



# SCA Youth Program Outcomes and Critical Program Factors

*Summary of Findings*



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For more than 50 years, Search Institute®—a research to practice organization—has worked with partners in 60 countries, discovering what children and youth need to succeed. Our work helps motivate and equip caring adults to create schools, communities, and families where all young people thrive. Our 40 Developmental Assets are the most widely recognized and most frequently cited approach to positive youth development in North America, and serve as the foundation of our work.

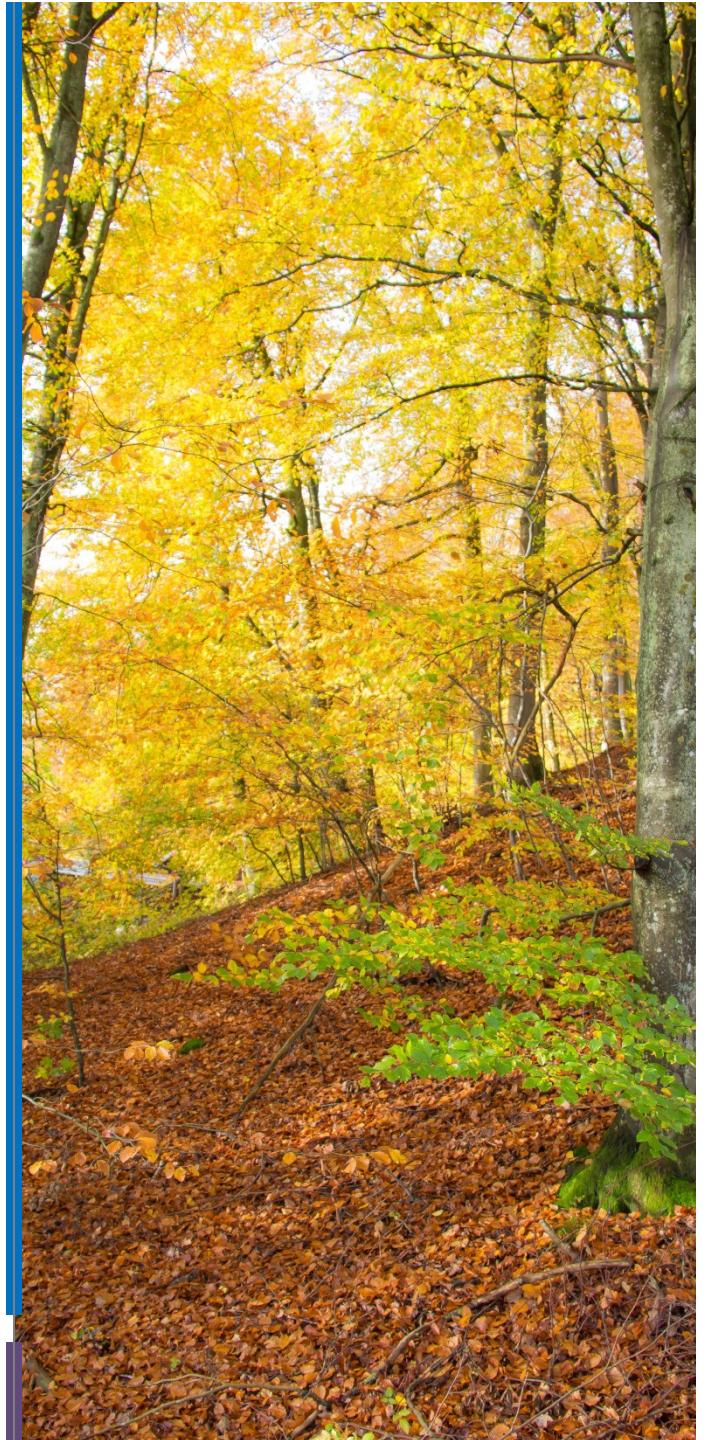


SCA unites young people with hands-on environmental challenges to create future stewards of our land, healthier environments and—ultimately—a better world. Since 1957, more than 70,000 young people have joined the ranks of SCA and have provided more than 28 million hours of hands-on service yielding immediate and lasting effects on our environment.

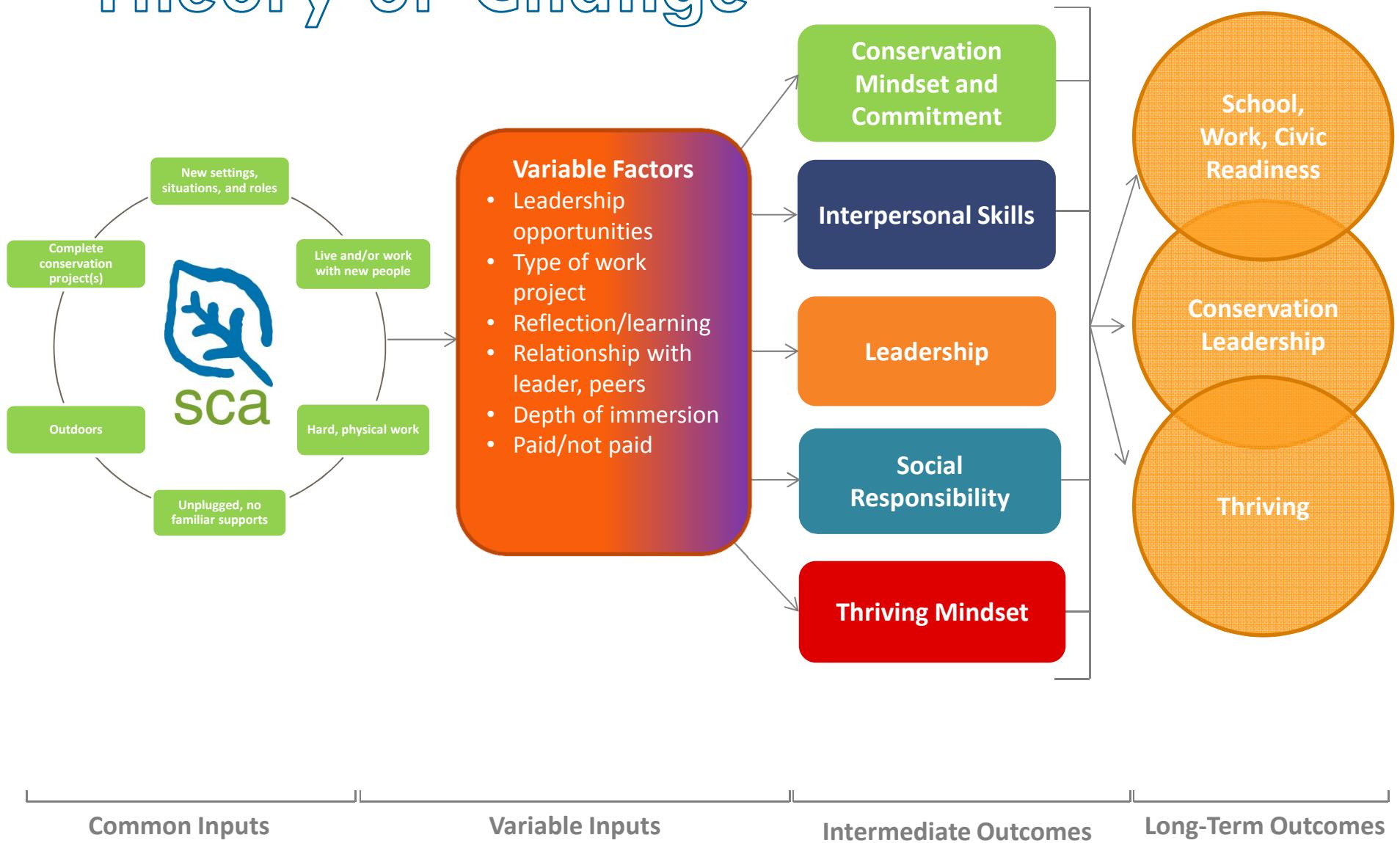
**What was the goal  
of this study?**

The goal was three-fold:

- **Demonstrate change** in key conservation and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills throughout the SCA experience;
- **Identify program factors** important for yielding outcomes;
- Design a survey that allows SCA to **use data to inform an ongoing continuous improvement process.**



# Theory of Change



# **Who participated in the survey?**

# A total of 693 National and Community Crew members provided pre- and post-test data.

National and Community Crew members were invited to participate in the survey prior to beginning (pre-test) their SCA experience and immediately afterwards (post-test).

Two-thirds of participants took the pre- and post-test surveys. Half of the sample was female (53%) and slightly more were Community Crew members (64%). The sample was racially diverse: White (34%), Black (33%), Multi-Racial (22%), Asian (10%), and American Indian (1%).



# **Does SCA have an impact on members?**

**YES!** Scores in each of these outcome categories were stronger at the end of the program than the beginning.

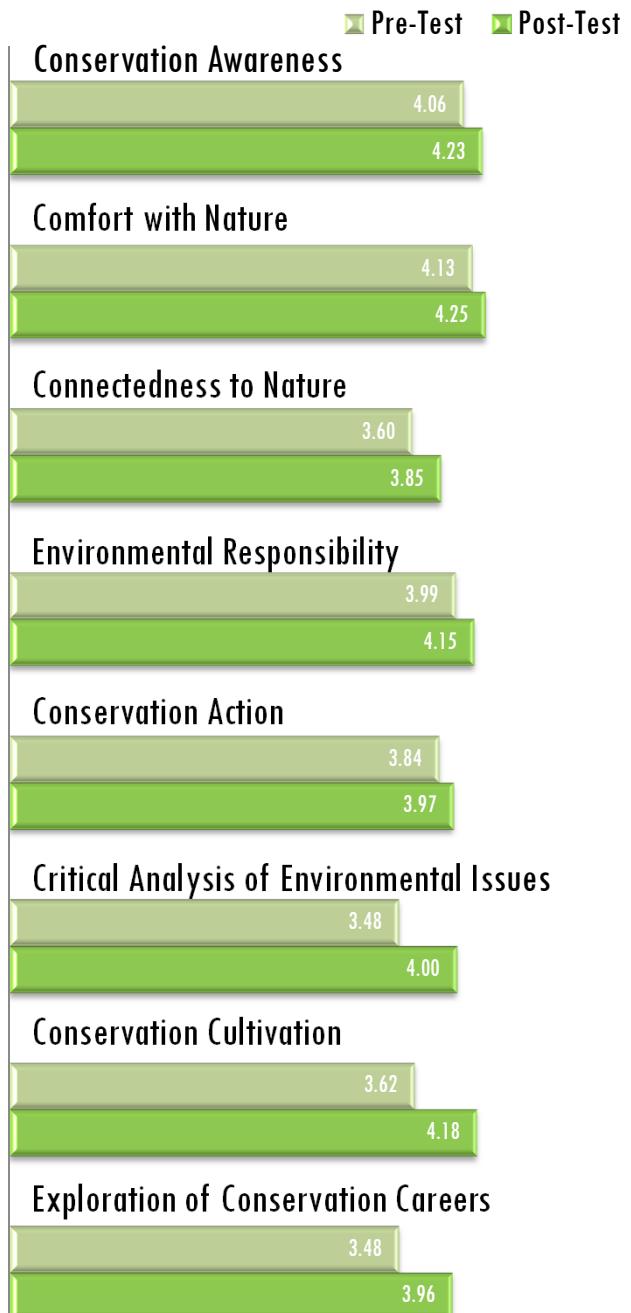


# Commitment to conservation practices and leadership increased.

SCA members self-reported higher levels on all eight elements of the Conservation Mindset and Commitment continuum stretching from being aware of—and comfortable with—nature to active consideration of conservation careers.



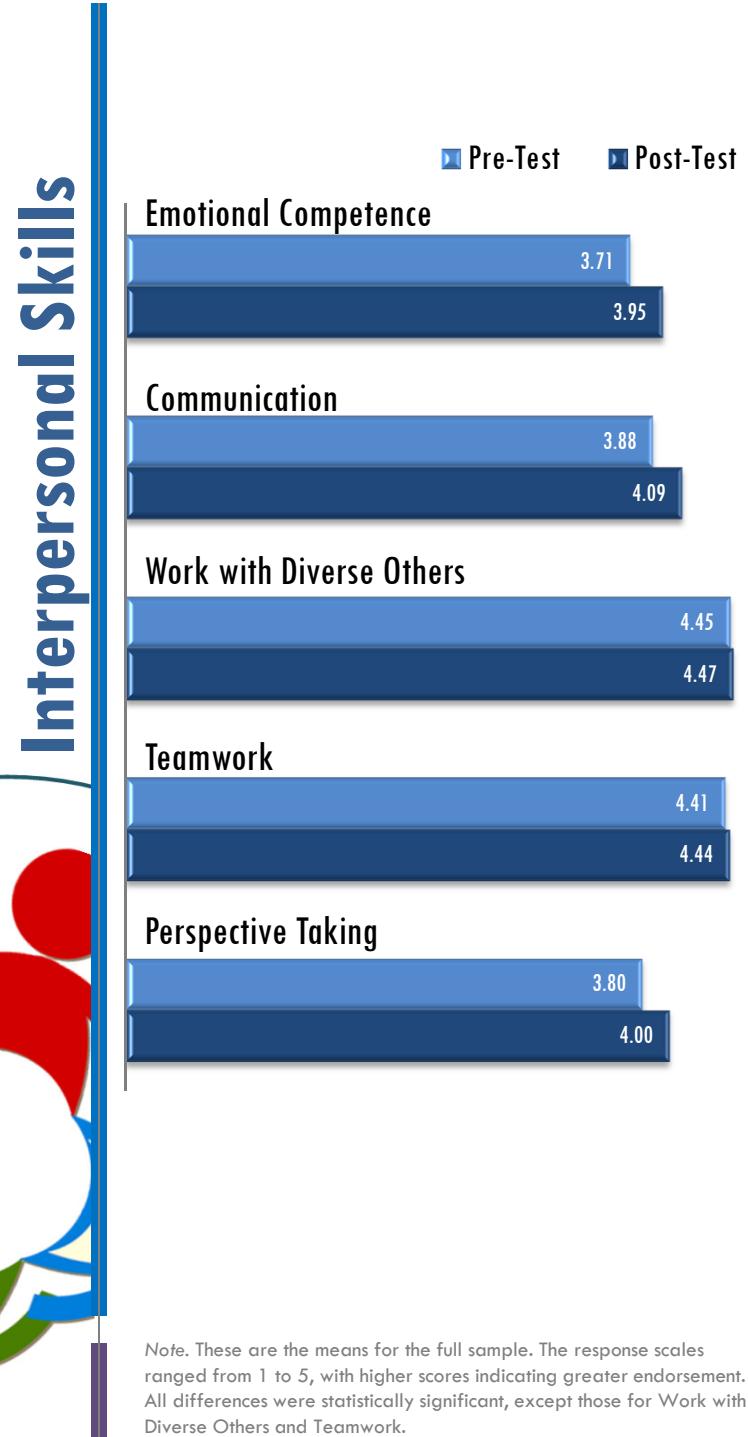
## Conservation Mindset



Note. These are the means for the full sample. The response scales ranged from 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating greater endorsement. All differences were statistically significant, meaning the difference is unlikely to be due to random chance.

# Young people improved in their ability to work with others.

In particular, SCA members showed significant improvement from pre- to post-test in their emotional competence, communication skills, and ability to see alternative perspectives. While the change in self-reported ability to work with diverse others and teamwork remained stable; the absolute levels of both of these indicators at pre- and post-test were quite high.

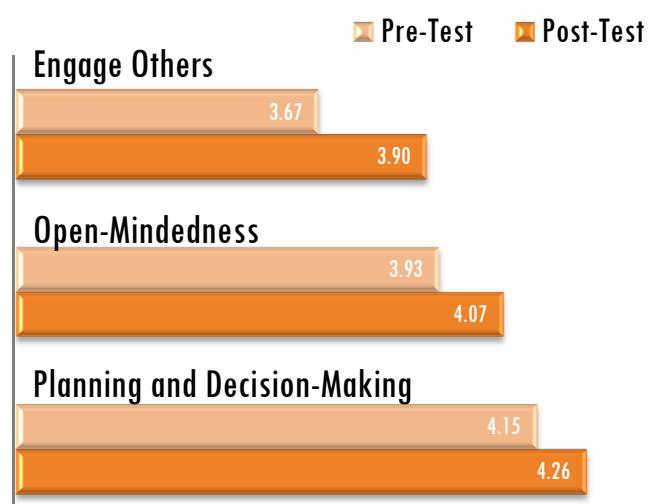


# Leadership skills increased over the course of members' conservation experience.

SCA members indicated gains in their ability to engage and lead others in reaching a goal, be open to the ideas and recommendations of others, and plan and make decisions by carefully evaluating the outcomes of different options.



## Leadership Qualities



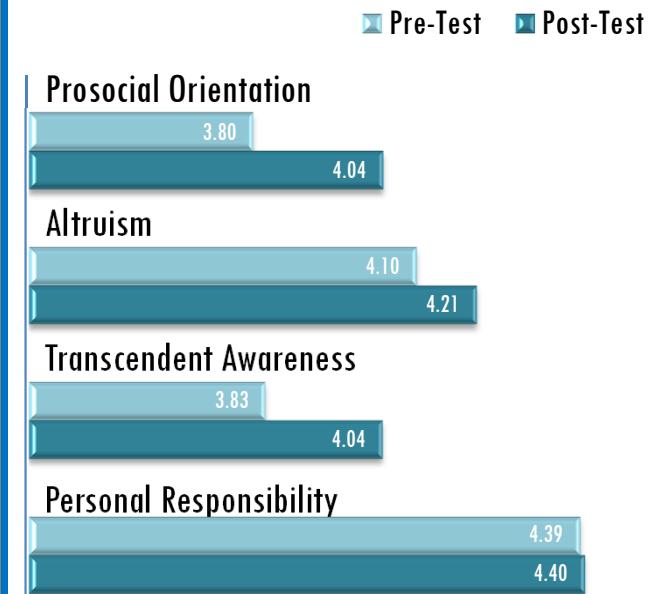
Note. These are the means for the full sample. The response scales ranged from 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating greater endorsement. All differences were statistically significant, meaning the difference is unlikely to be due to random chance.

# Members reported a greater willingness to help others and sense of connection to the common good.

Compared to themselves prior to beginning the SCA program, members were more likely to endorse a set of other-oriented measures after participating in SCA. This included a greater willingness to “help people,” “make their community a better place,” and feelings of connection with and responsibility for the common good. Members’ self-reported levels of personal responsibility remained high over the course of the program.



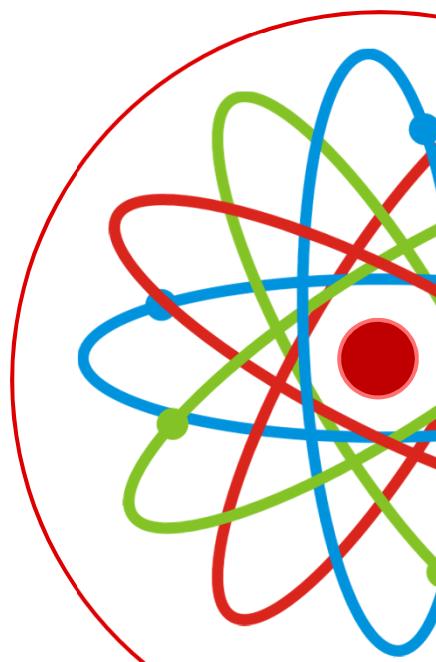
## Social Responsibility



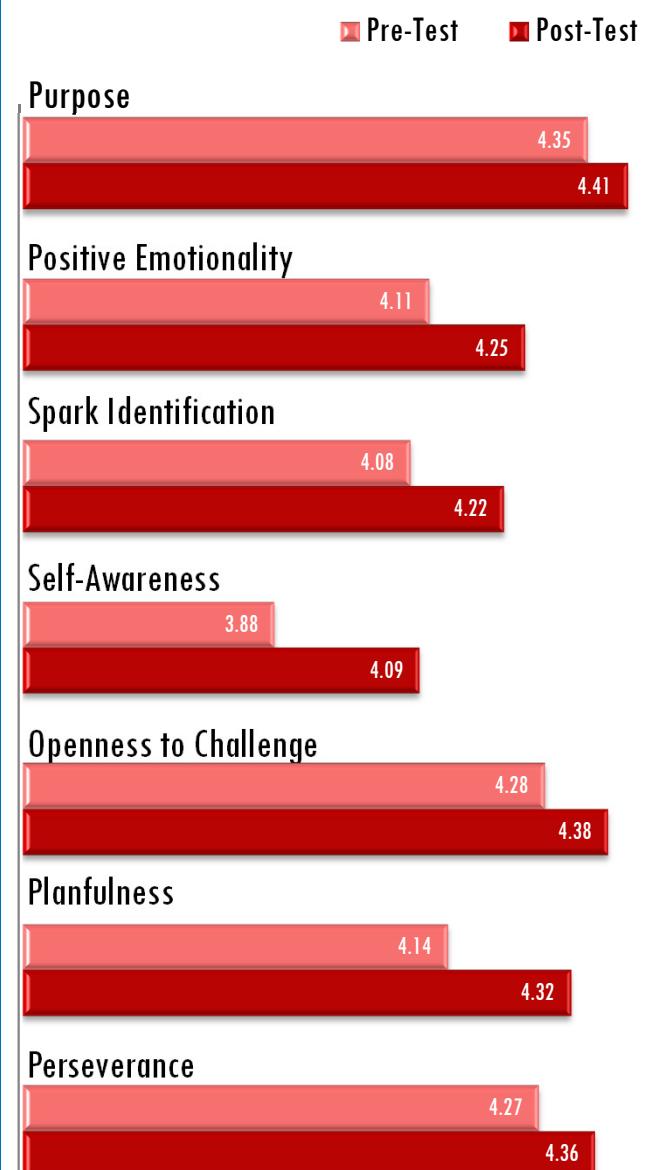
Note. These are the means for the full sample. The response scales ranged from 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating greater endorsement. All differences were statistically significant, except those for Personal Responsibility.

# Members showed significant gains in their thriving mindset.

A “thriving mindset” is a propensity to think, feel, and act in ways that fuel continuous growth and optimal development. It includes non-cognitive skills, perceptions, and character traits considered critical for college and career success. Taken as a collective, these qualities open the door to a lifetime of new experiences through which young people continue to build the knowledge, skills, and social connections needed to succeed and to lead.



Thriving



Note. These are the means for the full sample. The response scales ranged from 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating greater endorsement. All differences were statistically significant, meaning the difference is unlikely to be due to random chance.

The nature of the **Community Crew program afforded participants unique opportunities** to learn financial management and career skills. Most would still participate in SCA even if the work had been unpaid.

54%

73%

78%

67%

Learned to use a bank account

Better understand what it takes to be a successful employee

Feel they are better at time management

Definitely or probably would still have participated in SCA if the work had been unpaid

Approximately **3 out of every 4 SCA members agreed** their SCA experience helped: them positively impact the lives of others; refine their career goals; and, increased their sense of responsibility for their community.

As part of the SCA experience, members...

**78%**

Did things that will impact other people's experience with the natural environment

**79%**

Made a positive difference in the lives of others

**74%**

Have a better understanding about what kind of career they might pursue

**69%**

Feel more responsible for addressing issues in their community

**Is it a big deal to see  
this kind of change in all  
these outcomes?**

**It is rare to see such consistent change across so many conservation and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and dispositions.**



**Yet, it is not surprising!** This study builds on two years of extensive interviews, focus groups, and observations of SCA programs. We selected these developmental outcomes because the qualitative data suggested these were the areas where SCA had the most impact or potential for impact.



# **Does the impact vary by program?**

# National Crew members demonstrated larger gains on select outcomes than Community Crew members.

National Crew members scored higher than Community Crew members on each of the outcomes listed here. Most of these differences were in the thriving (red) and social responsibility (aqua) domains, with fewer in the conservation (green), interpersonal (dark blue), and leadership (orange) domains. These programmatic differences likely reflect the intense immersion experience offered as part of the SCA National Crew program.

- Consideration of Conservation Careers
- Emotional Competence
- Teamwork
- Engage Others
- Planning & Decision Making
- Personal Responsibility
- Prosocial Orientation
- Transcendent Awareness
- Self-Awareness
- Perseverance
- Planfulness
- Positive Emotionality
- Purpose

# However, National and Community Crew members showed similar change on a number of important outcomes too!

There were many other conservation (green), interpersonal (dark blue), leadership (orange), social responsibility (aqua), and thriving (red) outcomes in which there were NO significant differences in the pre-/post-program gains by program.

Interestingly, there were no significant program differences in 7 of the 8 Conservation Mindset and Commitment indicators. For all of the conservation measures, National Crew members had higher average scores at the beginning and the end of the program compared to Community Crew members. Thus, while both groups made equal gains from pre- to post-program, these gains were along different parts of the scale.

- Conservation Awareness
- Comfort with Nature
- Connectedness to Nature
- Environmental Responsibility
- Conservation Action
- Critical Analysis of Environmental Issues
- Conservation Cultivation
- Perspective Taking
- Communication
- Work with Diverse Others
- Open-Mindedness
- Altruism
- Spark Identification
- Openness to Challenge

# **What are the powerful program levers?**

**It varies by outcome**, but each of the following has been shown to have an affect:

- Having a quality experience
- Feeling valued by the crew
- Participating in reflection
- Being challenged
- A supportive agency partner
- Finding the work interesting/fun



**How certain are we  
that this change is  
the result of SCA?**

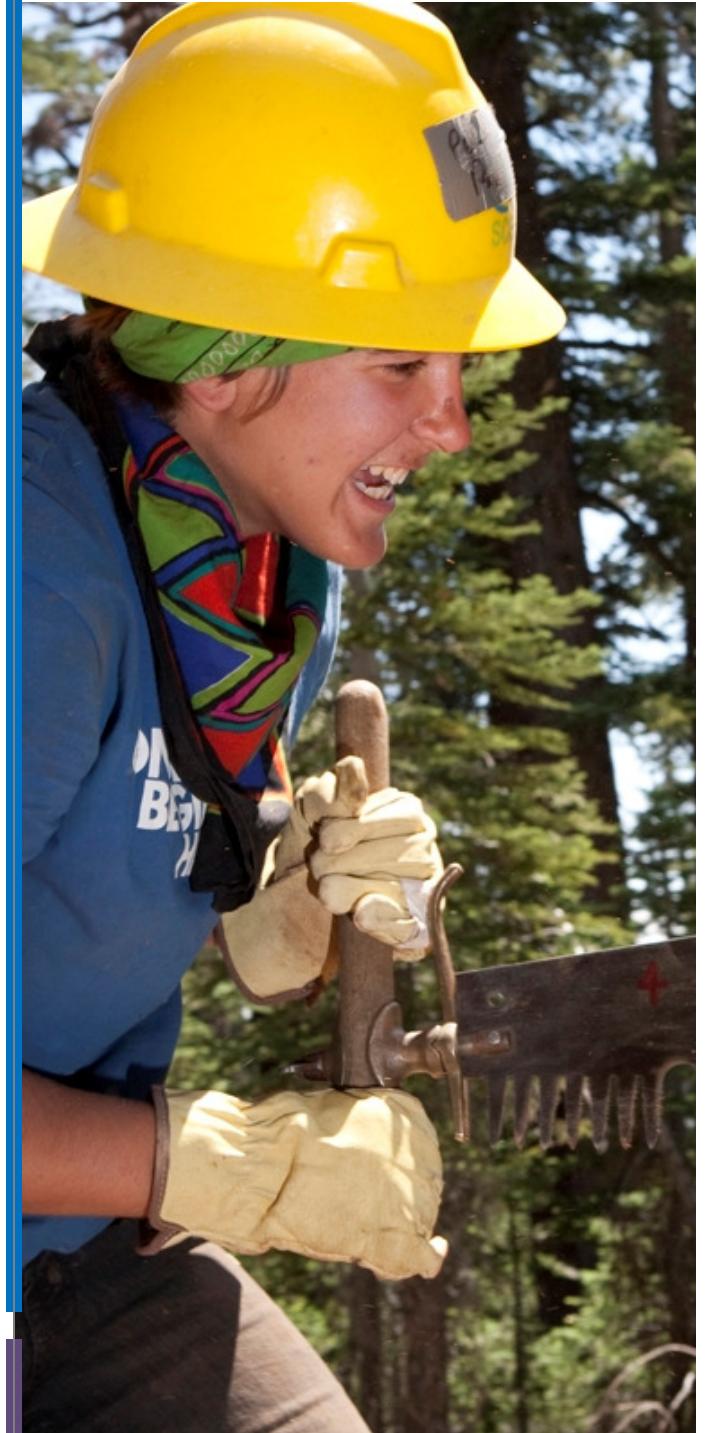
**The change we observed was REAL**, however the only way to say with certainty that the change was “caused” by SCA participation is to conduct a study that includes both a program and a comparison group.



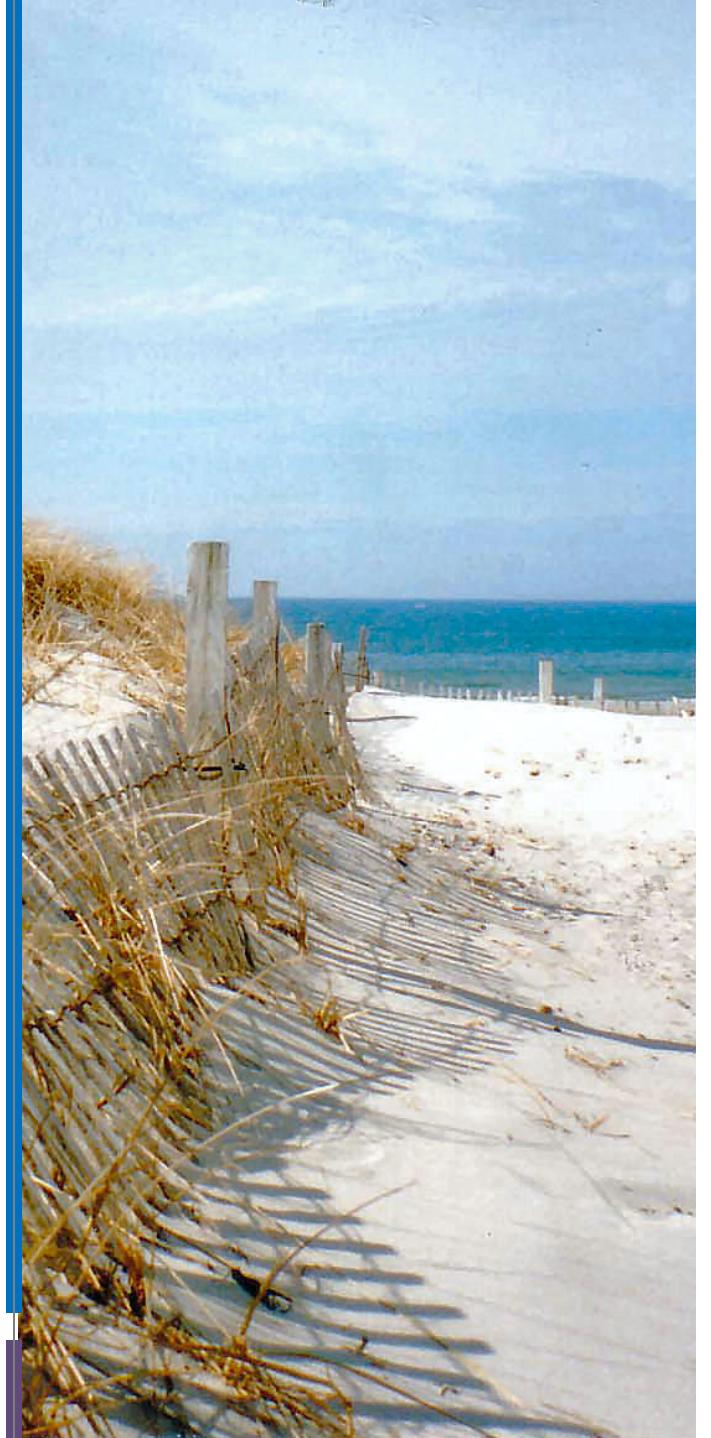
# Why does this matter?

**It provides hard evidence of the impact of SCA for its members.**

At the same time, it targets areas of focus to continually improve outcomes.



**It opens the door to new funders and supporters**  
interested in positive youth development and workforce readiness, while reinforcing the power of SCA among conservation stakeholders.

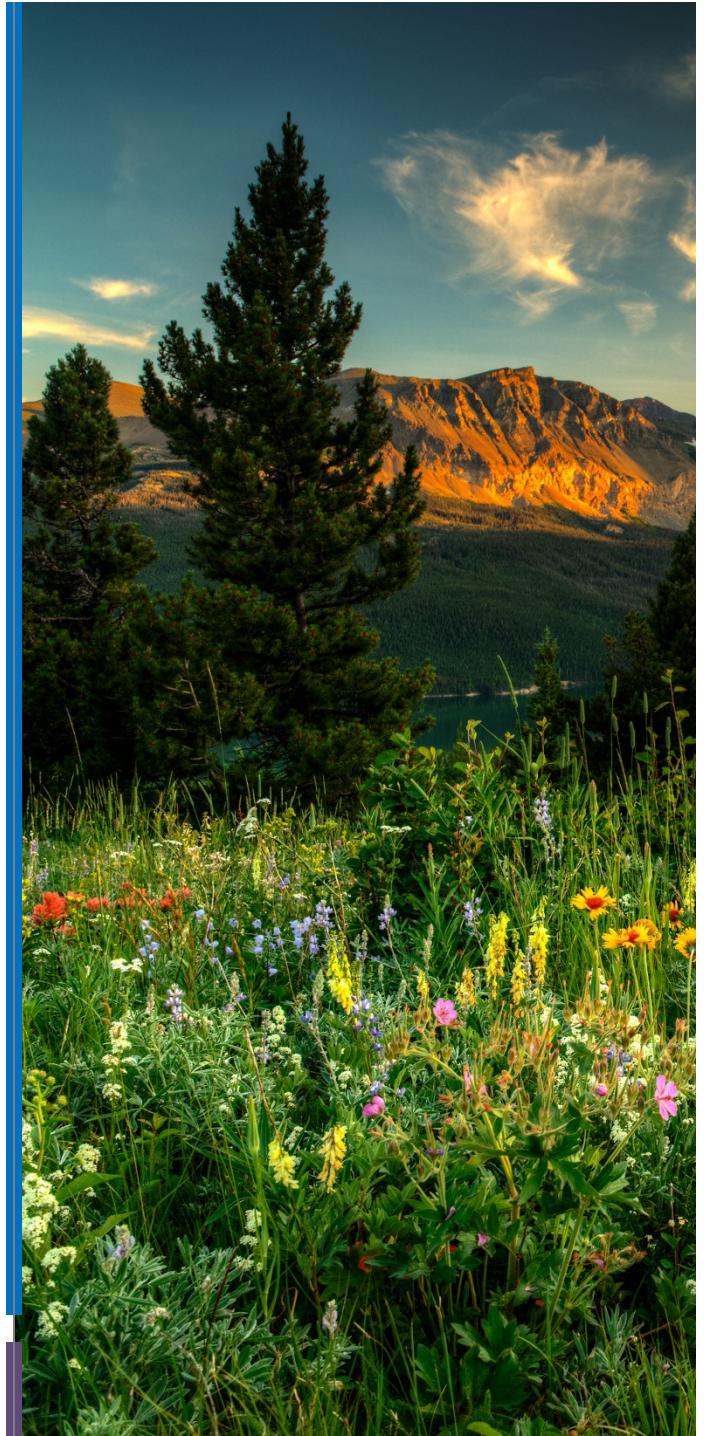


# Now what do we do?

**Shout from the  
mountaintops, river  
valleys, and city streets to  
let people know the power of  
SCA in the lives of diverse  
youth!**



Photo Credit: [Beau Rogers](#), flickr



**Focus program and crew leader development** to ensure program levers happen consistently, to increase the magnitude of impact.



**Think about differences  
between national and  
community crews and  
adjust measures and  
programming to show  
maximum impact.**





# SCA Youth Program Outcomes and Critical Program Factors

## *Summary of Findings*



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