Outcomes

A project assessing the long-term cultural impact of the U.S. summer camp experience for international staff

Jimmy, UK, Participant of Camp Letts,
Overlooking the Grand Canyon
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“I have a conviction that a few weeks spent in a well-organized summer camp may be of more value educationally than a whole year of formal school work.”

Charles Eliot, 1922, former president of Harvard University

“Listen to the mustn’ts, child. Listen to the don’ts. Listen to the shouldn’ts, the impossibles, the won’ts. Listen to the never haves, then listen close to me… Anything can happen, child. Anything can be.”

Shel Silverstein
Foreword

The American Institute For Foreign Study, Inc. sponsors quality J-1 exchange visitor programs in multiple categories, each with its own intrinsic value and impact. As AIFS celebrates our 50th anniversary of leadership in the field of cultural exchange, the Camp America program is proud of its key role in the organization.

Since 1969, the core of Camp America has been in the realm of summer camp, with over 221,000 participants from dozens of countries. The program is uniquely positioned for cultural exchange and experiential growth thanks to the sheer vibrancy and energy of U.S. summer camps, their diversity and the varied opportunities for interaction that they afford. Participants take on an assortment of leadership and support roles and creatively engage with American children, adults, peers, families and communities from all manner of backgrounds, economic strata and
ideologies. The “ripple effects” of these experiences are hugely exponential, influencing the lives of U.S. citizens through interaction and relationships to a scale that is incomprehensible.

We have always considered the value and lifelong impact of this dynamic to be inestimable. This project attempts to test this assertion through empirical evidence and direct feedback reaching back through the decades. We think that we have succeeded and that you will find the results interesting and compelling. We thank you for your interest and look forward to a bright future through the special and unique opportunity for cultural exchange and public diplomacy that is summer camp.
About Camp America and AIFS

A program of AIFS, Camp America is a leader in providing opportunities for qualified international applicants to meet American people, explore U.S. culture and broaden their horizons exclusively through the summer camp experience. A designated sponsor through the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs in camp counselor and summer work travel J-1 exchange visitor categories, we pride ourselves on careful recruitment and matching coupled with high levels of client relations, support and crisis management. Our successful 45-year record has resulted in high brand recognition worldwide and thousands of satisfied participants and summer camps. Headquartered in Stamford, Connecticut we have principal offices in London, Warsaw and Sydney, with subsidiaries and partners in twenty different countries.

Founded in 1964, the American Institute For Foreign Study (AIFS) is one of the oldest, largest and most respected cultural exchange organizations in the world. We have been committed to cross cultural exchange for 50 years. With global offices in 6 countries, we organize cultural exchange programs for more than 50,000 participants each year. Our programs include college study abroad, au pair placement, camp counselors and staff, gifted education, college prep, high school educational travel and insurance services. Since 1964, more than 1.5 million students and teachers have participated in AIFS programs worldwide.
Objectives

Within our overall goal of obtaining evidence of outcomes consistent with J-1 legislative intent, we identified specific measurable objectives relative to intrinsic program value and participants’ perception of the United States, its culture and its people. These are Mutual Understanding, Personal Growth and Employability, and Cultural Advancement and Global Perspective. We defined survey questions in order to give precise insight into these three broad objectives. We sent the survey to over 90,000 individuals and received over 11,000 responses, or 12%, representing a conventionally acceptable level of statistical significance.
Unbelievable, life changing, opened up my views and opinions on everything...

Nicola, UK, 2013
Project Results and Conclusions

Mutual Understanding

This set of questions is designed to isolate the outcomes that are most applicable to the stated goals of the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961 that laid the groundwork for J-1 visa opportunities for the international community in the United States. In part, its stated purpose is to “enable the Government of the United States to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries…” Project findings lend strong evidence to support over four decades of success in achieving this vital public diplomacy goal.

“I totally changed my opinion about U.S. and Americans. I will never forget this experience and I will always remember the place…. I am really thankful for people I met, for friends who stay with me in life, for places I never saw before, like an ocean… My attitude has grown about the economy, politics, and international relations. Camp gave me food for the mind and I learned how be polite to people and always be interested in people. “

Veronika, Russia, 2009
Results are presented in the percentage of responses indicating "agree" or "strongly agree"; and the balance of answers were "neutral", "disagree", or "strongly disagree".

### Mutual Understanding Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>92%</strong></td>
<td>A broader understanding of American society through personal friendships and contact with Americans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>78%</strong></td>
<td>Lasting friendships and social networks with Americans</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>85%</strong></td>
<td>Diverse and lasting friendships and social networks with people from different countries</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>79%</strong></td>
<td>A mutual understanding with the United States and its citizens</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>60%</strong></td>
<td>A more positive and tolerant attitude toward the United States and its involvement in world affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>84%</strong></td>
<td>A personal positive impression of the United States and the American people</td>
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Personal Growth and Employability

Further to the purpose of the Fulbright Hays Act is to achieve its goals “by means of educational and cultural exchange... toward a peaceful and more fruitful life for people throughout the world...”

Project results prove the educational benefits of the program to be both impressive and wide in scope. In terms of impact on their lives, respondents attached a high level of meaning. Intrinsic personal development scored high specifically with respect to confidence, self-assuredness, work ethic and interaction with people in general. Results reflect a strong impact on academic and career direction as well as employment marketability, clear indicators of a more “fruitful life” for international participants.

With regard to language acquisition as a key educational benefit, 30% of respondents indicated that English was not their first language. There was a significant upward trend in personal ratings of English language skill pre-program vs. post-program as follows:

- **26%** decrease in “low” rating
- **26%** decrease in “fair” ratings
- **53%** increase in “good” or “excellent” ratings

“This was one of the best summers of my life! I changed my degree pathway whilst sitting on the steps of a cabin talking to my fellow counselors. I decided to become a teacher. I am now in my 7th year of a successful teaching career, which I love. I doubt I would be in this position without my experiences from Camp America. I’ve recommended the programme to several students, who have all gone on to participate in the Camp programme and enjoyed it. Thanks!”

Anna, UK, 2003
Personal Growth and Employability Results

95% Was a compelling and meaningful life experience
77% Was an important part of my professional development
46% Influenced my choice of field of academic study
53% Impacted the direction of my career choices
77% Instilled a strong work ethic
77% Strengthened my Curriculum Vitae or resume
81% Augmented skills, competencies and experiences that assist me with employment opportunities
91% Increased my sense of confidence and self-assuredness
92% Helped me gain “people skills”

Results are presented in the percentage of responses indicating “agree” or “strongly agree”, and the balance of answers were “neutral”, “disagree”, or “strongly disagree”.

53%
77%
77%
77%
91%
92%
Cultural Advancement and Global Perspective

Further still to legislative purpose, the Act created exchange opportunities “to promote international cooperation for educational and cultural advancement and thus to assist in the development of friendly, sympathetic, and peaceful relations between the United States and the other countries of the world.” As a direct result of the exchange experience, responses display a very marked level of consciousness of world affairs, diversity and tolerance. Participants show that the program has given them the impetus to continue to explore the world and to learn more about its cultures and people.

“No TV, miles from the nearest town, no distractions, you are all thrown into such an immersive experience and you get to know people better than you ever do in situations back home. Believe me, after nine weeks in the woods without those outside distractions, all of the bonding activities and camp fires and just being sat outside your cabin talking with your co-counselors and your campers means that you make bonds that are stronger than many bonds that you will ever make.”

Keith, UK, 2003
A passion for travel and for learning about the world

Respect for diverse environments, which helps me to interact effectively and positively when confronted with cross-cultural differences

My cultural awareness

My ability to adapt quickly to new situations and developments

An appreciation of differences in others

Cultural Advancement and Global Perspective Results

After their Camp America experiences:

Returned to the United States to continue educational studies, to live, to work or for pleasure

Traveled to other countries to work, for pleasure or to continue their educational studies

Pursued careers in international firms including U.S. based companies

Results are presented in the percentage of responses indicating “agree” or “strongly agree”, and the balance of answers were “neutral”, “disagree”, or “strongly disagree”.
92% of participants said that the Camp America program was one of the most meaningful experiences of their lives.
Participants said Camp America was one of the most meaningful experiences of their lives.
Responses by Country

- **United Kingdom**: 51% of total responses (5819 total responses)
- **Sweden**: 1% of total responses (124 total responses)
- **France**: 1% of total responses (106 total responses)
- **Germany**: 5% of total responses (600 total responses)
- **Czech Republic**: 1% of total responses (126 total responses)
12% Poland
Total Responses 1332

2% Russia
Total Responses 237

2% Ukraine
Total Responses 245

7% New Zealand
Total Responses 785

9% Australia
Total Responses 1012

Total Responses: 1332

Total Responses: 237

Total Responses: 245

Total Responses: 785

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Legislative Goals and the U.S. Summer Camp Experience

Broadly speaking, the goals of the Fulbright-Hays act are to increase mutual understanding, strengthen ties between the U.S. and other nations, promote international cooperation for education and cultural advancement and assist in developing peaceful relations between the U.S. and other countries.

Camp counselor exchanges such as Camp America provide summer camp support and leadership experiences for international exchange visitors.

*What better environment exists in U.S. culture to further these legislative goals?*

Summer camps are settings designed to provide countless opportunities for growth in a variety of human endeavors in a uniquely personal way. They are microcosmic environments carefully planned to further personal development, diversify perspectives, teach transferable skills and intensify the process of human discovery. They accomplish their objectives through close personal interaction with peers, role models and leaders in a social context, resulting in strong bonds and long-lasting relationships. There are few more robust vehicles that fit the spirit of the exchange visitor program more than an experience at a U.S. summer camp. For example, consider values of the American Camp Association (ACA):

“…to share our knowledge and experience, and to ensure the quality of camp programs… Just as our membership is diverse and our programs are distinct, so are the children and adults who come to us to participate in the camp experience.….As an organization we value the world, the people who live in it, and the contribution each individual can make. These are not separate values, but concentric circles.”

The ACA publication entitled *Directions: Youth Development Outcomes of the Camp Experience* looked at outcomes through the lenses of Positive Identity, Social Skills, Physical & Thinking Skills and Positive Values & Spirituality. Parents, staff and children reported significant growth in all of these areas specifically through the power of the summer camp experience. The organized summer camp industry provides ongoing professional opportunities for directors to promote innovation, best practices, creativity and safety, as well as to ensure a dynamic environment in which to grow and learn.
The legislative goals that the United States Department of State is charged to uphold are uniquely congruent to those of the summer camp community. It is safe to conclude that sound J-1 experiences at U.S. summer camp, with all the regulatory compliance and preparatory safeguards in place, are in exemplary adherence to the legislative intent that made them possible.

“Working at a summer camp in America is one of the most challenging yet rewarding things I feel anyone can do. It opens your eyes to the real America… the America that you don’t see in the media… the local people getting on with their normal day to day activities… the children learning, growing and developing in a world that at times can be so harsh and cruel. You realise that the American people are not the Americans that are portrayed so badly in the world media but just normal everyday people working for a better future for their children! And being a camp counselor they put their trust in you to look after their most prized possession, their children. Working so closely with the children has made such an impact on my life that no matter where I am in the world my home will always be camp.”

Christopher, UK, 2013
The Value of Our Endeavor

From Sir Alec Reed

“As the founder of one of the biggest employment agencies in the UK, I would highly recommend taking part in the Camp America programme. It’s a great way to build confidence, learn new skills, and most importantly, make your CV stand out when applying for a job.”

Professor Alec Reed, Founder, Reed Specialist Recruitment
Since Alec Reed founded the company REED in 1960. It has grown into one of the UK’s largest private businesses with more than 3,000 co-members both in the UK and internationally in Europe, the Middle East and Asia Pacific.

From David Hempleman-Adams

“The three happy summers I spent with Camp America as a student taught me many things, including how to take responsibility for one’s life and to get on with people from different backgrounds. These qualities proved invaluable in my career as an explorer and mountaineer.”

David Hempleman-Adams, British industrialist and adventurer
Mr. Hempleman-Adams was the first person to walk to both the North and South magnetic and geographic Poles and has climbed the highest mountains on all seven continents.
Real human understanding does not grow without authentic unscripted personal contact.

Rodger Popkin, Camp Owner/Director (Retired)
Blue Star Camps, Hendersonville, North Carolina
From Rodger Popkin

I am a recently retired (2012) camp owner and director who worked with Camp America and other cultural exchange agencies since 1971. Always active in most camp issues I was, among other professional engagements, an elected member of the American Camp Association’s National Board for ten years and served a three year term as its elected National President.

For the purposes of a status review regarding the value of J-1 exchange programs, I should state that my camp has employed between 4000–4500 international staff members over those forty years. All of these J-1 staff were arranged through the several agencies approved by the U.S. State Department.

I will not pretend that I am capable of or attempting a comprehensive review in my observations, but I will comment on the conclusions drawn from my decades of personal experience. These conclusions apply to both Camp Counselor and Campower participants because I have witnessed that the cultural exchange value is, if not identical, very similar for all the participants.

I am confident that I can provide a useful long term perspective on the value of J-1 programs in American summer camps. My experience was predominantly with the Camp Counselor and Campower cultural exchange programs. I think it is critical that any program that promotes personal interactions that create understanding, especially for the young, is worth preserving and cultivating. I will state that in my camp, almost all participants on all sides of the cultural exchange J-1 programs had good experiences.

A “good experience” does not automatically mean a happy one. Rather it means, in this context, an experience that serves as a powerful catalyst for the understanding and appreciation of lives and cultures different from one’s own.

As a camp owner and director, my reason for participating in J-1 programs was and continues to be multi-faceted. At the beginning there was very little prospect for international youth to gain a personal experiential understanding of the United States and Americans before the J-1 program era. Even today, with the explosive potential for worldwide personal contact, there is no better or simpler mechanism for providing personal experiences with people from other cultures than a summer J-1 program.

The abundant need for these J-1 programs only grows. We must recognize that they do not have an expiration date. Real human understanding does not grow without authentic unscripted personal contact. Without that critical element people can only make judgments based on bias, prejudice and ignorance. It is absolutely clear to me that the J-1 program platform is a hopeful and practical effort for the transmission of mutual understanding.

It is important to recall and acknowledge that American children did not have opportunities to meet personally, much less live with, young leaders from other countries. At the start of the J-1 era, there
was no guarantee of success. It was a gamble that we, as camp people, were prepared to make because we believed personal connections made in a camp environment would have lasting value in expanding and developing true international understanding. It appeared to us that living successfully in a high quality, professionally operated camp would enhance the common human bonds needed for a more peaceful life on our planet.

While that may sound a little too idealistic for our current era, it is important while evaluating these programs to focus on the fact that they work beautifully in practice. International staff have the opportunity to live with Americans while campers and American staff learn about the lives and cultures of the international staff. Our camp now has a second generation of participants whose parents were staff years ago. There are also successful marriages that are producing current campers.

The relationships between peers have extended well beyond the summers they spent together at camp. The “real world” for those participants is, in fact, through the personal knowledge gained at camp, simpler and more easily understood.

My forty years of experience makes it crystal clear to me that the creation of positive attitudes by non-Americans about actual Americans would not be as effective as a U.S. Government program even if today’s taxpayers were willing to make the attempt. It is only the natural evolution of personal relationships into personal beliefs that result in this desired outcome. It is a very inexpensive price for Americans to pay for the creation of so much lasting good will. The cost of monitoring of the J-1 agencies is more than worth the price to enable these profound outcomes.

I have reviewed the survey documents received from participants that Camp America provided, and those results align with my view of the overwhelming success of these J-1 programs. Are the programs perfect? Probably not, but they are supported by professionals committed to the larger goals of international understanding. When mistakes are made, they are corrected. Keeping in mind that these international participants do not take American jobs, and there are no tax benefits offered to camps for participating in J-1 programs, there are no reasonable obstacles for renewal. I suggest the world can only become a better place through the types of experience that are the core of the J-1 programs.

I am happy to discuss my conclusions should you wish.

Rodger Popkin
Camp Owner/ Director (Retired)
Blue Star Camps
Hendersonville, North Carolina
I will always remember how fast we changed from strangers to family.

Delphine, France, 2013
Hear from Our Participants

On Gaining a Global Perspective...

“...It was great to learn about the American way of life and watch INDIVIDUALS from all around the world work together and CONNECT.”

Christopher, Australia, 2009

“I went to a place I believe is the best camp in the world…it CHANGED MY LIFE…Camp Augusta in Nevada City, CA…Never have I met before such inspirational, nurturing, caring, compassionate and loving people. I made FRIENDS for life and memories I will CHERISH FOREVER!”

Mallory, Australia, 2013

“It would be impossible to simply ‘sum up’ my Camp America Experience. I was put in new and challenging situations every single day, the work was not always glorious, in fact most of the time it wasn’t. It was the toughest and hardest job I have ever done, and this was exactly what our camp director told us on day one of Orientation. But it was the BEST JOB I’VE EVER HAD. I made friendships with people who are now my best friends, I got to act silly with kids 24/7, I got to RELIVE MY CHILDHOOD, WHILE ALSO BEING THE RESPONSIBLE ADULT. I feel that now I’m a more well-rounded person...all my friends have said I’ve come back and AMERICA HAS DONE SOMETHING TO ME - SOMETHING GOOD. It’s almost too hard to explain the exact effect it has on you, I just see things differently. People always say it’s the best summer of your life. You never really believe them until it’s happened to you! Camp was something I needed to do, and experience. And now that I have, I just want to do it every summer!”

Sarah, Australia, 2013

“It was a wonderful experience, meeting new people and LEARNING MORE ABOUT MYSELF WITHOUT THE CONSTRAINTS OF HOW PEOPLE PERCEIVED ME AT HOME. It was like a clean slate, and whether I warmed to someone or didn’t, or if they warmed to me or didn’t, didn’t illicit a personal reaction. It allowed me to own who I was and what I looked for in others… The biggest thing I noticed about the American kids was their POSITIVE OUTLOOK ON LIFE, the energy they radiated and the camaraderie they portrayed with their peers. Singing songs and chants were all new to me… it was like a brotherhood, where support and encouragement came at no price. CAMP AFFECTED MY ATTITUDE AND OUTLOOK ON LIFE IN SUCH A POSITIVE WAY. The diversity of people, the activities, and the new experiences had the biggest impact on my life and no doubt molded me into the person I am today.”

Jason, Australia, 2006
“Before I went to the states I actually thought Americans were rude people, until I went there, and learnt that they are actually the nicest, friendliest people I have ever met!”

Bernadette, Australia, 2010

“There was the shock of ‘they send their kids away for the whole summer??...!! How cruel!!!… from family and friends…. RETURNING, I KNOW AMERICAN PEOPLE ARE OPEN, HONEST, WELL ROUNDED AND ACCEPTING PEOPLE WITH A LOT OF GUTS, RESPECT AND DETERMINATION to understand their places in the world, their communities and in their social circles. Kids that have the opportunity to go to camp are enriched with the ability to grow into themselves as cultured, sophisticated human beings whilst allowing them the pleasures of childhood.

How skewed a thought to think these children’s parents are cruel and thoughtless to send their kids away for all of this! Seems like a pretty smart and well thought out plan to me!”

Catherine, Australia, 2012

“Eye-opening and amazing experience. …SHATTERS STEREOTYPES OF AMERICA AND AMERICANS….. Extremely diverse culture….Very outgoing and friendly people!”

Sean, Australia, 2013

“Camp is one of those things...You embrace everything about it, it is a community, and everyone there is there to support you. The friendships and the memories that I made at camp will be with me forever and are now a huge part of who I am! YOU NEVER EXPECT 3 MONTHS OF YOUR LIFE TO MAKE SUCH AN IMPACT- BUT IT DOES, your camp family is your second family… it is a bond that can’t be broken. Camp inspired me to continue working with kids, I now run group mentoring sessions for 12-14 year old girls and work towards preventing youth suicide- camp makes you love life so much, I now use that energy and skills in my life ever day! Camp is simply the best!!”

Michaela, Canada, 2012

“This experience has made me a better person. I LEARNED HOW TO DO MEANINGFUL WORK FOR KIDS WHO NEED IT, AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THEIR LIVES. I have also realized how important it is to be open towards other cultures and traditions, and to respect and learn about them. After all, not only I have made differences for the kids, Camp itself including all the people there have made one of the biggest differences in my life and I am incredibly thankful for that…”

Toja, Switzerland, 2013
“I loved being at a YMCA camp in Minnesota, they reached out to kids and taught them life lessons and how to be a part of a community.”

Elise, Australia, 2009

“This probably sounds like the typical cliché, but I wanted to travel to America to learn about culture and to improve my English…For the first week I didn’t say a single word to anybody – I was very shy and was afraid that my English was not good enough – I was clueless and hadn’t found my footing. I quickly found my place at camp and realized after a while that I was in the middle of a life changing experience. I never thought that I would see and try so many things in one summer, meet so many great staff members and campers that turned into great friendships. I ONLY PLANNED TO GO TO CAMP FOR ONE SUMMER, BUT I ENDED UP WORKING THERE FOR FIVE YEARS. One reason why I kept coming back was because of the great children. The bond you make with them is unbelievable – especially the boys at my table. I have followed them since their first summer and it is amazing to see how much they have grown each new year….Moments that I always cherish with my table, sharing all the wonderful stories of camp experiences and how camp has shaped our lives…. I network with people from all over America and the world. I have experienced so many things and every time I think of it, I remember THOSE THINGS WOULD NOT HAVE HAPPENED IF IT HAD NOT BEEN FOR CAMP…”

Stine, Denmark, 2012

“I met extraordinary people of every age (from 8 years old to 83 years old) through those summers, creating true lifetime friendships in an awesome place. IT CHANGED MY VISION OF THE USA AND ITS PEOPLE.

“This experience DEVELOPED MY PERSONAL SKILLS IN MANY WAYS: responsibility, adaptability, language, leadership, an open mind…I will never forget those summers, that land, those people, that camp…”

Cedric, France, 2013

“I will always remember how fast WE CHANGED FROM STRANGERS TO FAMILY.”

Delphine, France, 2013

“I had little knowledge of the American people and only had information from news, TV and film! I had no knowledge of family life until I stayed with several friends after camp finished and experienced the real America. NOT JUST WHAT YOU GET FROM THE HOLIDAY EXPERIENCE BUT DEEPER THAN THAT!”

Shaun, UK, 2009
“It was an interesting journey of my life in terms of experiencing a new culture, making friends, learning to be humble, bridging the knowledge gap. I have learned an important lesson of my life i.e. MISUNDERSTANDINGS EXIST AS LONG AS YOU KEEP YOURSELF AWAY FROM KNOWING THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY.”

Shahzeb, India, 2008

“Upon completion of medical school, I had the opportunity to travel to Missouri to participate in a summer camp for individuals with special needs. While I was there, I PERCEIVED A BEAUTIFUL EXAMPLE OF HOW HUMANS HELP EACH OTHER, how kind Americans are, and how far America exceeds other parts of the world in terms of development and technology.”

Sa’ed, Jordan, 2011

“Being responsible for children is something you take with you the rest of your life. Being able to learn about other cultures and learning to know new people, broadens your horizon. It won’t be coincidence that a few years after Camp America, I knew what I wanted to study; teaching on a elementary school. Now, I’m a senior teacher on an elementary school in the Netherlands. I’ve told all ‘my children’ about camp in the US and spread my experience and enthusiasm through them.”

Joost, Netherlands, 2000

“Being in a state like Iowa in a very small town it was incredible to experience a totally different part of America to what you typically expect. The people were so kind and gave so much to the community. And IT WAS FASCINATING TO TALK TO MANY PEOPLE THAT HAD NEVER BEEN OUT OF THE MIDWEST let alone the country.”

Penny, New Zealand, 2010

“Camp was an astounding way to meet friends, DEVELOP CULTURAL AWARENESS, not only of the United States, but also the 17 OTHER INTERNATIONAL ETHNICITIES ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAFF. Teaching children at camp lit a fire in me to want to develop professionally and to become even better at teaching children…”

Pamela, New Zealand, 2008

“Camp was an amazing experience and being able to interact with so many different people from so many different walks of life with so many different values, beliefs and world views was AN INCREDIBLE AND HUMBLING EXPERIENCE. The friends I have made at camp will last a lifetime.”

Michael, New Zealand, 2013
“I learned what the true freedom is. I learned that if you live an honest life there is nothing to be afraid of. I learned that I have many rights as a human being and that I can protect my rights. I had an opportunity to see the ordinary life of American people. I met many really good people who helped me in many ways and we are still friends to this day... I saw how people of diverse cultures and origin can LIVE SIDE BY SIDE AND RESPECT EACH OTHER. I was lucky to see the great beauty of this country... both nature and cities. I am really happy that I participated in this program. It means a lot to me.”

Ekaterina, Russia, 2001

“Before camp I really didn’t like the American people....I don’t know why... But after I work with Americans and with people from other nations it was a perfect experience for me. I had many friends, and after all now I like Americans. My ways of thinking are changed. NOW I HAVE POSITIVE IMPRESSIONS WITH ALL NATIONS.”

Ugur, Turkey, 2003

“That summer was definitely the best summer in my life - I got to know so many people, made lotsa friends, with whom I still keep in touch and even visit in their home countries! It’s in the US that I learned more about diversity, tolerance and even patience. It’s vitally important for people from Eastern Europe, where being different is not a good characteristic. After visiting the US and working with different people, I LEARNED TO ACCEPT DIVERSITY IN PEOPLE, WHICH MADE ME A BETTER PERSON. Apart from all the fun and learning and absorbing new information and notions, thanks to Camp America you’ll be able to get to know American culture and people better. It’s priceless knowledge you won’t get anywhere else! Of course, you’ll bring some diversity into the country as well - cultural exchange is important. It gives you broader outlook and you become more tolerant, flexible. I strongly believe that each student outside the US simply must apply for participating on Camp America, because it changes people’s lives for better!”

Diana, Ukraine, 2007

“I see my Camp America experience as a beautiful gift I never even expected to receive. I learnt so much, I’VE TALKED AND MADE FRIENDS WITH PEOPLE FROM EVERYWHERE. My world grew so much bigger. And yes, I do love Americans I met for being absolutely deprived of any prejudice, for being friendly and open minded.”

Joanna, Poland, 2005

“My experiences gave me a broader understanding of American society than before I took part on the programme. MY EXPERIENCE HAS NURTURED RESPECT FOR DIVERSE ENVIRONMENTS which helps me to interact effectively and positively when confronted with cross-cultural differences. My participation was a compelling and meaningful life experience. After visiting many countries I still think that it was the best adventure of my life.”

Karolina, Poland, 2007
“While participating I developed my inter-personal skills, my ability to interact with people from different countries, broaden my world outlook, developed language skills and I understood that I can be a good worker! This is a short list of things that I gained working in the American camp. I experienced American way of life and learned such a wonderful thing as a sense of unity and responsibility for people who surround you. I was so lucky to meet really outstanding Americans who helped me all the way! They were sincere with their desire to learn about me, about my country and to share with me their knowledge. The staff helps young people like me discover America and realize life time dreams! AS I'M A FUTURE TEACHER OF ENGLISH, MY AMERICAN EXPERIENCE WILL ANSWER A LOT OF QUESTIONS OF MY FUTURE STUDENTS...”

Yevhen, Ukraine, 2013

On Mutual Understanding...

“The Americans that I met were great people. I was also ABLE TO WORK WITH PEOPLE FROM ALL AROUND THE WORLD which was amazing. I made friends for life.”

Richard, UK, 2001
“Although I have been working with school kids before, working with American child gave me MORE TO UNDERSTAND CULTURE OF AMERICANS...QUITE DIFFERENT FROM AFRICAN.”

Shikomba, Zambia, 2006

“I had a brilliant time in America, it HAS GIVEN ME A BROADER UNDERSTANDING OF AMERICANS AND THE USA. I have met some wonderful people… I still keep in contact. What an awesome summer!”

Jemma, UK, 2008

“Exchange programs are crucial for the Ukraine-United States relations for two reasons. The first one: Americans think that stable personal contacts are the best basis for the development of relations between the countries. The second one, over the past half a century the world has become a much more united politically as well as economically. And SUCH EXCHANGE PROGRAMS ARE THE BASIS OF MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING IN THIS NEW WORLD.”

Nadia, Ukraine, 2011

“Through the program, I was able to EXPERIENCE THE WAY AMERICANS CONDUCT THEIR BUSINESS and culturally understand how they relate and associate with one another.”

Daniel, Australia, 2007

“I used to find it difficult to believe that so many Americans hadn’t ever been on holiday outside of America… but now that I’ve seen a number of places myself, I UNDERSTAND HOW VAST THE COUNTRY IS AND HOW THERE ARE LIMITLESS PLACES TO EXPLORE.”

Amandeep, UK, 2008

“It was lifetime trip… I benefitted a lot from visiting many wonderful places in the United States, as well as discovering the refined style of dealing by the Americans with foreigners. The participation of many people from all continents enriched my experience and increased knowledge of cultures and beliefs. NOW I KNOW HOW TO TALK TO PEOPLE DESPITE THEIR ORIGIN OR BACKGROUND.”

Majdee, Jordan, 2008

“MY ENTIRE ATTITUDE TO THE COUNTRY AND THEIR PEOPLE HAS CHANGED… love Americans now.”

Thomas, UK, 2013

“The stereotypes for Americans were primarily negative in Australia…, going there, meeting Californians and BEING INVOLVED IN CAMP AMERICA RESHAPED THOSE STEREOTYPES…”

Kiera O’Neill, Australia 2006

“My interactions with Americans during my stay and they’re willingness to be my friend, changed my life...Camp America and THE CONNECTIONS I MADE HAVE SIGNIFICANTLY CONTRIBUTED TO WHO I AM TODAY.”

Dionne, UK, 2004

“I was the only person at camp whose English wasn’t the first language. IT WAS GREAT TO BE ABLE TO ANSWER ALL KIDS’ QUESTIONS ABOUT MY HOME COUNTRY and an amazing feeling when campers sang songs with Polish words I taught them! Overall experience -amazing! Time of my life filled with fun and adventure! I am still in contact with my Americans and English camp friends! I’d love to do this again!”

Kamila, Poland, 2011
“Not only did I get A BETTER APPRECIATION OF AMERICAN LIFE I think those Americans who I worked with received some got some understanding as to how the world perceives them.”

Nathan, Australia, 2006

“It was an experience I will never forget. I LEARNED SO MUCH IN THE USA…. not just for work but also how Americans live… how to work in a completely different environment and most of all learn more about myself.”

Colm, UK, 2013

“Awesome people and culture, great country for sightseeing also for living probably…. I BECAME MUCH MORE FLUENT IN ENGLISH THAN BEFORE…. Great contacts with other travellers and Americans…. How has it impacted my life? I am much more positive person right now, I wanna travel much more than before and definitely I am way more tolerant and self-confident.”

Tomasz, Poland, 2013

“I went over there with an idea of Americans and how they would act with the stereotype of Americans being “self-centred”… But once you realise THAT THESE PARENTS AND CHILDREN BASICALLY COME TO CAMP TO LEARN MORE ABOUT STAFF WHO ARE FOREIGN, to gain an understanding about us, but also for us to get to know real life Americans and how they aren’t at all anything like what you would expect them to be. This may just be my camp, but I have never felt such a strong respect for the people, especially Americans who I met whilst away, both times!”

Kate, Australia, 2013
On Personal Development and Employability...

“I became more self-confident than I have ever been. I strongly improved my English, love using it, especially talking to native speakers. I had a chance to find out new things about myself, e.g. how I react in new situations...if I’m spontaneous..., if I can cooperate with people who are not the easiest to cooperate with :) ...I love working with Americans, so after camp I became an assistant in summer school programs for people who come to Poland to learn Polish (most of them were from the U.S). Also I’m at the university and I’M STUDYING TO BE A TEACHER OF POLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE. I think I WOULDN'T HAVE THOUGHT ABOUT THAT IF I HADN'T GONE TO CAMP to have the best adventure in my life.”

Linda, Poland, 2010

“It’s really difficult to put into words the amount that participating in the Camp America programme has impacted on my life in the years since. It was a hugely positive experience for me and I SERIOUSLY DOUBT THAT I WOULD HAVE HAD THE CONFIDENCE TO PURSUE A CAREER IN MY CURRENT LINE OF WORK IF IT WASN’T FOR THE EXPERIENCES AND SUPPORT THAT I WAS GIVEN WHILST WORKING AT CAMP. It’s been five years now since I worked there and I still look back on my two summers in America as the happiest times of my life...my only regret is not going back since.”

Robert, UK, 2008

“The experiences have a very strong affect on how I look at the world after I returned to home. I AM MORE OPEN-MINDED, TOLERATING AND ACCEPTING OF OTHER PEOPLE, OTHER CULTURES. Also, because I actually learnt English during the program, it gave me more opportunities in my career. I work in the Pharmaceutical American Company, and working people from other countries. So I would say this was a HUGE Lifetime Experiences I got from participation in the programs.”

Csongor, Hungary, 2001

“It was one of the best things I ever did. IT BROUGHT ME OUT MY SHELL AND DEVELOPED MY PEOPLE SKILLS TO LEVELS I DIDN’T THINK WERE POSSIBLE. It has helped me make friends at Uni and gave me the confidence to push myself further and leave my comfort zone more. Camp has also helped with my career prospects both by boosting my CV and giving me more confidence in interviews. I would recommend it to anyone.”

James, UK, 2012
“8 weeks of summer camp had a bigger impact on my personal growth than 3 years of University. Now living and working full time at the camp I joined 7 years ago, MY LIFE CONTINUES TO FEEL THE POSITIVE RIPPLES OF MY DECISION TO TAKE A CHANCE ON A SUMMER ADVENTURE.”

Nicholas, UK, 2007

“Camp America is the best thing I could ever have done during my young adult life. It set me up for the future and every day I think about my summers at camp. I am now happily working as a primary school teacher, and MANY OF THE SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL THINGS I LEARNT AS A CAMP COUNSELLOR HAVE BEEN BROUGHT INTO MY SCHOOL AND MADE ME THE CONFIDENT PERSON I AM TODAY. I couldn’t recommend the program highly enough!!!”

Catherine, UK, 2009

“I consider my experience of Camp America to be ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT, FUN, AND LIFE-CHANGING OF MY LIFE. The three months spent at Camp TAUGHT ME VALUABLE SKILLS SUCH AS TEAM WORK, PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING ACTIVITIES, MANAGING GROUPS OF PEOPLE, THINKING ON MY FEET, IMPROVISING, AND PROBLEM SOLVING. It also promoted cultural awareness, courtesy and consideration of others, how to become an effective leader, and how to get along with people of all ages, all the time. I often say Camp is the coolest thing I’ve ever done, and I only have fond and happy memories.”

Alannah, New Zealand, 2009

“Camp America changed my field of my career. Before Camp America I was determined to work with children, after I went to camp I fall in love working with people with learning and physical disabilities, and this passion is still motivating and inspiring me even 10 years later. I have also DEVELOPED LEADERSHIP SKILLS THAT HELP ME A LOT IN MY JOB PROGRESSION, and of course a massive improvement in my English language. I gained a lot of life lasting friends, and very proud to have had an opportunity to work with people from all over the world.”

Mariya, Ukraine, 2004
“It was a fantastic experience. **IT GAVE ME CONFIDENCE TO TRY NEW THINGS AND IT CONFIRMED TO ME THAT I WANTED TO PURSUE A TEACHING CAREER.** ESF changed my life personally and professionally and I know I would not be where I am today (teaching in Dubai) if it weren’t for Camp America. It builds friendships, relationships and professional connections that stay with you for a lifetime. Thank you Camp America!”

Angela, UK, 2012

“My Camp trip was one of the most exciting and important things which I made in my life. **IT HAD A BIG IMPACT FOR A REST OF MY LIFE**...showed me which way go with my career and future. **TODAY I WORK IN AN INTERNATIONAL COMPANY, TRAVELLING AROUND THE WORLD.** I have contacts in work with people from other countries and cultures. My career is going forward with speed. My camp adventure was the best part of my life...Best regards Christopher in this moment in Brasil.”

Krzysztof, Poland, 2008

“This was one of the best summers of my life! I **CHANGED MY DEGREE PATHWAY WHILST SITTING ON THE STEPS OF A CABIN TALKING TO MY FELLOW COUNSELLORS.** I decided to become a teacher. I am now in my 7th year of a successful teaching career, which I love. I doubt I would be in this position without my experiences from Camp America. I've recommended the programme to several students, who have all gone on to participate in the Camp programme and enjoyed it. Thanks!!”

Anna, UK, 2003
References


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AIFS Vision, Mission and Values

Vision
We bring the world together

Mission
To provide the highest quality educational and cultural exchange programs to enrich the lives of young people throughout the world.

Values
Excellence in programs, operations, people
Respect and understanding of different cultures
Exceptional caring support for our program participants to ensure their safety and well being
Honest, equitable and non-discriminatory treatment of program participants, partners and employees
Technological innovation
Teamwork and collaboration both within the organization and with partners
Encouragement of employee initiative and professional development
Responsible financial stewardship