

Our SOAR Story...

It is difficult to know how to begin to explain the many ways that SOAR camp has helped my daughter. She first came to SOAR camp 2 years ago at age fourteen. I wish that it had been much sooner. She will be attending her fourth trip to Soar camp this coming summer. She has gone from the most unlikely camper to one of the most enthusiastic participants the counselors have ever seen. Her experience at SOAR has exceeded any of our expectations. Every experience with Soar camp brings exponential increases in her self-esteem. What has happened to her is absolutely a miracle!

Sending our daughter to SOAR camp in her first year was what we considered a tremendous gamble. She has had a lifetime of social anxiety. She struggled with social interaction and had very few friends. In addition to her social issues, she was extremely fearful trying new activities and struggled academically. She had always refused to leave our sides. Visiting extended family was always a challenge, she struggled to communicate with her very loving grandparents, aunts and uncles. She was particularly fearful of interacting with kids her age. The heartbreak for us was knowing how badly she wanted to interact with them. We had exhausted the gamut of evaluations and solutions. She had a regular schedule of play therapy, psychotherapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy all meant to improve her social skills, additionally she attended a school for children with learning disabilities. We had tried to interest her in a multitude of activities to boost her confidence, skiing, horseback riding, snorkeling, rock climbing and karate, all with limited effect. Her social issues were reaching a crisis point. As difficult to manage as they were when she was a young child, adolescence was amplifying all of her issues. She also had to deal with leaving the school that she had attended and felt somewhat comfortable for a new high school where she could not fit in. She was becoming more isolated and depressed, her self confidence had plunged to an almost irretrievable low. I located the Soar website and it captured my attention immediately. I was impressed with the incredible courses and read the testimonials. I was hopeful but somewhat doubtful that they could help us. I called to speak to the staff (MULTIPLE times, they were extremely patient) to determine if she would be able to attend. We visited the open house with our daughter, she was not yet convinced, but we were. We were very impressed with the staff and felt immediately comfortable with them. The trip to SOAR for the first time was one of the most difficult experiences for all of us. Our daughter, who was reluctantly agreeable at first, was now absolutely howling in protest. Tearful, hysterical, at times, she made her way to North Carolina.

For us, the painful sight of our daughters' misery was tempered only by the strong intuition that we were doing the right thing. The ten days at camp were the longest days we had spent as parents. We waited for that any minute phone call telling us to come pick her because they could not manage her hysteria. That phone call never came, but 5 days into her adventure we received a call telling us she was doing well. We were very relieved but very surprised. The incredible surprise came when we went to pick her up. She did not want to come home! Her counselors told us how brave, open and helpful she was. They marveled at what a true leader she was (WHAT!! did they have the right kid??). I read the testimonials, the parents wrote how they came home with a different child, that phrase was what struck me the most. It revived in us the hope that our daughter could see what we saw in her, that she was capable, loveable and fun, that she could have the friendships that she longed for. That is exactly what happened for us. We brought home a very different child. She came back a more confident, much less fearful child. She learned a lot about herself on that trip. What she learned has translated into her daily life at home. With each trip she matured and gained more self confidence. We were able to see more of her true personality come through. She has made many close friends at her school and does volunteer work at a local dog rescue which is a passion for her. All of this would have been unimaginable a few years ago. She has expressed an interest in eventually becoming a counselor at SOAR camp.

The most impressive thing about her experience at SOAR camp for all of us was their incredible staff. I have never encountered such a talented, compassionate, and intuitive, group of young people. The counselors at SOAR are the exact role models that one would want for their child. I continually use them as examples of strong effective leaders for my daughter to follow. They seem to have incredible insight into awakening the individual strengths in the kids. We felt an immediate sense of trust with each one of them.

We have never had a doubt that sending our daughter to SOAR camp was the most life changing experience for her. I hope that our experience can speak to other parents experiencing similar challenges and concerns with their children. The transformation in our daughter continues with each visit to SOAR camp. The gifts that the staff at SOAR camp have given our family are priceless and too abundant to express. Our gratitude is eternal.