

american **CAMP** association®

Updated 2014

**Testimonials on the Value of the
Camp Cultural Exchange Program
(J-1 Visa)**

Testimonials from Participants



Being Here Gives Me Opportunity for Personal Growth

A Testimonial by Anna – Poland



I have been at Camp Mataponi for almost a month now and I found it to be an amazing experience. I am a dance and zumba instructor here at camp. I run activities for girls of different ages and different skill level. This job helps me a lot with my English language skills.

Camp Mataponi is a wonderful place surrounded by a gorgeous clean lake on one side and a beautiful forest on the other. After work I have been taking advantage of the great facilities we have here, I can practice sports, swim, in the evenings I can spend quality time with my new friends here. Camp Mataponi hires well qualified staff who are very devoted and passionate about their job.

Being here gives me opportunity for personal growth, learning about the American culture and make life long friends. It is thanks to Camp Leaders, Cultural Homestay International, my camp Director that I will go back home will get home with memories that I will cherish for the rest of my life.

Anna

Translated from her native Polish by Lonnie and Jeff Lorenz

An Open Letter to the Decision Makers in the USA Government

A Testimonial by Anna – *United Kingdom*



I write to you as a former camp counsellor, a girl guide and most importantly as a mother. Through my life 2 organisations have shaped me and helped me become the person I am today, the 2 are very closely linked together in ideology. Firstly the girl guides, an organisation that encouraged me to find out about 'my neighbour' to give my time to others and to work together to build communities.

Through my involvement with the Guides I was introduced to the second life changing organisation, the American Institute for Foreign Study, often referred to by its most successful programme :Camp America. In the summer of 1999 I travelled to the west coast to work at a Girl Scout camp. I was a shy, somewhat sheltered English Graduate, lacking in confidence but with a strong belief that children deserved the best. It was the summer that changed my life, I grew up, I grew in confidence I realised that my abilities when paired with others really could make a difference. I was introduced to women from all over the world, who on the surface seemed very different to me but who all had the same desire to bring out the best in the young people they worked worked. Over that summer I realised that our differences were to be celebrated and together we really could make a difference to our campers.

I made life long friends, the people who nearly 15 years later I still communicate with daily. When I got married one of my bridesmaids travelled 6000 miles to be by my side, when she suffered a still birth I was one of the first people she told, my heart broke for her. Each year as May turns to June my thoughts turn to Seattle and to camp, I reminisce on social media sites, I am encouraged to send a postcard half way round the world to let someone know I am thinking about them, I email specific staff members and remind them that they made a difference to me.

As a mother my greatest wish is that my children will have the opportunity to travel, to make life long friends and to work with people that they would never other wise encounter.

I believe that in a world which sometimes seems dominated by fear and terror that peace will not be achieved around a government table unless it can first be achieved by individuals growing in understanding and acceptance. I believe that the opportunities that summer camp gives young people (staff and campers) the chance to experience peace and acceptance enables them to be more tolerant and that can only be a good thing.

Please do not allow the small number of people and organisations who have abused the system to prevent my children and the thousands of other potential students and camp counsellors from experiencing the personal growth and global understanding that comes from word travel.

Anna

Why Camp Cultural Exchange Is So Important!

A Testimonial by Tove - Norway



As someone who works in your state and as the village dean at the Norwegian Language Program of the Concordia Language Villages (CLV) — a Concordia College–sponsored program that utilizes international cultural exchange visitors as camp counselors and camp support staff — I write to urge you to eliminate the provisions in the Senate Immigration Bill (S.744) that would greatly diminish the value of the International Cultural Exchange program!

I am also writing as the daughter of Liv and Tor, Minnesota residents who emigrated from Norway.

Our family odyssey began when my father first came to the U.S. as an international camp counselor with the purpose of improving his English and developing a deeper understanding of the U.S. He spent his first summer at Camp Lookout outside of Frankfurt, Michigan. That proved to be a significant summer for my family.

The following summer, my mom and I joined Dad at Camp Lookout — I as a sixteen-month-old little girl playing in the sands of Lake Michigan beaches as my parents worked at the camp and got to know fellow counselors and children from all around the U.S. and other countries. My parents ended up studying in the U.S. and finally settling in Minnesota once and for all — both of them doing work that is about cross-cultural understanding. Camp Lookout was key to their positive start in the U.S. and to their lifelong contributions to the U.S. and beyond.

That trip to the U.S. in 1962 and my subsequent bicultural existence engendered a keen curiosity about the world in me. It ended up leading me to CLV. There, my Norwegian background became my ticket to interact with people from around the world nearly every summer at CLV camps in the north woods of Minnesota. I started as a ten-year-old, and in 1983, I became the dean (director) of the Norwegian Language Village.

As an educational psychologist, I have been able to bring my academic skills to CLV, where our mission is to prepare young people for responsible global citizenship. From that platform, I know that through the fifteen different languages we teach and all the cultures we represent and live, our work is incumbent upon contributions from both native speakers and non-native learners of those languages and cultures.

Native speakers offer something unique to the mix. The staff members who come to us from Cameroon, South Korea, Argentina, Scandinavia, Egypt, China, Russia, Burundi, and countless other countries from around the globe open the world to our young U.S. participants. Their work can only be approximated but never duplicated by their talented, non-native-speaking camp counseling peers.

Our non-native (i.e. U.S.) staff members make important contributions in their own ways. Still, they can never have the inside knowledge of what it is like to grow up in places like my home country, Norway, which consistently lands on the top of the charts as the best country to live in, or what it is like to grow up in places like Mexico, Brazil, or Russia,

which line the bottom of those same charts. They can never know in exactly the same way what a lullaby feels like when sung by a grandparent called mormor, farsan, or babushka in a remote mountain cabin, on a Swedish farm, or in a small village in the Caucasus. They simply can never know, in exactly the same way, how the world looks through the eyes of a person who has lived another culture.

However, we can all start to understand what those things are like when people from different cultures meet. Creating that kind of meeting ground is the hallmark of CLV and of camps like Camp Lookout all around the U.S. where international staff are welcomed and treasured. The people these cultural ambassadors touch are the same people who will lead us into our future.

Please. Let's not take these opportunities to interact with the world away from deserving American youth and from the fine young adults who go to great lengths to come here for them. After such experiences, we all go home enriched. By living together, everyone has been given the opportunity to understand the world a little better, even through quiet lullabies in the darkness of night, and hone their repertoire of skills as global citizens who care about people everywhere and this world we all share.

I therefore urge you to eliminate the provisions that would classify camp staff and other exchange visitors as "workers," not as the cultural exchange participants they are — and were always intended to be since the inception of the program. This significant change would endanger the future of this important program and would also make the program more complex and expensive for camps — and ultimately greatly reduce the ability for us to provide cultural exchange to American children and international visitors.

Our camps, like so many others, provide an unforgettable cultural experience for our international visitors and our American staff and campers. International staff members return home with long-lasting friendships, an improved command of the English language, advanced leadership skills, and a deep understanding of American culture and customs. Their experience at our camps makes these young leaders — many of them from countries critical to U.S. foreign policy and national security — strong partners for U.S. interests as they, like my parents, move into careers in a variety of sectors. I understand that this specific part of the Senate immigration bill comes in the "prevention of trafficking of persons" section, in which camp staff and other exchange visitors are defined as "workers." I ask that you urge the Senate Judiciary Committee to support exempting camp counselors, camp support staff, and all cultural exchange visitors from this section, ensuring that this legislation strengthens these important exchanges, rather than weakens them. The daily cultural exchange that occurs between our international visitors and American campers and staff is genuine and life-changing for many. Our campers gain exposure to new countries, cultures, and languages. I have no doubt that this exposure will only benefit these young peoples' ability to thrive and compete in a globalized world, whatever they decide to do when they grow up.

Such as . . . Coming to study in the U.S. . . . Investing in a lifetime of work focused on cross-cultural understanding and good work. . . . Raising a daughter like me who took the torch and went on in her adult life to welcome other international staff, every summer, to our CLV programs with a deep appreciation for what this can and will mean for all involved. I ask that you ensure immigration reform legislation protects this important national asset and does not diminish it. **Do it for the kids. They mean the world to us. Let's bring the world into their lives one great camp staff member at a time. For the kids. For all of us.**

Sincerely,
Tove

The Importance of Maintaining the Cultural Exchange Program

A Testimonial by Michael – *Great Britain*



Back in the 70s the world was a more kindly place, and young Brits would think nothing of travel across the wider European continent. America, on the other hand, was far more of a distant adventure; no crossing through four different borders in an afternoon, in fact, no entry at all without the appropriate visa. For this Pan-European Brit, though, America remained his last big adventure. As a then teacher and youth leader, I was attracted by the opportunity to work as a counselor at that most traditional of American settings, a summer camp.

With my application completed and forwarded to one of the Cultural Exchange agencies, I awaited the result and landed a placement as the archery counselor for a co-ed overnight camp in the Pocono Mountain Region of PA: Pine Forest Camp.

The summer camp season, together with pre and post time for travel, was a big commitment, but one I eagerly anticipated. A few days of orientation in NYC paved the way for a bus ride to the small town of Greeley, and the start of a truly life changing experience.

International exchange counselors, while not so unusual today, were considered something of a trophy in those earlier times. My fifth grade campers wanted to know about any and everything British: Had I met The Queen, did I know the Beatles? Did I drink tea with every meal, and why did I talk “funny?” Eager young minds seeking knowledge, not just general, but culture specific; and a culture, of course, closely entwined with their own. My soccer skills, while average in England, were “awesome” I was frequently told, and the 24/7 opportunity to bond with and share ideas with these energetic and curious young guys was wrapped inside of a fun, caring environment called summer camp.

Albeit demanding, this wasn't work in the strictest sense. Nobody instructed me to share my culture, I understood it to be a part of the job and, frankly, was delighted at the opportunity. These young men are now parents themselves, and still recount some of the good times we enjoyed, as well as gaining appreciation for countries outside of their township, their state, this great country.

I'll fast forward my own life story in just a moment. Before doing so, however, I'd like to make the strongest case for permitting nothing to interfere with this free flow of ideas and staff members from so many countries – not just English speaking – to maintain a vital and significant interchange from their respective homelands. Summer Camp is a unique and wonderful creative natural environment; creative for growth... mental, physical, and spiritual. Blend in an international culture exchange visitor or two and a boy or girl takes home knowledge that no formal classroom can

impart. Indeed, international camp staff are still considered an important staffing adjunct because of the intrinsic value they bring to camp programs utilizing them. They are treated well and with respect and they, too, take home a live flavor of a section of America that no twenty four hour news feed can possibly bring to life. They make lifelong friends and extend the hand of dialog and interchange in many intangible ways. We/they are automatic goodwill ambassadors from our home country. Closing this open door would be a terrible mistake.

As for me, I fell head over heels for the music counselor, and after three years, married her. Thirty eight years later we have three grown children of our own, all of whom have attended and been counselors at camp. Am I prejudiced in my international staff thinking? You bet. You'll understand why if you've ever been a counselor at a summer camp.

P.S. Our youngest is presently interning in Berlin and is gently critical of his college friends who (his words) 'are clueless' about inhaling the culture of the country.

Michael C.

Cultural Exchange

A Testimonial by Andrew – *Great Britain*



I tell our camp staff from other countries the same thing every year: "Remember, you may be the first person from your country that a child has ever met. What do you want them to know about you and your culture?" It is a very powerful message and leads us beyond stereotypes to true understanding. Camp is the perfect place for a child to expand their world view. A camper can see flags from around the world in our lodge and know that people from all of those countries have stood where he or she is standing. This year we'll add the flag of the tiny country of Andorra to that impressive display. I vividly remember removing and replacing flags of Eastern European countries in the early 90's as cultural exchange participants wept over the changes happening in their homeland. I firmly believe that the campers and staff that shared those moments had a much better understanding of the personal impact of those amazing changes. Camp makes kids think and explore. Cultural exchange makes camp better.

Andrew

A Career Defining Moment

A Testimonial by Sam – United Kingdom



To whom it may concern,

Summer camp is not a nine week, one off experience. Summer camp is the single most important character defining experience an 18 year old in the United Kingdom or the world over can undertake. To think that this could be in jeopardy is simply wrong. I don't feel I can express this anymore emphatically.

I am the Vice Principal of a High school in the United Kingdom and a long time returning staff member of Camp Loyaltown, NY through the AIFS Camp America programme. For 11 summers I have worked in a truly special world - a special needs camp. This was an experience that as a nervous 18 year old defined me as an individual and cemented my career path in education. I have been rated outstanding in my teaching and leadership by three separate government inspections and I place most, if not all, of my successes in the classroom down to the opportunities and experiences provided to me by Camp Loyaltown through Camp America.

This is a programme which I encourage all my senior students to apply to. It is fair to say that a number of them are not ready for the special needs experience, but the character building results achieved from any summer camp cultural exchange are so huge, that I truly believe there is a camp for everyone where value beyond the placement can be determined.

America is an iconic country. In Britain we grow up with Hollywood on our TV sets and cities like New York and Las Vegas idealized. In 2008 and 2012 more Brits watched coverage of the US elections than the 2010 British General Election. We live for the Oscars and love the Old West. Whilst this may be wandering into stereotypes, the passion for experiencing this first hand is high. But, and crucially important, after 11 consecutive summers in New York, I have learnt that similar feelings are felt from our US counterparts regarding London, Cambridge, Edinburgh and everything iconic about a good old cup of British tea! This is where the exchange of cultures plays such a huge role. It's also worth remembering that this is not just Anglo American cultures. My own camp for example provides amazing summers for staff all over the world - 14 counties last year and this is true for a majority of summer camps.

To quantify just how camp has changed me would require a lot words and I am conscious of time to the audience reading this comment. Put simply, I was given the opportunity to experience religious, ethical and social diversity; be put out of my comfort zone more times that I can remember; challenge myself to do better for those around me; see the world of special needs in a new light and most importantly, I was provided the opportunity to invest and repay America for opening her doors to me for nine weeks each year. I and my fellow international counsellors provided a service year on year to the most vulnerable and fragile of families. We dedicated our time, working often in excess of 18 hours per day, serving our campers because we wanted to. Because we were passionate and enthusiastic and because we were grateful for the opportunities presented. We created a family at camp. A family which reached out

to parents, uncles, neighbours and whole communities. To this day, I still receive Christmas cards thanking me and my staff for our compassion and dedication to children, now themselves grown up. I had the joy of watching one of my campers, a severely autistic nonverbal little boy grow up at camp to become an inspirational marathon runner. I also waited with intense agony to hear how he was after the devastating events at the Boston Marathon where he and his trainer were running. (He was thankfully unharmed). Over the past decade I have also adjusted to the uglier side of special needs when campers do not return the following summer and somewhere in New York, a family are grieving for the passing of a loved one. I have attended memorial services but also bar mitzvahs, relationship blessings and even an engagement party for two of our adult campers. This is not experience which can be bought and certainly something that cannot be lost.

When I walk onto camp, I am at home. Whilst my physical home will always be in the UK, I am at peace with the world when I'm in the main office, the dining hall and the upper cabins of Camp Loyaltown. This is a happy, good place. When I order a drink and wings and sit down to chat with the landlady of Macgregor's, the local town pub 1/4 mile from camp, I am having a conversation with an old friend. The cashier at the Wal-Mart in Catskill, who loves my accent and tells me that our brief conversation has really cheered up her shift along with the clerk at the Village Hardware store still laughs at me with a long term fondness at my inability to remember which screws I need to order for the wood shop programme all go to show, in their own unique way, just how big this programme is and how many people out with the camp itself it can touch. When the town one over to Hunter flooded as a result of the horrific storms in the wake of Irene, I was honoured to be able to help bag up spare blankets and toiletries left over from the summer programme to donate.. Our staff and the local community also take part in a join Walk for Life relay each summer to support the work towards irradiating cancer. We are a community which learns from one and other and thrives from the experiences this programme can offer.

For me, this a programme where positive cultural experiences should continue to be made. Future generations of 18 year olds cannot be denied such an opportunity.

I thank you for your time reading my thoughts on camp.

Sam

The Most Unique Experience Possible

A Testimonial by Dan – *United Kingdom*



It was an obvious choice for me to go to summer camp back in 2008. I knew plenty of inspiring people who had done it, none more so than my older brother. Little did I know at the point I submitted my first application how much it would take over and change my life - for the better!

6 years on and I am preparing my first summer back on English soil, rather than being in the beautiful surroundings that the state of Maine had previously provided. Driving from NYC up to Oxford, ME (what a journey!), was the first view I'd had of 'real America' rather than just the touristy sights of Disney Land. It was those first views and my first days at camp that got me hooked and I knew this was a fantastic opportunity and one that I would continue to enjoy for a number of years.

The experiences, friendships and bonds that are gained and formed at summer camp are in-comparable to anywhere else. Friends that I would usually only see for 9 weeks a year, will be friends for life. From Oklahoma, to New York. San Diego to Chicago and even back here in the UK I have been lucky to meet this people and share with them great times at camp and beyond.

Being involved in a 'camp family' is an amazing feeling. Not many people would seek adventures outside of my hometown at the age I was when I started camp and I cannot count the amount of people who say they're jealous of the stories I tell them at the end of each awesome summer. Being in an environment where the people who employ you, the people you work with and the people you look after can be from the most opposite cultures/upbringings but are brought together as one family, is truly something that cannot be put into words. It has to be seen.

Being a camp counsellor has absolutely changed my life and benefitted me immensely. I owe so much to the summer camp experience and the people I have met and worked with over the last 5 irreplaceable summers.

I sincerely hope young people can continue to embark on the amazing adventure of being a camp counsellor so that they can have their eyes opened and lives changed in the best way possible.

Dan

Life Changing Times Should Be Preserved

A Testimonial by Imogen – *United Kingdom*



In the summer of 2011, I was going on yet another family holiday to a European country, being encouraged by my parents to soak up the culture. What that made me realise, at the age of 17, was that I wanted to experience another culture more deeply, not just to scrap the surface on a mere two week holiday. This marks the start of my life changing summer at summer camp in America, which wouldn't be possible should reforms happen.

It was September 2011 that I applied for Camp America, and by January 2012, with the help of the London Recruitment Fair, I was placed at what was the perfect camp for me. A small camp, with less than 50 staff, it truly turned out to be the best thing I've ever done and made me who I am now - a more outgoing, confident and enthusiastic person.

Landing in Boston last summer, I was a sheltered girl from a quaint English village, with no true experience of anything else. Leaving JFK Airport 10 weeks later, I was a different person, yet still retaining who I was. Camp helped me in so many ways, not only breaking me out of my shell but allowing me to make friendships that will be long lasting and true with people from a multitude of backgrounds and cultures. The enriching and unique experience that I had should not be unduly taken away from the many people like me who want to experience something different and to grow and gain from it.

To be a part of something so different, a cultural exchange gives you more than can be put into words. To take this away would be wrong, for the many people that go to America with a pre-placed job at a respected summer camp. I myself have every intention of returning to my summer camp next summer to relive and gain more memories and friends and to further connect to another culture, which only spending an extended amount of time can do. To not be able to do this because of reforms is not something I wish to think about.

To penalise providers of true, unique cultural exchanges would be unjust and to place sanctions on the good for a few unfortunate incidents would be negative to something that gives many an exceptionally unique and special experience.

Imogen

Making Memories, Changing Lives

A Testimonial by Charlie - *Scotland*



Summer camp has impacted and changed my life so much it is hard to think of what I would be like as a person without it. Originally from Scotland I grew up in a small village outside of Glasgow and first heard about the opportunity to work in the US from a friend who had just returned from working on a special needs camp. His stories of the adventures that he took part in had me hooked and I then decided that I wanted to work on a summer camp. In the summer of 2010 I began work at Camp Vacamas in New Jersey. Camp Vacamas is a non-profit summer camp for children from the 5 Boroughs of New York City.

Nothing (and I mean nothing!) could have prepared me for how much the kids and other counsellors at camp would impact me, it is something that I will never forget. I will never forget that first time I made a s'more with the campers, I will never forget the first time that I broke up a fight at camp, I will never forget the first time that I slept outside under the stars and I will never forget my time at camp. That sounds silly but camp has now changed into such a HUGE part of my life and changed me as an individual.

As much as camp has impacted my life I would like to think that it impacts the lives of the campers, a HUGE part of this is being able to meet counsellors from all over the world.

A lot of the kids that attend Vacamas every year have never left their block in New York City so otherwise would never have the opportunity to meet someone from another walk of life.

The reason that I love camp and returned for two further summers is because I genuinely believe in the positive impact of the cultural exchange that takes part at camp, not only has the experience changed me as a person but I have had the absolute pleasure to see the positive impact on the children that I have worked with over the last three summers.

Charlie

I've Had the Time of My Life

A Testimonial by Joanna - Ireland



Having grown up in the North of Ireland, for the first 19 years of my life I was constantly surrounded by sectarianism and narrow-minded teaching. In the summer of 2012 I was given the opportunity to work at a summer camp in South Carolina, which I accepted. From the first day I set foot on camp I just knew that my life was going to be impacted upon for the better. Within the first two weeks at staff training I learnt the importance of respect for other people from other communities, something that is totally overlooked in my home country. I learnt to be independent, and to have more confidence in myself. I have learnt to be a lot more open-minded and accepting towards other people, something that I certainly would not have learnt from home. The whole experience gave me the confidence to grow up that I needed, whilst still enjoying a fun-filled summer as a crazy camp counsellor!

Whilst other young people can find their way in life through other experiences, I know that I speak for myself and the thousands of others that have found their way through working at summer camps in America. These camps have helped develop and shape us into the people we are today. We go to summer camp not only to enjoy the summer, to become better people in ourselves, but also to give kids across America a truly amazing experience- an experience that can't always be achieved through American camp counsellors only. Whilst we as camp counsellors become a lot more open-minded and respectful, it also gives the children the chance to learn about other countries, to be more respectful of other communities and ultimately gives them and ourselves the chance to be ambassadors for our countries.

Joanna

Truly Life Changing

A Testimonial by Alan - Scotland



Plain and simply, my life would not be the same were it not for the summer camp experience.

As an 18 year old boy, who had grown up in an insular community in Glasgow, the prospect of spending 9 weeks working at summer camp in Pennsylvania was one that provided me with an opportunity to truly internationalize my perspective on life. Having lived in what can only be described as a bubble for the 18 years prior to my first summer spent in the US, upon touching down at JFK airport in the summer of 2002, I knew that my life would never be the same again.

Raised as a Catholic boy in the heart of a tough, working-class district, being placed at a Jewish summer camp, high up in the Pocono Mountains, was as culturally-unique and educational as anything I had previously experienced in life. From the very first minute I stepped onto camp, I was enriched and challenged in ways that would shape my perspective on life forever. The truly international community at summer camp introduced me to people with ideas, beliefs and behaviours that enhanced and improved my own principles - and I'd love to think they learned from me as well.

My summer camp experience(s) - which I celebrated for 5 consecutive summers - continues to drive me in chasing new cultural experiences throughout the world. Since making my first international trip aged 18, I have now been to every habitable continent and continue to revel in new, cultural experiences. I am a better person, citizen and am considerably more open-minded due to the impact summer camp and subsequent cultural experiences have had on my life.

To penalise providers of true cultural exchange is simply wrong and detrimental to global citizenship.

Alan

The Best Thing I Ever Did!

A Testimonial by Robert – *Great Britain*



It was Christmas 1974 when I first decided to apply for the Camp America programme and by January 1975 I had my placement. Life changed forever.

The summer was the most fascinating experience that I could have had at that age and prepared me superbly for my teaching career which has followed.

There can be no better learning experience than living within a culture and discovering new ideas and approaches to coaching and teaching. The team building techniques that you acquire by working with people from other places are immense and doing it within a cultural exchange programme enables quality control, a positive perspective and a safety net of protection and support.

My summer gave me an tremendous insight into motivational skills and communication skills. It enabled me to play a fundamental role in helping young people to surpass their expectations whilst instilling in me a level of self-confidence and self-belief that I never realised I could aspire to.

Whilst my primary reason of undertaking this placement was to learn and experience a new culture, the diversity of my experience came as a huge surprise. I gained an insight into a religious culture that I had only read and been taught about. I became far more aware of how to personalise learning to help develop the skills and talents of each young person. I also learnt the true value that personal best and pushing yourself far outweighed simple participation but that this did not mean that competitiveness at the cost of the welfare of others was a price that had to be paid. The greatest lesson of my summer at camp was what I brought back to England, that I was able to share my experiences and new found skills with others to improve the quality of provision for young people here.

I lived a dream and have since gone on to recruit many hundreds of other participants who have similarly had wonderful summer experiences which they have used to build their own lives and careers.

Camp life opens up people's horizons and makes them more rounded individuals. I am now the Vice Principal of an Academy and coming towards the twilight time of my career but I know that the success that I have had has its roots into my summer of 1975. It open up doors to me and there is no greater buzz for me now than listening to young people who come back from their summer camp experience and have the same buzz, enthusiasm and zest for life that I had.

Absolutely fantastic and long may it continue. America has something exceptional and special in Summer Camps which they can share with the world. Long may it continue.

Robert

The Best 7 Summers of My Life, A Part of Me

A Testimonial by Louise – *Camp Tioga*



Summer camp, fresh air, activities, cultural differences, education, life experience... you cant put a price on these things, an experience away from home, gaining independence and making friends for life. As a counsellor it prepares you for life away from home comforts, you learn how to be tolerant, patient, understanding, fun and how to make a difference.

In todays digital world we forget how important being outside in the fresh air is, we forget how we can have fun with just a our voices and a few pots of pain, we forget how to enjoy each others company without the aid of technology. Summer camps reunite us with our inner child and allow us to explore the world of adventure.

Coming from overseas to work at Camp Tioga for 7 summers allowed me to gain rich cultural experience which I will have for life, I was able to grow in an environment which accepted you completely for who you were, no questions, no judgements, just allowing you to learn from others and from children how you can make a difference in peoples lives. I would not be the person I am today if it had not been for me summers in America. I would not have the friends I now have for life and I would not have enriched my life with such wonderful days in the sun, rain and storms being free as only a summer camp can allow you to be,

Summer camps are unique and so important to the independence of the children of america, they are introduced to people from overseas and learn about there culture and lands, they grow up with better understanding of the world and how it works.

I hope the amazing tradition can continue and one day I could send my children to camp.

Louise

Camp America - Invaluable Cultural Exchange

A Testimonial by Luke – *Great Britain*



I shall be eternally grateful for the opportunity of being able to work for several years on a summer camp in the USA. Cultural exchange has completely transformed my life and, as I have kept in touch with people over the years I know the significant value in bringing this to hundreds of young people attending summer camps each year.

My story began as what was to be a one-off summer camp experience when I was employed to work as a counsellor on a Christian camp. By the end of that 1st season, I made friends for life, learned so much about the 'real' America and taught groups of young people formal skills as well as informal facts such as the subtle historical differences between the 'Black Country' dialect as opposed to 'Brummy'!! My camp organised cultural exchange evenings and I can remember supervising a group of interested young people as they learned how to prepare 'real' fish and chips– British style for the rest of the camp. I suspect that many of those young people would not have had the opportunity to learn about such hidden history were not for the cultural exchange program!!

I continued to work at camp for several years, became a best man at an American wedding (I am now the eccentric English uncle to 3 American children), and thanks to the experience of working at camp, completely changed career direction. I retrained to become a teacher and then eventually found myself managing child protection services across a busy London local authority.

I am now Assistant Director and I do wonder where I would be today had it not been for the invaluable lessons I learned at camp. Thank you so much for this opportunity USA–I hope it continues so that other people can gain in the way that I have and more importantly the young people attending camp can benefit from the exposure to different cultures and the educational opportunity this brings.

Luke

The Summer of A Lifetime

A Testimonial by Laura – *Camp Chenoa*



My two summers working on Camp Chenoa and Camp Hi Rock were two of the best summers of my life. To this day, over eight years later I still look back and remember the experiences and the friendships I made.

The experience of camp america gave me a fantastic insight into American culture as well as giving me skills that I could take away and use in employment.

I think it would be so terrible if people wouldn't get this opportunity any more. It wouldn't just be terrible for the counselors, it would be terrible for all the children too. They learn so much from meeting people from all over the world and from different cultures

Laura

Best Summer Ever!

A Testimonial by Liz – United Kingdom



In the summer of 2006 I had an amazing adventure in a camp in the Pocono's PA. It wasn't the first time away from the UK, but my first time in America.

The camp was just how I had imagined it, there were staff from all over the world and cultures that I have never dealt with before. During the orientation we bonded over the job we were about to do and were all excited the months we had ahead of us. I met so many new friends that I am still in touch with 7 years on, I even met new fellow camp friends in reunions over the years. These are people I would never of had chance to meet if it wasn't for the camp experience.

Meeting all the different children was fantastic listening to their home lives and seeing them have such fun was the best experience of all. They had such freedom to be themselves and learn new skills that they may not get the chance to in everyday life. Some of them live in big cities so all the fresh air and swimming is a vast change.

I learnt a lot about myself and others on this life changing experience I went on to work in summer camps in the UK and had the drive and determination that camp helped me find to finish my training in Chiropractic. I still love working with children to help them achieve their true health and potential and children can teach you so much.

I hope that other people from all over the world can follow in my Camp footsteps and experience everything that I did and more! It would be a massive shame to deprive the children of America from learning from different cultures and perspectives from around the World.

Liz

How Do I Begin?

A Testimonial by Martin – Yorkshire, England



Back in 2006 a shy young man arrived at Newark International airport little realising what a life changing experience he was about to go through.

The young man was me, and it was very much a year for firsts, My first flight, first passport, first time in America and first time working with Special Needs children at camp. I can't begin to describe how much this experience helped me at work, Uni and in life in general. I went from being shy and reticent to outgoing and friendly all in the space of the two and a half months in the USA.

From my first day at camp I felt welcomed and almost 'at home' within the first week I'd be promoted to be the Computer Specialist. This was one of the best learning experiences of my life and I was able to prove to myself I not only could teach about computers but help the campers learn about parts of the world they may not get to visit.

Due to my patriotic nature I had English, UK and Yorkshire flags in my computer room and the campers always loved to ask questions about England and what it was like. I believe that not only did I get the chance to experience a unique culture (and grow personally because of it) but I was able to help the campers understand how other cultures interact (especially as mine was a Jewish camp and I am a Christian).

The idea that other potential counsellors won't be able to experience this fills me with sadness and I hope things can be sorted to the benefit of the campers (which is after all why we do this!).

Making a difference to the campers... That's what being a counsellor's all about Making a difference and everyone should have the opportunity to do that!

Martin

Keep the Doors Open and Everyone Benefits

A Testimonial by Russell – United Kingdom



I attended camp in the summer of 1983. The cultural benefits of me, and other Europeans, being there are well documented elsewhere, and not for me to assume perhaps. But what I took away from my experience at camp was on many levels but can be distilled into one: an appreciation for America - its people, their cultural and social history, and their warmth, spirit and 'can do' attitudes.

In short I have become (in a minor way of course) a 'brand ambassador' for America. One person does not make much difference, naturally. But I am today still very much in touch with a dozen or so co-workers from 3 or 4 countries - and the common denominator is the USA. Good PR is hard to come by, and this is a kind of PR at a national level. Multiply my little scenario by X thousand overseas workers, all with the USA as the common thread, and you have a powerful benefit heading straight back to America. And that benefit manifests itself as cultural richness, but also through commerce and tourism.

So camp of course provides all the obvious benefits for its domestic 'market' (fun and experience for the children; employment for local people, social cohesion for the communities etc). But it also creates very real long term benefits for America through the medium of cross-cultural friendship. And this can only be achieved through overseas workers.

It would be a real shame, on many levels, if this remarkable programme closed its doors to international counsellors and the benefits they bring. They are far ranging, long term benefits and they have a positive impact on the people of America far beyond the boundaries of camp.

Russell

Incredible Cultural Experience

A Testimonial by Keeley – *Camp Shoshanim*



Last summer I was lucky enough to live and work in a summer camp with a different religious and cultural background of my own. I worked in Camp Shoshanim, PA for three months and Shoshanim is an Orthodox Jewish summer camp for girls. The experience of living and working and seeing a new culture for me was one which could not be achieved in any other way than camp. I experienced religious festivals, rites of passage and learnt about a new way of life while ensuring that the campers also had the summer of their life!

As well as the setting being a cultural experience, the beauty of Camp America and other organisations providing staff from all over the world is that you learn about other cultures too other than those that you're experiencing from the camp itself. I lived and worked with people from Mexico, Poland, Australia, New Zealand, Barbados, Jamaica, USA, Czech Republic, France, Ireland, Israel, Columbia and the Dominican Republic. I don't think I've ever been in a more diverse setting before for such a long period of time. It has given me tools to use in my life now I am back from camp in working in diverse areas, overcoming language barriers and appreciating differences and using the strengths within a group.

There was also an opportunity to travel at the end of camp, but also on days off from camp, and it was interesting to see different cultures within one country that is America. For example, culture in Scranton, PA is very different from the culture in New York City or Boston. I believe that it would be such a shame to make it more difficult for young people to take part in opportunities like this as I believe that it makes stronger and more culturally aware people. I went to camp the day after I finished my A Levels at age 18 and I think the experience has made me more independent and confident. It is something every young person from anywhere in the world should have the chance to experience. In addition, it was also culturally enriching for the children attending camp and the American counselors because they had the chance to learn about different countries and cultures from their own through the International staff. It can not be matched in its cultural opportunities.

Keeley

The Value of Camp America

A Testimonial by Nicole - Australia



I first became involved with Camp America in 2003. I headed over for my very first summer as a Counselor at Camp Crosley YMCA in Indiana. There I met amazing people whom I still in contact with today, I became a leader, and tried activities I had never done before. I went home a different person.

Back at home I always knew I'd return to camp and after talking to people ongoing about my camp experience for the next 4 years, I returned to camp for what was going to be my last summer. There I met some extremely close friends, became a lifeguard and had the time of my life changing campers lives watching them grow. Half way through the summer I knew I was going to return the following year.

Once I returned home I looked into becoming an interviewer for Camp America so I could continue to share my experience with others. I interviewed applicants who Los came to my camp. 2008 I was back at camp and seeing the campers again after they have grown over the past year is a magical experience. I worked on my leadership skills once again and continued to make close friends.

This experience is something I continue to talk all about, there's always something that reminds me of camp. Not only have I given to camp over the last 10 years, it is a place I can call home. The kids are amazing, the staff are life long friends and to take this experience away from future participants of such a unique cultural exchange program would be devastating.

The campers love international staff. They get so much out of learning about other cultures. It's a camp culture having international staff. There are no negatives to this exchange program it's all positives for everyone, so would be horrible to take an American tradition away from camps. Expecting our first child and I would love that one day they were to participate in Camp America and head off to experience what both myself and husband have experienced. Don't take this away.

Nicole

The Best Experience of My Life

A Testimonial by Becky – *United Kingdom*



Working at a summer camp was something that I have always wanted to do and when I got the opportunity to work at the International Gymnastics Camp in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania last summer I was so unbelievably excited and anxious about the adventure I was about to embark on. I had spoken to several friends who had previously been to summer camps and they had all said it would be the best decision I'd ever make and that there was nothing quite like working at a summer camp and boy were they right.

Any nervousness I felt about being a camp counsellor completely disappeared the minute I arrived at camp as we were made to feel like part of the family straight away and were given intensive training into what to expect as a counsellor and how to deal with any situation which might arise over the course of the summer. The returning staff members were so welcoming and happy to help us with anything we were unsure about and were more than happy to share their previous experiences with us to prepare us for what we might experience also.

The minute I arrived at camp I knew the people around me weren't just going to be a bunch of people I was going to spend my summer with, they were going to be friends that I would keep in touch with for the rest of my life. You don't just spend a summer hanging out with each other, you all grow and develop personally and as a team and that isn't something you can experience anywhere else. I learnt so much from my co-counsellors and will never forget the important values and lessons I learnt from being a member of such an incredible international family. I have spent the last year since returning from camp travelling all over the place visiting some of my fellow camp counsellors and our friendships and relationships are just as strong now as they were last summer at camp.

My experience of being a camp counsellor is still something I struggle to put into words, it really is one of the most unique and rewarding experiences a young adult can have. Being able to help and look after an amazing bunch of children week after week, help them have the best summer possible and watch them grow and develop over their stay at camp was such a humbling experience and really made you feel like you had an impact on that child's life. I can't imagine what my life would be like without having spent my summer at International Gymnastics Camp. I wouldn't be the same person I am today without the impact of the people I met there, who were from all over the world and will value the lessons I learnt from them and from living in a camp environment for the rest of my life. To think that in the future this experience won't be open to other young adults is just unthinkable. Being able to work with people from all over the world and experience the American culture on a daily basis, is such a unique and beneficial experience that can only be experienced through cultural exchange programmes. I will be forever grateful for my experience of working at a summer camp and strongly believe this opportunity should be available for young people for many many years to come.

Becky

Camp Helped Me Find My Life's Calling

A Testimonial by Brian - Australia



Hi, I'm Brian, living in Melbourne, Australia.

I first did camp in 2004. I had heard of the American Summer Camp experience in high school, as friends of my older sister had done it. I had known them since we were young, and seeing them return home after doing camp - they were different people. They couldn't stop raving about the experience they had. It was then, at age 16 the seed was planted firmly in my mind.

I eventually made it to camp as part of a one year travelling adventure that took me around the world. I went to the London Recruitment fair and walked around a room containing 35 American Summer Camps. I was nervous, not very confident but mainly just excited to just be at the recruitment fair at all. I came across a table for Summit Special Needs Camp, located in Pennsylvania. The hirers from Summit saw something in me that day, and offered me a position. I didn't know it at the time, but my life was about to be changed forever.

Arriving at camp in June, I dove straight into the experience. There was a large staff at Summit, many, like me, there for the first time. The kids arrived, and it was like a rollercoaster ride. I didn't know one place could be so fun, so challenging, so different and so special all at the one time. In a matter of one summer - 9 weeks - I grew in many ways, and became a different person. The friends I made, the memories I created, but mostly the kids I got to know and see develop all combined to create the best experience of my life to date. I returned to Australia in late 2004, knowing that I wasn't done yet and would one day return to camp.

Camp inspired me to become a Youth Worker, which I still do to this day. I studied my qualifications to become a youth worker, gained employment in a high school working with the students with disabilities and learning difficulties and continued to grow and grow. In 2006, I made my return and headed back to Summit as a returnee. Seeing the same kids now two years older, grown up and still as affectionate and happy as ever was great. They told me it was great to have me back and I went on and had another amazing experience that year and once again in 2007. Work and study took over after my third time on camp, but I stayed connected by becoming an interviewer for Camp America in Australia. I still had so much passion and enthusiasm for the program, I wanted to share it with the world and help the next generation of counsellors get over there and do the same thing. I began interviewing and speaking at info sessions, meeting many eager young applicants and preparing them for the summer of their life. All very rewarding. It was also during my early days of interviewing that I met my wife Nicole. She had also worked on a camp in Indiana for 3 summers.

It was in 2010, with the summer camp experience still running through our veins, that Nicole and I returned to America. This time, I worked on Nicole's camp - Crosley YMCA Camp. A completely different experience from

Summit but equally as fun, special and rewarding. I had come a long way since 2004, and by my fourth time at camp i felt very confident and skilled as a counsellor and was welcome on my new camp. I also found myself being the mentor for many first time counsellors who were about the same age I was when I first did it six years earlier (21). And now, my wife Nicole and I are expecting our first child in the coming weeks. We still have friends from all over the world who we worked together with on camp. Some of them even came out for our wedding in 2012, and we are planning another big reunion in Hawaii for 2015.

Camp changed my life. It woke me up to what I believe is my purpose in life; working with young people, inspiring them to discover who they are through fun and play. I would give anything to go back again, but I settle for encouraging young Australians to apply and give it a go. I let them know they will never regret it and will come back a changed person.

To take away this opportunity for many Australians wishing to do the summer camp experience is heartbreaking. It is imperative it stays alive, for the sake of future generations of counsellors, but mostly for the young children and teenagers who attend their camp each and every summer. They learn about the world, people and themselves through their counsellors. They bring their energy, ideas and personalities from all over the world, and to deny American children that extraordinary privilege would be a real shame.

Brian

Please Save Camp for Us and Many Others in the Future!

A Testimonial by Pavlina – Czech Republic



The English translation of Pavlina's testimonial follows after her testimonial in her native Czech.

Jmenuji se Pavlína Kopečná a letos chci prvním rokem vycestovat do USA jako účastník programu Summer Camps 2013. Byla jsem přijata do tábora Echo Lake (Warrensburg, NY) jako člen pomocného personálu.

Důvodem, proč píši tento dopis, je úmysl americké vlády nepokračovat v podpoře tohoto programu pro další roky a znemožnit tak novým i stávajícím účastníkům vrátit se do svých campů. Víte, možná si ani vláda neuvědomuje, jak velkou příležitost nám tu dává. U spousty z nás je možnost poznat americkou kulturu takhle zblízka velmi drahým snem, který by se nám nebýt programu Summer Camps třeba vůbec nesplnil. A mám-li mluvit za sebe, tak ani slovy neumím vyjádřit, jak vděčná za tuto příležitost jsem! Přesto, že mám strach z neznámého, tak už jen ten pocit, že někam patřím v tak velké zemi, který mi CEL rodina dala svým vřelým přivítáním, je k nezaplacení a přála bych ho každému.

Nejvíce se těším na to, jak poznám spoustu nových, zajímavých lidí ne jen z USA, ale taky z dalších koutů světa, kteří přijeli stejně jako já díky programu Summer Camps. Tato přátelství mohou často vydržet po celý život a myslím si, že to je cílem celého programu, spojit lidi a tím propojit a vzájemně zcelit celý svět. Byla by škoda o tohle přijít.

Pavlína

English Translation

My name is Pavlina, and this year is the first year to travel to the U.S. as a participant in the cultural exchange program. I was taken on at Camp Echo Lake (Warrensburg, NY) as a member of the auxiliary staff.

The reason why I am writing this letter, (I hear that ...) it is the intention of the U.S. Government to discontinue support for this program for the coming years and thus preventing new and existing participants to return to their camps. You know, maybe even the Government does not realize how much opportunity this gives us.

For many of us the opportunity to get to know American culture up close is a dream. And if I speak for myself, I can't even express in words how grateful I am for this opportunity! Despite the fact that I have a fear of the unknown, just the feeling that I belong somewhere in such a big country, (which gave me a warm welcome) is priceless and I wish it to everyone.

I most look forward to it, now I will know a lot of new, interesting people not just from the United States, but also from other parts of the world, who arrived just as I did with the help of this program. This friendship can often last a lifetime, and I think that this is the overall goal of the program, to connect people and the link to each other and the world. It would be a shame for this to end.

Pavlína

Being Given the Opportunity...

A Testimonial by Richie - Australia



Being given the opportunity to travel to the United States and work in a Summer Camp was a truly unique experience. And for that I will always be thankful that I had the chance to partake in that. It would also be a shame and a mistake to put an end to that experience for International Staff.

I attended the International Sports Training Camp in the summers of 2004 and 2009. The reason why there was a gap of 4 years between visits is because i made the decision to begin and complete an Education Degree (PE). The majority of the reason why i decided on this career path is largely due to the high level of staff training that i received as part of the camp orientation program and also the development of personal attributes and improved self-confidence i gained along the way. The camp orientation program ran over 7 days and was presented by our camp directors and senior staff (many of them international staff). Through this program we were trained and educated in problem solving, communication skills and many other important aspects of camp life. Again, this kind of training is not readily presented in many other forms of employment and as such i feel that i have already got an advantage in life that others may not have the chance to experience.

Summer Camps have provided so many domestic and international staff with unique life experiences, resources, education and professional relationships that is impossible to replicate. I have many friends that have met their life partners while working at Summer Camps and have moved permanently to the United States. Many friends have become permanent staff members at these camps and are responsible every year for training the new staff that arrive at camp.

Everyone should have the opportunity to work in a summer camp for their own personal experience. I believe that it would be a mistake to restrict international staff from working in the United States.

Richie

Camp Counselling Down Through the Ages

A Testimonial by Yvette – Clevedon, England



I had no idea aged 17 that the school assembly I was about to attend would shape my life. 28 years on and not a week goes by that I don't have the opportunity to introduce new youngsters to the concept of summer camp, or support them to gain skills which will help them secure a place counselling and have a positive impact on the campers they care for.

In 1986, never having travelled beyond Guide Camp before I was given the chance to share my Guiding skills as a Counselor in the Adirondacks, not on a Girl Scout camp as I expected, but an Orthodox Jewish Camp. From the moment I arrived I was learning and sharing. My campers loved to hear stories from my small hometown, and they in turn taught me about their Jewish Culture and introduced me to Pizza ! (Yes, I led a sheltered life 'til then) Back home I have used the activities and leadership skills learnt on camp to run my own Guide unit and organise our annual summer camps. So many of my Guides have gone on to work as International Staff and I share the running of my unit with another girl whose first taste of International travel was as a Counselor on a Girl Scout camp.

My 16 year old daughter has been inspired to work with campers, but way too excited to wait until age 18 she is returning to camp for the 2nd time this summer, with the CIT bunk. She has made many wonderful American friends with whom she talks daily and they in turn will be coming to stay with us in England.

As a local interviewer for Camp America I am now interviewing the children of applicants I interviewed 20 years ago. This Cultural Exchange experience is one that should continue for many generations to come.

Yvette

A Life Changing Experience

A Testimonial by Andrew – *Great Britain*



I had three incredible summers working as a camp counsellor for a special needs camp in the Pocono's. Each was as different, challenging and enjoyable as the next. I remember coming back for my second year, arriving on the first day and feeling as though I had come back to my second home.

Because that's what camp is to so many (counsellors and campers included) - it's a home. Every part of camp from the dining hall to the waterfront, from the first bunk you lived in to the canteen holds an individual, special memory that no matter where you are in the world, you will look back on with a smile.

Camp has had an astounding influence on my life and the way I see the world. Working with children with behavioural difficulties in an environment like summer camp opens your eyes more than any other job or class could. The people you met become your family and even if you went ten years without speaking or seeing some of them, you could still catch up like you'd only seen each other yesterday.

I know I'm not the only one who has been an international camp counsellor but I certainly shouldn't be one of the last ones who come from around the world to work at a summer camp. To deny thousands of people globally to experience what summer camp has to offer would not only be a disservice to them, but a disservice to the campers, summer camp industry and the people of America.

Andrew

Camp: Living Life With No Regrets

A Testimonial by Jules - Australia



I began working in the camping industry as a bunk counselor / ropes instructor at International Sports Training Camp, PA in 2006. I have been working at ISTC every summer since then.

I loved camp from the day I was hired at a CCUSA job fair in Sydney, Australia. My first summer not only did I make great friends, but could not believe what an impact I could make on a camper in just one week. Whether it was a high five in the cafeteria, or a cabin chat during a thunderstorm, these kids hung on every word we said. We are their heroes.

I loved camp so much I went to work for CCUSA Australia in Sydney during the off season. During my two years working there, my eyes were opened to how important international staffing is. I had the opportunity to work closely with many camps to assist aussie staff to get jobs at camp. The skills and experiences that those staff have are an absolute asset to any camp and are unique to each country.

This summer, ISTC has staff from 13 countries. Without the unique cultures, ISTC would not be the place it is today. Our camp does a fantastic job of integrating all staff, regardless of position or heritage. Our non-counselling staff all live in staff housing and are assigned specific bunks to ensure a mix. We go above and beyond during staff training to ensure all staff have a positive experience, and that we provide a solid support network for all staff. This mentality continues throughout the summer, with special surprises and events for all staff to enjoy, regardless of position. Summer camps look after their staff - they receive adequate time off and work in roles where there is plentiful time for cultural exchange. Camps provide housing and transport for international staff to enjoy their local surroundings. Thousands of US kids go to camp every summer, and all they speak about their counselors and what amazing people they are. We believe happy staff = happy campers.

Many of our current US staff were campers when I counselled. I am humbled to mention that they mention me as a reason for wanting to come to work at camp, and that I have been a role model in their lives. Mine is just one of thousands of stories of staff having life changing impacts on campers.

There is no doubt in my mind that if this cultural exchange program were to cease, so would the camping industry. International staff play an absolutely pivotal role in this industry, and without us, summer camp would not be what it is today. I actively promote and advertise positions online and person across the US. I attend college fair days and speak at local colleges. Having said this, I do not receive enough applications each season to fill our quota of staff with just Americans. International staff do not take jobs away from US staff. The staff combine and balance to ensure a camping experience true to American culture and values but with a distinctive international cultural element.

Please amend the bill to exclude the counselor and summer work and travel visa. Camp is my life and I would not be the person I am today without it. I truly believe in our mission to positively impact each and every camper who walks through our gates. Across America summer camps are doing great things each and every day to genuinely change the lives of young people.

Jules

For Me ... It Really Is Simple

A Testimonial by Richard – *Ely, England*



There is no question that I had the absolute time of my life in the summer of 1998 as a 20 year old sports coach working in New Hampshire. It gave me so much....independence, self confidence and opened up so many opportunities..but this is not about me!!

This is about the mutually beneficial and fundamentally essential opportunity for cultural exchange. So many people from across the world have worked at Summer Camps in the US, giving 100% of themselves to caring for the young people at camp, sharing their culture in the best of environments.

Any curtailment of these opportunities would be hugely damaging. There must be a solution that will safeguard the undeniable benefits of foreign staff working at camp whilst ensuring that these opportunities are not misused. I hope the right decisions are made

Richard

Changed my Life!

A Testimonial by Carly - *Australia*



Working at International Sports Training Camp has changed my life.

It all started in 2009 when I completed my first summer, I went back in 2010, 2011 and 2012. I am also planing on going back in 2014. That in its self says a lot! I have spent most of my 20's working at a Summer camp in America . It takes me over 24 hours to make the long trip from Melbourne, Australia. Worth every long flight and long hours in airports.

I have met some of the most amazing people from all over the world. I have met some of my best friends from working at ISTC. I also loved meeting American kids, I treated every single camper like they are a super star and they are the only person in the world. I think I made a difference in their lives, as they have mine.

I would hate if people form all over the world would miss out on this.

Its the 4th of July today, and I know where I would rather be. Sitting on the banks of the lake and watching the fireworks, and eating amazing american food! You cant take this away from us !!

Carly

The Most Important Thing in Camp is Round the Changes in Lifestyle

A Testimonial by Csanádi - Hungary



An excerpted English translation of her testimonial in her native Hungarian:

Asked to make a short statement about what kind of experiences I have had, and how it has changed my life for the past four years or so — perhaps the most important message is that this program brings to us is that this is the only opportunity for a student in Eastern Europe to get to America. Offering an experience which will help the right lifestyle design and extends the communication system with other cultures, and being able to develop friendships. From my own experience, I know that it is very hard to find a summer job that also give you two or three weeks of vacation and relaxation.

What was most surprising in the first year was that everyone received me very warmly. As a result, an extremely good atmosphere has developed both at work and outside of work at camp. I am working in the kitchen, where, fortunately, I can practice and develop English. Everyone is helpful and will do everything in order that the work can be enjoyable.

I have made friends with whom I will stay in touch even after the summer. Outside the job, I and other members of the camp staff also regularly organize joint programs and activities, such as music, sports, excursions, and evening conversations.

For me, the most important thing in the camp — which is one of the most important decisions of my life — is round the changes in lifestyle. It is the concept of a camp atmosphere which encourages people to live a healthier lifestyle. This contributes to the green environment, healthy eating, daily exercise.

Camp Androscoggin is in the middle of a forest — lakeside, where the proximity to nature, the purity of the air, refreshes. Fields for sports are also at our disposal in addition to the existing sports facilities where we can also learn new sports. We can try sports such as golf, baseball, water skiing or archery.

The only thing that can properly express the period here is this: If you start searching in my memories, not a single bad experience comes to mind — only positive things. Those that have made a better person and that I will keep forever.

Csanádi

Her full testimonial in her native Hungarian:

Marcell vagyok, a Camp Androscoggin táborban immár a negyedik nyaramat töltöm. Pár napja a tábor tulajdonosa Peter Hirsch beszélt nekem arról, hogy a programot, amelyen keresztül lehetőségünk van kint lenni, meg akarják

szüntetni. Arra kért, hogy készítsék egy rövid beszámolót arról, hogy milyen élményekkel gazdagodtam, és hogyan változott meg az életem az elmúlt négy év alatt, így Önök első kézből kaphatnak olyan információt, amely segítséget nyújt a helyes döntés meghozásához a program jövőbeli működéséről.

Talán a legfontosabb üzenet amelyet ez a program hordoz magában számunkra az az, hogy ez az egyetlen olyan lehetőség egy kelet-európai egyetemista számára, hogy eljusson Amerikába, olyan élményeket tapasztaljon meg, amelyek segítik a felnőtté válást, a helyes életmód kialakítást és bővíti a kapcsolati rendszert azáltal, hogy más kultúrákból érkező emberekkel képes barátságokat kialakítani. Saját tapasztalatból tudom, hogy Magyarországon olyan nyári munkát találni, amely hozzásegít két-három hetes nyaraláshoz és kikapcsolódáshoz nagyon nehéz találni. Viszont ha valaki egy gyerektáborban keményen végigdolgozza a két hónapot, olyan helyekre juthat el, amelyekről a mások csak álmodni tudnak.

A továbbiakban a saját élményeimet szeretném bemutatni, amelyeket az elmúlt négy évben gyűjtöttem.

Az emberi kapcsolatok terén ami számomra az első évben a legmeglepőbb volt, hogy mindenki nagyon barátságosan fogadott minket. Ennek következtében rendkívül jó atmoszféra alakult ki mind a munkahelyen, mind azon kívül. Én a konyhán dolgozom, ahol szerencsére rendkívüli módon tudom gyakorolni és fejleszteni az angol nyelvtudásomat, mindenki segítőkész és mindent megtesz azért, hogy a munka mellett jól is érezzük magunkat. Bátran mondhatom, hogy barátokra is szert tettem, akikkel a nyár után is kapcsolatban maradunk. A munkahelyen kívül a személyzet többi tagjával is rendszeresen szervezünk közös programokat, mint például meccsnézés, sportolás, kirándulás, esti beszélgetések. Talán a legjobb példa erre, mikor minden nyár elején a tábor teljes személyzetét, ami nagyjából 100 fő, elviszik bowlingozni. A harmadik elem az emberi kapcsolatok terén a gyerekek, akikkel néha lehetőségünk van kirándulni, közösen sportolni és akár barátságot is kialakítani.

Számomra a legfontosabb dolog a táborban, amely miatt életem egyik legfontosabb döntésének tartom azt, hogy belevágtam ebbe a túsába az az életmód megváltozása. A táborban olyan atmoszféra és életfelfogás uralkodik, amely arra sarkallja az embert, hogy egészségesebb életmódot éljen. Ehhez hozzájárul a zöld környezet, az egészséges táplálkozás, a mindennapos sportolás.

Saját példámon látom, hogy egy egyetemista számára, aki az év 9 hónapjában tanul, vizsgázik és esetleg kiegészítő munkát végez, hatalmas érték az, ha a nyár 3 hónapjában változtat az életén. Gyakran előfordul velem is az, hogy az egyetem mellett nem jut idő sportolásra, nincs elegendő anyagi forrás egészségesen táplálkozni és a nagyvárosi atmoszféra, a zöld környezet hiánya tovább rontja a helyzetet. A Camp Androscoggin egy erdő közepére, tópart mellé épített gyöngyszem, ahol a természet közelsége, a levegő tisztasága és a nagyvárosi nyüzsgés hiánya felfrissíti az embert. A sportolás terén a tábor teljes felszereltsége a mi rendelkezésünkre is áll, és amellett, hogy a már meglévő sportolási igényünket maximálisan ki tudjuk elégíteni, új sportokkal is megismerkedhetünk. Olyan sportokat, mint a golf, a baseball, a vízisíelés vagy az íjászat otthon nincs lehetőségünk kipróbálni, viszont munka után ezeket szabadon használhatjuk mi is. Az egészséges táplálkozás szinten egy olyan eleme a tábornak, amelyre első évemben meglepetésként ért. Minden adott ahhoz, hogy bárki kialakítsa saját maga számára az egyéni diétáját, amely például az én esetemben az egészség helyreállítását és a feltöltődést szolgálja az otthoni időszakra.

A fenti három életmód változást szolgáló elem következtében megfigyelhetően jobb eredményt szoktam produkálni az első pár hónapban amikor hazatérek, és energiával feltöltve vágok bele az iskola kezdésbe.

Természetesen a program fontos részét képezi a tábor utána nyaralási lehetőség is. Nagyjából két hét szokott rendelkezésre állni arra, hogy bejárjunk olyan helyeket az országban ahova egyébként nem lenne lehetőségünk eljutni. Számomra viszont mindig nagyobb élmény a tábori élet, mint az utazás, a fentiekben felsorolt indokok miatt. Végül egy rövid anekdotával szeretném zárni a rövid beszámolómat. Tavalyi nyár végén két magyar konyhában dolgozónak, akiknek az utolsó éve volt itt, lehetőségük volt beszélni az egész tábor előtt és elbúcsúzni tőlük. Mivel elképzelhető, hogy én sem tudok már jövő nyáron visszajönni, ezért elgondolkoztam azon, hogy egy ilyen szituációban, mikor 400 ember hallgatja a szavaimat mit tudnék mondani. Végül arra jutottam, hogy az egyetlen

dolog, ami megfelelően tudja kifejezni az itt eltöltött időszakot az a következő: Ha most elkezdek kutakodni az emlékeimben és visszagondolni az itteni időszakra, egyetlen rossz élmény sem jut eszembe, és bármennyire is erősen gondolkozok, csak pozitív dolgokat tudok felidézni. Olyanokat amelyek jobb emberré tettek és amelyeket örökre meg fogok őrizni.

Csanádi