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CAMP L.E.A.D: UNPACKING THE MAGIC

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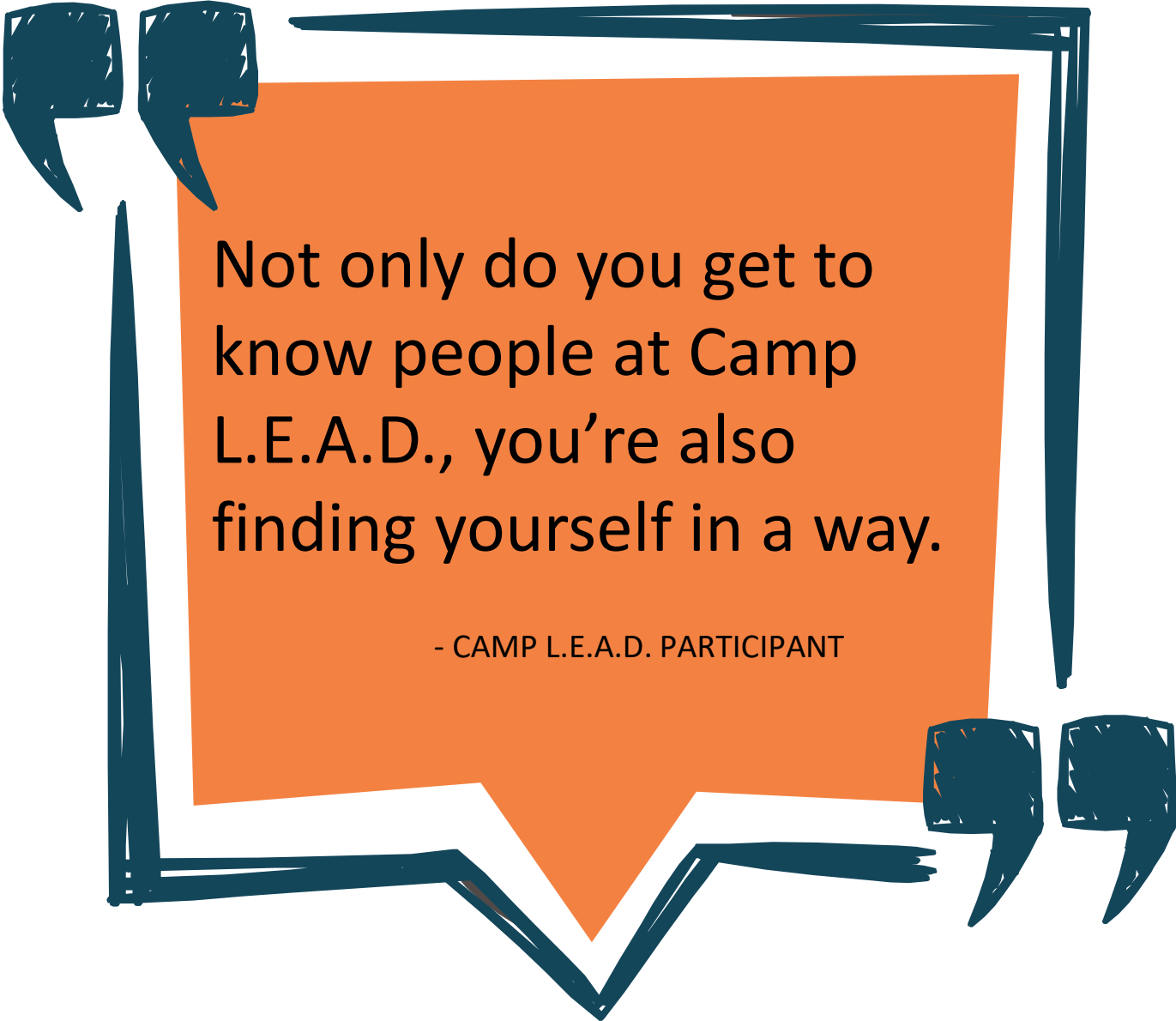
Search institute bridges research and practice to help young people be and become their best selves. Our work helps motivate and equip caring adults to create schools, communities, and families where all young people thrive.



The Ford Family Foundation is a private, non-profit foundation located in Roseburg, Oregon that generously supports Camp L.E.A.D. Started in 1957, the Foundation manages programs and offers scholarships. In addition, the Foundation makes grants to public charities predominantly benefiting communities in rural Oregon and Siskiyou County, California.



Camp L.E.A.D. (Leadership Education and Development) is a week-long outdoor leadership camp for incoming freshman (current 8th graders) in Siskiyou County. The Siskiyou Family YMCA annually facilitates Camp L.E.A.D. for incoming 9th graders to help youth get prepared for high school. Camp L.E.A.D. includes leadership development activities, river rafting, crafts, volleyball, skits, campfire, learning about nature, swimming and various other activities.



Not only do you get to know people at Camp L.E.A.D., you're also finding yourself in a way.

- CAMP L.E.A.D. PARTICIPANT

report outline

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Study Goals: Provide a detailed picture of the Camp L.E.A.D. experience to inform future planning, evaluation and innovation.

The following research questions guided this study:

 What do participants experience at Camp L.E.A.D?

 How do these experiences impact them?

 What goes into creating those experiences?



Study Design

DATA COLLECTION

A team of researchers from Search Institute attended the 2017 Camp L.E.A.D. reunion in February 2017. At that time, they conducted two alumni focus groups and led a theory of change workshop with staff. Researchers were participant observers for three days of Camp LEAD in July of 2017 and facilitated four additional focus groups with campers, counselors and coordinators.

DATA ANALYSIS

All focus groups were recorded and transcribed. Our analysis of the qualitative data used a grounded theory approach, facilitated by NVivo software. The analysis employed line-by-line coding of focus group transcripts, identifying statements that shed light on what happens at Camp L.E.A.D., with what effect. This process is sometimes referred to as open coding, because the aim is to stay open to participants' interpretation of their experience, thereby allowing the data to take us in any theoretical direction. We then identified patterns in the open codes, gathering similar ideas together in themes. Four of the focus group transcripts were coded independently by two or more researchers, who then came together to discuss similarities and differences in their coding, and developed a consensus theme structure. That structure guided coding of the remaining transcripts, with new ideas being added as they emerged. The researchers then came together to discuss, come to consensus, and finalize the themes presented here.



Core Finding: A strong curriculum was lived through relationships

Staff and participants alike believe that magic happens at Camp L.E.A.D. We saw that magic in action. It was our job as researchers to unpack the magic, learning how a variety of elements work together to create that it. This can inform efforts to continually build on strengths to maximize the programs' capacity to reproduce that magic consistently, within and across cohorts. It can also inform the work of others interested in achieving similar goals in a variety of settings.

What we found was a staff expertly crafting a curriculum through which young people stepped outside their comfort zones and tried things they never thought they could do. An ethos of inclusion, operationalized in the curriculum and in the rituals of the camp community, provided opportunities for all to experience a sense of acceptance, belonging and celebration of the contributions each individual brings to the group. Structured reflection activities provided opportunities for participants to learn about themselves, about others, and to recognize dynamics that take place among people in the group.

The curriculum and activities provided a critical structure that presented all these opportunities. Participants *experienced* the curriculum and activities in relationship with counsellors and each other. In the parlance of Camp L.E.A.D., without relationships, the curriculum and activities would be like an empty raft, drifting, bouncing, twirling, leaving the rider to navigate alone. Without the counsellors as facilitators and guides, without other participants as teammates, it is unclear where the journey would end, or what the experience might be along the way. Some might find it a thrill and succeed on their own. For others, it could end in harm. Camp L.E.A.D. staff were in the boat with participants, literally and figuratively, guiding participant experiences through:

- direct interactions;
- nurturing a collaborative team environment;
- navigating toward challenges for which individuals and the group were ready;
- supporting them in ways that kept them safe and made it more likely they would triumph; and
- helping them celebrate and learn from things that didn't turn out exactly as they'd hoped.



The ways in which Camp L.E.A.D. staff interacted with campers paralleled elements of what Search Institute calls “developmental relationships,” through which young people discover who they are, develop abilities to shape their own lives, and learn how to engage with and contribute to the world around them. Recent research by Search identified five critical elements of developmental relationships:

- Express Care
- Challenge Growth
- Provide Support
- Share Power
- Expand Possibilities

Research has shown that young people who experience strong developmental relationships are more likely to report a range of social-emotional strengths and other indicators of well-being and thriving (Li & Julian, 2012; Roehlkepartain, et al, 2017; Varga & Zaff, 2017).

As opportunities presented by the Camp L.E.A.D. curriculum and activities were brought to life through developmental relationships, campers experienced belonging, reflection and a burgeoning sense of comfort with stepping beyond their comfort zones. Along the way they developed:

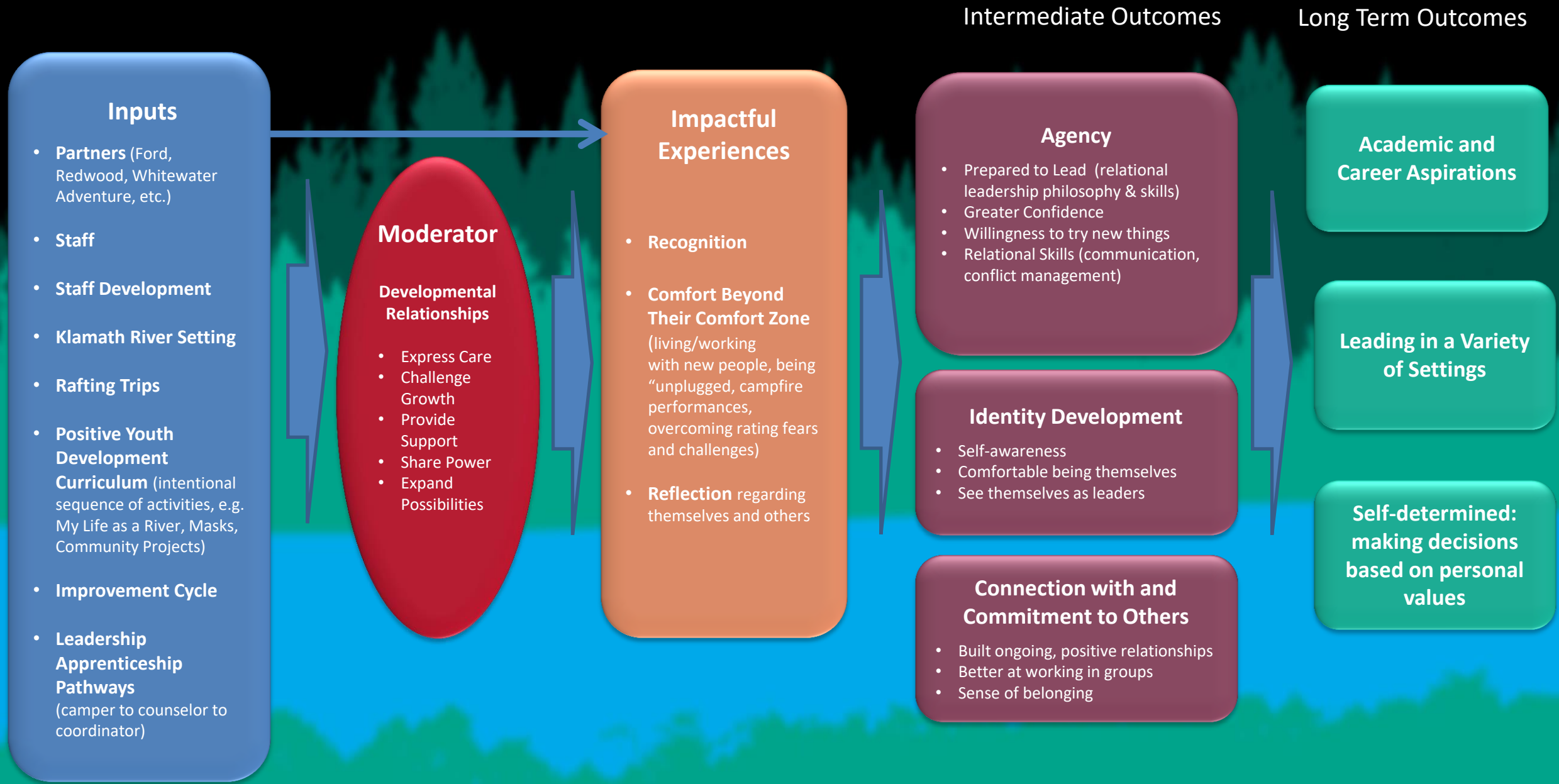
- agency, a sense that they can achieve their goals and their capacity to do so;
- identity, a sense of who they are and who they want to be; and
- a connection and commitment to a community beyond themselves.

We consider these “intermediate outcomes,” because they fuel longer-term outcomes reported by Camp L.E.A.D. participants, including:

- academic and career aspirations;
- leading in a variety of settings; and
- self-determination (making decisions based on internal values).

On the next page, we graphically depict these dynamics in a theory of change, beginning with inputs that make all of the above possible. In the pages that follow the graphic, we elaborate each element of the theory of change, sharing staff and participant descriptions of concrete ways in which they experienced and/or observed each element in action.





Inputs: The foundation that made it all possible

Many inputs were identified by staff and participants, and observed by our researchers, as critical to creating the Camp L.E.A.D. experience and outcomes. They included strong partners, a beautiful site, rafting excursions, thoughtfully conceived curriculum, experienced staff, ongoing staff development, a culture of continuous improvement, and a promote-from-within culture that creates a seamless pathway from camper to counsellor, to coordinator to senior staff.

Strong partners. The camp represents an authentic collaboration among several partners. It would not exist without funding from the Ford Family Foundation. But the Foundation is not just a funder. The camp also utilizes Ford Institute leadership activities. Staff believe Camp L.E.A.D. benefits from having the Siskiyou Family YMCA as an organizing agency, because of its positive reputation with youth and families in the area. Adventure Whitewater provides the Camp L.E.A.D. site, rafts, and experienced guides who are intentional about building leadership skills, not just technical skills. Youth talked about their raft guides as integral members of the Camp L.E.A.D. staff. The latter two partnerships provide opportunities for continued engagement of youth after camp, with a history of camp alumni participating in the YMCA's Teen Leadership Council and being hired as staff at the YMCA and Adventure Whitewater. Redwood Group, the Camp insurer, acts as a risk management consultant.

Klamath River setting. Camp L.E.A.D. takes place in a beautiful, natural setting, away from technology and normal every-day stressors. This provided opportunities for human interaction and personal reflection that are not common in other settings.

Rafting as challenge and life metaphor. Rafting provided a challenging experience and metaphor for applying lessons learned to life beyond camp. On rafting trips, youth experienced natural beauty; natural elements they can't control; new physical and emotional challenges; and a setting that requires teamwork. On dry land, they created "My Life as a River Life Maps," and shared their stories with each other. The River metaphor helped tie the rafting experience to their daily lives.



INPUTS





INPUTS



Intentionally sequenced curriculum. The Camp L.E.A.D. curriculum employs elements of the Ford Institute Leadership Program, creative facilitation activities staff learned through Partners for Youth Empowerment (PYE) trainings and *Catch the Fire*, a book by Peggy Taylor and Charlie Murphy. The curriculum is sequenced to scaffold the building of trust; an inclusive, relational culture; and risk-taking that set the stage for skill-building and personal growth. Other core activities, in addition to rafting and “My Life as a River,” included:


- “Masks,” in which youth reflected on who they are inside and who they present themselves to be in the world. They learned about each other beyond the masks they wear, and became more aware and intentional about when, where, with whom and how they let their true selves shine through.
- Community-based projects where youth worked in teams all week to highlight an issue in their community and develop strategies to solve it.
- “Killer Camper,” publicly recognizing campers who “really step up” or “go the extra mile.” Awardees receive a special life jacket, and are charged with choosing the next “Killer Camper.”

Experienced staff. There were two counsellors, age 16-18 in every tent. They were supported by a coordinator, each of whom worked with 2-4 counsellors, conducting a nightly check-in and addressing any discipline issues that might arise. Counsellors were volunteers drawn from geographically diverse areas within the region. All were camp alumni. They attended a training to learn about and employ the inclusive, strength-based, youth-centered philosophy of the camp. Continuing education for staff includes mandated reporting training and training to effectively facilitate groups.

Leadership pathway. Camp L.E.A.D. promotes from within, offering opportunities for campers to continue to participate as counsellors, coordinators and other staff. This provides an apprenticeship experience and ongoing mentorship. For example, the ability to create an inclusive culture that is true to the camp philosophy comes from: 1) living it; 2) creating it with support from others who have done so before them; and 3) supporting others as they learn to create that culture. As noted previously, camp alumni also have opportunities for continued engagement through opportunities at the Siskyou Family YMCA and Whitewater Adventures. One coordinator noted that becoming a counsellor after being a camper gave them the opportunity to “apply the skills they gained as a camper.”

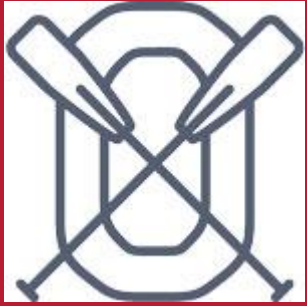
Improvement cycle. Camp staff and volunteers continuously reflect on how the camper experience can be improved. They often gather at the end of a long camp day to talk about what worked, what didn’t and what they might do differently the next day or even next year. Staff also bring new ideas from trainings they attend between camp seasons helping them prepare and stay responsive to campers’ needs.

Diverse, motivated youth. There is limited enrollment for Camp L.E.A.D. The application includes reference checks. Staff recruit and accept diverse youth who are willing to be challenged. Social life at camp includes being part of many different groups and activities.



“We’re not just giving you the tools to be a leader, we’re giving you the tools to be yourself, be confident in yourselves, and be empathetic toward other people.”

– CAMP L.E.A.D. STAFF



DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS



Developmental Relationships: The animating force

Camp L.E.A.D. staff and participants lived the five elements that make up Search Institute's Developmental Relationships framework: *Express Care, Challenge Growth, Provide Support, Share Power and Expand Possibilities*. In the pages that follow, we describe how each element was brought to life at Camp L.E.A.D..

Staff Expressed Care

"We do a really great job at participating in the activities or sitting with the group at mealtimes . . . I'm not afraid to be goofy and silly with the campers, just to set the tone that this is a safe space and no one's gonna judge you for being yourself." – Coordinators

Participants, staff and alumni said Camp L.E.A.D. staff expressed care by checking in, listening, encouraging, accepting, being accessible and dependable. A coordinator described checking in with campers "who may be the outliers from the group." S/he added, "It does require a balance of respect for their space and checking in with them, . . . being able to judge when you need to . . . say, 'Hey, how's it going?' and, if they're not too chatty, just let them be, if that's how they're comfortable." Smiling, laughing, having a good time, sharing their own stories and being "really good at starting conversations" made staff accessible for campers.

Participants and alumni said staff members "always find good in people" and are "totally understanding," which helped to build trust that they "won't judge you for anything." This allowed participants to "be myself." They said staff would "ask simple questions about how we were doing" and were "always there to watch over me." Staff were "willing to invest time in you." All of this allowed participants to trust that this is "someone I could bring anything to." That trust opened the door to deeper conversations. A participant said, "Any problems I had in the day, or after My Life as a River, it was me and my counselor awake and we sat and talked through the night about it. And [s/he] was really open to it. [S/he] related to a lot of the stuff that happened and I know I can trust [him/her] 'cuz [s/he] won't tell anybody else." Staff members were also openly appreciative of participants. An alumna said a staff member "walked up to me and . . . told me [my story] changed their life. . . When a grown man comes up to you and is crying in your arms, telling you that just changed [him/her] personally. That definitely touched my heart pretty big."



DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS



Staff Challenged Growth

“When two [campers] were giggling during a song [at camp fire]. . . I pulled them off to the side and asked them, ‘I know you guys aren’t trying to be hurtful or mean,’ asking them what they thought would be the perception when someone’s presenting and you’re laughing, what that could mean. . . . They all said it clicked in their mind. . . and the rest of the night, [they] were completely respectful.” – Counsellor

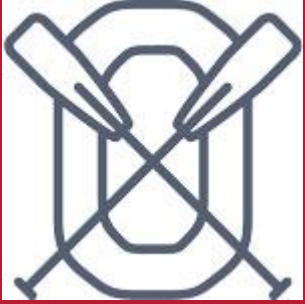
The curriculum and other activities at Camp L.E.A.D. are designed to provide opportunities for participants to step outside their comfort zones and try new things. The staff helped by nudging youth to take advantage of those opportunities. Participants said, staff members are “really good at not pushing you in an uncomfortable way, but in an encouraging way” to “do cannonballs off the jumping rock” or “stand up in front of people and talk.” In doing so, they helped participants expand their comfort zones. A coordinator said, “We’re not creating daredevils. . . but we’re . . . helping people to challenge themselves, both in the camp setting and later on, outside of the camp setting.”

In addition to nudging campers to try new things, coordinators said that staff also offered gentle guidance. One said, “We’re not here to babysit, we’re here to help them grow, so when kids do act up, I . . . ask them how they might be perceived by others, and what are the effects that happen from that?”

Staff Provided Support

“We’re not just giving you the tools to be a leader, we’re giving you the tools to be yourself, be confident in yourselves, and be empathetic toward other people.” – Coordinator

As participants came to trust that staff would be there to support them as they stepped out of their comfort zones, it became easier for staff to challenge growth. Participants described a variety of ways in which they experienced staff support. They said staff “[teach] me how to do it,” “help us with a few ideas,” and “listen to our ideas and . . . [help] us get through what we were struggling on.” Another said, “if we got stuck on one situation and we started arguing about it, they’d teach us a way that we could find a new route of how we could take on a situation. They could find the middle ground.”



DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS



Staff found it important to boost camper's confidence through positive reinforcement. After campers shared their stories, they tell them, "we see that you're all very strong people, you're all very courageous. . . we remind them that everything they've gone through has gotten them here to this point, that they've made it."

Because staff got to know participants, they were able to tailor support to meet individual needs. For example, one participant said, "[Staff member] asks me what I'm doing, how I'm gonna do it, and it makes me really think, cause she knows that's how I work." An alumnus recalled a staff member who offered to help with college applications or scholarships. S/he said "It's nice to hear, every once in awhile, that there is someone there."

Staff Shared Power

"Probably one of the biggest things that impacted me [when I was a Camp L.E.A.D. camper] – it seems so small – [staff member] was talking to me like we were the same age. It just really, really deeply affected me for years after. . . [We] talk to them as a person, not as us being superior. . . Of course, there are certain situations where you have to enforce something . . . [But] we're here . . . with you and guide you." -- Coordinator

Participants described a range of ways staff shared power. They "ask for my ideas" or "what our opinions on things were," "making sure everybody put their input." They "had us . . . coming up with ideas." They gave them an opportunity to take the lead. A participant recalled a staff member saying "Hey, can you do this? We need someone to do it. I know you can do it. Go do it." And, sometimes, "they really left it up to us." Sharing power is a two-way street. One participant described a staff member "giving me . . . input on it and asking me what I thought about it, and then giving me input on what I thought about it."

Staff were skillful about scaffolding the sharing of power, to ensure participants were safe and had the support they needed. One participant said, "At first they were there to get us going and show us how to do stuff, keep us out of trouble. But then, they step back and let us take over." And participants came to realize they could let staff know what they were ready for. One said, "You could say one word and they'd know to back off and let you do your thing."



DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS

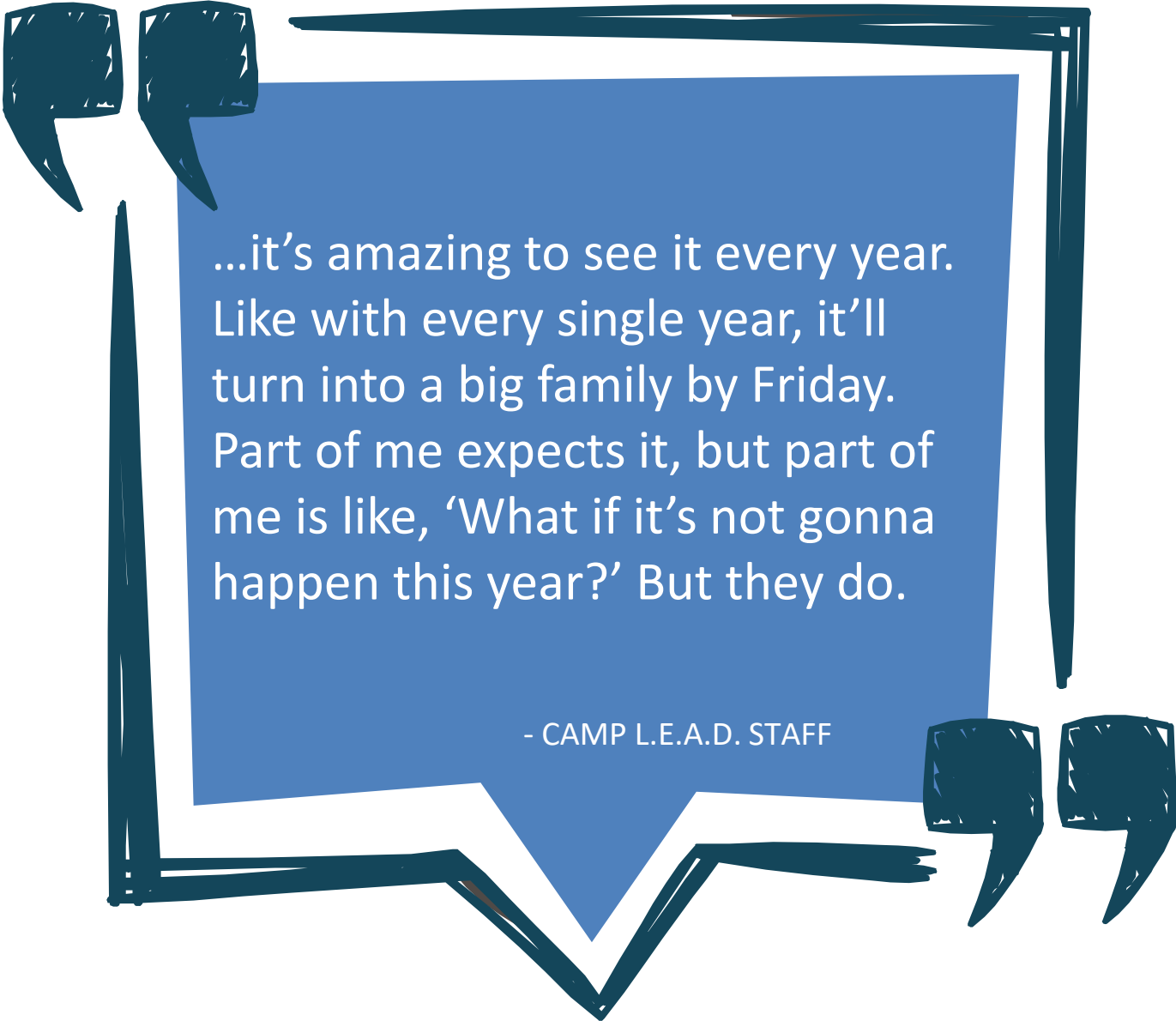


Staff Expanded Possibilities

“The My Life as a River, I was not wanting to do it, ‘cuz that was hard for me . . . [s/he] pushes me out of my comfort zone, to go try the new things, which makes it hard, but in the end, I ended up thanking her for it.” -- Camper

In addition to the opportunities the curriculum presents to expand their horizons, staff found ways to further that expansion within and beyond the curriculum. They were role models who inspire youth to be like them. One said, “I’ve always looked up to [staff member] as a role model. . . . [s/he] doesn’t go around to just the kids she knows, she’ll sit there and have conversations with kids she doesn’t know.” Another said, “I’m not very good at standing up I front of crowds and talking to people. But [staff member is] always really good at it and does it all the time, so [s/he] challenges me to be more like that.” Staff expand possibilities by simply inviting participants to try something. One appreciated a staff member who “asked me to be their spikeball partner.” Another said staff “get me to do stuff that I might not feel comfortable with but I never regret doing it. I would probably regret not doing it, though.” In this way, participants said staff “helped me become more adventurous” and “[gave] us tools to do better in high school and for our future.”

Alumni who had been counsellors themselves, recalled staff who opened up new career possibilities for them. One said staff “helped me visualize what’s down my river . . . what I need to do to reach the point where I wanna be.” Another described a staff member who talked at length about his/her own career “and how interesting it is. . . It clicked and I actually realized ‘Wow, this is really what I wanna do.’” The staff member offered to connect the participant with contacts in the field. “It’s awesome how [s/he’s] willing to make that happen for me,” the alumnus said.



...it's amazing to see it every year. Like with every single year, it'll turn into a big family by Friday. Part of me expects it, but part of me is like, 'What if it's not gonna happen this year?' But they do.

- CAMP L.E.A.D. STAFF

Impactful Experiences that promoted growth

"...the whole camp cheered for me and it changed my whole outlook on the camp...it really broke me out of my shell."

-Camp L.E.A.D. participant

The Camp L.E.A.D. curriculum, activities and the relationships that participants formed led to three core experiences that this study suggests were critical to participants' growth. They include feeling recognized, feeling comfortable outside their comfort zone, and learning through reflection about themselves, those around them, and their lives beyond camp.

Recognition

Campers said they felt recognized and appreciated for who they were at Camp L.E.A.D.. They experienced positive recognition from counsellors who often gave a "clap, clap, whoosh!" to a camper for trying something new. They experienced recognition through awards such as "Killer Camper," through which campers acknowledged other campers "displaying extra drive or leadership." That camper then was tasked with observing her or his fellow campers and awarding it to another person. One staff member noted, "I think that award is incredibly impactful because it's up to the camper to keep an eye out for a fellow peer who's going the extra mile or really stepping up." Campers also experienced recognition when they presented their community projects, after a week-long activity in which groups were given a hypothetical amount of money to work on an issue facing their community. Staff encouraged campers to clap and give positive feedback after each group presented its ideas.

Comfort Beyond Their Comfort Zone

Participants who came to Camp L.E.A.D. were encouraged to step beyond their comfort zones. Staff and peer support in this endeavor helped them succeed, allowing them to get more *comfortable* stepping outside their comfort zone. This opened the door to new growth experiences. Being 'unplugged' in a rugged and beautiful setting, away from the comfort of their ever-present technology, was a first for many campers. Staff saw this as integral to their success in building relationships. One staff member said, "I think this camp really forces you to be entertained with what's around you and get to know others." Participants also talked about the experience of being with "people they don't know" for the first time, sleeping in tents and working in groups together. While these things were difficult at first, they were among the positive experiences participants described looking back on the week. One said, "...it was nice to see new faces and meet new people and get out of my comfort zone, get out of my group and meet new people."



IMPACTFUL
EXPERIENCES





IMPACTFUL EXPERIENCES



Many participants were physically out of their comfort zones learning to whitewater raft. Some were nervous about falling out of the raft at the beginning of the week. Yet, by the end, some participants said they “hoped to fall out” on a “big hit” because they felt confident they could navigate safely back. They saw themselves and others grow in many ways through this challenging experience. As one camper noted, “rafting, for me, was a big thing, because it built teamwork and leadership on our teams.”

Finally, participants noted campfire (or “lamp fire” because of fire hazard conditions) was an impactful experience for getting out of their comfort zones. Counselors and coordinators set the tone by having fun and being “goofballs” so that campers knew it was okay to have a sense of humor about themselves. Campers were invited to participate in skits and sing songs. One camper said, “I really liked campfire the most, because everybody just, when we go up and do skits and sing, it’s really stepping out of your comfort zone for some people. It’s also fun watching people perform.” One participant said that during campfires, “[Staff would] all be singing the songs and trying to get us to get up, and now we all just get up.”

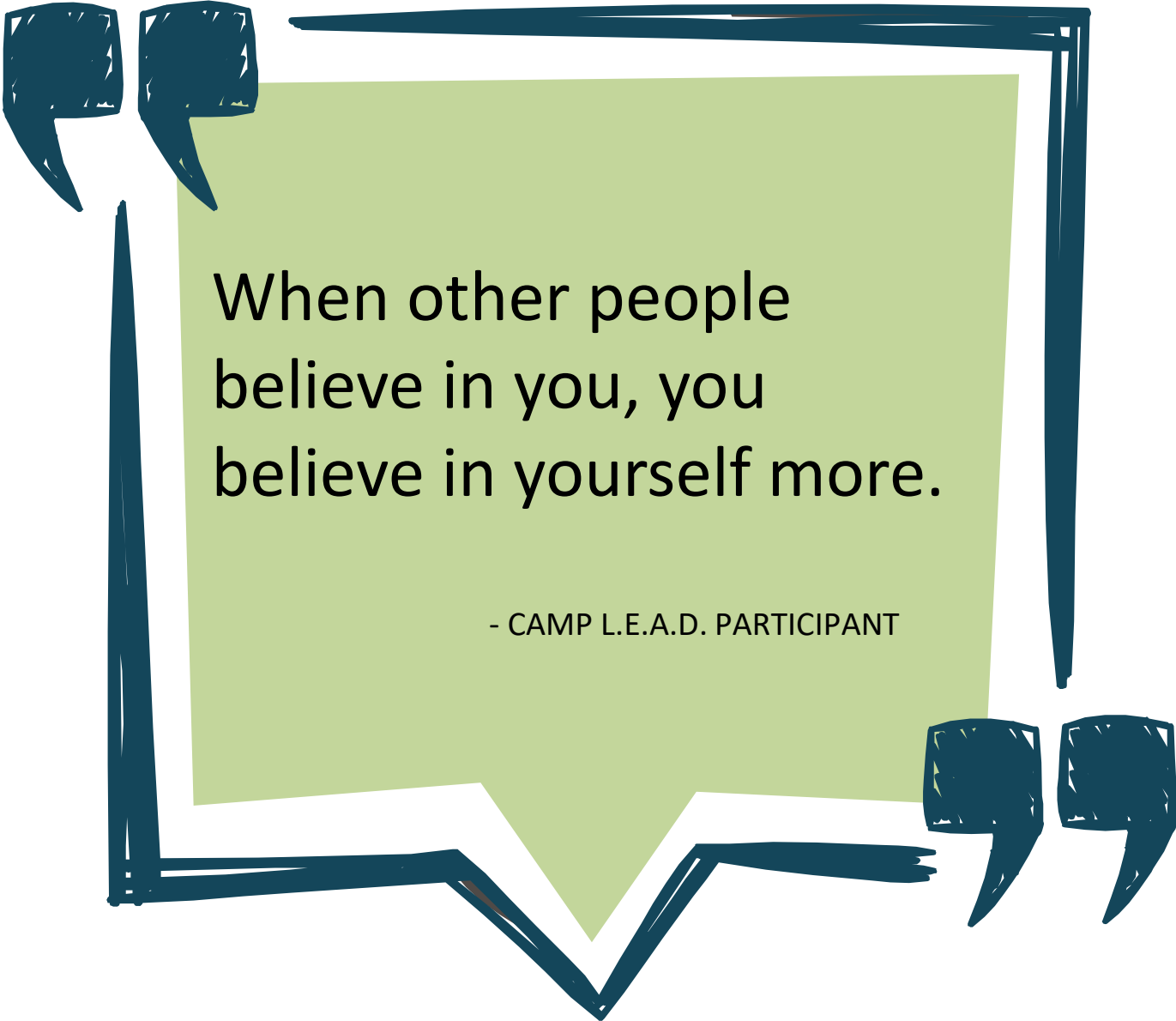
Reflection about Self and Others

“It was nice, because it was the one time where I could tell my story without being judged.”

-Camp L.E.A.D. participant

Participants appreciated opportunities, through a variety of activities, for self-reflection and learning about the experiences of fellow campers. For example, in “personality colors,” participants took a personality quiz and, based on their answers, were designated a color. Through this activity, participants realized what they had in common with others and what was unique about them. Campers said they learned about “how we are when conflict comes our way.” They came to realize that different people contributed different kinds of leadership and different skills to a group. In another activity called, “masks,” participants found it impactful to think about the ways they present themselves to the world and the people around them. One participant noted the activity, “...helped me realize how important it is to be yourself and not really care what other people think...”

Many participants talked about the perspective building they experienced through the “My Life as a River” activity as being one of the most impactful experiences of camp. For the activity, campers broke into small groups with counsellors and were asked to share what they were willing to share about the ups and downs of their lives using a river as a metaphor. One participant said, “It was really eye-opening, to see that you can’t be too quick to judge someone before you get to know them...so you learn to respect people.” Another participant noted, “For me, it was a really emotional experience, but I think being able to actually think about your life and have to write it on a piece of paper really made you remember all the good and bad things that happened to you, cause sometimes, you can forget about it or try to avoid it. Being able to share it, knowing that other people are truly listening to you and supporting you and letting you know that ‘it’s okay’ to share these things with them, that was a really...a great thing.”



When other people
believe in you, you
believe in yourself more.

- CAMP L.E.A.D. PARTICIPANT

Intermediate Outcomes fueled longer-term outcomes

Experiences at Camp L.E.A.D. directly produced three critical outcomes that this study and past research support as motivating longer-term outcomes. They include agency, identity and a connection and commitment to a community beyond themselves. In the pages that follow, we elaborate how participants grew in these ways.

Agency

Participants believe they can achieve their goals and actually have the capacity to do so.

"We could adapt to a new situation and make it the best."

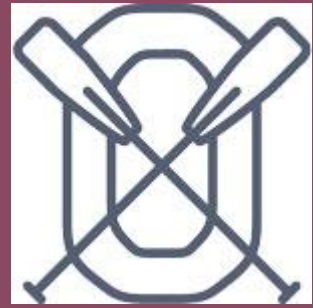
-Camp L.E.A.D. Alumnus

Greater Confidence and a Willingness to Try New Things

Through their experiences at Camp L.E.A.D., participants gained a deeper sense of confidence in themselves. Many talked about experiencing less fear around "public speaking" after having opportunities to speak or perform in front of their peers. One camper noted, "I am more confident than I was before and I'm more of a leader than I was before I came here." Another participant noted that being asked to participate in Camp L.E.A.D. as a counsellor was a confidence booster. This participant said, "When other people believe in you, you believe in yourself more...it gave me the confidence that 'we picked you for a reason because we believe in you.'" Participants talked about being willing to try new things and take risks because they felt supported at Camp L.E.A.D. One camper said, "I've actually stepped out of my group and hung out with other kids." They performed at campfire or took on a leadership role while rafting, *and succeeded*.

One of the coordinators described seeing young people's confidence grow over the week and said, "I've heard tons of tons of campers and people who have gone through the program in some form or another come back and say, 'I would not be the person I am today without camp.' I think a large part of that is what we talk about with confidence. We're allowing these kids to be confident in who they are and they are more confident to take risks that they otherwise might not have taken. And we're not creating daredevils, that's not my point, but we're allowing people—helping people to challenge themselves, both in the camp setting and later on outside of the camp setting."

As young people have the confidence to step out of their comfort zones to try new things, they continue to develop new competencies which, in turn, further builds confidence.



OUTCOMES





OUTCOMES



Prepared to Lead: Developed Relational Leadership Philosophy and Skills

Participants at Camp L.E.A.D. came to better understand their personalities and styles of leadership. Many talked about learning “everyone can be a leader in their own way.” Even though each participant came to understand their unique contributions, they often talked similarly about leadership as “facilitation” and “including the whole group,” demonstrating a relational and collaborative philosophy of leadership. They gained skills such as adapting to new situations whether in rafting or working with their small groups. One alumnus noted that their experiences at Camp L.E.A.D. had led them to “an increased willingness to build others up.” Participants began taking initiative in new ways. One camper said “I’m more of a go-getter now.” An alumnus said that, because of Camp L.E.A.D., “I have the ability to be an example to others on how to be a leader.”

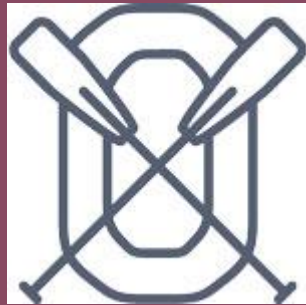
Relational Mindset and Skills

Participants developed a host of relational skills. Through their experiences at Camp L.E.A.D., many became more comfortable talking to people they didn’t know and opening up to others. One camper noted they “...opened up more and learned how not to use all my masks a lot.” In tandem with opening themselves up, participants became open to and accepting of people who are different from them. They talked about feeling “less judgmental.” It became “easier to make new friends” because they “learned to respect people.” One camper said, “Before I came here, I felt like I really judged a book by its cover. Once we heard the stories of other people, or I talked to new people, it really changed my perspective on what I thought about them.” Another said, “I changed myself to accept people for who they are cause they accepted me.”

Counsellors, in particular, said they learned skills such as conflict management and communication. One participant said, “It made me a more fluid communicator...When you understand people, I think that just helps your communication, when you know more about the person you’re talking to.”



OUTCOMES



Identity

Participants have a sense of who they are and who they want to be.

“That’s, for me, what camp really stands for, is finding yourself and finding your own person so you can become that and advance on that during hard times in your life.”

-Camp L.E.A.D. Coordinator

Self-awareness

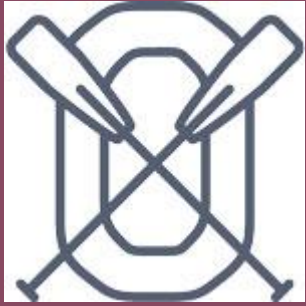
Through activities and reflective conversations, participants became more aware of the ways they interact with others and how they accomplish tasks. One participant recognized they were “a planner” while another realized that they “sometimes avoid problems.” An alumnus noted, “Camp L.E.A.D. helped me realize how outgoing, really happy, and positive [I am].” One camper considered how a deeper understanding of themselves connected with their lives outside camp and said “I learned about what type of person I am and that can help a lot, when you’re working in the real world.”

Comfortable Being Themselves

As participants learned more about themselves in a supportive environment, they experienced self-acceptance and came to value authenticity. One camper said, “I understand now how important it is to be yourself and not put up masks for anyone.” One alumnus talked about the relational importance of learning to be yourself around others noting, “...this is one really big, overarching theme and lesson about camp, is that when other people see you being yourself and being genuine and open and honest, that opens the door for them to be genuine and open and honest, as well.”

See Themselves as Leaders

In addition to becoming more aware of their own unique abilities and accepting themselves, they also developed a sense of identity as a leader. Campers talked about “becoming a leader” through their experiences at Camp L.E.A.D. Counsellors and coordinators talked about the importance of “being a role model” for campers.



OUTCOMES



Connection and Commitment

Participants experience a connection and commitment to a community beyond themselves.

“I’ve met my best friends at camp and I’ll be forever grateful for it.”


-Camp L.E.A.D. Coordinator

Built ongoing, positive relationships

One of the most prominent outcomes participants at Camp L.E.A.D. talked about was the development of positive relationships. One camper talked about a person she had had met that didn’t know anyone and said, “So, me and her started talking and we just got closer and closer. We’re so comfortable around each other and I love it. It makes me super happy.” For others, it changed or deepened existing relationships. One camper noted that an older sibling had come that year and they, “built a better relationship than we have at home” based on experiences together at camp. Some built relationships with people they didn’t expect to, such as sporting rivals from other towns. One participant said, “I left this camp being best friends with all my rivals from around the county, and that was a defining moment for me.”

Sense of belonging, working together

Coordinators noted that campers became more comfortable and connected with each other as the week wore on. One coordinator noted, “...they become more comfortable going up and talking to whoever, whenever because we create such a safe and secure area here.” Participants felt a deeper connection to those around them especially as they began to realize that others experienced similar struggles. One participant said, “I think it helped me to realize that, throughout camp, a lot of my peers felt the same way that I did about a lot of the same issues, like regarding low self-esteem. It changed my perception and I was able to see that most of us were in the same boat.” Beyond connecting with those around them, participants committed to others by developing teamwork skills and working hard to accomplish goals together in small groups.



It's more of a lifetime
impact than just one
week.

- CAMP L.E.A.D. PARTICIPANT

Longer Term Outcomes that are part of a thriving trajectory

Outcomes experienced by Camp L.E.A.D. campers and staff over time reflect critical aspects of a thriving trajectory, in which youth are able to be and become their best selves. They include heightened academic and career aspirations, taking on leadership roles in a variety of settings, and intentionally in living out their values.

Academic and Career Aspirations

Alumni academic and career aspirations were shaped by their experiences at Camp L.E.A.D.. One said, “[Camp L.E.A.D.] helped me realize goals I wanted to achieve and actually try to go get them. Like, academically, I guess it helped me challenge myself, taking harder classes...because I want to go to a four-year...it helped me challenge myself in that respect.” Some alumni noted that their time at Camp L.E.A.D. impacted their choices in college. One alumnus said, “[Going to Camp L.E.A.D.] also has affected my major. I’m doing business, but also with a side of recreational management. So, next semester I’m taking a couple classes and I’m stoked.” Others began to see themselves in outdoor recreational careers and explored other camps where they could work. Still, others were inspired to connect with the Ford Family Foundation, which funds Camp L.E.A.D., to “...see if I can do[an internship] with them.”

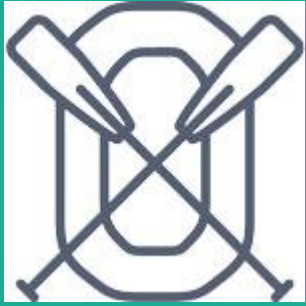
Leading in a Variety of Settings

Participants talked about leading in places they never thought they would or could because of the confidence and skills they built during their time at Camp L.E.A.D. Some became leaders in their after-school clubs, others took on leadership roles speaking at conferences. One participant said, “Camp L.E.A.D. gave me that confidence and courage to go out there and put myself out there in places I usually wouldn’t have. I [ended up being] class president in high school...and I became yearbook editor.” Another noted, “I was given the chance to be a captain for the volleyball team at the high school. I think if I didn’t go to Camp L.E.A.D., I don’t think I’d be able to take on the responsibility of that.”



OUTCOMES





For some alumni, their leadership continued beyond high school opportunities. One alumnus said, “When I was in college...I got put in an exec position in my fraternity as a freshman, which is just unheard-of. So people really look up to me, and I’m able to connect with people on so many different levels...I’ve been using the tools and resources I’ve learned from this camp in almost every aspect of my life.”

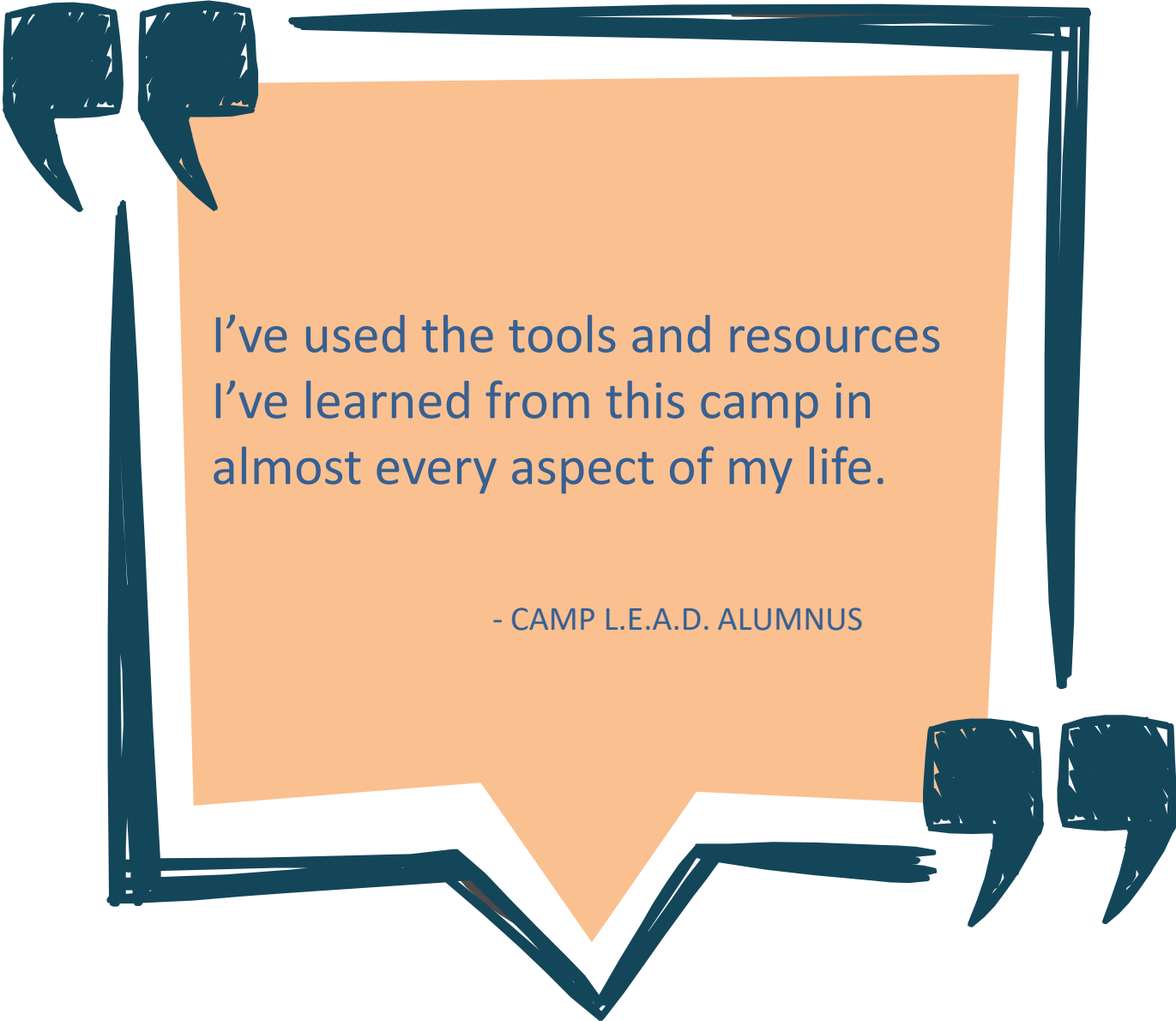
Self-Determined: Making Decisions Based on Personal Values

Participants noted that their experiences at Camp L.E.A.D. led them to think more about the kind of person they wanted to be in their and how they might live out their values. Some talked about wanting to “be their camp self” at home, the person who was confident and could make decisions based on things that mattered to them and made them feel good about themselves. One participant talked about the kinds of relationships they wanted in their life and said “I realized that you get to choose who you surround yourself with...once you leave camp, you can create a similar environment where you feel supported and you can have that emotional connection with people.”

A staff member said, “...they’ve seen what true friendship is, they know what it’s like to be supported and be appreciated for who you really are, and they’re able to make decisions.”

OUTCOMES





I've used the tools and resources
I've learned from this camp in
almost every aspect of my life.

- CAMP L.E.A.D. ALUMNUS

What Could Improve Camp L.E.A.D.?

When asked what could be done to improve Camp L.E.A.D., some mentioned possible facilities and transportation upgrades, such as:

- Canvas tents
- Have two buses for driving to and from rafting
- Better bathrooms
- More private shower facilities - "There's like ten girls out in front of the showers, just shaving their legs, and the boys will be behind us playing spike ball [laughter]."

Some had no suggestions for improvement. "Don't Change Anything, 'It's Perfect!'" one said. Other suggested expanding upon what they already like about the Camp, including:

- Outdoor activities beyond rafting such as rock climbing, mountain biking or hiking
- Longer length of time at camp
- Dancing
- Food – especially snacks between meals

Others suggested expanding the number of young people who benefit from the program:

- Make sure those in rural areas know about Camp L.E.A.D. – "I think they gotta get it out to the more out-there areas. I talked to people after I went in my class and they were like, 'Yeah I didn't even hear about it.'"
- Replicate Camp L.E.A.D.
 - "Maybe, we could provide a program where we have a super organized curriculum with textbooks and classes, leadership and communication-based classes they could take, and they could stay at a camp locally, in their own towns. "
 - "We could replicate this program in other places, and that would be awesome, to see this all over the nation."



Discussion

Camp L.E.A.D.'s leadership pathway and continuous improvement culture has led to three critical strengths:

- a finely-tuned structure that scaffolds growth;
- continuous critique of the structure, holding onto what works while finding ways to make it better;
- counsellors, coordinators and other staff who are responsive to the ever-changing dynamics *within* that structure, always adapting to make the most of the experience for each individual and each cohort of campers.

Together, these strengths create a powerful, transformative experience for campers and, for some, as counsellors and staff over time.

While teased apart in the theory of change for the sake of clarity, the strengths above integrate the “living” of the inputs, relationships and impactful experiences in ways that are dynamic, with each affecting and being affected by the others. As such, the arrows depicting the role of relationships in the model should be bi-directional. It is through relationships that inputs are lived as impactful experiences. And, it is through relationships that leaders deeply understand what campers experience. And that understanding fuels ongoing improvement.

Though we focused on describing the role of youth/adult relationships in this report, leaders also created a culture in which campers experience developmental relationships with *each other*. And all of that is made possible because counsellors, coordinators and other staff are also in developmental relationships with each other.



So What? Now What?

Our hope is that this report has delineated the many strengths, that together, produce the “magic” of Camp L.E.A.D. As staff continue to improve the experience each year, these are strengths to continually build upon. It is also important to recognize the essence of what is currently working and make sure new iterations don’t lose sight of that.

The impact of Camp L.E.A.D. could grow through opportunities to reach more youth and/or to expand opportunities for continuing alumni engagement. For example:



All campers in our focus groups raised their hands when we asked who wanted to come back as counsellors. But there are not enough spaces for all to move into that position in the current format. Counsellors could mentor campers in leading “peer leadership” groups during the school year at the YMCA and/or in area schools, using the tools and practices they learned at camp. This would provide ongoing development opportunities for alumni, while also expanding the reach of the Camp L.E.A.D. curriculum.



There is much others can learn from the practices Camp L.E.A.D. has refined through many cycles of ongoing improvement including:

- building developmental relationships among adults, youth and adults, and youth peers;
- using metaphor to scaffold reflection; and
- the strategic escalation of social/emotional risk to build a safe space for all.



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