

Rotary Youth Leadership Awards (RYLA) Camp, Corpus Christi, Texas

RYLA in Corpus Christi, Texas is a multi-level, 3-day annual leadership camp held each February organized by the Rotary Club of Corpus Christi for Rotary District 5930. During RYLA, campers participate in more than 25 hours of hands-on leadership training. Throughout the process these youth explore their abilities and values and discover how to work with others. The RYLA program focuses on team-based problem solving and decision making. Youth learn about the DISC personality profiles to recognize and utilize individual strengths and communication styles within a team. Trailblazers (second year campers) are able to identify their top five personal strengths and ways to continue building on those talents.

Activities are designed to develop multiple leadership skills including communication, situational leadership, critical thinking, goal setting, character development, ethical leadership, learning styles and team decision making and problem solving. After each activity, the youth counselors (former RYLA campers) debrief their teams to help the campers process the information and understand the target learning concepts embedded in each session. The result is interactive leadership training with youth at the core of the developmental experience.



In 2017, 184 high school students (144 campers and 40 Trailblazers) attended Camp RYLA. In addition, 40 college-age youth participated as counselors or elders, volunteering their time to support this youth-to-youth leadership training camp for a total of 224 youth participants. Approximately 60 Rotarians volunteered their time and talent to support the camp with another 100 actively involved in recruiting and sponsoring campers.

Rotary Clubs from throughout the South Texas District 5930 provide scholarships of \$300 per camper. . These clubs also provide transportation to camp for those students. Campers are selected with the help of high school counselors who identify those students most likely to benefit from the leadership training experience.

Trailblazers currently pay for their camp fee of \$300 which covers the cost of food, lodging and supplies for their portion of the program. Trailblazers are encouraged to secure funding for their camp fees as part of their leadership training. Outlines for letters of sponsorship are provided to each Trailblazer needing scholarship support. Many Rotary Clubs have added sponsorship for Trailblazers to support the continued leadership development of those students they sponsored as campers.

The program budget covers the camp fees for the Junior Counselors, Senior Counselors and Youth Staff and provides some travel stipends to help these volunteers attend the program. Our returning counselors take time off from college and travel from throughout Texas and the nation to provide this vital volunteer role as a youth mentor. Trailblazers and Counselors attend camp one day early for additional training and to prepare the activities and materials for the campers.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

RYLA-CC focuses on experiential learning to develop leadership potential within our youth for the benefit of our communities. Each activity allows the campers to experience and develop a wide range of leadership skills and learn by doing.

Day One

- **Global Games/Icebreakers:** Multiple games to help the campers get to know one another and become comfortable within their group. Peek-A-Who (name recognition), Gotcha, Keep Up the Balloons, Categories, Cheer Practices, team name and slogan creation.
- **Team Challenge Games:** Teams compete in games including Ball & Bucket, 3-leg races, freebies relay, Jenga and spoon egg races. Teams begin discovering the talents within their members. This activity is part of overall team challenge with winners accruing points.
- **DISC Personality Profile:** U Zoo Activity. Individuals take an abbreviated DISC test. Campers are then grouped according to dominate profiles and tasked with creating an exhibit for their profile “animal”: Directing Lion, Interactive Porpoise, Sensitive Koala and Cautious Eagle. The groups report on their exhibit and process. Through a series of questions and observations, the campers begin to understand the value of different personality traits.



- **Bon Fire:** Activities to move students through a series of strong emotions and learn about letting go of past mistakes. Quotes and poems provide inspiration and time for reflection. Campers get can write down past regrets and put them in the fire to let go of unproductive guilt.
- **Improv:** Campers are given props and interact with each other based on the provided scenarios. Builds communication skills and self-confidence.
- **Evening Meditation:** Calming activity to reflect on the day's events and experiences.

Day Two

- **Team Games:** Multiple strategy games to help the campers get to know and value individual talents. Games include Blind Retrieval, Raging River, Helium Sticks, Toxic Waste and Bull Rings.
- **Ropes Course:** Physical and mental challenges geared toward understanding the team's talents and how best to use those individual strengths while working as a group toward the goal.
- **Four Way Test:** Teams learn about the Four Way Test and create a 60-second ad on how the test fits into their life at home, school or in the community.
- **Character Mart:** Campers shop for five character traits which they feel are important. They meet in new groups to discuss why they selected these characters. Debriefing questions provide ways to facilitate this activity and help campers explore positive character traits.
- **Green Architect:** Teams must design and build a creative, useful and attractive project out of recyclable materials. They have ten minutes to discuss the plan, two minutes to collect the materials, and 30 minutes to build. Each project is judged based on the criteria and scores are part of the overall team challenge.
- **PB&J Skit:** Entertaining demonstration of how communication can go awry.
- **The Campaign:** Team challenge activities set within a pirate-theme treasure hunt. Teams are given maps and clues to find their game locations. Solving the games earns the team "jewels." Each team has three games to complete requiring different skills including word association, physical challenges and puzzle solving activities.
- **Labyrinth:** Personal reflection activity. Very powerful for campers who generally do not take time for reflection.



- **Bon Fire:** Quotes and poems for inspiration and reflection. Opportunity for campers to share what they have learned and how the camp has impacted them.
- **Evening Meditation:** Calming activity to reflect on the day's events and experiences.

Day Three

- **Slick Sleuthing:** A murder mystery game where teams earn clues by completing challenges. They get to select which clues they want in which order (another strategic challenge). Throughout the game, they experience a variety of points/objectives on problem solving.
- **Rotary Warriors:** Campers must complete example projects based on the six areas of focus for Rotary International. Examples: Build a school, compile birthing kits, weave bug nets, create water filters or organize vaccines for delivery. Teams are provided partial supplies for each project. Individuals must select their project, collect their supplies and report to a "District Conference" to meet up with other members of their "International Project Team."
- **Know It All:** This activity allows campers to experience multiple learning aptitudes: (mathematical/logical, musical/rhythm, words/linguistics, bodily/kinesthetic, visual/artistic, geometric/spatial, communicating/interpersonal and reflective/intrapersonal. Exploring alternate learning styles awakens learning intelligences by using multiple senses to process information.

Ongoing throughout Camp

- **Character Coins:** Campers are provided character coins by Rotarians when they display characteristics of good leadership. Coins count toward the overall team challenge. Characters include: creativity, listening, patience, cooperation, adaptability, accountability, candor, courage, organization, humor, citizenship, integrity, kindness, supportiveness, visionary, proactive, thoughtfulness, thoroughness and more.

LEVELS OF RYLA TRAINING

Camper (RYLA 101) – Campers develop an understanding of self and others by participating in team-based activities. Skill development includes critical thinking skills, strategy development, personality assessment through DISC, positive character development, self-confidence building, communication skills, team dynamics and leadership style analysis to understand the value different individuals bring to a group and how to maximize those skills within a team environment. Age: 16-17

Trailblazer (RYLA 201) – Trailblazers continue their leadership training by learning debriefing techniques, team facilitation, individual strength assessment, and activity logistics. Trailblazers learn how to create a volunteer organization designed to address a community problem. Armed with these



skills, Trailblazers are challenged to return to their schools and communities to implement a community service project. Age: 17-18

Jr. Counselor 1 (RYLA 301) – JC1s work under the mentorship of a Sr. Counselor to support a team of 12-15 campers through group programming. They begin learning how to lead post-activity debriefing to facilitate effective learning. JC1s must have completed their Trailblazer year, be recommended to be a JC by the current volunteer staff, and have completed a community service project and submitted a report outlining the desired outcomes, accomplishments and how they used their individual strengths during implementation. Age: 18-19

Jr. Counselor 2 (RYLA 401) – JC2s continue to work under the mentorship of a Sr. Counselor to support a team of 12-15 campers through group programming. They begin leading post-activity debriefing to facilitate effective learning. JC2s must have completed their JC1 year. Age: 19-20

Sr. Counselor (RYLA 501) – SCs mentor their JCs and facilitate their camper team through group programming and post-activity debriefing to help campers effectively process information. SCs must have progressed through each leadership training level and have demonstrated their ability to support and mentor individuals within a team environment. Age: 20-22

Elders/Staff (RYLA 601) – Elders and staff perform a variety of volunteer leadership roles throughout the camp including: activities coordination, music and photography coordination, Trailblazer counseling and administrative duties. These volunteers must have completed each previous level and demonstrated their commitment to leadership training and development. Age: 20-25

TESTIMONIALS

My daughter Taylor attended your conference. Her first comment to me as she got off the bus was, "That was the greatest experience of my life." Needless to say, I was taken aback for a moment. She mentioned to me that she had never had opportunity to reflect on the past/present while systematically and purposefully planning for the future. She absolutely loved this retreat. I just wanted to send a quick note to say "Thank you" to your staff, and your organization for creating such a meaningful, insightful, and focused youth leadership experience. -- Mr. John Gray, Principal Joe Nelson Middle School.

I am so grateful to have had this opportunity in my life. After four extraordinary years at this life-changing camp, next year I will not be able to attend as I will be studying abroad with Semester At Sea – a semester-long trip that will take me to 11 countries over four months. I personally don't believe I would have received this leadership-based scholarship without my participation in RYLA. I am just so grateful that I



have received these opportunities in life and so thankful for everything you have done to help me through this journey. – 2015 Senior Counselor

RYLA Goals: To make this “life changing” experience possible for as many of our area’s youth as possible. To help our youth understand that each and every one has something to contribute to our communities; each possesses a leadership voice waiting for the right opportunity to express itself.