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# Sustainable Opportunities for Youth Leadership

Youth and community development through sustainable food system initiatives



## Growing successful youth through food leadership

SOYL works to cultivate healthy communities by supporting youth in the transition to a healthy and successful adulthood. Through the SOYL internship, secondary students develop self-sufficiency and employment skills and give back to society as they cultivate thriving school gardens.

Interns develop a sense of agency as they learn to produce their own food, develop and market a product, earn money, inspire others, and make a difference! SOYL engages and inspires youth to build resilient communities and bright futures.

## In the Words of a SOYL Graduate

*“SOYL has helped me believe in myself and my capabilities. I was never confident in myself and I always shied away from activities that I believed to be difficult. I have more confidence now, which has helped me become more involved in my community.”*

-Iris, 2014 SOYL Intern, grade 11 student

## 2014 SOYL Stats

- 29** youth participants
- 1200+** volunteer hours donated
- 36L** of pickles and jam produced
- 34ft<sup>2</sup>** of new garden space built
- 60** children connected with good food through youth-led workshops



2014 Impact Report Prepared for Coast Capital Savings



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## Food for Success

In SOYL, youth learn that food is a powerful tool. They learn that food can be a source of income, promote self-reliance, educate, create health, and build a better world.

**Building Life Skills**—SOYL youth develop the skills needed to be healthy, productive adults. They learn to transform bare earth into food, cook healthy foods for themselves and others, and even preserve foods to extend the harvest.

**Teaching Financial Literacy**—Beyond providing nourishment, growing and selling food provides SOYL Interns the opportunity to develop financial literacy: how to earn money, to budget and spend wisely, and to donate.

### Planting the Seed for Entrepreneurship—

Jessica, now grade 12, joined SOYL after grade 10 to help the environment and learn about Canadian culture. Having recently immigrated to Canada from Taiwan, Jessica was worried about fitting in with her Canadian peers and anxious about communicating in English. Her time in SOYL helped her to build community, confidence, and food literacy. Jessica, now the president of her school's garden club, used canning and marketing skills gained in SOYL to raise money for those in need. She organized a chutney workshop for her club and together they canned and marketed a beautiful product. They sold out, raising \$144 for the food bank!

## Jessica's Chutney

*"I am looking forward to pursuing a BSc degree in food nutrition and health, or a bachelor's degree in health science."* –Jessica, SOYL grad



1 orange, peeled & chopped  
 ¼ cup orange juice  
 12 oz fresh cranberries  
 1 ¾ cups sugar  
 1 large apple, peeled, cored,  
 & chopped  
 ½ cup chopped dried apricots  
 ½ tsp ground ginger

Combine all ingredients in a saucepan. Bring to a boil.

Simmer on low heat 5 minutes or until cranberries are bursting.

Fill four sterilized 250 mL jars, leaving 2cm headspace.

Place and gently tighten lids. Process in hot water bath 10 min.

## SOYL Builds Skills

In the garden, youth develop life skills, knowledge, and confidence needed to become financially independent adults.

### Real World Work Skills

From tall trellises for climbing beans to new raised garden beds, youth put engineering and carpentry into action. Starting with safety, youth learn the skills needed to build their own wooden structures. For many it's the first time they hold a drill or a saw. The end result is newfound confidence and pride.

### Pre-Employment Skills

Just as SOYL Interns learn to create a foundation of soil in which to grow strong plants, SOYL develops a foundation of positive work habits that build successful employees. Youth learn to be responsible for their actions, take initiative, and bring focus to their work.



### Growing Young Scientists

SOYL prepares students for scientific engagement. Interns gain hands-on experience with the botanical principals of asexual reproduction by starting seedlings from cuttings, become intrigued with soil science as they explore micro fauna in garden soils, and see chemistry in a new light as they discover nitrogen-fixing bacteria in plant roots.

### Careers in Education and Facilitation

SOYL Interns learn that knowledge is power. When youth teach what they learn, they deepen their understanding and increase their investment. In 2014, SOYL youth developed and facilitated workshops for children. The children learned about healthy food choices by harvesting and tasting crops, making fresh teas from the garden, and taking home seedlings. More than 50% of SOYL grads continue facilitation work.



## A Future for our Youth

### Brandon's Story

*“SOYL was one of the best decisions I made in life as it helped make my world much more broader and help me realize that I am much more capable than what I was before.” –Brandon, SOYL grad*



When Brandon, a grade 11 student, entered the SOYL Internship in 2013 he was shy and reserved. The summer of growing food and building community helped him feel accepted and confident to take on new challenges. During the following school year, Brandon boldly stepped up to become his school's Garden Club president. The garden grew and bloomed under his leadership, yielding healthy crops of tall corn, sweet squash, tender peas, juicy carrots, and abundant greens. The club produced so much food that they were able to donate crops to the school cafeteria to feed their peers. In 2014, Brandon joined the SOYL 2 Pilot program, committing to regular field and market shifts. He cultivated confidence to face personal challenge and now inspires his peers to continue learning by planning hands-on food workshops for the school.



### Winnie's Story

*“I really have SOYL to thank for bringing me to where I am today.” –Winnie, SOYL grad*

Winnie, a first year Applied Science student at the University of British Columbia, joined SOYL in 2012. That year, Winnie worked part time in food service to help support her family, but SOYL opened up a new possibility for her future career. Through SOYL, she found her passion for connecting her community with healthy and sustainable food. Winnie returned to SOYL in 2013 focusing on project management. Through her projects she led campers to grow and harvest healthy food, held a mini-conference for elementary students to learn to grow green initiatives at their schools, and closed the loop on her neighborhood food system by cycling local food waste to her schools' in-vessel composter. Winnie also began to volunteer at the Fresh Roots schoolyard market garden, striving to bring local food and food literacy into her school. Introduced to UBC's Faculty of Land and Food Systems (LFS) by SOYL staff, Winnie applied and was accepted to LFS in 2014. Winnie is preparing for a career that will make her part of the solution for a healthy environment.

# SOYL Mentorship Increases Employability

## A World of Careers

Ask a teen what she wants to do when she grows up and you'll likely get a shrug. Not so for SOYL graduates. In SOYL, youth gain exposure to diverse organizations, businesses, and careers. Interns form connections with researchers and professionals in business management, science, and engineering.



## Adults Who Care

SOYL Interns connect with a wide world of adults who offer support and advice as they transition to adulthood. Program staff members studying at UBC introduce youth to post-secondary educational opportunities. Community leaders inspire and mentor youth in their journey to independence and adulthood.

## Overcoming Personal Challenge

Through food production, youth discover new and surprising strengths and interests. They push themselves physically, toting wheelbarrows and digging holes. They challenge themselves mentally, mastering the theory of pruning tomatoes, or solving the mystery of wilting peas. Many break through old fears, finding awe, rather than terror, in industrious honeybees.



## Communication Skills

SOYL youth cultivate communication skills, applicable to nearly every profession. You can read their blog at [soylprogram.wordpress.com](http://soylprogram.wordpress.com). On June 21, 2014, SOYL Interns hit the airways, inspiring the public by sharing challenges, rewards, and wisdom they have gained from the garden on CFRO, Vancouver Co-op Radio!

## What Our Survey Says

In winter 2014-15, 29 former participants responded to our SOYL Grad Survey. The survey measured SOYL Interns' involvement in school gardens, leadership roles, continuing education in fields related to SOYL, and employment after their participation in SOYL.

### Employment

41% of respondents reported working a job in science, food production or preparation, sustainability, business, or facilitation after completing the SOYL internship.

### Leadership Roles

From volunteering with community organizations, to motivating their families to garden or compost, SOYL Interns are inspired to make a difference. After participating in SOYL, nearly 60% of youth assume leadership roles in their homes, school, and communities. Many reported an increase in engagement:

- 25% of youth – ↑ Leadership at School
- 14% of youth – ↑ Leadership in Community
- 7% of youth – ↑ Leadership in the Home

### Involvement in School Gardens

86% of SOYL grads are involved in school gardens or environmental clubs. 50% of Interns increased their level of participation in garden or environmental clubs, with more than a quarter taking on leadership roles with their clubs after participating in the Internship.

### Continuing Education

Interns enjoy the challenges and successes they face in SOYL and are motivated to continue the challenge. After SOYL, they pursue informal and formal learning opportunities in:

- Science 79%
- Food production 38%
- Food preparation 48%
- Environment 38%
- Marketing/Business 38%
- Facilitation/Teaching 34%

*SOYL was a very important part of my personal development toward becoming an active member of the community. It was my own personal motivations and beliefs surrounding sustainability that brought me to SOYL, but it was SOYL that taught me how to achieve goals from these passions that will benefit future generations. SOYL has given me a drive to become a functional part of my community by collaborating with others that share my interests to make positive changes, wherever I may find myself.*



-Kiera, 2010 SOYL Intern and Simon Fraser University student in Molecular Biology and Biochemistry

## Next Steps for the Next Generation

SOYL accompanies youth through their transition to adulthood

The **2014 SOYL Summer 1 Internship** enrolled 12\* new youth participants. SOYL participants volunteered over 1000 hours. Some of their significant accomplishments include:

- Building financial literacy skills by selling \$300 of their produce at two market stands
- Developing labour market skills by constructing a new raised garden bed and a wooden tomato trellis at Churchill and Van Tech Secondary School, respectively
- Reaping the fruits of hard work through abundant fall harvests for Britannia, Churchill, Thompson, and Van Tech Secondary School cafeterias
- Increasing confidence by facilitating three unique “farm to fork” workshops for over 60 children

The **SOYL School Year Program** united 12 SOYL youth throughout the year for seasonal workshops related to food, gardens, and leadership. Workshops included:

- *Budgeting and seasonal cooking*: preparing a fall meal with farmers market ingredients
- *Grant-writing*: drafting grant applications fund school garden projects
- *Radio broadcasting*: compelling story-telling, creating *SOYL for the SOUL* radio show.
- *Fermentation* (upcoming): preparing fermented foods, exploring health benefits

\*This number was lower than originally planned due to teacher job action and school closures that took place at the end of the 2013-14 school year.

The **2014 SOYL Summer 2 Pilot Program** engaged 5 returning youth in developing mastery of garden and market management, with mentorship from Fresh Roots. Graduates of the 2012 and 2013 SOYL Summer 1 Internship learned production scale agricultural techniques in the schoolyard market gardens at Vancouver Technical Secondary, David Thompson Secondary, and Queen Alexandra Elementary Schools. In addition, the youth refined customer service skills, money-handling skills, and quality control by preparing for and running weekly farmers markets.



# Thank you!

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