



SOLE TRAIN

Boston Runs Together

2023-2024 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Sole Train bridges gaps in equity and ability, and makes a free and healthy activity feel accessible to all regardless of age, race, class and sports/fitness history.

– Sole Train Caregiver



Sole Train is a community-building and mentoring program that uses running to set and achieve seemingly impossible goals. Sole Train connects students (Young Soles, grades 4-8) with adult volunteers (Old Soles, approximately 70 percent of whom are school staff) in schools and community centers across Boston. Sole Train school teams practice weekly during the school year and come together for community-building events and races. The culminating goal is Boston's Run to Remember, a five-mile or half-marathon race.

2023-2024 HIGHLIGHTS

Sole Train teams at 13 sites trained hard all year. More than 200 Sole Trainers and their families turned out for Boston's Run to Remember, Monday, May 27, 2024. They crossed the finish line with immense enthusiasm, great support, and deep pride in their individual and collective accomplishments. Our Sole Trainers rocked their Sole Train hoodies, shirts, and Run to Remember medals at school the following week, despite the intense heat, and, for the rest of the year.

This year, Sole Train had our third cohort of amazing Mid Soles: high school Young Sole alums who return as youth leaders to support sites and participate in a leadership development curriculum. Six Mid Soles worked hard at multiple Sole Train sites around the city and demonstrated incredible leadership at Sole Train events. They all hope to return next year!



Staff reported that both young people and adults craved the Sole Train space, enjoying opportunities to:

- Be outside
- Exercise
- Reduce stress
- Experience joy
- Connect and talk about their week with those they came to trust

THE DIFFERENCE WE MAKE

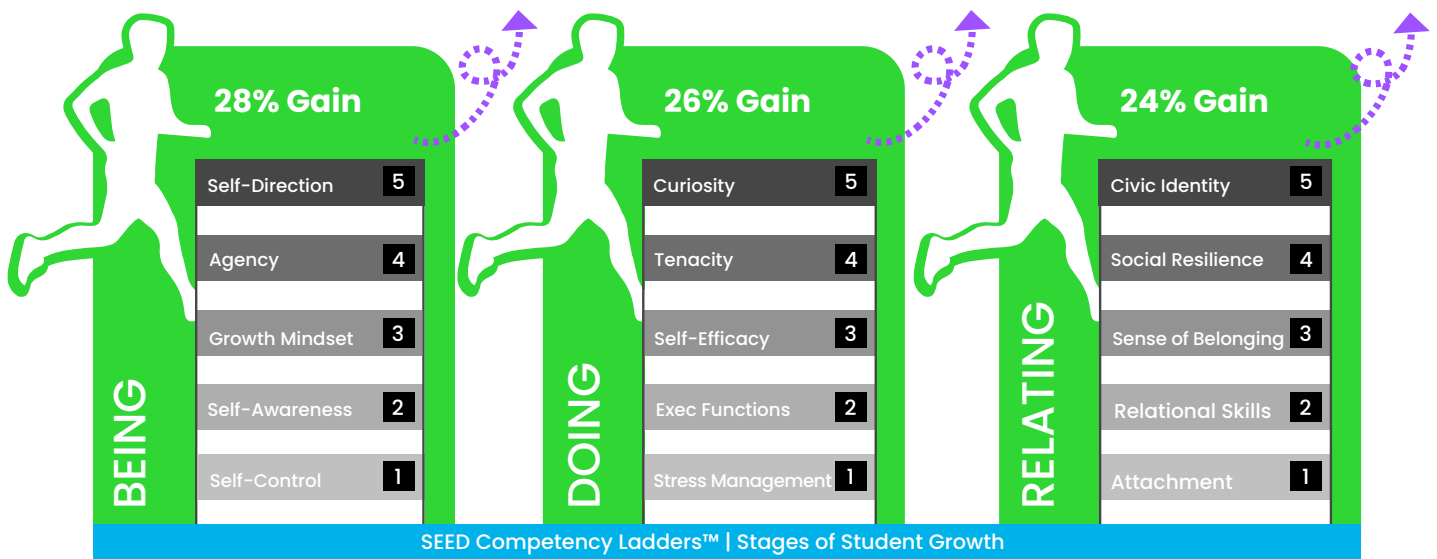
Working with [SEED Impact](#), Sole Train staff customized three [SEED Competency Ladders](#) to measure, credibly report, and accelerate whole-person development.

We measure and support youth development in **three domains**:

- **Being:** Focuses on the youth’s identity, emotions and values
- **Doing:** Emphasizes the youth’s personal responsibility through goal-setting, decision making and problem solving
- **Relating:** Involves social interactions, increased communication and improved relationships with others



YOUNG SOLES SEL GAINS 2023–2024



FINDINGS. YOUNG SOLE ACHIEVEMENTS:

WHO: 147 youth from 13 sites, grades 5–9

SEL GAINS: 26%

LEVELS REACHED:

Being — Self-Awareness

Doing — Exec Functions

Relating — Relational Skills

WHY THIS MATTERS: Social Emotional Learning (SEL) programs have been found to “significantly improve youth social emotional skills, reinforce affect and attitudes, promote academic performance, increase prosocial behaviors, and reduce antisocial behaviors.”

1 Shi, J., & Cheung, A. C. (2024). Effective Components of Social Emotional Learning Programs: A Meta-analysis. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 53(4), 755–771. *A Meta-analysis. Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 53(4), 755–771.

MEET TWO YOUNG SOLES

Aiden* initially joined the group to practice for track and spend time with friends from school. Over time, he took on a leadership role, and students looked forward to running with him. He was always eager to improve his running and grades. He was responsible for planning and scheduling running times. Aiden was also dedicated to the group. He was a supportive peer leader who fostered a positive, goal-oriented mindset among the other students.

SEL GROWTH: 47%

Matthew* has made great personal progress this year with Sole Train's support. He has built strong connections with community volunteers, excelled in his schoolwork, and is determined to move on to high school. Matthew wants to continue being part of Sole Train and passing on the support and positivity to his family and school community. He is a beacon of kindness and positivity.

SEL GROWTH: 40%

MEET THREE MID SOLES

Six Mid Soles, now in high school, had previously participated in Sole Train as Young Soles. They were welcomed back to assist Young Soles while deepening their leadership and communication skills. The Site Coordinators assessed the Mid Soles' progress using the student SEL ladder framework as a guide, and the Mid Soles self-reflected on their experience. **Average SEL gain for Mid Soles: 36 percent.**



Liam* is a great leader and has excellent potential to achieve whatever goals he sets for himself. He is a self-starter, and he knows how to ask for support. From the beginning, Liam understood how important it was for the Young Soles to have a role model like him as a Mid Sole, and he did not hesitate to meet and exceed expectations.

LIAM, SEL GAIN 56%:

Sole Train has been a great space for **Zayden*** to explore his identity. It has allowed him to see all his potential to achieve something seemingly impossible and create a strong community. Zayden has transitioned from being a program participant to becoming a leader and role model. He has earned the trust and respect of his coach as a young leader. Zayden has the potential to go far and to help others recognize their own greatness.

ZAYDEN, SEL GAIN: 42%

Arisa's* journey as a Mid Sole exemplifies the transformative impact of the Youth Leadership Program. She developed invaluable communication, collaboration, and public speaking skills in her second year. These experiences have boosted her confidence, fostering growth and preparing her for future success in college and beyond. Her active involvement in the program and enthusiasm for building connections highlight the importance of promoting leadership and providing opportunities for personal development.

ARISA, SEL GAIN 36%

OLD SOLES: THREE VOICES

Reflecting on the program year, **Old Soles** experienced five types of personal gains:

- Greater appreciation for students
- Physical Wellness
- Joy for life
- Appreciation for other Old Soles
- Deeper Understanding of Racial Healing

“My involvement with Sole Train has expanded my view of running beyond competition. One particularly memorable experience was during the MR8K, where I ran with three Young Soles, who taught me the importance of camaraderie and enjoying the journey. Despite being in last place, the Young Soles’ enthusiasm and perseverance in completing the race highlighted the value of community that Sole Train cultivates. This experience showed me that running can create a sense of belonging and accomplishment for these middle schoolers, a vital aspect of their personal growth and development.”



“Sole Train has shown me how a community can deepen your self-worth, self-efficacy, and personal investment in your goals. My commitment to our community has positively affected those areas of my life. Additionally, seeing how we can speak love and confidence into our Young Soles and watch them accept and invite that for themselves has been incredibly meaningful.”

“Sole Train provides a haven for the Young Soles, sheltering them from the violence in their community. During their time in the program, they experience a temporary sense of mental peace, free from the constant vigilance their environment often demands. In this sanctuary, Sole Train offers a much-needed respite for the youth to learn, grow, and connect with others.”

THANK YOU TO OUR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS



Sole Train contributed to my child’s tremendous personal growth this year. My child is interested in other kids and expanding her group of friends beyond a very small number. It also gave her a valuable perspective on teachers being real people. She also started to think and talk more intentionally about her plans for later in middle school and future years and what activities she actually enjoys. – *Young Sole Caregiver*

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

Trinity Boston Connects is grateful for the multi-year financial support the State Street Foundation provides and an anonymous Foundation for our Youth Development and Leadership programs. Sincere thanks to our sustaining annual partners, the Martin Richard Foundation, Global Partners, LP, Daymarc Foundation, Dick’s Sporting Goods, the Moglia Family Foundation, Plymouth Rock Foundation, Saucony Run for Good, and Brooks Running for their belief in the impact that Sole Train: Boston Runs Together program is having on hundreds of young people through financial and in-kind partnership support. Together with new institutional funders (The Jinny Chalmers Fund for Education Justice and The Hamilton Company Charitable Foundation), generous individual donors, and many annual sponsors of our Sole Train 5K, this funding community makes this work—and these results—possible.