, is opportunities for **reflection-based experiential learning**.
- High-quality camp experiences predict youth outcomes, with some connections enduring several years after the

quality camp experience. **Improving camp, or outdoor experience, quality** may thus have short- and long-term benefits for youth development.

- Assets of the camp, or outdoor team challenge, environment include **peer relationships**, **new opportunities**, and being in the moment.

Conclusion 2: Summer camp is one piece of a larger developmental ecosystem.

- Experiences in camp and school settings appear to be mutually reinforcing.
- In general, youth who had higher quality camp experiences than their peers also had better school experiences the following Spring.
- There were significant indirect effects of camp experiences on later outcomes through school experiences, meaning that "effects" of quality camp experiences on social awareness, grit, willingness to try new things, and affinity for nature were partly transmitted through improvements in school experience
- Positive peer relationships and new opportunities are part of what makes camp experiences memorable to youth. Memorable experiences like these may help explain the enduring effects of a high-quality camp experience.
- Youth who had higher quality camp experiences in terms of engagement, belonging, youth-adult relationships, and experiential learning also reported higher levels of appreciation for being present after camp.

Practical Takeaways *for Award Canada*

- An exceptional camp, or outdoor, weekend, or exploration style, team-based experience may support improvements in youths' school experiences, with benefits for developmental outcomes. This underscores the importance of promoting high-quality team-based Adventurous Journey (AJ) experiences.
- Camp, as well as AJ challenges, is one part of a larger ecosystem. While evidence suggests that camp may offer developmental benefits to youth, other settings such as sports and arts/music activities may offer similar benefits given shared qualities

APPLICATION TO AWARD CANADA

The Award Canada framework includes an overnight adventure, traditionally a camping trip, in each of the levels Bronze, Silver and Gold, largely in recognition of the power of small teams, out of their comfort zone and use of the outdoors specifically nature and the environment. More recently, and in appreciation of the changing landscape of Canada, the Adventurous Journey component has broadened the definition of Adventure beyond the legacy archetypal wilderness camping construct to appreciate that **many styles of adventure can yield the same development outcomes**, developmental challenges and ultimately benefits that have been recorded in this and many other camping and adventure related studies.

ARC PROGRAM ELEMENTS
• Youth ownership / design
• Participation decisions
• Youth leadership
• Appropriate structure
• Personal competence
• Intrapersonal achievement
• Skill building
• Adult – Youth bond
• Support from mentor /coach
• Sustained contact time
• Belonging
• Integrate family & school
• Community involvement
• Interpersonal exchanges

GUIDING PRINCIPLES
Meaningful & Personal journey…
1. Individual
2. Non-Competitive
3. Achievable
4. Voluntary
5. Developmental
6. Balanced
7. Progressive
8. Inspirational
9. Persistence
10. Enjoyable

THE AWARD CANADA WAY
"The 7 Elements" - program criteria
1. Framework
2. SMART Goals
3. Youth-Centric Focus
4. Purposeful Engagement
5. Guidance by Mentors
6. Progressive Development
7. Self-Reflection

Supported by …
• Strengths & Passions
• Flexibility & Adaptability
• Experiential learning
• Inclusive & diverse
• Community (Volunteerism)
• Leadership development
• Teamwork (with peers)

Chart 1: *Integrating youth development research and recommended program elements with Award guiding principles to develop an Award Canada method ("The **Award Canada Way**") that can be utilized for Award Centre program implementation.*

The practical takeaways from this study, while not over an extended summer period, can and should be integrated into an adventurous journey concept:

1. **Reflection-based experiential learning** – the power of a SMART goal, a mentor to guide, the intentional self-reflection and the application through exploration.

2. **High-quality experience** – ensure that the adventure is well planned, co-owned (by the youth), challenging and engaging – supported by mentors and tools.

3. **Peer relationships**, **new opportunities** – working in small teams with friends, peers, and new faces, develop plans and creative ideas, be part of the design plan, do and review – explore a new adventure make new friends and lifelong experiences.

4. **Part of a larger ecosystem** – The Adventurous journey is part of the Award Canada model. It can be a catalyst for excitement, team-development, and a construct to frame the other sections: physical, skill, community. Indeed, many programs that utilize the AJ as the primary lead / first activity or umbrella – often see greater participation and engagement.

AWARD CANADA: Non-Formal Education & Learning + Interventions + Principles + Framework
The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Framework has been regularly updated to ensure relevancy with youth development trends. The studies presented in this synopsis, and those contained within the extensive reviews and case studies discussed, offer more specificity around the key program elements that are correlated to increased probability of positive outcomes.

A key emphasis that emerges from the combined research is that: **how the principles and interventions are conducted, and where they are conducted is largely irrelevant.** The criticality is the design principles themselves, the occurrence,

longevity, repeatability, and quality of experience when enhanced, yield a higher percentage of both number and quality of positive outcomes in youth development attributes. Formal and non-formal education alike, can benefit from the proposed interventions in the design of curricular or program design to maximize the opportunity for youth development. It is further postulated that more integration and collaboration can further benefit youth outcomes.

For Award Canada, ensuring the program and associated framework is understood at its core principles and the experience provided to the youth is both consistent and high quality will improve the youth experience, motivation and improve outcome delivery: **Chart 1**. The framework works as a system, a whole, reinforcing the other components.

It differentiates itself from more traditional single-focused youth programs that may be focused on one attribute of competence or physical recreation, and provides the important variety, personal choice, youth-centric decision making, self-reflection and combined peer and team interaction.

Understanding and sharing the importance of the Award Canada methodology that integrates Program development elements and the Award guiding principles, will allow for more flexibility in application which should yield higher adoption, motivation, and completion. This will require legacy assumptions and rules-based barriers to be adjusted. Greater integration within the school program can be achieved through deliberate application of the methodology. **Chart 2** provides a summary of the method and framework integrating NFE&L characteristics of application with design and methodology to achieve the desired youth development outcomes. If activities are designed to ensure the method and

framework are integrated and respected, the outcomes can be achieved and thus the activity should be supported.

The research and case studies point to the importance of program quality and execution. The approach of mentors in their interactions with youth and the role of youth participation in activity selection, decision making and ownership. The camp study further reinforces the importance of the Adventurous Journey component, combined with the diversity of physical, skill and community activities that make for a broad, well-rounded experience addressing the cognitive/learning, behavioural/ social, and psychological/emotional aspects of youth development.
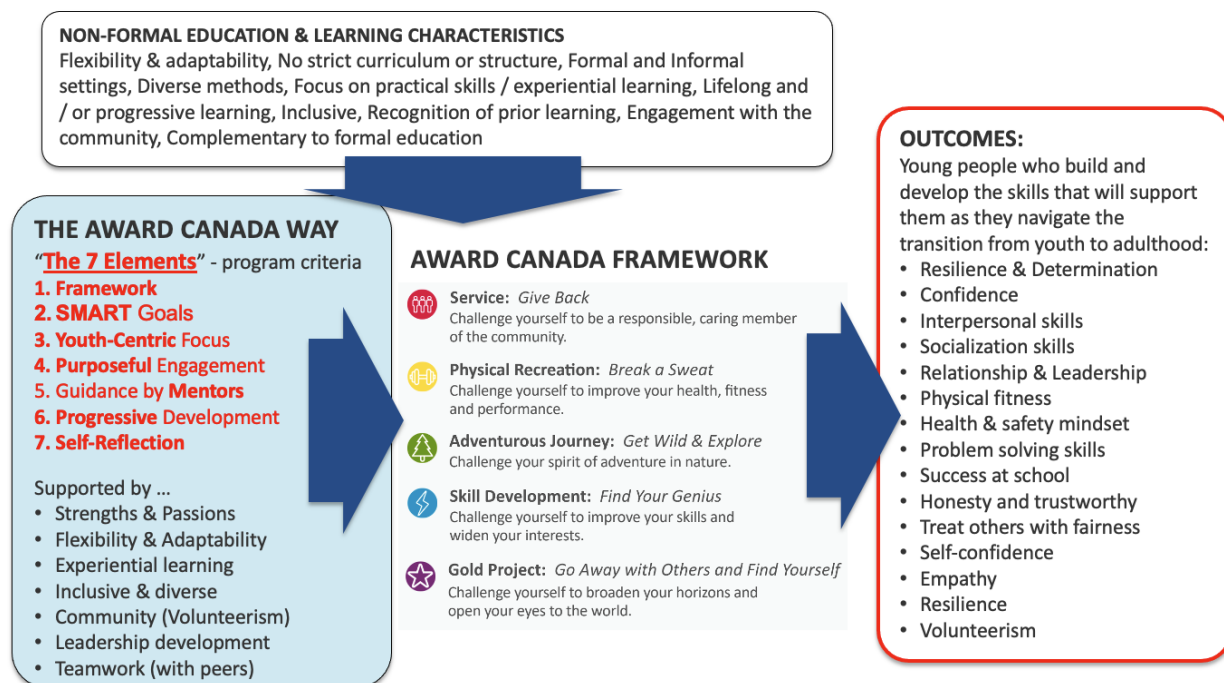
NON-FORMAL EDUCATION & LEARNING CHARACTERISTICS
Flexibility & adaptability, No strict curriculum or structure, Formal and Informal settings, Diverse methods, Focus on practical skills / experiential learning, Lifelong and / or progressive learning, Inclusive, Recognition of prior learning, Engagement with the community, Complementary to formal education

THE AWARD CANADA WAY
"The 7 Elements" - program criteria
1. Framework
2. SMART Goals
3. Youth-Centric Focus
4. Purposeful Engagement
5. Guidance by Mentors
6. Progressive Development
7. Self-Reflection

Supported by …
- Strengths & Passions
- Flexibility & Adaptability
- Experiential learning
- Inclusive & diverse
- Community (Volunteerism)
- Leadership development
- Teamwork (with peers)

AWARD CANADA FRAMEWORK

Service: *Give Back*
Challenge yourself to be a responsible, caring member of the community.

Physical Recreation: *Break a Sweat*
Challenge yourself to improve your health, fitness and performance.

Adventurous Journey: *Get Wild & Explore*
Challenge your spirit of adventure in nature.

Skill Development: *Find Your Genius*
Challenge yourself to improve your skills and widen your interests.

Gold Project: *Go Away with Others and Find Yourself*
Challenge yourself to broaden your horizons and open your eyes to the world.

OUTCOMES:
Young people who build and develop the skills that will support them as they navigate the transition from youth to adulthood:
- Resilience & Determination
- Confidence
- Interpersonal skills
- Socialization skills
- Relationship & Leadership
- Physical fitness
- Health & safety mindset
- Problem solving skills
- Success at school
- Honesty and trustworthy
- Treat others with fairness
- Self-confidence
- Empathy
- Resilience
- Volunteerism

Chart 2: *Application of NFE&L characteristics and program implementation using the Award Canada Way and Framework significantly improves the likelihood of desired Youth Development outcomes*

RECOMMENDATIONS: For Award Canada Application
The following recommendations are proposed for Award Canada program (re-)design and application:

1. Primary **focus on youth development outcomes** supported by design and methodology.
2. **Shared clarity of design methodology** and required components to empower Award Leaders with flexibility in implementation.
3. Maximize the use of youth **strengths, traits, interests, and passions** to engage, motivate and propel them forward.
4. Enhance the use **of integrated school delivery** in programs that understand both teacher and participant needs, constraints and reinforce a focus on outcomes.
5. Further **leverage the Adventurous Journey** to provide motivation, excitement and challenge while integrating the components of youth and award development
6. Recognizing the increased demands on both you, teacher, and parental demands, **reduce the administration and barriers to entry and progression**. Make it easier for teachers, the primary Award Leaders, to have access to tools, materials to support and enable them to be the engaged and passionate ambassadors and mentors to best utilize the Award for enhanced youth outcomes.

CONCLUSION
The Award Canada Framework and Methodology continues to be as relevant today as it was when designed 60 years ago. Updated to provide clarity and alignment with key youth developmental attributes and the associated recommended interventions, the combination of Award activities in each of the Physical, Skill, and Community sections, combined with the updated Adventurous Journey provides a unique, challenging but enjoyable and youth centric approach to development.

While already successfully integrated within many schools at whole-grade entry for Bronze at Grade 9, further opportunity exists to explore whole school board entry and whole province entry with a more specific cocurricular design that enables even more youth to be able to participate in their journey towards their **#infinitepotential**.

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The Award Canada Way bridges the gap:

The Award Canada Way helps young people build and develop the skills that will support them as they navigate the transition from youth to adulthood. It bridges what they learn in the classroom to what they'll do outside of it.

FORMAL EDUCATION LEARNING SETTINGS

AWARD CANADA EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING FRAMEWORK

THE AWARD CANADA WAY

YOUTH DRIVEN

AWARD FRAMEWORK

The Award regulations concerning the specific requirements and expectations for achieving each level of the Award (Bronze, Silver, Gold), including timeframes and age limits.

SMART GOALS

Encourage participants to establish a clear framework for their activities, ensuring they set Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound goals.

YOUTH-CENTRIC FOCUS

Keep participants' interests, aspirations, and developmental stage at the forefront. Allow them to shape their activities based on their unique strengths, passions and perspectives, fostering a sense of ownership and relevance

PURPOSEFUL ENGAGEMENT

Emphasize the importance of engaging in activities that have a clear purpose and meaning to the participant. Encourage them to seek out experiences that align with their values, interests, and personal growth.

GUIDANCE BY MENTORS

Provide participants with ongoing support and mentorship to help them navigate challenges, gain insights, and make decisions. Mentors play a crucial role in guiding participants towards meaningful experiences and facilitating their overall development.

PROGRESSIVE DEVELOPMENT

Encourage participants to pursue activities that challenge them to continuously learn, grow, and develop new skills. Promote a mindset of continuous improvement and encourage participants to set realistic goals that push their boundaries.

SELF-REFLECTION

Foster a culture of reflection where participants regularly evaluate their progress, experiences, and learning outcomes. Encourage them to reflect on their achievements, setbacks, and areas for improvement, enabling them to learn from their experiences and make informed decisions moving forward.

WE ARE #WORLDREADY