

# Qualitative Evaluation Report

Learning & Impact Project

## BGC Kawarthas

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### 1. Organization and Program Overview

BGC Kawarthas is one of the area's largest and most diverse child and youth-serving organizations. Established in 1970, the Club provides summer camps, before and after school programs, early learning, licensed childcare, a wide range of youth and family support services, sports, recreation, arts and adventure programs in Kawartha Lakes. Our team serves thousands of children, youth, and their families at up to 12 locations through services that foster self-esteem, build skills, and develop character. The Club removes financial barriers to participation by keeping program costs affordable and subsidizing all programs for families who can't afford to pay. At our Club, children and youth learn to become valuable members of their communities.

### 2. Evaluation Methodology

This evaluation is part of the BGC Canada *Learning & Impact Project*. The purpose of this project is to help our Club and Clubs across Canada understand and improve our impact in the lives of the children and youth in our communities.

The findings in this report are from a mixed methods evaluation, including a survey and in-depth qualitative interviews. The interview protocols and survey questions were designed to discover how children and youth who attend the Club are developing in four key areas: positive relationships, healthy living, lifelong learning, and leadership. To understand this, we explored two broad evaluation questions:

1. What kind and quality of impact are we having on children and youth?
2. What about our programming is contributing to the impact?

We are using the findings to guide our learning and development locally and nationally today and in the future.

### Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

We held 35 one-on-one, in-depth interviews with the children and youth who are in Club programs. Using in-depth, semi-structured interview protocols, we listened to our Club participants about the difference the Club has made in their lives. We used a purposeful stratified sampling technique to select our interviewees, drawing from the following strata:

- Age - we interviewed participants from the following age groups: 8-10, 11-13, 14-17
- Location - our sample included children who attend the main hub site and those who attend offsite locations

- Length of time at BGC Kawarthas - our sample included both long-term Club participants and others who have only just recently begun attending the Club
- Gender - we sampled all genders of individuals
- Socio-economic status - we included in our sample some participants in our Club subsidy program.

Our interview team conducted interviews with 35 children and youth lasting between 30 and 60 minutes, collecting data using the Otter voice-to-text transcription app voice recording, supplemented by handwritten notes. We then analyzed the data inductively using a modified version of thematic analysis. First, each interviewer analyzed their interviews individually to identify initial themes. Then, the interview team developed common themes from the full data set. We identified the insights and brought them forward in this report as findings.

## 3. Findings

### 1. Leader Impact Creates Leaders of the Future

#### Discussion

Throughout the interviews interviewees communicated that, in the future, they would like to be leaders at the Club. Leaders are the role models and mentors for children and youth participating in the Club. Children noted that leaders are caring, teach leadership games and how to make good choices, offer support and inspire interest in working at the Club. The study shows that their positive influences often inspire our children and youth to aspire to be like them. There were various comments from participants related to wanting to become a leader. Furthermore, youth are given the opportunities to take on responsibilities in the Leaders in Training, where they gain hands-on training to become a leader.

#### Key Takeaways

- When staff/leaders provide opportunities for children or youth to engage in roles like running a game or helping within a program, it gives them the confidence to aspire for other leadership roles.
- The Leaders in Training program is an effective way to provide youth with hands-on leadership training. Discussions are underway to expand the program in CKL and the Ptbo Area.
- Enhance opportunities for youth to connect with younger participants through innovative strategies, i.e. reading buddies and cooking.
- Discuss refreshing and relaunching the Clubs Kids in Training (KIT) program.

#### Interview Quotes

- “Always being nice like the leaders.”
- “I know there is always someone to listen and talk to.”
- “I made some friends at the Club and really like the leaders and consider them friends.”

### 2. Leadership Leads to Personal Growth

#### Discussion

Throughout the interviews, many children and youth revealed an eagerness to learn and grow, learning new skills and figuring out what is possible for them. The data show that leaders

reinforce Club values and help children and youth grow and develop through thoughtful goal-setting and recognition. Program activities align with leadership skill development and help participants build their confidence and learn how to solve problems creatively, work in a team, and work collaboratively. Club leadership games and activities help boost self-esteem, self-regulation, and self-advocacy skills. Leaders provide mentorship in many areas, including how to make positive independent choices, how to build friendships and the best way to treat people. Leaders encourage children and youth to speak up to support a friend or themselves.

The survey data from 2023 reinforced the data we found in this finding. The survey posed six questions related to leadership and in each case a significant majority of children and youth responded that because of Club, they are “some ” or “a lot” better at these skills. The data are particularly strong in the following areas: “I have a more positive influence on others” (70%); “I am more confident in my abilities” (75%); “I am better at helping out when needed” (80%); and, “I work better with others” (70%). Results in the remaining two categories weren’t far behind. (see Figure 1)

**Figure 1**



### Key Takeaways

- Some children look up to their leaders and want to become one in the future.
- Many children are excited to gain more responsibility and freedom at the Youth Warehouse, appearing to be ready to explore and experiment.
- Leaders support children and youth with positive mentoring.

### Interview Quotes

- “I learned no fighting, no hands-on, just be a good friend.”
- “I have more confidence to make new friends.”
- “During summer camp, we had lots of chats about how we can get along with each other, be good friends and make good decisions.”
- “At the Club, you can meet new people and be accepted, and if you want to be their friend, you need to treat them how you would want to be treated.”

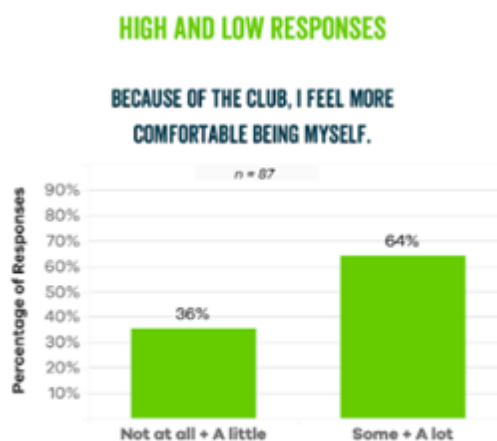
## 3. Club Participants Experience Self- Reflection

### Discussion

The data show positive self-reflection for children and youth in many areas. Consistently throughout the study, interviewees, especially our older youth, mentioned the Club helps them accept themselves. This, in turn, leads them to accept others’ recognition of their emotions and

their reactions to those emotions. A few times in the study, youth mentioned they felt more confident about themselves and could be their authentic self at the Club. Similarly, when we surveyed children and youth, 64% confirmed they are significantly “more comfortable being themselves” because of the Club (see Figure 2). Children and youth also reported that understanding how they treat others reflects how others will treat them.

**Figure 2**



### Key Takeaways

- The Club has provided a place for children and youth to be authentic.
- Self-reflection has led to building positive relationships and conflict-resolution skills.
- The Club leaders have helped children identify their emotions and feel safe to express them while at programs as they will be guided to manage them.
- Club youth feel they can now recognize their self-image and work to improve self in a goal setting way.
- There are opportunities for personal growth, improved mental health and wellness and managing one's emotions.

### Interview Quotes

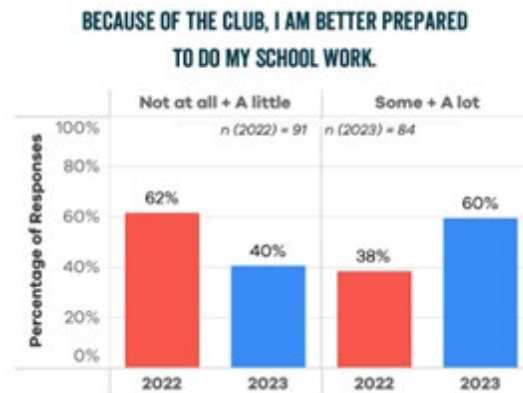
- "Coming to the Club has allowed me to “show who I am. I stay true to myself.”
- “Leaders showed me how to calm down and do breathing to relax.”
- “If you are that person, think about how they would feel and want to be treated.”
- "Self-regulation and taking deep breaths are ways to solve a problem."

## 4. The Club Gets Better Grades in School Support

### Discussion

Supporting children and youth with school continues to be an area of growth for the Club. However, the data show that progress has been made. When compared to previous quantitative and qualitative studies, the children and youth who were interviewed were more likely to point out that leaders were offering support to them with schoolwork. As seen in Figure 3, survey data between 2022 and 2023 demonstrated an improvement in the level of academic support for participants at BGC Kawarthas.

**Figure 3**



According to the interviews in 2023, youth felt they could come and get school help at the Club. However, it continues to be an opportunity for improvement, evidenced by the interviewees who mentioned they would like leaders/staff to do more school work with them.

### Key Takeaways

- Some children and youth are open to doing homework at the Club and see the leaders as helpful in this regard.
- Staff were also able to grow their skills in this area and provide a safe environment for homework support to occur more often.
- Individual participants have received support with specific school subjects, finding leaders receptive to questions.
- The Club can still work on building school support within programs, for instance, by introducing a homework club for which parents/guardians can register their children.

### Interview Quotes

- Have we helped you out with school? “Yeah, with science. I’ve been able to figure out a lot more questions in science.”
- “I want to be a teacher when I grow up, and I think the leaders will be able to help me because they help me now with homework.”
- “I wish the leaders would bring books to read with me.”
- “So you come here with a backpack and do my homework. It’s a quieter space than at home.
- When the youth is asked how their time at the club has helped them be more successful in school, they answered, “Well, when I’m here, I have like a lot of people that can help me study; I’m having a lot of tests lately. I don’t know why there are so many. It’s really hard for me to do the work and focus unless I have somebody there saying we’re doing the work, and I just get carried away and can’t put my brain to do it. I like how there are people here that can help me do it because at my aunt’s house, there’s so many people and so much she can’t really help me it’s always so busy.”

## 5. Friendships are Number One at the Club

### Discussion

The interview data reveal that children and youth continue to develop strong, positive friendships at the Club. They meet diverse peers from different schools, some of whom are very

different from them. The interrelations encouraged through Club activities cause them to be more empathetic, helpful, kind and understanding of others. Making and retaining friendships is essential to giving children and youth a sense of belonging at the Club and, even more importantly, a sense of self-worth and self-love that will carry them through life.

The survey data from 2023, reinforced this finding. When asked if they have more people they like to spend time with, 70% of those surveyed said “some” or “a lot”, 26% said “a little”, and only 4% answered “none at all”. (see Figure 4)

**Figure 4**



### Key Takeaways

- When children & youth have true friends, they are more confident about being around lots of people and earn an acceptance of their authentic self.
- The opportunities provided feel like extra opportunities to bond
- Children and youth are happy having friends both similar and different to them
- Unique programs bring together children and youth who share interests, creating opportunities for building friendships

### Interview Quotes

- “Whenever I come to the Club, I find a new friend.”
- “During the summer camp, we had lots of chats about how to get along with each other and be good friends and make good decisions.”
- “If you want to make friends, you must be a good friend.”
- “At the Club, you can meet new people and be accepted, and if you want to be their friend, you need to treat them how you would want to be treated.”
- The Club is “kind of like a big friend group.”

## 6. Open to Feedback and Talking Through Problems

### Discussion

Conflict is often messy but can be destructive if not dealt with properly. Talking through problems effectively and fairly is essential to having successful child and youth programs. Relationships can remain functional by being open to feedback and talking through problems instead of confronting the feedback and problems with malice. The study has shown that

children and youth, since coming to the Club, have generally become better with self-control when facing a conflict, respecting the other person, coming to a compromise, or walking away rather than engaging in a fight. We noticed within interviews in 2023, youth felt staff influence and support impacted their own ability to resolve conflicts.

Our survey data from 2023 showed that this was an area of improvement for our Club. When looking at high and low responses the data show that only 51% of those surveyed responded that because of the club they are either “some” or “a lot” better at working through arguments with others, with 34% choosing “some” and 17% selecting “a lot”. [See Figure 5] Since the survey, we have introduced a Reach program into youth afterschool programming which we anticipate will make a difference. Introducing the Reach program was also included in our next steps from 2023.

**Figure 5**



### Key Takeaways

- Leaders and supervisors influence how children and youth approach conflict.
- When talking through problems, it’s important for every side to feel heard, and if a side’s point of view is problematic, it’s important to explore ways to help that person understand the other view.
- It is important to recognize and understand the emotions and reactions of children and youth during problems, not just show disapproval.
- Developing confidence in self-regulation and self-control is an asset in child development.
- Children and youth who learn to empathize with others, including those different from them, tend to be better at de-escalating a conflict.

### Interview Quotes

- “Before, I would get upset and storm off in a conflict. Now I instead go talk to someone and take a break.”
- “If respect is given, it can be received.”
- “If you want to be their friend, you have to treat them the way you want to be treated.”
- “The Club has taught me how to respect others when they need time to cool down and give them space.”

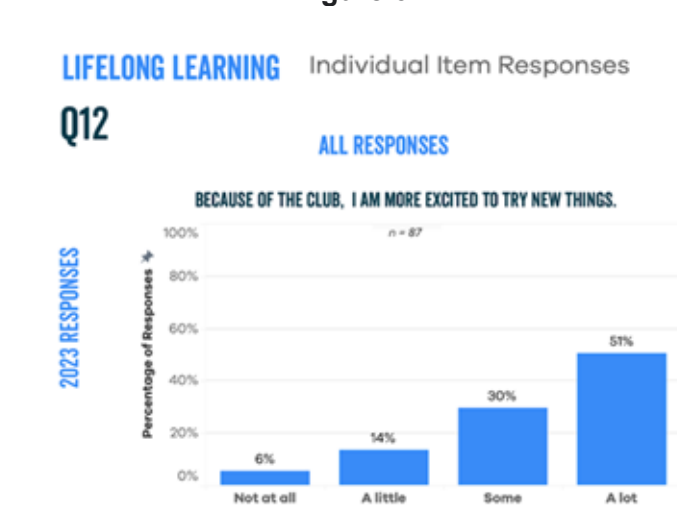


## 7. The Club Provides Opportunities To Explore & Invent

### Discussion

Allowing children to try new things early in life can lead them down a lifelong path that opens them to more opportunities and diverse perspectives. Interviewees spoke about trying new things such as food, activities, sports or creative projects while in Club programs. The survey of children and youth corroborated this finding: 80% of respondents said the Club has made them more excited to try new things, and 51% of the respondents said they are “a lot” more excited. (see Figure 6)

Figure 6



To allow participants to develop their own interests and identities, it is important that staff provide them with opportunities to explore and be creative on their own. Some interviewees mentioned that their ideas are heard, and staff develop programs around their interests and skills. Interviewees also noted they have been given opportunities at the Club that are not available at home and have developed a love for a new activity that they had previously never thought they would try.

### Key Takeaways

- Participants feel heard by staff when programs are created for their interests.
- Children feel comfortable trying new things while at Club
- Participants are allowed to be creative in new ways

### Interview Quotes

- “I like making up my own games, playing them with friends, and being silly. The leaders let us make up our own games a lot.”

## 8. Positive Impacts from Leaders & Staff

### Discussion

Leaders and staff are the core of an amazing Club. This study has proven leaders and staff positively impact children and youth due to the Club experiences and programs they lead, their interactions and communications with participants, and how they engage children and youth in programs. For example, according to interviews, staff have positively influenced the choices youth make and how they behave within the Club while influencing their decisions outside the



Club. Youth mentioned learning responsibility, working together, and contributing to the Club in different ways. Many children and youth mentioned individual staff by name.

Club programming and the spaces we provide also positively impact different areas of children's and youth's lives. Children and youth interviewed mentioned seeing improvements in school, outside programs, and relationships. Our staff team has done a great job at creating a positive Club experience that impacts many areas of children's and youth's lives. Teamwork and communication is an essential part of our role.

### Key Takeaways

- Youth have trust and feel safe around our staff. Children and youth see staff as approachable.
- It's not only the leaders and staff who positively impact our children and youth, but it's also their ability to create quality and meaningful programs that allow children and youth to get engaged.
- Whether after school or evening programming, children and youth engage daily in activities and have fun with staff.

### Interview Quotes

- "I remember a couple of years ago it was online (Queer Youth Program), and I remember going to it, and that's where I kinda found out this is kinda who I am, and I guess I found myself in that program too."
- When the youth were asked about something they wanted to improve on in their life, they responded with, "Not the best at baseball. And Andrew(staff) really likes baseball. And I like hanging out with Andrew. So we practiced playing baseball. He hasn't played baseball for a while. So to practice baseball together it's a way to exercise and do the usual sporting activities as you do".

## 9. Relationships Stem From Acceptance and Diversity

### Discussion

Diversity and acceptance of it come in all sorts of shapes and sizes, not just races, sexualities or classes, but interests, genders, and dreams. Children and youth may also have an identity that could make them feel excluded from most of their peers. Recognizing, acknowledging and accepting diversity without overemphasis, will allow people across various groups to feel the Club is where they belong.

Children and youth have expressed in the findings that they feel comfortable being their true selves. This has resulted in new friendships being made with different people. Some of the children from our rural locations mention they have gained an understanding of being a leader due to groups of diverse ages where they can be a positive role model for younger children. Children and youth have also acknowledged they feel safe at the Club and have met new people who like different things. The Club brings experiences and times for the youth to celebrate their interests and learn about the interests of others.

### Key Takeaways

- BGC Kawartha acknowledges we are not an overly diverse community in regards to culture and race but strive to be familiar and respectful to others who are typically seen as different
- Acceptance of self and others has led to new friendships

- Children and youth have expressed they can be their unique self at the club
- Youth have expressed being able to try new things, like new experiences in cooking multicultural meals

### Interview Quotes

- “It’s [the Club] taught me a form like respect kinda”
- “ It’s [the Club] helped me notice not everybody is the same.” “It’s that I am happy with myself and how I look”

## 10. Healthy Eating and Activity Lead to Healthy Habits

### Discussion

A common theme among participant interviews is the access to physical activity and nutritious food while in Club programs. Interviewees spoke of learning healthy recipes for snacks and dinners while participating in various Club programs, including summer cooking camp and the daily dinner program during the school year. Interviewees noted that Club staff have taught them about nutritious food, eating habits, and body image.

This has been an area of focus for the Club since survey results in 2022 pointed to a lack of impact in this area. At that time, there were few food programs running at the Club due to COVID-19. Past COVID, more traditional nutrition programs were reintroduced. In 2023, survey data demonstrated an improvement with 62% of those surveyed, confirming that they “know more about what kind of food is healthy to eat” because of the Club. (see figure 7)

Figure 7

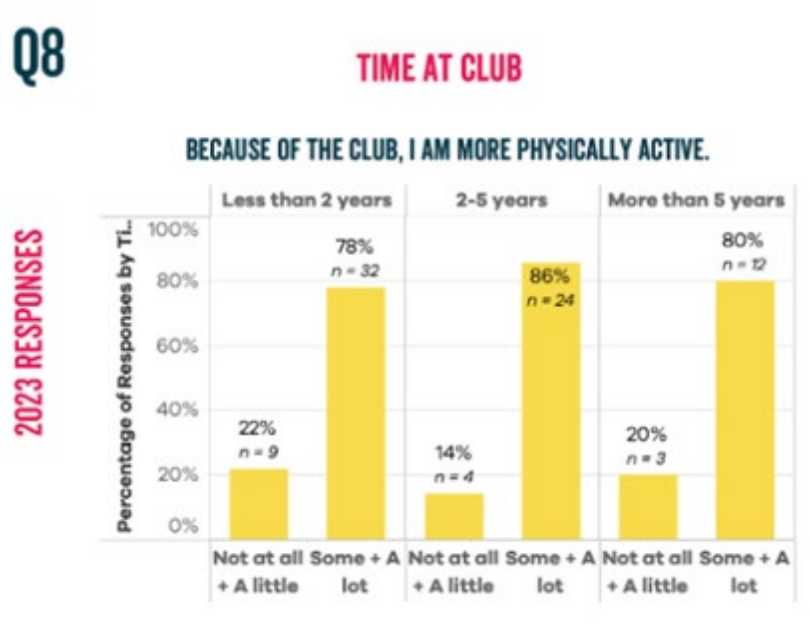


Given the interview data, it appears that the positive trend continues. Based on our findings participants have had positive feedback on learning more about healthy eating from the food programs we introduced.

Daily access to physical activity is imperative for children’s development and overall health. Interviewees spoke about having daily opportunities to be active through sports and games. Survey data strongly reinforces this finding. As an example, regardless of how long participants have been attending club programs, they felt strongly they are more active because

of the club with 78% of respondents and higher reporting they are “some” or “a lot” more active. (See Figure 8)

**Figure 8**



Participants are learning about health and discussed being able to use that knowledge in their lives outside of the Club to begin healthy habits. Research shows that children begin to develop and showcase habits around nine years of age. This is an age group that is well represented at BGC Kawarthas.

### Key Takeaways

- Many children said we are doing a good job of giving them nutritious and enjoyable foods.
- Children said they are more active at the Club because we play sports and games.
- Positive self-image has been learned from mental health programs.
- Participants are taught about healthy eating during food programs.
- Rural interviewees spoke more about outdoor physical activity, while those in Lindsay more often discussed playing in the gym.

### Interview Quotes

- “We go outside so much, and the leaders plan fun outside games. I also like playing outside with my friends, and it’s not always sports.”
- “Hunter and Genna have taught me lots about healthy food. They ensure I eat some fruits and vegetables, not just the cheese and crackers daily.”

## 4. Conclusion

### Insights Into Impact

Children and youth experience a strong sense of belonging at BGC Kawarthas. They have confirmed they are able to express and be accepted for their true or authentic selves while being at the Club. Moving forward, we want to continue to provide outstanding programming

where children and youth feel comfortable to be themselves and feel accepted by everyone around them.

Our findings show that strong staff and programming have an overall positive impact on children and youth at the Club. Children and youth report they are able to influence the direction of programs and undertake leadership development while they try new things and engage with a diverse range of peers.

BGC Kawarthas continues to provide wholesome food and access to physical activity and has expanded support for school work since our last qualitative study. To ensure this continues, we will work with staff to provide encouragement to children to be healthy and active when attending the club through various cooking programs, recreation and sports programming, and identify ways to further enhance homework support where appropriate.

## Steps Forward

In order to strengthen our impact on children and youth, we will explore the following in 2024:

- Introduce homework resources for all ages and support staff (ie. How does learning happen module), and routinely encourage participants to discuss academic needs with Club staff.
- Explore opportunities for a guest chef or guest leader with recipes for cooking lessons (ie. multicultural themes).
- Investigate family cooking lessons in the evening
  - Have parents come in and prepare a meal with their child/youth to take home and cook, or prepare virtually at home.
- Peer supports - encourage leadership by having children support others who need (like a leader in training but for younger kids)
- Investigate ways to better engage participants in program design and selecting activities for their group.
- Seek volunteers for different groups (knitting, painting/art, beading etc.)
  - Seek out people from the community or staff with unique talents to teach our children and youth
- Investigate opportunities to introduce participants to the youth centre in order to ease their transition and improve retention.
- Expand and enhance Leaders in Training program.