



Boston Runs Together



# The Social-Emotional Learning Achieved by Sole Train

A Trinity Boston Foundation Program

*It is commonly understood that “youth concentrated in under-resourced communities are more likely to experience trauma and community violence, which greatly affects their ability to learn and engage in schools.”*

*- Bragin & Bragin, 2010*

**Sole Train: Boston Runs Together** is a community-building and mentoring program that uses running as a vehicle for setting and achieving challenging goals. This report describes the findings of two complementary approaches for measuring the effectiveness of Sole Train:

- **SEED Competency Ladders™**

Sole Train and Trinity Boston Foundation have worked closely with SEED Impact to customize developmental Competency Ladders™ to track, guide and accelerate growth in Social Emotional Learning (SEL), a critical dimension of youth development. Coordinators at 19 sites administered this aspect of our study, assessing 186 youth at the start and end of the year.

- **Retrospective Satisfaction Survey**

In addition to the 186 SEL ratings and narrative observations provided by site coordinators, 230 Young Soles self-assessed their personal experience of Sole Train, using a separate, six-item Retrospective Satisfaction Survey. This data reveals how the youth themselves value their experience in Sole Train.



## SUMMARY FINDINGS

1. Competency Ladder analyses point to a **29 percent gain achieved in one year** in SEL development. These findings affirm that the social emotional skills taught are taking root in participants. Youth with stronger SEL are more likely to have academic and career success, positive relationships, better physical and mental health and meaningful contributions to society.<sup>2</sup>

2. Retrospective Survey findings revealed that 86 percent enjoyed participating in Sole Train; 83 percent reported increased confidence in goal-setting; 81 percent reported increased confidence in taking on hard challenges, and 80 percent were interested in joining Sole Train or another supportive community next year.

*Combining the two measurement lenses confirms validity of the SEL measure. The youth who self-reported gaining most from the year were externally assessed as having larger SEL gains, as well.*

<sup>1</sup> Across the field, SEL has been challenging to measure without lengthy surveys that yield questionable results. A white paper explaining the simple yet robust approach we are testing is available on request.

<sup>2</sup> Council of Distinguished Scientists National Commission on Social, Emotional and Academic Development. The Aspen Institute, September 2017.

## THE TRANSFORMATIONAL VALUE OF SOLE TRAIN

*The following profiles illustrate the life-altering impact of Sole Train for youth (Young Soles) as well as volunteer mentors (Old Soles):*

When **Joshua** entered Sole Train he was already a runner and had long dreamed of running a marathon, but never imagined he could do it. Josh was struggling in foster care. Over three years with Sole Train, Josh gained friends and family—in fact, an Old Sole became his foster parent. Josh faithfully attended Sole Train practice at school and on Saturdays. He saw practice as a chance to improve himself and enjoying running with great friends who love to do the same. Through Sole Train, he strengthened his running ability and created lifelong bonds. In 2015, Josh successfully completed the Boston Marathon, dedicating his run and funds raised to Sole Train.



**Margarette** moved to the United States from Haiti after the 2010 earthquake. Having been a runner in Haiti, she signed up for Sole Train and immediately appreciated feeling safe, accepted and supported. She built strong relationships with other Young Soles and flourished with the support of Old Soles in whom she felt safe to confide. She began to see herself as capable of managing college. Her relationship with one supportive Old Sole was so meaningful that upon graduating High School, Margarette became an Old Sole herself. Now a junior at UMass Boston, majoring in English, her lifelong dream of being a teacher is within grasp. Margarette says she doesn't always feel like an adult, much less a role model. But knowing firsthand how important an Old Sole can be in a young person's life, she hopes to remain an Old Sole for years to come.

**Matthew** is a volunteer Site Coordinator for Sole Train. He loves “seeing Young Soles set goals at the beginning of the year, crush those goals within a few months, and continue to set larger and larger goals until the biggest goal of the year: Boston’s Run to Remember.” Matthew is inspired by the dedication of Young Soles to weekly practice: “That they stick with the program all year shows their growing capacity for long distance running; sprinting through life is already comfortable for them.” Matthew gets emotional during the home stretch of a race. He feels proud seeing further evidence that they are learning to break down even bigger barriers in their young adult lives with the extraordinary support among peers and a greatly improved ability to set and achieve goals. He delights in seeing Young Soles become leaders in other environments and on sports teams. Matthew concludes: “No matter what kind of week I’m having, my energy and mindset change as I walk through the doors at school. I could never have imagined what this role would mean to me. I get much more out of Sole Train than I give.”

**Self-ratings by youth of their experience correlated with SEL gains on every element:**

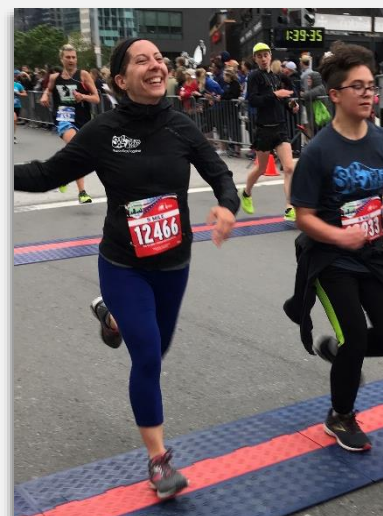
1. **Enjoyment**
2. **Positive Impact**
3. **Interest in Joining a Supportive Community**
4. **Confidence in Goal-Setting**
5. **Confidence in Taking on Hard Challenges**

## HOW WE MEASURE SEL

We analyze SEL in three domains:

- **BEING:** emotional competency; how learners view and carry themselves
- **DOING:** cognitive skills; how technically prepared they are to respond to challenges
- **RELATING:** interpersonal skills; how well they interact with others

*Competencies in all three domains tend to be retained and carry over to new tasks and life challenges.*

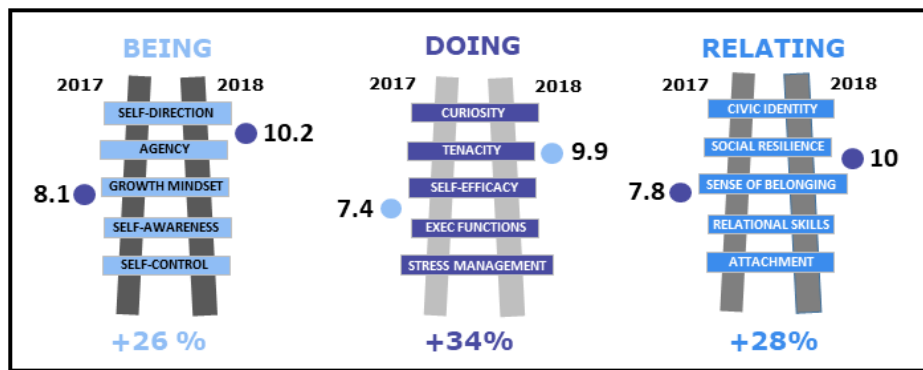


## DETAILED COMPETENCY STUDY RESULTS

On average, increases were achieved in each of the competency domains, as follows:

Data was collected at 19 sites in Fall 2017 to serve as the baseline, and again in Spring 2018, shortly after the culminating, five-mile R2R (Run to Remember).

Site coordinators used a cloud survey tool to indicate the rungs on the ladders that best described each youth. They included brief narratives to validate their assessments.



The Young Soles included 79 percent from elementary or middle schools and 21 percent from high schools. They were roughly evenly split by gender (52 percent male; 43 percent female; and 5 percent transgender).

Ethnicity was diverse:

- Asian (3 percent),
- Black/African-American (19 percent),
- Hispanic/Latino (33 percent),
- White/Caucasian (18 percent),
- Multi-racial (22 percent), and
- Other (five percent).

Comparable SEL gains were observed across age, gender, and ethnicity.

"Sole Train taught me that through hard work and positive thinking I can accomplish anything."

-Jamal, HS Student

"I used to think I was weak and slow, but I'm fast and strong."

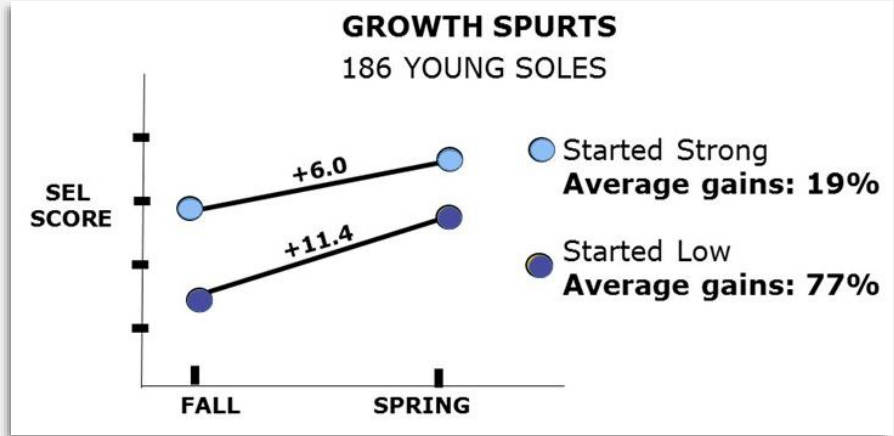
-Damaris, MS Student

"I'm not used to having everyone supporting me and having my back. Sole Train taught me that."

-Sharif, HS Student

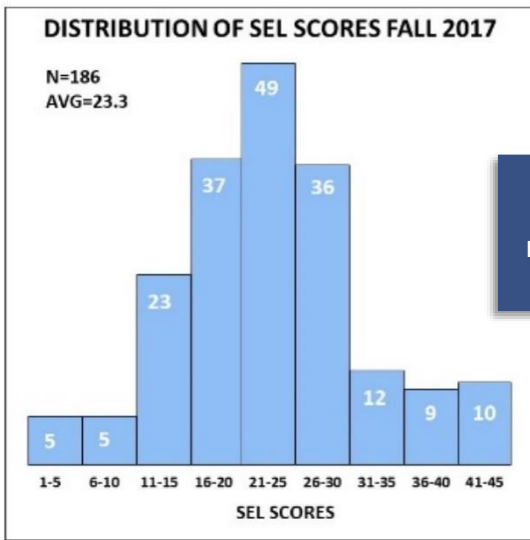
**Sole Train is changing the odds for Boston youth.**

With more than 80 percent of participants completing the R2R, the program had an especially pronounced impact on youth who started the year with low SEL competencies (20 or under). They had **average gains of 77 percent**, from Fall to Spring, with marked gains in all three domains, particularly in Doing and Being competencies.

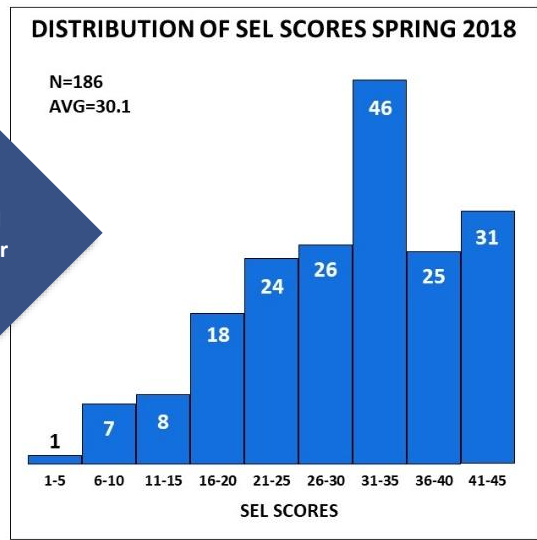


Those who began with higher SEL scores (26 and above) had **average gains of 19 percent**.

The charts below show how the overall 29 percent one-year increase in SEL was distributed. The Young Sole population represents the entire spectrum of competency levels at the start of their Sole Train



During the program year, there is a clear shift toward higher competency levels for the entire population.



"I want to continue to surround myself with people who have goals."

-Jorge, HS Student