

TRAILS REVISITED

Newsflash:

Trails Lakeside Wellness Retreat

From 9AM Saturday, Sept. 28 to 4PM Sunday, Sept. 29

Support Trails Youth Initiatives by indulging in a Wellness Retreat in the healing forest of the Whitchurch Highlands. Connect to nature and yourself next to a beautiful private lake on 143 acres of lush conservation land. Rest, rejuvenate and enjoy outdoor activities and incredible plant-based food while learning about wellness, mindfulness and health at informative workshops. The \$350 ticket buys you 2 days, including all activities, room and meals – plus, proceeds will benefit Trails' program for vulnerable youth.

www.trails.ca/events

Two years ago, in September 2017, we visited Trails Youth Initiatives, a camp in the highlands of the Whitchurch Forest. Trails is a unique 27-year-old charity that provides life-long, consistent programming for vulnerable youth. We visited with Founder and Chair Jim Hayhurst Sr. and President Melissa Millward.

In 2017, Trails welcomed twenty 12-year-olds (10 boys and 10 girls) to embark on their four-year journey. In addition, there are optional fifth and sixth year Leadership-in-Training and Facilitator-in-Training (LIT/FIT) programs where students can further develop leadership and life skills. They can also access bursaries to attend post-secondary education. Back then, Trails supported about 100 youth each year, they had a 90% 4-year retention rate, the annual \$800k budget was 100% supported by private contributions (0% from government) and Trails was preparing to double their enrolment.

Two years later, how are they doing? We went to find out. We arrive to a scene that is the same as before: a glimmering dark lake carries a reflection of the surrounding canopy, a wooden dock juts out towards a buoyed rope, while cabins and a lodge cling to a hillside, hidden in the long shadows of the forest. It is quiet, except for the dance of birds and bugs. There have been some changes: a foyer has been added across the front of the main building; it is a great place for all those shoes, snow boots and hanging coats and jackets. A little further up the hill, a new cabin has been built. Apparently, the campers helped specify certain attributes, like bed-length, etc.

Melissa Millward is still there – she greets us. We sit in a beautiful room lined with windows overlooking the lake. The Chair Jim Hayhurst wasn't available this day, but is still actively involved.

The “quiet” wasn't to last, as a group of campers have just arrived back from an overnight trip on the French River. Random voices exclaim bug bites, body odors and heat. These appear to be “regular kids” returning from camp, not vulnerable youth with tough stories about abuse, a lack of food, bad neighbourhoods and general poverty. But this is the key – Trails nurtures and empowers children to get beyond these major obstacles – and, it's working. The kids I see, are great kids.

Mel reports that their retention rate has increased to 93%, up from 90%. Trails has doubled their enrolment as planned; now they receive 40 new kids a year. 100% of the youth graduate high school, 100% give back to the community, and 75% go on to post-secondary school. The annual budget didn't double with the increased population, but it did rise to \$1.3 million a year. To their mantra, Trails still relies 100% on private charitable contributions – no government assistance. They now work with six inner-city schools.

What else is new? Mel reports the inevitable headaches – two vans and an ATV broke down, the Ash tree disease arrived, which forced a \$30k expenditure to reinstall the ropes course, and for a while, she personally battled with finding balance. To be more self-sustaining, Mel learned that in order to have a broader impact, she needed to bring together people whose combined knowledge and resources work better than apart. “We have great staff - who are

passionate and committed to changing lives,” she said.

In conclusion, Trails Youth Initiatives has become more amazing in the past two years. They need help in three ways: (1) Donate Now or Donate Monthly – they have a charitable registration number and can provide a tax receipt; (2) Name Trails as one of the charities for which your community event raises money; and (3) Volunteer - Corporate partners like Scotiabank, Deloitte, Intact Insurance, RBC, Desjardins, and Telus have been investing in the future of youth with social responsibility in the form of service. Corporate Impact days at Trails Lakeside include hosting corporate Volunteer Teams who come to help build docks, clean cabins, cut wood, rake leaves, and tend to the community garden. [1]

Trails Youth Initiatives

905-836-0285

admin@trails.ca

www.trails.ca

MEET CORPORAL BRAD COSBURN



Brad Cosburn joined Trails the summer before he started Grade 7 at Milne Valley Middle School in Toronto. His mom died right before he came to Trails and his Aunt TT, was raising him and his sister. Brad's cohort, known as the Moonlight Howlers, committed to attend Trails for two weeks each summer and one weekend each month, for the next four years.

Throughout Brad's journey, he learned to swim, canoe, camp, hike and cross-country ski while gaining important life skills such as taking responsibility for his actions, communicating effectively and managing stress. Brad relied on his committed and consistent staff team who immediately saw past his challenges of low social awareness and low self-regulation and highlighted the energy, enthusiasm and ambition for which he was recruited. Unfortunately, while Brad was on his Year 2 trip the following summer, Aunt TT went into critical condition and ultimately lost her battle to cancer. Brad was forced into foster care and changed homes five times before being adopted into a stable home. Throughout his darkest days, Brad says Trails was the one thing that was always there for him. Brad completed the Four Seasons, Four Years, For Life program and continued to be an LIT in his fifth year, mentoring younger Trails participants and giving back to his community.

Now 21, Corporal Brad Cosburn is studying Fish and Wildlife Technology at Fleming College with support from Trails' Dion Bursary Fund covering his annual tuition and book expenses. In addition, he is part of the Canadian Armed Forces and is currently serving in Norway. Through outdoor skill development, high school credits, mentorship, bursaries and, above all, a constant presence in his life, Trails challenged and equipped Brad to become a contributing member of his community.

“Trails has been the one thing that has always been there for me... I want to thank you for all you have done. It is far more than you know,” said Brad.