

The Tower Newspaper
"My View" Alyssa Czech, 2019
Copy Editor



With my alarm screeching and vibrating like it's about to blow up, I groggily roll over and force my eyes open. The clock reads 6:05 am. I have to leave my house in 15 minutes.

My heart racing, I frantically debate about what to wear, pull a brush through my hair (so much for straightening it), grab an apple from the fridge and swing my backpack over my shoulder, praying I have packed enough for a day that is sure to be full of surprises. This was the beginning of two days I won't forget. It didn't look good so far.

Everyone told me that going to the Rotary Youth Leadership Awards (RYLA) would change me, that I would make friends with people in those two days that would last forever. Erykah Benson '17 told me people were almost in tears at the end of the program when she attended, exchanging phone numbers and social media accounts and making plans for when to meet up again.

While I loved the idea of this, I just didn't see how it could happen, especially after a start like this. I didn't know what to bring, I didn't know anyone who was going and I had no idea what the day would entail.

I was wrong.

I left RYLA feeling empowered, inspired, optimistic and with much more confidence and self-esteem than I came with. I learned about myself and what I wanted to do with my life. I learned how to meet and introduce myself to new people, how to problem solve and how to deal with and interact with others. I learned about having ethics, good character and integrity. I am not exaggerating when I say that I left RYLA feeling like I could conquer the world in my own way.

RYLA is "a leadership development program run by Rotary," according to www.rotary.org. Throughout the days, the participants of RYLA competed in active events/games, listened to various speakers and took part in other collaborative activities.

One of my favorite parts about the program was how open everyone was with each other and how close we all grew within a matter of hours. Within the first hour of being at RYLA, I met someone from Livonia who I stayed close with throughout the program and even now. more than

two weeks later, I still talk to her constantly. I left RYLA with several groups of new friends and plans to meet up with them again soon.

What moved me most was when Michael Akpata-- who has been part of the Windsor Police Service since 1995, served in the Canadian Forces and was deployed to Afghanistan in 2007 and is a LaSalle Town Council member-- spoke to us. It was the fact that his presence was demanding, that he paced up and down the aisle, that his voice fluctuated and that he knew he had something important to say that made him such a captivating speaker. I wanted to take notes on every word that came out his mouth because it resonated so much within me.

"You need to say, 'We sink or sail as a team, failure is not an option and you're going to lead. Why? Because I want you to surpass me,'" Akpata said.

He taught us to build personal relationships with those we are leading, to let our ethics guide us and to trust ourselves, to personally be there for those we are leading, to SHOW people how much we care instead of just telling them, to never make promises we cannot keep, to take and run with the opportunities we are given and so much more. I could go on forever.

Akpata said we always need to be asking, "How can contribute to the success?" and then go do it.

Not only was I inspired by the speakers and instructors that led RYLA, but by the participants as well. In one of the first activities we did, people were given the opportunity to stand up and share short stories about themselves that they feel make them who they are, and I witnessed students who I had known for less than two hours grab the microphone and spill some of their most personal, chilling and heartwarming stories.

Another huge lesson I learned at RYLA that needs to be implemented at South is that we have to be willing to step outside of our comfort zones, try something new and talk to other people.

RYLA is an experience that can truly benefit everyone. When I first heard the speech about the seminar, I dismissed it without a second thought: I would have to miss school and go to Livonia, I didn't know anyone else who was going and I didn't even completely understand what it was. If it wasn't for Benson telling me about what an amazing experience she had at RYLA, I would have been sitting through my classes, barely awake, on Friday, Nov. 11 and doing homework and watching Netflix Saturday morning instead of experiencing one of the most enjoyable weekends of my year.

Take this as your wake up call. Take a leap. Take a chance. Sign up for RYLA next year. Even if you don't know people who are going; that's a perfect opportunity to meet people. Even if you don't know exactly what to expect: you'll be pleasantly surprised. Even if you think everything I've said is cheesy and exaggerated and that RYLA is a waste of time; go and see how wrong that assumption is.