



Toronto Community Housing



HOME RUN SCHOLARS PROGRAM REPORT 2016-2017

THE PURPOSE

The Home Run Scholars program is a dynamic and accessible four-hour after school program designed to support youth in grades 1 to 6 residing in Toronto Community Housing (TCHC) communities throughout the city. Home Run Scholars provides not only a safe, fun environment for children to attend after school, but also improves academic performance, enhances physical health, enhances social and emotional well-being and improves student behaviour. Participants also receive healthy nourishment generously donated by The Sprott Foundation.

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THE PROCESS

LOCAL YOUTH STAFF

Most of the front-line Home Run Scholars staff were motivated youth residents of the marginalized communities they were hired to serve. A total of 73 staff members were hired after a rigorous interview process that included facilitation practicals and a range of challenging scenarios.

TRAINING

All youth staff participated in a robust, dynamic 5-day onboarding training program to equip them with the confidence and expertise needed to lead an exceptional outcome-based after school program. The staff training included:

FACILITATION SKILLS - How to effectively facilitate high quality/ structured programming

BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT - How to pro-actively manage behaviours while maintaining integrity (PACE Training)

ACTION-PACKED ACTIVITIES - How to ensure that programs are action-packed

FILLING EMOTIONAL-TANKS - Strategies enhancing the self-esteem of each individual participant

ASSESSMENT - Activities to use to assess the program and continuously improve

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT - Monthly workshops designed to enhance skills and share best-practices

RESOURCES AND EQUIPMENT

All staff receive developmentally appropriate and user-friendly guides, program supplies and equipment to help them plan and lead each day of the program. In particular, Home Run Scholars staff are provided with 3 useful tools:

1. A Staff Handbook that outlines the goals, vision, mission, policies, procedures and weekly schedule of the program.
2. An Activity Manual that provides a wide range of examples of extended learning activities, choice activities, arts and crafts activities, cooperative games and sport-based activities for them to draw from.
3. A monthly supply of grade-divided worksheets. At the monthly professional development workshop staff are given a new supply of worksheets for students to work on upon completing their homework. Worksheets are separated by grade and include a variety of subject areas.

COLLECTIVE EVENTS

During the Home Run Scholars program, a minimum of 3 collective events were planned each month, including professional development days, 'Big Sports Days', and monthly challenges. These events brought together 5-6 Home Run Scholar sites to participate in fun, interactive activities that resulted in deeper connections between communities.

ON-THE-GROUND COACHING

Each youth staff was assigned a highly skilled supervisor and coach to support them throughout the program. The Home Run Scholars supervisors and coaches were responsible for providing mentorship, guidance, and ongoing feedback to the youth staff.

REGULAR MEASUREMENT

We used a variety of tools to measure the impact of the Home Run Scholars program on staff, children and parents. These include weekly discussions, art activities, child-friendly surveys and assessment games designed to help staff, children and parents tell us what is working and what needs to be improved within the program.

LONG-TERM OPPORTUNITIES

Using our wide network of implementing partners and organizational opportunities, we celebrated the goals and successes of the youth staff in ways that will support their long-term success in school and future employment.

LAUNCHING THE PROGRAM

On November 8th, 2016, Home Run Scholars officially launched in 22 different TCHC communities across the city. A total of 520 children aged 6 to 14 attended, and each Home Run Scholars site hosted between 15 and 30 children and staffed with a minimum of 2 Tutors, who were trained specifically to offer one-on-one and group homework support, and 1 Program Leader, who was trained to offer a wide range of dynamic sport-based programming.

POTENTIAL is the philosophy used to guide the Home Run Scholars program. Each staff member and volunteer who was part of the program had the privilege of helping every child participant fulfill their potential:

- P PHYSICALLY ACTIVE:** The Home Run Scholars program includes a full hour of sport and recreation activities that are designed to get their bodies moving and their hearts pumping.
- O ORGANIZED STRUCTURE:** The Home Run Scholars program schedule is highly structured so that children, staff, volunteers and guardians know what to expect each week.
- T TEAM ENVIRONMENT:** Developing essential social and emotional skills like compassion, communication and conflict resolution skills takes time and effort. At Home Run Scholars, each day focuses on helping children participate in team-building activities where they are challenged to develop these essential social and emotional skills.
- E EMOTIONAL-TANKS ARE FULL:** The Home Run Scholars staff are trained to ensure that each child leaves each day becoming more aware of their own limitless potential through celebrating their efforts and by encouraging others to do the same - consciously filling each child's emotional tank.
- N NUTRITIOUS SNACKS AND HEALTHY COOKING:** Children at Home Run Scholars receive two healthy snacks each day of the program and are taught about the nutritional benefits of various foods as well as affordable and fun ways to prepare them.
- T TRUSTWORTHY, TRAINED AND RELIABLE ROLE MODELS:** Home Run Scholars staff come from TCH communities and are selected because they are experienced, reliable and create safe and positive environments for all students.
- I INSPIRING CHOICES:** Each day of the Home Run Scholars program includes "choice time" that allows children to use their decision-making skills and enables them to further develop in areas that excite them.
- A ASSESSMENT AND IMPROVEMENT:** Each Home Run Scholars program is designed to meet the unique needs of each specific TCH site. Staff conduct fun activities at the end of each month to learn what the children like about the program, and how the program can be improved.
- L LEARNING:** Homework time is an integrated part of the Home Run Scholars after school program. Each day students receive support from their peers and from the staff to complete their required homework and to further nurture their love of learning through fun literacy and numeracy activities.

THE PROGRAM

Home Run Scholars was implemented from November 2016-May 2017, in alignment with the school calendar, three times per week from 3:30pm to 7:30pm. The after school program integrated a wide range of sport and team-building activities, arts and dramatic play, homework support, and nutritious snacks. Each month, participants attended a Big Sports Day (last Wednesday of each month), where they joined 5-6 other Home Run Scholars sites and participated in fun and competitive sports programming.

DAILY SCHEDULE FOR THE PROGRAM:

3:30-4:00	Participants Arrive, Attendance, Little Choice Time, Snack #1
4:00-5:00	Homework Time and Extended Learning
5:00-5:15	Snack #2 & Snack Challenge
5:15-6:15	Get Out and Play
6:15-7:00	Big Choice Time
7:00-7:30	Wrap Up and Assessment

PROGRAM IMPACT

520 **PARTICIPANTS** attended the program regularly

73 **PART-TIME YOUTH STAFF** were hired and trained to implement the program

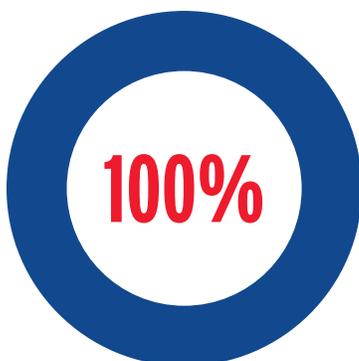
22 **TCHC BUILDINGS** hosted the program

24

BIG SPORTS DAYS were held, which enabled participants to meet children and youth from neighbouring communities and learn new sports skills

98% of Home Run Scholars staff said they had **FUN AT STAFF TRAINING**

98% of staff said that, compared to other trainings they have attended, the **HOME RUN SCHOLARS STAFF TRAINING WAS GREAT**



of staff said they were proud of their contribution to the Home Run Scholars program

of parents strongly agreed that they felt comfortable sending their child to the Home Run Scholars program

of parents strongly agreed that they would send their children back to the program next year

of parents strongly agreed that throughout the year, they noticed their child was engaged in more physical activity as a result of the Home Run Scholars program

[What I liked most about the HRS program]

IT HELPED MY SON ACADEMICALLY AND WITH GYM ACTIVITIES,
which my son loves very much. Keep up the good work." - PARENT OF HRS PARTICIPANT



[The things that I am proudest of from my work at HRS are]

"the connections I made with kids. The close bonds I formed with other staff; and seeing the growth I saw in many of the kids."

- HRS STAFF MEMBER

[What I liked most about being a HRS staff member is]

"being a visible minority and having grown up in TCH, I felt I could relate with youth. **I enjoyed hearing their stories and sharing mine,** setting high expectations for them."

- HRS STAFF MEMBER

[The things that I am proudest of from my work at HRS are] hearing from the parents that we **MADE AN IMPROVEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY AND THE CHILDREN ENJOYED COMING INTO THE PROGRAM."** - HRS STAFF MEMBER

[Some things I learned at HRS are]

HOW TO GET BETTER GRADES AND HOW TO COMMUNICATE BETTER." - HRS PARTICIPANT



[Some things I learned at HRS are] **to always be confident."** - HRS PARTICIPANT

[HRS would be better if] **we got to have it all year. I'm going to miss you guys."** - HRS PARTICIPANT

[My favourite parts of HRS are] **talking to the staff, play games, play sports, and going on trips."** - HRS PARTICIPANT

SPECIAL EVENTS



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DAYS

(last Friday every month)

Staff participated in a 4-hour professional development workshop every month. These workshops were designed to help staff share best practices, learn new skills to enhance their programs, and address existing concerns. Both internal (TCHC and Jays Care Foundation) and external (George Hull Centre) facilitators led workshops. Below are some examples of workshops led:

- Non-violent crisis intervention
- Child Protection
- Innovative Practices to Addressing Challenging Behaviours
- Big games for small spaces



BIG SPORTS DAY

(last Wednesday every month)

Each month, all Home Run Scholars participants attended a Big Sports Day, which brought together children from a minimum of 5-6 different communities. The event was designed to challenge children to learn new sport and physical literacy skills while forming relationships with others from neighbouring communities that suffer from gang-related disputes. Big Sports Days were hosted at several locations around the city and involved support from the following organizations, students and staff:

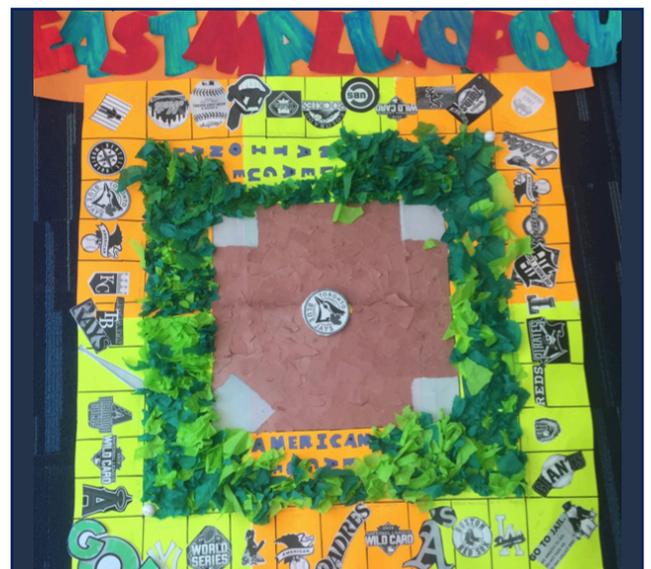
- Ryerson University, Ryerson Athletes
- University of Toronto
- Humber College, Humber Athletes
- Variety Village
- Ultra Sports, the Toronto Police
- The Hangar

MONTHLY CHALLENGES

Each month, participants were presented with a challenge to complete either individually or collaboratively with their site. The challenges were presented during homework time and integrated literacy and creative writing skills. Each month, sites would submit their challenges to Jays Care and winning teams were selected to receive exciting awards.

Examples of these challenges include:

- 1) creating an invention that will make the world a better place;
- 2) creating an alphabet board where each letter represents something unique to their community; and
- 3) creating a site Year Book. Rewards for monthly challenges were offered by Kids Up Front and included trips to: Raptors Games, Blue Jays Games, the Aquarium, TFC Games, and the Monster Jam.



THE SNOW BALL AT THE ROGERS CENTRE

12 Home Run Scholars sites were invited to attend the Snow Ball, hosted by Rogers and the Toronto Blue Jays on December 10th, 2016. The event was held on the field at the Rogers Centre with a winter carnival theme, and offered a wide range of rides and activities for staff to enjoy.

HOME RUN SCHOLARS STAFF GALA

On June 5, 2017, the Home Run Scholars Staff Gala celebrated all staff that completed the after school program. Hosted in the Rogers Centre Summit Suite, the night was elegant, inspirational, and most of all, rewarding. Staff were recognized for their outstanding commitment to the children who participated in the Home Run Scholars program and their passion for change.



HOME RUN SCHOLARS AWARDS

All youth staff were invited to attend the highly anticipated Home Run Scholars Staff Gala, where several awards were given out to celebrate their extraordinary efforts and achievements. Staff were rewarded for their leadership, creativity, inclusiveness, reliability, and ability to make participants feel valued. Two of the most distinguished Home Run Scholars Awards include:

ROLE MODEL AWARDS:

This award went to the staff members who were positive and inspirational role models to all the youth in Home Run Scholars program. They represented the values and qualities Home Run Scholars works to instill in all children and youth.

HALL OF FAME AWARD:

Our most esteemed award, Hall of Famers are staff members who encompassed and excelled at all the values of Home Run Scholars; they were an active mentor, a positive role model, they created vital connections, encouraged self-growth in the youth, and worked tirelessly to help every child and staff fulfill their potential.

HOME RUN SCHOLARS HALL OF FAME

DANIEL BARIAS

Daniel Barias was born and raised in Scarborough, Ontario where he attended Jean Vanier High School. At 21, he has already had a remarkable impact on his community.

His dedication to bettering the lives of those around him was what got him involved with the Home Run Scholars program. He was working with the Boys and Girls Club, when his incredible spirit and commitment were recognized by a Rookie League Staff member. He was eager to tackle a new challenge and accepted a position at 3847 Lawrence, where he has continued to work since the start of the program.

According to Daniel, programs like Home Run Scholars are instrumental in the development of our children and youth. He wishes he could have had participated in a program like HRS when he was growing up. Daniel's extraordinary contributions to his site, and to the Home Run Scholars program, earned him the highest recognition a staff member can receive; a place in the Home Run Scholars Hall of Fame. This award recognizes outstanding achievement and commitment to Home Run Scholars programming. For Daniel, giving back to his community is one of the most important jobs; as he said, working is not just about making money, it is about having fun and creating opportunities for those around you.

Daniel's many bright ideas about the future, his dedication, and hard work made him so deserving of this award. We know he will continue to positively impact the lives of those around him, and that this program is just the start of his amazing accomplishments!



PAMELA SAA

Pamela Saa is a 24-year-old aspiring social worker, who grew up in Toronto Community Housing. It was there that she discovered her passion for uplifting the children and youth in her community. She started volunteering with a tutoring program called On Your Mark, similar to Home Run Scholars. Her search for a job and her eagerness to work with children and youth brought her to the Toronto Community Housing website, where she discovered Home Run Scholars. She was stationed at Cooper Mills, 4020 Dundas St. West, and has remained there since the program's start in October.

Pamela strongly believes that motivating children to succeed cannot be solely based on their actions and behavior. One also has to look at the child's surroundings and social situation in order to properly build-up the child and their self-esteem. Her parents immigrated from Ecuador to Toronto, where she was raised by her mother. She says she can relate to a lot of the kids she works with because she understands their frustrations and their struggles.

Pamela's undying motivation earned her a spot in the Home Run Scholars Hall of Fame. She made it her mission during the year to connect with every child and youth on an individual level. She wanted to ensure that every child felt special and unique, and that they had the tools within themselves to succeed. This was no easy task, especially with such a large group, but Pamela was successful in her endeavor because of her incredible drive and perseverance.

Pamela created an incredible support system for the children and youth at her site. She believes that every child can succeed no matter what their situation may be. She said there were some tough times during the year but overall, it was worth it to see the children set goals for themselves and achieve those goals. We know Pamela has touched the lives of every child and youth she encountered during her year at HRS. She is a truly special staff member and she will go on to do great things. We hope to see her next year!



KEY LEARNINGS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

While the program was deemed a huge success this year, there are several areas in which we can improve. Below are some key recommendations from staff, children and parent surveys and interviews:

INCREASE COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND PROGRAM AWARENESS

- Increase the number of inter-site visits with more collective and off-location activities
- Increase the number of organizational partnerships to offer a variety of opportunities for the youth
- Reach out to tenant reps, schools, centres and events
- Host an Open House early September and advertise in late August

ADDRESS TIMING ISSUES

- Change the program start time to early September
- Adjust daily schedules to reflect daylight hours and community needs
- Consider changing the program to 5 days rather than 3 days
- Revise daily schedules to include a pre-homework activity, incentives and extended time for homework

IMPROVE RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

- Ensure alignment of HRS worksheets with school curriculum
- Offer workbooks tailored to each child, which include a personalized journal to log their work
- Translate materials (e.g., posters) to reflect primary languages of each community

ENHANCE ROLE CLARITY

- Continual training on staff roles and responsibilities
- Peer evaluations

ENCOURAGE GREATER PARENT INVOLVEMENT

- Ask staff to lead program registration so that parents can meet those working with their children
- Host a Parent Day/Event at the end of the year to showcase children's work and progress

*TCHC AND JAYS CARE WANT TO EXTEND
OUR THANKS TO ALL OUR PARTNERS
AND SUPPORTERS WHO MADE HOME
RUN SCHOLARS POSSIBLE:*

CITY OF TORONTO

MATTHEW TSANG

RYERSON RAMS ATHLETICS

FIRST BOOK CANADA

NIKE

THE SPROTT FOUNDATION

FOOD FOR TOTS

ROGERS

KIDS UP FRONT

**HUMBER COLLEGE
ATHLETICS PROGRAM**

