

OTTAWA TENNIS AND LAWN BOWLING CLUB

Leadership for young adolescents in Old Ottawa South

By Janet Uren

There have always been children in Old Ottawa South – babies, toddlers, school kids, teenagers and finally young adults ready to head off on their infinitely varied roads to life as adults. Over the years, the local tennis club has had a big part, not an observer of this parade of life, but as an active player.

Young people have always been a major focus at the club, from junior tennis lessons and supervised movie nights all the way to the annual hiring frenzy to find lifeguards and counsellors for summer camps. For the past few years, there has also been a program for one special age group – children between the ages of 14 and 16. Leaders in Training (LIT) is designed to support children in that vulnerable period as they pass from childhood to adolescence. For many, the club's LIT program will be the first time that they are challenged to think like adults.

The goal of the program is to introduce intermediate children to the working world and to encourage them not just to be creative but also to think like organizers and to take the lead. "For me the biggest thing is building confidence," says Harper McBrearty, who will be leading the program for the second year in 2024.



LIT students lead Talent Time at the OTLBC camp. PHOTO BY CLAIRE BRODIE

"These are kids without a lot of job experience, if any. We are offering them a chance to grow."

The focus of the "job" these youngsters will take on, as they come on board for a three-week training experience, are the club's ever-popular summer camps. "Every year," says customer service manager, Claire Brodie, "we welcome some 700 children to the camps, ages 5 to 13. We offer all kinds of camps, everything

from swimming to tennis or beach volleyball or arts and crafts or all of the above. LIT participants have a chance to help us enrich the camps, which means coming up with new activities, planning craft sessions or competitions and even playing in the sand with the little ones."

Harper McBrearty is a recent graduate of Queen's University, soon to begin teacher's training. Her role is to design the LIT program, produce a workbook, lead the classes and collaborate with camp counsellors to supervise on-the-job training for participants. "I work with very small groups," she explains, "anywhere from three to six participants, and the focus is on learning by doing."

What that means in practice is classroom sessions, based on a series of modules – beginning with health and safety and moving on to such subjects as appropriate business communication, planning and organization. Young people without previous experience in the working world have a lot to learn, and OTLBC provides them with a safe and supported place to acquire the attitudes and practices that will later help them to find jobs and succeed as employees. "We teach them to be team players," says Harper, "and that begins with good communication."

During their three-week program, LIT trainees learn how to create and

deliver activities at the camps. Harper introduces them to lesson planning, shows them how to establish goals, work out concepts and define the necessary materials. It may sound serious, and it is, but the emphasis is on fun. "The idea is to provide a framework," says Harper, "then let them exercise their creative and organizational skills." Some of the ideas coming out of LIT have been enormously successful – a pirate-themed scavenger hunt, for example, that included working with campers to design treasure boxes and maps, as well as the planning and coordinating of the hunt.

"Another really fun activity that the campers loved last year was the talent show," Harper recalled, "and an obstacle course that the LIT groups came up with. We let them take the lead, and that is just an enormous-confidence builder." Harper loves seeing how shy young people, with the right kind of encouragement and opportunity, can come out of their shells in a mere three weeks.

The health and safety component is another important part of LIT, especially as participants will be assisting at the pool and serving meals. As well as work in the classroom, they meet the kitchen staff, learn the basics of service, are introduced to the point-of-sale system, and help to put on the table a nutritious lunch – based on Canada's Food Guide – for the campers.

"Confidence is important," says Harper, "but we also want them to take away transferable skills." That includes the resumes that they create at the end of their training. Here, the LIT participants learn how to translate work experience into the beginning of a written record that they will be building for the rest of their working lives. They also take part in conversations about the kind of opportunities they will be facing as they finish high school and make some big decisions about the future.

"Skills, confidence and positioning them for future employment. That's what it's all about," says Harper McBrearty. "Oh, and did I mention 'fun'?"

Janet Uren is a professional writer who lives in Ottawa.

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