

Campbell United Methodist Church **August 5, 2018**
Conversation with four youth who were 2018 Sierra Service Project Volunteers

Abraham Akapo, a senior in high school this fall, and this was my first SSP

I did not have any strong reason to participate, just heard it was fun, and you would have a great time with the activities and helping out. I also wanted to have the experience. My goals were to learn what I can absorb and see what change in me will come about.

Each group had a job to do. My group, the Snazzy Shedders, were tasked with building a shed. We had to dig a trench which took two days because of the roots and rocks. We were supposed to build two walls, but we were able to finish up with three walls. On the last day we laid the cement, finishing the foundation for the shed.

I enjoyed working with my team on the project; we got along well, made jokes and had quality time during breaks. I enjoyed the breaks back at camp, the boys having fun shouting. The most challenging job was digging trenches. Never underestimate a trench. We had to deal with the roots, especially the big one that was just too deep, and the huge rock, which gave us a bit of problems since it was able to bend a pick axe and break a siege hammer. At the end we were able to reduce the size a little. What surprised me was how easy it was to interact with everyone since I find it hard to know what to say or interact with someone.

The theme for the trip was "Love Courageously". We were told how loving food was easy and very convenient, whilst loving God was inconvenient since we cannot see him, but it is worth loving God. Loving your brother or sister could be annoying but you must love them courageously. I learned that our connection with God is like a rope: it can always get disconnected but when we connect the rope back, the relationship will be closer than before.

What I learned at SSP: The teams, the night lessons, and stories were new to me in some ways, but this was something I can say I looked forward to. We also did the spirit walk in which we learned about faith and stories of how our counselors got their faith in God. I learned that you need an open heart and mind to help those around you. It can be easy to form a relationship with anyone depending on the circumstance; even meeting different people with different attitudes and personalities was quite interesting. We learned a bit about the culture of the Native American people, and our shed owner told us stories of his youth. Although it may be hard to believe in God, it is okay for us to put our faith in him

One more thing I learned: "Take off your cool jacket", was what Katie Strong said. It is okay to be silly and have fun. SSP was fun, and I think I would want to go again.

Felicia Keller, 9th grade, 1st year at SSP

My goal was to have fun. I was interested because my sister, Jocelyn, went when she was in high school and had a great time.

My work team was beginning to build a shed for Mickey. We dug the holes where the concrete will go, made a frame for the concrete pouring, and nailed together the stud walls. In addition to helping with the project, my extra job was to carry all of the tools to the car each day and to take care of them.

I was really surprised by how well I got along with some of the people on my work team that I had never met before. It was still difficult to do some of the more physical tasks where it was crucial that we work together.

The scenery was absolutely gorgeous. We went to two different lakes and saw bald eagles. We also went to see some of the sites and places important to the native people of the reservation.

The theme of the week was love courageously. In evening program we talked about the things that were needed to love courageously, and just what that meant.

On the first night, our spiritual leader, Katie, was introducing us to the concept of loving courageously. She was talking about what exactly that is. So she said that there is maybe the way you feel about ice cream, which is sort of a more comfy love. And there is the way you feel about someone who has hurt you, but you still love, which is a much more uncomfortable love. I'd never really thought about those different types of love.

I got to see and experience a group of people that really loved each other and that was pretty cool.

I learned that roots are really hard to get out of the ground with a shovel. We had one that was 2 or 3 inches thick and one of the kids on my work team named it mega root. It took us nearly a day to get it out. I also learned how to make enchiladas. It's a lot easier than it sounds.

Kiana Martin, a rising junior, first time on the SSP trip

I participated in SSP because all of my friends from youth group told me it is really fun and you get to learn how to build different things. My goal for going was to learn (about myself) in a new situation away from my parents.

My work team was called Leona's deck and stairs. Our group started the process of building a deck: demolishing (demo-ing) the old deck, measuring the lengths of the new deck, lining the spots where the holes were to be dug, digging the holes, and starting to fill the holes with concrete.

I enjoyed meeting new people the most. What challenged me was being away from home.

I learned that people come from many walks of life and have grown up differently than I have. There are some really awesome people I met or I got to know better during my time on SSP. I learned that I am stronger than I think I am. I learned God comes in more forms than I thought. He doesn't need to be the man in the clouds looking down on you.

At SSP, the spiritual coordinator this year was a young woman named Katie. Her philosophy is meeting you where you are at on your faith journey. She did just that. When we had evening devotional it did not feel like she was pushing faith on you, rather guiding you to explore your own spirituality.

The part that made the biggest impression on me was how peaceful and disconnected (in a good way) I felt when I was in Spokane. It was a wonderful experience not to have my phone. I felt I was really able to be in touch with myself because I didn't have any distractions.

I think it was a good reminder for me to remember how it felt to be one with myself especially when the school year comes. Just to take breathers and remember my phone is not my whole life.

It was a great experience that I appreciate having.

Zoa Willhoite, going into grade 10, and this was my 2nd year of SSP.

My sister did SSP before me so I kind of assumed I would to. But more seriously it sounded really fun and I was interested in doing some work that helped other people. My goals were to connect with the other youth group members more and to do quality work that would really aid someone in need.

My team demolished a rotting staircase. Then we dug post holes and a section of dirt. We filled the post holes and pit with concrete that we mixed to form a very stable concrete slab that would serve as a base for the staircase. We calculated the depth and the height of each stair and marked the stringers so that each stair would be level with the ground and the same size. We also installed posts at the post holes and replaced the front of the deck it connected to. Finally, we added the stairs.

My work team was a really engaging and helpful group, super fun to work with! Our worksite was in the shade and the view went out to the river below and all the hills. Our homeowner was a wonderful helpful woman who often provided us with fresh drinks and food. Our project was one of the few that completely finished and we did it well! It was challenging though to reach out to other churches and socialize when I already had a group of friends I was comfortable with.

I experienced my faith less in the hard labor of SSP and more in the quiet moments in between when I could look out on the river and think about the good we were doing. It also felt special to see three different bald eagles, almost as if we were being told that the work and love we were sharing was good. When we had reflections at the end of the day it was interesting to learn about how to take action in matters that mattered to me without feeling entirely responsible for larger problems that I can't solve by myself.

I think it was really special how deeply our homeowner appreciated the work we did and didn't take it for granted. She took the time to talk to us as individuals and thank us for what we did for her. She told us about herself and her culture and how our staircase would really help her every day. I think because that was so special I want to make an effort to get to know people in my community more and learn about where they come from and how I can help them and what that really means to them.

When I hear about loving your neighbor I often think that means being a perfect person to everyone, even if they've wronged you. But it was really nice to learn that being a good Samaritan is less about being a perfect person and more of stepping just outside your comfort zone to enact change in ways you might not do regularly.

I think being out in Spokane and getting up early and working long hours in the heat really provided a lot of time for self-reflection, and that's an opportunity for growth I think was really important for me. And also, being stuck on the plane and in the car and sleeping.