



**2023 Recipient ~ Isabella Farrelly
The Forman School, Class of 2024**

Since I was nine years old, during the summers, I went to a four week sleep away camp. Camp experiences were something that I eagerly anticipated each year. Like many, I always looked up to the older kids. I wanted to be like them, spend time with them, and laugh with them.

Unfortunately, because of COVID, I wasn't able to go back to camp for two consecutive summers. Finally, in the summer of 2021, everyone was able to return to camp. But this time, the camp experience would be drastically different because my friends and I were suddenly the older kids that we once looked up to.

Instead of doing our activities during the day, I volunteered to be the younger kids' counselor for a couple hours a day. I loved it. It reminded me of the child that I was at camp, but I was seeing life through a new set of eyes as a mentor. I made connections with the younger campers who, honestly, changed me. Whenever I saw my campers they would run up to me, so excited to see me.

The 20 hours of community mentorship was so fulfilling that it left me wishing once again for camp, but instead of being the camper, I would be the counselor. What's interesting is that while I was hanging out with these kids, I never really thought about the impact it could have had.

Looking back on it, yes, I made amazing memories with them. But what's of greater importance is that they started to not have the feeling of being homesick. With my help they started having the feeling that the new atmosphere could be their home-away-from-home. They felt they had someone to talk to, and now I realize they felt safer with me.

To be able to provide those comforting feelings for such young people has shaped me into who I am today. It's made me realize that all along I have enjoyed being a caregiver. Prior to my camp counselor experience I have done volunteer work at my local church, packaging meals and snack boxing of which we delivered to various shelters. I have also volunteered as a CCD teacher. I enjoyed helping young kids learn about Christianity in a more interactive way. Beyond that, I have volunteered in food banks and devoted over 15 hours of community service every year.

I have realized the joy of giving and I plan to continue on this path for the remainder of my teenage years and into my adult life.