

RYLA 5550: Newsletter

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF RYLA DISTRICT 5550: INCLUDING STORIES AND ADVICE FROM CURRENT AND FORMER RYLA CAMPERS!



ABOUT OUR RYLA NEWSLETTER

This newsletter is a celebration of everything RYLA stands for - leadership, connection, growth, and service. Whether you are a past camper, a future attendee, a longtime member of Rotary, or someone cheering us on from afar, this is your glimpse into the powerful ripple effect of RYLA across our district and beyond.

Inside, you'll find camper stories, alumni spotlights, counsellor reflections, and real-life leadership journeys. It's a chance to reconnect with the heart of camp - the laughter, the courage, the friendships, and the unforgettable moments that stay with us long after the week is over.

Most of all, this newsletter is a reminder that RYLA doesn't end when camp does - the values, the confidence, and the community you build here go with you, wherever you lead next.



A MESSAGE FROM OUR EDITOR

Hi everyone!

Putting together the second issue of the RYLA newsletter has reminded me of something truly special. We are never going to run out of stories to tell! Every time I reach out to a camper, counsellor, or alumni, I'm reminded that RYLA's impact doesn't stop when camp ends. It continues in schools, in communities, and across the world. It is carried by young people who are doing incredible things and leading with heart.

The stories in this issue are a reminder that RYLA's spirit of connection, kindness, and courage is alive all year long.

I'm extremely thankful for this community and grateful for every person who continues to share their light, lift others, and carry the RYLA spark forward.

Here's to more stories, connections, and moments of leadership that start with RYLA and reach far beyond it!

Sarah



A MESSAGE FROM OUR RYLA FACILITATOR

Every year, when I see the energy and optimism of our RYLA campers, I'm reminded that the future is bright, not because it's guaranteed, but because young people are working tirelessly to build it. Hope isn't something we stumble upon; it's something we create through hard work, compassion, and a shared belief in the power of service. The determination of these young leaders to make their communities and the world a better place inspires all of us.

In the spirit of Rotary's values, leadership, integrity, diversity, and fellowship, our RYLA participants continue to demonstrate what it means to unite for good. They come together from different schools, towns, and backgrounds, and quickly discover that collaboration, respect, and empathy are far stronger forces than any divide. Their teamwork and passion show that change doesn't happen in isolation; it grows when people of purpose come together, listen to one another, and strive toward a common goal. To our RYLA campers, past and present, and to the incredible counsellors who guide them—you make me proud beyond words. Your enthusiasm, resilience, and commitment to service remind us all why we believe in this program. Each of you embodies the hope we find in youth: the courage to dream, the drive to act, and the heart to lift others along the way. Together, you are building a better tomorrow, one act of leadership and kindness at a time.

All the best, Scott!

Turning Inspiration Into Action: Khrystyna's Story

Khrystyna Khomenko - RYLA Camper and Founder of Aid Rescues Kids (ARK)



For your first year at RYLA, what moment or activity had the biggest impact on you personally?

I would choose the project planning challenge. We created an initiative that could help our community in just a few hours. My team focused on the idea of cleaning up national parks across Canada, as we are known for our forests and nature but ironically, don't care of them as we should. This opened up my eyes to care more about the safety of our environment, wildlife, and human shelter from forest fires! Even though we had so many directions we could've gone, from addressing homelessness locally, to helping global issues like war. The fact that we were able to create a realistic outline in such a short time truly changed my mindset. It showed me that great ideas don't need months of planning. They just need passion, teamwork, and belief.

How did the people you meet at camp, counsellors and other campers, influence how you see leadership?

Everyone came from different backgrounds, with different opinions and experiences, yet we all shared the purpose to lead. I quickly realized that my views don't align with everyone's, so I decided to take a step back and see from their point of view. I learned dictating makes the groups outcomes shallow, but including everyone shares diversity and success. You must understand that including everyone's work looks different, rather than through artistic expression or public speaking. I learned that leadership isn't about being the loudest in the room, but about listening, understanding, and sympathizing. Our counsellors created a space where it felt safe to be vulnerable and real, and that inspired me to lead with empathy and authenticity.

You launched Aid Rescues Kids (ARK) right after camp, can you tell us what ARK is all about?

Aid Rescues Kids is a fundraiser project I launched after RYLA that focuses on children's welfare across the world. ARK's goal is to raise awareness and for kids who are struggling through education, poverty, or war. ARK attends local community events to host contests, provide activities for children, and raise funds for campaigns that cater specifically to children. The name "ARK" represents hope and shelter, as it is a symbol to Noah's Ark. Our motto is to be the ark in someone's flood. Every child deserves protection.

How did RYLA change how you view your ability to make a difference, even as one person?

Before RYLA, I thought real change only came from big organizations or adults in positions of power. But RYLA made me realize that one person can really light a spark that can spread a fire. Seeing how quickly a team of passionate people could form an idea and make it real reminded me that impact starts small. It starts with just one person brave enough to begin.

What lessons from camp have you found yourself using as you build and grow this initiative?

It's so hard to choose! The biggest one is the importance of collaboration and open communication. At camp, I learned that everyone's voice brings something unique to the table. Now I have the mindset that even if you start small, what matters most is consistency, heart, and purpose. Connections are huge when you're striving to build something big. Learning how to connect with like-minded people and build off of each other is key. Leadership isn't about perfection, it's about persistence and compassion.

Turning Inspiration Into Action: Khrystyna's Story

Khrystyna Khomenko - RYLA Camper and Founder of Aid Rescues Kids (ARK)

What has been most rewarding about starting ARK and what are you most proud of since its beginning this summer?

The most rewarding part of starting ARK has been seeing people come together for a cause bigger than themselves. I'm so proud of how interested people were and how quick they were to contribute once they heard about what it stood for. Seeing the first donations come in and hearing from others who said ARK inspired them to help too was when it hit me that this was making an impact.

What challenges have you faced and how have you worked to overcome them?

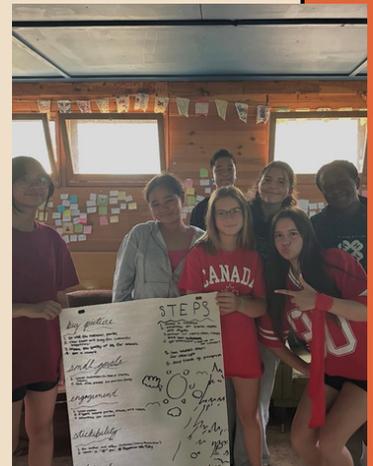
Starting something from scratch wasn't easy. At first, it was hard to balance time between work, social life, and the fundraiser. I also faced doubts about whether people would take it seriously since I was still young. But I overcame those challenges by staying dedicated, reaching out for guidance, and reminding myself why I started this. My cousins are serving on front lines in Ukraine for children to keep their innocence. No matter how little of impact I make, I know it's something. The support and feedback from my RYLA peers gave me confidence when I needed it most.

How has your community, including friends and family from home and RYLA connections, supported this project of yours? How do you plan to stay connected with the RYLA community as your project grows?

My friends, family, and RYLA connections have been incredible. They've helped spread the word through social media, donated, and shared ideas on how to grow ARK. The RYLA community especially has continued to be a source of inspiration and motivation. I plan to stay connected by collaborating with other Rotary leaders in District 5550, joining volunteer projects, and sharing updates about ARK's progress to keep that spark alive!

What advice would you share with peers who are attempting to start their own initiative to help others?

My advice would be to just start. You don't need to have it all figured out. Your idea will grow as you do. I changed my project plan countless times before finalizing it. Surround yourself with people who believe in you, stay true to your purpose, and don't be afraid to fail or adjust along the way. The most meaningful projects come from the heart, not from having a perfect plan. One idea, one person, and one small action can create something incredible! You got this!



Leading With Every Step: Anthony's Story

Anthony Rongcal - Former RYLA Camper and Counsellor, Dash N' Dine Run Club Leader



You first attended camp in 2019, what inspired you to come to camp this year?

Going to a leadership camp was something completely new for me — it definitely wasn't on my bucket list. The only thing that initially excited me was the chance to get out of the house and spend summer outdoors. Attending camp became an opportunity to further my knowledge in leadership when I was invited to join RYLA, and it has turned out to be one of the most rewarding experiences I've ever had. RYLA has shaped who I am today and continues to be an important part of my life.

After being a camper for one year and returning as a counsellor, how did your views on leadership grow and change?

Coming to RYLA as both a camper and a counsellor has helped shift my perspective on leadership. As a camper, I felt unsure of my abilities and what I could contribute as a leader. I often felt lost, uncertain of my strengths. But after that week, surrounded by encouraging and loving individuals, I discovered both my strengths and weaknesses. Returning as a counsellor allowed me to embrace the continuous journey of growth within my leadership skills. It gave me the opportunity to inspire others — and to be inspired in return. I went from being afraid and unsure of what I could offer as a leader to becoming someone excited to learn, grow, and guide others.

What's something you learned at RYLA that still sticks with you today?

One of the most valuable lessons I learned at RYLA was that home is not a physical place, but a feeling — a sense of belonging you find among those who love, support, and encourage you to become the best version of yourself.

RYLA and Rotary is all about "service above self", what does that idea mean to you know being a leader in your community?

I've always asked myself what "Service Above Self" truly meant. Now, taking on a larger role in the running community, I've slowly come to understand and live out that meaning. As a leader in my run club, I've learned that Service Above Self is about being authentic, open-hearted, and compassionate. I make it a point to listen to runners and ask them their "why" — why they run, who they run for, and what their purpose is. These conversations inspire me to be more welcoming and inclusive, ensuring that everyone feels they belong. Through running, I've found a part of myself — and I want to help others find theirs too.

You are one of three leaders for the Winnipeg-based run club "Dash N' Dine", what does community mean to your group, beyond just the running itself?

As one of the leads for DND, community for us means a safe space — no standards, just good vibes and a happy crew. Our community has no age limit; we welcome all ages, all paces, and all backgrounds. At Dash N' Dine, we wanted to create a space for people to feel they belong — a place where like-minded individuals can connect and grow together.



Leading With Every Step: Anthony's Story

Anthony Rongcal - Former RYLA Camper and Counsellor, Dash N' Dine Run Club Leader

What do you think RYLA taught you about working with others and building strong relationships?

RYLA has played a huge role in my personal growth, especially in teaching me the value of building genuine connections. Learning about others has helped me see the world through different perspectives and appreciate the diverse stories of those striving for growth and change. Working with others has also helped me accept my flaws and focus on my strengths.

What has been the most rewarding part about leading the "DND" run club? What are some things that you have planned for the future that you are excited about?

Being part of a run club that continuously builds community and spreads happiness has been deeply rewarding. That sense of togetherness is what I value most as a DND lead. Looking ahead, we plan to stay true to our roots — remaining beginner-friendly, welcoming all paces, and continuing to create a fun and supportive environment. We'll keep being an outlet for those who want to start their running journey or simply want a space where they can be themselves. We'll also continue empowering local businesses by collaborating with them to host new and exciting events for our runners.



If you were to lead a RYLA session now, what would it be about and how would it connect to your journey since camp?

If I were to lead a RYLA session today, I would talk about "Giving It a Chance." For most of my life, I've held myself back because of fear — fear of judgment, imperfection, or making mistakes. I never imagined I'd help lead a run club, but it all started by simply giving it a chance — being open-minded and trying something new. It wasn't the running itself that kept me coming back, but the connections and relationships I built through it. RYLA was the first camp I ever attended away from my family, and it was another moment of giving something a chance — a chance to make new friends, to find a new home, and to meet people I could look up to. Both RYLA and my run club have been a breath of fresh air — places where I can be myself, gather my thoughts, and feel celebrated, embraced, and loved. I'm grateful I gave it a chance.

What advice would you give to RYLA campers who want to turn their inspiration into real action in their communities?

My advice is simple: go out there and just do it — give it a chance. Creating change and helping others isn't measured by money or the numbers of people, but by your intention and commitment to making a difference. Surround yourself with people who inspire you to be better and share your vision for impact. Lastly, be transparent, be authentic, and most importantly, be yourself.



Leading on the Global Stage: Kate's Story

Kate Dederick - Former RYLA Camper and G7 Summit Intern



You've been a part of the RYLA family for a while now, when did you attend camp and what keeps you connected?

I was a camper at RYLA for three years, my first year being 2017. I am so lucky to have made so many friends, campers and counsellors included, in those three years and I keep in touch through social media and visits! I love seeing updates through social media posts, as well reconnecting with my friends through text or Facetime. Whenever I am travelling to a different city, I make sure to visit a RYLA connection wherever I am!

How did your years at RYLA shape who you have become today?

RYLA has taught me so many valuable lessons that have positively shaped me into the person I am today. The biggest and most rewarding lesson I learned was to be myself. Coming to camp in my first year, I was one of the few campers from Saskatchewan and didn't know a single person! Through encouragement and support from my counsellors, I opened up, let my personality shine and made life-long friends through the process. This especially helped me in university, as moving to a new city knowing no one was scary, but RYLA taught me to be myself and gave me the social skills to create a new home away from home.

What do you think makes RYLA so unique compared to other youth experiences?

I have always said to anyone who asks me about camp that the people make the place so special. Everyone who attends camp, whether they are campers, counsellors, nurses or other staff members, have a positive energy about them that makes it feel like home. The sharing circles, presentations and other leadership activities connect you with your peers and help you all grow together to form one big family. RYLA is a place for young leaders to come together, creating lifelong lessons and friendships.

Since your last RYLA, you've been attending the University of Calgary, what have you been studying and what has inspired this choice for you?

I am currently in my last year of International Relations, with a specific focus in development economics. I have always enjoyed social science classes in high school, and have always felt a need to help others, so by combining these two passions I decided to pursue my studies specifically in international development, which focuses on foreign aid projects in developing countries. I also believe that overall it is extremely important for everyone, especially the younger generation, to be well-versed in current global affairs as it affects our future, so studying it specifically is very important to me.

Are there moments in your university journey where you have used something you learned at RYLA to guide you?

So many moments! The most significant would be the leadership skills I developed at RYLA. My specific degree consists of a lot of group work and RYLA has taught me the important balance of contributing my unique skills to the group while learning from others' knowledge and experiences. RYLA taught me that being a leader is all about listening and utilizing the skills of your peers, and this has been extremely helpful in my group projects in university.

Leading on the Global Stage: Kate's Story

Kate Dederick - Former RYLA Camper and G7 Summit Intern

You had an incredible opportunity this summer to work as an intern for the G7 Summit, can you explain the summit and your role in it a bit further?

The G7 Summit is a meeting between seven advanced world economies: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as other invited countries that differ each year. The countries meet annually for three days to discuss significant global affairs, including climate change, the onset of AI and other issues that affect all nations. The G7 provides an opportunity for different countries to unite and work together on the international stage. My role as an Accreditation Student Intern was to provide access to the summit to high level officials, media, civil society, staff and suppliers. This involved distributing and printing badges, as well as working on-site at the Summit to ensure proper access for bilateral meetings between heads of state and their delegations.

What was it like being a part of something that had such a global impact? What did you learn about leadership on an international scale that connects back to what you have learned through RYLA and Rotary?

It was incredible to work for the G7 Summit, knowing I was contributing to the success of such a major global event. Seeing all of the work that goes into the Canadian government's impact on world politics made me feel like I was a part of something significant and meaningful. Throughout the experience, I learned that leadership holds the same foundations at all levels, whether it is at a major global event, in a classroom or in everyday life. It may look a little different in each setting, but leadership is all about working with a team and utilizing a variety of skills to create success. Seeing all of the hard work each team member put in across all the different areas of the Government of Canada reminded me of the importance of teamwork, which is a lesson I learned throughout my years at RYLA.

What is one leadership quality you think the world needs more of now?

As I mentioned earlier, being a leader is all about recognizing and highlighting the diverse skills and knowledge your peers bring to the table. I believe the world needs more compassion for others, understanding the different intersecting experiences we have and uniting in our commonalities, while accepting our differences. Solutions are only successful if they work for everyone, so compassion is necessary in current leadership to ensure all voices are heard.

What is one message you have to share with past, current, and future campers?

Whatever you want to achieve, go for it and work hard! I never thought I would be living in my dream city, attending a great university and interning for one of the most important global events, but through passion for my studies, I achieved all of these goals. I remember writing in my future letter to myself at RYLA that I wanted to move for university and contribute to the international community somehow. It is amazing to look back and see that I have reached these goals through my dedication, and I am so excited for what's to come!



Connected Through Rotary: Saswat's Story

Saswat Bhandari - RYLA Camper and Interact Club Member



You've had the unique experience of attending RYLA in two different places, can you tell us where else other than District 5550 and how both experiences came about?

Other than RYLA District 5550 I have also gone to RYLA 5360 in Alberta. The first day it was quite hilarious seeing everyone shocked that I was from Winnipeg, questioning how I even got here. At RYLA 5360, I tried to do as much as I could and get the most out of the experience, but I regretted not connecting with more people and felt that I wasn't the best leader. At RYLA 5550, I felt a stronger connection with both campers and counselors. In RYLA 5360 I tried to take the lead more but in RYLA 5550 I wanted to learn more from others and decided to observe instead. Overall, both experiences were incredibly fun; I loved the activities, competitions, and, most of all, connecting with everyone and laughing so much my stomach hurt.

What similarities did you notice between both programs, and what made each RYLA unique?

Both programs had the intention of creating a safe community, a place without judgment full of fun activities and a chance to open up. Campers and counsellors were all like professional therapists and it was as if I had built a bond with them last lasted decades. For both programs, the whole schedule was a mystery, building up suspense for what activity will be next. RYLA 5550 I definitely felt that I had connected more with the

the campers and counsellors due to the activities we did. I also felt that each activity was building off of the last, until finally the last day everything came together. Also the Amazing Race is well worth the hype, the competition is insane. Throughout RYLA 5360, the whole week was one huge competition full of activities that counted towards points, and there was a repeat of one activity called RYLA ball to see how we grew. The first time I did it with my group, I was definitely a bit frustrated with the lack of progress we made but with our final attempt later in the week our team cooked up.

How did both RYLAs reinforce what Rotary stands for around the world?

Both RYLAs reinforced Rotary's core values of service, leadership, and community. RYLA provided a platform for us to develop as leaders through engaging activities and gave us the opportunity to share our knowledge to help others grow. It also reflected the kind of community Rotary strives to create around the world, a safe and welcoming place where everyone can be themselves and support one another.

What have you learned about connecting with people from different cultures, backgrounds, and regions?

I learned the importance of trying to understand someone before jumping to conclusions. In reality everyone judges someone even if they don't want to, this could be even the small comparison of this person is taller than me. The stories I heard, lessons I learned, connections I built, made that judgment slowly go away, with a new feeling of curiosity to learn more about why they are the person they are today. I love listening to people talk about themselves because each one of their stories are so fascinating. I love to understand their journey and see how they pieced their lives together to become the person they are today, it's like I am reading the best novel in the world.

Connected Through Rotary: Saswat's Story

Saswat Bhandari - RYLA Camper and Interact Club Member

What was the biggest lesson you took away from RYLA in Riding Mountain National Park this past summer? What was your favourite moment or activity?

The biggest lesson I took was to be my authentic self. Being my authentic self breaks the barriers between me and others, and that has allowed me create friendships that I value deeply. There is nothing to be ashamed of about who you are. Love yourself, you are amazing for having come this far and for being the person you are today. Being your authentic self also means not suppressing your feelings; every feeling is justified, so express yourself freely. My favourite moment was the last campfire we had together. Seeing everyone talk about their journeys and give their final thoughts was heartwarming, especially hearing the counsellors share their experiences and that I got to share a heartfelt moment with Steven.

How would you explain the "spirit of Rotary and RYLA" to someone?

The spirit of Rotary and RYLA is about building community, fostering leadership, and encouraging meaningful connections. It's a place where people from diverse backgrounds come together to support each other, learn from one another, and grow into leaders who make their community a better place. But most importantly loving yourself every step of the way.

How would you explain the "spirit of Rotary and RYLA" to someone?

To anyone who attends RYLA in the future, please try your best to connect and talk to as many people as possible. The stories they tell and the lessons you learn is something that you might not get the chance to ever again, and you do not want to regret having not done so. I know it is easier said than done to talk to someone new, but RYLA is full of campers who will accept you with open arms, and that this whole community loves you.

How do you hope to use your RYLA experiences to make an impact in your community or future career?

Currently my goal is to become the best leader and person I can throughout the several roles I do in my school and community. Being a leader of multiple clubs, I want to use all these experiences to weave together even the most diverse groups to create an environment where everyone can be included. The guidance I have received and the knowledge I have gained about supporting others emotionally inspire me to do the same in the future and to be someone that others can look up to during difficult times.

How will you continue to stay involved in Rotary, now that you have participated in multiple youth programs? We also want to hear about your involvement with Interact!

I am currently the co-president of Interact and am connected with multiple Rotary clubs across Calgary and Winnipeg. After RYLA 5550, several campers decided they wanted to start their own Interact clubs at their schools, and Winnipeg Rotary reached out to me to help organize an initiative to collect winter clothing donations for their cause. I reached out to Kaitlyn and Cam from Sturgeon, Crystal from Glenlawn, and Aarika and Geneah from John Taylor Pippens to see if they wanted to collaborate. Unfortunately, Crystal's school had already planned a similar initiative, so she couldn't join us, but the rest agreed. We are now raising donations for winter clothing and hockey items, with our school organizing a competition between classes to see who can donate the most. Beyond Interact, I volunteer wherever I can, with over 200+ hours at my local senior living centre, enjoying the chance to connect with residents. Throughout this journey, two mentors, Barbara and Garry, have supported me and inspired me to pursue becoming a Rotarian myself one day. Once I become a Rotarian I will give back to the community and support all I can, just like everyone has supported me throughout my whole life.



From RYLA to Rotary Youth Exchange: Oliver's Story

Oliver Bures -
Former RYLA Camper and Current
Rotary Exchange Student in Japan

You attended RYLA twice, how did both of your experiences impact you, what moments did you enjoy most?

My first time it was definitely the challenges I enjoyed the most. It was all new to me and a great experience working together with everyone. The music video might've been my favourite. The dance was definitely another contender, honestly it was just a vibe to be a part of.

How did RYLA challenge you to grow personally and as a leader?

I've always been a bit reserved, so being put into a leadership role with other amazing people helped me feel like I belonged, and let me start to break past my boundaries. It's something I still struggle with, but the groundwork is all paved out.

What advice would you give to someone who is shy or unsure about attending RYLA for the first time?

Just go for it. It's better to go and decide it's not for you rather than regretting never giving it a chance. There's a limited window for going to RYLA, and for many other things too, so get out there and try new things! And trust me, it's worth it. RYLA is filled with many people who want to do good, or just have fun, and it's a place where everyone can feel welcome.



BEING PUT INTO A
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WITH OTHER
AMAZING PEOPLE
HELPED ME FEEL
LIKE I BELONGED

- Oliver Bures

Now you're living in Japan through Rotary Youth Exchange! What inspired you to take that step after attending camp?

I originally wanted to go on an exchange back in 2022 actually! I ended up opting out that year as I felt ill prepared to head out on my own, and it was my Youth Exchange Counsellor who recommended RYLA to me. Going to RYLA did help reinforce that I wanted to go on this endeavour and just built on to my confidence and excitement.

Did your RYLA experience prepare you for this new adventure in another country?

Yes. RYLA definitely helped me get more comfortable with being uncomfortable. Hearing from and sharing with everyone helped me realize that we're all uncomfortable and that someone has to take the first step into breaking that.



From RYLA to Rotary Youth Exchange: Oliver's Story

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What has been the biggest culture shock or surprise so far about life in Japan?

This is coming out of left field, but most bathrooms don't have soap in them or don't have anything to dry your hands! Even at school, we're missing a dryer or paper towel available. Also their garbage. There is like 4 or 5 different ones and I have no clue which is which still. I think there is plastic, food waster, and paper for sure, but there is definitely more.

How have you found ways to connect with your new community in Japan, through school and through Rotary?

It's tough given the language barrier, but I have joined my school's Interact club. Hopefully in the future I'll be able to help out with an event that they do. For now, its just nodding along.

What do you think RYLA and Rotary Youth Exchange have in common when it comes to building the next generation of strong leaders?

Getting people out there. RYLA, and by a much larger extent the Exchange, gets you meeting new people and creating new connections. Not every one of them sticks, but those that do will last. And developing self-confidence and discovering a little about yourself. The more we know about ourselves and others, the better we all can become as leaders.



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- Oliver Bures

What is one thing you hope to have accomplished or seen by the next time we check in with you after you have completed your exchange?

I wish to give back to the family hosting me during my exchange and those who helped organize everything. To share parts of my life from back in Canada, as thanks for sharing with me their life here in Japan. Also becoming fluent enough to hold conversations with friends and family, and to get better at karaoke in Japanese.

If you could describe your RYLA experience in one word, what would it be? If you could describe your exchange experience so far, what would it be?

For RYLA, I think 'eye-opening'. It definitely opened my eyes to what I want to be and gave me the correct way to start. For the exchange, I think 'metamorphosis'. This is such an incredible journey that I will forever remember and will have a lasting change on me, I'm sure of it.



2025 CAMPER Q&A

2025 Senior Campers: Steven C. Chua, Shreya Virani, Cam Liu
2025 Junior Campers: Hunter Dunne, Chanel Ramos, Iza Tiberio

How would you describe the “RYLA energy” to someone who has never experienced it before?

Hunter: Really fun, inclusive, and high-spirited.

Chanel: I would describe it as a place where you can just be you and where you can express your feelings and emotions while still learning more about leadership and things in life.

Iza: If I were to describe the RYLA energy to someone I would say it is electric, happy, welcoming, and loving.

Steven: As someone who has never experienced RYLA before, the energy right as we stepped into camp was not only full of energy, but it made me feel welcome right away and have the feeling that I am in the right place. From the first to the last day, that feeling of acceptance only helped me discover great things about myself, the people, and the opportunities around me.

Shreya: I would describe the “RYLA energy” as something you can instantly feel, it’s warm, welcoming, and full of positivity. Everyone is open, supportive, and genuinely happy to be there, which creates an atmosphere where you can be completely yourself with no worry of being judged. There’s this balance of meaningful conversations and fun challenges that push you out of your comfort zone while still making you laugh and enjoy every moment. It’s an energy filled with motivation, teamwork, and joy, the kind that inspires you to grow, connect, and leave with memories and friendships that last.

Cam: “RYLA energy” is something indescribable yet felt by every person who attended. It was an almost immediate sense of belonging and acceptance by the counsellors and my peers. I found myself having fun even through difficult challenges like The Amazing Race and participating in so many events outside my comfort zone. This welcoming and supportive energy is something I wish to see reflected everywhere, as I saw and experienced firsthand how transformative it could be.



2025 CAMPER Q&A

2025 Senior Campers: Steven C. Chua, Shreya Virani, Cam Liu
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What was your favourite activity, session, or memory from camp? Was there any specific moment you remember that stood out to you and why?

Hunter: Dance night, it was my favourite because everybody got together and had a super fun time.

Chanel: For me, the sharing circle stood out the most because I got to talk about the things that I was afraid to talk about and to speak up about my opinions around people who are really comforting.

Iza: I loved all the activities, but if I was to pick one, I would say the day of the dance. That full day was just unforgettable, everyone dancing, singing, expressing themselves and their feelings without the fear of being judged, everyone was just there to have fun. Also, the songs we all sang together and people complimenting each other's outfit was super nice.

Steven: It would be hard to pick one favourite activity, so I'll just give 2 that are still etched into my memory! The sharing circles where we shared each of our perspectives and experiences through topics that were hard to even talk about would definitely make it to the top 2. Another one would be the last campfire. That last campfire was where we reflected over the amazing week we had at RYLA; a lot of tears and hugs were shed on that day for sure!

Shreya: My favourite memory from camp was definitely the first sharing circle of the week. It really helped me feel connected to the people around me and get to know everyone on a deeper level, even without having to talk to each person individually. That moment stood out to me the most because it showed how opening up about things that truly matter to you can help you understand others' perspectives too. I think it helped everyone bond and feel comfortable with each other right from the start.

Cam: My favourite memory would definitely be the talent show; it was a beautiful showcase of everyone's unique skills and personalities. I laughed until my stomach was sore and was even moved to tears by the performance of others, all in a few hours. This was also the first time I have ever competed in one; along with my friends, we performed a dance that we had only a couple hours to prepare for. We tried our best, and despite the quality of it, I had so much fun dancing without the slightest feeling of judgment.



2025 CAMPER Q&A

2025 Senior Campers: Steven C. Chua, Shreya Virani, Cam Liu
2025 Junior Campers: Hunter Dunne, Chanel Ramos, Iza Tiberio

What made your cabin or team special?

Hunter: Our team was awesome because we always brought people up, we were also really nice to each other.

Chanel: The special thing about my team is how we were always so positive even though we were mostly last for the challenges (best for last) and the way we supported other teams too. And how amazing we worked as a team.

Iza: I think what made my cabin special was for sure all the people in them. The late night talks, the jokes, the codenames, the girls borrowing things from each other if they were ever needing something, everyone saying goodnight, everything. And for my team, I think my counsellor (Tye) and the people on my team just made it a very comfortable environment. The challenges just bonded us more, almost like a family and we all helped each other with whatever the other person was going through, if they needed a pick me up, or support, or maybe just someone to talk to, everyone from the team was always willing to help.

Steven: Our cabin was special since being able to have late night conversations with ambitious and talented people for sure changed how I viewed and approached opportunities after that. The green team, Lizzy's Lizards, was amazing! I loved the effort each one of us put into each activity we did! We were all competing hard, but always with a smile on our faces.

Shreya: One thing that made my team special was how genuinely happy everyone was to be at camp and to be there with each other. We connected so quickly and grew close right away, which made the whole week feel even more meaningful. What made my cabin special were our late-night talks, the girls understood me in a way that people outside of camp never really have. I remember a few of them made my bed and wrote "happy birthday" on the whiteboard when they realized it had just turned midnight. That moment made me realize how lucky I was to be surrounded by such caring and thoughtful people.

Cam: Although this was common throughout RYLA, I really feel that the support and understanding my team shared for each other was extraordinarily special. No matter the outcome of a competition, I knew my team would be there to cheer me on and encourage me to become my best. The efficiency of our communication really surprised me in the best way possible, and I think that was the reason behind many of our successes.



2025 CAMPER Q&A

2025 Senior Campers: Steven C. Chua, Shreya Virani, Cam Liu
2025 Junior Campers: Hunter Dunne, Chanel Ramos, Iza Tiberio

What inspired you most being a part of camp? How does this still continue to impact you in your everyday life?

Hunter: Being myself, it keeps me happy.

Chanel: Being myself while still being able to help people around me. By thinking about the things they taught us which I continue to apply to myself everyday.

Iza: Being myself, supporting everyone around me and acting like a leader. It really helps at school, at home, and with my friends.

Steven: Every single person I met in this camp honestly inspired me. Hearing all their stories and interacting with all these great personalities challenged me to step up once I stepped out of the camp; you guys know who you are!

Shreya: What inspired me most about being a part of camp was how easily everyone connected and supported one another. From the first sharing circle to the late-night cabin talks, I saw how being open, kind, and genuinely interested in others could create such a strong sense of community. The people I met inspired me to be more understanding and to listen to others' perspectives. This still impacts me every day because I try to carry that same positivity and empathy into my friendships, school, and everything I do.

Cam: I really appreciated the amount of kindness I saw shown to people who were brave enough to be vulnerable and open about themselves and their struggles. I've always considered myself to be more closed off, even to the people closest to me, but I was really inspired to open up more and be myself. On the flip side, all the advice I was given has really stuck with me, and I've also been inspired to become more like the people that have made an impact on me.



2025 CAMPER Q&A

2025 Senior Campers: Steven C. Chua, Shreya Virani, Cam Liu
2025 Junior Campers: Hunter Dunne, Chanel Ramos, Iza Tiberio

What does leadership mean to you now, after attending RYLA?

Hunter: Leadership is making sure everybody is included, sharing ideas, helping out or volunteering, and sometimes doing the jobs that other don't want to do.

Chanel: Leadership is being someone people can look up to and being everyone's friend and helping them with the things that they are having a hard time doing.

Iza: Leadership is not about being under the spotlight and dictating what everyone has to do. It is about listening, understanding, observing, learning, helping, and being a great example to others. As well as being there for someone when they need you.

Steven: Every single person I met in this camp honestly inspired me. Hearing all their stories and interacting with all these great personalities challenged me to step up once I stepped out of the camp; you guys know who you are!

Shreya: After attending RYLA, leadership to me means more than just guiding others - it's about creating an environment where everyone feels seen, heard, and valued. I learned that real leadership comes from empathy, teamwork, and the ability to connect with people on a deeper level. It's about lifting others up and helping them recognize their own strengths while continuing to grow yourself.

Cam: Leadership has many different applications; since RYLA, I really think the best way to describe it would be action. Even though I've participated in other leadership conferences or sat through many presentations on "what it means to be a leader," I don't think I truly grasped the concept until I saw it displayed in front of me. Words and promises don't mean anything without the action alongside it. Everyone I met at RYLA led by example and demonstrated how powerful good leadership could be.



2025 CAMPER Q&A

2025 Senior Campers: Steven C. Chua, Shreya Virani, Cam Liu
2025 Junior Campers: Hunter Dunne, Chanel Ramos, Iza Tiberio

What kind of impact has RYLA had in your life - has it influenced you to try something new, get involved with your community, or build deeper relationships with others?

Hunter: RYLA has influenced me to try new things whether it sounds like something you may want to do or not.

Chanel: It inspired me to be myself more and make friends that would actually like me for me and to not be afraid to speak up about my feelings more and to be kind.

Iza: RYLA has influenced me to become a better person, work great under pressure, listen and understand other's point of view, be nice, make friendships, and try new things. Also, every time I feel down, I always read the shiny's people from camp wrote me and somehow a smile always shows up on my face.

Steven: RYLA taught me how to take advantage of opportunities given to me and to be courageous enough to take them. After a hard school year prior to RYLA due to only being in Canada for a few months; the lessons I've learned from RYLA allowed me to be more active through clubs, sports, and community organizations here in Prince Albert. In all of these, I was able to make an impact and hear all the unique stories shared by every person I met through these experiences.

Shreya: RYLA has had a huge impact on my life. When I first went two years ago, I was really nervous, I didn't know what to expect or if I'd fit in. But from the moment I arrived, everyone's positivity and support made me feel comfortable and excited to be there. The experience pushed me to step out of my comfort zone and try things I never thought I would. It's helped me build deeper relationships, get more involved in my community, and gain the confidence to pursue opportunities I would've been too scared to before. RYLA showed me the value of growth, connection, and believing in myself to shape who I am today.

Cam: After discussions with my peers, I noticed a lack of leadership opportunities and student-led initiatives at my school. Once I returned, I established an Interact Club in hopes that new students could become more involved and strengthen the community. So far, we've partnered with Winnipeg Rotary and other school-based Interact Clubs to donate winter clothing and hockey equipment to Indigenous communities and families that have been displaced due to wildfires in the north of Manitoba. I hope by taking this small step to start this club, it'll continue and encourage more young leaders to step up.



2025 CAMPER Q&A

2025 Senior Campers: Steven C. Chua, Shreya Virani, Cam Liu
2025 Junior Campers: Hunter Dunne, Chanel Ramos, Iza Tiberio

What is one word that sums up your RYLA experience or what RYLA means to you?

Hunter: WHOLESOME

Chanel: MEMORABLE

Iza: UNIQUE

Steven: COURAGE

Shreya: HOME

Cam: UNFORGETTABLE



COUNSELLOR HIGHLIGHT

A Grateful Reflection on Leadership, Friendship, and Community

As we move through a season of gratitude, two of our counsellors took a moment to reflect on what RYLA means to them, not just as a camp but as a community that continues to shape who we are long after the summer ends.

This newsletter, we asked them one simple question:

“Why are you grateful to be a part of RYLA? What are three things that make you thankful to have RYLA - and the people who are part of it - in your life?”

Their answers remind us that leadership is built on connection, service, and the friendships that feel like family.

They each shared what 3 things they think about when reflecting on gratitude for RYLA!

SARAH

(Dauphin, MB/Lloydminster, AB)

1. Experiencing moments that quietly change your life one relationship, one conversation, and one activity at a time!
2. Knowing that there are people around us who truly care about making a difference and want to work together to do so!
3. Having RYLA and these incredible humans in my life, I have been changed for good!



BRIELLE

(Portage la Prairie, MB)

1. The people and connections I have made through RYLA have definitely changed me and will forever be important in my life
2. The opportunities RYLA has given have not only changed the course of my life but also my entire mindset
3. The reminder that kind people are everywhere!



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Youth tab - RYLA

Do you have a story you want to be featured in our next RYLA newsletter? Reach out to sarah.hogue@live.com!!