

Sonja Carrière, CYL Program Director (2008 - 2010)

“I’ve learned that people will forget what you say, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

- Maya Angelou

When I think of CYL, I cannot help but smile. I get warm fuzzies reflecting on my time in the program as a participant (1999-2001), facilitator (2003-2012), Program Coordinator (2005-2007) and Camp Director (2008-2010).

As a first time participant, I remember feeling so anxious the closer I got to camp. I had no idea what to expect, no idea the profound impact that this program would have on my life. I went from being hesitant about approaching the facilitators and entering the facility, to devastated that I had to leave just a week later. I am not alone.

So, what is this CYL magic that draws us all in and keeps us all wanting to come back for more? For one, it is the courageous individuals that enter as strangers and leave as friends. Additionally, it is the barriers that we break down and the masks we leave behind as we begin to realize that we can truly be ourselves in this safe space, where we will not only be accepted but encouraged and celebrated. Furthermore, it is finding power in working as a collective instead of having to stand on our own as an individual.

For the first time in my life at Talking Stick, I felt truly heard; I felt seen. The Talking Stick has given voice to so many. It is powerful, validating, unifying. The CYL Program also empowers participants through challenge by choice; each activity you encounter allows you to go as far as you feel comfortable...and then hopefully one step further, stretching your comfort level and experiencing personal growth. You learn to trust in others through the various activities and to know they have your back. Each participant and facilitator is strengthened by putting their trust and belief in others and in themselves.

Most of all, CYL is about the incredible people.

If you haven’t had an opportunity, please join me in sending gratitude to the incredible people (past and present) who make this program possible:

- The OCA board and staff;
- The dedicated volunteer facilitators;

- The program sponsors;
- The courageous young people who decide to take a risk and participate.

Thank you! Thank you to all of you for your contributions and for investing in our youth, helping us to discover more about ourselves and about co-operation.

I encourage each of you to continue to participate in the co-operative sector, whether it be through membership, employment, and/or serving on the board of directors; incredible opportunities await you!

I will leave you with a quote that reminds me of the warm fuzzy feeling I get when thinking of the people I have met at CYL: “I’ve learned that people will forget what you say, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel”. - Maya Angelou

Never forget those warm fuzzies, the amazing connections, and the lifelong takeaway of considering people over profits when making your decisions in your career and in life.