

## The Downtown YMCA of Frederick County: Y-Leaders Club

By Michael Malloy

Everyone talks about the importance of leadership. There is no better time to learn about leadership than the teenage years. Youth can benefit from these skills throughout their lifetime. At the Downtown YMCA Of Frederick County, we offer a great program for teens to learn about leadership through service to others in an interesting way.

To help navigate teens through decisions, the Y-Leaders Club uses a framework developed by the Character Development Learning Institute, an initiative of Y-USA. This framework is a foundational aspect of the Youth & Teens department at the YMCA of Frederick County. Additionally, we supplement learning opportunities with The Search Institutes 40 Developmental Assets to Teach. These resources help provide students with the critical thinking and introspection to further develop their leadership.

How do you teach leadership to teens? Simply put, we use an established YMCA program, leveraging best practices and experienced leadership that is passionate about youth development. We were thankful to find an energetic and approachable teacher. Mr. Evan Bates joined the YMCA of Frederick County from the West Coast where he has been serving the YMCA since he was 18 years old. Another important aspect of building the program was establishing connections with reputable community agencies.

The Y-Leaders Club is open to students 12-18 years of age. They have a monthly meeting at the Downtown YMCA where they learn leadership principles, interact with from speakers, and conclude with snacks and time to build personal relationships.

They also have an opportunity to develop character and leadership through recreational games (e.g. laser tag, attending hockey, ice skating, movies). Y-Leaders Club engages in volunteer opportunities three to four times a month during weekends, out of school days, and afterschool hours.

“Leadership through Service” is the motto of the program, and they live this by serving local agencies. Most recently they have participated in the following activities:

- Frederick Rescue Mission- serving meals, helping to unload and stock their food and clothing centers, and interacting with volunteers and guest.
- Providing support as cashiers and distributors at the Hungry Harvest Market that provides produce at a low cost to the community.

- Planting trees with Streamlink Education.

All service learning projects are chosen by the students as a way to give them the ownership and say in how they give back to the community.

One of the attractive benefits of the program is that participation in the Y-Leaders Club is that participation in leadership counts toward fulfilling their community service hours requirements for school.

Although the program participants come from various backgrounds and schools, they have become a close knit group through their Y-Leaders Club activities.

Should you or a loved one be interested in learning more about planned giving options at the YMCA of Frederick County, please contact Tom Clingman at (301) 663-5131 or [tclingman@frederickymca.org](mailto:tclingman@frederickymca.org).