

Camp Noah

As this is the last week of Camp Noah in the BR3T area, it is important to reflect back on not only the Camp Noah recovery process, but children in disasters in general. Talking to the adult staff and instructors who have worked with the children during these week long camps it is hard to not be impressed with the impact these camps have had in San Marcos, Martindale and now Wimberley.



When disasters strike, the traumatic impacts on anyone can be enormous. Long lasting and /or reoccurring fear and anxiety, stress and in some cases shock or psychological paralysis can often be tied back to what a person sees, hears, feels or otherwise experiences. Many people may remember the personal impact of watching CNN showing people jumping to their deaths from the World Trade Center. For some, they were not able to even watch any coverage of 9/11 for years as it would bring them back to those images.

For some people who survived the devastation of the 2015 flood events, these types of feelings reoccur every time our region experiences a severe thunderstorm. Imagine how those feelings might be in people who do not have the experience, context or life skills to process this information and separate what fears are reasonable and justifiable from those that might be unreasonable and unnecessary. This is why BR3T is working with Camp Noah, to help with the physiological and emotional recovery of youth whose lives were disrupted by the 2015 flood events.

In many ways, children are more resilient than adults in processing stresses that weaken many adults. Yet at the same time children are more vulnerable and dependent upon the security systems or lifelines in their lives. Helping these children process the conflicting stress, fears and other emotions that these children feel is essential to the long term recovery process of BR3T communities. A common description that campers in the first camp had was the San Marcos Community Center was there “Safe Place” following the flood. Many of the areas of their lives that they looked to for security had been disrupted. They saw their homes damaged, family lives disrupted and people they looked up to fearful of what was going to happen. Camp Noah was able to help them move past these disruptions, name those fears and move past the trauma of these disasters.

One of the staff members shared a story of how a local child transformed over the week and went from one who would not talk on Monday to standing up and being a leader of the camp on the last day. Watching this child respond and open up over the course of the week was personally inspiring to this staff member. On the first day of camp, this young man obviously was having trouble dealing with the trauma he had faced in the floods. Staff had a difficult time even getting him to talk to the class; however, he did express himself through his artwork.

As the week progressed he began to open up. On the second day he drew a picture of an Eagle, the mascot of his class, to place on the door. The next day he began to do similar drawings for the other classes for their doors. On Thursday he shared his love of drawing and showcased his artwork with the entire camp as part of the talent show. On Friday, he stood up in front of the entire camp and led them in friendly competitions with the winners receiving the artwork he had made for class. This young man was completely different than the one who walking in on the first day.

One of the other staff members shared his observations of the group of 6th graders he was working with. As they discussed their fears and anxieties, he observed more than 60% of them were significantly traumatized by the Flood events. They talked about what happened that night, what they lost and two even talked about how they re-experience those feelings again. This staff member had worked with this same age group before as an AmeriCorps volunteer in Connecticut and was impressed with how these children opened up.

Kristen is a staff member who plans on working as a teacher in the future. She responded to the ad, looking for camp helpers and found this camp so inspiring she is going to work in a camp in California next week and then in Bastrop the following week. Although her plans still include teaching, she has seen this opportunity as a calling.

Simply stated, Camp Noah works because it provides a safe, caring and fun environment using a proven curriculum designed to help children process their experiences. Children are encouraged to identify, name and face their fears, grieve their losses and then move on. Camp Noah also helps these children identify and share their unique gifts and talents and plan for their future. Participants leave with skills for dealing with traumatic events, a personal backpack filled with emergency supplies and a handmade blanket to serve as a physical reminder of what they learned. What is incumbent upon us is that we continue to look for ways we can help provide a safe place for them to continue the conversation that was started.