

# TAKING CARE OF WHAT WE KNOW

An Evaluation of the SEAS Community Initiative



Prepared for:  
TNC Canada



Prepared by:  
EcoPlan International (EPI)





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EcoPlan International, Inc.  
208-131 Water Street  
Vancouver, British Columbia  
V6B 4M3  
Phone: 604.228.1855  
Website: [www.ecoplan.ca](http://www.ecoplan.ca)  
Prepared by: William Trousdale, Holly Andrews and Trevor Coghill

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# 1. Introduction

*TNC Canada has been partnering with First Nations in the Great Bear Rainforest since the organization first began operating in the region in 2005. As part of this work, TNC Canada supports a stewardship-oriented youth capacity development project known as the Supporting Emerging Aboriginal Stewards Community Initiative, or “SEAS”.*

SEAS enables TNC Canada and First Nation community partners to invest in youth through innovative education programs that combine Indigenous and western modes of learning. The programs are designed to engage, develop, and prepare Indigenous youth as they become the next generation of leaders and stewards in their communities and territories.

SEAS is currently active in three Great Bear Rainforest communities: Bella Bella (the Heiltsuk Nation), Bella Coola (the Nuxalk Nation), and Klemtu (the Kitasoo/Xai'xais Nation) (Figure 1). The programs have been up and running for between six and eight years, and it is increasingly evident that they are having widespread positive outcomes, both anticipated and emergent.<sup>1</sup> However, many of the benefits that program participants and partner communities derive from SEAS have to do with social and individual changes that are by nature quite difficult to measure and communicate.<sup>2</sup> As a result, there is interest in creating new methods and tools for reporting outcomes that provide multiple entry points for different audiences—in particular, funders and external partners/agencies—as Kitasoo/Xai'xais Chief Councillor Doug Neasloss explains:

*“One of our biggest challenges is going back to funders and trying to explain the importance of this program. A lot of funders, they want to see results tomorrow, they want to say well listen, what did my \$80,000 do? Do you have a diploma, can you show me a degree—I’m like well, no, I can’t. Sometimes these are four to five year investments for us, or it could even be ten years. But I think the future of stewardship rests on programs like*



**FIGURE 1:** SEAS partner communities in the Great Bear Rainforest

*the SEAS program. These are the guys who are going to be the next stewards. These kids that we’re grooming now, they’re going to be our next leaders.”*

This report contributes to ongoing efforts to evaluate and measure the impact of SEAS. It presents a structured evaluation of the SEAS programs from the perspective of SEAS community partners and program participants, drawing on both qualitative and quantitative results.

The report first provides context for what SEAS is and does. Then, the approach and methods used to carry out the evaluation are reviewed. Key findings are discussed next, followed by more detailed analyses of how SEAS programs benefit both youth and partner communities.

1 No adverse effects were found.

2 See Vallejo and Wehn (2016) for a discussion of challenges associated with evaluating capacity development programs.

## 2. The SEAS Program Context

*SEAS programs have a broad core objective of supporting the emergence of young Indigenous leaders and stewards. In general, they do so by:*

- Building youth capacity through applied learning experiences;
- Creating opportunities for participants to build strong connections in and to their communities, cultures and territories; and
- Supporting youth in pursuing their education and career goals.

SEAS programs are developed locally by partner communities and tailored to suit the unique priorities, needs and opportunities of each Nation. Our evaluation indicates that this is a strength of SEAS, but it also means that SEAS programs differ from community to community. Despite these differences, the programs all share the same essential premise—to invest in youth—and they also share a similar structure: a **school program component** and a **summer internship component**.

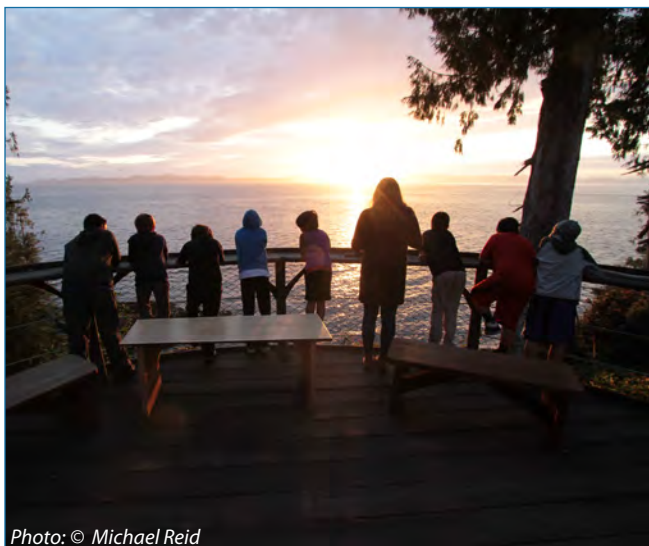


Photo: © Michael Reid

### 2.1 SEAS School Programs

SEAS school programs are integrated into classroom activities across multiple grade levels throughout the 10-month school year period. Program coordinators work collaboratively with school administrators, teachers, elders, community leaders, and other mentors and partners working in the Great Bear Rainforest to develop and deliver a mix of field trips and classroom-based learning experiences that align with provincial curriculum requirements while also engaging youth in hands-on learning in their ancestral territories. Program activities are designed to encourage students to build an interest in culture, territory, science and stewardship. Outdoor and classroom-based lessons led by elders, naturalists, archaeologists and scientists expand students' horizons while also helping them to build new skills, values and knowledge.

#### *Examples of SEAS school program activities:*

- Nature walks
- Land-based ecology and stewardship-focused lessons that mix traditional and cultural ways of learning with western science approaches
- Field trips to culturally-significant sites
- Hatchery visits
- Habitat explorations (land and sea)
- Sea mammal observation and hydrophone research site visits
- Traditional harvesting, preparation, processing and preservation (e.g., herring roe, medicinal plants, seaweed, salmon, berries, shellfish, cedar bark)
- Visits from elders and other local and non-local experts (e.g., scientists, archaeologists)
- Community-wide events, celebrations and ceremonies (e.g., potlatches, Salmon Fest)

## 2.2 SEAS Summer Internships

SEAS internships are designed for older youth. They offer a different but complimentary experience from SEAS school programs by providing immersive educational experiences for a select group of students in each community every summer. Internships are paid, and typically delivered in partnership with local stewardship organizations. They provide opportunities for youth to receive focused technical training while working alongside land and resource officers, guides, local knowledge holders, and other mentors. They also typically offer youth the chance to spend extended periods of time out on the lands and waters of their ancestral territories, visiting and learning about places of long-standing importance to their communities.

### Examples of SEAS internship program activities:

- Job shadowing and hands-on training with hatchery staff, ecotourism staff, Guardian Watchmen, scientists and researchers, BC Parks staff, etc.
- Certification training (small vessel operations, wilderness first aid, bear safety, etc.)
- Traditional food, medicine and cedar harvesting, food preservation, and other cultural practices (e.g., ceremony preparation, cedar weaving, regalia making)
- Fieldwork (e.g., archaeological data collection, bear research, sea mammal research, resource monitoring)
- Camping trips and canoe journeys with elders, community leaders and other knowledge holders (e.g., ethnobotanists, archaeologists)
- Exchanges with other SEAS partner communities
- Trail building
- Presentations to community members and participation in community-wide events
- Photography
- Youth mentorship

## 2.3 SEAS in the Great Bear Rainforest: Program Profiles

### HEILTSUK NATION, BELLA BELLA

<i>Years running:</i>	8
<i>Grades involved:</i>	Pre K-12
<i>Number of students involved in the SEAS school program:</i>	210
<i>Number of SEAS interns each summer:</i>	4-6
<i>Total community population<sup>3</sup>:</i>	2,446

In the Heiltsuk community of Bella Bella, TNC Canada has partnered with the Bella Bella Community School to deliver SEAS programming throughout the school year.. A local Heiltsuk nonprofit organization, the Qqs Project Society, develops and delivers SEAS summer internships. Community partners (e.g., Heiltsuk Integrated Resource Management Department) and other programs, organizations, and individuals support SEAS activities. The Bella Bella Community School also hosts a student Outdoors Club as part of SEAS.

### KITASOO/XAI'XAIS NATION, KLEMTU

<i>Years running:</i>	6
<i>Grades involved:</i>	Pre K-12
<i>Number of students involved in the SEAS school program:</i>	56
<i>Number of SEAS interns each summer:</i>	4
<i>Total community population:</i>	513

In the Kitsoo Xai'xais community of Klemtu, TNC Canada has partnered with the Kitsoo Community School and the Kitsoo/Xai'xais Integrated Resource Authority to deliver year-round school and summer internship programming. SEAS is also supported by the Spirit Bear Lodge, the Spirit Bear Research Foundation, and other funders and partners (e.g., Tides Canada, the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, Coast Funds, etc.).

### NUXALK NATION, BELLA COOLA

<i>Years running:</i>	6
<i>Grades involved:</i>	Pre K-12
<i>Number of students involved in the SEAS school program:</i>	190
<i>Number of SEAS interns each summer:</i>	6
<i>Total community population:</i>	1,732

In the Nuxalk community of Bella Coola, TNC Canada has partnered with the Acwsalcta School and the Nuxalk Stewardship Office to develop and deliver year-round school and summer internship programming for children and youth. SEAS coordinators work closely with the Guardian Watchmen program, the Snootli Fish Hatchery and the school's language and culture program to support classroom and field-based programs and to develop the summer internships.

# 3. Approach and Methods

*With this evaluation, it was important to ensure that the findings accurately reflect partner community understandings of where SEAS is having an impact and where it is creating the most value. To achieve this aim, EPI developed a participatory approach that was focused on identifying where participants and educators have seen the programs have the most significant change. EPI then focused the evaluation on articulating and measuring these changes, as well as providing an understanding of how they connect to one another and to program activities over time (i.e., as students progress through SEAS and move into the world).*

**The evaluation was structured around three phases:**

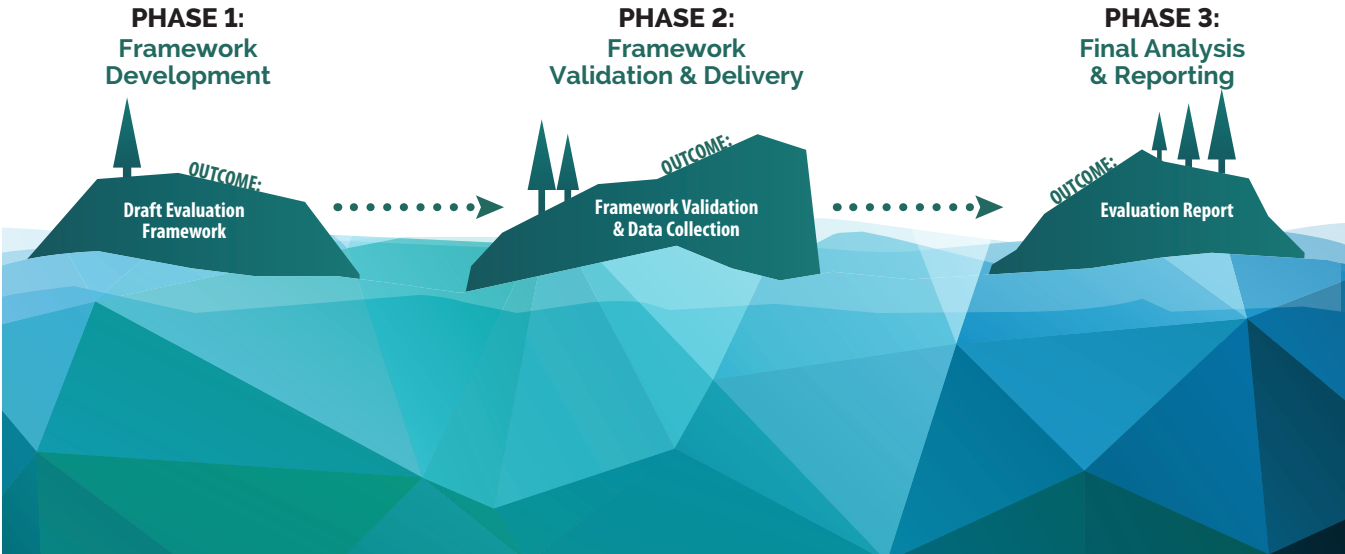
**Phase 1** began with a pilot study in the Heiltsuk community of Bella Bella. The pilot study provided the basis for the development of an evaluation framework and helped to refine the methods used to collect data.

**Phase 2** validated and refined the evaluation framework and assessed the impact of the Heiltsuk, Nuxalk and Kitasoo/Xai'xais SEAS programs. Participatory methods involved a mix of one-on-one and focus group interviews, and the development and delivery of an online survey. Evaluation methods

included impact analysis (card sort and digital survey), baseline change analysis (worksheet-based interview) and value analysis (swing weighting and scaled paired comparison).

**Phase 3** involved data analysis, verification and final reporting. Data analysis included interview transcription and analysis, baseline change review, value analysis review, and survey data review. Verification interviews took place on an as-needed basis (e.g., for clarification and validation).

**FIGURE 2:** SEAS evaluation process





# 4. Key Findings Overview

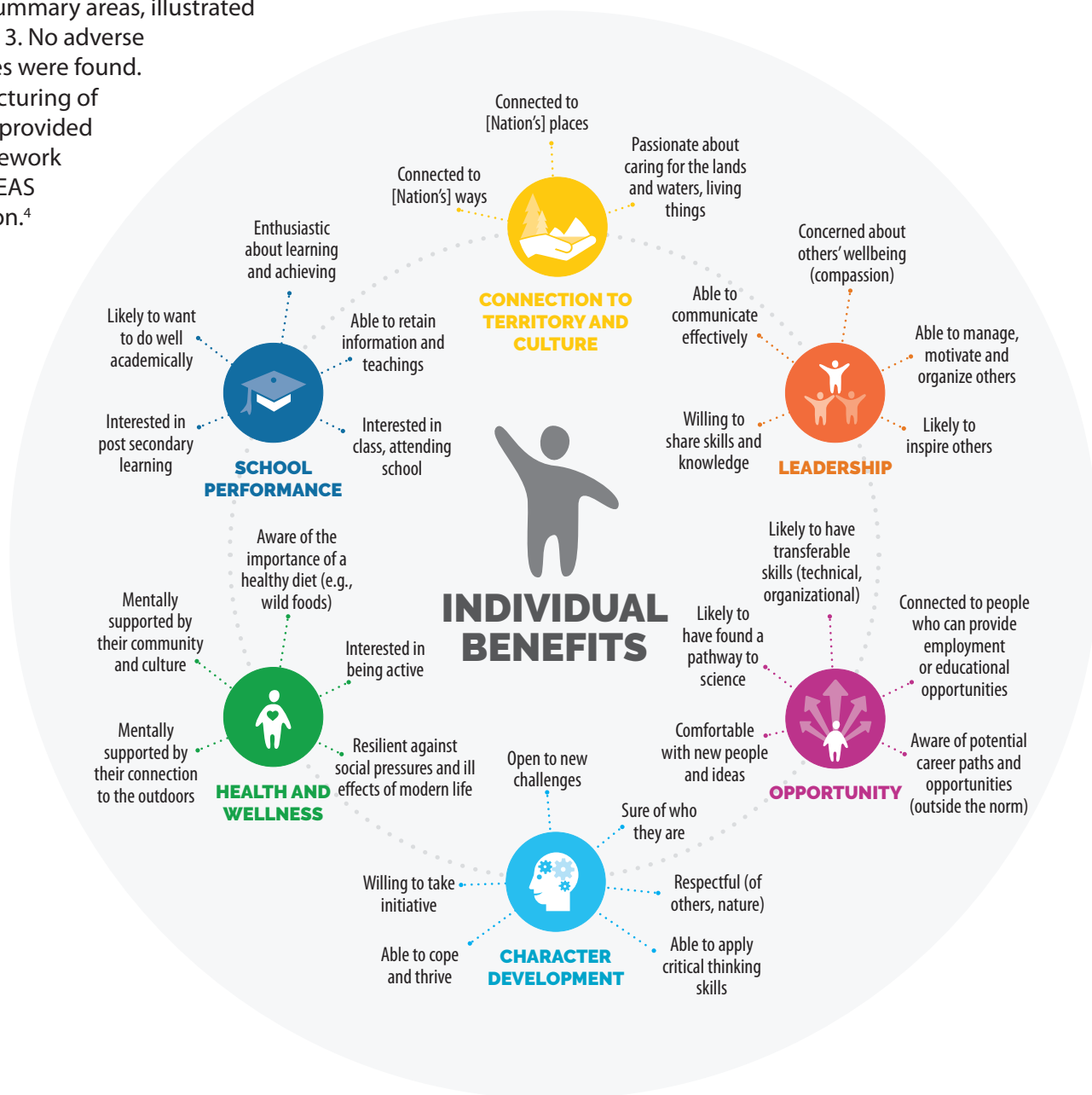




**Finding #1:** SEAS programs are positively impacting youth in six key areas: leadership, school performance, character development, opportunity, connection to territory and culture, and health and wellness.

The evaluation process uncovered many benefits, and no adverse impacts, from the SEAS programs. Benefits experienced by program participants on an individual level (i.e., “individual benefits”) were given 26 unique identifiers, then organized into six key summary areas, illustrated in Figure 3. No adverse outcomes were found. This structuring of benefits provided the framework for the SEAS evaluation.<sup>4</sup>

**FIGURE 3:** Evaluation Framework: Individual Benefits from SEAS



<sup>4</sup> A separate graphic was developed to illustrate community-wide benefits, which are an important aspect of the evaluation framework. This graphic appears on page 24.



**Finding #2:** *The SEAS programs' magnitude of impact was found to be significant across all six key summary areas.*

Figure 4 shows the average impact of SEAS across the six key summary areas identified in Figure 3. The gray pointer represents the *observed impacts* reported by educators, while the black pointer represents the *experienced impacts* reported by SEAS participants. The results highlight two important outcomes:

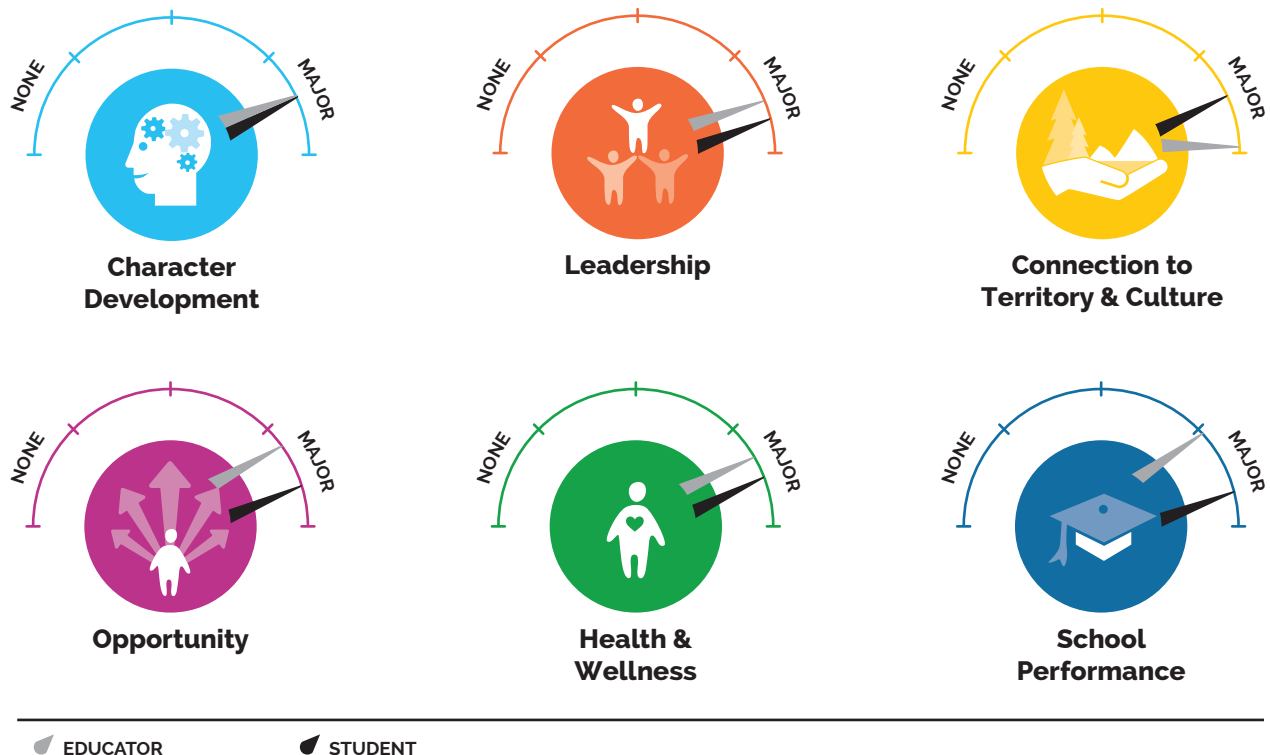
- The SEAS programs are having a **major positive impact** on program participants in all six impact categories, on average; and
- This finding is validated by the alignment between educator and student perspectives.

More specific findings suggest that educators and SEAS youth are *most consistently* reporting major impacts in relation to the following top ten program outcomes:

1. *Passionate about caring for the lands and waters, living things*
2. *Concerned about others' wellbeing (compassion)*
3. *Connected to their Nation's places (e.g., sites of cultural and ecological importance)*
4. *Respectful (of others, nature)*
5. *Connected to their Nation's ways (e.g., stories, laws, practices, values)*
6. *Mentally supported by their connection to the outdoors*
7. *Enthusiastic about learning and achieving*
8. *Comfortable with new people and ideas*
9. *Open to new challenges*
10. *Able to retain information and teachings*

**FIGURE 4:** SEAS impact magnitude across all six impact categories

These are the areas in which SEAS youth are typically experiencing the most profound shifts in awareness, attitude and behavior.





### Finding #3: *The SEAS programs are successfully engaging, developing and preparing Indigenous youth to become the next generation of leaders and stewards in their communities.*

The SEAS programs are still evolving, and while many young people have completed SEAS internships, none have yet completed an entire school program (i.e., pre-kindergarten through grade 12). Even so, it is already clear that the programs are supporting the emergence of young Indigenous leaders and stewards in all three partner communities.

To be effective stewards, Indigenous youth need to be confident, culturally-grounded, healthy, and knowledgeable. To be effective leaders, additional skills and qualities are needed, such as the ability to communicate effectively, work well with others, and inspire people. SEAS programs achieve positive change in these and other relevant areas through well-designed activities that engage youth via hands-on learning activities and exposure to both traditional knowledge and western science.



Photo: © Cayce Foster

#### INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

Below, we provide indicators and supporting quotes that demonstrate how SEAS is contributing to the development of skills and qualities linked to both leadership and stewardship.

#### SEAS youth are developing important leadership skills and qualities

**FIGURE 5:** Percent of youth experiencing significant benefits in leadership due to participation in SEAS

Leadership Quality or Skill	Percent of participating youth reporting a significant positive impact resulting from SEAS, on average <sup>5</sup>
Concerned about others' wellbeing (compassion)	100%
Likely to inspire others	91%
Able to manage, motivate and organize others	87%
Able to communicate effectively	80%
Willing to share skills and knowledge	70%

*"Now our kids will get up in front of a crowd at the potlatch and speak into a microphone. Now 80% of the students will do it. And that's through SEAS—they get that strength and confidence."<sup>6</sup>*

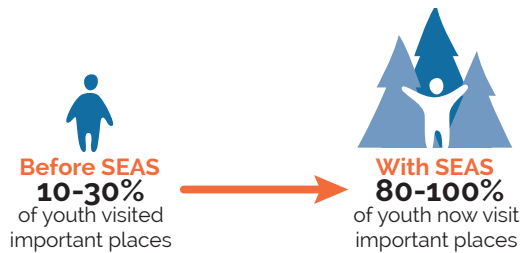
- Community leader

- 5 Percent of evaluation participants (primarily teachers and program coordinators) reporting average moderate to major impact, where moderate is equivalent to a modest but noticeable shift in youth attitude and behaviour and major is equivalent to a substantial shift in youth attitude and behaviour.
- 6 Quotes from evaluation participants (i.e., educators, program coordinators, community leadership, and SEAS participants) are used throughout this report to highlight and contextualize key findings.



## SEAS youth are connecting to their territories and cultures.

**FIGURE 6:** Percent of youth who have opportunities to visit culturally important places within their traditional territories<sup>7</sup>



*“When visiting these places and explaining that a large percentage of our current population have never been to these places, you can see the look of astonishment in their faces. Some interns cannot believe it and some are in awe themselves of the wonder the places hold that they’ve never visited. And as we explain why we do the things we do within our own ways, they have a better understanding of these ways. I had one intern say that they never knew why, and upon learning why, they had more respect for that way because they now understood it. This had to do with crab fishing and how we dispose of the crab shells.”*

- Internship coordinator

*“Prior to the SEAS program, I would say 80%-90% of our youth were not culturally exposed.”*

- Community leader

## SEAS youth are learning to “take care of what they know”.

*“[SEAS] interns learn continuously that the land holds more value than a dollar sign by what it grows, offers, and holds for us. They learn the importance of being responsible for it. Interns have come to understand that there are certain things we cannot do. When they realize that some places are or will be logged, they become passionate about why they shouldn’t be. They understand.”*

- Internship coordinator

## SEAS youth are taking up stewardship causes in their communities.

*“There was a sit-in at the local fisheries office and a lot of kids were over there supporting their parents and in general they were really emotional about the conservation aspect. That is really part of the knowledge they’ve gained about conservation and being Aboriginal stewards.”*

- Educator

*“It was really amazing. She got up in front of the whole community and got on the mic and just went off about how we’ve got to do everything we can to not allow this [major resource development] project to go forward.”*

- Community leader

## SEAS youth are pursuing educational opportunities in stewardship-related fields.

*“It’s this kickstart. The SEAS program alone did not take [former SEAS participant] and turn her into a biology student. But if she hadn’t done that internship she probably wouldn’t be a biology student.”*

- Internship coordinator

*“You know the two interns that we’ve hired this year—one’s only in grade 10, but she’s firm on going to university to specialize in marine biology, and then the other intern that just graduated this year is doing our six-week program before he takes off to Langara. He’s enrolled in a BA program in biology.”*

- Internship coordinator

## SEAS youth are working in their Nations’ stewardship offices.

*“Our stewardship department within the last three years has grown significantly. We’ve gone from two full time staff to twenty-nine staff this year. About 8 [of these staff] are SEAS graduates.”*

- Community leader

*“We’re getting guys like [former SEAS participant] in marine planning, and we have people like [former SEAS participant] as one of our [Guardian] Watchmen this year, and you know, all of our bear researchers are SEAS too.”*

- Community leader

<sup>7</sup> These estimates capture differences across the three partner communities. They were developed based on interviews with local educators and leadership.

## Finding #4: SEAS youth are experiencing benefits that extend well beyond the development of skills and qualities linked to stewardship and leadership.

All SEAS youth become better stewards of their traditional territories, and many become better leaders. However, the SEAS programs are also having a more straightforward and fundamental effect: **they are supporting the development of healthier, more grounded individuals who are connected to their territories and cultures and invested in their own and others' wellbeing.**

A wide body of research indicates that relationships to land, culture and community are critical to overcoming the psychophysical and social suffering that Indigenous youth often experience as consequences of colonialism (e.g., assimilation pressures, intergenerational trauma, cultural dislocation) and related socioeconomic factors.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising that this evaluation found that on a broad scale, the SEAS programs are having a transformative impact on the lives and wellbeing of 95% of program participants (Figure 7).

What it means for SEAS youth to experience a fundamental shift in behaviour and attitudes varies from person to person, but in general, research indicates that SEAS participants are:

- ✓ Connecting to their cultures and territories;
- ✓ Feeling more secure in their Indigenous identities;
- ✓ Becoming more confident, compassionate and communicative;
- ✓ Developing strong social support networks within their communities;
- ✓ Feeling more resilient and capable;
- ✓ Finding success that they wouldn't experience in a conventional classroom environment;<sup>9</sup>
- ✓ Becoming more enthusiastic about learning and achieving; and
- ✓ Becoming more invested in contributing to community and culture.

These examples and many more are explored in further detail in Section 5.



### HEALTH AND WELLNESS BENEFITS: EMERGENT AND SIGNIFICANT

This evaluation found that benefits accruing in the **health and wellness** category are largely emergent, meaning that they are not explicitly identified as SEAS program objectives. Yet, as the examples to the left and in Section 5.3 indicate, health and wellness-related benefits are among the SEAS programs' most significant contributions. Through participation in SEAS, youth are becoming mentally and physically healthier in the immediate term, and they are also experiencing long-term changes in awareness, attitude and behaviour that will support them in leading healthier lives as they get older. This shift is especially noteworthy because members of all three Nations mentioned long-standing challenges associated with youth health and wellness issues (e.g., depression, anxiety, addiction, suicide) in their communities.

While recent improvements in youth health and wellness in SEAS partner communities cannot solely be attributed to SEAS, it is clear from this evaluation that the programs are a major contributing factor:

*"SEAS absolutely helps with mental health and addictions. Students have a better sense of their mental health through their connection to the outdoors."*

- Educator

*"I think SEAS is one of the reasons why we don't have a lot of the same problems as other First Nations."*

- Educator

**FIGURE 7:** The average estimated impact of SEAS on the lives of program participants<sup>10</sup>



**95%** of youth are experiencing a transformative impact on their lives because of their participation in SEAS. In other words, SEAS is credited with *fundamentally shifting* the behavior and attitudes of the vast majority of participating SEAS youth. SEAS is also credited with directly influencing the career and education trajectories of approximately 10% of SEAS youth.



**5%** of youth are receiving minor benefits from their participation in SEAS, meaning that participation in SEAS is affecting awareness but not fundamentally transforming attitudes and behaviour or affecting life decisions.<sup>11</sup>

8 Alfred, 2009; see also Simpson, 2014.

9 This bullet particularly applies to young people who find learning in a classroom environment challenging.

10 These numbers are estimated averages based on interviews with community educators and program coordinators. They will vary across communities and have not been validated with community-wide surveys.

11 Interviews indicated that this is primarily due to personal interest or external factors such as social circumstances and/or developmental disabilities.



**Finding #5:** *The SEAS programs are effective in part because they are flexible and responsive to each Nation's priorities.*

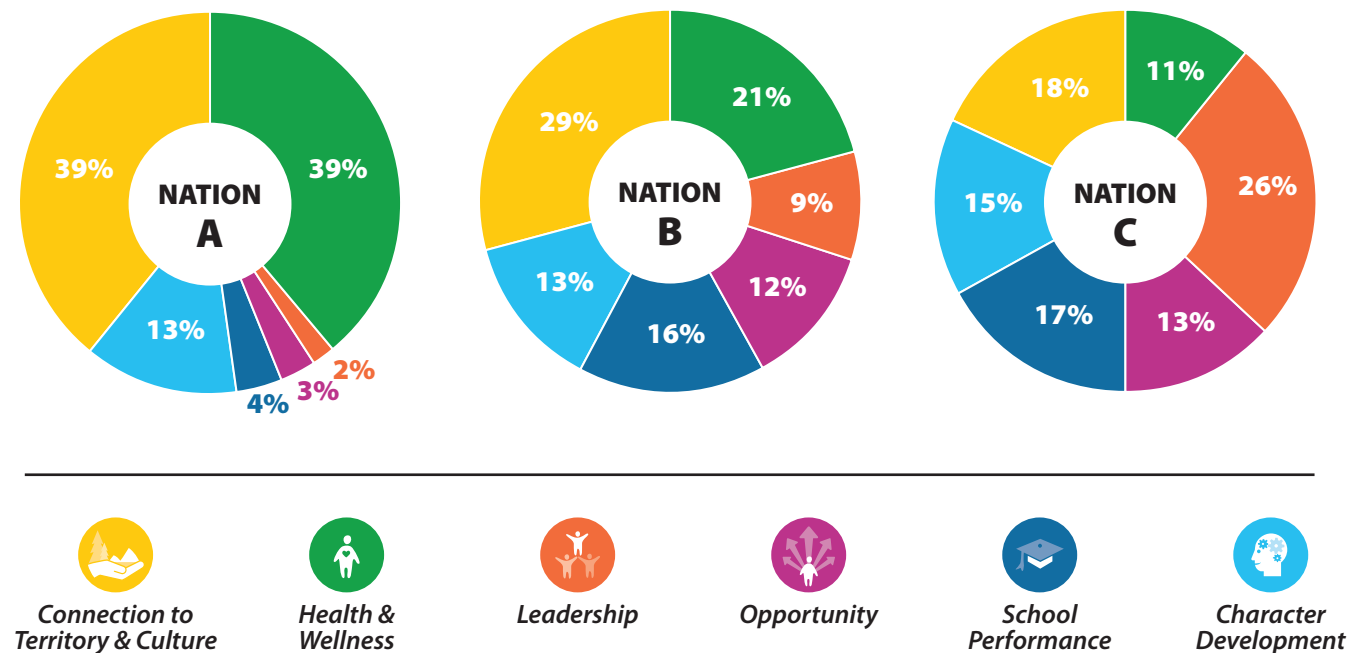
SEAS programs are developed by partner communities, for partner communities. This means that program coordinators and others involved in guiding program development (e.g., community leadership, school administrators) have the flexibility to shape the programs to meet community-specific priorities. This flexibility is important, because each Nation's circumstances are different, and the programs need to be responsive to community needs in order to have a meaningful impact.

Figure 8 highlights how SEAS contributions are valued in each community. This information provides insight into how and why the SEAS programs differ in their focus from Nation to Nation. For example, in Nation A, the SEAS program is highly valued for its contributions to local priorities of **connection to territory and culture** and **health and wellness**. In contrast, in Nation C, SEAS contributions are valued more evenly, with contributions to **leadership** valued most.

Importantly, although Figure 8 indicates that Nation C values SEAS contributions to health and wellness

the least out of the six impact categories, this data does not tell us that Nation C values health and wellness any less than it values leadership (either for the youth or for the Nation as a whole). Rather, it tells us that for Nation C, leadership is more of a *SEAS program priority* than health and wellness. This could mean that youth in Nation C are already doing relatively well in health and wellness, or it could mean that Nation C has other programs that support health and wellness, making the SEAS program's contributions here less important. This evaluation found that the latter is certainly true. Nation C has several youth programs, including a large on-the-land cultural program with a substantial health and wellness focus. As a result, it is plausible to suppose that Nation C has more room to focus SEAS programming on other aspects of youth capacity development besides health and wellness. In other words, SEAS enhances Nation C's broader youth support system by filling key gaps and complementing other community-based youth programs.

**FIGURE 8:** How SEAS contributions are valued differently in relation to each Nation's unique priorities



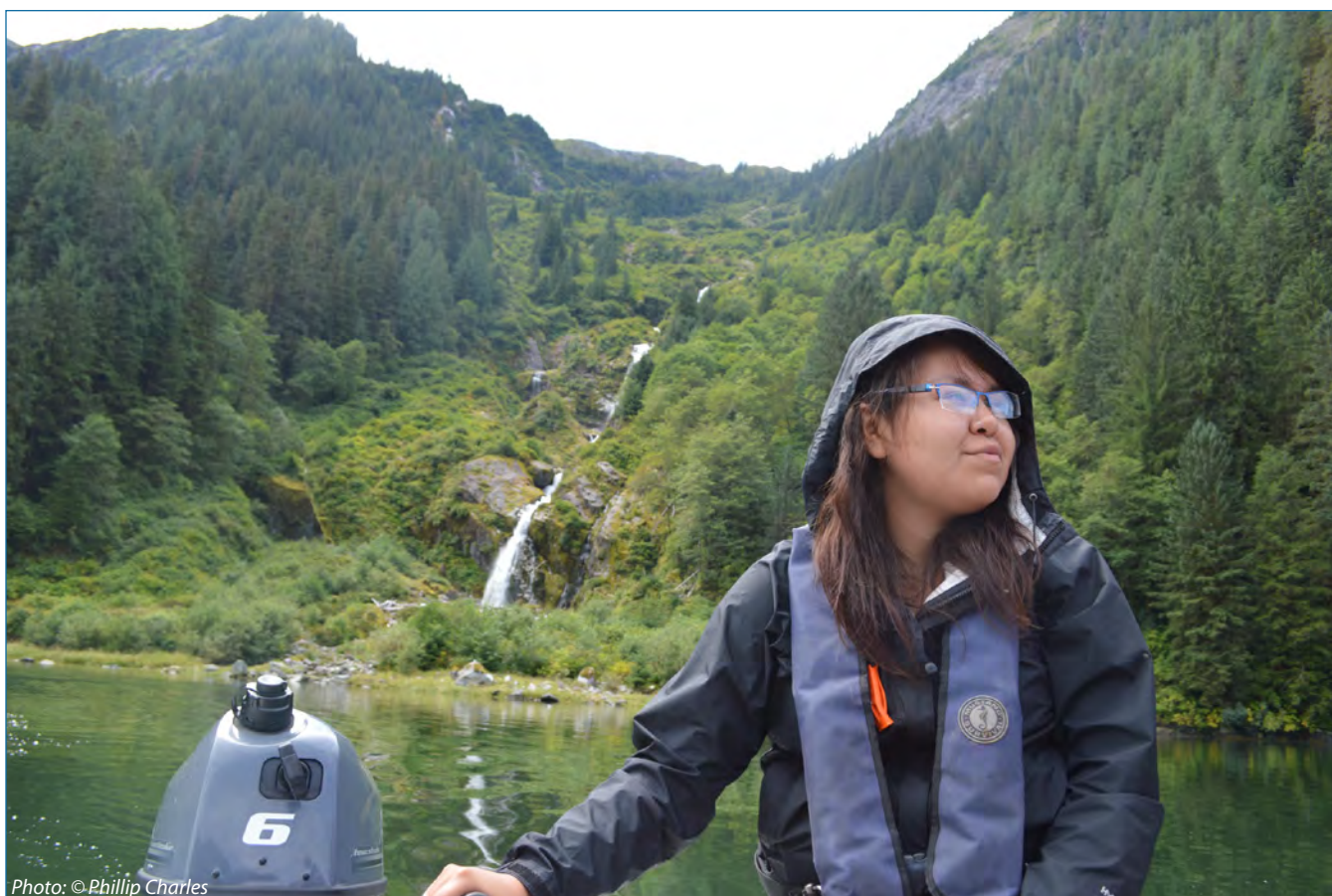


Photo: © Phillip Charles

Nation B's data is interesting in this context because SEAS is the primary youth program in this community. This means that SEAS provides the main connection to territory and culture for Nation B youth, which is reflected in the value that Nation B places on SEAS program contributions in this area. It is also worth noting that both Nation B and Nation C have more established SEAS programs than Nation A. This could explain why these Nations value SEAS contributions in areas besides health and wellness and connection to territory more strongly than Nation A—they have both invested more resources, and invested more consistently, in programming that supports youth development in these other categories (e.g., leadership, opportunity, school performance).

**Stepping back, the broader point is that the ability to develop and modify programs locally helps to explain the transformative effect that SEAS is having on the lives of many program participants.** Within the larger program context, this community-driven approach enables partner communities to develop dynamic programs that meet local and individual needs. As progress is made in priority areas over time, new priorities may emerge, while others may become less important. If the SEAS Community Initiative were to take a more prescriptive approach to program development and delivery, it is unlikely that the programs would have such a significant impact on partner communities.



## **Finding #6:** *Youth access to SEAS over multiple years and through different types of interventions (internship, school program) is an important aspect of program success*

One of the advantages of the SEAS Community Initiative is that SEAS programs take place over several years and have different components that support a variety of learning styles and development stages. By providing continuity and opportunity throughout a student's education, the programs are able to achieve major impacts each year. However, while it is clear that the programs are having a transformative impact on many SEAS youth, where and how these impacts are experienced by each participant varies depending on several different factors. These factors include, but are not limited to:

- *The particular needs, interests and aptitudes of the participant*
- *Contextual factors, such as home life*
- *The capacity and commitment of the SEAS coordinator(s)*
- *The extent to which the programs are integrated into SEAS classrooms<sup>12</sup>*

- *The number of years a participant is involved in SEAS*
- *The opportunity to participate in both the school program and the internship*

In other words, based on the factors above, every program participant has a unique SEAS experience, and moreover, the success of SEAS is directly connected to how the programs support participants on their individual journeys. In the examples on the following pages, we illustrate this finding in two ways. First, we show how participation in a SEAS internship program has impacted four different SEAS youth. Then, we show how integrating a SEAS school program into different subject areas and grade levels supports growth in different areas. The purpose of both examples is to demonstrate how SEAS programs benefit youth by providing multiple entry points for learning and development over time.



Photo: © Jason Houston

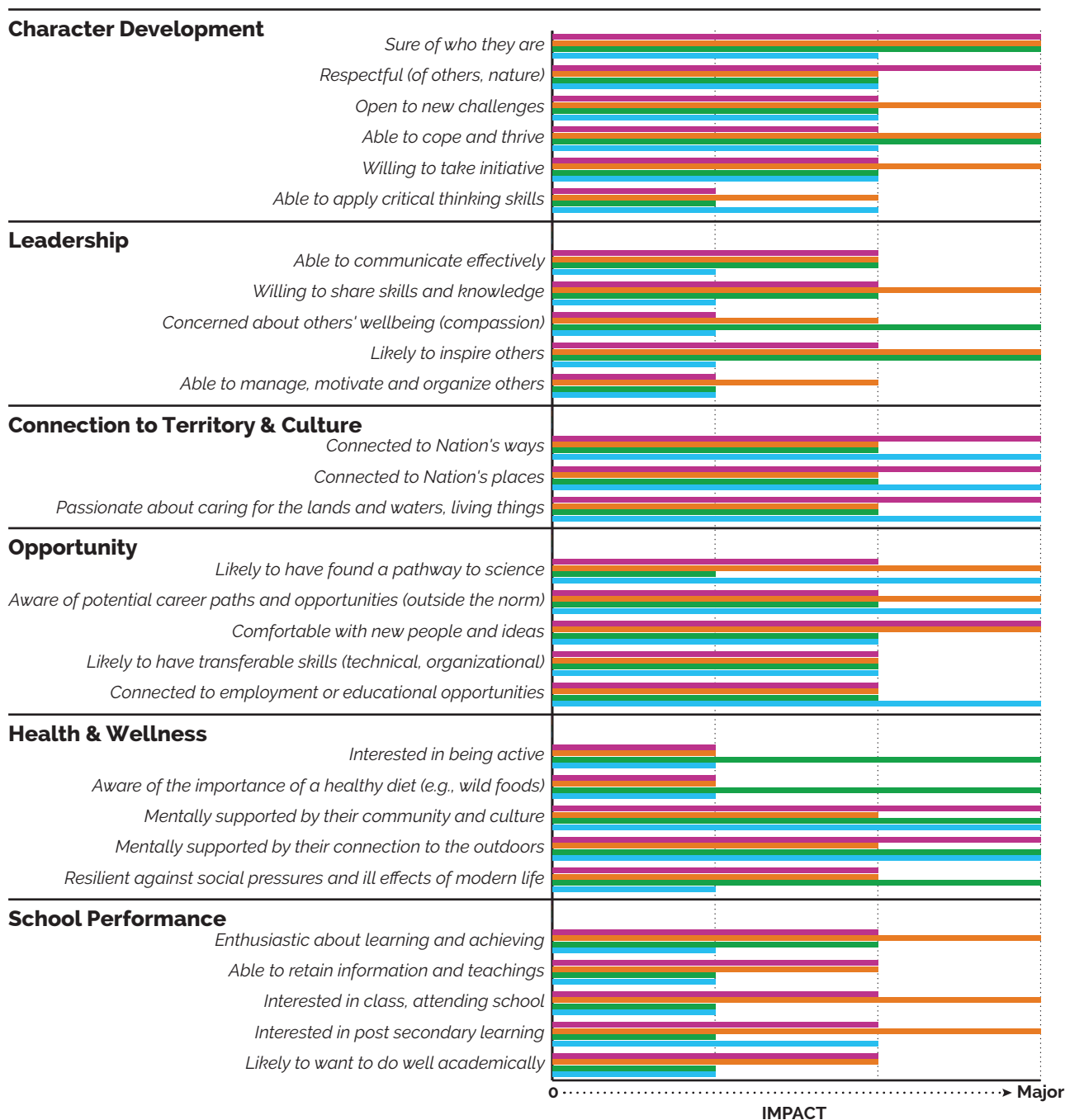
<sup>12</sup> This is specific to the school program component and dependent on whether or not teachers and school administrators are aware of SEAS and supportive of integrating SEAS programming into classroom curricula and activities.

### THE SEAS INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE

Figure 9 uses the framework presented in Finding 1 (see Figure 2 on page 7) to show how four former SEAS interns were positively impacted by the experience of completing a SEAS internship. As the figure indicates, these four individuals all experienced substantial but vastly different benefits from participating in the program.<sup>13</sup> The measure from zero to major on the x-axis of each graph is based on the SEAS program coordinators' evaluation of change from baseline, meaning that the graphs

show where the interns experienced the most significant positive changes over the course of their internship experiences. Bear in mind that these internships are just eight weeks long and many of the interns also participate in the SEAS school program. Therefore, lower levels of impact do not necessarily indicate that SEAS is not impactful in these areas; rather, our interviews suggested that many interns enter the internship programs with relatively high existing baselines in some areas.

**FIGURE 9:** The impact of SEAS internships on 4 selected past interns ( Intern 1 Intern 2 Intern 3 Intern 4)



13 Our evaluation found that these differences are likely attributable to the fact that the interns all came into the program with different existing capacity levels and interests. They are also likely attributable to the customized nature of the internships, which tend to be tailored to “meet the youth where they are” based on an assessment of their unique needs, interests and aptitudes.

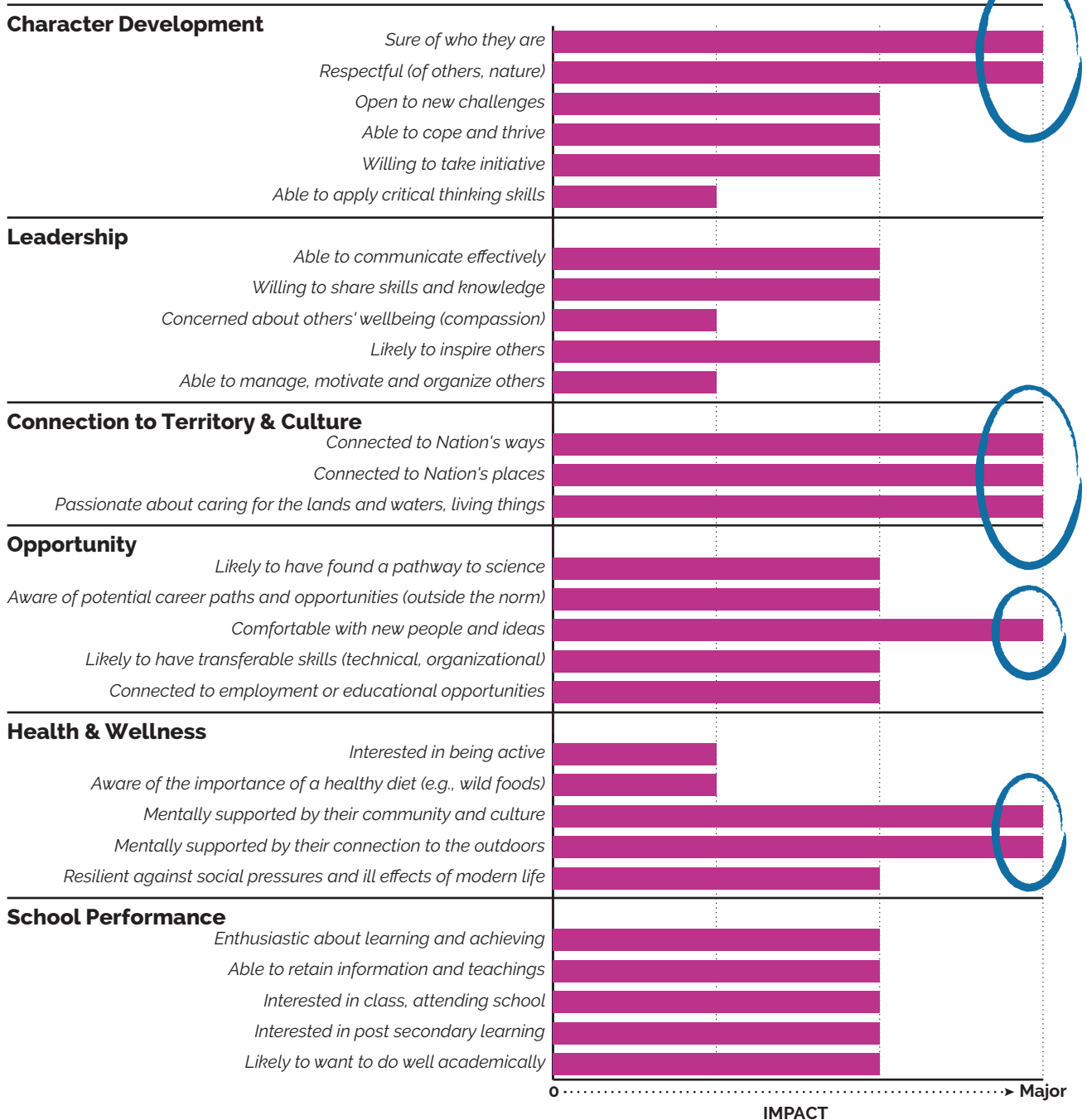


Where this is the case, the marginal impact of SEAS may be less substantial, but our evaluation also found that even moderate impacts from the SEAS internship may be significant in advancing critically important qualities and skills. This supports the idea of critical marginal change or moving interns past a “tipping point” in their development, which internship coordinators suggested is key to understanding how the internship programs benefit SEAS youth.

While Figure 9 compares intern experiences, Figures 10-13 show how the internships impacted these participants independently. The accompanying descriptions highlight how the interns’ experiences were shaped by unique contextual factors that influenced how they each benefitted from participating in the program. The point is that while each intern experienced different impacts, all four experienced profound shifts in awareness, attitude and behaviour in key areas.

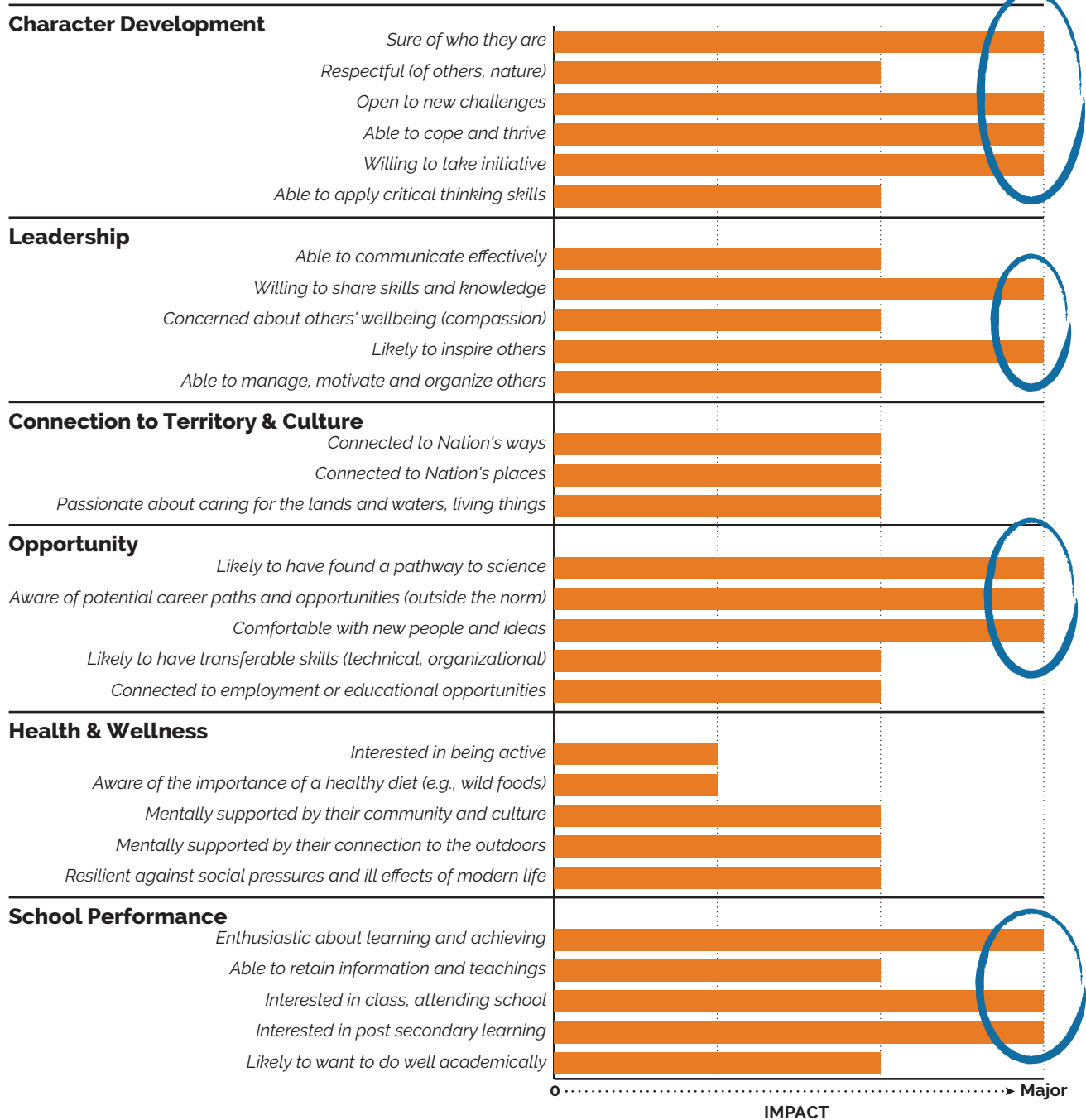
**FIGURE 10:** Intern 1 - Confidence Through Connection

Student grew up off reserve in an urban school system. The internship built a strong sense of connection to culture, place and community, which was an important outcome and starting point for personal growth toward possible career goals. New sense of connection built confidence and resilience.



**FIGURE 11:** Intern 2 - Exponential Personal Growth

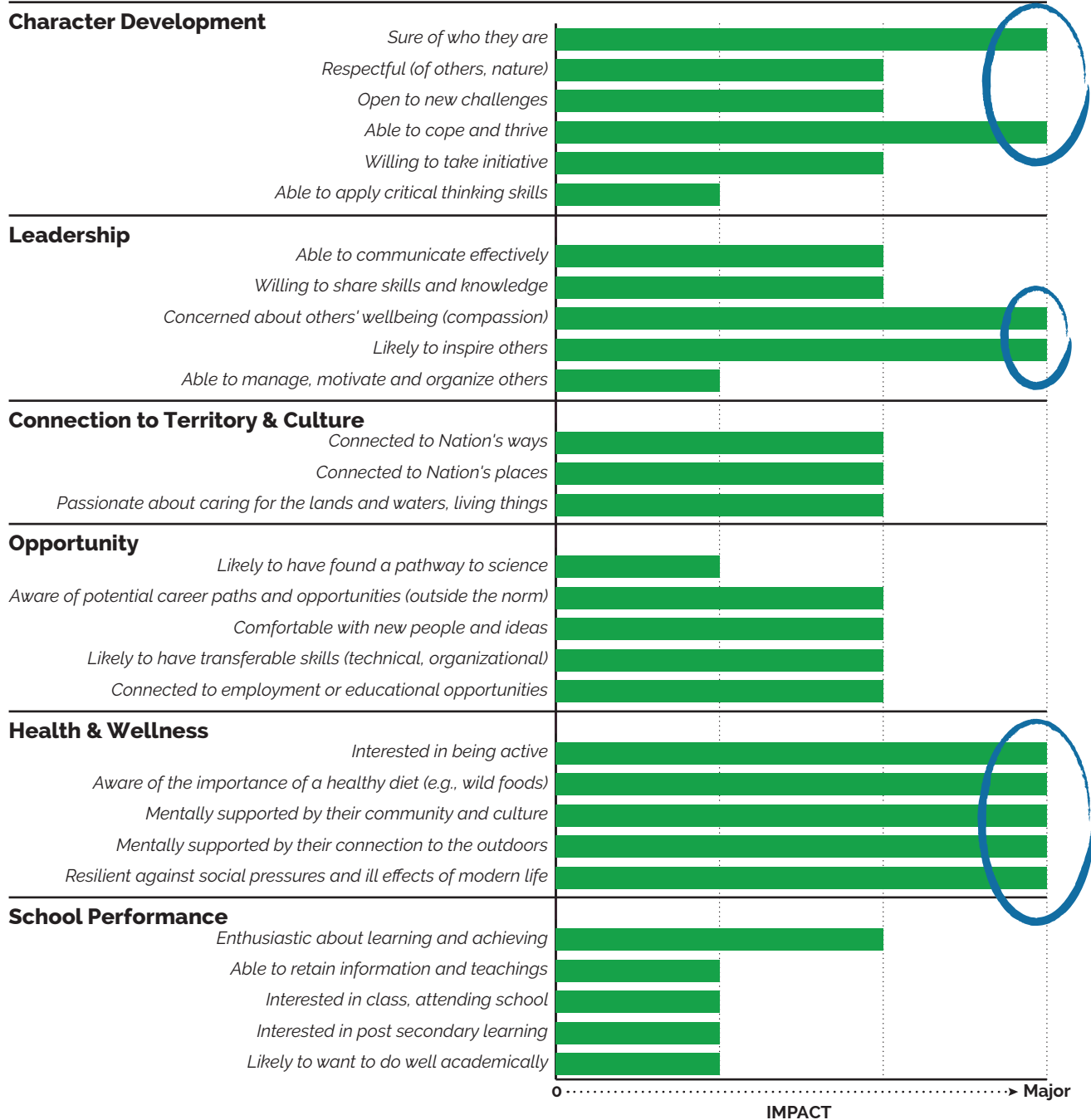
Student came into internship at the ideal time and with great potential. Strong one- on- one connection with mentor supported student in exponential growth and clear match between aptitude and opportunity. Connectedness to culture and nature an important element of success in this case—created the ideal setting for personal growth.





**FIGURE 12: Intern 3 - A Healthy Foundation**

Internship came at an ideal time in this student's life to encourage a focus on self-care/resilience, empathy and peer support. Circumstances in student's life supported self-actualization. Academics/hard skills were secondary to character growth, but great opportunity to build on the foundation of the internship when the student returned to school in the fall.



**FIGURE 13: Intern 4 - Identity and Direction**

Student came to the program with very strong skills/capabilities but little sense of direction, or cultural identity. Value of SEAS for this student was in channeling strengths into land-based applications.

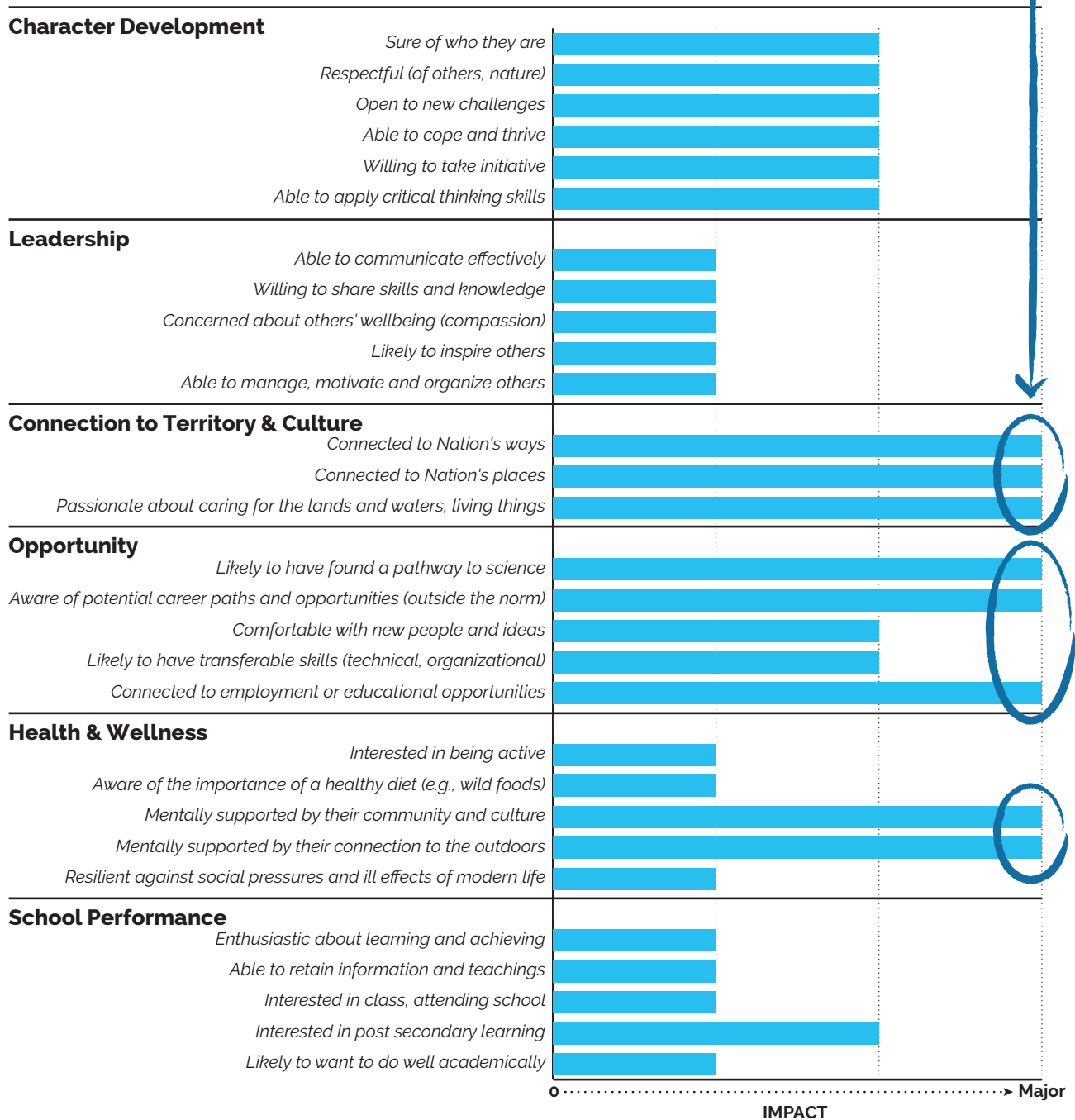




Figure 14 (below) highlights how different benefits are also achieved by integrating SEAS into different subject areas and grade levels. In the example illustrated below, we show how SEAS programming has benefitted two distinct student cohorts: science students in grades 8-9-10, and outdoor education students in grades 11 and 12—both taught by the same teacher. Importantly, perception bias was minimized because it was the same individual teaching these classes and conducting the SEAS evaluation for these two different classes/cohorts. For the purposes of this evaluation, two benefit areas were isolated and discussed: **health and wellness** and **school performance**.

The results presented in Figure 14 describe year-end benefits—i.e., how much change the teacher observed (and could attribute to SEAS) over the course of one school year. They can be summarized as follows:

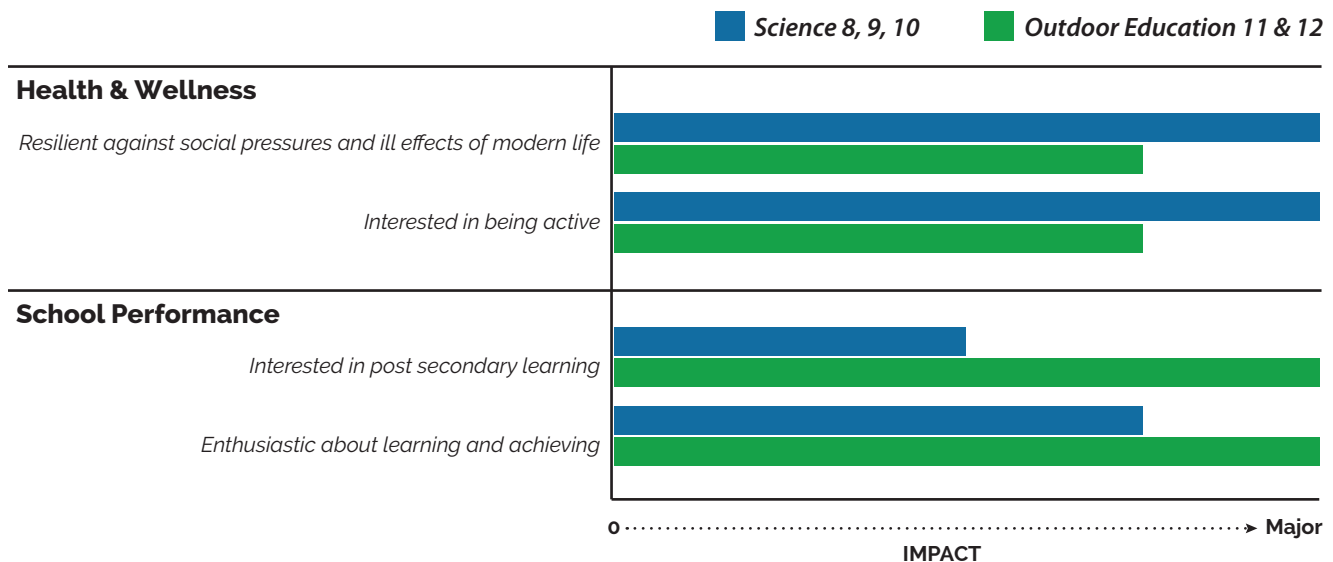
- On average, the teacher observed major positive changes in relation to the grade 8-9-10 student cohort becoming more *resilient against social pressures and ill effects of modern life* and *interested in being active*. In contrast, the grade 11-12 outdoor education students experienced only moderate benefits in these areas.
- On the other hand, outdoor education students experienced major benefits in two aspects of

school performance that were only moderate or minor for grade 8-9-10 science students. These included *interested in post-secondary learning* and *enthusiastic about learning and achieving*.

What these results tell us is that SEAS programming supports different kinds of learning via integration into different classroom contexts and grade levels. Impacts are expected to differ because student baselines (beginning of the year) may be higher in some areas, meaning that there is not as much room to support further change. Another factor may be student interest levels in a given area at a particular stage of education, such as interest in post-secondary learning as students approach graduation. While SEAS programming may help to awaken an interest in post-secondary in earlier years, it makes sense that students would both develop and show that interest more as they get older.

In any case, this evaluation found that the integration of SEAS into different classrooms and grade levels is one of the keys to its success. SEAS programs provide ongoing support to youth over the duration of their learning careers, which in turn ensures that significant benefits occur and accrue over time. Students who have the opportunity to participate in SEAS programming for several consecutive years are thus likely to benefit from SEAS more than students who do not have the same opportunity.

**FIGURE 14:** Comparing SEAS benefits across different classroom contexts



## Finding #7: *The SEAS programs are having far-reaching positive impacts at the community level.*

SEAS programs are designed to support youth capacity development, so many of the short and long-term benefits derived from SEAS are experienced at the individual level. However, another fundamental objective of SEAS is to benefit partner communities as a whole. This is important, as community members interviewed for this evaluation spoke candidly of the challenges facing their Nations due to the profound effects—both past and present—of colonialism.

In BC and elsewhere in Canada, the imposition of the reserve system and the transition to private property and a capitalist economy seriously diminished the self-sufficiency and wellbeing of Indigenous communities. First Nations were dispossessed of their traditional territories and confined to reserve lands, becoming increasingly dependent on the state as traditional practices were criminalized and Indigenous economies undermined.<sup>14</sup> The effects of dispossession were also compounded by assimilative policies such as those enacted through the establishment of the residential school

system and the '60s Scoop. Over the course of our evaluation, several community members highlighted how such factors have disrupted their cultures and affected their communities' social fabric and overall wellbeing:

*"[A] lot of people were taken out of the community and unfortunately for that group they were forbidden to speak their language and learn anything about their culture. So we have a lot of people in this community who are very disconnected and just unable to pass on that cultural information."*

- Community leader

*"When I was younger, there used to be a potlatch, and between the smallpox epidemics [...] and the banning of the potlatch, the residential schools, a lot was lost in our time."*

- Educator

*"We used to have over 108 fishing boats here in the community, and now we only have about 12."*

- Community leader



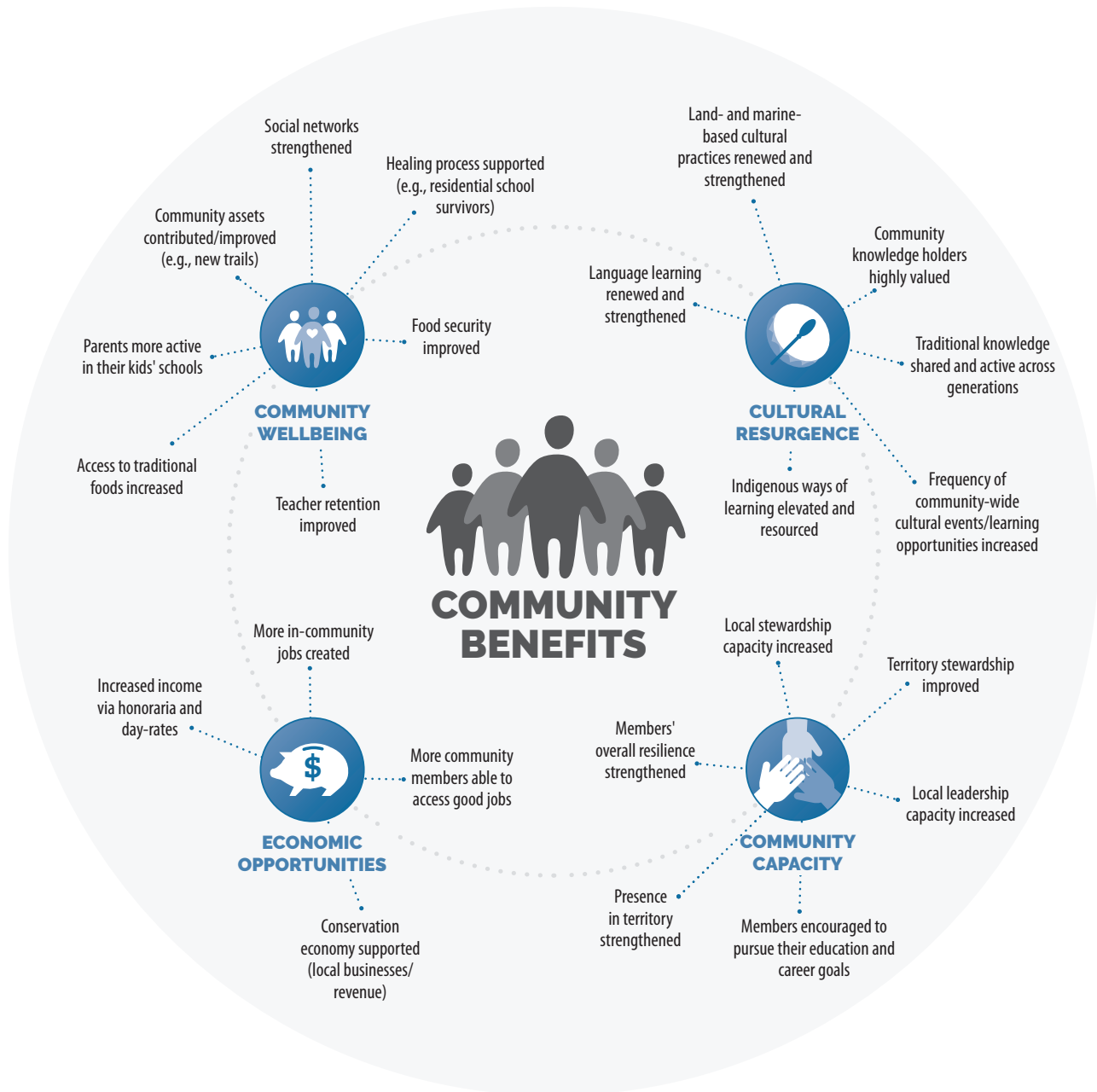
Photo: © Jason Houston

14 See Alfred, 2009; Harris, 2002.



Within this context, SEAS is seen by partner First Nations as an important contributor to the restoration of healthy, resilient communities. Our evaluation found that SEAS is contributing to this process in several specific areas, including: **community wellbeing**, **cultural resurgence**, **community capacity** and **economic opportunities**. Figure 15 illustrates these community benefits.

**FIGURE 15:** Evaluation Framework: Community Benefits from SEAS



## Community Wellbeing

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SEAS is contributing to community wellbeing by strengthening community social networks, fostering intergenerational relationship-building, and supporting the re-emergence of important social institutions (e.g., community norms and values). For example, SEAS is credited with increasing the frequency of community-wide events and bringing community knowledge holders, parents, and teachers together. SEAS is also credited with getting parents more involved at school, connecting teachers with the community,<sup>15</sup> and helping to heal intergenerational trauma.

*“The program helps bring the community together.”*

- Community leader

*“The parents come down and join, and watch [SEAS youth] while they’re learning. The parents are probably way more interested in coming to school now because of events like this.”*

- School program educator

*“I think SEAS plays a part. It’s like a piece of a larger part that’s helping us heal in terms of the colonial abuses, and understanding how those traumas have affected us. And coming back from that.”*

- Internship coordinator

## Cultural Resurgence

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While the cultural emphasis of SEAS varies from community to community, by design, all three programs are contributing to cultural resurgence. For example, SEAS programs are creating more opportunities for community-wide engagement in cultural events and activities (e.g., potlatches, ceremonies), getting more community members out into their traditional territories, and reconnecting people to their languages and cultural practices. They are also credited with helping to bridge the gap between elders and youth by connecting youth to community knowledge holders. This practice is helping to revitalize Indigenous ways of learning, while also ensuring that local knowledge is shared and active rather than lost.

*“We get so much benefit just by bringing our community members to places in our territory that they’ve never been able to go to before.”*

- Internship coordinator

*“There has been a resurgence in the past 10 years, and SEAS is a huge part of that.”*

- Community leader

*“It’s a totally different way of learning that really goes back to our cultural roots.”*

- Community leader

## Community Capacity

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SEAS is contributing to community capacity by strengthening the individual capacity of SEAS youth and fostering growth in leadership and stewardship capacity. As more members do better in school and become more active and involved in their communities and territories, they also become better community contributors and territory stewards. SEAS is having an impact in all of these areas, which in turn is helping to ensure that each partner community has more people with the skills and capacity to fill key community roles. Importantly, SEAS is also credited with improving territory stewardship more broadly.

*“Our stewardship office has grown significantly in the past 4 years, we went from a 4-person staff to a staff of 29. And most of them are youth, under the age of 25. And SEAS has been a huge contributor to that, a lot of our senior staff were SEAS kids.”*

- Community leader

## Economic Opportunities

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Finally, SEAS is contributing to partner communities’ economic opportunities by providing funds for honoraria and wages for local SEAS coordinators and interns, much of which is spent in-community. SEAS is also supporting youth in acquiring the skills they need to find jobs, which in turn is helping partner communities to shift economic priorities over the long term. For example, through SEAS, youth are exposed to job opportunities in their Nation’s stewardship offices and in conservation

15 This came from teachers from outside the community, but also from those that are community members.



Photo: © Phillip Charles

tourism. These opportunities make SEAS training both meaningful and practical, and as the collective capacity of SEAS youth grows, it also helps to make the transition to a conservation-based economy more realizable.<sup>16</sup> Thus, SEAS training opportunities synergistically reinforce partner communities' economic opportunities.

*"SEAS is definitely contributing to the economy, most of the SEAS programs participants will be working in our industries here. About 90% of our community members stay here."*

- Community leader

*"I think that we're moving towards a conservation based economy. I don't think we need to cut down trees and continue fishing to provide employment opportunities. And some of the work in the stewardship area is just providing opportunities that really the community has never explored."*

- Community leader

*"There's a million things we can do, whether it's doing research or getting involved with things like ecotourism. And you know, we see our SEAS program as an entry way into the workforce."*

- Internship coordinator

Figure 16 (on the following page) describes the positive change that community leaders attributed to their SEAS programs in each of these four areas.<sup>17</sup>

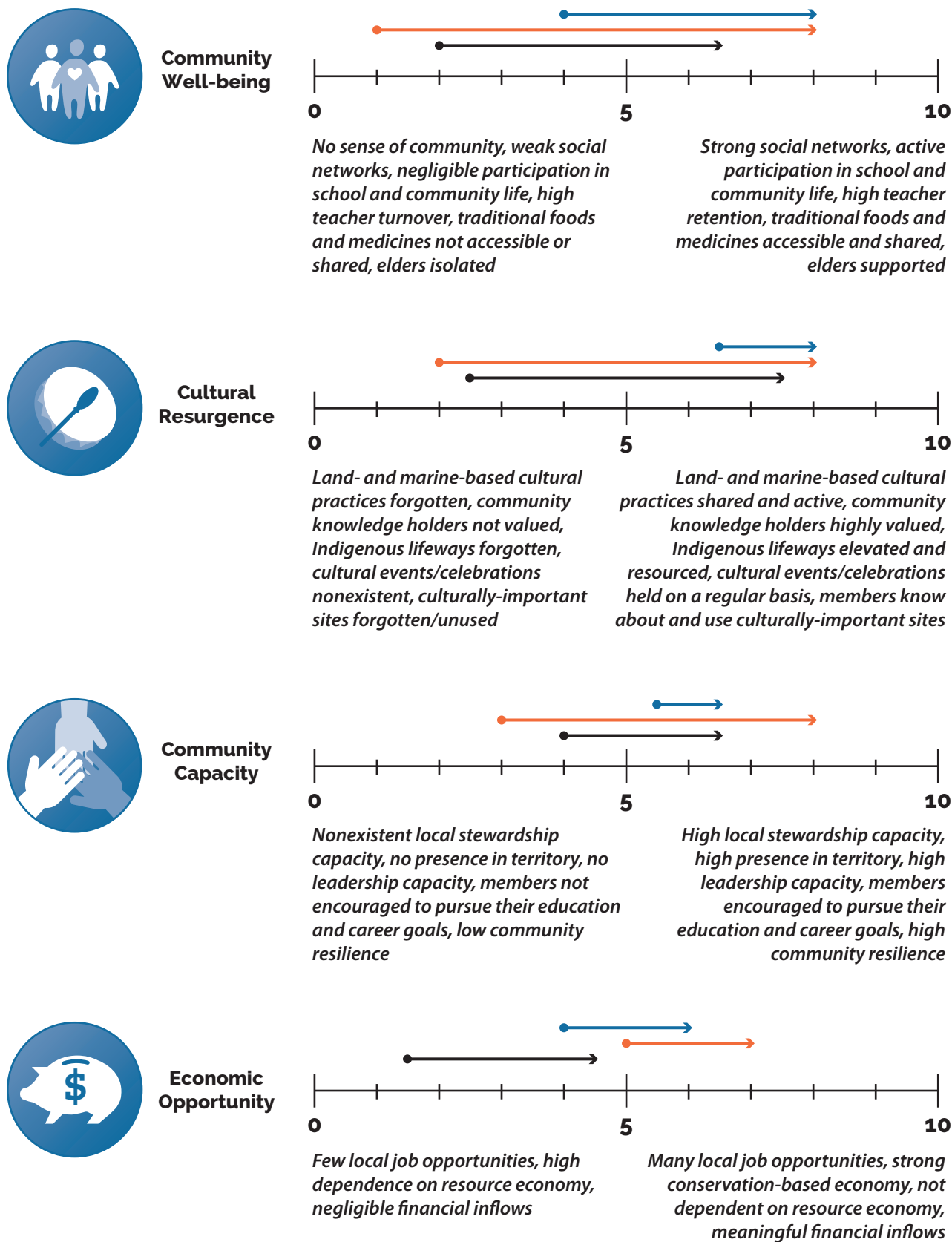
For a more comprehensive review of the many ways in which SEAS is benefitting partner communities, see Section 6 (page 43).

<sup>16</sup> This is a stated goal of at least two partner communities.

<sup>17</sup> The measures used in Figure 16 were developed based on input from evaluation participants. They describe how the SEAS programs are contributing to each end value (community wellbeing, cultural resurgence, etc.).



**FIGURE 16:** SEAS impacts at the community level - change from baseline



Nation A Nation B Nation C

FIGURE 17: Individual Benefits from SEAS





# 5. Program Outcomes: Benefits to SEAS Program Participants

*As highlighted in Section 4, this evaluation found that the SEAS programs are positively impacting program participants in six main areas:*

- *Connection to territory and culture*
- *Character development*
- *Leadership*
- *Health and wellness*
- *Opportunity*
- *School performance*

*In this section, we describe how the SEAS programs are generating positive outcomes for program participants in each of these six areas, using examples and quotes to highlight important findings.*



### 5.1 Connection to Territory and Culture

In speaking to teachers and school program coordinators, we learned that without SEAS, many young people would have little to no cultural exposure, and most would not have an opportunity to visit important sites within their traditional territories. However, through SEAS, program participants frequently spend time visiting such sites, and they also get to participate in land-based learning on a regular basis. By providing opportunities for these activities to occur, the SEAS programs are helping program participants connect to land, and to the social relations, knowledges and languages that are tied to land. As we discuss further in the sections on character development and health and wellness, the benefits that youth derive from these connections cannot be overstated.

*“Some of the kids don’t have families with opportunities to get out, so SEAS provides that, the [link] to culture and territory.”*

- Internship coordinator

*“I know that before I worked here, not many of them had ever been out on a boat. And now a lot of them have.”*

- School program coordinator

*“That’s what they gain from being part of the program—that being out on the land isn’t just an opportunity to catch a fish or pull cedar bark but to share all of the teachings that are around that activity, some of which have very little to do with catching a fish or pulling cedar bark, but are very values-based and really deepen their sense of connection to the place they’re in or the resource they’re interacting with.”*

- Internship coordinator

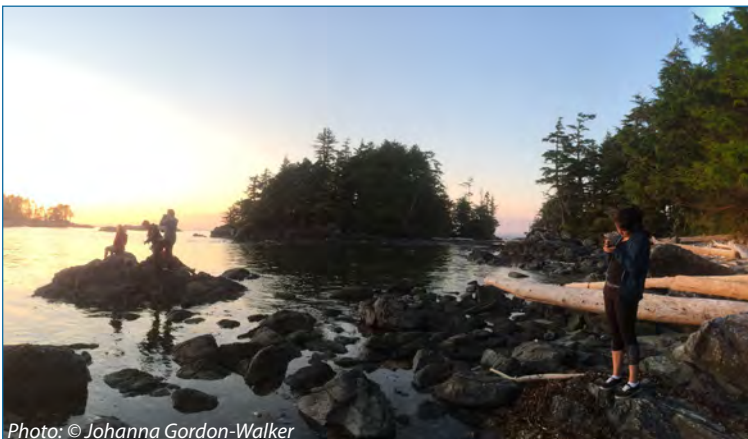


Photo: © Johanna Gordon-Walker

**FIGURE 18:** This figure shows the average impact of SEAS in relation to Connection to Territory and Culture. The gray pointer represents the observed impacts reported by educators, while the black pointer represents the experienced impacts reported by SEAS participants.



Both the school programs and the internships contribute benefits in this area, though in different ways. For example, for many students, the school programs provide a foundational introduction to both culture and territory. Through SEAS activities, children as young as five get to spend time out in their territories learning on the land with elders and other community knowledge holders. Because SEAS is a multi-year program, these students then have opportunities to slowly build connections to important places within their territories over time, while also gradually becoming more deeply immersed in their cultures. We heard that many students become more culturally rooted as these connections develop, which in turn helps to foster a stewardship ethic among SEAS youth.

*“It comes from having senior staff in our programs who are taking the kids and saying, “hey, this is where your family’s chieftainship comes from, let me tell you about the origin story of the chief in your family and how it ties to that bay right there or that feature there. They’re saying, “this is your name, and this is what it means and this is how it ties to this place.” [...] And so the kids’ path to caring really deeply about places is often very cultural.”*

- Internship coordinator



Photo: © Jason Houston

*I have had interns in the past year comment on what they learned and the realization that we all contribute to being Nuxalk."*

- Internship coordinator

All told, we found that the SEAS programs are helping youth build critical connections to both culture and territory. These connections complement and support a passion for stewardship.

*"It's all about mixing [Indigenous and Western] knowledge, it's all about creating the right environment that will inspire and motivate, and create some intimacy with our environment, some desire to steward and care for it, some connection and compassion about where we live and why we live there, and you know, what our responsibilities are—this whole reciprocity thing—all that folds into it."*

- Internship coordinator

SEAS internships complement the school programs by providing additional opportunities for youth to build intimate connections to the places and ways of their people. For some interns, this means having an opportunity to apply an existing passion for caring for territory to an activity or project that will have a tangible impact. For others, it means fostering new and deeper connections to important places and practices, which often has the effect of encouraging young people to develop a stronger understanding of their role as leaders and stewards in their territories. We heard that many SEAS interns also develop a sense of purpose through the internships, which they then carry forward into other aspects of their lives (e.g., community engagement, education and career decisions).

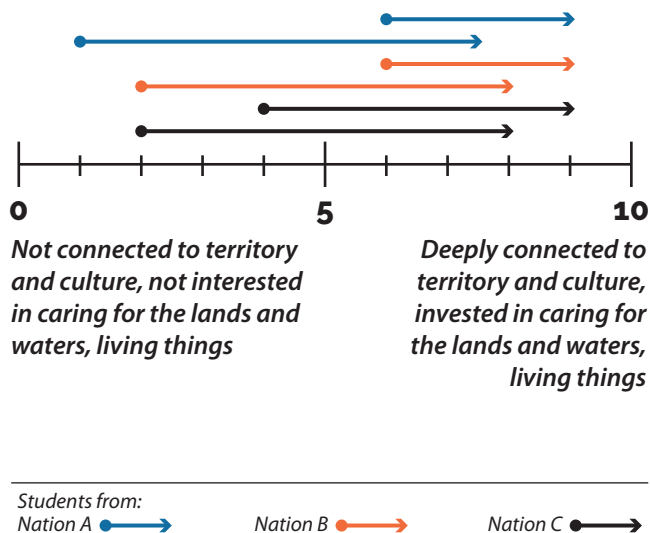
*"SEAS helps them have a better understanding of what Nuxalk is. It is more than just songs, dances, and potlaches. It has opened many of our interns' eyes in terms of the work being done when the songs are sung and the preparation of harvesting and preserving to feast and to potlatch that our SEAS program teaches.*

*Respect is learned in the appreciation of what each Nuxalk member has to offer in their wisdom, knowledge and contribution to our community. Respect is learned for our environment because of everything it has to offer - nourishment, protection, recovery, safety, etc.*

*"How [SEAS] benefits them is it awakens them, and I'd like to say just widens their perspectives. You see a wider bigger picture of what's out there, what we're responsible for, and why we're responsible for it as Nuxalkmc people. You know, by learning our history in it—first, where we come from, and then why it's important to us, and then why we're stewards of it, and allowing our children to see all of that, or at least maybe a glimpse of it—hopefully it sparks passion in them. And allowing them to understand that even if you don't choose a direct career in stewardship, that in essence because you're still Nuxalk, you still are a steward regardless."*

- Internship coordinator

**FIGURE 19:** SEAS impacts at the individual level – change from baseline for six SEAS youth. This figure shows that these six students all experienced a change from baseline due to participation in SEAS. Some started at a lower baseline and thus became much more connected to their territories and cultures because of SEAS, while others started at a higher baseline and so experienced comparatively small changes in these areas. However, the students that experienced smaller changes moved to the high end of the scale, meaning that SEAS provided a small but important push.



## 5.2 Character Development

This evaluation found that the SEAS programs are connecting program participants to their cultures and heritages, and teaching them to feel strong in their identities as members of their respective Nations. Teachers and program coordinators described this process of connection as increasing participants' confidence and self-awareness. Thus, the SEAS programs are contributing to character development by helping SEAS youth become more sure of who they are.

*"SEAS gives the students a sense of identity; there is a difference between the students who do go out [on the land] and those who don't."*

- Educator

*"I remember when I first got here, I would always stand at the top of the stairs. I would say good morning to the kids and they wouldn't do or say much. But now, their heads are up, they are proud, they are happy to be here, they love being here. I think [SEAS] has made a huge difference. They know who they are, they are strong in their culture, strong in their Heiltsuk identity."*

- Educator

*"A lot of students really came into their own sense of self and personality when they were out at Hakai and out on the land. The teachers said that these students were entirely different when they were outside. I've seen that through the program."*

- Educator

Program coordinators suggested that the SEAS programs provide opportunities for interactions with traditional knowledge holders and other community members that would likely not take place otherwise. We heard that these experiences foster more respectful behavior in relation to both community and territory by encouraging youth to both learn about and embrace cultural values such as reciprocity. Importantly, these experiences were also said to have a grounding effect on program participants.

*"They definitely grow more empathy for the natural environment. They learn to be more respectful."*

- Educator

*"SEAS allows them to get comfortable with being outside and gaining confidence, and they build on that."*

- Educator

**FIGURE 20:** This figure shows the average impact of SEAS in relation to Character Development. The gray pointer represents the observed impacts reported by educators, while the black pointer represents the experienced impacts reported by SEAS participants.



*"I think the SEAS program really grounds them."*

- Educator

Additionally, several teachers stressed that students who experience less success in a more conventional classroom setting often benefit considerably from participation in SEAS. Through the school programs, students have opportunities to learn on the land and develop and share skills and knowledge that are not typically valued within the Western school system. We heard that these opportunities enable struggling youth to build confidence and develop better coping mechanisms despite facing significant challenges.

*"There are students that get to experience success [through SEAS] in a way that these students probably very rarely would otherwise get experience with."*

- Educator

*"For those who aren't strong academically, participation rates go up, confidence goes up and that usually translates into improved marks after a while of going out on these excursions."*

- Educator

SEAS internships support character development in many of these same ways, but what they offer in addition is deeply immersive applied learning experiences that provide in-depth exposure to new environments and people. Because the internships are typically tailored to the strengths and needs of each young person, SEAS interns have opportunities to really activate their individual potential, and flourish in new and profound ways.





*“Being part of [SEAS] makes them feel stronger about taking a stand about things they don’t have control over. So, they went out and documented the oil spill. They’re more engaged in protecting the land, not from themselves but from outside influences. [...] To see how quickly they’re making those connections and then applying them to risks associated with shipping issues or tankers or pipelines—these kids are thinking really critically and making those connections to real risks and issues that the Nation is addressing. And it’s a pretty amazing path to having a really strong voice on those issues.”*

- Internship coordinator

*“I think [SEAS] really opened his eyes. He grew up in the city as a youth and finally moved back and was really trying to connect back to his culture, and I think this was a venue to be able to do that and see things firsthand. So his eyes are wide open now through SEAS and I remember that quite well. And it actually really inspired him to get involved in some of the other work.”*

- Community leader

*“In my class, I see their ability to now give presentations, or make connections to real life examples when we talk about science. Like ecosystems.”*

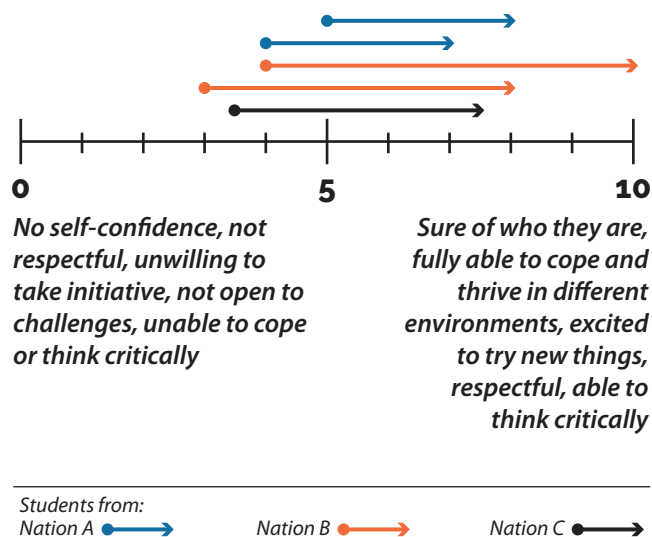
- Educator

*“I will say that a student who doesn’t write very much and is very shy, she wrote a super long answer about what she found interesting, and it was very surprising.”*

- Educator

The internships also tend to push SEAS youth past their comfort zones, but in a supported setting. For example, Heiltsuk SEAS internships usually take place in the Koeye River Valley, which is located 30 nautical miles outside of Bella Bella and accessible only by boat. Interns typically remain at Koeye for the duration of the summer, which means they are away from their families for weeks at a time. Similarly, Kitsoo/Xai’xais interns spend the summer travelling in their traditional territories learning about culturally significant sites, doing research, and learning their culture. According to program coordinators, these kinds of experiences encourage youth to become more independent, more confident, and more comfortable working with others. This has cascading effects as students become more willing to take on new challenges and more comfortable thinking critically and contributing in a collaborative environment.

**FIGURE 21:** SEAS impacts at the individual level – change from baseline for five SEAS youth. This figure shows that to varying degrees, these five students all experienced significant developments in character due to participation in SEAS.



### 5.3 Leadership

Program coordinators and others involved in the evaluation had a lot to say about how SEAS programs are improving the leadership skills of youth. Broadly speaking, they linked this outcome to character development, and specifically, to program participants becoming more confident, more culturally-grounded, and more communicative.

*“Every year there’s a very strong core group of [student] leaders. It seems like [SEAS] has made a huge difference.”*

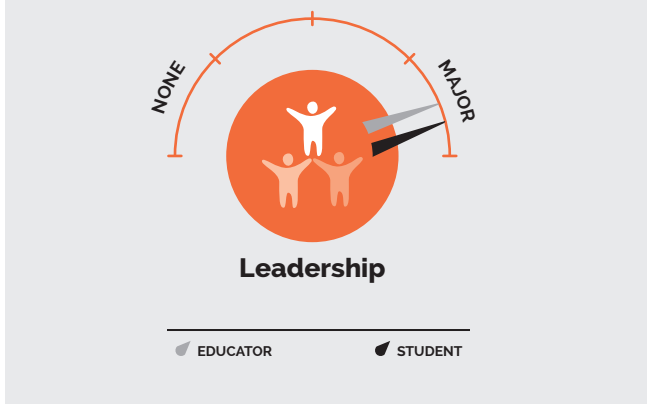
- Educator

*“The SEAS program is very reflective of the culture, our stories. And that’s really important because it ties into their ability to be good leaders too, when they know themselves.”*

- Educator

Both teachers and program coordinators highlighted how the SEAS school programs support increased peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchange. SEAS activities are often project-based, so students have lots of opportunities to work together and share their skills and knowledge with one another. In addition, SEAS activities regularly involve hands-on projects that take place outside, where students get to learn by doing. We heard that these experiences encourage compassion, teamwork and motivation.

**FIGURE 22:** This figure shows the average impact of SEAS in relation to Leadership. The gray pointer represents the observed impacts reported by educators, while the black pointer represents the experienced impacts reported by SEAS participants.



*“They learn to help each other and share. They encourage each other, and cheer each other on, watching over each other.”*

- Educator

*“There’s definitely a sense of teamwork with some of the projects I’ve seen students work on.”*

- Educator



Photo: © Phillip Charles



We also heard that the SEAS programs are having a substantial impact on program participants' communication skills. For example, one evaluation respondent shared a story about a SEAS summer intern who, at the end of her internship, got up in front of her entire community on her own initiative to talk about the importance of protecting cultural sites and food fish areas from threats associated with resource development. After describing this intern as "one of the shyest people" he had ever met, the respondent went on to say that the transformation she underwent within a two-month period was remarkable.

*"It was really amazing. She got up in front of the whole community and got on the mic and just went off about how we've got to do everything we can to not allow the [resource development] project to go forward."*

- Community leader

These outcomes are all contributing to the development and emergence of tomorrow's leaders. Specifically, we heard that SEAS youth are stepping into mentorship roles, taking on new responsibilities in their peer groups and communities, and learning to inspire, motivate and organize others.

*"It's built into the internship role that the interns are interacting with younger kids, they're teaching them what they're learning, they're having to communicate to them, and in that leadership category, because of the age at which we're taking interns, for a lot of them I think it's their first time having a job where those kinds of roles are expected of them. But I do think that [leadership] is an area where we foster a lot of growth."*

- Internship coordinator

*"The youth here, the SEAS interns, they really help the younger grades as well."*

- Educator

*"There was a time when I was the only person who would take campers out and teach them scientific facts about plants but also traditional names and uses, and now there's probably fifty kids that can do that. [...] That's our real measure of progress. When we don't have to do the things that we do anymore because other people are carrying them."*

- Internship coordinator

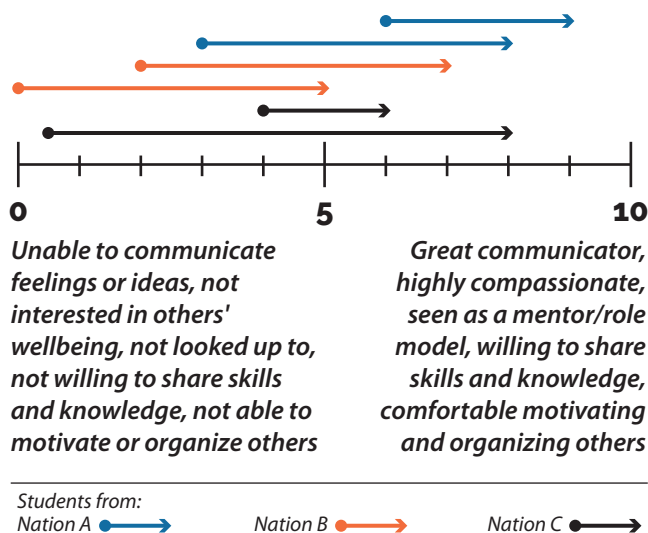


Photo: © Jason Houston

*"I don't feel like I have to babysit the whole process anymore. You know, they know what they're doing, they know how to be out there, so it's been really good, they're taking ownership of it, and so it's been extremely good for me."*

- Community leader

**FIGURE 23:** SEAS impacts at the individual level – change from baseline for six SEAS youth. This figure shows that some students experienced tremendous gains in their capacity for leadership due to participation in SEAS, while others experienced smaller gains. All six started at fairly low baselines.





### 5.4 Health and Wellness

In all three partner communities, the SEAS programs play a vital role in fostering youth connections to community, culture, and the outdoors. We heard that SEAS participants are benefitting from these connections in several ways, but in particular, they are seeing improvements in health and wellness.

SEAS supports connections to community and culture by creating opportunities for youth to build relationships with community members through a variety of events and interactions. For example, through the school programs, youth routinely engage with traditional knowledge holders and community staff, and they also have regular opportunities to come together with the broader community at SEAS-related community celebrations and events. We heard that in at least one partner community, events hosted through the SEAS school program are among the most popular community-wide events that take place.

*“I do think SEAS has an impact. The group activities that SEAS does at the school, the group practices, cultural singing for example, I do really think that these things help the kids have a sense of community and belonging—those basic needs that need to be filled.”*

- Educator

*“SEAS absolutely helps with mental health and addictions. Students have a better sense of their mental health through their connection to the outdoors. They are excited about going hunting or talking with an elder.”*

- Educator



Photo: © Phillip Charles

**FIGURE 24:** This figure shows the average impact of SEAS in relation to Health and Wellness. The gray pointer represents the observed impacts reported by educators, while the black pointer represents the experienced impacts reported by SEAS participants.



SEAS programs also connect youth to their communities through activities that encourage them to make direct contributions to community members’ wellbeing. In the Heiltsuk community of Bella Bella, SEAS youth go door-to-door to distribute harvested foods and medicines to more isolated community members, and in the Kitasoo/Xai’xais community of Klemtu, they have been working with elders to bring back traditional songs. We heard that many program participants come to feel a strong sense of belonging and interconnectedness through these types of interactions.

*“There is definitely a strong sense of community when it comes to SEAS, and feeling that they’re connected to culture and a sense of belonging to the community in terms of their mental health. I think there’s a major connection there and I’ve seen that happen.”*

- Educator

In addition to fostering connections to community and culture, the SEAS programs also contribute important physical and mental health benefits simply by encouraging youth to get outside and be more active. When they go on SEAS trips, SEAS youth have a chance to disengage from technology and social media and participate in physical and social activity. Just as importantly, they also get to spend time at important places within their traditional territories. We heard that program participants find respite and inspiration

through these experiences. Program coordinators said that older youth will sometimes even choose to go on SEAS trips rather than stay home on the weekends and go to parties.

*“I find that physically they get out more. There’s a couple that bought a fishing rod now and they go rod fishing, because they learned how to do it in our program, you know, they got their first catches with us and it just inspired them. And they had nobody there to teach them that.”*

- Internship coordinator

*“One of our students has come a long way, she used to be the kind of person who had a lot of high anxiety issues. Taking her out on the land was a big deal, and now she’s teaching the younger kids.”*

- School program coordinator

*“It makes him feel good that he’s out on the land. He’s getting to that age now where those weekend parties are coming up, and he’s going to make that choice to come out with us, rather than party.”*

- Internship coordinator

*“Certainly, the youth always talk about it, finding strength in being outdoors and just sitting around some old growth forests, or walking the same trails that their ancestors walked. I think it’s extremely inspiring, and I think they gain a lot of strength from that.”*

- Community leader

*“It helps them physically and creates more mental awareness that there’s more out there than technology.”*

- Internship coordinator

*“At risk kids feel more comfortable at school and have something that they can connect to emotionally and spiritually.”*

- Educator

For some program participants, the SEAS programs also function as a safety net. We heard that many young people feel supported just knowing that SEAS is a constant in their lives year after year. We also heard that school program coordinators will sometimes work with internship program coordinators to provide continuous, targeted support to more vulnerable kids. For some SEAS youth, this personalized support has made a huge difference with respect to their overall health and wellness.



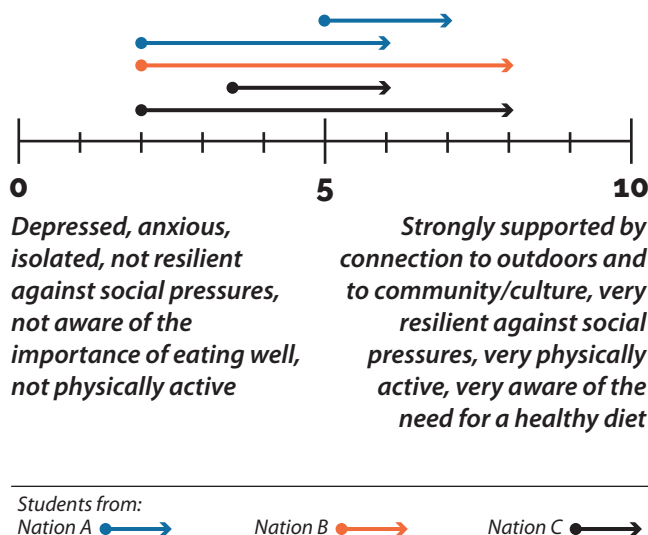
Photo: © Jason Houston

Finally, we also heard that the SEAS programs are benefitting youth by making them more aware of healthy eating habits.

*“It is something we consciously work on, it’s not just a side effect. Over the years we’ve applied for things like diabetes prevention because we do make sure people eat good healthy foods with a good mix of traditional foods and we make sure they walk and hike to get to their meals and you know, live a healthy lifestyle. It really is teaching a new healthy way of looking after yourself.”*

- Internship coordinator

**FIGURE 25:** SEAS impacts at the individual level – change from baseline for six SEAS youth. This figure shows that the students with very low health and wellness baselines experienced the most significant changes in this area. In contrast, students with higher baselines experienced more moderate changes.



## 5.5 Opportunity

In addition to supporting connections to territory and culture, a key objective of the SEAS programs is to expose youth to opportunities that will help them “find a pathway to science”.

*“We’re trying to get science stewards here. We want some focus to be on helping to fill our stewardship office with Heiltsuk graduates. We don’t want to hire outside people to run our stewardship office.”*

- Internship coordinator

*“There’s a very strong focus in science, we bring in a lot of academics, although we try and get them to merge that with traditional ecological knowledge and that’s extremely important. We have a challenge where we don’t have a ton of people in our community that head out to post-secondary, so we’ve been trying to give them some career options. We bring in people like Nancy Turner, who is a world-renowned ethnobotanist, we bring in bear biologists, salmon biologists—we bring in all types of different people and are always merging that with some of the local knowledge.”*

- Community leader

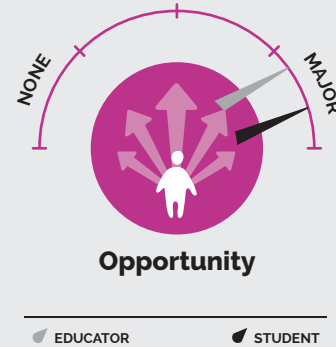
We heard that the SEAS programs have been quite successful in this objective, largely because they support youth engagement in science and stewardship over several years. At the elementary school level, the school programs focus on simple things like getting children outside and encouraging them to be more passionate and curious about nature. As they get older, SEAS activities become more structured and science-focused, with an emphasis on ecology, biology, stewardship, and sustainability. Several teachers mentioned that their students tend to demonstrate a stronger interest in their schoolwork, and in science specifically, when they have experiential and applied learning opportunities through SEAS.

*“SEAS is really being integrated into science classes and the curriculum now. SEAS is becoming really important.”*

- Internship coordinator

We also heard that one of the biggest benefits of SEAS is that it exposes students to researchers and professionals who are working in and around the community (e.g., biologists, ethnobotanists, archaeologists; both local and non-local). These

**FIGURE 26:** This figure shows the average impact of SEAS in relation to Opportunity. The gray pointer represents the observed impacts reported by educators, while the black pointer represents the experienced impacts reported by SEAS participants.



experts, many of whom are renowned in their fields, are often invited to lead or support SEAS activities. Many evaluation respondents reported that these experiences help to inspire and motivate SEAS youth by opening their eyes to the range of options and possibilities available. For young people growing up in remote communities with limited exposure to role models in professional fields, these experiences can be life-changing.

*“We had Arran from the coastguard come in, and she did a presentation with the kids. She’s always been outdoors, but seeing the fact that Arran had been successful in the coastguard in a male dominated profession, and seeing her being successful, my niece said, ‘Wait a minute, I can do that too.’ It gives them motivation when they see what’s possible.”*

- Educator

*“The career opportunities it opens up for students in the future—kids start learning about archaeology, or in apprenticeships, or learning the history and the culture, going to village sites where their ancestors were from—but they’re also saying hey, this is something I have an opportunity to do in the future. SEAS constantly lets the kids see these other industries and people with different occupations, and it opens up opportunities for their futures.”*

- Educator





Photo: © Johanna Gordon-Walker

*“Some guy like Will, who’s a PhD student at Simon Fraser [University], hanging out with a SEAS intern for eight weeks— obviously there’s going to be some [knowledge] transfer there—not just about what university is all about, but also about interests, and about the world, and about caring, and it creates a slightly different worldview, and it does it in their own comfort zone. To me that’s critical. If we were taking these kids and sending them off to a UBC science camp, it wouldn’t work.”*

- Internship coordinator

*We encourage these kids to do whatever they want, we want to support them in whatever career path they find. You know, we talk about some of the challenges we have—our lack of capacity as a Nation—and we talk about the lack of having archaeologists or anthropologists, scientists, so we try and just provide those options so the kids can meet those kinds of people, and hopefully that will encourage them to get off and go to school and come back and help the community in some capacity.”*

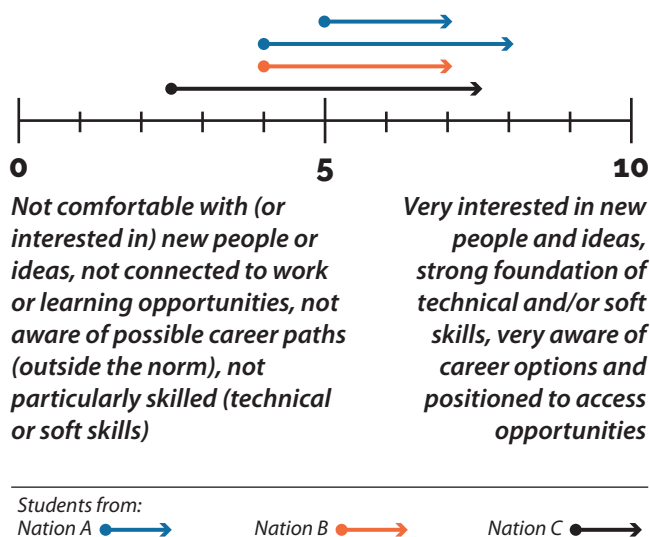
- Community leader

*“Another objective of SEAS is for those who choose to pursue careers or education in stewardship, that we’re there to support them. Whether it be finding funding, but more importantly providing them with a network of professionals that will be able to connect and assist them in their goals.”*

- Internship coordinator

Both the school programs and the internships expose SEAS youth to new opportunities, but the internships tend to be particularly impactful in this area. Though internship activities vary across communities, in general, the internships are all designed to provide SEAS youth with immersive, eye opening experiences. Through SEAS internships, program participants get a chance to work with people who can support them in developing an interest in a specific field. They also get to do applied work in their traditional territories, and some interns receive technical training such as bear safety, swift-water operations, first aid, and wilderness training as well. This mix of activities ensures that SEAS interns have a chance to develop and grow highly transferable skills, and it also positions them to develop relationships with people who might be able to connect them to job and educational opportunities later on. All of these benefits have the effect of opening doors for SEAS youth.

**FIGURE 27:** SEAS impacts at the individual level – change from baseline for five SEAS youth. This figure shows that two of four SEAS youth experienced substantial changes in opportunity, while two SEAS youth experienced smaller yet still significant changes.



## 5.6 School Performance

Finally, school performance is another area in which young people are experiencing significant personal transformations because of SEAS. Specifically, teachers and program coordinators emphasized the connection between land-based and experiential learning opportunities and increased student enthusiasm. They said that by getting students outside and providing them with regular occasions to engage in more hands-on, culturally-relevant learning activities, the SEAS programs are supporting a more powerful student learning experience.

*“They have a lot of enthusiasm for the SEAS class. The hands on cultural aspect of the class engages them in a way that they’re not otherwise engaged. Most of them are super, super proud of their cultural identity, it’s become natural. And that translates into their enthusiasm for being at school.”*

- Educator

*“The kids retain information better when the education is physical and engaging. And that translates into how the kids do in school.”*

- Educator

*“I can’t imagine the school without SEAS anymore. The engagement, the motivation, it would probably just go away.”*

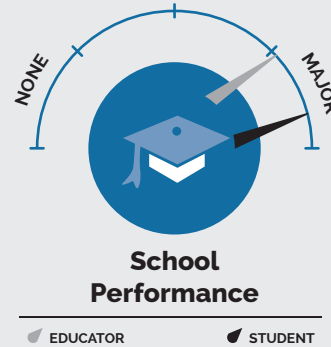
- Educator

For example, in Bella Bella, SEAS school program participants were studying ancient civilizations, and they had a chance to visit an ancient Heiltsuk village site with a Heiltsuk archaeologist through SEAS. This experience took place on the land and provided students with a wonderful opportunity to connect to their culture, territory and heritage. At the same time, the trip aligned with BC’s new curriculum, which emphasizes “concept-based learning”. This meant that the students were meeting curricular competency requirements while simultaneously learning through the land. As one teacher put it, “the whole curriculum is about adapting it and making it meaningful to the [youth]. That is what SEAS is doing.”

*“The more opportunities these kids have to learn outside of the classroom to learn the same curricular competencies, it sticks with them. It makes that part more meaningful when they get back to the classroom.”*

- Educator

**FIGURE 28:** This figure shows the average impact of SEAS in relation to School Performance. The gray pointer represents the observed impacts reported by educators, while the black pointer represents the experienced impacts reported by SEAS participants.



Because of SEAS, these kinds of experiences are increasingly common. Several teachers mentioned that as a result of the land-based learning that SEAS supports, their students both enjoy learning more, and retain information better. Some teachers even suggested that for students who are not as strong academically, SEAS encourages attendance and participation. For one, students enjoy SEAS activities, so they come to school to take part in these activities when they might otherwise not show up. In addition, some program coordinators incentivize students class by making their presence on special SEAS trips and events (e.g., overnight trips) contingent on attendance and participation at school. Students who do well in school also often have a better chance of getting a SEAS internship position over the summer. SEAS thus motivates some students to come to school, while inspiring others to work harder. It is also worth noting that when the SEAS program is more integrated with classroom activities, it appears to have a stronger effect on student attendance and participation.

*“The students here, they just want to know so much more about their place and history. They come to school and always ask ‘Is it SEAS today?! Is it SEAS today?’ They’re so excited about it.”*

- Educator

*“The field trips that SEAS offers are a huge draw for students to come to school. Students would have to have a certain level of engagement and attendance*



Photo: © Johanna Gordon-Walker

*in order to go on the overnight trips, and you see kids actively working towards being on that trip.”*

- Educator

*“I had two students with chronic attendance issues who began attending much more regularly after connecting with [the] SEAS program.”*

- Educator

*“I think you would have much lower attendance without SEAS, because students want to come to school to learn about their culture and history.”*

- Educator

As mentioned in Section 5.4, another benefit of SEAS is the exposure that it offers to career and education opportunities. Several teachers said that as a result of this exposure, many students are becoming more interested in pursuing post-secondary education. This also encourages students to do better in school, as they recognize that to get into a post-secondary program, they must complete high school and get decent grades.

*“A lot of the students who are going on [to post-secondary] were exposed to SEAS.”*

- Educator

*“I would say they are improving by a full grade point average because of SEAS. Definitely as they’re nearing the end of their high school career they are learning about what they want.”*

- Educator

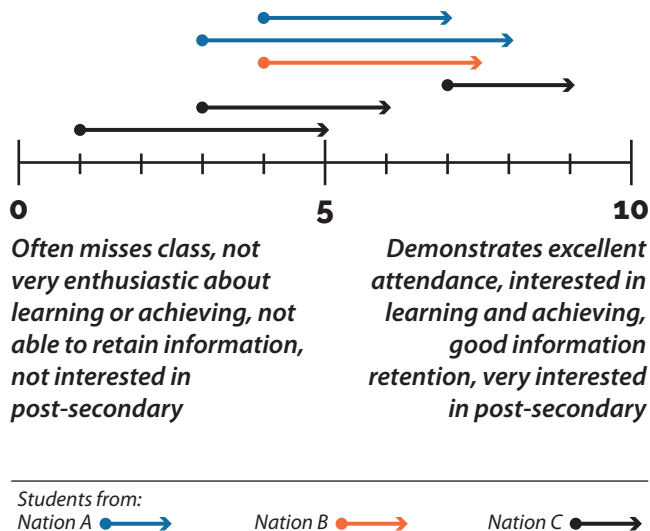
*“We’ve had a few of the first SEAS students pursuing university, going to [study] archeology, things like that. A lot of it has to do with the exposure. We have a huge research focus in our [stewardship] office—ethnobotanists and archeologists will come in and give that one spark to the kids.”*

- Internship coordinator

*“If you look at our SEAS participants, they have four times the university graduation rate of a kid who doesn’t participate in SEAS in this community.”*

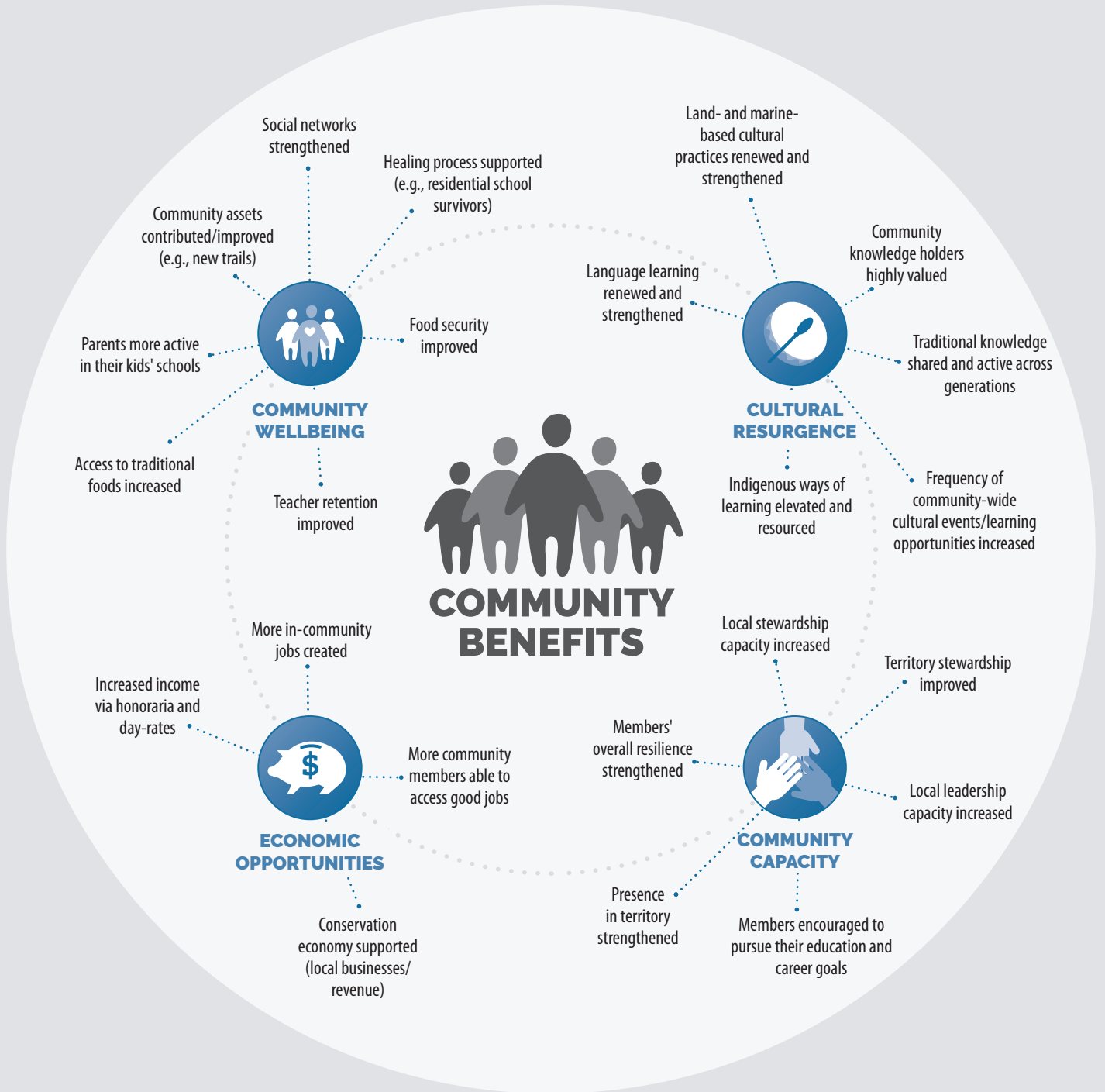
- Internship coordinator

**FIGURE 29:** SEAS impacts at the individual level – change from baseline for six SEAS youth. This figure shows that all six students experienced significant shifts in school performance due to participation in SEAS. Youth with lower baselines became much better students, while youth with higher baselines moved from average or slightly above average to excellent.





**FIGURE 30:** Community Benefits from SEAS



# 6. Program Outcomes: Benefits to SEAS Partner Communities

*This evaluation found that the SEAS programs are also having substantial positive impacts on a community-wide scale. Specifically, we identified four key areas in which program benefits are being felt in partner communities. These include:*

- *Community wellbeing;*
- *Cultural resurgence;*
- *Community capacity; and*
- *Economic opportunities.<sup>18</sup>*

*In this section, we describe how the SEAS programs are generating positive outcomes for partner communities in each of these four areas, using examples and quotes to highlight important findings.*

<sup>18</sup> It is important to note that while we have separated program outcomes into these four categories to enable a more structured discussion of how SEAS programs are benefitting partner communities, these categories are overlapping and mutually reinforcing. In other words, program outcomes are complex and there are benefits that may be discussed under one heading that also apply across others.





### 6.1 Community Wellbeing

Over the course of this evaluation, it quickly became clear that the SEAS programs are having a significant impact on community wellbeing in all three partner communities. Perhaps most importantly, we heard that SEAS is strengthening community connectedness by fostering intergenerational relationship building and encouraging participation in community life. We also heard that partner communities are experiencing a stronger sense of kinship and community because of SEAS.

*"I notice the community involvement, right from the youngest ones to the older generations."*

- Community leader

*"SEAS definitely helps the culture of the school, setting the tone for the culture of the school and then the culture of the community. We go out with elders, and people who drive the boats, who are fishing, harvesting medicine. It's a connection throughout the community."*

- Educator

As an example, several teachers mentioned that the SEAS school programs have encouraged parents to take a more active role in their children's education. They reported that parents are taking part in school life more regularly by coming out to SEAS events and connecting with their kids through SEAS activities (e.g., harvesting, traditional food preparation). They also said that some parents are finding that engagement with local schools through SEAS is

helping to heal past traumas associated with their experiences in residential schools. We heard that this is likewise true for elders and other community members who participate in SEAS.

*"I think it brings them more pride and understanding that their children are learning more about the territory and nature. Parents are happier because their children get to have these experiences."*

- Educator

*"I see the benefits to the community with local knowledge, they get to come in and show their skills."*

- Educator

*"I've seen [parents] help out with the youth at the youth center with the herring eggs. Even salmon fest, the parents are there and they're helping out. These become big events, and I love the fact that the entities work together as well. Working together because we all serve the same community."*

- Educator

*"I believe our community is a lot more involved with school activities because of SEAS. They've been drawn in."*

- School program coordinator

*"[SEAS provides] a renewed connection to schools, especially for some of the parents who were residential school survivors. The SEAS program actually helps with that healing."*

- Educator



Photo: © Johanna Gordon-Walker



Another key benefit that partner communities derive from SEAS concerns the fact that SEAS youth regularly harvest and distribute foods and medicines to community members. These offerings further contribute to community connectedness, while also improving access to traditional foods and increasing food security.



*“The interns bring traditional native foods back to the community and share them, it’s high on the list, mostly through the school to give to the students.”*

- School program coordinator

*“We got a lot of good remarks from the community about the work that SEAS did, because the community got halibut. SEAS fills a role in the community.”*

- Internship coordinator

*“Definitely I think parents and elders appreciate the food that they’re given from the SEAS program. It really facilitates connections and stories from when they were younger and would go out and collect seaweed, and that really strengthens those cultural connections.”*

- School program coordinator

Ultimately, we heard that these connections and contributions are all helping to strengthen social support networks and restore community health and wellness.

*“I think SEAS plays a part. It’s like a piece of a larger part that’s helping us heal in terms of the colonial abuses, and understanding how those traumas have affected us. And coming back from that. And SEAS does that [contributes to community healing] by helping reconnect our knowledge holders with our youth, and then also—our youth, who now have a stronger passion to pass their knowledge on to their younger siblings or to the next generation, their children, and understanding the lack of teaching that they had and the importance now of learning and keeping it going for their children. So SEAS plays a part in that—it’s certainly a big piece of a larger puzzle that we’re trying to put back together.”*

- Internship coordinator

*“If SEAS wasn’t here I can’t see us trying to do something along the lines of what SEAS does. So definitely the funding that has come in to allow it to happen is very beneficial, and—it’s hard to describe when you live it, but it is benefitting us—our youth, from where we’ve come from, to where we are now.”*

- Internship coordinator

## 6.2 Cultural Resurgence

Cultural resurgence is another key area in which partner communities are realizing important positive benefits because of SEAS. Specifically, we heard that by getting young people out on the land and resourcing activities that bring youth and elders together, the SEAS programs are playing a major role in renewing land-based cultural practices and curtailing the loss of traditional knowledge.

*“That middle generation’s a bit lost, I hate to say that, and I’m not saying it’s their fault, residential schools were a major factor, a lot of people were taken out of the community and unfortunately for that group they were forbidden to speak their language and learn anything about their culture. So we have a lot of people in this community who are very disconnected and just unable to pass on that cultural information. And we only have a handful of people now that are really key knowledge holders in the community, and that’s who we’re trying to bridge that gap with.”*

- Community leader

*“It feels like we’re in a bit of a race against time. All of our elders are getting old, we just lost four within a two-month period, and we only have a handful of traditional knowledge holders left. That’s what we’re trying to document and save, that knowledge transfer has to happen. I hate to bring that up, but [...] having this program, and being able to bridge that gap, is very timely.”*

- Community leader

*“My grandparents taught me how to start a fire in the rain, but the kids don’t know how to do it. But now they’re learning it. They’re learning how to use specific parts of the trees to start fires. The kids didn’t know what I just told you, but we did because our parents taught us. But it’s coming back now, and I’d like to see a lot more of it.”*

- School program coordinator

*“The SEAS interns have started harvesting cedar, and are learning about how to prepare it. They are harvesting cedar to make headbands for chiefs, they help with harvesting, and they’re taught how to strip it. It’s only just been reintroduced back to our culture.”*

- Internship coordinator

While SEAS youth benefit most directly from the knowledge transmission that takes place when they spend time with elders and other community

knowledge holders, many program participants also share what they learn with friends and family. These exchanges are helping to revitalize cultural practices on a community-wide scale by encouraging community members to reconnect with their heritage, spend time on the land, and participate in cultural practices. Many of these benefits in turn strengthen community connections to territory and culture, while also contributing to social capital and community wellbeing.

*“Not only are [SEAS youth] out teaching other kids, they’re teaching their families. They’re going out and their grandmothers and grandfathers are blown away that they’re bringing them home medicine that they used to gather as a kid. Their parents are like, ‘What? Where did you get that? What’s that for?’ So the impact on our community and the return support—it creates this cycle.”*

- Internship coordinator

*“There has been a huge transformation that SEAS has helped, a resurgence on the cultural side of things. I remember when I was younger there weren’t even enough songs to host a potlatch with. We probably have about four traditional songs that survived, and now our youth group is really taking it upon themselves with some of the elders to develop some new songs, and revive some old things. We have about forty songs now. There’s actually a youth group just dedicated to dance performance, and SEAS is a part of this program. They’ve named their group ‘Sua,’ which means ‘thunder’ in our language. So they’re the Thunder Dancers.”*

- Community leader

*“Another example is setting up the tables for all of the kids to work on the herring roe, and singing the songs, it was unbelievable, it was a powerful experience and the community came in and took part in it and learned the different Heiltsuk names for the different types of herring roe.”*

- Educator

*“People are starting to use the trails again, the ones I used to walk on as a kid.”*

- School program coordinator

*“I’ve seen people become more interested culturally in what is being done in terms of language, song and dance. They’re more open to it and not afraid so much anymore.”*

- Internship coordinator

Importantly, the SEAS programs are also helping partner communities revive and elevate Indigenous pedagogies through land-based education. We have included this impact under “cultural resurgence” because land-based modes of learning are closely connected to the dissemination of Indigenous values, knowledges, and ways of being. However, it is important to note that the revival of local and traditional learning practices brings benefits that extend into virtually every aspect of community life.

*“Now you take these kids today, and you slap them in a classroom and take them away from their parents for eight hours a day, and so unfortunately, they’re not being groomed like they used to be. They’re not learning the ways, and part of that may be because their parents also went through the same thing. So really having the opportunity to take these kids and get them out of that classroom setting and get them out into the field, so again they’re learning their territory, learning their culture, learning the medicinal plants and the food plants, learning their stewardship responsibilities, learning the history of the chieftainship and the responsibilities that carries, so I think that’s huge.”*

- Community leader

*“The biggest gap that we’re missing as a community is our sense of identity, and it’s the knowledge we get from getting out on the land, learning traditional practices, that will help.”*

- Internship coordinator

*“SEAS brings something that is culturally relevant, whether its stories, cultural things, being tied to the land. It enriches the community.”*

- Educator



Photo: © Johanna Gordon-Walker



### 6.3 Community Capacity

The Heiltsuk, Nuxalk, and Kitsoo/Xai'xais Nations are all currently in the process of (re)assuming greater responsibility for land and resource management in their traditional territories. This shift is part of a broader trend towards increased Indigenous authority on BC's central and northern coast, but SEAS partner community leaders have identified a critical hurdle to both current and future territory stewardship efforts: in their remote communities, there is a shortage of people with the capacity to fill key roles in their organizations. Due to this shortage, people from outside the community are often hired to fill local positions, particularly those positions that require post-secondary education or technical training. This reliance on external capacity is hindering local capacity development by limiting growth opportunities for Indigenous youth. It is also impeding the ability of SEAS partner communities to improve community resilience by effectively responding to threats.

The SEAS programs were developed to help address these issues, and this evaluation indicates that the programs are both already demonstrating considerable success in this area and showing enormous promise over the longer term. In addition to supporting the renewal of land-based cultural practices and the restoration of community wellbeing—both foundational aspects of strengthening community capacity—SEAS programs are contributing to community capacity by supporting youth in acquiring and developing the interests, skills, qualities and values that partner communities deem important (see Section 5). As more and more SEAS youth develop their individual capacity, community capacity also grows.

Because of SEAS, partner communities are beginning to experience small but significant shifts in two key areas: stewardship and leadership. More youth are growing up with knowledge of their territories and awareness of the importance of caring for specific sites and resources. While some of these young people will go on to fill formal stewardship roles in their communities, this background is preparing all SEAS youth for a future in territory stewardship and community involvement/contribution.

*"There's just a change in attitude towards what's beyond the village. And I think that's critical. Because everybody can't be out there stewarding all the time but there needs to be support for the stewarding process. So for [the Heiltsuk Integrated Resource Management Department] to work, or for the Guardian Watchmen to be successful, people need to care about what these people are doing. And they're only going to care about it if they care about stewardship."*

- Internship coordinator

*"I'm certain that SEAS will encourage them to be leaders, and that they don't necessarily have to be a leader to contribute to the community. They've learned right from a young age."*

- Community leader

For those youth that do ultimately take on stewardship-oriented jobs, SEAS is setting them up for success by ensuring they have the foundational skills and capacity to fill these roles.

*"Having that first-hand experience, walking it, seeing those areas—it brings a lot of value. I think it instills a sense of ownership for these youth. So one day, when they're at these [negotiating] tables, they'll know exactly what's there and what decisions they're making."*

- Community leader

*"And this is way bigger than training kids to get a job; these kids are going to be our leaders, they'll be sitting at the Band Council table in five to ten years, making decisions for the community. And now they'll have an idea of what the territory is like, and what impacts will be."*

- Community leader

*"I've always had to focus a lot on capacity building, but a lot of these people are returning people and as a manager I don't feel like I have to babysit the whole process, you know, they know what they're doing, they know how to be out there, so it's been really good. They're taking ownership of it."*

- Community leader

SEAS is also strengthening community capacity more generally by encouraging and supporting young people to pursue their dreams and career goals. For some SEAS youth, this may mean going off to university, while for others, it may mean becoming



a bear guide or a fish weir technician. As we discussed in Section 5, SEAS inspires youth to recognize their own potential. It also opens their eyes to the variety of opportunities that are available. In some communities, these changes are contributing to a broader shift away from resource dependency.



## 6.4 Economic Opportunities

Finally, the SEAS programs are contributing to partner communities' economic opportunities. They do so by creating more in-community jobs in the form of program coordinator and internship positions, and also by providing funds for honoraria and day rates for community members hired to support SEAS. In remote communities with relatively small populations, these contributions can have a big impact.

*"Capacity building is huge, and is such an important step for us, from being a resource-based town to a conservation-based economy."*

- Community leader

As several evaluation participants mentioned, the overall impact of SEAS has been to strengthen the capacity of partner communities to steward their territories and ensure the wellbeing of their members.

*"The majority of the interns spend their money in the communities. We try and hire people from the community."*

- School program coordinator

*"I've seen a huge change, a very strong resurgence of stewardship."*

- Community leader

*"SEAS enhances the ability of our community to take care of the territory and teach the knowledge to young ones."*

- Community leader

*"They're going to start filling these jobs really quickly. Like I said, we have an aging population, they're kind of moving out and these young pups are coming in—it's a pretty exciting time."*

- Community leader

*"The economic opportunities are happening already. There are a lot of challenges being from a small community, and the SEAS program allows us to be creative (economically)."*

- Community leader

In addition, the SEAS programs are contributing to local economies by building up the skills that youth need to find jobs, and by helping partner communities to shift economic priorities over the long term.

*"And to me I think we need to shift how we do business in the GBR. 85% of the GBR is not protected, in my territory we have the highest amount of protection in all the GBR. Close to about 55% of our traditional territory is all locked up in protected areas, so we also chopped off a huge economic arm in forestry, which is fine for us, we knew what we were doing when we protected these areas, so just trying to shift how we do business up here, and really look at some long-term sustainable industries and models of creating employment."*

- Community leader



Photo: © Jason Houston



# 7. Conclusions and Recommendations





*Measuring the impact of SEAS is an important long-term strategic priority for TNC Canada and other program partners, including partner communities. By identifying and evaluating program outcomes, program partners can:*

- Strengthen local support for the programs;
- Better ensure that SEAS communities have the data they need to design programs that facilitate desired outcomes;
- More effectively demonstrate the value of the programs to current and prospective funders and partners;
- Attract and retain program funding and resources, thereby building a broader and more secure foundation of long-term program support; and
- Inspire other communities in the Great Bear Rainforest and elsewhere to design and implement their own SEAS programs.

This report was commissioned by TNC Canada to support the organization's efforts to clarify, measure, and share the impact of SEAS. To meet these objectives, EPI developed and carried out a structured evaluation of SEAS program outcomes with broad-based participation from both current and past program participants and community partners (e.g., school administrators, teachers, program coordinators, community leaders). The evaluation resulted in the development of a framework for evaluating program outcomes at both individual and community levels. The figure below provides a visual expression of the combined individual and community framework attributes that emerged from this evaluation.

As Figure 31 on the following page illustrates, we found that at the participant or individual level, SEAS programs are positively impacting youth in six core areas, while at the community level, SEAS programs are contributing benefits in four areas. We identified 26 unique benefits at the individual level, and 22 unique benefits at the community level. Taken together, these findings indicate that the SEAS programs are generating widespread and often profound positive outcomes for program participants and partner communities, as described in Sections 4, 5 and 6.

Moving forward, there are opportunities to build on the evaluation framework and improve the methods and tools used to measure program outcomes over

time. With this goal in mind, we recommend two next steps for future evaluation initiatives:

1. **Further clarify the connection between program activities and outcomes.** For this evaluation, we analyzed the impact of each program as a whole (i.e., what is the impact of the SEAS programs on youth participants and partner communities?). In future, it would be useful to carry out a finer-grain analysis by connecting program activities to specific outcomes across SEAS partner communities, and then evaluating which activities are having the biggest impact. This approach could enable improvements in program planning, as it would allow program coordinators and community partners to develop and have access to a full library of program activities that extend beyond local ideas. They could then use this library to refine their programs so that they better achieve desired results. For example, as part of annual SEAS planning or as part of designing a new program, local program partners could identify the outcomes they want to achieve stronger results in, and then use the library to design their programs around activities that specifically support those outcomes. We already heard from one SEAS coordinator that the evaluation framework really opened up how they thought about SEAS program design, confirming that this approach could add additional value. Program coordinators could also use the library to better ensure that they are making the best possible use of funds and other resources.

We would recommend the use of influence diagrams, means-end networks and consequence tables, developed together with partner communities, to achieve further insight into the connection between actions and outcomes. This would also facilitate cross-community information sharing in an accessible way. Structured strategic planning sessions could then use the evaluation framework to modify existing programs or design new programs.



**FIGURE 31: Individual and Community Benefits from SEAS**





- 2. Refine methods and measures to better capture change from baseline for individual students.** Isolating the impact of SEAS and evaluating change from baseline for individual students is challenging, but it is also an important component of program evaluation. To improve baseline change assessments, we suggest developing tools that would support a pre/post intervention evaluation approach. This approach could be designed to support both annual evaluation and evaluation at program completion. It could be combined with coaching techniques to target individual needs and goals. Though beyond the scope of this evaluation, it could be incorporated going forward using the program outcomes identified in the framework as evaluation criteria.

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EcoPlan International  
#208 - 131 Water Street, Vancouver, BC V6B4M3  
604 228 1855 • [www.ecoplan.ca](http://www.ecoplan.ca)

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