



LAKE HURON
COASTAL CENTRE

COASTAL CONSERVATION YOUTH CORPS

Youth Education Program | 2023



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This program would not be possible without the generous funding from our sponsors and program partners.

We are grateful to Kerry Kennedy, our Coastal Education Technician, whose incredible enthusiasm, and dedication to educating youth in our coastal communities continues to inspire us.

The 2023 Coastal Conservation Youth Corps was made possible with support from:



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Coastal Conservation Youth Corps program (CCYC) provides youth with opportunities to volunteer and create community solutions for environmental challenges that impact Lake Huron. Designed as an experiential learning and skill building volunteer opportunity, the program provides an entry point for engagement in shoreline stewardship. In 2023 23 youth in Saugeen Shores and Goderich earned a total of 663 volunteer hours. Over all four years of the program 142 youth participants have taken coastal stewardship action while developing their leadership and interpersonal skills to serve the coastal community with a total of 3951 volunteer hours.

OBJECTIVES

The Coastal Conservation Youth Corps is designed to educate, inspire, and engage youth about the threats, stressors and opportunities for resilient communities around the shoreline of Lake Huron, while making positive impacts through restoration and monitoring. The program is intended to give young people an opportunity for meaningful participation, with a sense of purpose and authentic experiences to apply their unique abilities for social and environmental action and impact. The delivery aims to foster a sense of community through a connection with others, supportive relationships, and a respect for diversity. By supporting youth in developing knowledge, communication, technical, interpersonal and leadership skills, the goal is to prepare them to steward a healthy Lake Huron through future personal choices and community engagement. Ultimately the program aims to support youth as they develop a leadership orientation with competencies as problem solvers and the awareness that their knowledge and skills make them valued community resources.

Between 15 and 25 years of age, the fields of neuroscience and developmental psychology tell us that adolescents and emerging adults naturally possess traits of successful innovators; in fact, during this life stage people are at the height of their innovation potential. They are collaborative, creative, observant, curious, willing to experiment, willing to challenge the status quo, risk takers, action oriented and visionary (Dougherty & Clarke, 2017).

PROGRAM RESOURCES AND PARTNERSHIPS IN 2023



Launched in 2020, cohorts of high school aged teens have participated in up to 5 sessions annually with week-long summer programs, or 4-day fall programs held over a pair of weekends. Thanks to funding from corporate sponsors and community organizations two week-long sessions were held July 10-14 in Saugeen Shores and July 17-21 in Goderich.

Program continuity was facilitated with the return of Coastal Education Technician, Kerry Kennedy, with support from LHCC summer students; Cameron Hogg returned for a third season in Saugeen Shores and Brooke Beutenmiller had an inaugural CCYC experience in Goderich. Approached by the coordinator for Canadian Wildlife Federation's Wild Outside program, Paul Diamond, we partnered to offer a joint program. We welcomed youth leader, Madison Vanderleest, who volunteered as an assistant during the Goderich CCYC program, enabling her to successfully complete stage 3 of the Canadian Conservation Corps program. CCYC participants were invited to co-register for Wild Outside, with the intention of participating in outdoor activities to be organized through the summer.

Excellent partnerships and support from staff in the municipalities of Saugeen Shores and Goderich helped to facilitate field work on public spaces within these communities. Katie Prionis, the Waterfront Stewardship Specialist in Saugeen Shores was particularly supportive, joining and facilitating the CCYC efforts over 4 days. In Southampton, the Historic Saugeen Metis welcomed program participants to their interpretive centre to learn about coastal heritage and geography.

Through a connection with the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority, youth were welcomed by the Southcott Pines Park Association to work alongside residents, removing invasive Eurasian water-milfoil from the Old Ausable channel near Grand Bend, while researchers from the University of Toronto were on hand to survey the impact on the aquatic environment that is home to four fish on the species at risk list.

Members of the Maitland Trail Association generously volunteered their time to meet with Goderich participants and assisted the crew to identify and pull invasive buckthorn seedlings in Maitland Woods.



PROGRAM ENROLLMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Tracking program hours and attendance is important as participants can use the Coastal Conservation Youth Corps as credit towards the community service component of their high school diplomas. With the week-long sessions running Monday to Friday from 9:00 – 3:00 daily, participants had the potential to earn 30 volunteer hours. Six Saugeen Shores participants returning from 2022, were invited to a pre-session online meeting to generate deeper engagement, gather their input for programming and to prepare them to take on a higher level of leadership, while earning additional volunteer hours.

A total of 23 youth participated in the Coastal Conservation Youth Corps program in 2023, with a total count of 663 program hours (see Table 1). Acknowledging the contribution of Madison Vanderleest, volunteering through the Canadian Wildlife Federation’s Wild Outside program, her hours have been included in the participant column.



Table 1. 2023 Coastal Conservation Youth Corps Participation Summary

Group	2023 Dates	Participants	Hours	Staff Leaders
1	July 10-14	12	357	2
2	July 17-21	11	306	2
Total		23	663	

The majority of participants were local to their respective program location. Three participants had a 50km daily commute. Five were from the greater Toronto area, staying at cottages or with family for the week. The participant who came the furthest was an exchange student from France. Further demographic information was not collected.

Registration for the Coastal Conservation Youth Corps was made available in early spring via an online registration form on the Lake Huron Coastal Centre website. Upon indicating interest through an online submission form each registrant is sent a confirmation email and then, closer to the session date, waiver forms are emailed along with the schedule and meeting locations. 100% of registrants for Saugeen Shores arrived on Day 1, with a 98% attendance rate. In Goderich one participant did not respond after initial registration, while another did not attend due to last minute unforeseen circumstances (but is hoping to participate in 2024). Although the 2023 website invited people to request to be wait listed, perhaps including a more obvious “Apply to the wait list” button beside the session full notice would be more successful.

PROGRAM FORMAT AND TOPICS

Over the course of four delivery years the educational materials, options for field work, skill development, and leadership activities have expanded greatly and now contribute to the capacity to vary the program plan for each session and respond flexibly as needed. The format of each day generally commences with an educational component and transitions to field work activities which reinforce the concepts learned. The schedule varied greatly between the two municipalities due to the options for field work, available meeting locations and transportation. Fortunately, the weather conditions were ideal and did not impact the program delivery or site locations. A summary of the program schedule is outlined in Table 2.



Table 2. 2023 Coastal Conservation Youth Corps Program

	Session 1 July 10-14 Saugeen Shores		Session 2 July 17-21 Goderich	
Monday	North Shore Park; Beiner Woods	Lake Huron 101 Ecology in Beiner Woods Microplastic Analysis	Knights of Columbus Hall; Maitland Woods	Lake Huron 101 Ecology in Maitland Woods
Tuesday	Concession 4 to Eidt's Grove	Coastal Ecosystems Litter & plastic pollution Vegetation survey Invasive species monitoring	Goderich Main Beach	Coast Watchers Coastal Processes Coastal Ecosystems Dune Restoration
Wednesday	Long Dock Pavilion, Southampton	Invasive Species removal Protecting Species at Risk Dune grass harvesting Vegetation survey	Bus to Southcott Pines, Grand Bend	Invasive Species/SAR Wetlands
Thursday	John Kyles Parkette, Gobles Grove	Coastal processes Restoration	St. Christopher Beach; Sunset Park	Coastal communities & economies Low Impact Development Bluff restoration
Friday	Huron County Museum; Historic Saugeen Metis; Pioneer Park	Coastal communities & economies Low Impact Development Water quality monitoring Pollinator garden planting	Camp Klahanie	Shoreline Cleanup Water quality monitoring Microplastic analysis



In prior years, meeting locations required a power source and projector to enable Powerpoint presentations for the education aspect of the daily program. This season, three days were planned to facilitate field work locations in Southampton without access to power, necessitating these knowledge aspects be fully embedded with the field activities. Feedback from prior years' post program survey results indicated a strong preference for reducing presentation length, therefore a concerted effort was made to intersperse knowledge components with field work throughout. Presentations were also geared towards engaging dialogue and incorporating the participants' prior experiences and knowledge.

RESTORATION IMPACT

Thanks to support and collaboration with multiple partners, authentic and meaningful monitoring and restoration work was conducted across a broad range of ecosystems. The variety of field work opportunities allowed participants to apply new skills and to reinforce health and safety considerations.

Coastal Conservation Youth Corps members looked for opportunities to improve habitat for the ordinary and rare species that make their home in coastal woodlands, wetlands and sand beach ecosystems, while also building resilience in these natural buffer zones. Habitat restoration activities focused on reducing the spread of invasive plant species while enhancing biodiversity through planting native herbaceous plants and shrubs, sourced locally where possible. Plantings in certain shoreline situations will aid in the controlled deposition of sand, minimizing wind borne sand loss and retaining it in the sand cycle of nearshore waters.



By conducting formal shoreline cleanups, CCYC participants removed harmful litter from the environment, recorded results and submitted their data to the Ocean Wise Shoreline Cleanup portal, reducing plastic pollution while contributing to a larger citizen science effort.

Table 3. 2023 Coastal Conservation Youth Corps Restoration Initiatives

Date	Location	Activity	linear metres
July 11	Concession 4 to Eidt's Grove	Shoreline Cleanup	1150
July 12	Long Dock Park, Southampton	Oriental bittersweet removal	200
July 13	Gobles Grove, Port Elgin	Dune restoration. Transplant of American beach grass. Native grass and shrub species planted as living snow fence	100
July 14	Pioneer Park, Southampton	Shoreline cleanup & invasive monitoring	25
July 17	Maitland Woods	Manual Buckthorn removal and planting of red oak seedlings	50
July 18	Goderich Main Beach	Dune restoration. Removal of invasives. Transplant of American beach grass. Native grasses planted for diversity	35
July 19	Southcott Pines, Grand Bend	Eurasian water-milfoil removal	170
July 20	Sunset Park	Removal of Himalayan balsam and planting of deep-rooted native grasses on top of bluff.	17
July 21	Black's Point	Shoreline cleanup	100
	TOTAL		1847

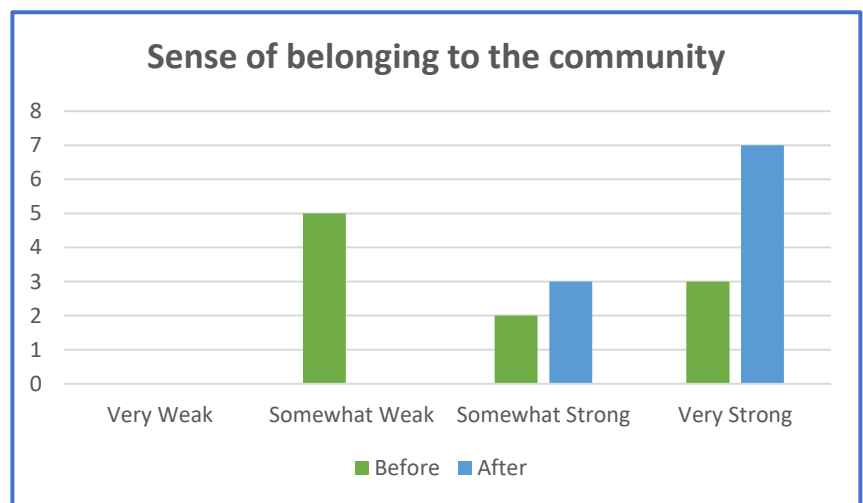
Perceiving one's life as significant, purposeful and valuable is positively associated with psychological well-being (Dezutter et al., 2014)

EVALUATION

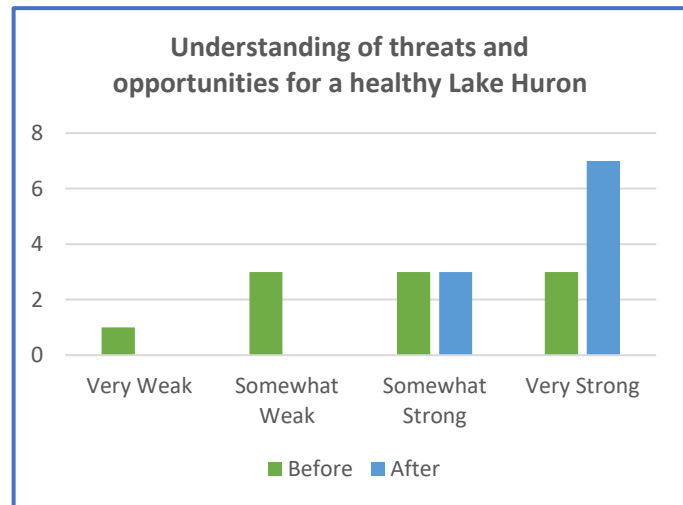
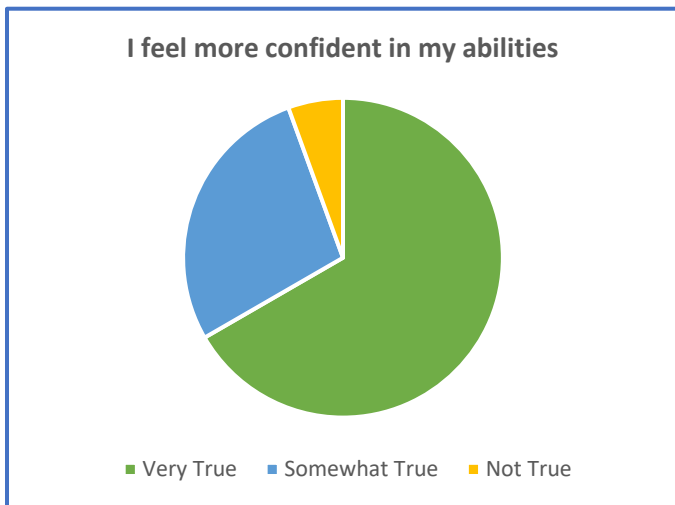
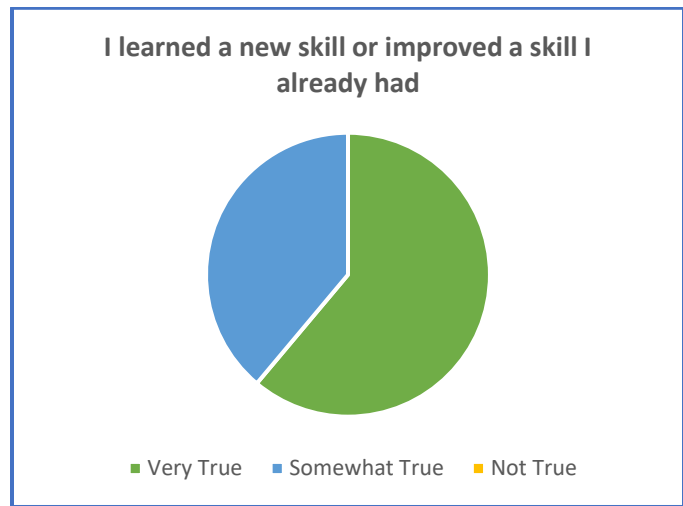
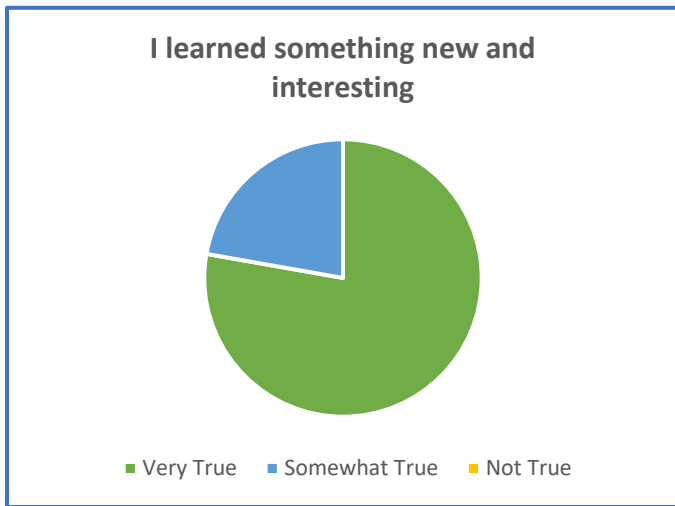
On the final afternoon of the session, participants completed surveys to provide feedback on their experience, growth and recommendations for improvement. The survey format for 2023 is new, combining elements of the previous Ontario Trillium Foundation surveys and the Lake Huron Coastal Centre's own survey in a format that can be analyzed without external expertise. Unfortunately, due to a photocopy issue, one page was missing in the Goderich survey and although it was sent to participants via email afterwards, only one was subsequently returned.



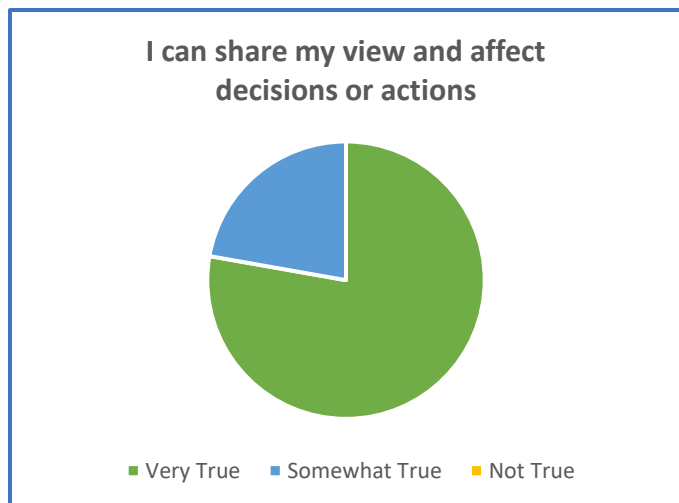
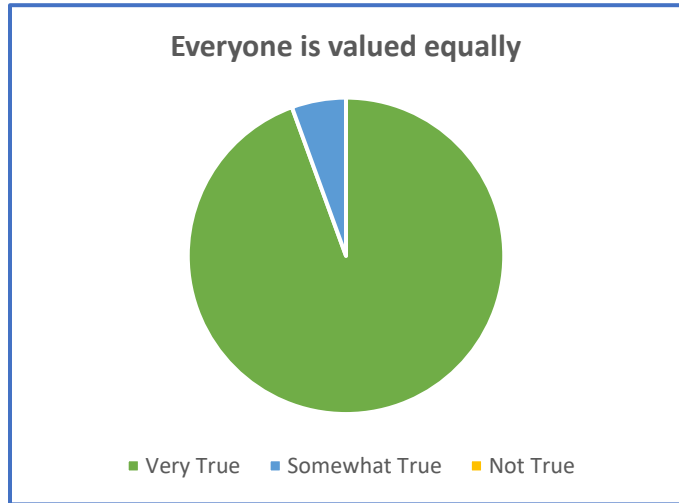
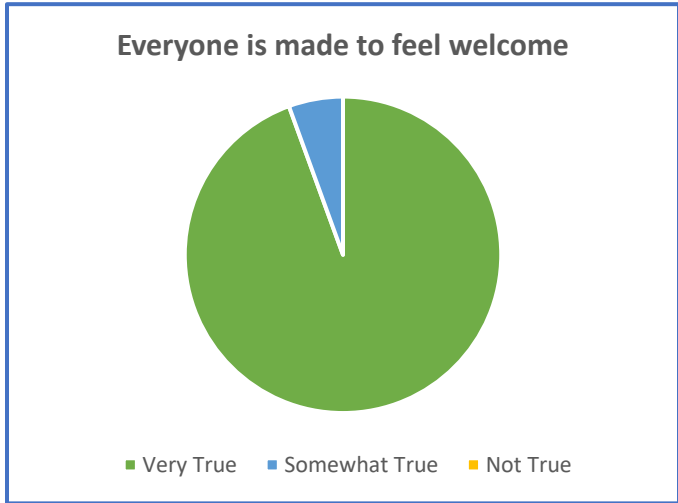
Indicative of the positive experience youth had in the 2023 program, 100% of survey respondents would recommend this program to others. An increase in the participants' sense of belonging to the Lake Huron community is evident from the beginning to the end of the program as reflected in the graph below. Except for the participants who already ranked themselves as very strong at the beginning of the program, every participant indicated a greater sense of belonging at the end of the program.



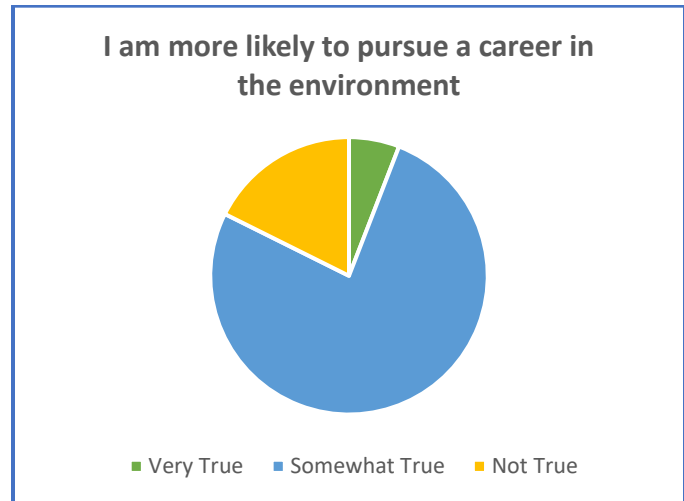
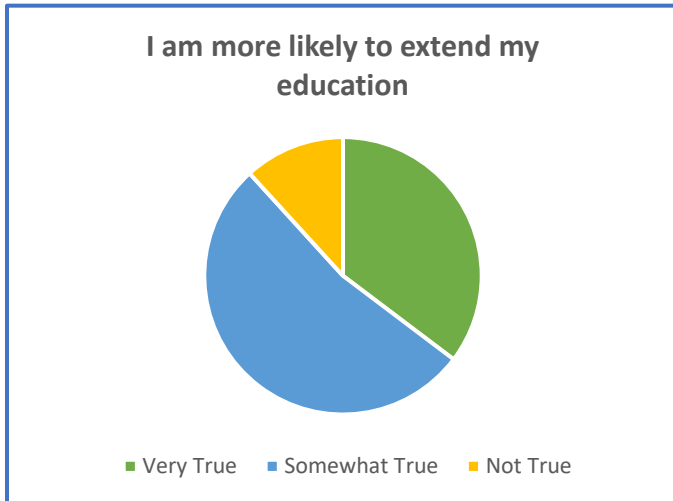
The following graphs summarize responses to a segment of questions related to personal development. The results indicate skill and knowledge development along with growth in communication, working in a team and confidence.



The following charts summarize responses to a segment of questions related to their experience and give feedback for fostering a learning environment that is inclusive and respectful.



The following graphs summarize responses to a segment of questions related to the participants' engagement beyond the program experience.



ON THE HORIZON

The evaluation process from 2022 found the following opportunities to further enhance CCYC and they continue to be relevant as goals looking forward for the Coastal Conservation Youth Corps.

- Seek funding to remove barriers to participation
- Seek partnership with Indigenous communities to embed Indigenous teachings in the curriculum
- Consider expanding programming through the year with weekend events
- Build relationships with other community organizations to promote the program
- Create a program manual to document and transfer activities and lessons learned for future instructors to use

The future of the Coastal Conservation Youth Corps program will rely on funding sought through grants, individual donations, corporate sponsors and support from community organizations to continue and further enhance this program. Inspiring, engaging and informing youth who will be making decisions that impact Lake Huron for years to come is well worth the investment. If funding is secured for a program in Kincardine, building relationships with municipal staff and local partners to establish site locations and restoration projects for 2024 will be a primary focus in the upcoming year.

As a critical resource, the Great Lakes provide great benefit to coastal communities including clean water, ecological health, social well-being and economic prosperity. The Lake Huron Coastal Centre recognizes these great assets, strives to protect them and is proud of the role a new generation of coastal residents will be able to play in guiding long-term human and environmental health.





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