



The River Performing and Visual Arts Center
Serving children with special needs since 1996

The River Performing and Visual Arts Center

The Star E-Scoop

Summer 2009 Issue

Welcome to The River's e - newsletter! The board and staff are looking forward to sharing exciting information about our program with you online. We'd love your feedback!

Best,

Sandy Wicoff
Executive Director

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Life as a River Intern

This summer, The River is hosting two interns provided by ExxonMobil and Shell Corporations' nonprofit internship programs. Natalie Rodgers and Courtney Peters are working at The River's summer camp as teacher aides and also assisting in the office during the break between camps. They have each written a brief summary on their experience at The River so far.

Natalie Rodgers

Natalie will be a senior studio art major at Baylor University this coming fall. She hopes to pursue graduate study in art and eventually work as an art teacher or in another art related field.

Giving My Whole Self

I have only been working at The River Performing and Visual Arts Center for two weeks and already it has touched my heart in more places than one. Coming from an art background, I was so excited to find a summer internship at an arts organization like The River where I could utilize my skills and explore different art career options. Working as a teacher aide in the art classroom has given me much insight in how much fun it is to teach a class as well as how hectic it can be! I've learned that patience and flexibility are essential when working with children, especially children with special needs who may need extra care and attention. In addition to art, I have a strong passion for helping others. While I hoped to be able to share my love of art with the children, I realized that it is more important for me to just give my undivided attention to each child and be a positive influence in their lives for the moment I spend with them. Sometimes that means encouraging them as they work on an art project, and other times it is simply sitting with the child and keeping them company. Just as every child is very different in their needs, they each have different personalities that I try to adapt myself to so that each child can have the best experience possible. I want them to know that they are loved exactly for who they are.

Working at The River is extremely rewarding, but there are definitely some challenges to face! An advantage to working in the art classroom all day was that I was able to see all of the kids that came to camp that day as they rotated among the different classrooms. With most of the kids, I was able to talk to them and make small connections, but one girl was particularly difficult for me to interact with. She would often turn away if I tried to talk to her, and she preferred to be alone. I wanted to reach out to her so much, but nothing I did seemed to help. This continued into the second week of camp until one day at lunch, I saw her laughing with a huge smile on her face. One of the other teacher aides was able to knock down the barrier and make her laugh. It humbled me to realize that I cannot do everything, and not every child is going to like me. I can, however, recognize that every one of us has different skill sets and gifts which we can use together as a team to work through all kinds of challenges. I first thought that there were too many volunteers and teacher aides at the camp, but I slowly realized throughout the first week that every single one of us is needed. So many of the children thrive under one on one attention, which is only possible with a diverse and large group of volunteers and staff.

Whether I am playing blocks with the children, helping them with an art project, or eating lunch with them, I hope that they feel like they are loved while they are away from home for the day. I know I certainly felt loved on the first day of camp in the early drop off room. Immediately, several children welcomed me with smiles and hugs, accepting me wholeheartedly without any judgment. For many of the children, this is not their first summer at The River, and in my first two weeks I can see why so many return year after year. The kids benefit so much as they are able to socially interact with other kids and gain a sense of independence while they are away from home. I hope that the love and attention that the children receive at camp empowers them to be individual people who are capable of fulfilling their dreams.

Courtney Peters

Courtney will be a senior at the University of Oklahoma this coming fall. She is majoring in International and Area Studies with a minor in Spanish, and she hopes to work for a nonprofit human rights organization following graduation.

A Whole New World

“Miss Courtney, Miss Courtney, let’s get some vegetables.” As the words rolled out from a camper’s mouth, I was completely awestruck. Here was a child, who, in the previous week had said little or nothing, and, for most of us, it was unimaginable that he would ever pronounce our names. At this moment in time, it suddenly clicked in my mind: this is what The River stands for, and this is what its teachers, teacher aides, and volunteers wake up every morning to hear. It is a constant struggle for progress, and some days you feel like throwing in the towel. You get hit. You get kicked. On the occasional afternoon, you go home covered in spit—or worse. However, for all of us here, every minute is worth its weight in gold. A year ago, I would never have pictured myself on the floor, trying to communicate with an autistic child or playing dress up with a group of five year olds, but my mindset has completely changed.

When I applied for my internship through Shell and The River, I, honestly, had no idea what to expect. I had never worked with special needs children, and my experience with kids only went as far as a few visits to my own mother’s classroom. I imagined it would not be easy, and I assumed the camp might be overwhelming. However, it never crossed my mind that I would form lasting bonds in such a short period of time. These campers have already left an indelible impression upon my heart. The first two weeks of camp have taught me more about life and myself than multiple years in college. I now have an idea of what I want from a future career, and I can say with full confidence that I hope to spend the rest of my existence helping others.

During the two week break in between camp sessions, I am working in the office with the other intern, Natalie, and Susan, Sandy, and Eileen. While I love each of them, and we have a great time with each other, I have begun to miss camp terribly. The halls are too quiet, and the air is too still. I miss the hugs and the laughs. I miss chasing some of our most active campers down the hallway. Most of all, I miss the knowledge we gain with each passing day. As I get to know these kids—your kids—better and better, I feel as if we make incredible progress.

As if the experience was not fulfilling enough as is, I have gained a fresh perspective on life. I began to realize how fortunate I am to have the ability to walk, speak, and eat on my own. It is something that most people I know take for granted, but as I watch these little campers fight their way through the day, I suddenly know how easy my life has been. They are better people than I could ever hope to be, and I think everyone, old or young, can take a cue from their perseverance, positive attitude, and never-ending smiles. It has truly been a blessing working at The River, and I look forward to the weeks ahead with incredible anticipation and excitement.

One Week of Summer Camp Left!

Mariachi Week (August 3rd-7th)--A collaboration with HGOco.

All recitals take place on Fridays at 12:30 PM. We are located on 1475 West Gray in the

Houston Metropolitan Multi-Service Center.

See pictures from camp [here!](#)

Thank You for Your Continued Support of The River!

The River is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that relies on the kindness of people like you. If you would like to show your support for The River, please click [here](#). You may also view our [Wish List](#) that includes much needed supplies.

As always, you may address your concerns, comments, or suggestions to info@theriver.org.

