

BOLD & GOLD was born out of two Seattle programs and a desire to inspire young men and women.

In 1996, Jane Bierman-Siebel and Annie Lareau, two young educators, met on a whale watching voyage and realized they shared a passion for female empowerment and a common concern for the growing troubles facing young women in their communities. They began leading wilderness trips for young women to discover and develop their physical, expressive, and inquisitive courage as well as their interest in the natural world.

In 2006, Craig McKibben, a rock climber-turned-computer developer, recognized a similar need for the young men of the area. Craig saw the importance of time in nature and shared challenge. He recognized what time outdoors had given him as a leader, businessman, and person. Based on the existing model for girls, he worked with the YMCA of Greater Seattle to create a program using wilderness adventure to foster leadership and emotional awareness in young men.

Both programs valued diversity and inclusion and made it a priority to serve youth that fairly reflected the Seattle community. In 2011, the two programs combined under the YMCA umbrella to form BOLD & GOLD. The program doubled in size for the first several years, and it became clear there was a need for experiences like these.

SHARING THE VISION

In 2013, through a partnership with the YMCA of Greater Seattle and the YMCA of the USA, the YMCA of the Greater Twin Cities began running its BOLD & GOLD Program at Camps Menogyn and Widjiwagan. In March of 2015, after two summers of small successes, we invested in BOLD & GOLD by creating a full-time position to oversee the program. Since that time, our BOLD & GOLD program has grown to serve well over 300 teens a summer who are representative of the demographics of the Twin Cities.

BOLD & GOLD has become a national YMCA program which operates in almost 30 locations across the country, taking teens on wilderness canoeing, backpacking, rock climbing, mountaineering, and sea kayaking expeditions to learn and develop 21st Century leadership skills and become stewards of the environment.

The BOLD & GOLD program for the YMCA of the Greater Twin Cities is the second-largest program in the country, and its Director is one of three members of the BOLD & GOLD National Leadership Team. YMCA staff from around the country now come to the Twin Cities to receive training on how we bring together diverse groups of campers and teach them to be leaders in their community!

King Leadership Camp – History at Camp St. Croix

In 1996, a dedicated community member named Eric Fotsch approached the Peter J. King Family Foundation to fund a research grant. Eric's research reached out to hundreds of youth and their families and to various youth-service organizations to discover what percentage of Twin Cities youth were truly engaged in outdoor activities. Out of the 1,100 youth survey responses Eric received, the vast majority of those youth did not consistently participate in outdoor activities, but they wanted to do so!

Therefore, Eric approached the YMCA to learn what sort of opportunities the Y could offer through its summer camps. After a couple of early programming trials, Eric was able to develop a partnership with YMCA Camp St. Croix, in Hudson, WI. From 1996-2003, Eric recruited and sent about 30 elementary school aged 4th-6th graders to Camp St. Croix each summer with no cost to the camper families.

While these were definitely great experiences for the youth involved, there was a clear need for more youth to be involved and for the experience to last for longer than one summer. With the support of Camp St. Croix and the Peter J. King Family Foundation – the King Leadership Camp (KLC) was born!

KLC was designed to be a three-year progression of camp opportunities for its participants, with the goal of developing community leaders. It was such a hit that many of its participants continued to return to Camp St. Croix to be KLC counselors – passing on the skills and lessons they learned at KLC to the next wave of campers. In addition to attending Camp St. Croix in the summer months, KLC participants were encouraged to attend both a fall and a spring retreat each year – all at no cost.

By the end of the summer of 2016, KLC had served over 780 campers during the summer and had 300 graduates of the program (campers who completed all 3 years of participation).

King Leadership Camp – Merger with BOLD & GOLD

In the fall of 2016, YMCA Camp Staff, the Peter J. King Family Foundation, and Eric Fotsch all met to discuss the future of these two great programs. After a variety of discussions, the team decided that we should use many of the core elements of King Leadership Camp, such as its three-year progression and its focus on year-round involvement, and combine it with the nationally recognized BOLD & GOLD name and curriculum to develop one large program that can serve teens through challenging and rewarding outdoors experiences. These stakeholders decided to call the entire program BOLD & GOLD and to recognize its graduates as King Scholars.

BOLD & GOLD Progression – King Scholars

The YMCA of the Greater Twin Cities now runs its BOLD & GOLD program at four of our Overnight Camps (Ihduhapi, St. Croix, Menogyn, and Widjiwagan).

Most first-year campers attend either Camp St. Croix or Camp Ihduhapi for a one-week session, which includes a two-day canoeing or rock-climbing trip on the St. Croix River. In years two and three of their BOLD & GOLD King Scholars journey, campers are encouraged to head to Camp Widjiwagan or Camp Menogyn for progressively longer canoeing expeditions in the Boundary Waters. We also offer a variety of free outdoor and educational programming in and around the Twin Cities throughout the school year. All campers who complete all three years of participation get to celebrate their accomplishments at our annual graduation weekend and ceremony, which is held every April at Camp St. Croix.

By graduating as a King Scholar, our BOLD & GOLD campers demonstrate their commitment to improving themselves and their communities by developing their cultural competency and leadership skills through challenging outdoor activities.

Many of our King Scholars continue to be involved with BOLD & GOLD through participation in the BOLD & GOLD Internship. Our Interns work for us during the summers after 11th and 12th grade in order to further develop their leadership skills and prepare to become BOLD & GOLD counselors when they are eligible to do so at age 19. We are working to develop youth who are lifetime advocates of the BOLD & GOLD experience and of outdoor recreation.

As BOLD & GOLD continues to develop and grow, it does so through the leadership of YMCA staff, the Peter J. King Family Foundation, and the BOLD & GOLD Advisory Board – a team of dedicated volunteers who are committed to ensuring that all teens have the opportunity to be a part of BOLD & GOLD, regardless of their background or their ability to pay. We envision a world where young people have the emotional intelligence, courage, and compassion to be leaders in their communities.