

Impact Report 2021

*"Do what you can
and then do a little
more...*

*Because it all
makes a difference.*

*You make a
difference."*

*~Jim "Hurst" Hayhurst,
Trails Co-Founder*



Trails was built on the belief that all youth – especially those facing barriers based on race, income, education and neighbourhood – benefit from a long-term consistent approach to engagement, one that uses outdoor experiential learning to teach leadership, resilience, and conflict resolution, as well as physical and mental wellness.

MISSION:

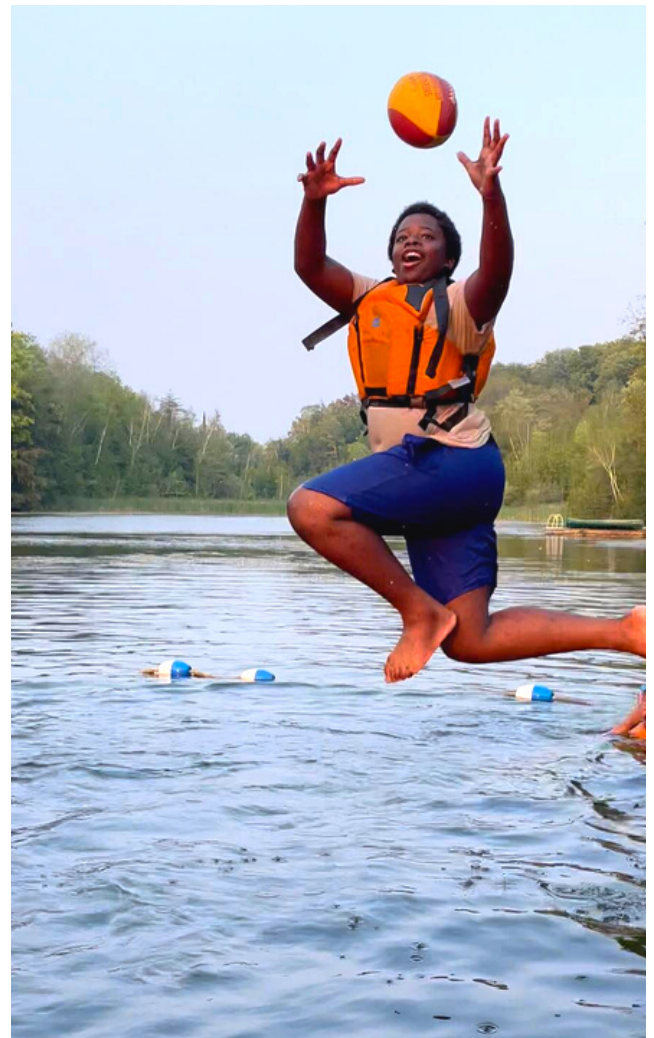
To challenge and equip vulnerable youth from at-risk areas of Toronto to become contributing members of the community.

GOALS:

To instill practical skills, relevant knowledge, and the self-confidence to use them.

VISION:

Our vision is to break the cycle of poverty and systemic racism.



105

of youth participants in 2021-22

\$1.5M

cost to run the program this year

99%

of our participants graduate from high school

35

post-secondary bursaries paid in the Fall 2021 semester



"As a whole, my Trails journey has been one that has helped define my understanding of friendship, mindfulness, physical and emotional health, and perseverance. It has allowed me to express myself confidently and work through challenges, whether they are emotional or physical, personal or academic." ~Michael, LIT

YEAR IN REVIEW

Thank you for your generous support of the Four Seasons, Four Years, For Life program. 2021 was another year of adjusting our program, managing provincial guidelines and above all, supporting our participants and their families regardless of the circumstances.

January 2021 started in much the same way as we spent many months in 2020, supporting our youth participants through virtual programming, phone call check-ins and online course work. As a private school, we follow the guidelines of the Ministry of Education for in-person learning. This meant that we had four in-person weekends between January to June and for the rest, our Program Team worked hard to creatively and effectively deliver our program remotely.

Meanwhile, we forged ahead with our plans for summer 2021. Although re-opening guidelines were not in place until the eleventh hour, we remained committed to being ready to welcome our youth back when the time came. This resulted in a wonderful six weeks of in-person summer programs, including camping, canoeing, hiking, swimming...and most importantly, reconnecting. Our Year 2 participants were on-site for their first summer, having missed that opportunity in 2020. Our Years 3, 4 and LIT participants travelled to Algonquin Park for back-country canoe trips that allowed them to put into practice the canoeing and camping skills they had learned at Trails in previous years.

While it was great to back together, programming could not always proceed as planned. Adjustments needed to be made to account for declines in many kids' physical and mental health over the previous 18 months. One youth participant fell asleep while paddling in his canoe. Others needed to re-learn some of the Trails norms for behaviour and living as a group. These were stark reminders of the unseen toll that the pandemic had on many youth.

The biggest casualty of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021 was the difficult decision to not recruit new Year 1 cohorts to begin at Trails in July 2021. Recruitment takes place in the fall and winter and with so much uncertainty about what our program would look like, combined with the inability to work with our feeder schools because of Covid-19 restrictions, we decided to pause recruitment for the year. This is being addressed in 2022 with the recruitment of 20 Year 1 (Grade 6) participants and 20 Year 2 (Grade 7) participants who will begin their journey this coming summer.

The fall meant the return to the full scope of our weekend programs. Participants learned about mindfulness, communication, conflict resolution and taking care of their physical and mental health. They re-engaged in relationships with their peers and their dedicated leaders. They ate nutritious home-cooked meals. In December, Trails hosted 100 participants and their family members for our annual Holiday Celebration.

All of this work – the challenges, successes, adjustments and learnings – could not have been possible without the generous support of our foundation and corporate partners. We are so grateful to have you alongside us as together we make the future brighter for our youth.





YOUR IMPACT

After their summer sessions, we asked participants to finish the sentences, "Before Trails, I..." and "Because of Trails, I..."

Here are some of their responses:

Before Trails, I...

- ...didn't really know how to express my feelings. I also was not comfortable with the outdoors.
- ...had very low self-confidence and didn't really know how to express my thoughts and feelings.
- ...was scared of many things like bugs, nature, getting dirty, and even things like getting used to trusting people, letting my inside self show, and being myself.
- ...felt lonely because I felt like I was disconnected from the outside world and people in general.
- ...didn't know how to build a fire or tent and I didn't know how to swim well.
- ...was scared to talk to people and always cared what they thought of me, I would try and do everything by myself even when I knew I needed help.

"Thank you. I've been struggling a lot and Trails helps take me away from a stressful environment and let's me piece together my issues. You've helped a lot in my personal development and I think I'm on a decent road to recovery."

Because of Trails, I...

- ...learned my own self-worth and learned to balance both worlds. I can now take care of myself and others while keeping a confident smile on my face.
- ...have many friends. I'm more social and I have more self-confidence.
- ...have met the most amazing people that have made me feel really comfortable in my own skin. I feel more comfortable opening up to people and being myself. I have also gotten used to being in the outdoors.
- ...have learned many skills that could be useful in life, for example: leadership skills, conflict resolution skills, mental health and wellness and more. I also feel more comfortable with new spaces and being at Trails.
- ...was able to become a leader and because of that I found new friends and I'm able to do a lot more in my community.
- ...can express how I feel without being judged or feeling alone because everyone had my back they all felt like family. I also enjoy outdoors and just being outside with nature it is an escape from reality.
- ...am able to communicate better with my peers as well as make deeper connections with my peers. I've changed my perspective on how I see things and I can truly say that I am more optimistic about things.