

Year-round youth program building skills & making a difference in the community

by Stacy Dunn

YMCA Community Action Network (YCAN) is a national youth program new to PEI this summer and runs year-round. It is operating out of the Robert L. Cotton Centre located in Stratford.

YCAN involves young Canadians ages 15 and up with developing projects that address specific community needs. Coordinator **Joseph Déry** says that YCAN launched in June for the first time. “It’s a great way for youth to gain volunteer service hours and increase their employability by building professional and personal skills and connect with their community.”

“The youth run this program,” says Joseph. “I step back and let them do their own thing. They pick the issue and get to decide how they want to approach it. As they are going into high school and college, their autonomy is important. YCAN gives them the chance to share their ideas and meet new people from all walks of life.”

The current group has seven participants who have chosen homelessness as their area of interest. In August, they teamed up with the Stratford Youth Council to collect non-perishables for the Upper Room Food Bank. They also ran their own event on August 29th at Tea Hill Beach to clean up litter, collect more donations, and have a fun day in the sun.

Participant **Tom Nguyen**, age 16, says he liked the independence given to his group. “We had our voices heard and took action in our community,” he says.

“I definitely learned planning and organization skills at the beach clean-up,” says **Karla McCallum**, age 15. “This experience will look good on my resumé for sure.”

Max Zhou, age 18, who is thinking about a career in video game design or animation, liked the teamwork. “I liked being with people my own age and showing we can do hard work. I also improved my communication skills. I am a shy person, so this group helped me talk to others.”

Eric Thai, age 17, is thinking about a career in hotel management. “YCAN taught me leadership that I know I can apply to managing a hotel one day.”

Rosie Nguyen, age 18, is taking Tourism Management at Holland College this fall. “The experience in advertising events was good practice in my people skills and networking skills.”

“There is a great synergy between having the YCAN Program and the Stratford Youth Centre in a shared space,” says Stratford Mayor **David Dunphy**. “When youth begin to age out of the Stratford Youth Centre, this offers them another place to go and continue building on their community spirit and volunteerism.”

“And other young people from the area who weren’t Stratford Youth Centre members also participated.”



YCAN participants: Front row, from left, Rosie Nguyen, Sofia Rincon and Karla McCallum. Back row, from left, Tom Nguyen, Eric Thai, Oyku Dal and Max Zhou.

Recruitment for new members began in September, and the next cohort runs from October to January. YCAN is also affiliated with the Community Service Bursary Program. Each youth can earn up to about 120 hours of volunteer work.

For more information on the upcoming second cohort of the YCAN Program, contact **Joseph Déry** at 902-393-4324 or joseph.dery@ymcamoncton.ca

Visit <https://ymcagta.org/youth-programs/action>.

For more information on the Community Service Bursary, visit www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/workforce-and-advanced-learning/community-service-bursary



The YMCA is one part of a new program called **Canada Service Corps**. The program aims to support young Canadians aged 15 to 30 get involved in their community and gain valuable skills.

For more information on **Canada Service Corps**, visit www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/canada-service-corps.html



Programs across the Island encouraged youth beyond their expectations

by Gloria Welton

Youth programs held in seven locations across the Island this summer have proven to be of great value to the participants and the community.

The programs supported students heading into grades 11 and 12 by offering career direction and encouragement to make successful life choices. They were held at Westisle, Alberton, Summerside, Charlottetown, as well as Morell, and St. Peters.

East Prince Youth Development Centre sponsored the **Skills Enhancement and Mentoring (SEAM)** program in Summerside. **Jessica Gallant**, Program Coordinator, welcomed guests to the closing ceremony. “We were able to provide a wage for the youth in the program, so this was their summer job,” says Jessica.

“It was an opportunity to enhance skills such as teamwork, leadership, communication, problem solving, creativity, and time management. We achieved this through hands-on activity-based learning, volunteering, peer support, and participating in community activities.”

Participants talked about their experiences in the program

Tyson: “During the past seven weeks, I learned skills pertaining to time management, commitment and dedication, and had hands-on experience on job sites. I worked with the City of Summerside, Venture Stables, Home Hardware, and the Boys and Girls Club of Summerside.

“I also learned about scholarships, interest rates, the time it takes to pay off a loan, and programs at Holland College and UPEI.”

Logan and Juliana did a video together which described the highlights and challenges of the program. “I liked working outside,” says Logan. “It was hot, and I thought I would fall over, but that didn’t happen. I learned courage and bravery, and the facilitators helped a lot with that.”

“Speaking in public is hard for me, but through this program I’m getting better,” says Juliana. “I also learned First Aid & CPR, which is great.”

Danny: “The program was so much more than I expected. I made new friends, and became closer to people I previously knew. I was able to expand my ideas of future careers and get more work experience. The biggest moments were the cardboard boat races, the mental anxiety of the high ropes, and meeting and communicating with the SEAM team.

“It’s not a huge amount, but I’m going to donate \$50 from my paycheck to the SEAM program because I enjoyed it so much.”

Hailey: “The past seven weeks have opened my eyes to the great resources and opportunities on our Island. I have had the chance to experience volunteer work in our community and learn about team building. I would like to thank everyone involved, especially the East Prince Youth Development Centre staff.

Shoshanna: “I drew a picture to express how amazing this summer has been for me, and I wanted to express my gratitude. I am ready to go back to school now and graduate. I have much more confidence.”

Landon: “The skills I learned will help me maintain a job, so I was really thankful to be here. One week we were at Home Hardware, and the next we were at Generation XX. It was unpredictable, and that’s what I enjoyed about it. I was able to gain more references, which will make me more employable. It taught me that cooperation is everything.”



Top row, from left: Logan (plaid shirt), Landon, Tyson, Danny, Jessica Gallant (Program Coordinator). Bottom row, from left: Hailey, Shoshanna, Juliana. Missing from picture: Jaykeb McLure (Program Team Lead).

Photo courtesy of Cherished Memories Photography.

“I want to thank my grandmother for encouraging me to take this program. I want to thank Jessica for being a great instructor, and likewise for Jayk. I would also like to thank my co-workers for being who they are.”

“This is my favourite event to attend,” says Minister of Family and Human Services **Tina Mundy**. “To see such growth in a few short weeks is always a highlight. This is why I went into politics: to encourage and enhance programs that can help steer people towards their dreams. The youth in this program have character traits that will determine their success: grit, determination, and resilience.

“When I was in high school, a program like this would have steered me in a different direction earlier on. That is what this program is for.”

“We couldn’t have done this without the community employers and staff taking the time to help the participants and show them skills, and the government officials, friends and family who offered support to make this possible,” says Jessica.



October 2018