“People Helping People”

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I came to camp thinking that I knew what my summer was going to be like. Growing up I attended a camp for people with disabilities in Pennsylvania because I have cerebral palsy. I loved camp more than the universe. One of my favorite things about camp was building relationships with counselors and programmers with disabilities. They were my role models. They taught me to be proud of who I am and to never ever give up. I wanted to give that to someone else.

Despite the fact that I had been previously exposed to the diverse range of emotional and physical needs of people with disabilities, I wasn’t prepared for what it meant to actually fulfill those needs. I thought that serving at Easter Seals Wisconsin would feel very similar to being a camper. It was completely different but just as beautiful. One day, a camper excitedly said to me, “Wait! Wait! You’re in a wheelchair too!” Although the obvious nature of the statement made it humorous, his excitement was really meaningful to me. Not only was I a mentor and a role model to campers, but my role was also a reminder to staff, campers, and myself that we are all human, whether we have a disability or not. Although my role was very different than that of a camper, I looked, talked, and walked like many of the campers. I learned just as much (if not more) from the campers as the campers did from me. By serving others, I showed how camp isn’t (and shouldn’t) be framed as a place where people without disabilities help those with disabilities. Rather, it should be a place where people help people. My time serving with AmeiCorps taught me that viewing those I help as human beings is crucial to being able to help them.

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