

## Stories From Youth Unlimited



### A PLACE TO BELONG

Corey\* is an autistic teen who struggles with PTSD and identifies as non-binary\*\*. When Corey enrolled in the Jesters Theatre summer day camp through YU, their social worker warned staff of potential disobedient behavior. "I wasn't overly concerned," said Ryan Scramstad, the program's Artistic Director, "this is what we do best." Speaking from experience and through authentic YU values, Ryan was committed to allowing even the more challenging personalities to participate in an experience that would undoubtedly enrich their life.

Corey breezed through their first day, making friends seamlessly and participating in a wide range of activities. It was evident Corey felt accepted by staff and campers alike. It wasn't until the following day, when they posed for group photos, that Corey began acting out.

Corey's photo consent forms weren't signed, so they couldn't be in the photos, which caused them to feel excluded. "They kept trying to jump into the photos, and when staff explained to them that they couldn't, they became angry and aggressive," said Ryan. "It was a difficult position for staff to be in." The leaders sat



with Corey to calm them down, hoping to give them a positive experience, but calming seemed impossible. Staff went home defeated.

Ginny\* was a camper who often sat out of God-related conversations at camp. She had no desire to get to know Christ, and was supported without judgement in her decision not to participate. Corey found a friend in Ginny, as they were able to relate on many levels, and a strong bond was formed. They quickly became inseparable and the sense of belonging was restored.

While the relationship between a youth and mentor can be transformative, youth workers may not always be what the youth needs. It's through community that we are strongest. Jesters, like all YU programs, encourages natural connections and flourishing friendships. Sometimes all youth need is someone to relate to in order to feel seen.

\*Corey and \*Ginny = not their real names

\*\*Corey's preferred pronouns are "them/they"

“ Jesters has been a big part of molding me into who I am today. ”  
- Jesters Theatre Alumna

“ My only friends are at Jesters. I can be myself here. ”  
- Jesters Theatre Youth