

# Unique Summer Camp Changes Lives

## Camp LIVE UNITED

Making lunch for the homeless and participating in an “Elder Simulation” aren’t typical summer camp activities, but Camp LIVE UNITED was no ordinary camp.

For one week in July, 25 students from nearly every school district in Berks County took part in a unique first-time opportunity created by United Way of Berks County to help the teens gain an understanding of community needs by participating in varied activities, including learning about the issue of homelessness by making and serving lunch for shelter residents at Opportunity House, increasing awareness around the issues facing senior citizens by participating in an elder simulation at Berks Encore, visiting child care centers and helping to create mural and garden projects at an elementary school.

“We developed Camp LIVE UNITED because we wanted to change the kids’ lives,” said Sharon Mast, Director of Volunteer Engagement and the driving force behind the program. “We wanted them to understand why they were volunteering and the impact of their work on the community. It was heartwarming for me to see what they’ve gained from this.”

During the interactive closing ceremony, it was the parents’ turn to take part in some of the activities that had shaped their children’s experience at Camp LIVE UNITED. The students led their parents through a personality type exercise, performed a skit that demonstrated what they had learned about flash judgments and judged a tower building contest between two groups of parents who each faced unique challenges during the exercise.

Pre- and Post-camp surveys show that the experience was not just a fun week for the teens. At the beginning of the week, only 14% of the campers strongly agreed that they knew what they could do to help our community. On the final day, 81% strongly agreed with that statement, and the rest agreed.



“We hope this is just a starting point for the kids to build their knowledge of what they can do for the community,” said Pat Giles, Senior Vice President of Community Impact.

In their final activity of Camp LIVE UNITED, the students talked about what they were taking away from the week, and their parents shared the changes they had seen in their teens.

“I’m going to leave here knowing that I made a difference in the community,” said Ameer Couvertier.

Ameer’s mother also noted a major change in him. “The night after they served lunch at Opportunity House, he stopped his sister from throwing away food that was still on her plate after dinner,” she said. “He never would have done that before.”

United Way is grateful to RACC for hosting Camp LIVE UNITED and to all of the agencies and organizations that supported this program.

To see more photos of Camp LIVE UNITED visit [www.flickr.com/unitedwayberks](http://www.flickr.com/unitedwayberks)



United Way of Berks County