

# LIFESTYLES

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## Justin Mallard's excellent summer vacation

*Youth on Purpose, a program to empower young people, has been brought to the Lower Mainland. YOP, which was first introduced in Sweden, helps participants aged 13 to 23 understand and appreciate the young adults they have become.*

**Janis Foster**  
*Times Reporter*

When Justin Mallard's mother suggested that he attend the Youth on Purpose retreat this summer, the 15-year-old Lord Tweedsmuir student was dubious.

"At first I didn't want to go. Like, I don't have a problem, why are you sending me to this? Then I decided I had nothing to lose," he said.

"I can say it's the best decision I made in my life."

Youth on Purpose, a Langley-based organization, was brought to Canada and is subsidized by developer and businessman Stan Silverman.

Its vision is to empower young people to discover their unique talents and gifts so they will realize their true purpose and passion for life.

YOP is based on a previous program created in Sweden by international seminar leader Sandy Levey-Lunden. "Fri Sikt" — meaning "open view" — completely changed the lives of 85 Swedish youths and their families.

Conducted in 1996-97, Fri Sikt was an intensive three-month residential program, followed by 18 months of further course work, for at-risk youth whose problems ranged from anorexia, low self-worth and alienation to gang involvement, drug abuse, crime and violence. It was funded to the tune of \$300,000 US by Ingbar Jenssen, owner of ELSA Corporation, an electronics firm in Sweden.

All of the young people are now leading purposeful lives, acting as mentors for their peers. All have reconnected in a meaningful way with their parents.

The local Youth on Purpose program took place Aug. 7-19 at Xenia Centre on Bowen Island. Forty-one participants ranging in age from 13 to 23 came from Sweden, Halifax, Ontario, Alberta and California, as well as the Lower Mainland. The program was facilitated by 30 support staff and eight kitchen staff.

The kids spent half a day working with Levey-Lunden on core course material (career goals, purpose in life, personal marketing, self-acceptance, family relationships, relationship with self) and the other half-day with drama/music director Jack Bernard.

Follow-up seminars for youth — and their parents — will take place locally throughout this fall and winter. These sessions are open to all youth.

Levey-Lunden predicts that by the end of the program, "We will have youth that are fully alive, clearly expressive, rejoined with their families, know their vision for their lives, have plans for their future; communi-



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**Justin Mallard, 15, is thankful his mom Lori encouraged him to attend Youth on Purpose this summer. He learned a great deal about himself, worked through some issues and now feels better about himself than ever before.**

cate clearly and take responsibility for their lives."

Justin Mallard feels he is well on the way.

"I was convinced that I didn't have anything to work on. I was a bit stubborn at first ... but I sure did open up," he said.

"I realized that I did have stuff I needed to work on about my parents' divorce and their new relationships, and also my relationships with my friends and how I felt about myself. I also had troubles at school last year with my attendance and I just didn't want to get out of bed in the morning.

"In this program, I also found out that I was a very judgmental person, which surprised me because I had always thought that I was very accepting. I am so happy I have found that out about myself and have changed it. I know that everyone is equal and to accept each person as they are. We are all unique."

Justin admits now that he had wanted to sabotage his mother's relationship with her boyfriend. "Now I realize he treats my mom like a queen. He treats me great too. My relationship with her boyfriend is actually awesome. I can talk to him. It's just great."

Justin's mom, Lori Mallard, backs up her son's assessment of Youth on Purpose. She says she was hopeful that YOP would assist Justin in working through his issues about his parents' divorce.

"He was an awesome kid even before he went to this program but when I heard about it, I thought, 'what a gift I can give him.' I want the best for him. He has a delightful heart, a very good heart. He's seen me go through some personal growth work but he's never had the chance."

Since taking the program, Lori says her son's demeanor has changed. "He just seems happier, not so argumentative. I think he just listens better. He just has a different twist on life now."

"I can't say enough about it. I think it's very exciting. It's a great program. She [Levey-Lunden] does fantastic work. She's able to facilitate a lot of growth in people and acceptance and healing. It's time we started looking after our kids."

As far as Justin is concerned, his life has been irrevocably changed.

"All I can say is that I have never felt so good about myself in my whole life and I am really glad that I decided to go to this camp and plan to continue with the year-long program. I think this program would benefit every youth. If we worked towards empowering youth and helping them realize their dreams, the world would be a better place."

YOP continues this fall and winter with weekly meetings in Langley, one-on-one sessions with support group staff, and a mentor program pairing youth with elder mentors. The program also includes eight three-day courses facilitated by Levey-Lunden, and workshops for parents and family members. These programs are open to all young people.

YOP offices are located at Langley Twin Rinks. For information call 532-5840.

To see YOP in action, attend "Poor Impulse Control," an evening of improv and comedy Sept. 29, 8 p.m. at Presentation House, 333 Chesterfield Dr. in Vancouver. Tickets are \$10. Call 990-3474.