



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
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SUBMIT YOUR Y STORY

BRIANNA'S Y STORY

2011 was a trying year for Brianna and her family. It was when her eight year old son, Skyler, was diagnosed with ADHD. Brianna didn't understand how her son's brain worked—Skyler didn't understand how his world worked or how to fit in. Brianna found that both she and Skyler needed a break from day to day life and one afternoon, she began to Google summer camps. "I spent that entire afternoon looking up camp, after camp, after camp. I kept coming back to YMCA Camp Collins for three reasons:

"THE Y HELPS KIDS GROW INTO A WHOLE PERSON."

1. I believe in the work of the YMCA, having been a participant myself and having kids in their sports programs.
2. Horses. I don't have them and to date I've only been on a horse twice, but they fascinate me and I wanted my son to experience being around those beautiful animals.
3. It was close to home. As much as I needed a break, I didn't want my baby to be too far from me."

Skyler was not happy that his mother was going to send him away. "At 8 years old he very matter-of-factly told me that he would report me for forging his initials on the online camp registration." He was scared to leave. He didn't think he would like sleeping in a cabin. He was not going to do this. Skyler's attitude lasted until they both walked through the welcome gate at YMCA Camp Collins.

They walked in to see the camp director greeting people. The camp counselors were singing, dancing and smiling all around camp. "It's infectious. And Skyler caught the excitement." When they arrived at Adventure Village, Skyler had decided he was ready for this, Brianna on the other hand, was suddenly so nervous that she considered walking back out to the car, child in hand. Skyler's counselor welcomed them and told Skyler it would be a great week. "Then he said to me 'I stayed up late last night reading up on ADHD to make sure that Skyler has an excellent week.' I went to my car and sobbed out of gratitude and relief. I couldn't believe that this college-aged



kid was so dedicated to the mission of YMCA Camp Collins that he would research my son's specific needs before we arrived."

What amazes Brianna more, is that after so many years of being a

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part of the YMCA Camp Collins family, she realized that all of the staff is dedicated and caring. They go above and beyond for these kids. "The Y helps kids grow into a whole person." They instill the mission and make sure their staff are involved in promoting it.

"The first of the camp's values is love. That value is well represented by camp staff, which ultimately spreads to the campers." Brianna stands by the value of camp because of how they treat and interact with kids like Skyler—kids with ADHD or some other issue that makes school or life a little more challenging.

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Brianna knows that teachers and schools are not set up for these kids. "It isn't the schools' fault, of course—they have the monumental challenge of teaching a wide variety of subjects to kids of all different skill levels, personality types and needs.

You won't hear me criticizing them for needing Skyler to conform." But this format does mean that for the children who have a hard time sitting in class for hours on end, school can be very discouraging. "That's where summer camp comes in. Suddenly the obstacles in school—boundless energy, quick movements, and the ability to pay attention to many things at once—become traits which these kids are praised for." And every child deserves a chance to

Last year, was Skyler's first year at teen camp. He had the opportunity to demonstrate the fourth camp value of responsibility, by mentoring a day camper. Skyler could not stop talking about how awesome the younger kid was and how fun it was to share the magic of camp with this boy. He also had more independent time to problem solve and build relationships with other teens. This sense of community carried on into the school year, when the teen campers organized a meet up at a high school football game. They came from different schools, have different interests and lead very different lives—but those weeks at camp, they formed a community that meant enough to stay in touch.

SKYLER HAS GROWN IN SIZE, APPEARANCE, PERSONALITY, ATTITUDE AND MATURITY. "WITHOUT QUESTION I HOLD YMCA CAMP COLLINS—ESPECIALLY HIS MENTORS OVER THE YEARS—RESPONSIBLE FOR THAT LAST ONE."

succeed at something, to get the boost of confidence that comes with that success.

In 2013, Skyler got his camp leather. Leathers are a goal that campers choose every year. Campers begin their leather training in the Explorers Unit when they enter grade six. Because Skyler was entering middle school, his goal was to improve school behavior. His leather goal has been hanging in his room ever since, with the exception of camp weeks. Skyler has grown in size, appearance, personality, attitude and maturity. "Without question I hold YMCA Camp Collins—especially the counselors who have been his mentors over the years—responsible for that last one."

Camp works hard to reflect the YMCA's mission by showing respect. The staff are key influences who show this value to the campers. It is within that value that the campers grow and develop each day at YMCA Camp Collins.

In 2015, Skyler took one of his best friends along to YMCA Camp Collins. They were Questors, and got to go mountain biking. When Brianna showed up on Saturday to pick them up, Skyler was scraped head to toe and his friend was on crutches. "I said Oh no! Was it a rough week? They looked at me like I had three heads and said 'No! It was awesome!'"

"Think about that for a minute. Many of you are members of the business community, local service clubs, church groups and volunteer organizations. Those community ties start here." YMCA Camp Collins is teaching youth the value of community and how to be responsible members of our world. When Brianna looks to the future of the Y, she is hopeful because of all the community relationships and people that support its mission.

The last camp value is service. The value of service is implemented into the YMCA camp culture in various ways. The campers are expected to clean up after themselves at meal time, cabin time and during activities. Skyler says that "service, as a value, is important to me because other people can't do what I do and flourish in the specific ways that I can in life." Service is seen as doing what is right, and recently, for Skyler, it has meant refereeing kindergarten—second graders in the Mt. Hood YMCA programs.

Brianna and Skyler have had an extraordinary experience with YMCA Camp Collins and its staff. "It has been life changing for our family. The values taught at camp make this community better for every single one of us."

We want to hear from you! How has the Y impacted you or your family's life?

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