



TAKING S.T.E.P.S. NEWSLETTER

YMCA CAMP NORTHERN LIGHTS | FALL 2022

A LETTER TO OUR COMMUNITY

Equity has been a core value of Camp Northern Lights since the very beginning. The summer 2020 staff team believed in seeing equity put into action. They believed that racial, cultural, gender and LGBTQ+ inclusivity should be integrated into the daily life and spirit of the Northern Lights community.

With the help of many community members and outside resources, the idea of Supporting the Transformation of Equity and Power in outdoor Spaces (S.T.E.P.S.) was born. This bold initiative was created with both a deep-seated love of Family Camp and the desire to make our community a more equitable and accessible space where all families can feel a sense of belonging.

The goal of the taking S.T.E.P.S initiative is to thoughtfully create more opportunities for BIPOC and LGBTQ+families to experience representation and community in a family camp setting. We are focusing on making tangible, lasting change that will grow year to year.



Summer 2022, photo credit: Brea Copeland

2022 HIGHLIGHTS

- Doubled efforts from previous year by offering 4 S.T.E.P.S. Sessions
- 46 families served through S.T.E.P.S. this summer: 16 returning and 30 new
- 5 Leadership Development Program participants (entering grades 9-12) volunteered at camp through S.T.E.P.S.
- Secured funding from 283 individual donors and two Minnesota foundations to sustain S.T.E.P.S.
- Successfully piloted tiered pricing system to allow for a more equitable registration process
- Hosted North Hennepin Community College – ‘Nature Immersion & Environmental Justice’ course – though a partnership with a S.T.E.P.S. family



Summer 2021

“What a sigh of relief it will be to not immediately notice that we are the only minority family around.”

–S.T.E.P.S. Parent

SUMMER 2023 REGISTRATION UPDATES & TIMELINE

NEW THIS YEAR – S.T.E.P.S. LOTTERY REGISTRATION

- Registration for S.T.E.P.S. will now begin with a lottery process, giving all families an equal opportunity.
- Online registration for the lottery is free of cost.
- Each family will register as a household.
- When a household registers for the lottery, they are randomly assigned to a registration wave. Wave assignments will be sent the week prior to the lottery.
- Participating households will register online using this link.
- Families interested in being a part of the general Family Camp Lottery can also learn more [here](#).
- **S.T.E.P.S. Lottery Registration is open from January 2 – 27, 2023**
- **S.T.E.P.S. Lottery: February 22 – 23, 2023**



Summer 2022, photo credit Angela Wunderlich

IMPORTANT DATES

- Summer 2023 S.T.E.P.S. Sessions
 - 6-Night sessions (Sunday to Saturday)
 - Session 4: June 25 – July 1
 - Session 10: July 30 – August 5 (LGBTQ+ Pride Session)
 - 3-Night sessions
 - Session 7: July 16 – 19 (Sunday – Wednesday)
 - Session 8: July 19 – 22 (Wednesday – Saturday)
- Leadership Development Program (LDP) S.T.E.P.S. Session
 - Session 4: July 23 – August 6
 - For teens entering grades 9-12
 - Applications due Nov. 25th
 - Apply [here](#).



Summer 2022, photo credit: Sal DiVita

“We enjoy the diversity of thought, culture, background, family structure, age, income level, etc. that we found at the camp. The outdoors are for everyone of course. And it’s not a tokenizing thing happening there. Many languages being spoken at Northern Lights, So much music being shared by kids, adults and families. Music I had not heard before. I was pretty surprised that this is even happening in Northern Minnesota, which sometimes feels very “white” to me. But not at Northern Lights! This is what S.T.E.P.S. camp is all about.”

FAMILY SPOTLIGHT

Lester, Meredith, and their two kids have now been a part of the S.T.E.P.S. initiative for the last two years. Lester agreed to sit down with good friend and S.T.E.P.S. participant, Martha Higuera to reflect on his experience.

Martha: How did you hear about camp, i.e. what/how/who introduced you to camp, and did it take any encouragement or convincing to come?

Lester: Someone had told Meredith about camp, and to be honest I was a little nervous going for the first time. It was really different, something that sounded healthy, and really fun to do as a family together.

Lester: Alguien le había dicho a Meredith sobre el campamento, y me sentía la verdad un poco nervioso ir por primera vez. Era diferente, algo bastante sano y saludable, y muy divertido hacer algo en familia juntos.

Martha: How would you describe your comfort level of being outdoors, both at camp and back home in St. Paul?

Lester: I loved it [being at camp], it was a beautiful experience. When we went to the island in the pontoon at night, for the first time in the lake, that was something that I had never done before. In fact I loved it more than being in the city. I love being around the lakes and river, walking, etc....what I don't like is swimming in or getting into cold water;). Camp was just something so healthy and relaxing for me.

Lester: A mi me encantaba (estar en el campamento), era una experiencia bastante bonita. Cuando fuimos en la lancha a la isla por la noche, era algo que nunca había hecho yo. De hecho, me gustaba más estar allí que estar en la ciudad. Me gusta andar por el lago, caminar, y todo, lo único que no me gustaba era el agua fría. Más que todo es algo sano, relajante para mi, a mi me gustaba muchísimo.

Martha: What were your initial impressions of camp (upon arriving, first gathering, age groups, etc.)?

Lester: I felt comfortable because we were able to leave our routine in the city, you know with work, family, and the stress of daily life. I was so happy for the kids to get to go because we just got to be together and enjoy one another. Sometimes you just need time as a couple, go walking, think about something else for a bit. I felt very relaxed at camp, very comfortable.

Lester: Me sentía cómodo porque pudimos dejar nuestra rutina de la ciudad, como el trabajo, la familia, y el estrés de la vida. Me sentía contento de que los niños pudieran ir, porque estuvimos juntos y disfrutando entre familia. A veces uno necesita tiempo como pareja, salir a caminar, distraerse. Era bastante relajante para mi. Me sentía bien allí.



Summer 2022, photo credit: Meredith W.

FAMILY SPOTLIGHT CONTINUED

Martha: What surprised you the most about camp?

Lester: I didn't think it would be like this. At first I felt nervous but by the end I didn't want to leave!

Lester: No pensaba que iba ser así. Al principio, me sentía nervioso, pero al final no me quería ir!

Martha: What did your family members enjoy most about camp (i.e. children vs. partner, etc.)?

Lester: For me what I liked the most was being able to see my children getting to enjoy camp. We had been social distancing for so long that getting to see my children try new things and have quality time doing campfires, reading books at night, etc. was so special and tranquil.

Lester: Para mi lo que me gustaba más que todo era ver a mis hijos disfrutar el campamento. Habíamos pasado tanto tiempo en casa, no saliendo mucho que para ver a mis hijos intentar algunas cosas nuevas y pasar tiempo juntos en familia en una fogata, leyendo libros por la noche, pasándola bien era bien especial y algo tranquilo para mi.

Q: What are you looking forward to this year, as a returning family?

Lester: I would like to come back and look forward to the boat rides (take the pontoon to Bear Island, pick raspberries). I am a little nervous/excited to come back and remember all the beautiful moments of when we went the first time.

Lester: Me gustaría poder volver y me gustaría ir en la lancha de nuevo (a la isla del oso, recoger frambuesas). Estoy ansioso y emocionado por volver y recordar todos los momentos bonitos de cuando fuimos por primera vez.

Martha: What would you like to see from CNL and STEPS week, as it continues to grow in the coming years?

Lester: It was perfect!

Lester: Era perfecto.



Session 14 (S.T.E.P.S.)
Summer 2022, photo
credit: Sal DiVita