

american **CAMP** association®

Updated 2014

**Testimonials on the Value of the
Camp Cultural Exchange Program
(J-1 Visa)**

Testimonials from Camps and Sponsors



Cultural Exchange for a Better World

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Peg Smith, CEO – American Camp Association



Some of my son's best memories at camp were related to the friends he made from other parts of the world. His appreciation of what makes us different and, more importantly, how we are all the same, was profound. Even today, as a young adult, he draws on those camp experiences to make sense of the world.

Camp has always been a unique developmental environment that weaves global citizenship with other outcomes such as critical thinking skills, leadership, and character development.

And now more than ever, the gifts of culture that our international visitors bring are critical. Not only because the Partnership for 21st Century Skills calls for [social and cross-cultural skills](#) as a stepping stone to success. But, importantly, because we must teach our children cultural empathy and understanding — to see themselves in others, recognize the beauty in differences, and unite in the spirit we share across global boundaries.

That is why I am so touched by the [words of Tove](#), a former cultural exchange program participant from Norway who recently advocated with the Senate to keep our nation's Cultural Exchange Program viable for camps. Currently, Congress is considering legislation that would overhaul our immigration system, including the Cultural Exchange Program that provides international camp counselors and support staff to camps across the country. If [provisions currently under consideration](#) are swept up in this reform, the program may be in jeopardy.

If we want a world of peace and understanding, we must let our children experience that world firsthand — at camp. I encourage you to read [Tove's testimonial](#). ACA will keep you up to date on this important issue. And if you have a cultural exchange story to tell, [please share](#) with us in the comment section of Tove's page.

Photo courtesy of Camp Howe, Goshen, Massachusetts

It Will Change Your Life!

A Testimonial by Michelle – U.S.A.



In 2005 I took up an opportunity to work at a summer sports camp in the Pocono Mountains. It was a life-changing decision that I will never regret. It was such an amazing experience and I had the pleasure to work with a wide range of people from different backgrounds and cultures. We learned so much about each other and where we came from, real relationships formed. And the bonds forged with these incredible people will last a lifetime. None more so than my husband, who I met during my second summer working at the camp.

He grew up in England and decided to take advantage of a program through CCUSA. Now almost 7 years later we live very happily together in England. Our time together at camp is unforgettable and we reminisce often. There is so much value in these programs, not just personally or culturally, but also educationally. The skills learned here really can change and enrich so many lives. I would not have changed my experience for anything, and it saddens me to think opportunities like these could be taken away from young people around the world.

Michelle

Camp America

A Testimonial by Patricia – *Camp America*



I have worked at 2 summer camps and am now an interviewer for Camp America and get the opportunity to meet young people ready to get the experience of a lifetime.

Summer camp was the best thing that ever happened to me. I had an amazing time. I learned new skills and improved my confidence as well as making lifetime friends. After camp I got the opportunity to travel around America with my new found camp friends and I am now back home in Ireland and this summer I am going to put some of my skills in to practice and start developing my own camp with help from the people that I met in America.

This opportunity would not be possible without the chance to go to America and learn from the best. I think summer camp is a very valuable cultural exchange and helps both the international counsellors, as well as the American counsellors and the children. The children learn new things and meet people from other cultures and realise that there is more to the world than just where they live and learn new languages and cultures and see where in the world the counsellors come from.

This is an opportunity not to be missed and impacts on so many lives not just the international counsellors and people at camp but when these counsellors go home they bring new skills and are able to pass these on in their own country.

Patricia

Preserve These Programs For A Better Future!

A Testimonial by Dennis – U.S.A.



I have enjoyed 33 years in the field of cultural exchange, administering camp counselor and summer work travel programs with the American Institute For Foreign Study Inc. (AIFS) and the Camp America program. I have seen over two hundred thousand international participants touch the lives of countless Americans, relationships that lasted lifetimes, and careers that grew from the experience to enrich so many more lives throughout the planet.

The greater Camp America community is a labyrinthine network of dedicated individuals who have made a difference in the world in unique ways due to the exchange visitor program and the opportunities it provides. I reflect on the many thousands of special needs campers who live for a few weeks of camp each year and their parents who are afforded a brief respite due to the efforts of international staff. Of course there are the disadvantaged campers who have never left their city block that are exposed to international role models and global perspectives that they would never have dreamed of sharing. Campers are exposed to rare skills that only few in the world possess. The programs allow people reach firmly out of their comfort zones, stretching to help others grow and enriching themselves in the process. The lifelong personal bonds and relationships are as priceless as they are beyond enumeration.

There are so many quality programs and world class operations in this field that manufacture profoundly positive experiences with all the appropriate safeguards and support. The possibility that a few unfortunate incidents can unduly endanger them due to the stroke of legislative pen is a devastating thought. Simple sense and goodness must prevail.

Dennis

Changed My Life Forever

A Testimonial by Allen – U.S.A.



I was a typical America boy growing up in Brooklyn. As far as I knew the world consisted of the 5 boroughs of NYC and my grandparents place in the Catskill Mountains where I spent my summers.

I had never met any foreigners and all I knew about the world was what I saw on TV.

When I was 18 I got my first summer camp job at New Jersey YMHA (NJY) camps in Pennsylvania. NJY participates on the cultural exchange programme and hires staff from all over the world. For the first time in my life I got to meet people from Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Israel and countries in Africa. I had so many questions for them. I wanted to learn as much as I could about life outside of my own country At the same time I wanted to show these visitors my country and the best the USA had to offer. I took them to baseball games and became their tour guide for NYC. Many came to stay at my house after camp and my parents and sisters also learned about them and where they came from.

Some stayed with me in Buffalo where I attended college and got to experience America college life.

My cultural exchange experience changed my life forever in two ways. When I became a history teacher I use my experience and knowledge of the outside world in my lessons even inviting one of my UK friends to come and speak to my class. They learned more about the UK in one day than I could ever teach them in a year.

I also met my wife at camp. I young girl from the UK. We now live in the UK and my eldest son is working at a camp. Because of my camp experience I have visited over 30 countries around the world. Something I would have never done if not for the cultural exchange aspect of my camp.

If the Immigration Bill is passed as it stands the J-1 Cultural experience that I and my wife receive will be destroyed. I urge the member of Congress to amend this bill. if you do not think it is important enough, think about future generations of Americans who will grow up knowing nothing of the outside world.

Allen

One Step Closer to World Peace

A Testimonial by Sonja – U.S.A.



International staff at summer camps are really and truly bringing us one step closer to world peace - and I believe this through and through! As an American now living in the United Kingdom, my perspective is unique. I went to camp as a camper for years and years and worked my way up to the Administrative team at camp and ultimately I worked for the organization that owns and operates "my" summer camp. Over this 15 years of service I saw literally 100's of International Staff come through my camp. Their impact was HUGE. Why did they have such strange accents? Did they live the same way as I did in their countries? Were their parents worried about them traveling so far from home?

The differences were apparent. But after spending a summer, many summers, getting to know New Zealanders, Russians, South Africans, Australians, Ukrainians, Turkish, Germans, Swiss, Danes, Norwegians, Swedes, French, Spanish, Czechs, Slovaks, the English, Scottish and Welsh - (very definitively defined I might add!), I learned...I learned that despite what the news says and what our history books tell us, these people, these great people were my friends. After the summers, when I was old enough, I traveled to some of their homes and their countries and they visited mine. We initially kept in touch with pen and paper letters and costly phone calls and in time, we connected through email, social networks and Skype! I learned about the wars in their countries, the history they were taught, their favorite local foods, their favorite music groups, sports teams and that they laughed, loved and lived for the same things I do. In fact, my post is incredibly timely as - no word of an exaggeration - this Saturday I am meeting up with some of these very same people, my friends who I went to camp with exactly 30 years ago!!! Some friends are even flying into London for this reunion. Their children are now camp counselors themselves. The spiral continues. So, like I said, cultural exchange is one step closer to world peace. Can you see that? It's because we're developing meaningful relationships with other human beings from other countries which creates understanding and tolerance and respect. I can't imagine our world without this fundamental opportunity for cultural exchange.

Sonja

Cultural Exchange Enriches and Changes Lives!

A Testimonial by Lauren – U.S.A.



As someone who has grown up working in the camping industry and who is tremendously passionate about cultural exchange, I am writing to you to ask for your help to eliminate the provisions in the Senate Immigration Bill (S.744) that would greatly diminish the value of the International Cultural Exchange program. The specific part of the Senate immigration bill in question comes under the "prevention of trafficking of persons" section, in which camp staff and other exchange visitors are defined as "workers", not as the cultural exchange participants they are and were intended to be since the inception of this program under the Fulbright Act of 1961.

Growing up in a middle class family in a small town in Connecticut, casual international travel wasn't an option for my family or the families of my friends. Yet I always possessed a strong fascination with other countries and their cultures and languages. As soon as my school's curriculum offered foreign languages in grade 7, I jumped at the chance to learn Spanish. By the following school year, I was enrolled in Spanish and German classes simultaneously. When I began looking at colleges to attend, my primary focus was colleges with a strong language program. I ended up at Dickinson College in Carlisle, PA, which has since been repeatedly voted one of the top 10 schools in the US for foreign language and study abroad.

During these same years in high school and college, I spent my summers at Hartford County 4-H camp in Marlborough, CT. Camp Director for 40 years (now director emeritus), Elsie, always believed in hiring a handful of international staff each summer to enable campers to learn more about the world outside of Connecticut and the USA. Over the course of my years at this camp, I made friends from Russia, Slovakia, England, Australia, Denmark, the Netherlands, Scotland and many other countries. My parents always invited these staff to come to our home for a meal on nights off to experience 'American culture'. I spent time learning from these staff about their countries, while showing them around my state. I developed friendships that still exist today and visit these friends on my regular international travels. A true blessing!

In my junior year of college, I studied abroad in Bremen, Germany and fell in love with Europe. I received a Fulbright scholarship after graduation from Dickinson College to return and teach English in Germany in a place called Halle in the former 'Eastern Germany'. In addition to English, I also taught the students about 'American culture'. Many of the students were as equally naive to the world outside of Germany as I had been as a child growing up in Connecticut.

To this day, I still communicate with my students and their families.

After my Fulbright year, I received a call from a Swedish friend who had worked at Hartford County 4-H camp with me. He was now working for CCUSA (the company which had sponsored his J1 visa to work at summer camp). He let me know about a position available with the company in Dublin, Ireland, where I was living at the time. I applied for

the job and was successful. The person who hired me indicated that my success over the other candidates was due to the fact that during my interview I was visibly passionate about helping others experience foreign exchange and thus he knew I was right for the job.

Fifteen years later and I am still, passionately, working for CCUSA to provide a summer camp experience for international staff and to give American children and their families a chance to learn more about the world as well. I have travelled extensively promoting this wonderful program on television, radio and informational meetings; conducted interviews and job fairs on various continents and visited program participants at their camps to see first-hand the wonderful experiences they are having. One of my posts took me to England, where I met a handsome man who told me in conversation that he had spent a summer on a cultural exchange program working at camp in the USA and it had been the best summer of his life. I was so impressed by this and that handsome man is now my husband!

To think that immigration reform could hinder the cultural exchange industry and what we work towards each day is heartbreaking. In the current world climate, embracing programs that enable us to learn about and interact first-hand with other cultures is vital to ensuring that our future generations to live a more peaceful existence. We ask that you please take into account the tens of thousands of international staff and even more American children and families that have been positively impacted by these programs and help us to ensure that this is able to continue.

Sincerely,

Lauren

Cultural Experience and Life-Long Friends

A Testimonial by Meg – U.S.A.



I was lucky enough to be both a camper, as well as a staff member, at International Sports Training Camp (ISTC). As a camper, I used to look forward to attending ISTC every summer because, among many other things, it meant getting a taste of something different! Making the decision to go back and work at ISTC is still, to this day, the best decision I've ever made.

As an American 21-year old, I was very excited to have the opportunity to work in such a positive atmosphere that combined so many different cultures and people. Not only did I have the opportunity to learn so much about so many, but I met my best and closest friends there. Connecting with so many people from around the world made my positive camp experience even more memorable and special.

It is so important for summer camps to be able to staff internationally because it gives staff, as well as campers, the opportunity to see what life is like outside of their own countries. Foreign staff members have the chance to explore what America has to offer in so many ways, while American staff and campers can both learn from their international peers, as well as have the chance to show them parts of their own culture.

I will never forget my experiences with all of the international staff and hope that campers and staff in the future will have the same opportunities and amazing adventures that I was lucky enough to experience!

Meg

International Sports Training Camp

A Testimonial by Chloe – U.S.A.



Over the past seven summers, I have been a camper, counselor-in-training, and finally, this summer, a counselor at International Sports Training Camp in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania. My experiences as both a camper and staff member have played a large role in shaping me into the person I am today—largely because of the international staff. When I first came to camp in 2007, I had no idea what to expect. I was 13 years old and knew very little about life outside of the United States, or even really outside of my hometown. Over my two-week stay I became acquainted with countless staff members from all over the world. They shared their stories from home and their adventures all around the world. They taught me more than any class in school could have about culture and the importance of embracing different ways of life across the globe. More than anything, everyone I met had a strong sense of adventure and inspired in me a desire to travel and experience all that they had.

When I became a staff member in 2011, I had the opportunity to get to know all of the staff on a more personal level. It was only then that I understood the gravity of just how important international staff members are to camp and how much we can learn from one another. I once sat with an Australian counselor at a meal and taught her all of American history in the span of five minutes. It was amazing to me that she knew so little about something I had been learning all my life—and that I knew almost nothing about the history of her home country. Working with people from all over the world has made me proud to share my American traditions while also giving me the opportunity to learn about life all around the world.

Working and attending a camp with both American and international staff has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life, one that I hope many children will be able to experience. The camp experience would not be what it is, were it not for the presence of international staff members—I think that this is why so many kids come back each summer to ISTC.

Chloe

The Magic of Camp

A Testimonial by Marisa-Marie – U.S.A.



Summer 2013 will be my tenth summer at International Sports Training Camp located in PA. I started off at ISTC as a 10 year old camper. Growing up, I experienced some hardships when interacting amongst my peers. I had constantly been bullied and switched schools when I was younger to try and solve the problem. Camp was always my happy place. When I walked through the gates I suddenly felt safe.

ISTC has such a magical positive feeling encompassed within it. I did not come back every year because of the blob or the rock wall it was simply because of the staff. I can name every single staff member I had as a camper. Each one of them helped me in a different way. After every summer I was able to go back to school in the fall with a different confidence within myself. Nothing anyone could say could strip me down because I knew I had a whole community cheering for me to get back up.

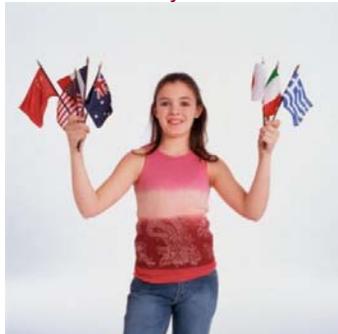
As a camper, I was wide eyed by all the stories I had heard about the different parts of the world. Having such a diverse group of people on staff really opens up a child's eyes. They learn that there are so many different types of people and cultures within this world. In some cases this may be the only time a child can experience this diversity. Something about that is quite comforting. International staff truly bring that magic to camp.

I am now a full time staff member at ISTC. Spending half my life here I have learned so much about the world and myself. I am currently attending SUNY Oswego studying to be a teacher. ISTC has helped develop that path for me. I would not be the person I am today without all the staff that has come through this place. I am more confident and no longer afraid to take on a leadership role(I have all my past counselors to thank for that). I treat my campers as I was treated hoping they will grow and experience the same magic I did. ISTC would not be the camp it is today without all the staff!

Marisa-Marie

Summer Camps - Cross Cultural Skills and Employer Recognition

A Testimonial by Alexandra - Recruiter



I have 5 years work experience within the cultural exchange area, and 6.5 year's experience within business resourcing / recruitment - all of which stemmed from my first experiences with Camp America in 2 US camps in the new England area.

Throughout my career I can not only accredit my own success down to my early years of experiencing differing cultures and roles, but still continue to see this reflected in those coming though as graduate candidates to this day. The skills and experience gained at such a stage in someone's career can gives them the confidence, problem solving abilities, itegrity and compassion needed to show potential as future leaders. Well-structured programmes such as this allow young people to take the first step to both understanding themselves and others around them, and allow them to realise their potential and motivations for their future career choices.

I sincerely hope that these cultural exchange programmes continue for the future, and that the ligitimate organisations in this sector are allowed to continue what they do best - Bringing people together and providing the building blocks for our future generations

Alexandra

Camp

A Testimonial by Leanna – U.S.A.



On Sunday, July 27th, 2003 as a very excited nine-year-old I walked onto the grounds of International sports Training Camp in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania and I have not been the same since. Over the past ten years camp has changed me for the better and shaped me into the person I am today. I did not return year after year to camp because I enjoyed running around playing soccer on the all sports fields. I didn't start counting down the days until I returned the second after I left because I thought that splashing around in the lake was really fun. The activities and the games aren't the reason I return to camp year after year; I come back because of the staff, most of which are international.

Some of my best memories not just of camp but also of my whole childhood were when a big thunderstorm was about to strike camp and we would all have to go back to our cabins. These were the best times because we were able to hang out with our counselors and learn about their home and culture. ISTC hires international staff from over 10 different countries as counselors, coaches, and as recreation directors. Having vegemite (an Australian spread) for the first time or trying to imitate my counselor's English accent were such fun and downright hilarious experiences. I think when I would get home from camp my cheek muscles were stronger from laughing so much.

That said the fun of camp is not the activities or games but getting to interact with the staff and that interaction would not be nearly as amazing and life changing if the staff did not all come from such completely different cultures. This summer will be my first working as a full time counselor and I can't wait to have a different relationship with the international staff, becoming friends with them on a different level then camper counselor, but still getting to hear about their culture and life at home. This summer I know I will make lifelong friends with the international staff and camp would not be nearly as amazing without them.

Leanna

Camp ISTC

A Testimonial by Hannah – U.S.A.



I have loved International Sports Training Camp (ISTC) since the first day I first arrived as a camper in 2010. I knew about camp since I was 10, but never asked my parents until 5 years later and it was the best decision of my life. I had no idea what I was signing up for and it was honestly a life-changing experience. I went through 3 years as a camper, 2 years as a counselor in training and now finally I am a full time staff member.

Having the opportunity to work with an international staff has not only helped me grow as a person, but it also impacted my life and opened my eyes to other parts of the world. Being surrounded with these internationals, not only do i make great friends, but endless memories as well. Children of all ages truly respect and look up to their counselors and love love love the thrill of having these internationals in their cabins, and at our camp, all sports coaches, maintenance and kitchen staff as well.

The most exciting moment is usually when the kids first arrive at their cabins and find out what country their counselors are from. As a young child, in my case, 15, this was the first time I was exposed to accents and the culture of foreign countries. It was mesmerizing to me. Here at camp, we have staff from over 13 different countries this year! Not only do we learn their languages, but we learn about their weather, culture, sports and just their way of living as a whole. Being an American, it it obvious to see that campers absolutely adore these staff members and learn so much from them. Seeing the campers faces light up and their smiles grow each and every day is a huge reward. Campers come back year after year for these people. Yes, we have many different activities such as the blob, jet skis, a variety of sports, but those are only the small reasons why kids return; the most important is for the staff. We, regardless of our nationality impact these campers in a positive way and they mean everything to us during the week. I still remember going home and telling my parents everything I learned such as "Mom, did you know they call flip flops thongs?" or "In Australia, cotton candy is called fairy floss!" It's little things like that that will stay with me and every camper forever.

Now, being a counselor and having the opportunity to really get to know each staff member on a more personal level, the importance of these internationals is tremendous. Words can't even begin to express how much I learn every day from them, whether they be from Australia, England, New Zealand, Poland, Scotland, etc. It's not an everyday thing where you can walk down the street at home and hear a different form of "hello" in 13 different accents, but camp is different. Camp is the place where these staff members can share their lives with us and campers. They live for the stories they get to tell and the different phrases they can teach their campers. The average American kid can't go around telling their friends that they had "Vegemite," but here at ISTC, they can. Not only do these counselors teach, but they also learn. They learn about American culture and history, schooling, language, you name it, they learn it. It is safe to say that each staff member brings their own uniqueness to this camp and this place wouldn't be the same without them. Hannah

The Heart of Camp

A Testimonial by Kim – U.S.A.



I was one of those campers that had a countdown in my room until the start of camp. I would never have guessed that after seven years of being a camper and two years of being a staff member I would still keep the same calendar hung in my room, marking the days until my arrival at camp.

My first summer at ISTC is as crystal clear as what I ate for breakfast this morning. At age 18, camp is one of the few memories I actually remember about my childhood. What constantly drew me to think about camp and my amazing experiences as a camper was not as simple as the beauty of the camp or the friends I made along the way. Rather, those I remember the most and continually came back to see were my counselors, both foreign and home-grown, that helped me grow into the person I am today. As cheesy as it may sound, my counselors were and truly are my role models. As a camper, I wanted to be the coach from New Zealand and see where the counselor from England lived. I wanted to get to know those that taught me the importance of friendship and teamwork more than I ever wanted to know my own friends at home.

There is something about waking up every morning to an Australian singing, even though you could barely understand him or her. Walking to dinner and seeing how much fun and how friendly staff members were to each other as well as the campers furthered my desire to get to know them and to try and be like them. Coming to camp for the experience, sports, and fun would not be the same without the people putting the show on. Every summer, I would leave camp in tears, fighting my parents all the way to the car, begging them to let me stay for just one more week. My counselors, even though I only knew them as a camper and for a short period of time, became my role models and inspiration for the future. I eagerly waited each year to see how they have changed and what they would think of the new me. I learned so much about myself and who I can become as a person from them.

They have inspired me to pursue a career in education, to participate in Peace Corps, and to help improve the lives of everyone I come in contact with. One counselor in particular truly opened my eyes to the importance of life. Getting injured on my first day of camp would ruin most camper's experience. Instead, my injury allowed me to see people in a different light, get to know the counselors on a more personal basis, and see how much fun I can have, even while on crutches. While my friends in school panic about finals and stress about injuries like I faced, I have come to understand the little significance of such events in the scheme of things.

Now as a counselor, I hope to give back even just an ounce of the experience I received from my counselors to my campers. I have learned and plan to pass on the idea of "Be the change you are waiting for", a motto instilled in my mind from international staff that have influenced my development as a person. On top of being beneficial for campers to learn about the cultures and stories of international staff, it is also important to remember the positive

impact camp staff members receive from a summer like no other. Camp truly inspires and pushes people to limits they thought were untouchable. If they are not given the opportunity to grow as individuals and inspire those around them, the camp experience for children will be altered and will never be the same. International staff are vital members of the camp experience, and play a huge role in keeping those countdown hanging on campers walls.

Kim

The Most Positive Experience of My Life

A Testimonial by Melanie – U.S.A.



When I was twelve years old my parents dropped me off at my first sleep-away summer camp, International Sports Training Camp in Stroudsburg, PA. Although I was nervous, I was greeted with warm welcomes, strange accents, and an experience that would come to shape the rest of my life. I returned as a camper for three more years after that summer, and every week at camp was the best of my life. The facilities were beautiful and the games were fun, but the reason I returned was because of the staff.

ISTC employs people from as many as fifteen different countries in a summer and there are no words to describe what an amazing opportunity it is for a child to be surrounded by different cultures and different perspectives. Growing up in camp, I learned more and more from my coaches from Australian, counselors from Ireland, canteen workers from Slovakia, and even food service staff from Mexico. I learned about other parts of the world in a way that no geography class in high school could teach me. It was the international staff members that made camp such a special experience, unlike anywhere I had ever been before. These people allowed me to have such a great camp experience that I never wanted to leave... which is why I am still here ten years after my first day at camp, now as a staff member myself.

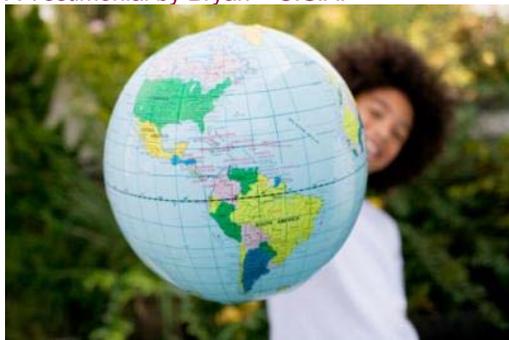
I have been working here for the past six years and still feel honored to be able to gain all that I am from the people of this camp. Just last night I was practicing my French and learning some Polish, which I now know is one of the hardest languages in the world. The people I have met here have opened my eyes to all that the rest of the world has to offer. Their courage and adventurousness to leave their homes and spend months working in America has inspired me to make it a point to get outside of my comfort zone and travel as well. From just recently taking a three week tour of eastern Europe to soon be spending three months studying in Morocco, I have witnessed the benefits of travel first-hand and will forever strive to immerse myself in the diversity of the world.

There is no doubt in my mind that my journey within the camp grounds at International Sports Training Camp have bettered me as a person, and will forever influence my future. This would not have happened without the opportunity to meet, befriend, and learn from the hundreds of international staff members that have been a part of my life for the past ten years. They are what makes this camp special, what takes it from a simple summer camp to a life changing experience, and what has been the single most positive influence in my life.

Melanie

Mike Was the First Australian I Ever Met

A Testimonial by Bryan – U.S.A.



Mike was the first Australian that I ever met. He was so different than me, or so I thought when camp started. At the International Sports Training Camp in Stroudsburg PA., I also met Cooper from England, Peter from Canada, Joao from Brazil and so on, and so on.

I am from the Midwest. and I had never been around so many different cultures. By the end of the week, I learned a lot more than sports training. I learned that I am really not different than a trainer from Australia, or England, or even Pakistan. That they are more like me that not like me.

If these talented camp trainers were not given a visa to come here in the USA, all I would have learned was to be a better athlete. Instead I learned to be a better young man.

International camp instructors are like being an exchange student without leaving our country. Please grant these international camp instructors a visa to attend our USA camps!

Bryan

Champions of Global Understanding

A Testimonial by Liz – New Zealand



"Involving or bridging the differences between cultures." - the definition of cross-cultural. "To give something in return for something received." The definition of exchange. I sit here musing over why anybody would pass a bill that endangers this powerful opportunity for the youth of today, and I am perplexed.

I write to you as a former counselor, a cultural ambassador for New Zealand and the United States, a champion for cultural exchange, and the Country Director of CCUSA New Zealand; the organisation responsible for sending hundreds of Kiwis to the USA every year to work as camp counselors, amongst many other positions. The youth I send to the USA are eager. Eager to learn, to explore, to share and to grow. Eager to provide the opportunity to young American's in camps to learn about countries different to the one they live in. Brave enough and dedicated enough to live there to truly understand those differences, and appreciative enough to come home to New Zealand and share those experiences with their communities.

They learn compassion and understanding for cultures different to their own, as do the children and staff within the camps they work in, as do the wider communities they interact in, as do the States near and far they travel to afterwards. They feel personal growth, as do those around them. They embody global understanding, and pass that knowledge on to the people of America, and then bring it all the way home again.

I am proud of each and every one of them, for they are the leaders of tomorrow. Able to leverage social and cultural differences to create new ideas, increase innovation, expand upon the quality of work and contribute to global understanding.

It would be a sad day, as we strive for a global community and cultural understanding, to lose a program so embodying everything we should be working towards.

Liz

It Made A Difference in My Life

A Testimonial by Christopher – U.S.A.



Twelve years ago I met my wife at a summer camp dance in western North Carolina. She was from South Africa and was teaching horseback riding to girls under the J 1 visa program. We've been married for eleven great years and have two children who are growing up bilingual and with an enhanced appreciation for different cultures and perspectives.

This program, as it applies to the cultural exchange program for summer camps has made the difference in my life and undoubtedly in the lives of many others.

Christopher