

Investing in Today's Youth

The objective of the Youth of the Year is to recognize exceptional Boys & Girls Club members and give them a voice and path to showcase character, leadership and personal development; critical skills needed to become productive adults. This movement begins at the local Club level where Club professionals foster the traits that help young people grow into responsible and caring citizens.

Local Clubs are encouraged to regularly select members who exhibit outstanding character and leadership skills through Youth of the Month celebrations. Every month, Club staff nominates members who demonstrate exemplary character and leadership skills. Out of 12 monthly winners, three finalists are chosen and then a Youth of the Year is selected to represent their Club site. These youth compete locally amongst all the local Club sites and finally, one youth is chosen to represent the local organization. This youth continues in state and potentially regional competitions.

The Youth of the Year Program

In 1947, Boys & Girls Clubs of America formed an important partnership with Readers Digest to implement a national youth recognition initiative that promotes good moral character, leadership and service qualities in today's youth. The Youth of the Year program is a national youth recognition program that celebrates the Boys & Girls Club experience. It is a year-round program for youth ages 14-18 that promotes and celebrates members' service to Club; community and family; academic performance; moral character; life goals; poise and public speaking abilities. It is the cornerstone of the organization's Character and Development core program area, helping young people focus on personal development attributes needed to successfully transcend into adulthood.

The Youth of the Year program is a mainstay of the Boys & Girls Club experience, and gives young people a voice and a path to showcase personal development. The program provides young people with the opportunity to show their Club, their community, their state, their region and the entire United States that they have developed into model citizens. Through essays and speeches, Youth of the Year candidates illustrate how they have turned their aspirations into actions and overcome personal obstacles to achieve success.

The program begins by recognizing youth at the local level, where Clubs are encouraged to select one promising youth demonstrating exceptional character each month. Selecting Youths of the Month provides the opportunity for year-round program participation and helps Club professionals work with members to enhance the traits needed to become successful Youth of the Year candidates. As Club staff identifies Youths of the Month, a pool of 12 qualified candidates emerge from which three finalists will be identified and one Youth of the Year chosen. Winners go on to compete on state and regional levels where a National Youth of the Year is selected. An overview of the Youth of the Year selection process is as follows:

Club Finalists

Community leaders serve as local judges who choose a Club Youth of the Year from three finalists. By this point, candidates have been nominated, written essays, gathered support letters and prepared short speeches. Club Youths of the Year and second-place winners are eligible to receive a \$1,000 Presidential Freedom Scholarship. All local winners go on to compete at the state level.

State, Regional and National Finalists

State winners advance to compete regionally where five winners are selected representing Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Southwest and Pacific regions. The five regional winners go on to participate in the national competition, which takes place annually in Washington, D.C. Participants are recognized at a Congressional Breakfast and scheduled for a White House visit with the President. Each winner receives an engraved plaque and a \$5,000 scholarship. The national winner receives the National Youth of the Year plaque and an additional scholarship award of \$10,000.

It is at the local Club level that the Youth of the Year program has its greatest impact and it is where the Youth of the Year nomination begins. It is here that, Club staff identify outstanding Boys & Girls Club of _____ members who go on to participate on state, regional and national levels.

As with any Club program, staff plays a vital role in its successful implementation. The level and quality of the program's success, however, is affected by critical factors such as time, funding, staffing, etc. The support of *[name of funding source]* will help local Club professionals implement a local Youth of the Year program that mentors members to their full potential as productive community citizens and Club ambassadors.

This process creates a group of outstanding young adults who continue to serve the Club and community as voices about Boys & Girls Club of _____ and the programs offered. With guidance and mentoring, these candidates will serve on youth task forces, panel discussions and become visible symbols of youth empowerment.

The Youth of the Year program is a year-round tool for fostering young people's character, personal growth and leadership qualities. It showcases youth who demonstrate what can be achieved as a result of participating in Boys & Girls Clubs. The program helps young people focus on the specific areas of personal development that they need to be successful Youth of the Year candidates, as well as successful and productive adults. Specifically, the Youth of the Year program helps Club members:

- develop healthy attitudes toward home, community, school and Club;
- recognize the importance of patriotism and good character, and demonstrate them in all aspects of their daily lives;
- strengthen their moral values;
- build positive self-concepts;
- achieve personal growth;
- improve writing, listening and speaking skills;
- identify with positive role models; and
- develop leadership skills.

The foundation of the Youth of the Year program is recognizing members who display good character, utilize leadership skills and provide service opportunities to Club youth throughout the year. Through structured group participation and one-on-one mentoring, the program provides members with a solid foundation and a pathway to reach their full potential as productive adults.

Through this effort, Club members become articulate, well-groomed and knowledgeable Club ambassadors who display exceptional character and proven leadership. These qualities are the foundation of the Youth of the Year and are promoted and reinforced throughout the Club every day.