



Building Leaders Through Summer Fun

Live Oak Wilderness Camp

By the time it received an Impact 100 grant, Live Oak had a large contingent of loyal campers — last year, 85% of past campers returned to the cluster of cabins for 10-day sessions in Wiggins, Mississippi, said Jack Carey, 36, who co-founded the camp with a team of educators four years ago. The team's vision reflects their work with New Orleans students — Carey himself spent a decade working at KIPP New Orleans and Teach For America — along with a dose of environmental studies, which Carey studied in college.

Some might liken Live Oak to an “Aspen Institute for children.” Carey likes the ambitious comparison, but he has a less-lofty description of the camp's origins. “We set out to get a group of future leaders of New Orleans together when they were kids,” Carey said. “Summer camp seemed a unique new way that could happen for outstanding New Orleans kids.”

Though Live Oak is generally open to all high-performing New Orleans students ages 9 to 15, not every camper follows the same path.

Some campers apply on their own along with the required recommendation from a principal or teacher. Other campers are nominated by their school's staff. That was how Amiyah Bernal was recruited, during her sixth-grade year at Mildred Osborne School in New Orleans East. Amiyah was ecstatic about the concept from the start. “I always wanted to go to sleepaway camp, ever since I watched the movie *Parent Trap*,” she said.

Though she was a little scared and homesick at first, she soon fell in love with the lake, trees, and sunset. She found that she liked having conversations uninterrupted by cell-phone messaging. She liked the counselor to camper ratio, which gets no bigger than

The Impact of Your Support

The Impact 100 grant gave more children the opportunity to be part of Live Oak. Thanks to the grant, the camp accelerated its growth in enrollment from a few years ago, when it served 120 children from 36 New Orleans schools. This summer, the camp has more than doubled that, enrolling 300 students from 70 local public, private, parochial, and independent schools.

The Impact grant also allowed the camp to continue as a racially and economically diverse experience. Some students pay Live Oak's \$1,700 tuition in full. About half could not attend without a generous scholarship. Typically, for each scholarship camper, the child's family pays \$125; the school pays \$500 and Live Oak raises \$1,000. Because of Impact 100, the camp was able to supply more scholarships to deserving students.

With support from Impact 100, Live Oak also expanded its youth-development programming and launched a 15-month Live Oak Leadership Seminar for its oldest campers. In the seminars, these



When Amiyah Bernal was in sixth grade, her teachers identified her as an extraordinary student with the makings of a future leader. Her school helped to send her to Live Oak Wilderness Camp, a summer camp that goes beyond toasted marshmallows and games of Capture the Flag to help campers reach their full potential as New Orleans leaders.

6 to 1 and its staff, which includes many young educators hoping to build their own skills.

Through speeches at evening campfires, Amiyah also overcame her “really bad anxiety” about speaking in front of other people. “I don't think my voice shakes anymore,” she said.

It's been a transformative experience for Amiyah, now a 15-year-old student at Ben Franklin High School and a fourth-year Live Oak camper. “You step onto the bus in New Orleans and step off in Mississippi, where it's a whole new world,” she said. “I could go on for hours and hours about Live Oak.”

campers engage in experiences that mirror adult leadership-development exercises and focus on the camp's core values: bravery, kindness, and awareness. They get ongoing coaching and development from a Live Oak coach who works with them through the Seminar.

Amiyah keeps a regular journal to track her life's achievements and teachable moments. She said that the seminars are a highpoint of any week, though it's hard for her to capture in words why it's so special, she said.

From the feedback that Live Oak gets from past campers, parents, and teachers, it's clear that transformative growth has become an integral part of the Live Oak model. Thanks to Impact 100, the camp is closer to codifying the experiences that lead to that growth. “We don't have all the answers yet,” he said. “But we do have kids, adults, and team members who say, ‘This feels like something different.’”