

Deaf Youth and Summer Programs: The Why

Overview

For many young adults, summer programs such as camp provide a respite from the humdrum of everyday life, a hiatus from the watchful eye of parents and teachers, and the opportunity to try something new and forge long-lasting friendships. At first glance, camp might appear to be all fun and games, but research has demonstrated that camps can have a positive impact on youth development outcomes related to independence, leadership, self-esteem, problem-solving, and feelings of empowerment.^{1,2} Summer camp can also provide opportunities to develop personal and professional relationships outside of the constraints of the school environment.^{3,4,5,6} This document provides a summary of why summer programs are important for all youth and specifically for deaf youth.



Why are Summer Programs Important?

Summer programs can contribute to a wide range of outcomes. As a result of attending summer camps and programs, youth are likely to demonstrate growth in three areas: youth development, academic development, and career development.

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

- Youth camps have been found to strengthen self-esteem¹¹ and self-confidence,¹ especially for younger campers and economically disadvantaged youth.^{12,13}
- Youth with disabilities benefit from peer role modeling in summer camp environments,¹⁴ which can strengthen an understanding of their capacity.¹⁵

- Summer camps can support the development of social skills and friendship skills.^{1,16,17}
- Camp experience can also contribute to the development of identity, values, and spirituality.^{1,17}
- Youth who attend summer camps demonstrate independence,^{1,2,15} self-reliance,^{2,18} adventure and exploration skills,¹ and leadership skills.^{1,19}
- Youth demonstrate stronger environmental stewardship as a result of attending camp.²

EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Summer programs can contribute to increased enrollment in college-track curricula,²⁰ likelihood that youth will attend college,²¹ and motivation to complete college.⁹
- Summer camps and learning programs can contribute to gains in reading achievement^{10,22} and reading enjoyment.²³
- Summer camps and learning programs can also contribute to gains in math achievement.^{10,22}
- Youth who attend summer camps may be more likely to attend college, stay in college, and use support services while in college.²²

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

- Attitudes about career choices^{7,8} and thinking about a field of study⁹ can be positively affected through summer programming.
- Programs with an internship component can improve students' career decision-making skills.¹⁰

Summer Programs for Deaf Youth

Summer programs and camps are unique educational opportunities that can play a prominent role in youth development and act as a catalyst for growth and skills development for all students. Deaf youth summer camps are unique in that they bring together deaf students, many of whom are not in regular contact with other deaf students or adults.²⁴ Research shows that youth with disabilities benefit from attending camps that are disability-specific because such camps reduce feelings of isolation and inadequacy.^{11,15} The opportunity to learn from and alongside other similarly disabled individuals can be a powerful experience for youth. The focus of summer programs for deaf youth include, for example, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) content,^{25,26,27,28} college and career readiness,^{29,30,31} language development,³² and youth development.^{28,33} Many sources of anecdotal evidence, as well as a few research studies, show the positive impact of deaf youth summer camps.

Why Are Deaf Youth Summer Programs Important?

- Deaf summer programs can have a positive impact on youth social skills⁵ and social acceptance.^{34,35}
- Deaf camp environments where youth engage with deaf peers and staff members contribute to a better understanding of Deaf culture and the youth's identity.⁵
- Younger deaf students' interaction with older deaf students at summer programs provides mentorship opportunities and benefits.³
- Summer programs can contribute to improvements in language skills for deaf youth.⁵

Summer programs and camps can make a strong contribution to youth, academic, and career development. For deaf youth, summer programs have the additional benefit of reducing isolation, strengthening social skills, and serving as an opportunity to connect with deaf peers and role models. A wide variety of deaf youth **summer camps and programs** exist across the country, though there may not be enough to meet the needs of all deaf youth. Given their potential to make a significant impact on the lives of deaf youth, summer programs are important and should be considered a strategy to support deaf youth as they prepare for life after high school.

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