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## The importance of summer camps

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By **Maria Garcia**

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With summer just around the corner, children in our community will be spending the summer months attending day camps and overnight camps across the city. Summer camps are essential for guardians who work full-time and require childcare when their kids are off school. However, summer camps are not only a child-care alternative for the summer months, they are also vital in the social development and skill-building of both its campers and staff.

Local York University student, Diana Boa explains her experience, “I had a very positive experience at camp, notably StepStones for Youth Summer Camp, it was one of the things I found myself looking forward to the most. I believe that it gave me lasting memories that I will always carry with me... there I learned a lot. I became more of a team player and more aware of my team spirit with the different cheers and team building activities. But most importantly, StepStones Camp made me aware of how and why we should respect the land we live on, it taught me to embrace nature at a young age.”

Summer camps not only expose youth to different and new activities from those in the classroom, it also allows for a structured opportunity for them to learn and grow. Overnight camps allow children to feel more independent and ultimately instill a sense of self-confidence through various skill building activities like canoeing, swimming, learning to build a campfire all while socializing and creating lasting friendships. It also provides a mental break from academics and ultimately a gateway to new experiences.

Diana explains why summer camp was important to her, “coming from a city like Toronto there are not (in my experience) a lot of possibilities of experiencing that authentic outdoors atmosphere. Also, in my case being in a situation where my family dynamic was unfavourable at the time, it really gave me the chance to get away from that and experience things that I would have never had the to do like canoeing, there was no lakes in Scarborough, where I grew up, for me to do that.”

Overnight camps allow for youth growing up in urban settings to connect with the outdoors and the spaces our province has to offer. On the other hand, city-based camps allow campers to experience all the great spaces our city has to offer while remaining active and encouraged to be creative through arts and crafts projects.

Both campers and staff benefit from summer camps. Although I never attended camp as a child, I did work at an overnight camp for over 7 years. There, I found a passion for working with youth and the importance of community. I learned about social justice, emotional intelligence, and being conscious of how my everyday choices affect our environment. To this day, some of my fondest memories and closest friendships were made at camp.

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The weather is getting warmer and our contributor Maria Garcia writes about the importance of summer camp:

"With summer just around the corner, children in our community will be spending the summer months attending day camps and overnight camps across the city. Summer camps are essential for guardians who work full-time and require childcare when their kids are off school."



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