



Hope Blooms Youth Social Entrepreneurial Ventures Inc Years 1 & 2 (2024-2026) Report

Written by Students Commission of Canada, March 2026



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BACKGROUND CONTEXT

Hope Blooms Youth Social Entrepreneurial Ventures Inc (Hope Blooms) is a youth-led social enterprise based in North End Halifax, Nova Scotia, that empowers young people to create lasting change in their community through food, education, and social innovation. The organization began as a small community garden in public housing, with just 15 young participants. From those early days, Hope Blooms has grown into a powerful model of youth empowerment and community transformation.

What started as a garden soon led to the youth selling their produce at the local farmers' market. Their initiative gained national attention when a group of participants pitched their salad dressings on Dragon's Den – a Canadian television show where entrepreneurs seek investment from business leaders. Some of those youth now work full-time with the organization, continuing the cycle of mentorship and leadership.

Hope Blooms creates lasting impact through initiatives rooted in experiential learning, with a focus on food security, education, social inclusion, and disrupting cycles of poverty. Today, the organization includes over 150 youth, 10,000 square feet of organic gardens, an award-winning off-the-grid greenhouse designed by one of the youth, and a small commercial kitchen that hosts culinary training and community events.

Their growing social enterprise produces five products, with all proceeds going toward post-secondary scholarships for graduating youth. Young people often join the organization as early as age five, and after two years of involvement, they can begin participating in the social enterprise. Many alumni later return to Hope Blooms to mentor the next generation.

Guided by the belief that changing perspectives can change outcomes, Hope Blooms continues to inspire, empower, and cultivate meaningful change for individuals, families, and the wider community.

In 2024, Hope Blooms received a two-year grant from Catapult Canada of the Rideau Hall Foundation to support its mission. Catapult Canada is a national platform dedicated to increasing equitable access to learning opportunities for youth across Canada. Specifically, Catapult Canada invests in community-based organizations committed to improving educational outcomes for youth through innovative approaches.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Catapult funds have been used to support Green Labs, one of the many programs at Hope Blooms. Launched in March 2024, Green Labs is a year-long, hands-on STEM education initiative designed to engage children and youth in environmental learning, renewable energy exploration, and holistic health education. Delivered primarily in outdoor, experiential settings, Green Labs is a key part of the organization's broader mission to empower young people as leaders of positive change, particularly in the face of climate and energy challenges.

Green Labs operates through a tiered, age-responsive model that offers developmentally appropriate learning and leadership opportunities across three age groups. Since its launch, the program has reached more than 100 youth annually.

Age group	Number of participants in Year 1 (2024-2025)	Number of participants in Year 2 (2025-2026)
Youngest age group (ages 5-7)	20-25	19
Middle age group (ages 8-12)	30-35	57
Oldest age group (ages 15-17)	15-20	25

Participants in the youngest age group are introduced to environmental stewardship through hands-on learning in the community garden, where they learn the basics of growing food and caring for the environment.

Youth in the middle age group engage more deeply in STEM-focused Green Labs workshops alongside other Hope Blooms programs such as culinary arts and music. Active year-round, these youth gain deeper exposure to science and environmental learning through topics such as solar and wind power, aquaponics, composting, and biology-based activities such as vermiculture. In the summer, they also serve as junior leaders, supporting children in the youngest age group and receiving an honorarium for their leadership and contributions.

Youth in the oldest age group participate primarily in the spring, when they receive technical training in clean energy and environmental science. With support from environmental science students at Dalhousie University, they also develop facilitation skills and take on the role of educators - teaching youth in the middle age group as part of the Green Labs project. These older participants serve as mentors and role models, building both subject knowledge and leadership capacity through hands-on teaching and collaboration.

Participation in Green Labs shifts seasonally:

- Spring focuses on technical and facilitation training for the oldest age group, preparing them to lead learning sessions for the middle age group
- Summer sees peak participation, with 70–100 youth from all three age groups involved in expanded outdoor programming
- Fall and winter involve a core group of approximately 20 youth aged 8–12 (the middle age group) who participate year-round to deepen their learning and prepare for leadership, returning as junior leaders each summer.

In **Year 2** specifically, **two additional components** have been added to enrich the Green Labs project, as outlined below.

In-school “Green Labs on the Go” Sub-Program

Green Labs on the Go is a five-session, in-school environmental STEM program delivered to Grade 4 classrooms (cohorts of approximately 25 students) at Joseph Howe School. The project is a new addition to the Hope Blooms curriculum, piloted from September to December 2025 and continuing from February to May 2026 with a new cohort of students. Each 1.5-hour workshop brings hands-on science activities, creative exploration and tangible classroom projects that teachers can continue using throughout the year. Grounded in Hope Blooms’ values of youth empowerment, inclusion, innovation and sustainability, the program strengthens environmental literacy while helping students, particularly those underrepresented in STEM, build confidence, agency and a deeper connection to environmental learning.

Workshop Curriculum Overview:

1. Plant Power Lab: Students plant seeds, design simple experiments and observe biodiversity through a living classroom project.
2. Waste Warriors & Decomposers: Students construct a classroom vermicomposter and explore how decomposers reduce food waste.
3. Light Up the Future & Renewable Energy: Students assemble solar lanterns to learn about renewable energy and foundational engineering concepts.
4. Eco-Inventors Challenge: Students design environmental inventions, build prototypes, create posters and present their solutions.
5. Celebration Showcase: Students present their projects, reflect on their learning and celebrate their achievements as emerging environmental leaders.

Green Labs on the Go expands equitable access to sustainable STEM learning by embedding hands-on, culturally inclusive, youth-led experiences directly into local public schools in the North End Halifax community. Through ongoing collaboration with local school boards, the program contributes to a more holistic educational ecosystem - one that strengthens opportunities and long-term success for marginalized youth.

“The Power of Green” Collaborative Book Project

In Year 2, the Green Labs Collaborative Book Project marks a significant step forward in the growth and depth of the program, showcasing what students learn and how they see themselves as leaders in environmental change. Younger participants worked closely with youth mentors and program leaders to transform a year of hands-on science learning into an original children’s book, which is fully written, illustrated and conceptualized by the youth themselves.

Each student is represented as both a character and contributor, with their names included in the book and their personal reflections featured in response to the question *“What is your dream future for our Earth?”* This ownership approach emphasizes representation, diversity and the importance of seeing marginalized youth as creators and innovators within STEM fields.

The collaborative process strengthens scientific understanding, creativity, confidence and peer mentorship as students refine environmental concepts, shape the storyline and illustrate their shared experiences.

The book project culminated in a community book launch attended by families, friends, teachers and local partners, where each youth proudly read their page aloud. This celebration honors their achievements and creates a lasting educational resource for schools and community organizations, demonstrating the expanding impact and youth leadership emerging from the Green Labs project.

Hope Blooms intends to repeat and expand Green Labs annually. By blending science, sustainability and community connection in a fun, hands-on environment, Green Labs helps youth reimagine their relationship with education, the environment and their own power to lead change.



THIS REPORT

This report contains highlights of the independent evaluation conducted by the Students Commission of Canada (SCC) on the specific results of the Green Labs project across Years 1 and 2 (2024-2026). Due to time constraints, only the main component of the Green Labs project was evaluated; the additional components introduced in Year 2 were not included in this evaluation.

Among the three participating age groups, the middle and oldest age groups were invited to respond to surveys more consistently. The youngest age group was excluded from survey data collection in Year 1, as their intensive garden programming during the summer made it challenging to identify appropriate survey moments. Creative methods were employed in Year 2 to capture the voices of the youngest age group as well.

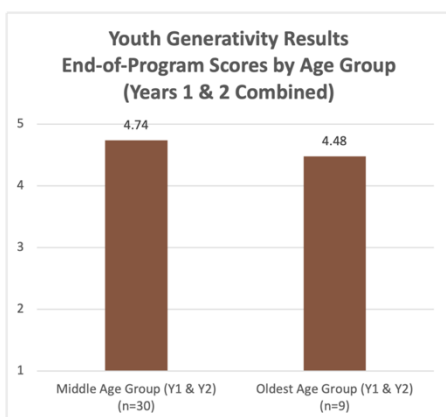
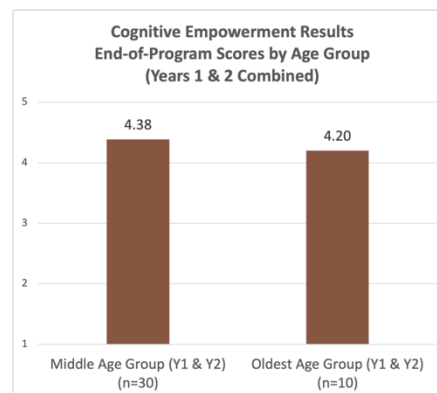
A mixture of SCC surveys and a customized survey developed by Green Labs were used, as outlined below.

Respondents	Year	Data collection timepoint	Survey
Middle and oldest age groups	1	End of program	Addressing Social Issues - Cognitive Empowerment (from SCC)
	2	Beginning of program & end of program	
Middle and oldest age groups	1	End of program	Preparing to Lead - Youth Generativity (from SCC)
	2	Beginning of program & end of program	
Oldest age group	1	End of program	Preparing to Lead - Leadership Engagement (from SCC)
	2	Beginning of program & end of program	
Youngest and middle age groups	2	End of program	Garden Learning and Program Experience (from Green Labs)

HIGHLIGHTS

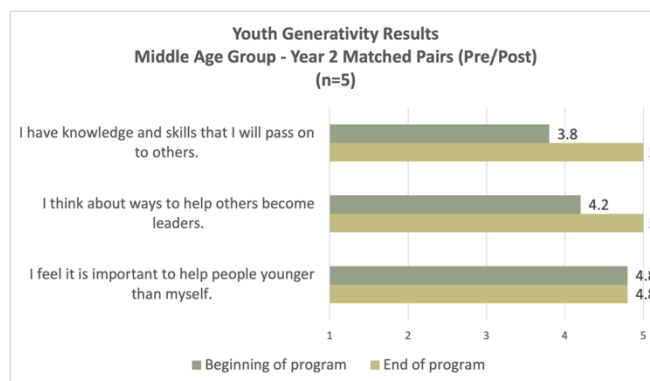
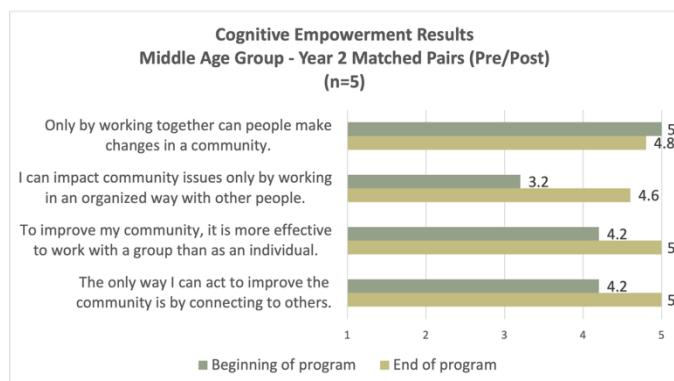
Survey findings suggested that Green Labs was building a strong foundation for youth leadership through its tiered model of engagement and mentorship.

Youth responses from the Addressing Social Issues survey indicated **cognitive empowerment related to community action**. Specifically, cognitive empowerment refers to youth's understandings of social power in communities and how to make change. Respondents from the middle and oldest age groups reported high agreement that improving their community requires working with others, with average scores above 4 on a 5-point scale. These responses suggested that youth developed an appreciation for collaboration and collective action.



Findings from the Preparing to Lead survey with the middle and oldest age group showed strong agreement with statements about **skill-building, decision-making and supporting younger peers (youth generativity)** in the programming space. Youth generativity refers to having “concern for future generations as a legacy of the self” (Lawford & Ramey, 2015). While overall experiences were positive, responses also pointed to opportunities to continue strengthening mutual trust between youth and adults.

Notably, in Year 2, five matched pairs of respondents were identified in the middle age group at the beginning-of-program and end-of-program timepoints. Their average scores tended to increase from the beginning to the end of the program on most items related to **youth generativity and collective action** with the largest increases related to learning that they can impact community issues in collaboration with others, and gaining knowledge and skills to pass on. While the sample size was small and no statistical comparisons were conducted, this trend could suggest that program participation strengthened youth's sense of responsibility to support others and work collaboratively.



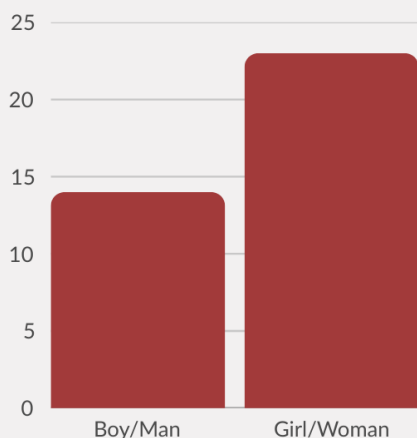
A brief reflection activity with participants from the youngest and middle age groups also showed positive responses related to **garden learning, food habits and program belonging**. Participants responded to a series of yes/no questions.

Category	% of youth responding “Yes” (n=34)
Overall Sense of Belonging	88.2%
Garden Learning	76.5%
Food Habits	92.6%

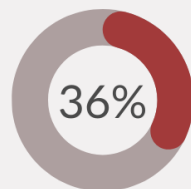
The following sections review the survey findings in more detail, with larger images of the graphs, and a Discussion and Conclusion section.

SCC SURVEY RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS – YEARS 1 & 2 COMBINED (2024-2026)

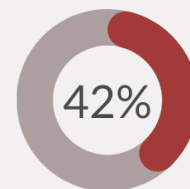
Gender



Born in a country other than Canada



Parents born in a country other than Canada



How do you identify (Select all that apply)



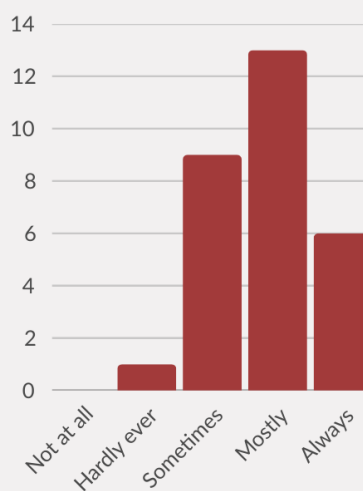
Indigenous 4.4 %
A person of colour 26.7 %
Black 44.4 %
White 2.2 %
Not sure 2.2 %



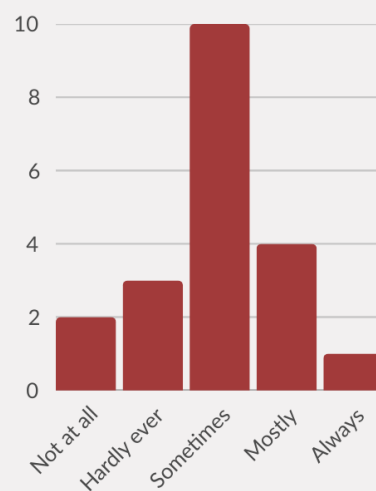
Language Spoken at Home (Select all that apply)

English 37.8 %
French 2.2 %
Arabic 11.1 %
Bangla/Bengali 6.7 %
Filipino/Tagalog 2.2 %
Hindi 4.4 %
Somali 2.2 %
Spanish 4.4 %

Do you have enough money to meet your basic needs?



Do you have enough money to do the fun things you'd like to do?



Cultural and Racial Groups (Select all that apply)

East African 4.4 %
West African 15.6 %
Arab 11.1 %
Caribbean 4.4 %
Filipino 2.2 %
First Nations 4.4 %
Latin American 4.4 %
South Asian 13.3 %
Southeast Asian 4.4 %
North American 15.6 %
Eastern European 2.2 %

45 out of approximately 127 invited participants from the middle and oldest age groups completed the demographics surveys designed by the Students Commission of Canada



COGNITIVE EMPOWERMENT IN ADDRESSING SOCIAL ISSUES

The Cognitive Empowerment section in Addressing Social Issues survey explored youth's understandings of social power in communities and how to make change. There were four questions:

1. *Only by working together can people make changes in a community.*
2. *I can impact community issues only by working in an organized way with other people.*
3. *To improve my community, it is more effective to work with a group than as an individual.*
4. *The only way I can act to improve the community is by connecting to others.*

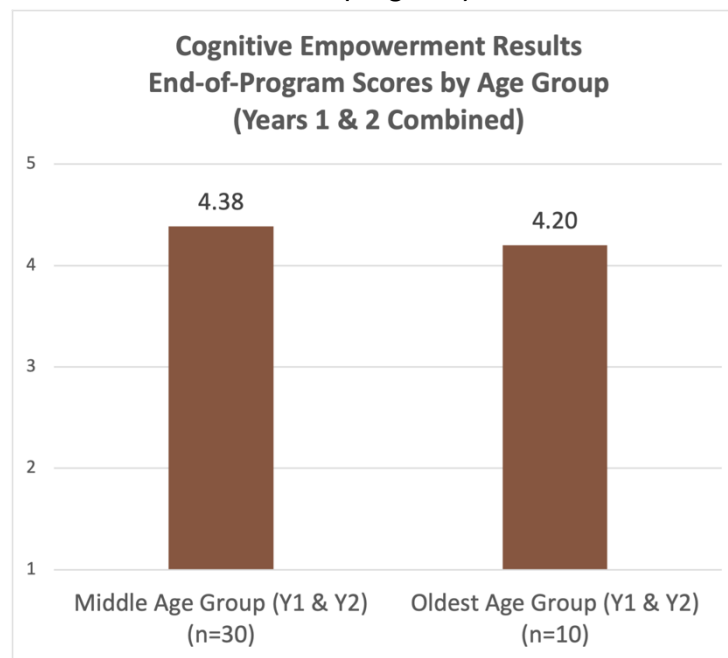
Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).

In Year 1, approximately 30 Green Labs participants from the middle age group and 15 from the oldest age group were invited to complete the survey at the end of the program in early December 2024.

In Year 2, a different group of participants was invited to complete the same survey at two points: 1) at the beginning of the program in August 2025 and 2) at the end of program in December 2025. 57 participants from the middle age group and 25 from the oldest age group were invited to participate.

End-of-Program Scores by Age Group (Years 1 & 2 Combined)

The graph below compares the end-of-program Cognitive Empowerment results across age groups using combined data from both program years.

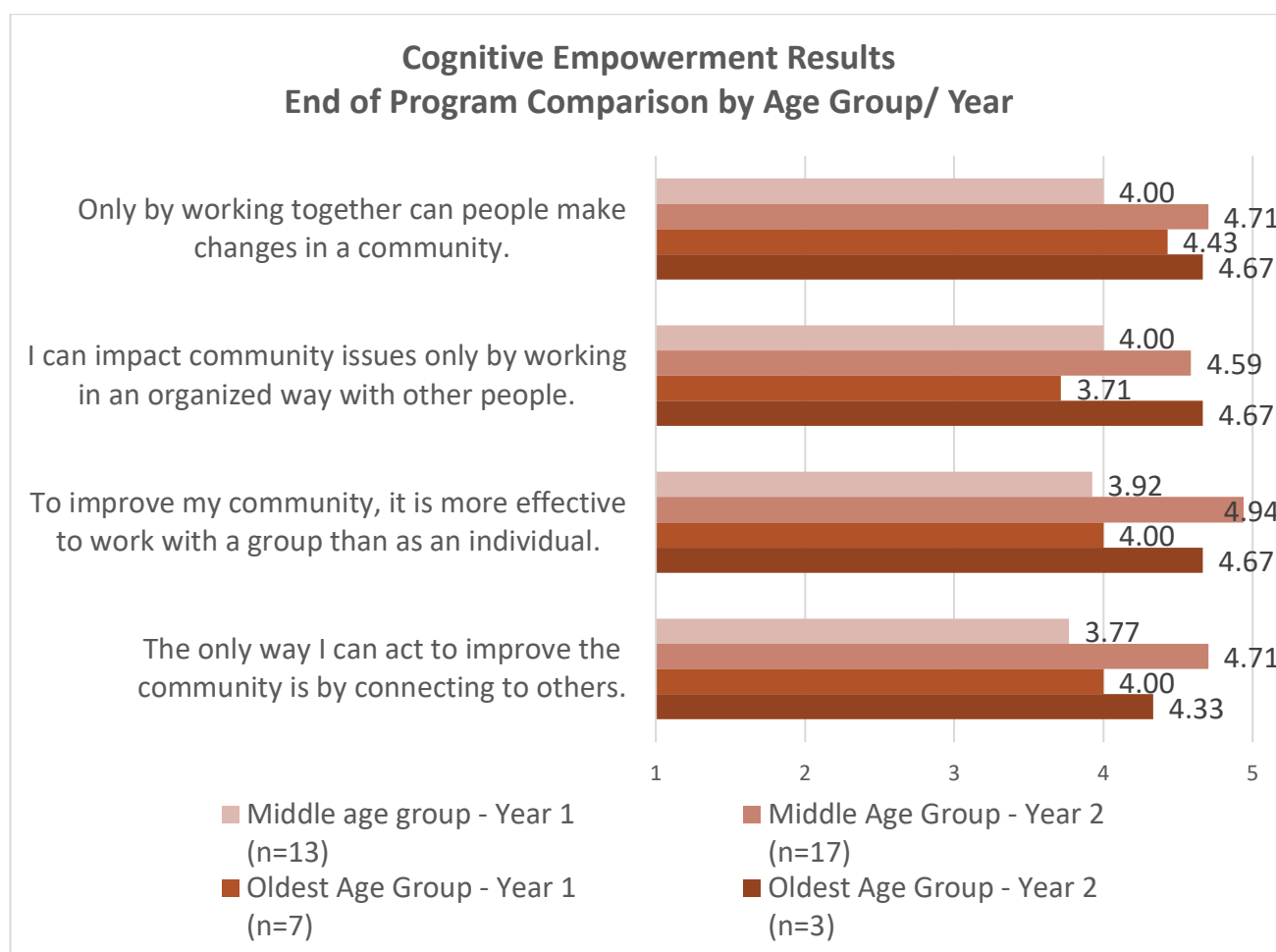


Takeaways:

- Both age groups scored highly with overall average scores above 4 on a 5-point scale.
- The oldest age group reported the highest average score of 4.5 for the item “Only by working together can people make changes in a community”.
- The middle age group reported the highest average score of 4.5 for the item “To improve my community, it is more effective to work with a group than as an individual”.
- For both age groups, the lowest average score was reported for the item “The only way I can act to improve the community is by connecting to others” (Middle: 4.30; Oldest: 4.10), though the item was still highly rated overall.

End-of-Program Scores by Age Group/ Year

Further breaking down the responses by age group and year, the graph below compares end-of-program Cognitive Empowerment results for the middle age group in Year 1 and Year 2, and the oldest age group in Year 1 and Year 2.

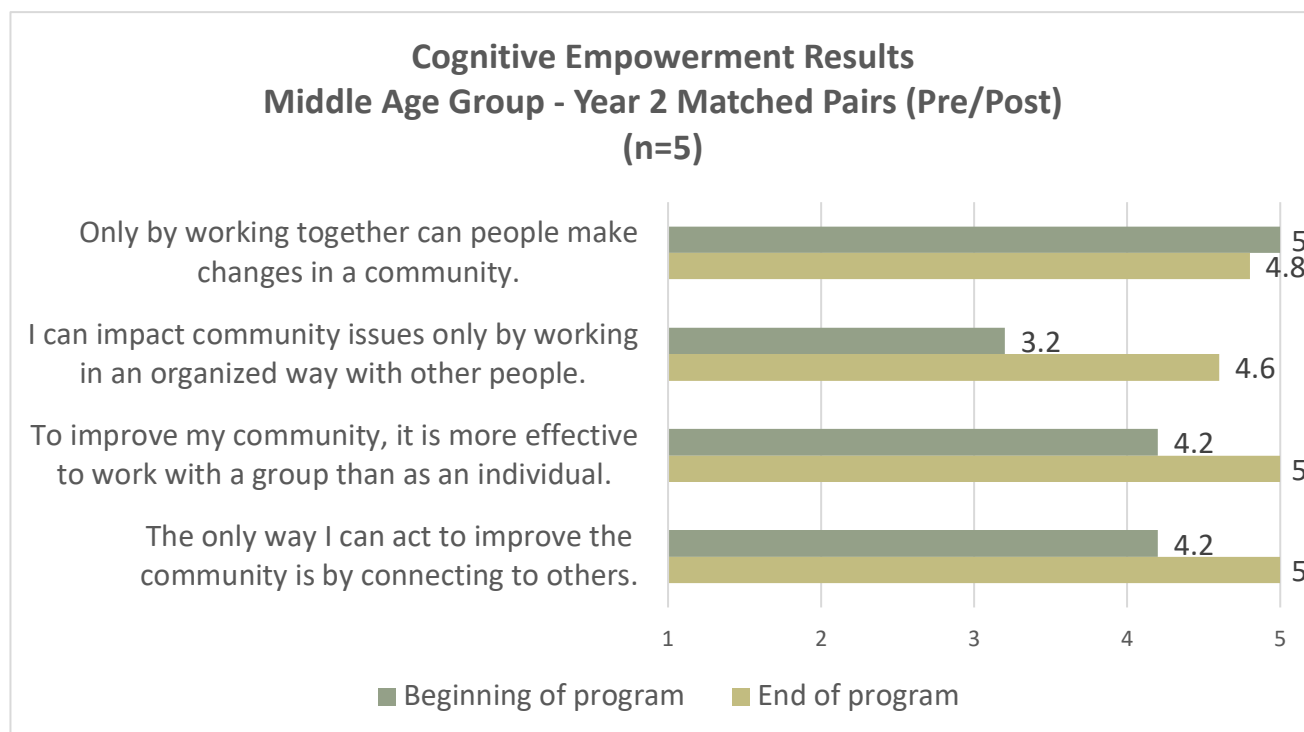


Takeaways:

- For the middle age group, average scores tended to be higher in Year 2 across all four items when compared to Year 1. Although no statistical comparisons were conducted, this could indicate higher levels of agreement with the survey statements among Year 2 respondents.
- The highest score observed in the graph was 4.94 for the item *“To improve my community, it is more effective to work with a group than as an individual”* among middle age group respondents in Year 2.
- Scores for the oldest age group in Year 1 were generally comparable to those of the middle age group, falling between the middle age group’s Year 1 and Year 2 scores on three of the four items.
- The sample size for the oldest age group in Year 2 was very small ($n = 3$). Findings should therefore be interpreted with caution and are not sufficient to establish trends over time or to compare with findings from other groups in the graph. However, matched pairs were identified and are discussed further in the next section.
- Across all groups, the item *“Only by working together can people make changes in a community”* received the highest or among the highest average scores, suggesting that respondents shared a belief in the importance of collective action in addressing community issues.
- Overall, cognitive empowerment scores were consistently high, suggesting that Green Labs participants reported a strong sense of agency through group-based approaches.

Middle Age Group - Year 2 Matched Pairs (Pre/Post)

In Year 2, a beginning-of-program survey was added to allow for comparison of participants' perspectives before and after the program. Five matched pairs from the middle age group were identified for this analysis. Although the number of matched pairs was small relative to the 57 participants invited in Year 2 and no statistical comparisons were conducted, the results still provided useful insights into trending changes over the course of the program.



Takeaways:

- Among the five participants, average scores at the end of the program tended to be higher than at the beginning of the program.
- The item “*Only by working together can people make changes in a community*” remained highly rated. Given the small sample size, this difference should be interpreted with caution.
- The largest increase was observed for the item “*I can impact community issues only by working in an organized way with other people*”, which increased from 3.2 at the beginning of the program to 4.6 at the end.
- End-of-program scores were very high across all items, ranging from 4.6 to 5.0 on the 5-point scale.
- Overall, the matched-pair results suggest that participants reported stronger agreement with statements related to collective action and community engagement by the end of the program.

PREPARING TO LEAD

Different sections of a survey called Preparing to Lead were used. The full survey examines how well youth are equipped with educational experiences and attitudes to take on leadership roles. It evaluates three key areas: youth leadership engagement opportunities, lifelong learning practices, and attitudes toward helping others. Responses are measured on a five-point Likert Scale from 1 (Strongly disagree/ Not at all) to 5 (Strongly agree/ Completely).

YOUTH GENERATIVITY

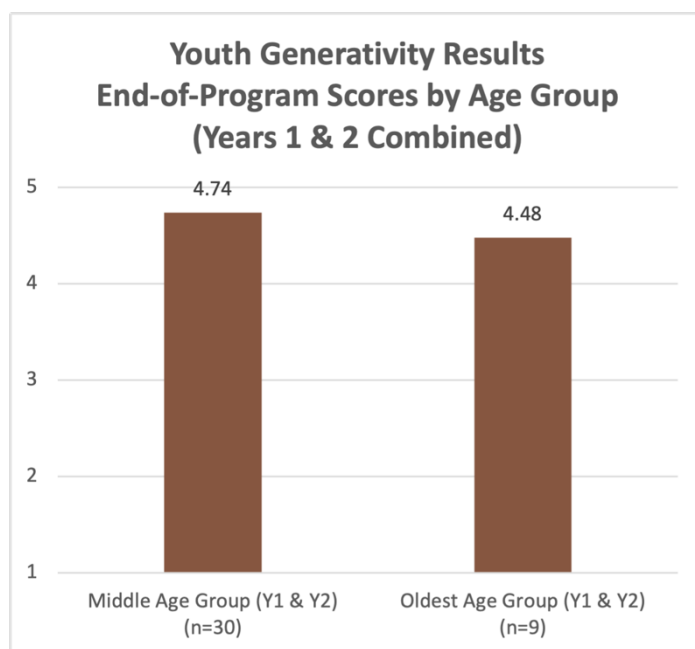
For this evaluation, the section related to youth generativity was extracted from the full survey and used to assess the experiences of Green Labs participants in the middle and oldest age groups. There were three questions:

1. *I have knowledge and skills that I will pass on to others.*
2. *I think about ways to help others become leaders.*
3. *I feel it is important to help people younger than myself.*

In Year 1, approximately 30 Green Labs participants from the middle age group and 15 from the oldest age group were invited to complete the survey at the end of the program in early December 2024.

In Year 2, a different group of participants was invited to complete the same survey at two points: 1) at the beginning of the program in August 2025 and 2) at the end of program in December 2025. 57 participants from the middle age group and 25 from the oldest age group were invited to participate.

End-of-Program Scores by Age Group (Years 1 & 2 Combined)

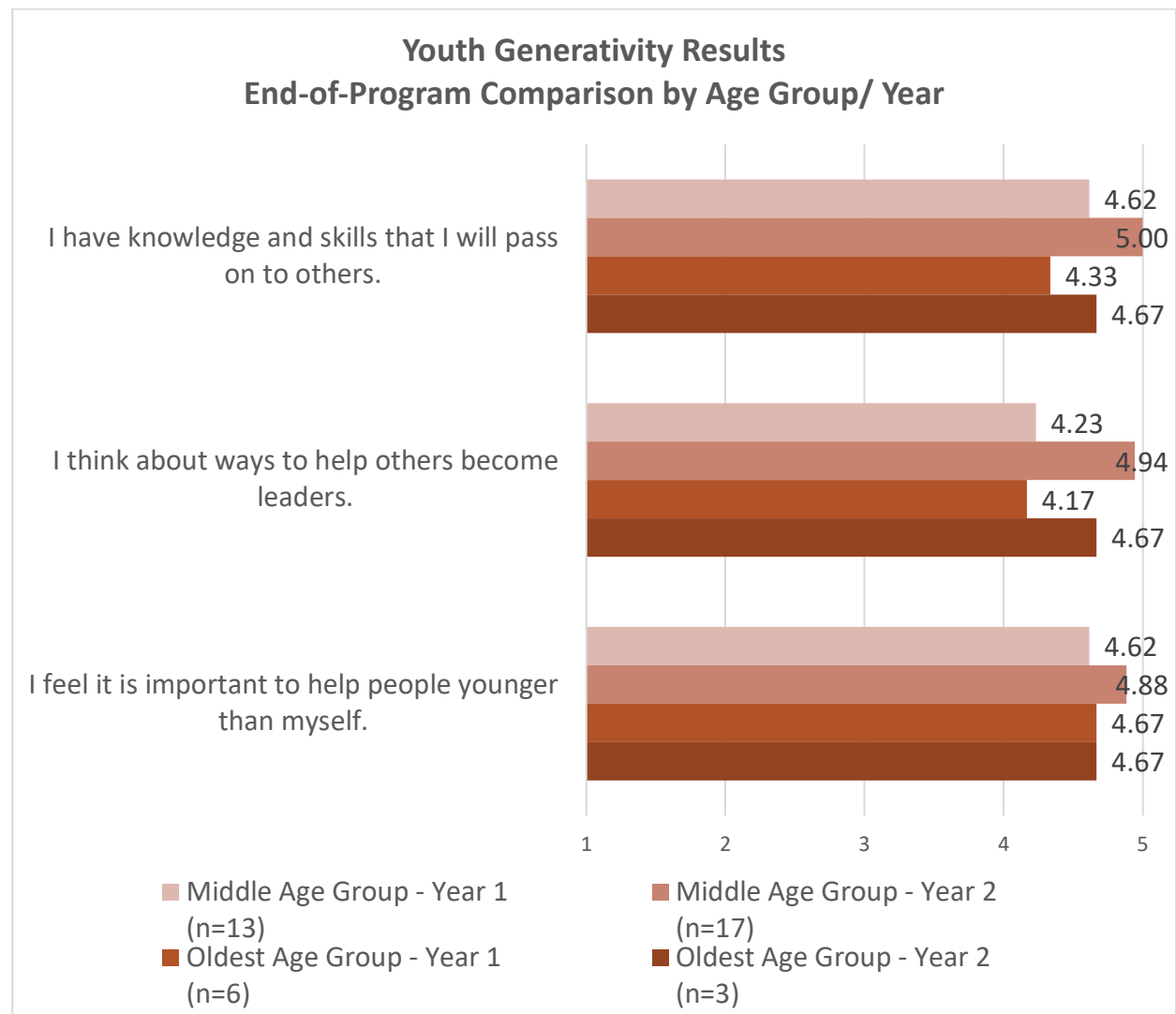


Takeaways:

- Both age groups reported high scores across all items, with average scores above 4 on the 5-point scale.
- Among the middle age group, the item “*I have knowledge and skills that I will pass on to others*” received the highest average score (4.83).
- Among the oldest age group, the item “*I feel it is important to help people younger than myself*” received the highest average score (4.67).
- The item “*I think about ways to help others become leaders*” received the lowest average scores across both age groups (Middle: 4.63; Oldest; 4.33), though the item was still highly rated overall.
- Taken together, these findings suggested that participants showed a high degree of generativity, which refers to having “concern for future generations as a legacy of the self” (Lawford & Ramey, 2015).

End-of-Program Comparison by Age Group/ Year

Further breaking down the responses by age group and year, the graph below compares end-of-program Youth Generativity results for the middle age group in Year 1 and Year 2, and the oldest age group in Year 1 and Year 2.



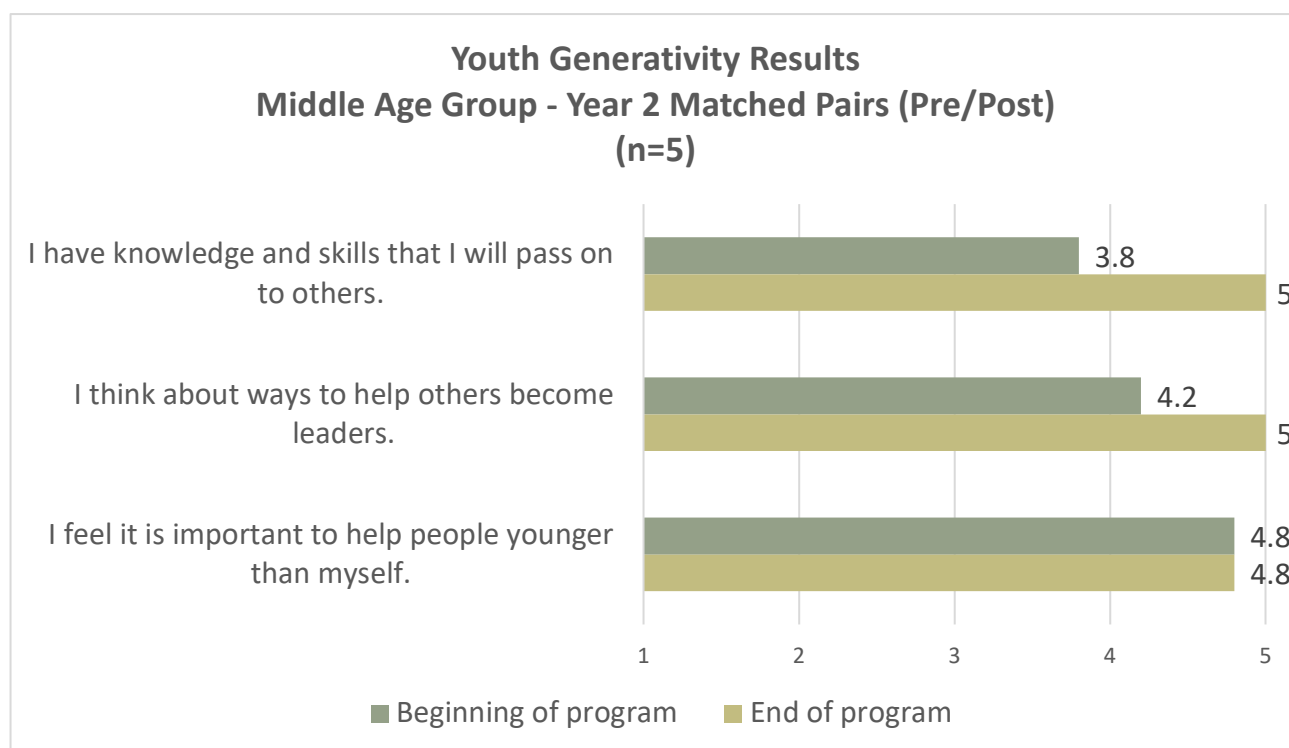
Takeaways:

- For the middle age group, average scores tended to be higher in Year 2 across all three items when compared to Year 1.
- The highest score observed in the graph was 5.0 for the item “*I have knowledge and skills that I will pass on to others*” among middle age group respondents in Year 2.
- The item “*I feel it is important to help people younger than myself*” received consistently high scores across all respondent groups, implying a strong shared sense of responsibility to support younger peers.

- The sample size for the oldest age group in Year 2 was very small ($n = 3$). Findings should therefore be interpreted with caution and are not sufficient to establish trends over time or to compare with findings from other groups in the graph. However, matched pairs were identified and are discussed further in the next section.
- The overall results suggested that Green Labs contributed to nurturing a culture of mentorship, knowledge-sharing, and leadership development among youth participants.

Middle Age Group - Year 2 Matched Pairs (Pre/Post)

In Year 2, a beginning-of-program survey was added to allow for comparison of participants' perspectives before and after the program. Five matched pairs from the middle age group were identified for this analysis. Although the number of matched pairs was small relative to the 57 participants invited in Year 2 and no statistical comparisons were conducted, the results still provided useful insights into changes over the course of the program.



Takeaways:

- Among the five participants, average scores increased from the beginning to the end of the program for two of the three survey items, with both items reaching the maximum score of 5.0 at the end of the program.
- The largest increase was observed for the item “*I have knowledge and skills that I will pass on to others*”, which increased from 3.8 at the beginning of the program to 5.0 at the end.

- Overall, the matched-pair results suggested that participants reported strong agreement with statements related to youth generativity, showing that the environment fostered by Green Labs' tiered mentoring design may play a meaningful role in shaping how youth perceive and engage in interactions with younger peers.

LEADERSHIP ENGAGEMENT

The oldest age group was invited to complete an additional section of the full Preparing to Lead survey focused on leadership engagement opportunities. The 14 statements in this section assess how often youth are involved in decision-making, supported by adults, and given opportunities to lead, learn independently, and contribute to group dynamics.

In Year 1, 15 participants from the oldest age group were invited to complete the survey at the end of the program in early December 2024.

In Year 2, a different group of 25 participants from the oldest age group were invited to complete the same survey at the end of the program in December 2025.

Since there were fewer than five responses in Year 2, results from both years are combined to provide a general overview.

Statement	Average Score (n=9)
Overall average	3.97
I am asked for input about what activities I would like to do before activities are planned.	3.67
Adults do not make negative assumptions about me.	2.78
Adults talk to me in ways that I can understand and am comfortable with.	4.33
I am encouraged to discuss things and ask questions of others.	4.11
I am encouraged and supported to solve problems in new ways.	3.89
I am learning new skills.	4.67
I feel like adults and peers are learning from me.	3.67
I participate in the decisions about group activities.	4.11
I participate in setting group rules and guidelines.	3.78

If youth want to do an activity that for some reason isn't appropriate, we are told right away and given an explanation of the reasons why.	4.22
I have opportunities to learn on my own (e.g. adults start a discussion with me about issues so that I can figure it out on my own rather than telling me what to do).	3.89
I make sure that all group members have a say in laying out our purposes, expectations, motivations and roles.	4.44
I am involved in discussing issues of respect, conflict, or discipline.	4.11
Adults support me without being condescending or assuming that I need or want their help.	3.89

Takeaways:

- Overall, responses suggested that youth experienced generally supportive leadership and engagement in the program space, with an overall average score of 3.97 on the 5-point scale.
- The item “*I am learning new skills*” received the highest average score (4.67), indicating the strongest agreement among respondents that they were learning and developing new skills, which may be leaderships skills and gardening skills.
- Several items related to youth voice and participation in group processes, such as participating in decisions about activities (4.11), ensuring group members have a say in roles and expectations (4.44), and feeling adults and peers are learning from oneself (3.67), also received moderately to highly positive scores.
- While responses suggested a generally supportive adult–youth dynamic, the item “*Adults do not make negative assumptions about me*” received the lowest average score (2.78), suggesting that this may be a potential area for improvement. Yet, it is worth noting that respondents may have also been referencing interactions with adults outside of the program, rather than program staff, when completing the survey.
- As these results were based on a small number of responses (n = 9 across both years), they should be interpreted with caution and viewed as a snapshot of participant experiences rather than definitive conclusions.

GARDEN LEARNING & PROGRAM EXPERIENCE

In addition to the SCC surveys analyzed above, Green Labs project staff facilitated a brief reflection activity with youth participants from the youngest and middle age groups in August 2025 to gather feedback on their experiences in Green Labs that summer.

A total of 34 participants took part, representing all youth present at the time. Participants responded to a series of yes/no questions by raising their hands while keeping their eyes closed, allowing them to share their responses comfortably in a group setting while maintaining privacy from their peers. This interactive approach enabled younger youth to provide feedback quickly without the use of written surveys. The questions focused on youth outcomes related to garden learning, food habits, and their overall sense of belonging and enjoyment within the program.

Category	Question	% of youth responding "Yes" (n=34)
Overall Sense of Belonging	When you come to Hope Blooms do you often feel happy and proud of yourself?	88.2%
	Do you feel like you belong here and are always welcome here?	88.2%
Garden Learning	Have you tried a new fruit or vegetable as a result of this program?	73.5%
	Have you learned new skills here at Hope Blooms in gardening, science and food?	91.2%
	Do you think you could/would know how to grow a plant at home because of this program?	64.7%
Food Habits	Do you feel like this program has helped you eat more healthy fruits and vegetables?	94.1%
	Have you shared food from the garden with your families?	91.2%

Takeaways:

- Respondents reported the strongest agreement with statements related to food habits developed through participation in the program, with both questions in the Food Habits category receiving over 90% "Yes" responses.

- The Overall Sense of Belonging category also received high levels of agreement, with 88.2% of participants indicating that they felt happy and proud when they came to Hope Blooms and had a strong sense of belonging.
- In the Garden Learning category, most respondents reported learning new skills in gardening, science, and food (91.2%) and trying new fruits or vegetables as a result of the program (73.5%). However, fewer participants indicated that they would know how to grow a plant at home (64.7%), suggesting that continued opportunities for hands-on practice may further strengthen confidence in applying these skills independently.
- Overall, respondents reported positive program experiences, along with strong perceived learning related to garden knowledge and healthy food habits developed through the program.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Overall, the perspectives collected from youth across all three age groups suggested that participants had positive experiences in the Green Labs project. Despite the different roles and responsibilities assigned to each age group, responses indicated that youth at various stages of the program gained meaningful experiences from their participation, whether through learning new environmental knowledge, developing leadership awareness, feeling connected to the program community, or sharing a sense of purpose in contributing to environmental stewardship through collective action.

Across the surveys, the middle and oldest age groups were invited to participate in data collection more consistently. A noticeable pattern emerged in which the middle age group showed both higher survey participation and slightly higher scores across surveys, with SCC survey response rates of 34% for the middle age group compared to 25% for the oldest age group. This pattern may have been connected to the design of the program's tiered mentorship model. A core group of middle age group participants remained involved throughout the year, learning foundational knowledge from the oldest age group during the fall and winter to prepare for leadership roles and later returning in the summer as junior leaders to support younger participants. This continuous engagement may have contributed to higher survey response rates and more positive reflections on their experiences.

Looking across the different findings, emerging themes of inclusiveness and peer mentorship was evident. Youth in the youngest and middle age groups reported feeling welcomed and proud of their participation in the program, while youth in the middle and oldest age groups expressed strong agreement with statements related to collective action and supporting others. Notably, among the matched pairs of respondents identified in the middle age group in Year 2, average scores generally increased between the beginning-of-program and end-of-program timepoints on items related to youth generativity and attitudes toward collective action. This shift may reflect the collaborative and tiered mentorship learning environment of Green Labs, where youth regularly worked with peers across age groups and had opportunities to both learn from older participants and support younger ones. Such experiences may have strengthened participants' appreciation for inclusive group-based approaches, peer mentorship and collective action. Together with the youngest group's self-reported learning in garden knowledge and healthy food habits through the tiered mentorship structure, these findings further illustrated how inclusive, cross-age learning environments and peer mentorship were embedded across the program.

While these results should be interpreted with caution due to varying response rates and relatively smaller sample sizes in some analyses, they nevertheless provided useful insight into participant experiences.

The hands-on and outdoor nature of the program sometimes made it challenging for project staff to identify appropriate moments for administering surveys. However, the 100% participation rate in the reflection activity with the youngest and middle age groups showed that more creative approaches to data collection may be effective in engaging youth participants in the future.

Overall, the evaluation conducted in Years 1 and 2 (2024-2026) suggested that Green Labs supported youth in developing leadership awareness, a sense of belonging within the program community, as well as environmental knowledge and skills through hands-on learning and mentorship opportunities.

REFERENCES

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