This August I was granted the unique opportunity to attend Camp Shout Out as a graduate speech-language pathology student. For those who are unfamiliar with this organization, Camp Shout Out is a week-long summer camp for children, adolescents, and teens (ages 8 to 18) with fluency disorders, the most common of which is stuttering. Speech-language pathologists, graduate students, and volunteers flock to a wooded oasis in northern Michigan from all across the country (and beyond) to work with the campers and with each other to obtain the knowledge, skills, and experiences that could only be gained in this one-of-a-kind program. While it is truly impossible to describe Camp Shout Out in a way that will even begin to encapsulate its magic, I’m going to give it my best attempt.

Co-directors Julie Raynor and Kristin Chmela started Camp Shout Out nine years ago with the aim of providing a welcoming, authentic summer camp experience for young people who stutter, as well as a hands-on training opportunity for new and seasoned clinicians alike. Throughout the week, all participants are taught how to be more competent communicators, how to implement different approaches to speaking, and how to practice mindfulness by truly noticing oneself and one’s surroundings. Perhaps even more importantly, though, is that these young campers are able to hear -- for the very first time, for some -- that their voice matters, that they have the power to hold space for themselves, and that their message is worth waiting for.

While I gained so much more from this experience than I could possibly put into words, perhaps one of the greatest things I learned from Camp Shout Out was how to silence my internal anxieties and remain present in the moment. Before camp, I (admittedly) felt a certain degree of unease whenever I was in a conversation with a person who stutters. I knew all the "rules" (i.e., don't interrupt, don't finish their sentences, don't look impatient, don't be condescending, etc.), but I still felt a degree of internal tension during these exchanges (e.g., "Should I jump in now?" "Am I maintaining enough eye contact?" "Am I maintaining *too much* eye contact?" "Should I look away?" "What will they think if I look away?" "Am I making *them* nervous?" "Can they tell that *I'm* nervous?", etc.)

Within just a few days at camp, that anxiety was gone. It was as if my body finally internalized what I was so sure my brain already knew: that I was just talking to another person, and that person needed a little extra time to say what they wanted to say, that's all. I learned I shouldn't impose my assumptions upon them, or presume that they were uncomfortable and that I was being a "good person" by waiting and letting them talk. I was just having a conversation -- a regular conversation. The other person could be funny, kind, scared, frustrated, excited, sad, sarcastic, just like any other individual, so why should I be uneasy?

At the risk of sounding cliché, I can say with all honesty that Camp Shout Out was a life changing experience for me. I met an amazing group of campers, volunteers, and clinicians whom I love and to whom I will forever grateful for welcoming me into that family.

Ann Jonker

For more information on Camp Shout Out, how to donate or get involved in this organization, or about stuttering in general, please check out the following links:

Camp Shout Out: <https://campshoutout.org/>

The Stuttering Foundation: [https://www.stutteringhelp.org](https://www.stutteringhelp.org/)

National Stuttering Association: <https://westutter.org/>

“When I Stutter” documentary by filmmaker John Gomez: https://www.whenistutter.org/