

YMCA CAMP CARTER

CHARACTER & LEADERSHIP JOURNEY

Building Character. Inspiring Purpose. Growing Leaders.



Executive Summary

The YMCA of Metropolitan Fort Worth Character, Leadership & Legacy Pathway is a comprehensive youth development framework designed to guide campers through a progressive journey of character formation, leadership development, spiritual growth, service, and workforce readiness.

This pathway transforms camp from a seasonal experience into a long-term developmental journey. Through intentionally designed experiences, recognition systems, leadership opportunities, mentoring relationships, service projects, and personal growth milestones, campers progress from young participants into community-minded leaders and future YMCA staff.

The framework creates a seamless connection between:

- Daily Character Development
- Leadership Skill Building
- Mind, Body & Spirit Growth
- Faith & Purpose Exploration
- Service Learning
- Ragers & Leaders
- Camper-to-Counselor Development
- Workforce Readiness

At its highest level, the pathway serves as both a youth development model and a leadership pipeline, helping young people discover their purpose, develop their gifts, and become leaders who positively impact their communities.

The YMCA Camper-to-Counselor Toolkit emphasizes that staff development begins long before hiring and that youth leadership programs should intentionally build future counselors through progressive responsibility, mentoring, reflection, and leadership opportunities. The Character, Leadership & Legacy Pathway expands that philosophy into a comprehensive camp-wide developmental framework.

Program Philosophy

Every Camper Has a Journey

Every camper enters camp at a different age, background, and level of experience.

Every camper leaves with greater:

- Confidence
- Character
- Leadership skills
- Connection to others
- Sense of belonging
- Understanding of service
- Awareness of their purpose

Our vision is to create a development system where:

A five-year-old earning a Caring Brag Tag can ultimately become an eighteen-year-old counselor, mentor, servant leader, Ragger, and lifelong advocate for the YMCA mission.



Program Philosophy

Why This Framework Matters

Today's youth face increasing challenges:

- Social isolation
- Anxiety
- Lack of belonging
- Decreased face-to-face interaction
- Limited opportunities for authentic leadership

Meanwhile, families increasingly seek developmental experiences that produce measurable growth in:

- Character
- Responsibility
- Leadership
- Independence
- Workforce skills
- Community engagement

Camp is uniquely positioned to meet this need.

The YMCA Camper-to-Counselor framework notes that camp experiences can intentionally provide meaningful responsibility, strong community, challenge, reflection, mentorship, and opportunities to contribute to something larger than oneself.

The Character, Leadership & Legacy Pathway ensures that growth is intentional rather than accidental.

Development Philosophy

Four Foundational Outcomes

Everything within the framework supports four primary outcomes.

1. Character

Rooted in YMCA Core Values:

- Caring
- Honesty
- Respect
- Responsibility

Character is demonstrated through actions, choices, and relationships.

2. Leadership

Leadership is developed progressively.

Campers learn to:

- Lead themselves
- Lead peers
- Lead teams
- Lead service projects
- Lead communities

Leadership is viewed as service, influence, responsibility, and stewardship.

3. Mind, Body & Spirit

The YMCA believes healthy development occurs through balanced growth.

Mind

- Curiosity
- Critical thinking
- Emotional intelligence
- Reflection



Development Philosophy

Four Foundational Outcomes

Body

- Outdoor education
- Physical activity
- Healthy living
- Personal wellness

Spirit

- Gratitude
- Purpose
- Reflection
- Faith exploration
- Connection to something greater than oneself

4. Faith & Purpose

Faith development is inclusive and mission-centered. The objective is not religious instruction.

The objective is helping young people:

- Discover purpose
- Practice gratitude
- Serve others
- Reflect deeply
- Explore values
- Build meaning

Campers learn that they are part of something larger than themselves.

Development Philosophy

The Character Compass

All recognition, evaluations, leadership opportunities, and advancement systems align to the Character Compass.

Character Domain

- Caring
- Honesty
- Respect
- Responsibility

Leadership Domain

- Leadership
- Team Player
- Problem Solver
- Change Maker

Community Domain

- Helping Hand
- Empathy
- Sportsmanship
- Camp Spirit

Growth Domain

- Achievement
- Creativity
- Courage
- Resilience

Spirit Domain

- Gratitude
- Service
- Stewardship
- Reflection

THE LEGACY PATHWAY

Stage 1: Pathfinder (5-7yrs)

Identity Statement:
"I Belong."

Focus Areas:

- **Friendship**
- **Camp traditions**
- **Basic responsibility**
- **YMCA values**

Success Indicators:

- **Positive participation**
- **Daily engagement**
- **Demonstrates core values**

Primary Recognition:

- **Brag Tags**
- **Participation Awards**



Stage 2: Explorer (8–10yrs)

Identity Statement:

"I Contribute."

Focus Areas:

- **Character development**
- **Teamwork**
- **Community building**

Success Indicators:

- **Positive peer interactions**
- **Goal setting**
- **Core value application**

Primary Recognition:

- **Brag Tag Collections**
- **Character Certificates**



Stage 3: Adventurer (11-12yrs)

Identity Statement:

"I Can Grow."

Focus Areas:

- **Personal challenge**
- **Resilience**
- **Confidence**

Success Indicators:

- **Initiative**
- **Problem solving**
- **Reflection**

Recognition:

- **Achievement Awards**
- **Growth Milestones**



Stage 4: Trailblazer (13–14yrs)

Identity Statement:

"I Can Lead."

Focus Areas:

- Service leadership
- Peer mentorship
- Camp influence

Success Indicators:

- Leadership behaviors
- Responsibility
- Positive example

Recognition:

- Leadership Badges
- Service Milestones



Stage 5: LIT (14–15yrs)

The YMCA Camper-to-Counselor model identifies this stage as the beginning of intentional staff pipeline development. Focus areas include camp culture, personal leadership, role modeling, challenge experiences, feedback, and service.

Identity Statement:
"I Lead By Example."

Focus Areas:

- **Leadership foundations**
- **Service-learning**
- **Mentorship**
- **Camp citizenship**

Requirements:

- **Application**
- **Positive behavioral record**
- **Leadership readiness**

Key Experiences:

- **Shadowing counselors**
- **Leading younger campers**
- **Team-building initiatives**
- **Service projects**



Stage 6: CIT (15–17yrs)

The YMCA Camper-to-Counselor model identifies this stage as expanding responsibility, group leadership, communication skills, accountability, and active support of younger campers.

Identity Statement:

"I Serve Others."

Focus Areas:

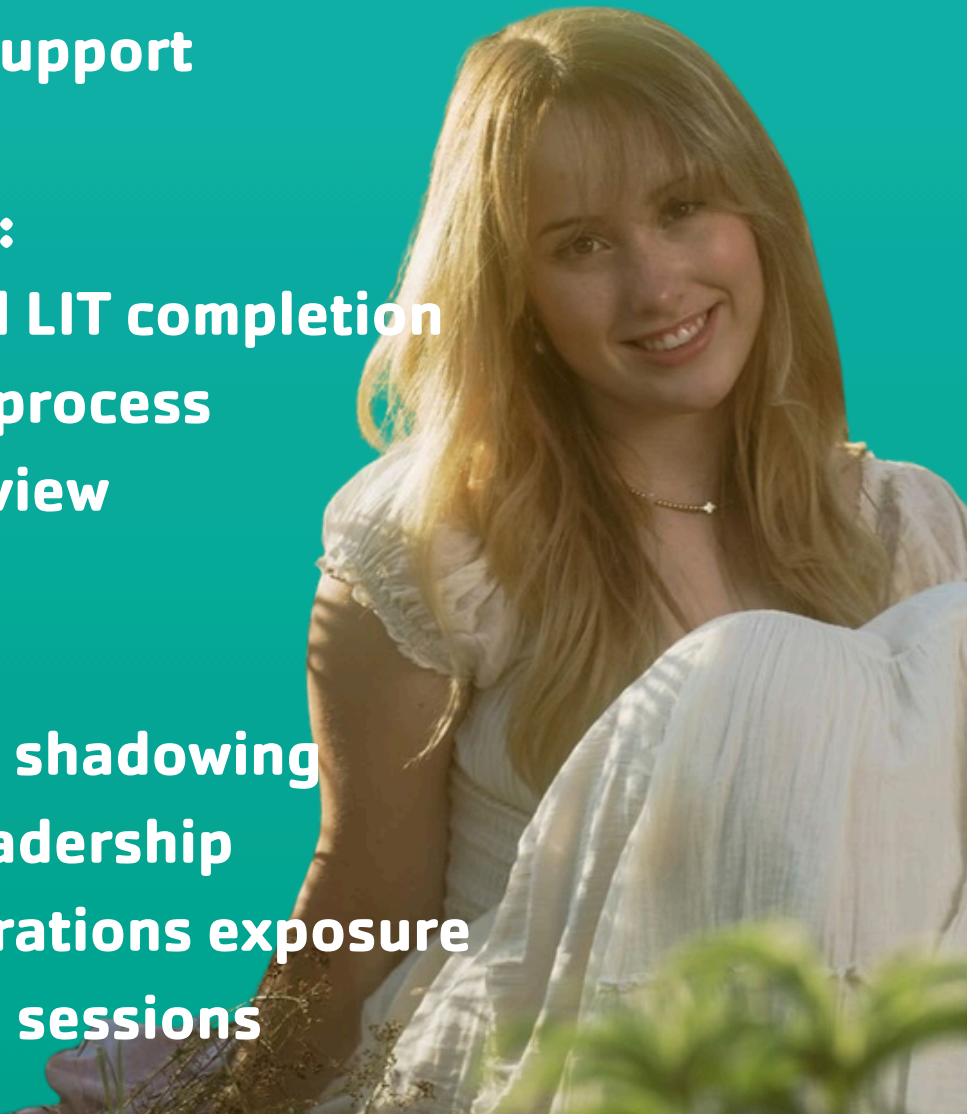
- Youth leadership
- Group management
- Communication
- Program support

Requirements:

- Successful LIT completion
- Interview process
- Annual review

Experiences:

- Counselor shadowing
- Service leadership
- Camp operations exposure
- Reflection sessions



Stage 7: Counselor (18+yrs)

The YMCA Camper-to-Counselor model identifies this stage as the transition from camper to staff member.

Identity Statement:

"I Develop Others and Create Transformational Experiences."

Responsibilities:

- Activity leadership
- Program support
- Camper mentoring
- Camp representation
- Culture Building

Development Areas:

- Child development
- Conflict resolution
- Professionalism
- Workforce readiness



BRAG TAG ACHIEVEMENT SYSTEM

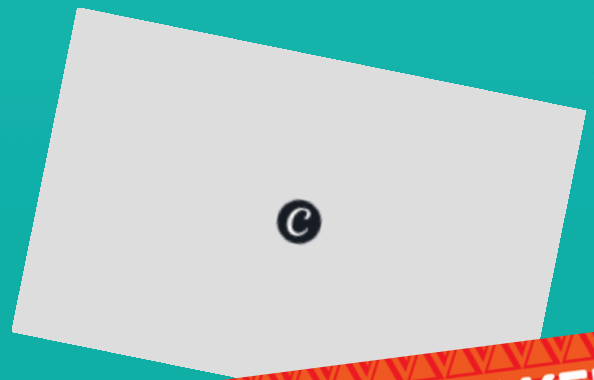
The Pathway

The Brag Tag system serves as the daily recognition engine of camp culture.

Campers receive tangible recognition when they demonstrate YMCA values and leadership behaviors.

Current Tag Collection includes:

- Caring
- Honesty
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Team Player
- Leadership
- Sportsmanship
- Achievement
- Camp Spirit
- Helping Hand
- Creativity
- Empathy
- Problem Solver
- Change Maker



The Pathway

Tier 1: Earn

Campers earn individual tags through demonstrated behaviors.

Tags are celebrated publicly at Closing Ceremony.

Tier 2: Collect

Campers work to complete themed collections.

Character Collection

- Caring
- Honesty
- Respect
- Responsibility

Leadership Collection

- Leadership
- Team Player
- Problem Solver
- Change Maker

Community Collection

- Camp Spirit
- Helping Hand
- Sportsmanship
- Empathy

Growth Collection

- Achievement
- Creativity

The Pathway

Tier 3: Master

Campers can earn multiple copies.

Levels:

- Bronze = Earned Once
- Silver = Earned Three Times
- Gold = Earned Five Times

Tier 4: Legacy Recognition

Complete collections unlock:

- Leadership invitations
- Special camp experiences
- End-of-summer recognition
- Pathway advancement points



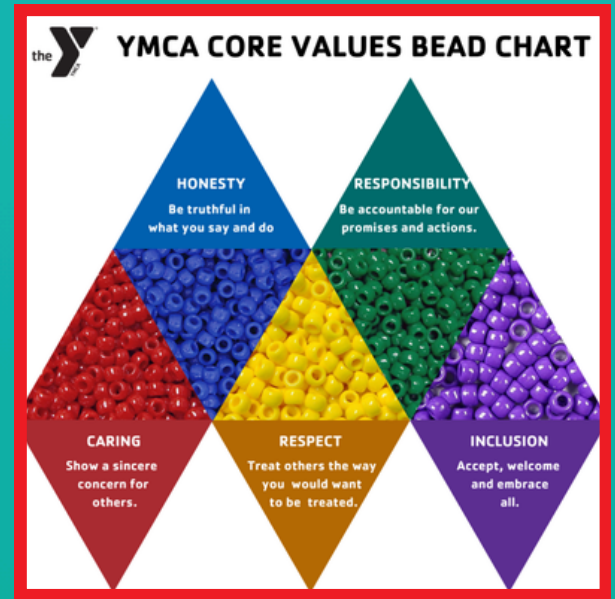
SPIRIT AND PURPOSE TRACK

The Pathway

The Spirit Journey

Campers complete experiences designed to help them explore:

- Gratitude
- Faith
- Service
- Reflection
- Purpose



Examples:

- Campfire reflections
- Gratitude journals
- Sunrise devotionals
- Acts of kindness
- Prayer opportunities
- Service experiences

Recognition:
Spirit Beads



SERVICE LEARNING FRAMEWORK

The Pathway

Pathfinders

Simple service:

- Cabin clean-up
- Kindness projects

Explorers

Community service:

- Camp beautification
- Stewardship projects

Adventurers

Service teams

- Environmental projects
- Camp improvement initiatives

Trailblazers and Above

Leadership service projects

Examples:

- Food drives
- Community partnerships
- YMCA outreach events
- Mentoring younger campers

LEATHERS & RAGGERS

The Honor Society of Camp

Raggers & Leathers becomes the highest recognition within the framework.

Not everyone earns it. Everyone aspires to it.

Requirements may include:

Character

- Completion of Character Collection

Service

- Required service hours

Leadership

- Leadership role experience

Spirit

- Documented reflection and spiritual growth

Commitment

- Multi-year camp participation

Raggers become:

- Ambassadors
- Mentors
- Service leaders
- Tradition keepers



Annual Growth Review

Every returning camper participates in a formal developmental review to participate in Leathers & Raggers.

Growth Categories

- Character
- Leadership
- Community
- Service
- Spirit
- Responsibility
- Camp Engagement

Goal-Setting Cycle

Summer Start

Campers identify:

- One Character Goal
- One Leadership Goal
- One Personal Goal

Mid-Summer

- Progress review
- Reflection conversation
- Coaching

Summer End

- Celebration
- Growth documented
- New goals identified

FAMILY PARTNERSHIP MODEL

Family Participation

Families are critical stakeholders.

The Camper-to-Counselor Toolkit emphasizes that the entire family be involved in their camper's journey and requires intentional communication around growth, leadership development, and return on investment.

Families Will Receive:

Beginning of Summer

- Pathway Orientation

Mid-Summer

- Growth Update

End of Summer

- Camper Growth Profile

Annual Leadership Roadmap

- Recommended next steps
- Future opportunities
- Leadership goals



Year-Round Engagement

Leadership development does not stop when camp ends.

Sustained engagement through workshops, newsletters, retreats, volunteer opportunities, and leadership events will encourage character development throughout the year, not just at camp.

The YMCA of Metropolitan Fort Worth will implement:

Fall

- Service Days
- Family Camp

Winter

- Leadership Retreat
- Hiring Fairs

Spring

- Camp Readiness Summit
- Family Camp
- Pre-Camp Orientations
- CIT/LIT Interviews

Ongoing

- Volunteer Opportunities
- Healthy Kids Day
- Camp Clean-Up Days
- Community Impact Events

COUNSELOR SELECTION FRAMEWORK

Hiring Future Counselors

The pathway creates a transparent hiring pipeline.

Future counselors are evaluated based on:

Character

25%

Leadership

20%

Service

15%

Responsibility

15%

Camp Engagement

15%

Staff Recommendation

10%

A counselor position is not awarded simply because of age. It is earned through demonstrated growth and readiness.



SUCCESS METRICS

What Success Looks Like

Youth Outcomes

- Character Growth
- Leadership Confidence
- Increased Belonging
- Improved Resilience
- Service Engagement
- Spiritual Development

Family Outcomes

- Parent Satisfaction
- Retention
- Trust in YMCA mission

Camp Outcomes

- Increased Retention
- Increased Multi-Year Participation
- Improved Camp Culture
- Stronger Leadership Programs

YMCA Outcomes

- Strong Counselor Pipeline
- Workforce Development
- Increased Volunteerism
- Increased Membership Engagement
- Lifelong YMCA Connection

The YMCA Character, Leadership & Legacy Pathway exists to help every camper discover who they are, develop who they can become, and understand how they can serve something greater than themselves.

Through intentional experiences, meaningful recognition, service opportunities, faith exploration, leadership development, and mentorship, campers progress from participants to servant leaders. The journey begins with a single act of character and culminates in a lifelong commitment to strengthening communities through the YMCA mission.

