

2017 Peace Camp

ICPJ monthly column, written by Mary Heaton, ICPJ Youth Board Member.

When I was in the sixth grade, I had the privilege to be a guest speaker at the Interfaith Center for Peace and Justice of Adams County's Peace Camp. Around three years later, I came back as a junior counselor. I have now been fortunate enough to serve as a junior counselor for the past two years. Every year I have been involved with Peace Camp has been an unforgettable experience that I could not be more grateful for.

Coming from a family with six children means I am constantly surrounded by kids, so I never thought being a counselor would be that difficult. And while I was very wrong about this, despite all the challenges, it was worth it. Over the course of a week, I got to interact with children of varying ages with vastly different backgrounds. Additionally, seeing the way that these children look past their differences is truly beautiful, and is something many adults cannot do themselves.

Peace Camp provides lessons to the children that are extremely topical. In 2016, the theme was "Loving Our Neighbors: Refugees Past, Present, and Future." This year, the theme was "Taking care of our Environment." Lessons included learning the importance of pollination, recycling, water conservation, insects, and our own nutrition. By engaging in fun and educational activities, the children in attendance at this year's Peace Camp were able to learn how to take care of the planets and their own bodies.

I would like to thank Tania Reyes, Director, and Analy Blanco, Assistant Director, members of the Interfaith Center for Peace and Justice Board who volunteered each day, the many special presenters and guests, and the community at St. John's Lutheran Church in Littlestown who hosted Peace Camp this year.

Peace Camp is a place where everyone is accepted by their peers and their leaders. As cliché as it might be, children are the future, so it is vital we teach them to care about each other, the Earth, and even themselves. The greatest lesson Peace Camp taught me was this: We are not as different as we all think. While I had an understanding of this prior to Peace Camp, it was further reinforced by the most unlikely of teachers- the children.