



Active Citizenship Initiative

2020 Report

Acknowledgements



Active Citizenship Initiative activities are funded through the Ottawa Carleton District School Board to build globally-aware citizens, prompt innovation and problem solving, provide community-connected, experiential learning opportunities, and promote student success. Youth Ottawa works in partnership with Innovation and Adolescent Learning, Student Success and dozens of Grade 10 Civics teachers to create learning which builds citizens through a process of “actually doing something” about the community challenges that young people see in their communities.



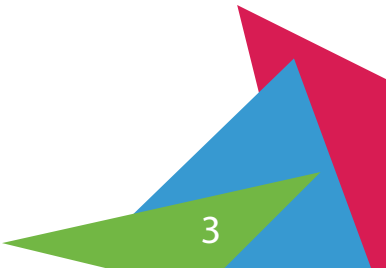
Youth Ottawa uses a “for youth by youth” model, where we hire diverse post-secondary youth from our Amplified Fellowship to run the Active Citizenship with participating Grade 10 Civics classes in the OCDSB. Our Amplified Fellowship provides business model workshops, one-on-one (social) entrepreneur-in-residence mentoring, and deliberate networking to help these young social innovators to adopt a “business by design” mindset, toolset, and practice, turning their social innovation projects into social enterprises. Without the Amplified Fellowship, we would not have access to such an exemplary pool of talented Facilitators for the Active Citizenship Initiative, so without our further key partners, Youth Ottawa could not run the Active Citizenship Initiative. We further acknowledge the generous and critically-important support from the Ottawa Community Foundation, the City of Ottawa’s Community Economic Development fund, the RBC Foundation, the Government of Canada’s Canada Summer Jobs Grants.



Finally, the Active Citizenship Initiative is an outgrowth from our previous DILA program, which we developed through significant, multi-year support from the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

Table of Contents

Action Citizenship Initiative Overview	4
Executive Summary	7
Key Impact Measurements	8
Methodology	10
Results	12
OCSDSB Specific Metrics	22
Youth Perception of Programs	25
Key Barriers	26
Impact on Perception of Schools	29
ACI Case Study	30
Youth Action Showcase	32



ACI Overview

Citizens aren't born. They are created when individuals are given opportunities to work within collective frameworks to contribute their time, talent, passion and energies towards making their communities better places. Providing such opportunities for youth is the essence of the Active Citizenship Initiative (ACI).

The ACI further provides curriculum-connected, experiential learning interventions for one of the most failed classes in Ontario, the Grade 10 Civics class. By employing extraordinary, young post-secondary changemakers to facilitate high school student-led civic engagement projects, Youth Ottawa works with School Boards, Schools, and teachers to amplify student voice, enable innovation, foster collaboration, and activate solutions to community challenge which matter to youth: broadly defined, to "actually do something" and, in the process, become active and engaged citizens. Along the way, the Active Citizenship Initiative connects to Ontario Ministry of Education curriculum, School Board priorities (Strategic Plan, Exit Outcomes) and community partner realities.

The specifics of the projects undertaken by students through the ACI range based on student interests, experiences, and ideas, but past projects include: student-initiated Pride Parades to celebrate 2SLGBTQ+ peers, "Blind Dates" to meet others blindfolded and "judge them by the content of their characters," and even a "Not-Bored with Board Games" event to connect students with intellectual disabilities with their peers and promote social inclusion. The case study in this report (see below) involves a case of further "for youth by youth" peer mentoring, where students from a Grade 10 Civics Class at Glebe Collegiate Institute ran Climate Change education workshops for elementary students in their feeder schools.

History

The ACI builds on Youth Ottawa's twelve-years of experience working with thousands of students and hundreds of teachers from all Ottawa high schools. Started in 2006 through the vision and efforts of Jason Collard, what is now the ACI started as a 'Day of Information for a Lifetime of Action' (DILA) began as a one-day conference connecting youth with community leaders on social and environmental challenges. In 2011, based on consistent feedback from students and teachers, DILA facilitators began the move away from a one-day conference and into a much more effective model, running on-going programs in schools that fit within curricular expectations. Under the successive leadership of Jason Collard, Ian Bingeman, and Helene Boulay, as well as with the support of three consecutive grants from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, by June 2019, the DILA program had been run with over 700 unique high school classes. The ACI represents the next step in this initiative, with programming now being supported and further developed through the Ottawa Carleton District School Board and tailored to their specific Strategic Goals and intended Exit Outcomes for their students.





Executive Summary

In August, 2012, I was hired to design and deliver the first of our comprehensive, curriculum-embedded, and community-connected civic engagement programs for high schools. Eight years and 700-plus student-led community impact projects later, I am thrilled to see how much our youth civic engagement project has evolved.

With the progression to the Active Citizenship Initiative, Youth Ottawa now works in closer partnership with the OCDSB to better meet its needs, employs diverse young changemakers as Facilitators (rather than relying on volunteers), and is building deeper connections with community partners. As this report demonstrates, we also are making a better impact than ever before, but I am particularly excited by the prospect of what is to come as our Facilitators get more experienced in their roles and teachers become more comfortable with adapting the ACI's community-connected, experiential learning concept to other areas of their teaching practices.

Feedback from students in this report continues to validate the learning that informed the first iterations of our program. Time, school, and knowledge are still the biggest barriers to youth civic engagement, so a program embedded into school curriculum continues to make the most sense from the perspectives of Social Returns on Investment (SROI), achievement of outcomes (see key progress indicators below), and respect for what youth are experiencing. Collaborative projects, experiential learning, community connections, and just simply “actually doing something about something” continue to be among the biggest impact factors driving success. However, youth feedback from work done September to December 2019 (20 Civics classes at 9 different OCDSB locations) further demonstrates that employing diverse young

change-makers as Facilitators - and the deeper relationships and connections they developed with students - is becoming the single greatest impact factor for program success.

There are many ways that were suggested to improve the program, but by far the most common response from students when asked was that the program was perfect as it was. Increasing our touchpoints with Facilitators throughout the process and being more deliberate about structuring community partner challenges will be two improvements that we seek in programs run from February to June 2020. But the biggest change we will make will be to add a Social Enterprise Pilot for Careers class - providing a complementary addendum to the Active Citizenship Initiative and responding to the second-most common critique from student participants: more time to work on projects!

I present this report on Youth Ottawa's Active Citizenship Initiative with great pride in our accomplishments. I look to the future with an even greater gratitude for the host of folks - youth, teachers, school administrators, community partners, and my Youth Ottawa colleagues - involved in this project. Our strength is collective, and the outcomes highlighted by this report are the results of our combined efforts.

Ian Bingeman
Executive Director

Youth Ottawa

Key Impact Measurements

Youth Ottawa’s principle charitable purpose is to “meaningfully involve children and youth in the civic lives of their communities.” To measure our impact with respect to our school programs and interventions, we track three Key Progress Indicators (KPIs): identity, knowledge and skills, and perceived self-efficacy. We use these three indicators, because they have been shown to be both reflective of current achievements as well as predictive of future behaviours.



In the case of the Active Citizenship Initiative, and the DILA Program before it, these KPIs translate more specifically:

Civic Identity

I see myself as a citizen with a responsibility and a willingness to create a positive impact for myself and others within our community/ies.

Civic Knowledge and Skills

I understand the tools and tactics available for citizens to impact their communities, and I have developed associated skills.

Civic Self-Efficacy (percieved)

I feel confident that, should I choose to do so, I can make a difference on the community issues that matter to me.

Our Program Evaluation for ACI activities from October to December, 2019 further accounted for the OCDSB’s exit outcomes, where we tested progress made against each of ten exit outcomes that the OCDSB intends for its students.

For this reporting period, we tested: Civic Identity in connection with the OCDSB’s “Globally Aware” exit outcome (“How likely are you to help others in your community?”); Civic Knowledge/Skills in connection with the “Academically Diverse” exit outcome (“How much did you learn about Civic Tactics and Tools and how to use them?”); and Civic Self-Efficacy in connection with the “Innovative” exit outcome (“How confident are you that you can solve complex problems?”)

Methodology

Student participants in the Action Civics Initiative (ACI) were provided feedback forms at the end of the eight visit program. Questions addressed Youth Ottawa's key civic engagement metrics (Civic Identity, Civic Knowledge, and Perceived Civic Self-Efficacy - all strong indicators of the likelihood of future civic engagement), the OCDSB Exit Outcomes, and general feedback questions posed after all Youth Ottawa programs.

293 out of 500 program participants provided feedback. In order to reduce the amount of time per participant providing feedback, questions were split into Survey A (106 respondents) and Survey B (183 respondents) with questions on Civic Identity and general Youth Ottawa experience common to both Surveys.

1 Questions were posed in a "pre-post question" format, where students were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 10 (highest) where they felt they were before and after starting the ACI activities. The reported impacts shared below draw from the number of participants who reported an increase, the overall percentage of improvement between pre and post evaluations, and the qualitative data provided by students.

3 Pre and post surveys at the start and finish of an intervention are generally preferable for program evaluation. However, we did not have permission for pre and post surveys from the OCDSB approval board on Research and Program Evaluation for the reporting period. Our "pre-post question" form was developed in consultation with YouthREX as a next-best solution to the challenge of getting permission for pre and post surveys.

2 For example, students first are asked, "On a scale of 1 to 10 (highest), BEFORE participating in the Active Citizenship Initiative, HOW MOTIVATED were you TO HELP OTHERS in your community?" Participants are then immediately asked, "AFTER your Youth Ottawa experience, how MOTIVATED NOW are you to help others in your community?" Students are also offered a space to provide a qualitative description of their answers.



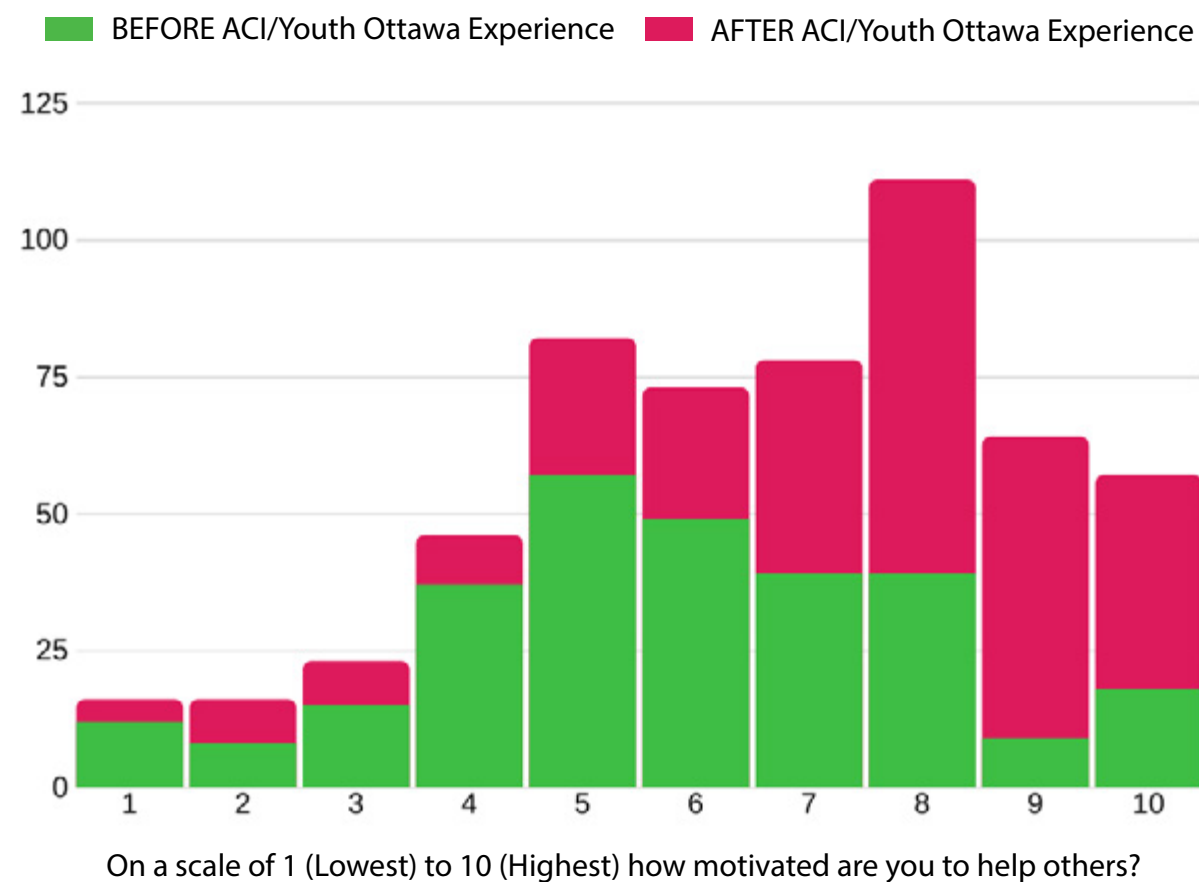
Impact on Civic Identity/ Global Awareness

By asking the question, “How motivated are you to help others,” we addressed two separate evaluative measures. First, do participants see their Civic Identities as including active and engaged citizenship, and how do they respond to the active verb in the question (“to help”)? Second, to the extent that helping “others” requires going beyond your own experience, how globally aware are participants?

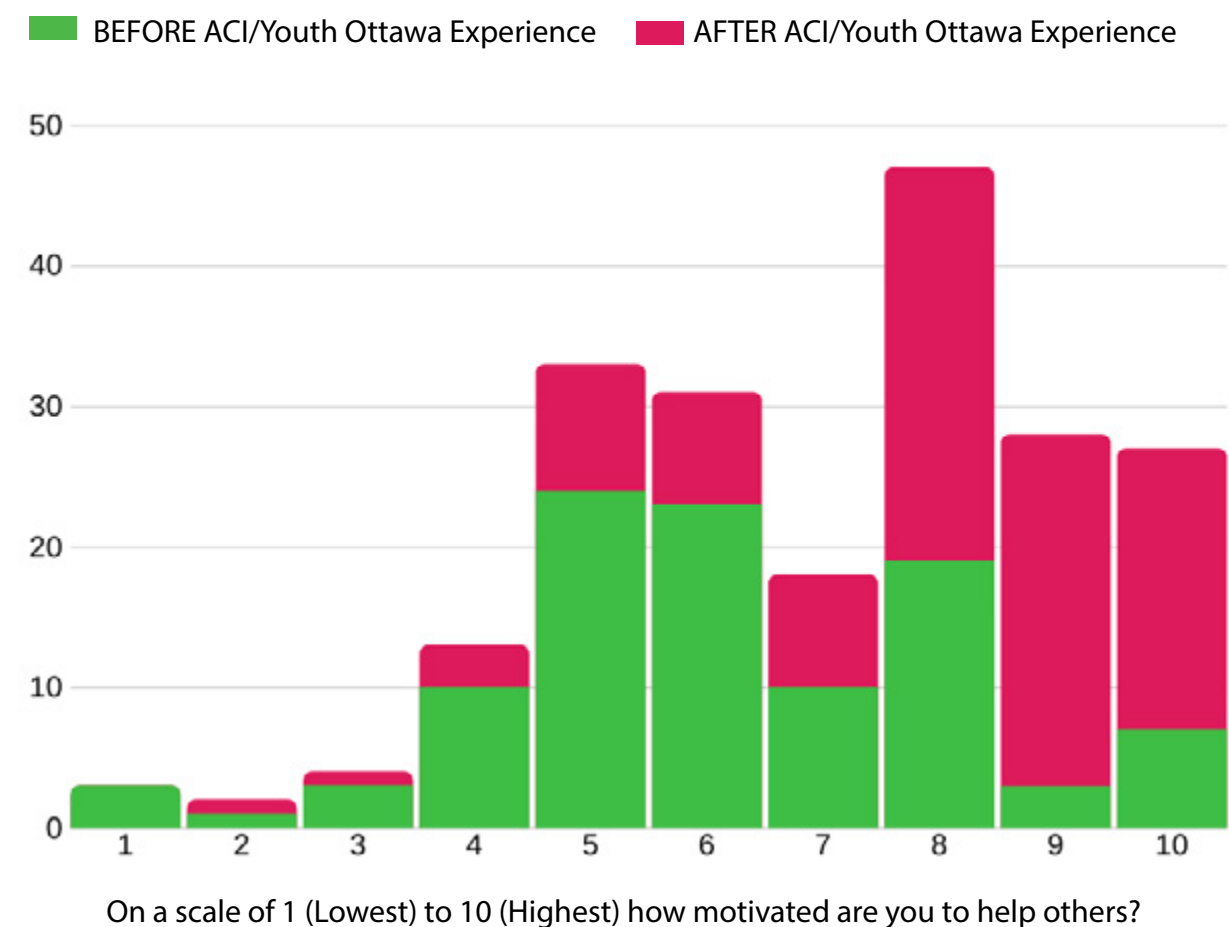
Quantitative Analysis

Across all respondents and all key data splits (participants at priority schools and participants who were not previously engaged in their communities (e.g. those who registered a 5 or lower on the “before” question), the ACI generated significant statistical improvements:

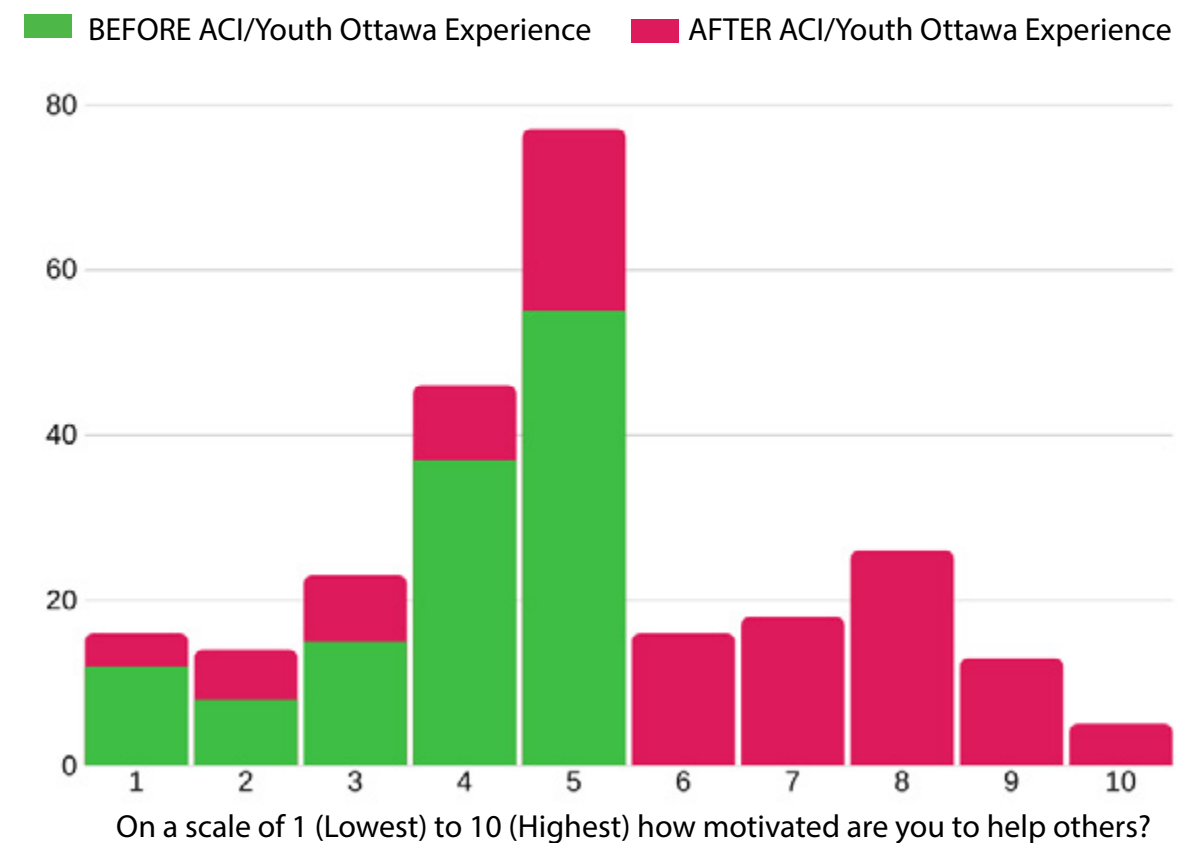
Civic Identity/Global Awareness : All respondents n.283



Civic Identity/Global Awareness : Priority schools n.103



Civic Identity/Global Awareness : Not previously engaged students n.127





Qualitative Analysis

Three Key Impact Factors came through from the qualitative analysis where participants benefited from the ACI intervention:

1 Increased awareness of community challenges issues (42 responses) and empathy for those impacted by these challenges (31 responses).



“I used to neglect that it was an actual problem, or I would blame the people for being homeless. I now see that it was very unfair for me to think that way, because it was obviously not their choice.”

2) Impact of Experiential Learning through the Active Citizenship initiative (15 responses).



“My Youth Ottawa Facilitator] was so encouraging and made it fun and meaningful to create positive change in my community”

3 Increased skills (15 responses) and the sense that creating a difference was easier than previously thought (12 responses)



“Before, I didn’t know how and what to do to help others in the community. I also didn’t know what they need help with. Now, I understand the issues in our community and I know how I can help them”

Impact on Civic Self-Efficacy/Innovation

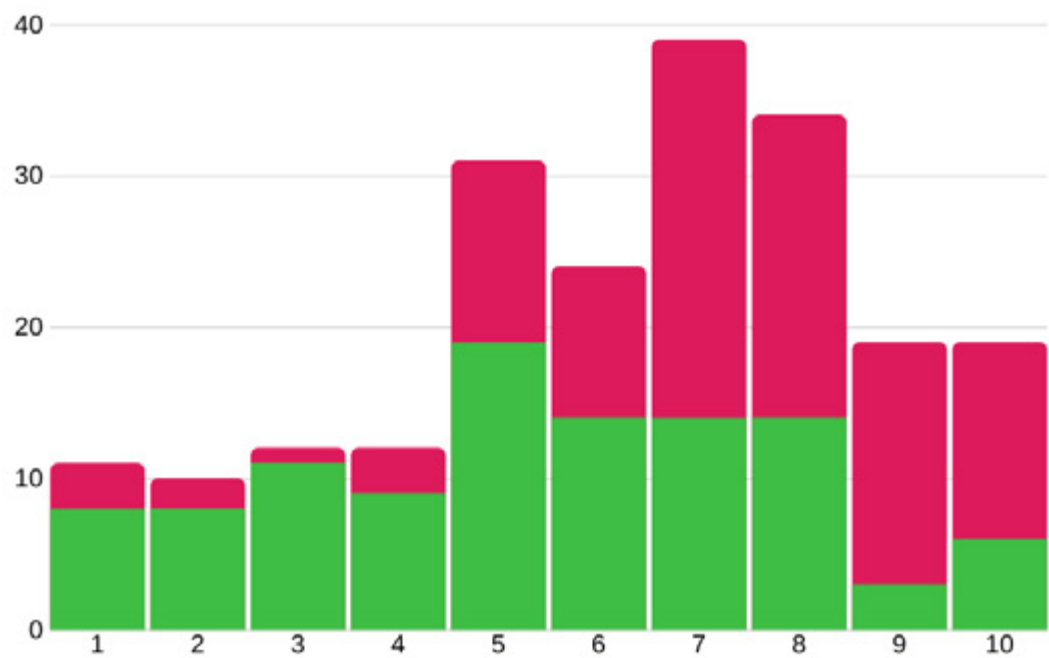
By asking the question, “How confident are you that you can solve complex community problems,” we addressed two separate evaluative measures. First, do participants perceive their future actions to be impactful? Have we increased their sense of Civic Self-Efficacy? Second, to the extent that innovation derives from constraint (in this case of a posited complex community problem), we can measure participants’ readiness to innovate.

Quantitative Analysis

Across all respondents and all key data splits (participants at priority schools and participants who were not previously engaged in their communities (e.g. those who registered a 5 or lower on the “before” question), the ACI generated significant statistical improvements:

Self Efficacy/Innovation : All respondents n.106

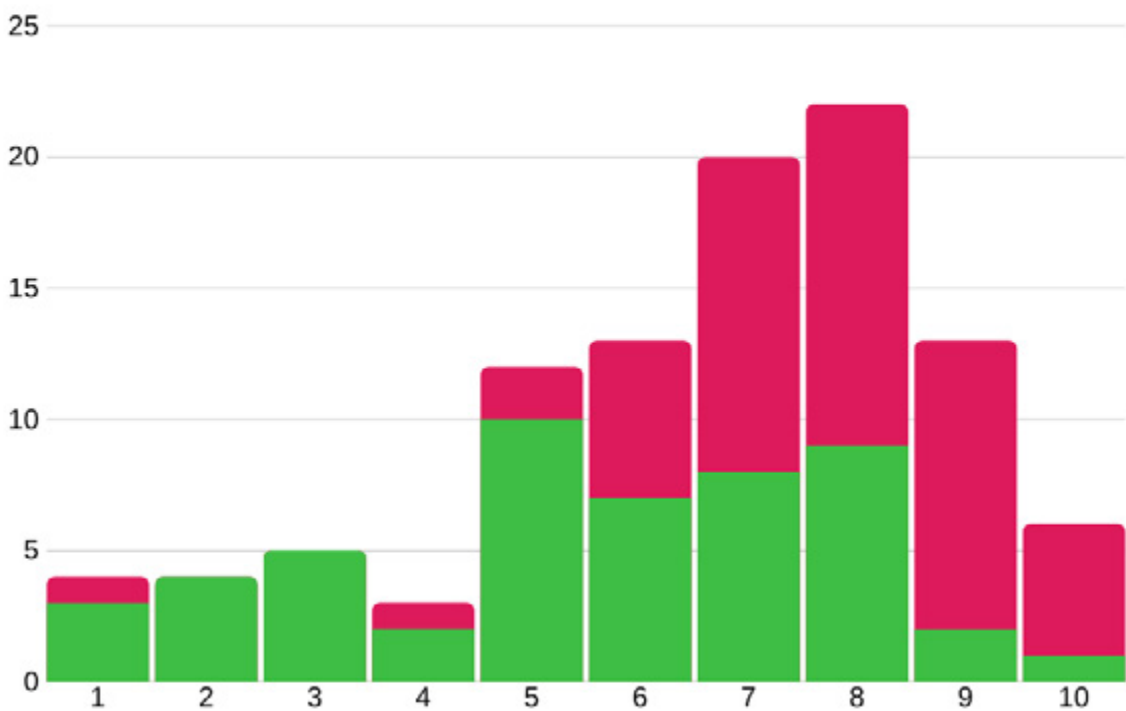
BEFORE ACI/Youth Ottawa Experience AFTER ACI/Youth Ottawa Experience



On a scale of 1 (Lowest) to 10 (Highest)

Self Efficacy/Innovation : Priority schools n. 51

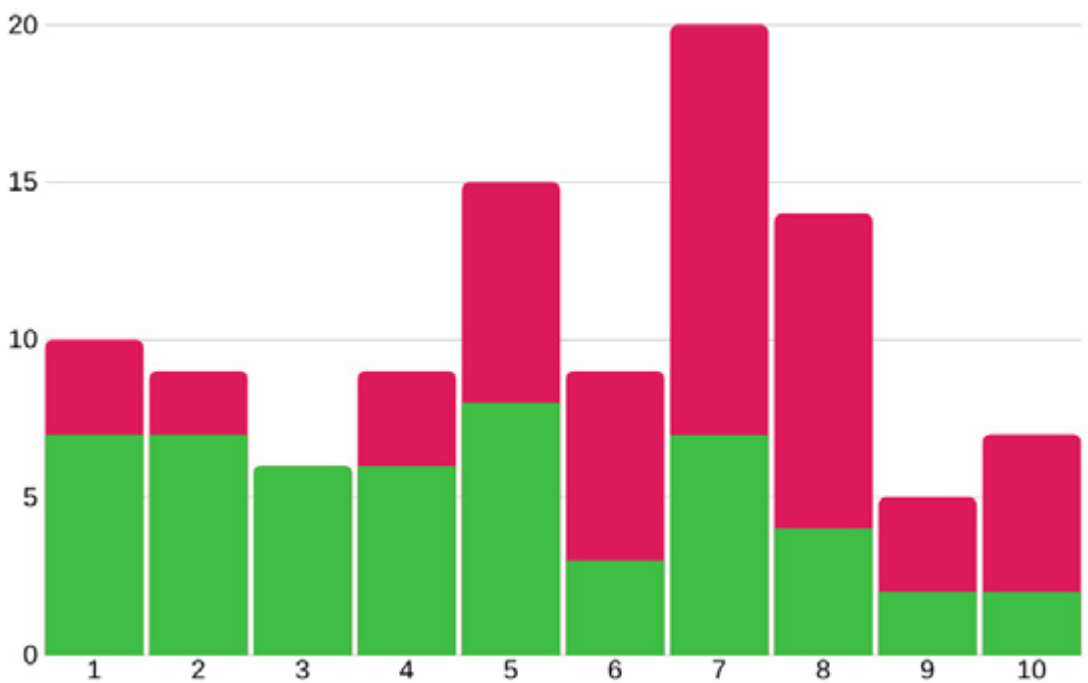
BEFORE ACI/Youth Ottawa Experience AFTER ACI/Youth Ottawa Experience



On a scale of 1 (Lowest) to 10 (Highest)

Self Efficacy/Innovation: not previously engaged students n. 52

BEFORE ACI/Youth Ottawa Experience AFTER ACI/Youth Ottawa Experience



On a scale of 1 (Lowest) to 10 (Highest)

Qualitative Analysis

There were three significant key impact factors (mentioned more than 3 times out of 20) for the impact made on increasing Civic Self-Efficacy and Innovation through the ACI intervention:

1 Participants felt better equipped to tackle community challenges (8 comments out of 20)



“At first I never knew how to make a change in the community, but after the [ACI] it showed me exactly how to start and how to make an impact,”

2 Increased confidence as a result of having already accomplished something (5 comments out of 20)



“I am much more confident as I have solved problems by myself and in teams and was satisfied with the outcome.”

3 Participants realized that making a positive impact wasn't as hard as they originally thought (3 comments out of 20)



“We did our small part to help the community, and now I see how simple that can be.”



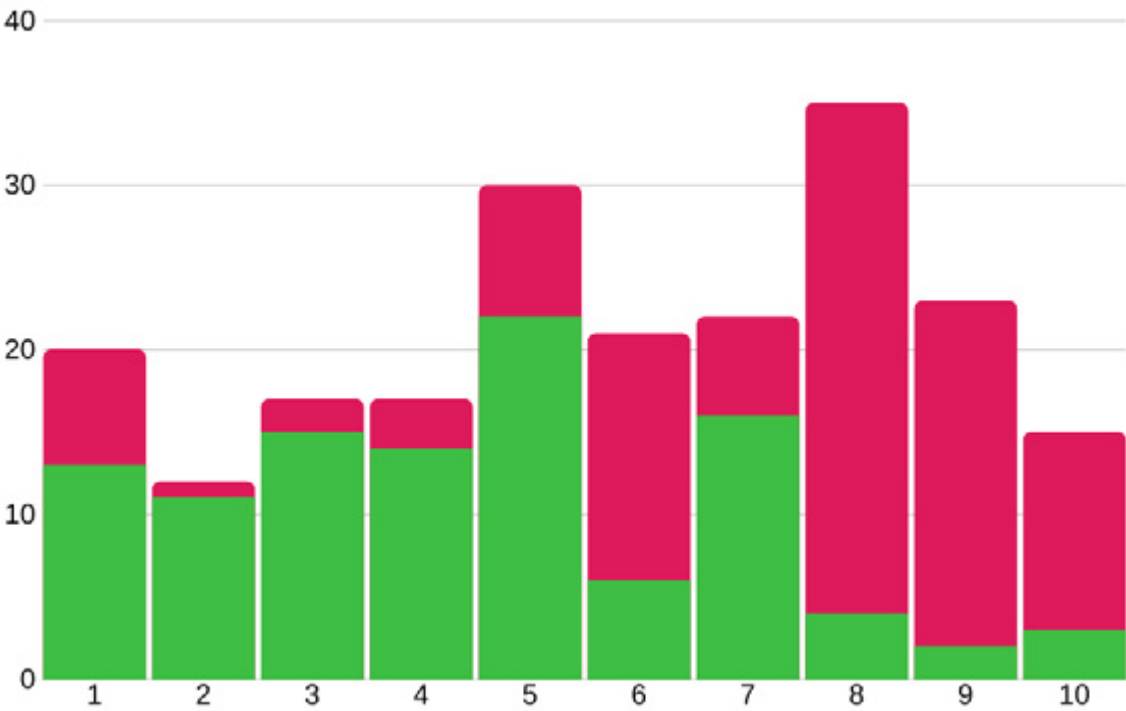
Impact on Civic Knowledge/ Diverse Academic Skills:

By asking the question, “how much did you know about civic tactics/tools and how to use them” (e.g. surveys, coalition meetings, petitions, protests, town halls, public service announcements, etc.)?”, we addressed two separate evaluative measures. First, how much new Civic Knowledge did participants encounter throughout the ACI intervention? Second, and to the extent that civic skills and tactics like surveys, coalition meetings, etc... require diverse skill sets, how much academic diversity did participants draw upon in the course of creating their action plans?

Quantitative Analysis

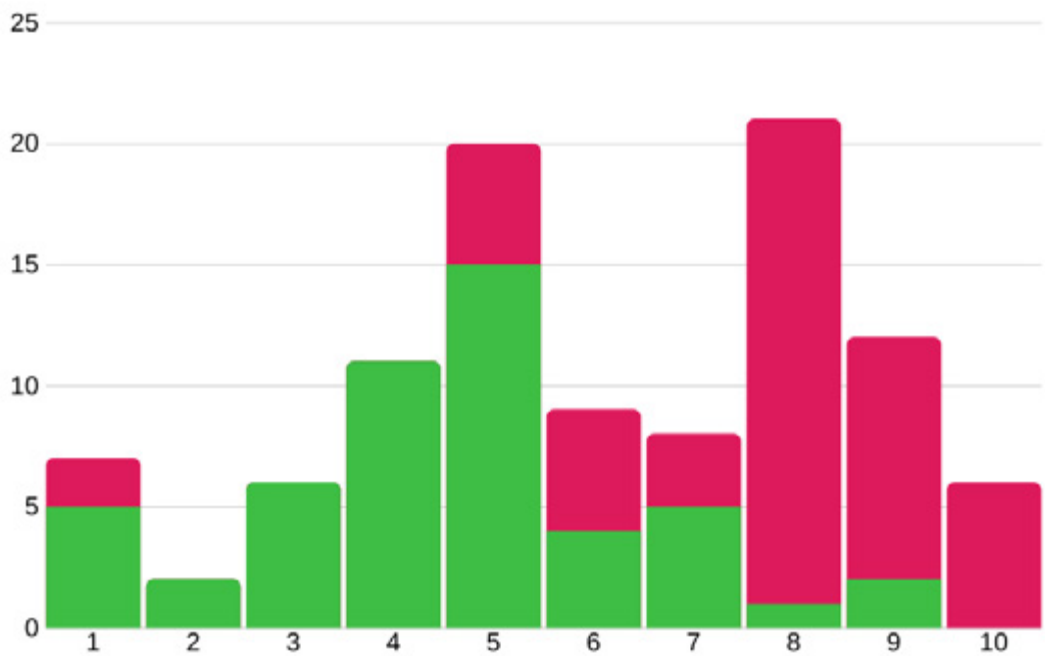
Across all respondents and all key data splits (participants at priority schools and participants who were not previously engaged in their communities (e.g. those who registered a 5 or lower on the “before” question), the ACI generated significant statistical improvements:

Civic Knowledge/Academic Diversity : All respondents n.106
BEFORE ACI/Youth Ottawa Experience AFTER ACI/Youth Ottawa Experience



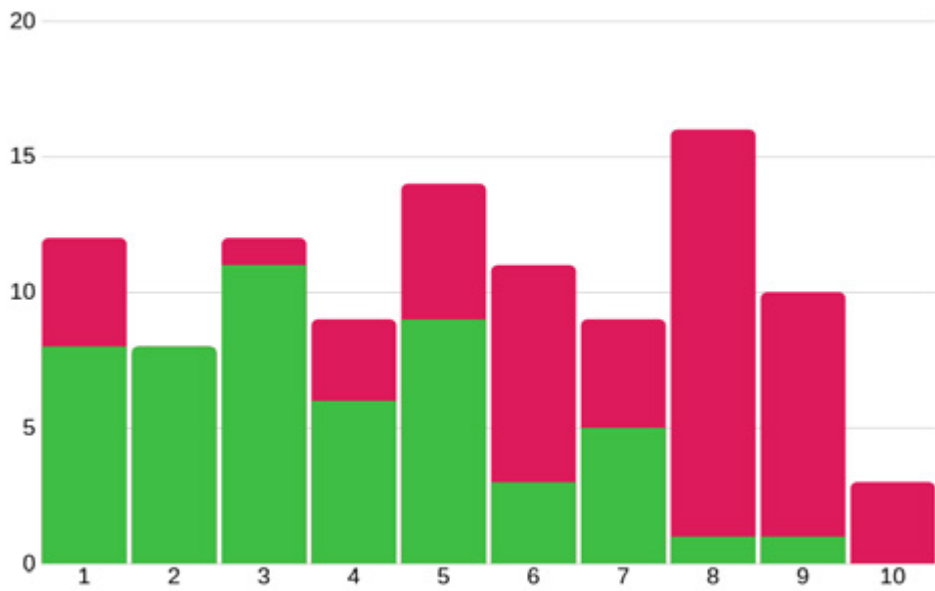
On a scale of 1 (Lowest) to 10 (Highest) how much do you know about civic tactics/tools?

Civic Knowledge/Academic Diversity : Priority schools n.51
BEFORE ACI/Youth Ottawa Experience AFTER ACI/Youth Ottawa Experience



On a scale of 1 (Lowest) to 10 (Highest) how much do you know about civic tactics/tools?

Civic Knowledge/Academic Diversity: Not previously engaged students n.52
BEFORE ACI/Youth Ottawa Experience AFTER ACI/Youth Ottawa Experience



On a scale of 1 (Lowest) to 10 (Highest) how much do you know about civic tactics/tools?

Qualitative Analysis

According to the qualitative data provided by participants, the single greatest impact factor for increasing civic knowledge was simply being exposed to the concepts and allowed to practice with them throughout the course of creating an action plan (20 comments out of 26)

OCDSB Specific Metrics

Metrics

The OCDSB was the sole funder for the Active Citizenship Initiative for the Reporting Period, so special consideration is given to their preferred metrics: student success and the OCDSB Exit Outcomes.

Student Success is an indicator that will be tracked internally to the Board, but it is a significant consideration, because again, the Civics/Careers courses are among the most failed courses in the Ontario K-12 public education system.

Exit Outcomes

The OCDSB identifies 5 Characteristics and 5 Skill Sets that all students should acquire on graduation in grade 12.

Characteristics: Collaborative, Globally Aware, Goal Oriented, Innovative/Creative, Resilient.

Skills: Academically Diverse, Critical Thinkers, Digitally Fluent, Effective Communicators, Ethical Decision Makers.

We suggest: that the Civic Identity question, “how likely are you to help others?”, covers both the Global Awareness characteristic and Ethical Decision Maker skill set; that the Civic Knowledge/Skills question, “what do you know about civic tactics/tools and how to use them?”, covers the Academically Diverse skill set; and that the Civic Self-Efficacy question, “how confident are you in your ability to solve complex social problems?”, covers the Innovation Characteristic.

Impact on Participants

Here are the impacts on participants for the other categories, with outcomes measured by the percentage of participants who benefited from the ACI intervention (either improved or started with a high threshold for the characteristic or skill that was then reinforced):

Exit Outcome:	All Participants	Priority School Participants	Not-Previously-Engaged Participants
Collaboration	62%	77%	47%
Globally Aware	87%	84%	74%
Goal-Oriented	62%	75%	53%
Innovative/Creative	76%	82%	70%
Resilient	67%	75%	58%
Academically Diverse	87%	90%	83%
Critical Thinkers	70%	78%	67%
Digitally Fluent	72%	75%	65%
Effective Communicators	67%	78%	67%
Ethical Leadership	76%	80%	71%





There are five key progress indicators that we use to track whether or not we are succeeding with youth:

- › The “describe your Youth Ottawa experience in one word” challenge/visual
- › What key barriers exist to future engagement
- › What impact did Youth Ottawa Facilitators have on the experience?
- › What did participants most like about the intervention?
- › What would participants most like to change about the intervention?

What word would you use to describe your Youth Ottawa experience?



The word cloud generated by participant responses to the question of “what word would you use to describe your Youth Ottawa experience” provide efficient, “at a glance,” measures of how we are succeeding. In the case of the data received for the ACI from September to December, 2019, the positives outweigh the negatives, with words like “Interesting,” “Good,” “Educational,” “Informative,” and “Inspirational” getting the largest number of common responses.

Key barriers for future engagement

Why offer an intervention if it is only going to create barriers for participants? That is the question that lead Youth Ottawa to abandon one-off conferences and extracurricular programming in favour of ongoing and curriculum-embedded interventions.

Over a period of 13 years, we have consistently heard the same thing from youth regarding barriers to future civic engagement: lack of time, burden of school, demands at work, and transportation barriers unique to Ottawa. To this, we have also noticed that engagement interventions reliant on youth volunteers create “civic opportunity gaps” whereby youth from lower socio-economic are effectively barred from participation. Volunteering is a privilege. Consequently, all program evaluation for Youth Ottawa interventions asks this question as a way of continuing to validate our common approach. For the respondents to the ACI program evaluation form, here were the common responses:

Lack of time

(78 comments out of 110), specifically manifesting in the perception of significant extracurricular demands through sports, homework, work and other duties.

“Parents and time. School takes over our lives inside and out and it’s hard to find or make time for literally anything other than school”

Not knowing where to start

and/or lacking the skills to do so (28 comments out of 110)

“Students don’t have a lot of resources or connections to really start a change in a community. We are not taught thoroughly on how to effectively make an event or organize another activity that will make a difference.”

Financial restrictions

(24 comments out of 110).

“Funding is a problem, most things need money to help get going and unfortunately I don’t have much.”

Percieved lack of power for youth in the community

(18 comments out of 110)

“Lack of exposure to other ethnic backgrounds might affect what people think of me, and therefore they might not take my genuine intentions to help them, seriously./lack of trust or awareness”; “not many people will take us seriously because we are just kids to them”

Top Likes

Collaborative projects, working together

(62 comments out of 293)

“Being able to work in a group > ability to express one’s ideas > Playing the part as a leader alongside others.”

Hands on learning

(21 comments out of 293)

“I really liked when we had our finished project and we presented.”

The facilitators

(18 comments out of 293)

“The personality of the people running the program with us were amazing and vibrant. They were very transparent with us.”

Overall experience

(15 comments out of 293)

“It was very fun and I looked forward to the class because it was different and exciting.”

After the eight weeks with Youth Ottawa, we asked the students what they would change about the ACI program. The most frequent response was that they wanted more time to work on their project. Many students had no suggestions for the betterment of our program.

A few students expressed they wanted the program to be more engaging for everyone by selecting a social issue that interested the entire class. This is a comment that we have heard many times, but the lowest outcomes in our program evaluation occur where students pursue their own individual projects, and we should also recognize that the most commonly identified impact factor for the program’s success was the collaborative nature of the projects. This comment, and others like it, serve as a reminder to be diligent about finding points of entry for all learners into the project. For example, if you don’t “really care that much about mental health,” then perhaps there is a role for you doing a task that you are really good at, or in serving as a “devil’s advocate/quality control” function within the broader project. Well-structured and intentioned dissent often produces better products and projects!

A background image showing a group of students in a classroom. A girl in a maroon hijab is looking at a smartphone, while other students are seated at a table, some looking at papers or devices. The scene is brightly lit and appears to be a collaborative learning environment.

Case Study: Fighting Climate Change at Glebe Collegiate

Students at Glebe Collegiate took part in the Active Citizenship Initiative during the 2019 Semester. 25 students from Cindy Savards civics class decided to tackle the issue of Climate Change. They organized an environmental fair for younger kids at Mutchmor Elementary School. Students wanted to educate the future about the impacts of climate change and to share concrete actions they can apply on a daily basis.

They planned climate change oriented games and workshops to teach the kids in a fun way that included a science experiment related to climate change, a vegan cooking activity and storytelling about Climate Change awareness.

Action Plans

Students followed the Action Civics Initiative curriculum headed by Youth Ottawa facilitator Melanie St-Martin. The class was divided in 4 teams (research, planning, timeline, letter to the admin and promotion.) The 4 teams then prepared a workshop on their chosen area and did a practice in class presenting their workshops to each other.

Students also worked with community member Elyse McCann from EnviroCentre who ran a presentation for the class on Climate Change.

“The program had an enormous impact on my students motivation to become a model for younger kids. They felt they could make a difference, they grew confidence in their capacity and they learned what civic engagement meant. They realized that they were part of a system where they could have a real impact in their community.”

Youth Action Showcase

The students from Glebe attended the Youth Action Showcase in December 2019. The young change-makers with matched with community leaders and presented their Climate Change project.

“The students were really proud of their projects. Important people showed interest in their initiative, their ideas were not just promoted but also meaningful for adults. One of the students at the Youth Action Showcase felt confident enough and took the initiative to speak up in the microphone!”



Youth Action Showcase

Youth Ottawa’s Youth Action Showcase Series serves as a celebration of projects created through our civic engagement programming. In the case of ACI projects reported on here, students gathered on December 17th, 2019 for an event that is a cross between a science fair and speed-dating event - but for ACI civic engagement projects and matching youth change-makers with community leaders like Mayor Jim Watson, MPP Joel Harden, Senator Peter Boehm, Superintendents and Principals from the OCDSB, and grassroots community leaders.

The idea behind the Showcase is to turn the tables (literally) on youth engagement events. Our belief is that youth don’t need to be inspired by others to become active and engaged citizens for their communities. Instead, once we open up opportunities for them to contribute their time, talents, and innovative ideas to issues that they already care about, they provide the inspiration for others.

The Showcase also gives us an opportunity to test the ACI’s impact at a two month remove from the intervention (most students presenting at the Showcase were pitching projects that wrapped in late October).

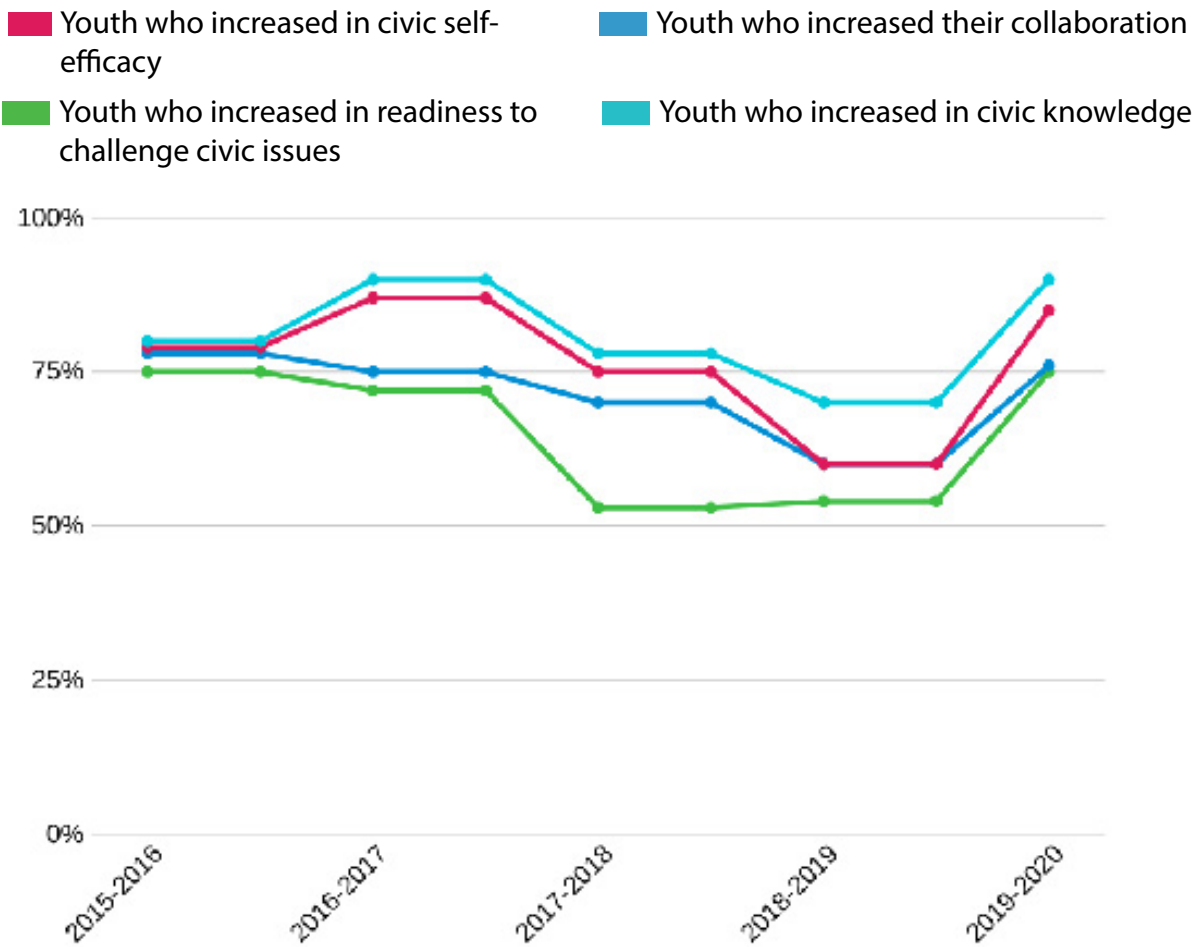
“I wasn’t confident in my abilities to make a change, but after doing and completing the project, I have more confidence in myself to [make] change”

“The positive feedback and motivation from community leaders really pushed us and built our confidence”

“The project helped to show that students and kids can have an impact and adults are listening.”

Comparison of ACI Impact to Past Outcomes:

The ACI is a new project for the OCDSB, but it continues Youth Ottawa’s tradition of working with youth on civic engagement projects through Civics Classes. When we compare the results of the ACI to past experiences, we are achieving the desired outcomes at a higher rate than before.



HISTORICAL COMPARISONS



