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A Day In The Life of A Camp Trailblazers Volunteer

By Colleen Wheatley (2012)

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Each of our camps are unique in their location, programming and of course, our amazing campers, however, this is an example of what a day as a Camp Trailblazers volunteer could be like. In the days building up to camp there is a flutter of last minute emails, criminal reference checks, and online training. Then, it's finally time for Camp Trailblazers! The following is a fictional account based on some true stories.

Day 1

1600 hrs – Drop Off

I show up at a mall parking lot listed as the drop off/pick up location. It's my first time volunteering at Camp Trailblazers. It's been awhile since I've been to camp, but I remember having a lot of fun when I went as a kid and hope to be part of it for the campers at Camp Trailblazers. I'm not sure where to go until I see a bus in the far corner of the parking lot and a huddle of cars. As I get closer, I see a group of campers and family members with anxious smiles loading backpacks and sleeping bags onto the bus. I finally catch the eye of a woman with a clipboard and an AboutFace t-shirt and decide to introduce myself. She shakes my hand and says thanks for joining Camp Trailblazers this year! She then gestures to the bus before hurrying off to collect last minute paperwork. I look around and decide that I might as well join the campers who are heading to the bus door.



1730 hrs – Bus Ride to Camp

The bus gets quiet as we pull away from the row of families waving goodbye to everyone. Looking around, there are a few campers who seem to know each other catching up and chatting at the back of the bus. I look around and see a camper sitting by themselves staring out the window. I decide to sit down and discover that this is the camper's first time going to camp (other than day camp for a few days in the summer). They say they're not homesick but worry about being away from their cat for the weekend. I start asking the camper about their pets and hobbies, and am relieved to see the tears in the corners of their eyes replaced by a shy smile.

2100 hrs – Cabin Time

I can't believe that it's already time to start winding down and head back to the cabin with some of the campers. We've eaten dinner (thankfully the camp food has improved since my time as a camper) and learned each other's' names (which I'm still trying to remember, but they seem to be willing to help me out, or at least enjoy laughing at me when I get it wrong). When we get back to the cabin, I take a top bunk and find myself looking forward to bed. Camp has only just begun and I'm already tired but looking forward to my time at camp!



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2300 hrs – Bed Time?

I thought it was going to be an early night, but it took a while to get everyone ready for bed with their pajamas on and teeth brushed. It also turns out that I'm in the chatty cabin and campers have been playing cards and talking non-stop for the last hour. It's great getting to know everyone, but I'm not sure if I'll get to sleep... ever!



Day 2

0650 hrs – Wake Up

My alarm goes off and I'm groggy as I look at the time. It's a Saturday and I'm getting up before 7am?! I get up to start waking up the campers who begged me to wake them early so that they can do the polar bear swim with everyone else. I am met with a few "5 more minutes" comments and sleeping bags pulled over heads. I even debate going back to bed myself, before hearing other campers start heading down to the water. Eventually, my cabin mates and I gather to get ready to head out for the morning



0800 hrs – Polar Bear Dip

With sleep in our eyes and some stellar cases of bed head, my campers and I finally make it to the water. The mist is still hovering across the lake. We jump in and it turns out the water is surprisingly warm. Actually, it's not – it is definitely FREEZING!! I am now wide awake and ready for the day.

0900 hrs – High Ropes

We are divided into groups and my group starts heading over to the high ropes course. I used to love rock climbing when I was a kid, so I can't wait to get out there. Once we're there, we go over the safety equipment. A few enthusiastic campers climb up the pole and seem to get through the elements 20 feet above our head without any fear or hesitation. There are also a few who are less certain about putting the harness on. The group spends 20 minutes cheering a camper who clings to the ladder before coming back down. We congratulate her on getting outside of her comfort zone, and she shrugs and says next time she'll try to get to the top. We're running out of time, but campers insist that I try the catwalk. With 5 minutes to go, I look up; it looks simple enough. As I shimmy up the ladder and then the pole, I realize it's a lot higher than I thought. I am grateful when I make it across to the other side and am lowered to the point where my feet are safely on the ground (although now jelly). I am greeted with high fives before we head off to our next activity. I'm pretty proud of myself, and now I get why the campers were slightly nervous themselves!



1100 hrs – Kick The Can

I have never played such an intense game of kick the can!

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1330 hrs – AboutFace Time

We all get together to talk about what makes Camp Trailblazers unique. I get flashbacks of what it was like for me as a kid. We talk about what it feels like to feel different from other kids at school. When I was younger, it was different; we did not have facebook or cell phones, however, it seems like some of the challenges of being a kid are still the same. I learn a lot about everyone in the group, and we agree that what we share in the discussion is kept within the group. I'm happy to see the kids open up, feeling comfortable, and I wish to myself that I could take away every single one of their worries and negative experiences, and ban all bullies from their lives. I realize that just being here and creating that safe place at camp is a huge step forward.

1600 hrs – Capture The Flag

I have been crawling on my stomach with a group of campers through the edge of the woods for 20 minutes. It's amazing that the same campers who could not sit still long enough for me to eat a full lunch are now scolding me if I snap a twig or rustle some leaves. We can see the other team guarding a suspicious corner of the playing field. Finally, we decide to rush them and attempt to locate their flag. There is a flurry of us running and yelling directions to each other. A camper on my team yells she saw the flag, but runs back to safety on our side while being chased by the other team. I am not so lucky and am escorted to jail where I am guarded by a stern looking 11 year old. I am secretly relieved to be able to sit down and catch my breath.



1900 hrs – Talent Show

I am wearing an oversized jacket and jester hat. I am not sure how this fits my character in the skit but am told that I need to wear it. Our play goes well and everyone laughs and claps. I hope my pint sized director didn't notice that I forgot my lines. When we leave the stage, my director reminds me of the original line, but thankfully tells me I did a 'pretty okay job.'

2000 hrs – Campfire

We sit around the campfire. I've lent my hoodie to a camper who forgot to bring an extra layer to the campfire (which is not giving off as much heat as I would have liked). We are all huddled together because we are all a little cold, yet nobody wants to leave. We sing campfire songs, a few pop songs, and there is a debate about whether One Direction is any good or not. Campers take turns teaching the group songs and there are even a few solo performances. Some of us also get dragged into improv skits. I had forgotten what it's like to be a kid enjoying the night's sky and campfire.



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2130 hrs – Snack and Bed?

We head back to the dining hall to warm up and grab some snacks. Hot chocolate is made, spilled, cleaned up, and repeated. All of my cabin mates who looked like they were getting tired and ready for bed at the campfire are now full of energy and have told me they want to stay up the whole night talking in the cabin! Whose idea was the hot chocolate?! It was a bad one. We eventually head back to the cabin and I start thinking about my cozy sleeping bag. I wonder what time I'll get to sleep tonight and what time I'll have to set my alarm to do it all again tomorrow...



Thank you to all of our Camp Trailblazers Volunteers for 2012:

West Coast: Greg, John, Vikrim

Manitoba: Brittany, Cindy, Jim

Ontario: Amanda, Andrew, Anthony, Audrey, Dan, Kariym, Kelly, Kyle, Lina, Licaiah, Pauline, Shaun

Nova Scotia: Caroline, Jill, Kathleen, Linda, Liz, Tim

Newfoundland: Brittany, Jessica, Laura, Andrew

Every year, we have dozens of amazing people who volunteer their time at Camp Trailblazers. Sometimes it's the first time these individuals have been involved with AboutFace, or even been to camp! Volunteering often means taking time off work or school and disconnecting from cell phones/computers for 3-5 days. It involves early mornings, late nights, sleeping on plastic mattresses in sleeping bags, giving up Starbucks coffee, and eating camp food every meal with a table of 8 campers. It is exhausting, exhilarating, challenging, emotional, enlightening and a lot of fun!

Camp Trailblazers would not be possible without our amazing volunteers. From Trailblazers Campers and everyone at AboutFace, **thank you!** We truly appreciate your time and commitment to making camp a fantastic experience for our youth!

