

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

OVERVIEW

eRYLA in Corpus Christi, Texas is a multi-level, 4-day leadership camp for high school youth held virtually. Organized by the Rotary Club of Corpus Christi for Rotary District 5930, programming for eRYLA is provided by Leader NU, LLC. During eRYLA, campers participate in more than 23 hours of fun, challenging, hands-on leadership training modified for the virtual environment. Based on time-proven activities from in-person RYLA camps with more than 40 years of activity-based learning, campers explore their abilities and values and discover how to work with others. Over two dozen youth graduates from Camp RYLA District 5930 and Camp RYLA District 5750 used their problem-solving and creative abilities to help translate the in-person RYLA activities to an innovative virtual experience.

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. 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.

This virtual camp is delivered through ZOOM and Leader NU, LLC's unique leadership website with multiple rooms for different activities. Each participant receives a unique login to the website with access to all of the activities and their team's own space, a specifically designed Retreat Crate with that participant's activity guide, specific supplies, t-shirt and snacks.

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.

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 self-awareness. Using activity-based learning, they learn by doing. Activities have been modified from in-person Camp RYLA activities to work within the virtual camp environment.

- **Team Icebreakers (60 minutes):** Multiple games to help the campers get to know one another, become comfortable within their group and comfortable with how the virtual camp works.
- **Global Introductions/Welcome (30 minutes):** Introduction to the Virtual Camp environment, how eRYLA works, team leadership and the goals of the camp.
- **DISC Personality Profile (60 minutes with discussion):** U Zoo Activity. Campers take an abbreviated DISC test, are grouped according to dominant profiles and tasked with creating an exhibit for their profile “animal”: Directing Lion, Interactive Porpoise, Sensitive Koala and Cautious Eagle. Through a series of questions and observations, campers begin to understand the value of different personality traits.
- **Team Challenge #1 (30 minutes):** Multiple strategy games to help the campers get to know and value individual talents. (All Team Challenges are worth points for their team, which are kept on a Leaderboard on the website all week.)
- **Problem-Solving Challenge (90 minutes with debrief):** Mystery on Centurion Hawk! Series of problem-solving activities to challenge the mind and the team. Debrief explores the process of problem-solving, reflecting on the specific paths taken and decisions made by the team during the activity.
- **Bonfire and Reflection (60 Minutes):** 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.
- **Challenging Course (60 minutes with debrief):** A series of strategizing, challenge-course like activities through which rotate.
- **Communication Deep Dive (60 minutes with discussion):** First impressions activity to: (1) Explore social media and the role it plays in how we see ourselves and how others see us, (2) Explore generational communication. With four distinct generations in the workplace, at a time when communication has changed more over the last 50 years than in the history of the world, how do those rapid evolutions impact how each generation interprets messages through different media, and (3) Discover how interactions – in person and online – differ and impact communication as well as the brain itself (including empathy).
- **PB&J Skit (30 minutes):** Entertaining demonstration of how communication can go awry.
- **Character/Values Exploration (60):** Campers go to the CharacterMart to shop for five character traits which they feel are important. They discuss why they selected these characters. Debriefing questions provide ways to facilitate this activity and help campers explore positive character traits.
- **Team Challenge #2 (30 minutes):** Picture Perspective activity- Teams work collaborative to recreate a Picasso masterpiece, with each camper only being able to create a part of the big picture.

- **Escape Room Challenge (90 minutes):** “Close Encounters” An original online activity built using clues on the website, as well as from their Retreat Crate, students find the clues, piece together puzzles, solve the puzzles and try to stop the aliens from invading the earth! Problem-solving, communication, persistence and collaboration are all heavily highlighted through this activity.
- **Communication/Improv (60 minutes):** Campers given various scenarios for impromptu interaction. Builds communication skills and self-confidence.
- **Rotary’s Four Way Test (30 minutes):** Teams learn about the Four Way Test and discuss how the test fits into their life.
- **Team Challenge #3 (30 minutes):** Campers practice using the varying skills of their team to complete the challenges.
- **Fun with Jung (90 minutes with debrief):** Personality profile activities based on Meyers Briggs. Campers learn about how they interact, recharge and make decisions and why (includes discussions about how their brain take in, process, and store information).
- **Mental Health (60 minutes with discussion):** “Clarity.” Suicide rates of the youth today have been creeping up as well as students medicated for anxiety and/or depression. In this activity, students choose up to two rooms, with each room having a theme of a challenge faced by students today. It is not meant to be therapy, but rather a place to freely discuss (if they wish) some of their challenges and realize that they are not alone. They topics range from difficulties in school, to family and relationship challenges, to anxiety and depression, to body image, and more. It is a powerful session that students have greatly appreciated.
- **Collaboration Challenge (60 minutes with debrief):** Legends of RYLA. Multiple challenges the team must solve together. Learn collaboration, valuing team members and thinking fast.
- **RYLA U (90 minutes with discussion):** Discussion of college and real world. Next steps and how to prepare.
- **Growth Mindset (60 minutes with debrief):** Students explore the difference between ‘fixed mindset,’ or the belief that we are born with a finite amount of intelligence and talent and nothing one does changes that, and ‘growth mindset,’ or the belief that with the right strategy, plenty of effort and persistence, you have the potential to learn the hard stuff and grow your talent.
- **Synthesizing (60 minutes with discussion):** “Metaphors Be With You” Teams look at RYLA as a whole picture- what they learned, what was meaningful, who impacted them, etc. Then they select a metaphor of a system (solar system, cardiovascular system, etc.) and use the metaphor to explain their synthesis of RYLA. Helps students connect dots and bring it all together.
- **Labyrinth/Bonfire (120 minutes):** Personal reflection activities. Quotes and poems for inspiration and reflection. Opportunity for campers to share what they have learned and how the camp has impacted them.
- **Closing Ceremonies (60 minutes):** Graduation ceremony with awards, etc. Parents and others can attend via Facebook Live.

Total 23 Hours

Additional Activities Time permitting

- **Team Time (60 minutes/day):** Opportunity for teams to debrief activities, bond and practice creativity by developing team chants
- **Showcase (60 minutes per day):** Showcase chants daily, etc.
- **Additional Debriefs (30 minutes per day):** Added on longer days, adds end of the day debrief
- **Energizers (30 minutes per session):** Added energy for those longer days.

LEVELS OF RYLA TRAINING

1. **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
2. **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
3. **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
4. **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
5. **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

6. **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

RYLA 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***