

Why Camp Matters

FRANKIE'S STORY

Every year we hear from young adults whose lives are changed because of camp. Frankie, a sharp, articulate, and hope-filled young man, attended Camp Qwanoes every summer throughout high school through UGM's camp sponsorship program. Today, he shares the difference camp made in his young life.

"I guess I should start with my parents, because that's always the beginning of somebody's story," Frankie says, reflecting. "They met at Carnegie Hall on Main and Hastings. My mom was actually a sex worker, but she'd gotten out of it by the time I was born. My dad ran away when he was young and was raised in the Downtown Eastside. He did a lot of drugs. I'm actually just getting to know him because he left when I was younger."

As he grew up, Frankie experienced the same pressures his dad once felt. *"At 13 I started to drink, smoke weed, do any drug I could get my hands on,"* he shares. *"I got so caught up in this lifestyle. Maybe if there'd been another option, another environment in which I could settle, I would've taken it—but I just didn't know anything else."* Eventually, he started selling drugs to support himself. *"I just wanted money; I wanted to be able to buy lunch or new clothes—the simplest things, really."*

Frankie loved school, but had trouble attending it. In grade eight, he was kicked out of high school; he began grade nine in an alternative program called *Street Front*, where he re-connected with a childhood mentor and basketball coach named Gage. Gage was a *Street Front* alumnus. At the end of grade ten, Gage introduced him to Inner Hope, a local organization that provides housing, support, discipleship, and mentorship to at-risk youth in East Vancouver.

"I started going to Inner Hope's life skills program," he explains, *"and heard all these stories from other kids about Youth Camp at Qwanoes."* **Because of your generous support, that summer, Frankie went to camp too.** At camp, Frankie met counsellors, made friends, and learned about God—all of which changed his life forever.

"Even at fourteen, I had a longing for a different life," Frankie recalls. *"At camp, I felt the presence of God for the first time. It was so different—a place I walked into and never wanted to leave. It was warmth, comfort."* *Camp changed Frankie, but permanent change takes time to root. "I'd go to camp for a week and be in this place I never wanted to leave. I'd come home changed, but nothing else had. It'd be easy to slip back into old habits."*

The summer after grade twelve, Frankie found himself at a significant crossroads. His whole life lay before him, but he wasn't sure what to do with it. While he was at camp that August, he thought critically about his future. *"I realized that my father and everyone in my family had the same lifestyle I was toying with. I knew I needed to do something about it. If you want a generational cycle broken, which I did, you have to break it yourself. So I said, 'I'm going to break it.' I knew I needed God's help for that. That week was one of the best weeks I've ever had."*

Camp ended on September 2nd. Days later, Frankie found himself at home, staring at

a blank wall, bearing the weight of breaking this cycle. *"I kept repeating: 'What am I going to do?' I wanted the best thing for my future kids, my future wife, for the next generation, but I felt like it was all on me. So I prayed. I got an overwhelming feeling of peace from God, a peace in knowing I wasn't alone in the decision I was making. I told God I'd go wherever, do whatever."* That Sunday, September 9th, Frankie was baptized through Reality Church in Vancouver.

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Frankie had decided he wanted to do a faith-based program, but didn't know where. He couldn't afford much—certainly no plane ticket nor costly tuition—so his Inner Hope mentors helped him research options. *"They told me about a Youth With a Mission (YWAM) discipleship training program in West Kelowna,"* he explains. *"I quickly enrolled."* On September 16th, Frankie arrived in the Okanagan. He ended up excelling so much in YWAM that he went on to work for them, and eventually, as a youth pastor in a partner church. *"I started to understand that I can do so much more with my life."*

Frankie returned to Vancouver last fall with renewed determination, wanting to make a meaningful difference in other people's lives. Soon after coming home, he heard the District Principal of Aboriginal Education speak. *"He said less than 50% of Aboriginal youth graduate high school here,"* Frankie remembers. This was sad but motivating news. *"That's when I knew I wanted to be a teacher in alternative schools."*

He has always had a gift with people—youth in particular—so Frankie will make an invaluable teacher. This September, Frankie starts his BEd degree at the University of British Columbia (UBC) through their Indigenous Teacher Education Program (NITEP). *"I'm not doing this for me,"* he explains matter-of-fact. *"I'm doing it for the next generation, for the kids I will teach, for my own kids."*

"When people sponsor kids for a week at camp," Frankie shares, "they need to know it's making a difference, that it's going to change a lifetime. It's so important that a child knows that someone, somewhere, is investing in them—and that investment might be huge. With me, I know that the seven days of camp I had will last me seventy years long."

Frankie (below) spent his summer working in East Vancouver, saving up for full-time studies in the fall.



Because of your compassion, kids in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES) can receive support at UGM all year round.

Our **Eastsiders** Afterschool Program provides kids from grades 3-7 with a safe, fun environment and encouraging adult role models.

After Elementary school, Eastsiders transition into **Teen Girls** or **Teen Boys**, where they continue to have fun and learn lots.

All youth can access our **Mentorship** Program, where they are matched with a mentor who provides rich and nurturing one-on-one support.

UGM's **LEAD** Program builds teenagers' leadership skills by providing fun, effective training, practice, and development.

Every summer, you give these kids—and many more!—a life-changing week at camp.

thank you

Dear Sponsor,

Thank you for sponsoring me and giving me the opportunity to go to Keats Camp. It was a great experience for me that I enjoyed very much! I especially enjoyed the activities like: skateboarding, mountain biking, and high ropes. Aside from the activities I really liked meeting new friends, participating in worship and learning more about God. My highlight of the week was playing games in the evening. I enjoyed the games because everyone participated and no one was excluded. Over the duration of the week my relationships with cabin mates and counsellors grew stronger. Going to Keats was probably one of my favourite parts of my summer. Thank you for sponsoring me so that I could have the experience that I did.

-Alec

YOUR IMPACT IN ACTION

This summer, bighearted donors like you gave 499 life-changing weeks of summer camp. Of the 445 overnight camp attendees, 278 have been previously sponsored and 167 were sponsored for the first time this year. Because of you:

404 KIDS ATTENDED WEEKLONG SUMMER CAMPS



41 PARENTS ATTENDED FAMILY CAMP WITH THEIR CHILDREN



54 KIDS ATTENDED DAY CAMPS AT UGM

Pictured above: Every year, sponsored campers and their families send us stories or drawings to share about their week at camp.

You Helped Change Children's Lives!

SUMMER CAMP REPORT 2015

Thank You!

Because of your generosity, 499 campers attended a life-changing week at summer camp, filled with fun and adventure. See your impact inside!