

Stephanie Garcia- Summer Youth NCC Participant

The challenge I faced during the summer was trying to find employment. Unfortunately, I come from a low income family, whose sole provider has been my mother. It has always been difficult to make ends meet when there is one person supporting the family. Therefore, when I became of age, I took it upon myself to assist the family financially. So throughout the spring and early summer, I visited Hub Cities to ask if they had any employment opportunities. All my attempts were unsuccessful, as I was told that there were limited funds or I was unqualified for a program. I felt very disappointed that I could not help my family, especially this year because I know the amount of economic strain that is going to be put on my family as a result of me being a senior.

Around the end of July, Hub Cities notified me of an employment opportunity. They stated that an organization named Special Needs Network was sponsoring a camp for children with disabilities. As camp counselor, I would be assisting, motivating, and interacting with the children. All these aspects sounded wonderful to me, until I encountered a problem, which was distance. I live in Huntington Park and the location of the camp was more than 10 miles away. However, Hub Cities also supplied me with the motivation to make a sacrifice and they guaranteed that I would not regret this experience. I reluctantly agreed, and they were right because it turned out to be one of the best experiences of my life.

I was very excited to start my new job and experience a new job setting. I was able to visit the camp officially when I went to the trainings. The training seminars were held for 3 days and it was very enriching as they had speakers who were not only there to talk about the camp and the disabilities of the children, but also about subjects that the youth needed to be informed about such as job interview etiquette, bank accounts and credit, and leadership in the community.

Additionally, the camp itself was an extremely jovial and inspiring environment. Most of the children at the camp had autism, but other disabilities included multiple delays, Down syndrome, **asperser's** syndrome, mental retardation, etc and were from the ages of 4-16. This factor, although poignant, never limited any of the children from being involved in camp activities or having fun! A factor I deeply respected about my occupation was that the camp was non-segregation, which means that the typical children were integrated with the children with disabilities. This element allowed the children to learn from each other, accept the differences of others, and be more open minded about our society and the individuals it is composed of. Also, the camp had two cycles, where a group of children came for two weeks and we had another group of children the second two weeks. At the end of each cycle we put on **a show as a culmination of the program and the camp's work. The play that was performed this year was** a Harlem Renaissance rendition of Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory. I can say proudly that both performances were successes and I was very pleased to be a part of them and to have contributed to such a glorious effort.

The best component of the camp that composes the best of my memories would be the children I worked with. I worked with the lowest age group, Group 1, which had children from the ages of 4-6. I **felt honored to be a part of these child's lives, as I know that most of a child's brain develops at these**

ages. It was very prestigious to teach them the morals, norms, and manners that will always be a part of their lives. Moreover, when we were able to have fun activities such as dance, sports, music, art, or culture, it was always heartwarming to see a smile on their face or be the reason for their happiness. I absolutely loved working with them and will miss them dearly, as they have left a profound mark on my heart.

Another fantastic and unforgettable aspect of the camp was my colleagues. I am eternally grateful for having such a wonderful staff and I am glad I was able to meet and spend my summer with some remarkable individuals. It was truly inspiring to see the youth of many regions in California come together and provide an essential service to the underserved communities. It made me really believe that the youth are the future leaders of society. I also enjoyed the diversity of my coworkers as some were from North Carolina, Virginia, Los Angeles, Pennsylvania, etc. Furthermore, I took pleasure in the fact that at times my job could be a social setting, where it allowed me to rejoice in the company of benevolent and gregarious individuals. Ultimately, I firmly believe that we did justice to the saying **“Teamwork makes the *dreamwork*.”**

In brief, I was extremely grateful to have been given the opportunity by Hub Cities to work at Camp JPAC. And in return for my hard work and dedication, I was given an award for being Most Valuable **Counselor. The award was given to me as I was infamously known for “working all day”, by volunteering the morning shift and working the afternoon shift, all in all a whopping 10 hours.** My manager, Daniel Mendoza and other colleagues were impressed by my diligence and devotion and they believed that I deserved such an honor. I am thankful they saw fit to give me this award and I hold it as one of my highest achievements. Although, I recognize that my success would have never been possible if it **wasn’t** for Hub Cities. Thus, I resolutely **stand by the statement that “you can’t know where you’re going until you know where you’ve been.”**