

Sarah Drake

I stumbled across Between Friends Club after working the previous summer inside an office, where I longed for days outside and to be making a bigger difference in my community. I applied not knowing much about people with disabilities and was really excited to be given the group leader position (this is back in 2009). The summer flew by, the kids I met impacted how I viewed the world by showing me that anything is possible and that the sky was the limit. I was surprised with just one year under my belt the amount of responsibilities that team leader position was given to me my second year. I found that I excelled in this type of environment creating an environment for my staff to thrive in and create opportunities for our participants.

It's hard to describe to someone how meaningful your work is when you're so passionate about it. It was this summer as a team leader that a participant that was non-verbal and seemed to be a bit distant from the group the entire summer, on the last day came over and gave me a hug and my eyes filled with tears... you can't pay for moments like these. It's hard to tell sometimes if you're making a difference and it can be a thankless job some days. We've had participants that just seem to not be interested in anything you want them to do, they participate, grudgingly, but never seem to be want to be there. Those participants' parents are the ones that call you and tell you that their son or daughter looks forward to camp every year and can't stop talking about it each and every night. Who would have thought? Your countless hours of trying to get a laugh, smile, or enthusiasm are paying off- you just are missing the gratitude part that the parents get to experience hearing about their day.

My third summer in 2011 at camp I was given the team leader position, however one week in was promoted to sr. staff planning lead. With my time at camp alone I've worked over 1200 hours. . I have recently graduated before the previous summer and seeking employment that would give me meaning as well as prepare me for future studies. I was offered a position in

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the office as an administrative assistant for 8 weeks (264 hours) and then my contract was extended for another 8 months as a Program and Special events assistant. I finally got to see what goes on behind the scenes in the planning of the programs throughout the year. I also volunteer once a week in the teen W.E.S.O.A.R swim program (18 hours so far). There are two courses during my year off I need to continue my education. I would like to take an intro to counseling course and the other would be an anatomy and physiology course. Both these courses will allow me to pursue graduate studies in Occupational Therapy or Masters in Child and youth care- both degrees which will allow me to focus on people with disabilities in the wider community.

When all is said and done it all comes down to lasting imprints that these participants have on who you've become by the end of the summer. Between Friends Club has a ripple effect. It's watching the video telling and hearing stories from everyone that you realize that this was where you were meant to be. When you're saying goodbye to a camper that has been there for a month and you choke back tears and wish you could explain to them it's not you that needs to be thanked it's them. That the bravery, excitement, laughter and growth you saw in the campers has shown you a totally different side to humanity that you wish you could show the world. You think back and all the long nights planning for the next day, preparing your outrageous costumes and going that extra mile was worth it. The sunburns, bug bites, rainstorms (hail storms) and cold nights are so small compared to that feeling that has sparked in you. That contagious feeling that you'd like to share with the world, that you can't wait to go home and tell your friends and family about this amazing boy that finally got in the water after being scared. About the camper that hasn't said a word all summer came up to you in the morning and said hi. I think people take advantage of the little things and in a way camp is like a reality check. It humbles you and opens your eyes to this whole new world that is full of possibilities.