

Hello. My name is Julie Reeves and I am a YL Leader at David Douglas High School in SE Portland. My husband and I have been involved at David Douglas as teachers^{coaches} and Young Life leaders for over 15 years.

It is in those 15 years that I have come to believe that kids at David Douglas High School have 2 major obstacles in the way of them leading successful and meaningful lives. The first obstacle is poverty. David Douglas is nearing 90% free and reduced lunch,^{so} many single parents working multiple jobs, leaving many kids without a strong adult influence at home. The result is that kids are forced to live in a "survival" mode, living day to day, not thinking more than 1 or 2 weeks into the future.

Secondly, David Douglas is the largest high school in Oregon, this year having over 3000 students. So to say kids can get lost and feel invisible is an understatement.

I recently read
In a report conducted by the Commission for Children At Risk, ~~doctors, scientists,~~ and mental health professionals claim that what youth need more than anything right now is to be connected to people who are committed to one another over time.

Teenagers are offered this chance to connect through Young Life, and a week at Washington Family Ranch accelerates this process of connection.

When I think of the impact Washington Family Ranch has had on students, the list goes on and on, but I want to take a few minutes to tell you about 3 of them.

Ryan. I had Ryan in biology 11 years ago and he was what we would call a "pot-head," He was a smart kid but running with the wrong crowd. Here is what he had to say about his experience at camp:

"Almost ten years ago, I went to summer camp with all my friends and some of my favorite teachers. At the time, I am sure I was only interested in the cute girls and fun activities that camp offered, but I was soon struck with something so much more.

I was able to connect with my leaders on a deep level. To this day, these men are still involved in my life in a huge way, and are two of my biggest role models. I can honestly say that I would not be the same person I am today without the influence of these men."

Ryan is now a high school teacher and a YL leader.

Ashley. Ashley grew up with an alcoholic father and seemed to be headed down the wrong path in a hurry but all that began to change when she decided to go to camp.

She says, "Camp provided an opportunity to get away from all of the pressures of my daily 'teenage' life. One of the greatest parts was getting to spend a week with my leader. Camp was amazing, and from that day forward she committed to being there for me. 13 years later I am thankful that I get to call my Young Life leader my friend and one of my spiritual mentors. If I didn't have that time with her at camp, I cannot imagine what my life would look like today."

Ashley is now 27 years old, an insurance broker, and a YL leader

Lastly, Stephen. Stephen grew up with his dad in and out of prison and his mother an addict. Stephen basically raised himself and as you can guess, kids don't raise great kids. He had a 1.0 GPA his first 2 years in HS, and when he met his YL leaders, he was basically couch surfing, with no home of his own. But then Stephen spent a week just last summer at Washington Family Ranch. When asked to describe what a week at camp meant to him, he said, *"When I was sitting by that pool at camp on the 5th night, it was like I knew for the first time in my life I had a purpose and I was going to make it."*

Stephen is now a senior, still couch surfs but spends many of those nights on his YL leaders couches. He is going back to Washington Family Ranch for a month this summer to volunteer so that other kids can have the same experience he had. He is on track to graduate this spring and hopes to one day work for the Department of Fish and Wildlife.

I have absolutely no doubt that because of the authentic long-term relationships that are built at camp, hundreds of lives in the David Douglas community have been changed. Kids that were headed down the road towards addiction, crime, depression, suicide, and so many other forms of brokenness, are filled with hope. And hope affects every aspect of a person's life. Because of this hope, we have seen kids move from a survival mentality to a future mentality, kids actually thinking about their future, knowing they have a purpose and that there are people in their life that are willing to help them get there. Teenagers need to feel connected to people who are going to be a part of their life long term.

Washington Family Ranch provides a catalyst for these connections to take place.

It's clearly the more kids ~~that~~ ^{that are able to feel} connected, the better.