

Aspyre is a leadership camp for LGBTQ youth. It is a weekend sleepaway camp for LGBTQ youth, with the goal of teaching them the skills that they need to take on a leadership role in their community. The roles that they take on can be anywhere from president of their school's GSA, or compiling and then presenting a comprehensive sex education workshop. It involves a bunch of workshops, activities, and every once in a while we have a well known guest speaker. I was fortunate enough to be a part of the team that planned Aspyre 2019. The planning team was made up of three youth and three adults. The aim of the adults was to have the youth take control of the planning and only be there to help us with the logistics.

I think that this group absolutely succeeded in relational leadership. It wasn't totally relational in the planning period because there was not one sole leader, but each of us held a common goal. We shared a similar moral compass, which was a big relief since this camp can be hard to plan if you don't all share similar ethics. I also think that we fulfilled inclusion and empowerment, largely thanks to the adults that worked with us. The adults led by example and gave us the tools to be empowered, and to empower others. The whole goal of Aspyre is to teach empowerment and inclusion to our campers. If the planners weren't able to show how we embodied that, the campers wouldn't be able to pick up on it. Once it came to executing the camp, I think that the two other youth and I did a great job at leading the camp. Cora, Sam-Levi, and I knew how each other felt and thought, and our leadership showed how comfortable and open with each other that we were. We were able to convey our goals as leaders to the campers. In return, the campers recognized us as leaders and helped the camp to flow smoothly.

Being a part of this group felt absolutely amazing. The two other people that I worked with became two of the closest people in my life very quickly. In this role, I felt accepted for

both myself and my role as a leader. There was never a time when we tried to one up each other to claim a higher leadership role because we trusted each other and knew that we all wanted the same thing. It was immeasurably valuable to be a part of this group because it showed me a level of teamwork that I hadn't experienced. I truly think that being a part of planning Aspyre grew my leadership skills more than anything else. While the planning portion was amazing, being a counselor in this camp gave me hands on experience. I led a group to develop goals that they wanted to complete in their own community. I've been a camper at Aspyre before and I have had an experience with a counselor that didn't make camp as great as it should have been. Having known what that felt like, I wanted to be as great of a leader as possible so that my campers would grow the same love for Aspyre that I have. It wasn't hard to fall into a direct leadership role and it was an amazing feeling to have my group rally around that and support me. After Aspyre, my campers came up to me to tell me how impactful it was to have me as their counselor and how much they enjoyed themselves. I very nearly cried (and I totally would have if the adults hadn't remembered how much of a crybaby I was last year and asked me to try not to cry until the campers were gone this year). I'm genuinely sad that I couldn't be a part of the planning team this year, but I'm incredibly excited to be a counselor with my friends again next year. Aspyre holds a very dear place in my heart and it's ridiculously cool to get to take on a leadership role for something you love.

The knowledge that I gained from this is going to be easily transferable to my service application because it taught me how to lead a group. It also gave me high expectations of how I need to behave in order to get the best results from my team. I know that I can't expect to become best friends with the people in my groups, but I learned that being able to get along with

a group goes a long way. This fits with my top strength, harmony, because I do work best when the people around me are getting along. It gave me knowledge about how to best communicate from a place of leadership. I know how to function as a leader because Aspyre threw me into the role and made me do it well.