

Catholic Charities CHANGING LIVES

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AN EASY PLACE TO BE A KID

These days, it seems most youth are happiest when they are playing video games, responding to a flurry of text messages, or being entertained by the latest movie. But are these interactions really connections? For **Jeremy**, a long-time camper at **Catholic Charities CYO Summer Camp**, true happiness involves deeper, human interaction.



Growing up in subsidized housing on Treasure Island near San Francisco was difficult. Jeremy’s mom had a history of addiction and she was not always present. Living in an environment of drugs, crime, and neglect presented many challenges, especially when exposed to so much of it at such a young age. “It was a hard place to be as a kid,” said Jeremy. “There weren’t a ton of options and it was scary sometimes.”

Jeremy was introduced to CYO Summer Camp in 2009 at age ten. “I was scared my first year at camp,” said Jeremy. “I didn’t know anyone, but another kid in my cabin encouraged me when he told me I would ‘get it’ next year, so I went back.” That second year, Jeremy met CYO Summer Camp counselor **Shawn Washington** and a long-term friendship was born. “When I met Shawn, he acted a lot like I did. He made me feel alright about being me.”

One of Jeremy’s favorite moments at Camp was at a time called “candle pass” where a group of youth pass a candle to share something meaningful with their peers. “After I shared, I passed the candle to another camper who told me how much impact I had on her life. I cried because it meant so much that someone would share that with me.”

The aspect of Camp that excites Jeremy the most is the diversity of campers. “Sometimes at school, kids like to say they are from different backgrounds, but we all feel alike. At Camp, kids really are totally different. The fact that we can all spend a week together is amazing.”

Now, at 16 years old, Jeremy plans to participate in CYO Summer Camp’s **Counselor-in-Training (CIT) program** this summer. “I definitely want to be a counselor,” said Jeremy. “What’s great about Camp is that it’s set up perfectly for different ages. Ten-year-olds can run around and play capture-the-flag, but as we get older, we can be part of ‘Soul Food’ discussions where we can talk about our experiences. One time I got to lead a discussion and we all talked about a time when we didn’t feel loved. Over that hour, it was really cool how people opened up.”

Jeremy’s face lights up when he calls CYO Summer Camp “the happiest place on earth.” When asked about how he imagines life as a counselor, Jeremy said, “I think it’s about having someone who will take the time to listen to you. That’s what I felt like when I was a younger camper—all these people really do care about me. They really do want to hear what I have to say.” Thinking about becoming a counselor, Jeremy reminisced about his own counselor and friend, Shawn Washington. “He always treated people the same—super open and loving.” ■



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Staff Profile

THE NATURE OF CHANGE

"What I've learned about nature is that there are always dynamic changes," says **Alexa Martinez**. "It's just like being a kid."

Alexa admits that she wasn't a "cool kid" growing up and that she struggled to make friends. "I didn't fit in and wondered if I ever would," said Alexa. But when her mom received a flyer about **Catholic Charities CYO Summer Camp** in 1999, Alexa's life was about to change. "When I went to Camp that summer, the counselor made me feel like someone was listening to me," she said. "I felt a sense of freedom to learn more about myself."

In 2011, Alexa was hired on staff as a **Naturalist** and is now **Site Director** at **Catholic Charities CYO Outdoor Environmental Education**. "I was so excited to be back at a place that changed my life. It was like coming home," she said. "Now I get to make every single child feel important. I smile at every one of them because I remember what that meant to me when I was a camper."

Alexa appreciates the present moments in her life now. "The holistic approach of CYO Outdoor Environmental Education weaves science with a greater understanding of a spiritual connection," she said. "That balance made me determined to become better every day, but it also reminds me that I need to have grace for others." ■



5 TIPS FOR PLANNED GIVING

Here are **five** ways **Catholic Charities' Planned Giving** program can maximize your giving, minimize your taxes and possibly create an income stream for your retirement:

1. Set up a Charitable Gift Annuity
2. Download the free Estate Planning Organizer
3. Designate a beneficiary for your IRA
4. Donate real estate
5. Donate stock

To learn more about how to take advantage of these tips and other valuable resources, visit CatholicCharitiesSF.org/PlannedGiving, or contact **Kathy Brown**, Director of Advancement, at kbrown@CatholicCharitiesSF.org or 415 972 1291.

CYO
camp



Visit us at
www.cyocamp.org
for **Summer Camp 2015**
dates and info!



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GET INVOLVED

Help us carry out our mission to support families, aging and disabled adults and youths. Here are some meaningful ways to share your time and talents as a Catholic Charities volunteer:

- Provide support to **Refugee and Immigrant Services San Francisco/San Mateo** (weekdays)
- Serve as a medical escort to seniors at **Peter Claver Community** (weekdays)
- Support a summer barbeque for families at **Star Community Home** (July 18th)

For more details about these and other volunteer opportunities, contact **Diana Contreras**, Volunteer Manager, at 415 972 1297 or volunteer@CatholicCharitiesSF.org. ■

Meaningful Connections



Reflecting on our cover story about Jeremy, I am reminded of what a great young man he is. Jeremy is positive, energetic and optimistic. He is definitely in his element at **Catholic Charities CYO Camp**. If one did not know Jeremy's whole story, it would be easy to miss that this engaged and hopeful teenager grew out of a challenging childhood.

CYO Camp is more than a physical location. CYO Camp is a natural wonderland placed in a safe and nurturing setting, where children and youth experience the world as it could be. We know that children learn more when they experience rather than merely observe. We also know that children are more apt to achieve their goals, such as graduating from high school and attending college, when they are enthused about the future. It is much easier to persevere through setbacks when one believes that things will eventually work out. Being a part of a healthy peer group, having positive adult role models, and learning through engaging with the natural world are all key components of the CYO Summer Camp experience.

Jeremy's story reminds us that we can put away the gadgets and distractions of modern life, and make real and meaningful connections with other human beings. We long to immerse ourselves in the depth that life offers; the reality of trials and triumph. Catholic Charities CYO Summer Camp offers youth the space and time to connect with the joys and struggles of their peers, the experience of their counselors, the wonders of nature, and the inherent spirit of God.

Sincerely and with gratitude,

“ Dear young people, please, don't be observers of life, but get involved. Don't be observers, but immerse yourself in the reality of life. ”

Pope Francis
Youth Prayer Vigil – Rio, Brazil

Jeff Bialik
Executive Director

THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROSITY

Thank you to all who attended the **18th Annual Loaves & Fishes Dinner and Gala** at the **St. Regis Hotel** in San Francisco on **April 18**. With nearly 300 people in attendance, the night was a big success, honoring **Kristine and Jim Silva** for their faith in action and raising over \$400,000 for **Catholic Charities Homelessness and Housing Services**. Your support provides stable housing for individuals and families as they move toward self-sufficiency. ■



Jeff Bialik with Loaves & Fishes 2015 Honorees, Kristine and Jim Silva; and Archbishop Salvatore Cordeleone.



(L-R) Esmeralda Michel; Jeff Bialik; Nancy Maldonado, client guest speaker; Noemi Loyola, and Rosa Garcia



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Sponsor a Kid to Go to Camp!

Change the lives of **150** low-income and at-risk kids this summer by making a contribution to the **2015 Catholic Charities CYO Campership Campaign** (formerly **Catholic Charities CYO Golf Day**).

Catholic Charities CYO Summer Camp provides fun and challenging adventures to youth from the Bay Area's most economically underserved areas; building character and making memories that last a lifetime.

Visit **CatholicCharitiesSF.org/campership** or phone **415 972 1291** to donate today. Even the smallest donation can change someone's life.