

American Camp Association (ACA) Youth Impact Study – Oversample for SeriousFun

Approved External Messaging

Prepared by: Ann Gillard, Blake Maher, and Tara Fisher

Date: February 13, 2019

Short-form Messaging

- A 2018 study carried out by The American Camp Association (ACA) and the University of Utah showed that alumni campers (aged 18-25) from eight (8) SeriousFun Children's Network (SeriousFun) camps experienced a number of beneficial outcomes from camp that they now consider useful in their daily, adult lives. The most prominent of those outcomes were appreciation for diversity, living in the moment, empathy and compassion, perseverance, self-confidence, and self-identity.
- Alumni campers conveyed that they learned these outcomes primarily at camp, compared to other environments like home or school. For them, camp was a unique experience that allowed them to develop these outcomes in a supportive and encouraging environment.
- Alumni campers also responded that the aspect of camp that most supported the development of these outcomes was the people. Camp leaders, staff, and volunteers were the people who created the environment in which campers' positive experiences and outcomes thrived.

Study Description

- In 2018, The American Camp Association (ACA) and the University of Utah carried out a Youth Impact Study to understand former campers' long-term learning outcomes from summer camp. In addition, ACA and the University of Utah worked with SeriousFun to survey participants who had attended SeriousFun camps to better understand how the outcomes of the broader study related to respondents who had attended a SeriousFun camp serving children living with serious illnesses.
 - Respondents were from eight SeriousFun camps across the United States, Hungary, and Ireland.
- Participants in this study were 195 individuals aged 18-25 who attended a SeriousFun camp growing up. Affiliated with a SeriousFun camp, they were either first-year staff intending to work as a counselor the upcoming summer or camper alumni. The average age of participants was 20. They were 55% female, 44% male, and 1% gender non-conforming. Respondents identified predominantly as white and completed some college credit. All participants had no previous work experience as counselors and were reporting on their experiences as former campers.

- The questionnaire included four sections: 1) a ten-point scale that measured the role summer camp had on developing 18 outcomes, 2) a ten-point scale that measured the importance of these 18 learning outcomes in participants' daily life, 3) the primary setting participants developed these 18 learning outcomes, and 4) open-ended questions.

Key Outcome Messaging

1. **Outcomes:** The outcomes most distinctly learned at a SeriousFun camp that were also considered most useful in daily life included: appreciation for diversity, living in the moment, empathy and compassion, perseverance, self-confidence, and self-identity.
 - Descriptions of these learning outcomes are as follows:
 - Diversity – Appreciation for different people and perspectives
 - Living in the moment – Appreciation for being present in the moment
 - Empathy and compassion – Ability to empathize with others
 - Perseverance – Ability to persevere in the face of challenges
 - Self-confidence – Confidence in abilities to be successful
 - Self-identity – Understanding of who I am and how I want to live my life
 - These six (6) are of importance because compared to the other 12 outcomes measured in the study, these were distinct outcomes from camp that respondents also considered to be the most useful in their daily lives.
 - Compared to two national samples, alumni campers from the SeriousFun sample reported greater development for all learning outcomes at camp.
2. **Development of Interpersonal Skills:** The outcomes from camp considered most valuable by the respondents themselves were related to social development (e.g., relationship skills, teamwork, and friendship).
3. **Critical Role of Camp:** These outcomes were primarily learned at camp compared to other non-camp settings (e.g., school or home).
 - Why is this important for SeriousFun campers? SeriousFun camps offer children living with serious illnesses a novel experience compared to other contexts (e.g., home or school) in which they can interact in a medically-supported environment with other young people living with similar illnesses. Doing so encourages children to explore who they are within an environment in which their medical condition is not a differentiating factor.
4. **Critical Role of People:** The program elements at camp that supported the development of these outcomes were predominantly people (staff and peers).
 - Examples of the role of people in supporting the development of these outcomes can include:
 - Trained, committed adults at camp create the environment for campers to thrive.
 - Camper peers provide a sense of belonging and understanding.
 - This social environment helps ensure campers feel safe environmentally, psychosocially, and medically to be present in the experience.

5. **Other outcomes:**

- **Impact of Leadership Training:** Compared to alumni who were not counselors-in-training (CITs), alumni who attended CIT programs reported greater development for career orientation, self-identity, self-confidence, and leadership.
- **Multiple Doses of Camp:** Alumni who attended SeriousFun camps for four (4) or more sessions reported greater development of many outcomes compared to those who went to camp for three (3) weeks or less. Caution should be taken in interpreting this finding as more research on repeated camp experiences is needed.

How this Messaging Should Be Used

- The outcomes and messaging from this study can and should be used to communicate and explain:
 - The longer-term impact of the SeriousFun camp experience on children living with serious illnesses.
 - Evidence of the worth of camp for supporters such as camper alumni, parents and caregivers, volunteers, funders, and other communities.
 - This is not meant to replace or serve as an update to the results of the Outcomes Evaluation done by Yale Child Study Center (2014-2015).
 - The data from the study should be properly referenced:
 - Youth Impact Study: SeriousFun Children's Network Oversample conducted by the American Camp Association and the University of Utah
 - If needed, the appropriate reference is: *SeriousFun Children's Network. (2019). American Camp Association (ACA) Youth Impact Study – Oversample for SeriousFun. Westport, CT.*