

Evaluations, and Beyond!

Personal judgment, or process for growth?

The answer to the above question is ultimately a matter of perspective. All staff at Camp Augusta participate in a detailed evaluation process that happens continuously throughout the summer. Camp Augusta and the CIRCLE program set out clear expectations for what type of community we are trying to create (communal), and what type of attitudes (positive!) help us to achieve our goals. Evaluating ourselves against these expectations helps us to retain our focus and to continually improve our relationships and our community.

As you have probably noticed, the name of the leadership program has changed from Counselor-In-Training (CIT) to Communication, Independence, and Responsibility: Compassionate Leadership Empowerment (CIRCLE). Yes, it is wordy, but we feel that it accurately describes what we are trying to do with the program via the CIRCLE mission statement:

“To inspire within teens aged 16-17 an appreciation for and understanding of the beautiful complexities of working intimately with children; to empower teens with focused leadership and communication skills that allow them to engage their world with independence, responsibility, and compassion”

So why not the Counselor-in-Training program anymore? Frankly, that name places too much emphasis on this program providing a *specific path* to follow on your way to becoming a counselor at Camp Augusta...that this program will *train* you to be a counselor here. Maybe being a counselor here is an option, but there are also many more options that might become available after participating in the program. Given our small staff (18 counselors, 25 administrative and HEROES) selected from over a dozen countries, it simply is not realistic that we would hire 8 CITs for counselor positions every year, even if everyone was of stellar quality and a perfect fit for Augusta, nor would we want to. Having most of our staff come from within a couple of hours of Augusta would limit the broad range of perspectives that are so important to creating a vibrant community dynamic.

So even though you will be receiving a lot of the same training current staff receive, it would be more useful to think about it in terms of what you personally can gain from the training, and how you can apply it to your own life back in the non-camp “real world.” When the emphasis is shifted from “will I be asked back as a counselor to Camp Augusta” to “what do I hope to achieve from this program, and what do I want to learn from this program,” the evaluation process can be seen as a process for growth, and not a Camp Augusta vs. You personal judgment. Because the program focuses on both working with kids as well as peer leadership, these are some potential paths you could follow after completing the CIRCLE program:

<u>Work with Kids</u>	<u>Work with Peers</u>
✿ After School Care	✿ Student Government
✿ YMCA Programs	✿ Clubs
✿ Babysitting	✿ Protests
✿ Big Brother/Big Sister	✿ Leadership Conferences
✿ At-Risk Youth Programs	✿ Sports Teams
✿ Day Camps	✿ Educational Tutoring
✿ Sports Camps	✿ Peer Mentoring
✿ Educational Tutoring	✿ International Leadership (see links below)

- ✿ <http://www.ptpi.org/>
- ✿ <http://www.amigoslink.org/>
- ✿ www.outwardbound.com/
- ✿ <http://www.cityyear.org/>
- ✿ <http://www.unitedplanet.org>
- ✿ <http://www.eftours.com>
- ✿ <http://www.leagueworldwide.org>
- ✿ <http://www.globalcrossroad.com/>

Of course, these are just a few of the many options before you, and related specifically to children and peers. There are many, many more opportunities available, in any fields that you may be passionate about. In short, the CIRCLE program doesn't just train you to be a counselor. Rather, it will provide you with opportunities to learn skills that you will find useful in any aspect of your life that you care about.

By signing off on the CIRCLE Expectations Review, you will have agreed to enthusiastically participate in a program and a community that is moving towards a common goal with a specific mission: "To reclaim and foster the beauty, wonder, awe, potential, and innocence of childhood" (Camp Augusta's vision statement). Your signature will also have indicated an agreement to work towards meeting the criteria set out for you in the CIRCLE evaluation. Being evaluated against that criteria while the program is running allows us to check in and see how you think things are going, and also allows us to give our perspective. There are many opportunities for synchronizing your perceptions with our perceptions, and if we feel there is something that you may be falling short on, your final evaluation will not be the first time that you hear about it. Likewise we will also let you know where we think you are exceeding the bar. You will also have the opportunity to evaluate your CIRCLE counselors, and your thoughts are ALWAYS encouraged.

Further, the CIRCLE acronym encompasses what we are trying to do using the evaluation process: *continuous* self-improvement. If you have been to camp before, you will probably have noticed that we try to keep things as new, fresh, and interesting as possible. There are new clinics every year, new evening programs, and new twists on existing programs (moving target at archery, Tribal Capture the Flag, Level Five mountain boarding, etc...). Our programs are always undergoing changes and improvements, and we carry that same philosophy over to our staff. All returning staff answer a large set of reflection questions (along the lines of the questions you answered in Phase One) before coming back to camp each year. All staff are also formally evaluated twice a summer by their peers to continue aiding in their growth. These processes create a continuous, circular path to reinvent ourselves and our community, always pointing towards *growth*.

We recognize that this process could still be nerve-wracking. We don't want it to seem like a surgical procedure where you are given a number based on your performance, and that's it. Many of the points of consideration listed on the evaluations are open-ended, so we don't want it to look like there is a checklist of items for you to do; creativity and original thought make up a large part of the CIRCLE program, and those things are difficult to measure with numbers and words. The numbers are placeholders, and points from which to start a discussion. When we actually sit down and check in, which will happen at least 3 times during the program, it proceeds more like a conversation, where we ask you what you think your strengths are and where you could improve. Then we give our feedback and discuss it with you.

The evaluation process is quite personal, and we aim to keep it that way. It is up to you if you would like to share the discussions with others. However, one audience that should never have to worry about your evaluations is the campers. This might seem obvious, but it has been an issue in the past so we feel it necessary to bring up. If you are nervous about the evaluation, that's OK, but chatting about that with other staff or the CIRCLE counselors is the proper forum to voice those concerns. Campers should not be worrying about your evaluations, or whether or not you will be coming back as a counselor.

To recap, the CIRCLE program is seeking to provide skills that can empower you to be an effective leader in whatever it is you do. The evaluations help to mark progress and areas of improvement against the objectives that we set out for the program and the participants. They are not meant to decide whether or not you will be a good fit for counselor at Camp Augusta. Your future beyond the CIRCLE program will be part of your final evaluation discussion, and will be framed in terms of how you can keep developing personally and as a leader. Maybe Camp Augusta will be a good fit for you in the future, maybe it won't. It might not be until a few years down the road, if ever, that being a counselor would be a good fit for you, and that's okay. These are all options to be discussed, but it is most important to remember that the CIRCLE program is not seeking to be a Counselor-in-Training program. Leadership and personal development are our main focuses.