

# BYM Camps Annual Report - 2021

Presented to Interim Meeting - October 9, 2021

*Brian Massey, Program Manager, BYM Camps*

First things first: We did it. We re-opened BYM Camps in 2021. We had an incredible, miraculous, restorative, joyous, and necessary summer. Catoctin and Opequon and Shiloh and Teen Adventure were once again full with campers and counselors, with songs and laughter, with friendship and challenge and transformation. The summer of 2021 was an unqualified success, something that was not guaranteed, that was not preordained. We worked incredibly hard to make it happen. We all should celebrate and be proud of that momentous accomplishment.

Now, what did the details of that summer look like? To start, we had 568 individual campers attend one of our camps, signing up for 680 sessions, representing a total of 1430 “camper weeks” at Catoctin, Opequon, Shiloh, and Teen Adventure. Overall, our camps were at 97% capacity for the summer, the highest number in recent memory. Furthermore, in a typical year, we’ve had between 40-60 new campers entering into our program. In 2021, we had 260, a five-fold increase. There are many possible reasons for this level of registration -- pent-up demand for outdoor summer experiences after a year of virtual school, our sliding scale fee structure, broad loyalty and word of mouth recommendations, etc. -- but whatever the factors, it represented an incredible opportunity to build relationships and connections with many new families, and to provide transformational and impactful experiences for many new young people.

To look a little more closely at who our campers were, 398 (71%) of them were white, and 160 (29%) fit under the broad definition of “campers of color”. In terms of religious identity, 131 (23%) of our campers came from BYM Quaker families, with another 31 (5%) coming from non-BYM Quaker families. The rest of the campers came from families that identified as “Not Religious” (33%), non-Quaker Christian (22%), “Other” (9%), Jewish (6%), or Hindu/Buddhist/Muslim (3%).

The sliding scale fee structure that was put in place for the 2021 camp season resulted in the broad affordability of, and access to, the BYM Camps. It also gave us a glimpse at the financial reality of our campers’ families and the greater camp community, and it gave us a sense of the level of financial support needed to ensure long-term accessibility to these incredible camps. To be specific, 47% of sessions were paid for at the top rate, \$1950 for two weeks, which we identified as the “true” cost of camp. Another 16% were paid for in

the second tier (\$1600) and 11% were paid for in the third tier (\$1250). In total, 74% of sessions were paid for in the top three tiers. Of the 26% of remaining sessions, 7% were paid for in the fourth tier (\$900), 5% were paid for in the fifth tier (\$600), 5% were paid for in the sixth tier (\$400), and 9% were paid for in the seventh tier (\$200).

The sliding scale fee structure was wildly successful at ensuring access to the BYM Camps during a pandemic that has been emotionally and financially challenging for so many families. It also helped to make sure that they were full after being empty in 2020. That said, it also highlighted a large gap between what it costs to run these incredible camps in a safe, responsible, and sustainable way, and what we are asking families to pay, either with their own funds or through scholarships or other outside support. To put a number on it, if we assume that \$1950 is in fact the “true” cost of one camper session -- and many believe it either is or should be higher -- and if we assume that all families paid full price, either on their own or with support, than BYM Camps would have brought in \$1,406,500 in camper fees this summer. Instead, we brought in \$991,450. We effectively provided \$365,750 in camper fee discounts through the sliding scale, plus another \$41,500 in work grant discounts, resulting in a total gap of \$415,050.

The good news is that our budget was built on a projection of camper fees being \$906,000, so we're not *technically* in the red. In fact, we appear to be in the black for the camp season, from a narrow accounting perspective. We also have \$118,000 in the camp scholarship fund to help narrow this gap. But it is clear that we've been radically under-budgeting our camper fees, at the expense of the quality of our program and the well-being of our staff. The real price to camp has been that we are woefully understaffed at a programmatic level, and that we underpay and underinvest in those staff from whom we expect so much. This year, they did more work than ever, with more campers than ever, with more complicated challenges than ever, and they did it with less, coming in under a budget that was 70% of what it should have been. We should celebrate them and that incredible accomplishment, but we should also honor and respect them by making sure they are adequately supported and compensated in the future. We must find a way moving forward to balance the discounts we provide to ensure accessibility at the camper level, with increased fundraising and/or increased full-price fees so that we have the appropriate year-round and seasonal staffing to make our camps sustainable, equitable, accessible, and just at the staff level as well.

Now, I'm sure many of you are wondering about COVID-19, and how the camps navigated that incredible and unprecedented challenge. I'm happy to report that not one camper tested positive for COVID-19 while at camp. None. Zero. We should all have enough humility at this point to know that this virus is mysterious, that there was surely a great

deal of luck involved in that outcome. But nonetheless, an incredible amount of work went into the development and implementation of the BYM Camps 2021 Health & Safety Plan, and everyone should feel proud, Directors and staff most of all.

Beyond that, I want to highlight and lift up the incredible amount of work that our Directors and staff did this summer to balance mental health concerns with concerns about viral transmission. This past year has taken a huge toll on the mental and emotional health of our campers and our staff, and in so many ways that was a bigger challenge and more salient concern this summer. We did not meet those challenges perfectly, and there is plenty of room for institutional growth and improvement, but we were aware of them, and we committed to prioritizing them amidst all the other concerns that were present at camp this summer. There were reports from other summer camps across the country of staff burning out, leaving early, quitting on the spot, as COVID-related mitigation efforts created an unsustainable burden on the staff. While we have a long way to go before we are adequately supporting our staff, this summer showed me that we have a camp-level culture of valuing and listening to our staff that we should be proud of, and that once again we should not take our Directors and their visionary leadership for granted.

Before moving on, I should acknowledge that I tested positive for COVID-19 this summer, along with two other BYM Camps staff. While it was certainly scary, and while we certainly got lucky, the fact is that none of us tested positive while at a camp that was in session, all of us are fully recovered, and the many mitigation strategies that we implemented -- vaccination mandate for all staff, maximum outdoor programming, selective and strategic masking, etc. -- managed to break the transmission chain before it spread too far. Ultimately, in a harrowing summer, it was a moment from which we (and I) learned a great deal, but it was also a moment that highlighted the many reasons for us to be proud of what we accomplished this summer.

The last piece of reflection on which I'd like to report is the feedback that we received from our enhanced family and staff evaluation forms. We had 164 families (36%) and 49 staff (40.5%) fill out and submit these feedback forms, a solid sample size that gave us many valuable pieces of information. We analyzed their responses using the Net Promoter Scale, which is essentially measuring how likely someone is to recommend our institution to others. (The scores can be read using the following guidelines: -100 to -1 = Needs Improvement; 0 to 29 = Good; 30 to 69 = Great; 70 to 100 = Exceptional.) The Overall Net Promoter Score from our families was 77, which is exceptional. The Overall Net Promoter Score from our staff was 20, which is good, and in line with other similar institutions.

The conclusions I've taken from both the quantitative and qualitative analysis of these survey results is that our camps are broadly successful, continue to produce fantastic and meaningful and transformative outcomes, and continue to generate significant levels of satisfaction, loyalty, and appreciation. In particular, there was widespread gratitude for the "extra mile" that so many went to pull off camp this year, when it was both harder and needed more than ever. That said, there were also serious and persistent concerns about the need for infrastructure improvements, increased seasonal and year-round staffing, and increased investments in staff through both training and pay. As always, reasons to celebrate, and reasons to keep working.

To end, I'll share my main takeaways from the summer, the lessons I'm carrying forward, the needs and imperatives that I've identified in the program as we move toward 2022, toward 2025, toward 2030 and beyond.

First, there is the need to look honestly and clearly at this large, ambitious, intricate, and multifaceted program. It is a program that has been wildly successful and transformative for countless campers, staff, and families. It is a program that is a leader and exemplar for many within the larger summer camp and experiential education industry.

Second, there is the need to take that program seriously, to invest in and believe in it, to allow for it to be truly sustainable, to enable it to grow and evolve so that it can be as transformative and powerful to young people and their families in 2025 and 2035 as it was in 1985 and 1995.

Third, there is the need to listen to and center the voices of our Directors and our Staff, understanding that they are -- and historically have been -- the visionary leaders who push that growth and evolution, who create joyous and liberatory communities, who make the camps what they are, full stop.

Lastly, there is the need to open up BYM Camps to all of the stakeholders, all of the people that love and care about it, to build structures and systems and gatherings that are truly welcoming and inviting and accessible to all members of this community, some of whom identify with BYM, many of whom do not. There is the need to understand and acknowledge that it is in the hands of this broad and beautiful community that lies the future of BYM Camps -- with their energy, their ideas, their evangelism, their talent and brilliance, their joy and celebration, their expertise and connections, their donations, and, of course, their kids -- and to act accordingly.

In 2021, we made it happen. Now we get to work on making it better. Onward.