

116 hours. 6 days.

RYLA was intense—physically, mentally, and emotionally. You're sleep-deprived, your social battery is pushed to the limit, and you're surrounded by 30 strangers who quickly become your teammates, challengers, and friends. Every day is packed with thought-provoking talks, emotionally raw conversations, and activities that stretch your comfort zone.

It's not just leadership training—it's perspective-shifting.

RYLA challenges you to dig deep, grow fast, and walk away seeing yourself and the world through a completely new lens.

That is exactly what RYLA did for me—it changed me for the better.

Attending RYLA was a truly transformative experience, both personally and professionally.

One of the most impactful sessions was on different leadership and personality types.

Learning how people think, communicate, and lead in different ways opened my eyes to how diverse leadership can be. It helped me better understand not just myself, but also those around me—friends, family, teammates, and colleagues.

This new awareness has changed the way I communicate. I've become more thoughtful, more empathetic, and much more effective in how I interact with others. Beyond the workshops and team activities, RYLA gave me the confidence to lead with authenticity and provided me with the tools to build stronger, more respectful connections with the people I work with and care about.

Before RYLA, I always considered myself to be shy, but only in casual settings. In professional environments, I was confident and knew how to take charge. It was the informal, everyday situations where I struggled to connect with people.

At RYLA, I realized that I could carry over that professional confidence into personal interactions. The program encouraged me to step outside my comfort zone in a casual, supportive setting. I began striking up conversations with people I had never met, making connections that I would have avoided before. It was freeing, and I was surprised at how natural it became.

When I went into RYLA, I knew I wanted to take a step back from leadership. I often find myself stepping into the role of leader, but this time, I wanted to approach things differently. I wanted to learn from others, listen more, and understand the diverse leadership styles around me.

Take the "Lily Pad Library" challenge, for example. It perfectly reflected the diversity of leadership styles in our group. At first, we didn't quite gel—strong personalities clashed, and it felt like there were too many leaders. But as we worked through the activities and applied what we were learning about communication and personality types, things started to click. We learned how to listen, adjust our approaches, and truly collaborate.

By the end of the week, not only did we produce something we were proud of, but we also learned how to trust each other's strengths and work together as a cohesive team. And I realized these lessons didn't just apply at RYLA—they've shaped how I communicate and collaborate at work and in my personal life too.

RYLA showed me that leadership isn't just about taking charge—it's about understanding people, listening to their perspectives, and adapting to how we all work best together.

It was an inspiring, empowering experience—one that I'll carry with me into every part of my life.

[Pause, smile]

It was challenging, eye-opening, and absolutely worth it.

Mentally, RYLA was about constantly stepping outside my comfort zone—whether it was speaking in front of others or tackling the obstacle course. What made it manageable, even empowering, was the environment. RYLA felt like a truly safe and supportive space, where we could take risks without fear of judgment. Even if things didn't go perfectly, no one criticized—what mattered was that you gave it a go.

Physically, the experience was demanding. The early mornings, the hike, the gully clean-up, and all the group activities took a toll—especially for me, as someone with asthma. But pushing through those challenges showed me that I'm capable of more than I realized, and that was incredibly empowering.

Emotionally, the talks and the conversations we had were raw, intense, and thought-provoking. They challenged the way I see myself and others, and gave me the perspective I didn't even realize I needed.

It was all a part of the growth RYLA inspired—mental, physical, and emotional.

Before I finish, I just want to take a moment to sincerely thank Rotary for giving me the opportunity to attend RYLA.

It was an experience that challenged me, pushed me outside my comfort zone, and ultimately changed me for the better.

The lessons I've learned will stay with me forever, and I'm incredibly grateful for the chance to grow, connect, and become a stronger leader.

Thank you, Rotary Dunedin, for believing in me and investing in young leaders like me.

Your support made this incredible experience possible—and I'll carry the impact of it with me for the rest of my life.