

BYM Camps

Catoctin / Opequon / Shiloh / Teen Adventure

The BYM Camping Program is a large, ambitious, multifaceted operation. In 2021, we had 568 individual campers attend one of our four camps, signing up for 680 sessions, representing a total of 1430 “camper weeks” at Catoctin, Opequon, Shiloh, and Teen Adventure. We hired and employed over 120 seasonal staff members, including five Directors, six Deputy Directors, and two Assistant Directors. We led campers on overnight camping trips where they hiked, canoed, and rock climbed. We facilitated multi-day artistic activities and workshops with campers. We supported campers and staff through physical injury and illness, through mental health challenges, through social conflict, through emotional and spiritual development. We created meaningful and life-changing experiences.

At the end of 2021, after several months (and one summer) in the job, and after coming into it with 19 summers of personal experience with the program, it is clear to me that if we are to continue running this program safely and ethically and sustainably and well, there are several urgent investments needed in the camping program, mostly in the area of human capital.

In 2021 we ran what should have been a \$1.5 million summer camp operation with only \$1.1 million in funds. We had planned for only \$1.1 million in expenses, so we technically broke even, but it came at a cost to our staff. Our camps were understaffed, and our staff was underpaid. There was widespread burnout and exhaustion. We made it happen, but it was unsustainable, and we cannot let the situation remain the same, or I believe it will eventually come at a cost to our program as well.

The proposed budget revision, which was recently approved by the Camping Program Committee, would allow for us to invest in increasing the level of staffing at each camp, and in increasing their level of compensation. Among many other things, this would enable us to recruit and retain a high-quality and diverse staff and leadership team.

The proposed budget would be self-funded, paying for itself using an altered and elevated sliding scale, which would ensure equity and access while keeping our camps at a level still at or below the fees of other similar overnight, wilderness- and adventure-based summer camps.

To dive deeper, and to hopefully make the urgency clear, through a conservative estimate of their total workload, we are currently paying our Directors at a rate of \$15/hour. That is what our community broadly agrees should be the minimum wage in this country. Given the skill and expertise and dedication required of the position, I believe that pay rate to be unethical, and it is almost objectively unsustainable. We are at risk of substantial leadership turnover, and past Director searches have shown how hard it is to find new Directors at this salary level.

Through a similarly conservative estimate of hours worked, we are currently paying our counselors at a starting wage of \$2.67/hour. This budget would provide a meaningful raise, but it would still be only \$3.72/hour. To recruit and retain a high quality and diverse staff, this is a necessary first step. It allows us to invest in Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) initiatives at the staff level, which is the foundation upon which all camper-level JEDI initiatives must be based. And to invest in the quality and quantity of our staff is to invest in the quality and impact of our program. It is also to invest in risk mitigation, in the safety of our program.

This budget would also fund the first full-time and year-round Director position, another necessary step toward near-term stability and long-term sustainability at the camp leadership level. The industry standard at overnight summer camps across the country is for Directors to be full-time and year-round. This would move us closer to that baseline, and it is a trajectory that the Camping Program Committee endorses.

The primary work of this position -- beyond the current Director-specific tasks which already account for over 800 hours of work annually -- would be:

- family engagement (to increase camper / family retention)
- camper recruitment (with the goal of achieving 100% enrollment)
- fundraising (through alumni engagement and small donor cultivation)

This is all work that we are currently unable to do, and it would be work focused on supporting the long-term sustainability and viability of both the position and the program.

I will also note that the proposed revised budget has a surplus built in, and is based on moderate projections of enrollment (85%), of the percentage of families able to pay the full cost of camp (40%), and of increased fundraising goals for our campership fund (\$100,000). If any one of those metrics come in under expectation, I believe that we will be fine, financially. And if they come in above expectation, then we will have more space to both invest in our program and ensure broad access to our program.

I'll end by making clear my commitments to you, to the BYM Camps staff, and to all of the BYM Camps stakeholders, with regards to this decision and any others of great consequence.

- I will center the values of equity and justice for both campers and their families, and for staff, in all decisions and designs regarding the systems and structures that determine how much it costs to go to camp, and how much you get paid to work at camp.
- I will build a functional and easy-to-use financial aid system by the start of the 2022 registration period, so that families who need support through the sliding scale are not intimidated nor discouraged nor asked to carry too heavy of a time or paperwork burden in

their application.

- I will work extensively to ensure that the annual "campership" fund rises to a level where it can support a similar level of access as has been traditionally given, with an initial target of \$100,000 in 2022. I will focus on extensive and creative engagement of our vast alumni community, and the cultivation of a substantial small donor base outside of the traditional BYM communities.
- I will communicate directly with all returning and new camper families about this change in the sliding scale, and will personally answer and address every question, concern, and criticism that comes as a result.
- I will do everything possible to ensure that no camper is unable to come to camp due to financial need or a lack of funds.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this proposal, of this request. I look forward to receiving any and all questions, comments, concerns, and criticisms, and I eagerly await future discussion and deliberation on this topic. I also eagerly await the bright future of BYM Camps.

Peace,

Brian Massey
Program Manager, BYM Camps