

# NEW CAMP COUNSELORS: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



*“We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.”*

– *Winston Churchill*

Thank you for your interest in volunteering with The Laurel Foundation! Often times the most difficult part of any journey is simply getting started, so we’ve compiled some information here to help you take your first steps towards becoming a volunteer with us.

## **WHAT ARE WE LOOKING FOR IN A VOLUNTEER?**

Camp is without a doubt one of the most fun and special experiences you can have, but it can be one of the most challenging as well. As a camp counselor, you will be living and working with campers and other camp staff over several days in a rustic environment. Due to this, camp is a whole new experience in patience, flexibility, and collaboration for most first time counselors.

We are looking for volunteers who have a willingness and desire to play and reside in a rustic mountain setting and have the capacity to work in a team environment. Counselors must



have a strong desire for working with youth, the ability to adapt to new challenges as they arise, and a passion for The Laurel Foundation's cause. All our volunteers must be excellent role models and put the safety of our campers first at all times.

## **WHAT ARE THE VOLUNTEER REQUIREMENTS?**

Our campers' parents place the safety of their children in our hands while at camp, and we take that responsibility very seriously. As such, we are very specific with the requirements for all our volunteers.

All Camp Laurel counselors must:

- Be at least 18 years old and a high school graduate
- A US citizen or legal resident
- Be able to provide 3 professional references
- Consent to a criminal background check (\$19.95 fee for all volunteers)
- Attend the mandatory weekend training prior to every camp
- Certified in CPR and First Aid (certification course will be offered at training)

## **WHAT IS THE MISSION OF THE LAUREL FOUNDATION?**

The mission of The Laurel Foundation is to empower children, youth and families affected by HIV/AIDS through educational and support programs in a safe and trusting environment. While HIV/AIDS is often an isolating illness because of negative social stigma and the sickness or loss of a parent, The Laurel Foundation aims to eradicate this isolation through a comprehensive approach, including residential camps, mentorship, life enhancement workshops, ongoing support programs and collaborative partnerships.

The Laurel Foundation's camp programs are based on traditional camp programs yet cater to the medical and mental health needs of children living with HIV/AIDS. At camp we balance providing fun activities like swimming, archery, hiking, and camping with instruction on basic life skills, such as teambuilding and problem solving. Camp Laurel is a place where campers are free to be who they are without fear of judgment or preconceptions, and is a space where they can develop the life skills necessary to become successful and confident adults.

## **WHAT ARE OUR CAMPERS LIKE?**

The Laurel Foundation's summer and family camps are free of cost to any child or youth who is either infected or directly affected by the HIV/AIDS virus. 91% of the campers The Laurel Foundation serves are living at or below the national poverty line. Additionally, a large majority of our campers come from single parent homes. While most of our campers come from the Los Angeles and San Diego regions, we do have campers that travel all the way from Northern California and Nevada to be a part of this experience.



The age range of our camper varies quite a bit between the Family Camp and Summer Camp programs. The Laurel Foundation's Summer Camp program is based on the traditional summer camp experience and is solely for children and youth ages 6-17 yrs old. Our Family Camp programs, on the other hand, were created to provide a bonding and supportive experience for the whole family. Here, both the parents and children of the families we serve attend Camp Laurel and get to spend a long weekend team building and growing together as a family unit.

## **WHAT IS THE TIME COMMITMENT OF A CAMP COUNSELOR?**

Counselors must be available for all dates of camp. In addition to camp itself (a full week for Summer Camp and a long weekend for Family Camp), all volunteers must attend the weekend Staff Training. Staff Training is held on a Saturday and Sunday a couple weeks prior to camp at The Laurel Foundation's office in Pasadena.

Staff Training walks counselors through camp rules, safety procedures, and counselor role so all of our volunteers are set up for success on day one. Additionally, counselors receive training in behavior management, team building, active listening, and cultural diversity. Staff Training is more than just a time to learn the operations of camp it is also the time that volunteers are introduced to their co-counselor partner and start planning fun activities and projects for their campers. Every camp, about 75% of our counselors are returning volunteers, so our camp staff is truly a family for most. Staff Training is the place where the strong bonds between our counselors begin and the cohesive, supportive counselor community that we present at Camp Laurel is created.

## **WHAT WILL I DO AT CAMP?**

Counselors switch off between acting as mentors, facilitating activities, playing games, and running programs throughout the week of camp. The majority of our volunteers act as 'cabin counselors' where, with the assistance of their co-counselor partner, they are responsible for providing supervision and support to a cabin of 6 - 9 campers for the duration of camp. Relief Staff, on the other hand, are responsible for facilitating and assisting with the various activities scheduled throughout the day, such as arts & crafts, team building, outdoor time, and more. All of our counselors, whether in a cabin or on Relief, participate in all activities, sleep in cabins, and eat in the dining hall along with our campers.

## **WHAT DOES A DAY AT CAMP LOOK LIKE?**

In order to keep fresh and exciting for both campers and counselors alike, the activities presented at Camp Laurel are constantly changing. Activity periods can consist of a myriad of activities such as archery, swimming, high ropes, arts & crafts, team building, science, photography, and dance. At our Family Camp programs, we also run activities tailored specifically for our parents, like yoga, relaxation, workshops on how to disclose HIV status, and healthy living.



A typical day at camp closely follows the below schedule:

<b>7:50 AM</b>	Morning Circle
<b>8:00 AM</b>	Breakfast
<b>9:15-10:30 AM</b>	Activity Period 1
<b>10:45-11:45 AM</b>	Activity Period 2
<b>12:15 PM</b>	Lunch
<b>1:15-2:15 PM</b>	Rest Period
<b>2:30-3:45 PM</b>	Activity Period 3
<b>4:00-5:15 PM</b>	Activity Period 4
<b>5:30 PM</b>	Dinner
<b>6:15 PM</b>	Break
<b>6:45-8:15 PM</b>	All Camp Evening Program
<b>8:15 PM</b>	Return to Cabins Evening Debrief
<b>9:00 PM</b>	Lights Out for Campers
<b>10:00 PM</b>	Counselor Meeting
<b>12:00 AM</b>	Drift off to Dreamland

## **WHAT DOES THE HIRING PROCESS LOOK LIKE?**

At The Laurel Foundation we are very committed to hiring the best volunteers for our camp programs, and for that reason our interview process is very thorough. As soon as The Laurel Foundation staff has received a New Counselor Application from an interested volunteer, an initial phone interview will be set up with The Director of Volunteers. During the phone interview we will discuss the potential volunteers' background, experience working with children, and why they became interested in Camp Laurel, as well as their responses to the application's essay responses. If, after that phone interview we feel like they will be an asset to our campers and camp staff, we will then invite them to a final group interview.

At the group interview, a small panel consisting of The Laurel Foundation's staff and experienced volunteers will walk 4 - 6 potential counselors through introductory ice breaker games, hypothetical camp situations, and group problem solving scenarios. This interview is structured so we can find out more about each candidate's personality and discover if they have the enthusiasm, good judgment, humor, and flexibility to be a success at camp.

## **HOW DO I GET STARTED?**

Glad you're interested! To get started, fill out the New Counselor Application found at [www.Laurel-Foundation.org/volunteer](http://www.Laurel-Foundation.org/volunteer). Have any questions? Call us at 626-683-0800.