



Sole Train gives us a supportive community, a place to reach your goals, and a program that teaches you to run better.

-Young Sole

Sole Train

Boston Runs Together

2021-2022 REPORT



Sole Train is a community-building and mentoring program that uses running as a vehicle for setting and achieving seemingly impossible goals. Sole Train connects students grades 4-8 (Young Soles) with adult volunteers, 50 percent of whom are school staff (Old Soles), in schools across Boston.

An additional cohort was launched this year called Mid Soles. These are Young Sole graduates who have progressed to high school, returning as youth leaders and to further develop themselves.

Sole Train school clubs practice weekly during the school year and come together for community-building events and races.

The culminating event is Boston's Run to Remember, a five-mile run, or half marathon.



2021-2022 Highlights

This year, **approximately 250 students in Sole Train teams at 14 sites** were eager to return to in-person practice for the first time since the pandemic's start. Given the challenges schools faced, we were incredibly proud of the number of participants and levels of ongoing engagement.



[Sole Train] helped me by facing challenges and asking for help. You don't need to be afraid to ask for help or face challenges in your own life.

-Young Sole

Staff reported that both young people and adults craved the Sole Train space in a tumultuous school year where things were decidedly *not* back to normal. Students enjoyed opportunities to:

- be outside,
- exercise,
- reduce stress,
- experience joy, and
- connect and talk about their week with those they came to trust.



This was an exceptionally hard school year, and Sole Train was one of the few bright spots. I often left practice feeling renewed and connected to my goals of providing the best experience for youth.

-Site Coordinator, Mission Hill K-8 School

On Sunday, May 29th, 250 participants turned out for Boston's Run to Remember.

- 100 Young Soles
- 75 Old Soles
- 75 family members

Everyone crossed the finish line with a deep sense of pride in their accomplishments.

Students rocked their Sole Train hoodies, shirts, and Run to Remember medals at school for the rest of the year.



The Difference We Make

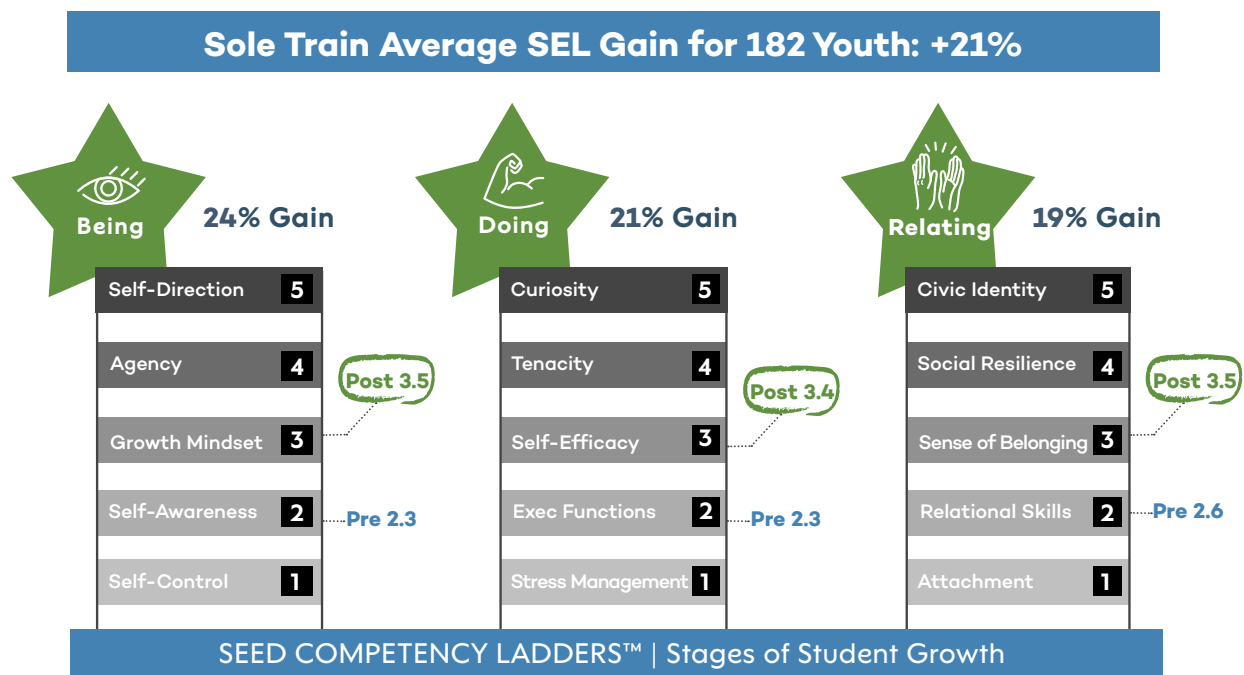
HOW WE MEASURE SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Working in partnership with SEED Impact, three SEED Competency Ladders™ were customized by the Sole Train staff in 2017, and have been integrated with our programming each year to measure, credibly report, and accelerate major shifts in competency.

We measure and nudge growth across three domains to support whole-youth development:

1. **Being** (comfort with self),
2. **Doing** (aptitude with new skills), and
3. **Relating** (interpersonal relationships).

GROWTH IN SEL COMPETENCIES



As shown above, **significant gains of 24 percent, 21 percent, and 19 percent** were observed by Site Coordinators in Being, Doing, and Relating, respectively. These gains reflect **a full-stage advance** on each of the three SEL Competency Ladders.

OUR YOUNG SOLES' ACHIEVEMENTS

- **WHO:** 182 youth from 12 sites
- **GROWTH:** SEL competencies increased 21 percent
- **SO WHAT:** Youth with stronger SEL are more likely to gain academic and career success, foster positive relationships, and attain better physical and mental health, leading to more meaningful contributions to society.⁽¹⁾

¹ Council of Distinguished Scientists National Commission on Social, Emotional and Academic Development. The Aspen Institute, September 2017.

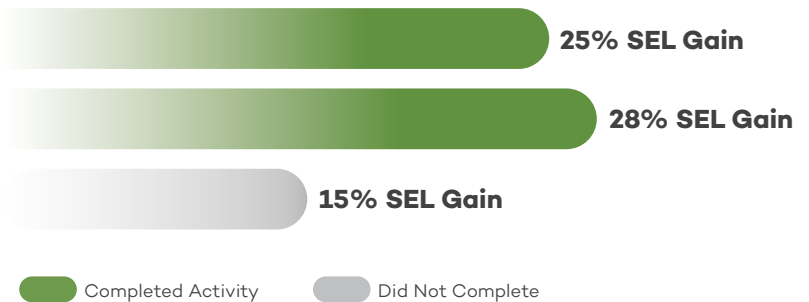


The “Run to Remember” Has Lasting Effects



An amazing experience was running my first five miler! I was so nervous, but I got there, and there was my best friend who I ran with and an Old Sole who I'd run with lots before. Everyone was also nervous and excited, and it was amazing to cross the finish line with these amazing people and get this THICK medal. It was just so empowering.

-Young Sole



As in past years, the youth who complete end-of-year runs achieve the most significant SEL gains:

- 66 students who completed the Run to Remember achieved average SEL gains of **25 percent**.
- 18 students who completed the makeup race achieved average SEL gains of **28 percent**.
- 28 students who did not complete either activity advanced their SEL competencies by only **15 percent**.



Sole Train is an amazing organization to help youth grow in their experiences and connections with others. My child learned to love running, which is so good for her and other youth like her. I highly recommend.

-Sole Train Parent

Our Staff & Old Soles Pay Close Attention to Young Soles

Debbie* gained confidence in herself both as a student and as a person through Sole Train. In addition to our weekly sessions, she started taking the initiative and running more with her dad. She became a key member who supported the other Young Soles on her team. She would even head back to finish running with her friends who may have been further behind. She took on leadership roles in the classroom, too, such as successfully running for class student council.

Niya really stepped into a leadership role during her time in Sole Train. She struggled with behavior during the school year, but by the end of the year, she was so motivated to attend the Run to Remember that she turned her behavior around, wrote apology notes to her teacher, and checked in with her Site Coordinator daily. In the end, she and her family attended the Run to Remember together and had an awesome time.

Hannah grew a lot during her time in Sole Train. Her teacher last year observed her as a reserved and shy student, hesitant to volunteer in class. During Sole Train this year, she bonded with two other Young Soles, became more vocal, and shared jokes with friends and teammates! Her increasing ease and confidence were so fun to see!

Manuel was having a lot of trouble figuring out who he was. Through our practices, he could chat with the Old Soles from his school and, little by little, he started to feel more comfortable in his own skin. He began to run more each practice and visited with Old Soles on non-practice days.



I feel like I was more determined to do my best. When I first started Sole Train, I didn't run that far, but my speed and stamina improved a lot as I came to more practice. This carried over into my schoolwork because I knew how to set and achieve goals.

-Young Sole

Liam had been asking about joining Sole Train since first grade. This year as a fifth grader, he finally made it. He was our biggest supporter, rallying the other kids, getting his mom to call the other moms, and helping us coordinate carpooling to events. He started running with his mom outside of practice and race days. His mom wrote the Old Soles at his school a really nice message at yearend with thanks for helping them find this familial bond over running.

Jacob jogged and walked most of our practices. He preferred a walking pace but could be encouraged to jog every now and then. When the Run to Remember day came, he was his usual calm and peaceful self, and stated his intentions to walk. When the race started, Jacob started jogging. He would jog for maybe five minutes, take a walk break, and start jogging again in the calmest, steadiest, job/walk pattern the Old Soles had ever witnessed. When he reached the finish, he exclaimed: "I guess things do go fast when you're having fun."

*Names throughout this report are fictitious to protect participant anonymity.



Detailed Findings - Four Populations:

1. YOUNG SOLES

112 students completed end-of-year surveys reflecting on their experiences with Sole Train.

Of note, the students who took the time to self-reflect about their year showed a **two percent higher SEL gain** than those who did not.

IN THEIR WORDS: YOUNG SOLES

Why did you participate in Sole Train this year, and why did you stay with it?*

"I started with Sole Train this year because my mother said it would be good for me. She was the one who convinced me to do my first 5k. I stuck with it because my competitive side wanted to beat my previous time. And for the feeling I have after I run. It felt amazing."

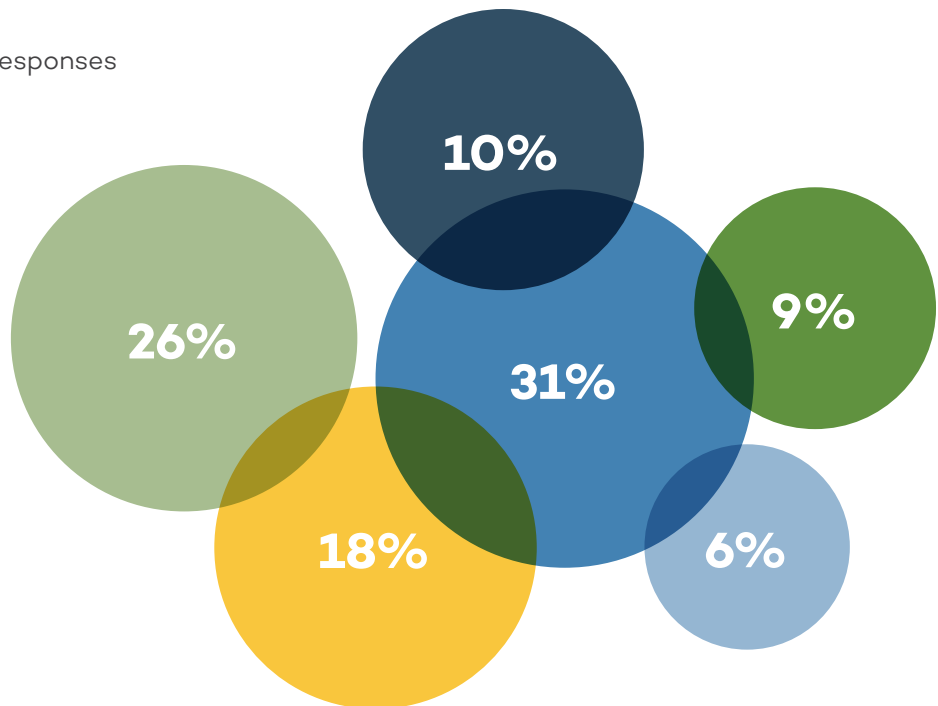
"I wanted to participate in Sole Train this year for the experience of meeting and getting to know some new people. I stayed with it because I could see the improvement in my running skills and abilities."



WHY DID YOU STAY WITH IT?

Percentage of Most Common Responses

- Running/Exercise
- Fun/Games
- Be With Friends
- Health/Fitness
- New Experience
- Accomplishments



Sole Train has helped so many people gain confidence, endurance, stronger friendships, and motivation to do more active activities, which is super important for kids our age.

-Young Sole

*Note: Percentages include multiple responses per youth.

IN THEIR WORDS: YOUNG SOLES (continued)

What did you find most challenging about participating? How did you overcome these challenges?

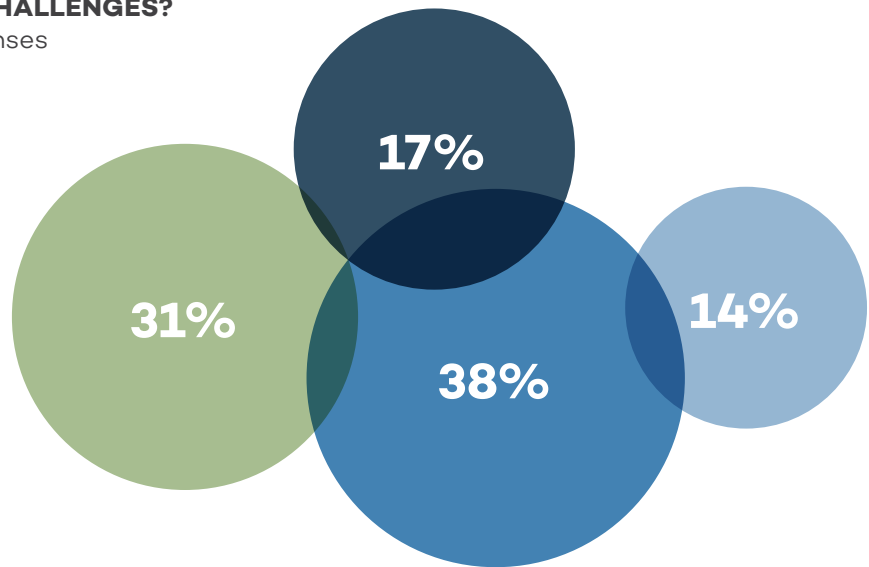
"The most challenging thing was just showing up. Some days, I was exhausted and just wanted to go home. I even considered not going! But I went down, did the run every time, and never regretted not leaving."

"What I found the most challenging was when we had to run laps around the school because I got easily tired, and I found it difficult to pace myself. I overcame this by learning how to pace myself correctly from our teacher. She also was very helpful in sparking encouragement."

HOW DID YOU OVERCOME YOUR CHALLENGES?

Percentage of Most Common Responses

- Practiced and kept at it
- Sense of accomplishment
- Motivated by friends/others
- Learned to pace myself



Can you think of ways that your experiences in Sole Train this year changed how you see yourself?

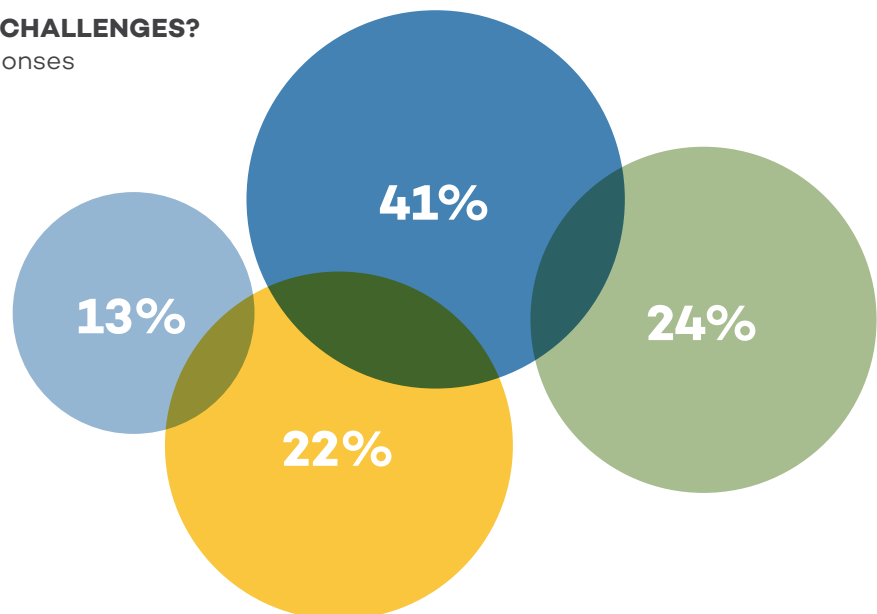
"Sole Train this year boosted my confidence in running a lot. I may not be able to run as fast as the others, but thanks to Sole Train, I can run far. I was thinking of joining the High School Cross Country team next year once I make it to high school, and because of Sole Train, I'm excited to have a little experience in running."

"Sole Train made me see that I can do anything I put my mind to ... Running gives you energy and makes you happy/feel good to put anything you set your mind to."

HOW DID YOU OVERCOME YOUR CHALLENGES?

Percentage of Most Common Responses

- More confident
- More fit/healthier
- Ability to reach goals
- Hopeful about my future



IN THEIR WORDS: YOUNG SOLES (continued)

How would you describe what the Sole Train community meant to you this year personally?

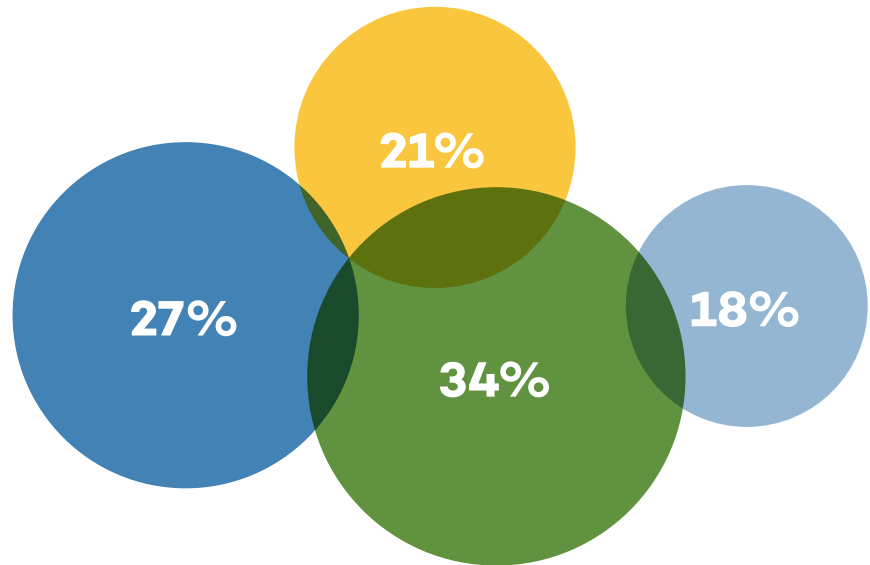
"The Sole Train community made me much more friends than I thought I would have, and because of them, I'm able to participate confidently in group conversations, and I'm able to speak my mind clearly as well."

"Sole Train made me gain stronger relationships with friends and people I wouldn't normally talk to and better relationships with teachers who are part of the Sole Train at our school."

HOW DID YOU OVERCOME YOUR CHALLENGES?

Percentage of Most Common Responses

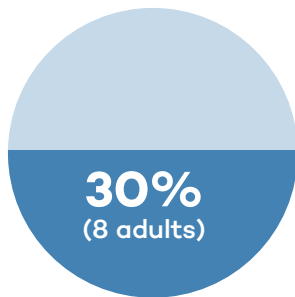
- New friendships
- Be with friends
- Supportive community
- Be with teachers



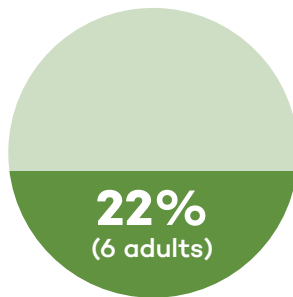
2. OLD SOLES

In July, **27 Old Soles** (13 Site Coordinators and 14 other adults), completed a survey where they reflected on the program year.

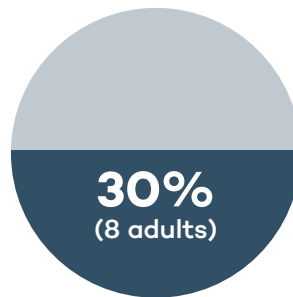
Our Old Soles stay with us! This year:



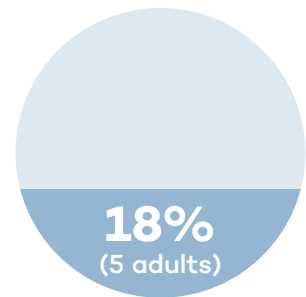
Participated for the first time



Second year participants



Third or fourth year participants



Five to seven year participants

When asked about the experience, **96 percent of Old Soles exclaimed that Sole Train met, exceeded and greatly exceeded their expectations!**

IN THEIR WORDS: OLD SOLES

“Sole Train gives students a different type of outlet to express themselves and grow as people than they usually are provided at school. It helped foster relationships between students and staff at the school and brought joy to Young and Old Soles during an extremely turbulent school year.”

“At the Run to Remember, I witnessed true community and love as our Young Soles pushed themselves to finish the race. One of our Young Soles with significant orthopedic issues began limping and was clearly in pain, around mile 3.5. The three Old Soles advised him to take his time and communicate what he needed. His teammate, who could have continued forward, slowed his pace and kept him company until the very end—chatting about their favorite video game, memories of time spent in Downtown Boston, and their plans for the summer. Both Young Soles ran across that finish line, and I know that experience will stay with them for a long time.”



IN THEIR WORDS: OLD SOLES (continued)

Why did you choose to participate in Sole Train this year?

"The best part of being back in person was the ability to restart Sole Train! It's such a wonderful part of our school community and an incredible program for our students."

"I enjoy running and want to pass that joy on to my students. I LOVE the chance to continue interacting with former students (I teach lower grades) in a positive and low-stress environment. I knew it would be a bright spot in my week."

"I chose to participate because our students deserve high-quality opportunities to build their confidence, social skills, and physical wellness. The benefits of belonging, succeeding, and moving are infinite!"

"I have been part of the Sole Train Community for many years and wanted to bring it back to my new school because I know how much of a positive impact the program has on the youth and the overall school culture."

THE VAST MAJORITY OF OLD SOLES (see percentages) EXPERIENCED FIVE TYPES OF PERSONAL GAINS:



89%
Physical wellness

96%
Greater appreciation for students

93%
Joy for life

96%
Appreciation for other Old Soles

63%
Deeper understanding for racial healing

As two Old Soles explain:

"Nurturing and continuing the relationships I built with former students was extremely rewarding. Same for Old Soles I knew and ones I just met. I believe us all—young and old—appreciated and needed having time to chat, unload, and be in a setting where we felt safe and appreciated."

"Running and walking each week helped keep me on track. Our Young Soles loved coming each week and brought so much joy to me. They even visited on non-practice days! Our Old Soles were also amazing! We covered for each other. Our community volunteers were especially amazing."

When asked if the Old Sole experience translated to changes outside of Sole Train, 78 percent of Old Soles said, "Yes."

"The conversations with kids certainly changed my teaching as it does every year."

"Sole Train made me a better teacher as it helped me form deeper relationships with students and our school community."

"My love for running and youth development has grown significantly since joining Sole Train, and I have begun looking for more ways that I can engage with my community."



3. MID SOLES

Having previously participated in Sole Train as Young Soles, the three Mid Soles, now in high school, were welcomed back to assist Young Soles while deepening their own leadership and communication skills. Near the end of the school year, they participated in a focus group and completed a short survey.

IN THEIR WORDS: MID SOLES

Why did you decide to become a Mid Sole (MS) and how was the return?

"I wanted to give students the opportunity to get a youth mentor. I've already done something similar at an afterschool program, so to give a different community those opportunities was important to me. Going into the year, I was very nervous that having the Young Soles look up to me as a role model, friend, and mentor would be hard. I thought it would be much harder to be myself and be accepted for the positively energetic person I am. It was cool to be in new communities, as well as helping me improve my running and stamina."

"At first, I just wanted to volunteer and get community service hours, but then I was offered this job; I was happy because I love Sole Train. I like working with kids but was nervous because I'm shy. I knew it would be hard for me to try and communicate with the Young Soles at first, but I had a lot of fun despite the challenge. As it turned out, I loved it."

Describe your proudest/most memorable experiences as a Mid Sole.

"Run to Remember, running with the kids, saw kids from all sites. When I was running back and forth at the Spring Scream, one of the kids told me, 'You inspired me to keep running!'"

"Spring Scream and Run to Remember: extending my voice, that was fun, and hearing people say I did a good job, that I motivated them. There were a lot of moments in the beginning when I was working with kids, teaching breathing techniques, stamina, etc., and it was so cool when that worked. Also, just getting to know them and building relationships was great too. Sole Train gave them a place to be themselves and not worry about any stress factors that may be bothering them personally."

How did your role change from the beginning of the year until now?

"I got more comfortable with the different personalities and improved my communication skills. It was hard to know what to expect, and I experienced some stress before the events. There were so many different personalities. It was challenging to figure out how to let Young Soles be themselves without limiting them."

"I was intimidated at the beginning, and it was hard to feel comfortable and express myself. But I tried to step up and support the Site Coordinators and take on leadership, such as asking Young Soles to listen. I was surprised that the Site Coordinators told me I was doing a good job at events. I felt like they provided really good support."



4. PARENTS and CAREGIVERS

24 parents and caregivers reflected on the impact Sole Train has had on their children. Sample feedback follows.

IN THEIR WORDS: PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

“Sole Train helps children understand how to set goals and the small steps necessary to achieve them. It’s a wonderful opportunity for children to be active, be more in tune with their surroundings as they run through the community, build endurance and improve levels of determination and grit.”

“Sole Train is an amazing program with staff dedicated to the children. My son is more active now and is excited about making healthier choices.”

“A great organization that brings out the best in our youth.”

MOST SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON THEIR CHILDREN:

- sense of hope about the future
- new friendships
- growth in self-confidence



My Sole Train experiences affected my life outside of school a lot. Because of Sole Train, I now tend to take morning runs before I go to school, which helps me focus more and wake up more in class.

-Young Sole

What experiences this year in Sole Train did your child appear to be most excited about?

“She was enthusiastic about the longer runs because they kept her engaged. She didn’t run fast but liked feeling like she was accomplishing a lot. She also connected with the adults in the program (teachers and non-teachers).”

“He was most excited about training to run a 5k and transferring his running skills into other sports he’s involved in.”

*“**Jack** had an opportunity to meet new friends and enjoy some friendly competition together. He was also able to set some goals with the races and accomplish them.”*

What effect, if any, did Sole Train experiences have on your child’s schoolwork or life outside of school?

“When she came home, she could sleep better because she was so tired. This was great because she was in a better mood all the time. I also noticed she tried to do things by herself more. She became more focused on her school work and got into the school of her choice.”

“She seemed more comfortable talking to the adults around her about certain things. Like when she was going through relationship problems, she came to me and trusted me to comfort her.”

*“**Aniyah** learned to be a consistent teammate. She has a greater appreciation for her teachers. Her attention span and schoolwork improved tremendously. She has ADHD. It’s difficult for me to keep her focused or interested in outside activities. When Aniyah joined Sole Train 2-3 years ago, she was shy and was never on a team. She has gained two friends and never missed a Sole Train meeting.*

*Names throughout this report are fictitious to protect participant anonymity.



START

