

adventure risk challenge

developing youth leadership and literacy

2022 summer course highlights



Dear Adventure Risk Challenge Community,

I'm glad you are taking the time to read a few of our students' stories, written and edited during their month-long experience with ARC. Nearly three years after the emergence of COVID-19, ARC staff and school partners have observed significant changes in the way teenagers speak about their mental health. In this book of selected writing from our 2022 summer courses, students allude to this mental health crisis and feelings of overwhelming stress and depression. One student uses vivid imagery in her poem, comparing her sense of emptiness to a dry riverbed: "My rapid, my confidence, slowed & dried out / Leaving behind a rotting riverbed with a tiny trickle / Everything once beneath the rapid's water / Became dehydrated and exposed / I was in middle school when / A switch had suddenly flipped in my head / All of the light that I was known for was gone."

In a recent New York Times article ("It's Life or Death: The Mental Health Crisis Among U.S. Teens"), the mental health crisis is attributed to teens spending less time exercising, less time in-person socializing, and more time on social media and screens. ARC's Community Leadership Program and summer courses counteract these negative forces. We remove the influence of technology. We provide meaningful exposure to nature and outdoor adventures. During the 2022 summer courses, students backpacked over 50 miles and participated in over 125 hours of physical activity. We also offer an inclusive and accepting community that involves trusting relationships with peers and mentorship with caring, trained ARC educators.

Additionally, ARC programming builds resiliency by encouraging openness and sharing (as you'll read in the students' writing), while combating students' feelings of isolation and negative self-worth. On Search Institute's 58-question Developmental Assets Profile, which ARC has administered since 2005, the two statements in which students show the greatest positive gains from pre- to post-participation are: "I feel good about my future," and "I feel in control of my life and future." Meanwhile, in the last two decades, the DAP asset category in which ARC youth have seen the greatest improvement over time is "Positive Identity."

In the closing stanzas of the poems in this book, students use adjectives like intelligent, strong, compassionate, and helpful to describe themselves. They are seeing themselves more positively and envisioning a brighter future. At ARC, we invest deeply in individual students because we believe that long-term, individualized, and community-based support is what truly makes a difference in a young person's life.

If you are an ARC donor or community member, thank you for helping our participants see a future filled with more hope and strength.



Sarah Ottley
Executive Director
sarah@adventureriskchallenge.org



PARTICIPANTS GROW IN 7 IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS, INCLUDING POSITIVE IDENTITY, SOCIAL COMPETENCIES, AND COMMITMENT TO LEARNING.



OVER 90% OF ARC 2022 SUMMER GRADUATES RESPONDED "AGREE" OR "STRONGLY AGREE" TO "ARC HELPED ME TO BECOME A BETTER WRITER."



GRADUATES OF THE ARC COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP PROGRAM RECEIVE \$1,000 SCHOLARSHIPS.



Share your story.

Find your best self.

Write your future.



Amili Aceves

Growing Branches

When I was a little sapling
of a Ponderosa Pine tree,
I wasn't spiky;
I was happy and social.
I always wanted to grow in a forest,
with other pines, bushes, and animals.

I grew into a small tree.
I reached out to others
with my growing branches.
I had many friends and was excited to grow up.

Then mi hermano, the bird, was born.
The Pygmy Nuthatch.
He was small, with a coffee brown cap,
soft blue wings, and a sugar white belly.
He always chirped his head off.
And for a time,
one wing was broken;
he fell and broke his arm.
But no one noticed it except for me.
No one believed me right away,
and I started to doubt others.

He was the one whose nest would be a part of me.
I needed to protect and care for him
and I had no idea why, but I knew I needed to.
I needed to be sweet like vanilla
and strong like my bark,
my bark that grew fire resistant and thick.

I closed myself off from the world,
protected the bird and myself.
I had to become strong and mature
to make sure we were safe.



But I had no trust,
thinking that everyone judged me,
that everyone judged him.
He was a tiny, naive fledgling,
and I was a towering, protective Ponderosa.
It would only ever be the two of us;
I couldn't lose him.
He needed to be safe.

Over time, I got worn down.
I lost needles.
I had to grow up fast.
I had to give the Nuthatch shelter and strength.
But all of the stress from home and school,
Having to be the best I could for others,
It broke me down.
Clouds came;
rain, thunder and lightning hit me.

Through it all,
the sun, mi apá,
was there to cheer me up.
And the grounding earth, mi mamá,
was there to keep me calm and growing.

I don't want to stop protecting
my brother or myself.
And I never will.
He will always be protected and safe.
But I do want to be able to trust.
To love.
To grow into the big tree.
I want to care, to defend.

But I also want to be loved
and cared for.
I want to be trusted and defended,
by others and myself.

I want to grow my branches,
to provide shade and comfort.
I want to be confident; happy.
I want to be a grand tree.
And I want to make an impact.

I was a sapling,
and now I am a tree.
A towering,
comforting,
strong,
Ponderosa Pine tree.
And I will continue to grow.

Katelyn Hames

Rapid to a Riverbed

Summer. 7 years old.
"She's strong-minded,"
Mom would remind everyone.
"She's independent."
But mom would have to remind me
That the world doesn't revolve around me.

I was a wild rapid, tough and oblivious;
Smart and at ease.
People tried to understand my rapid,
Map it out, and keep it contained.
They were scared of a flood.
They should have prepared for a drought.

I was fueled by the turbulent love of my rambunctious family,
My rapid's source.
Encouraging, present, together.
A glistening, clear lake.
Their energy and support made me believe
That I could do anything.

I used to appreciate myself.
I was an ambitious little thing.
White blonde hair
Running through stores in my neon bikini.
Loud and bold, never afraid to take a risk.
I liked myself that way.

Then there was this little thought
Whispering that I wasn't good enough.
All at once the whispers turned to screams.
"I am annoying."
"I am ugly."
"I am ordinary."
"I am not skinny enough."
The thoughts took over.

Fall. 13 years old. Summer ended.
And fall hit like high water that year.
My rapid, my confidence, slowed & dried out,
Leaving behind a rotting riverbed with a tiny trickle.
Everything once beneath the rapid's water
Became dehydrated and exposed.

I was in middle school when
A switch suddenly flipped in my head.
All of the light that I was known for was gone.
Because I chose to believe I didn't deserve it.

Only 13 years old.
Now 17.
4 years. A long time for a drought.

My rapid grew tired of fighting and I decided to block my source.
I gave into the drought.
I gave into my insecure thoughts.
My loneliness.
My doubt.

Winter. 15 years old.
A dam built from fake smiles and buried feelings.
I no longer felt the glisten of the sun on my white-capped rapids.
My family tried to run water through
But then the temperature dropped and the water froze over.
My rapid wasn't strong enough to break the cold ice that trapped
The slow running water beneath it.

Before, there was no doubt that my rapid was strong enough
To flow through the ice, to survive the hottest days.
All four seasons.
But everything had changed.

My parents would say,
"You are perfectly fine the way you are."
But you can't tell the rapids which direction to turn,
And you couldn't tell me what to believe.



Spring. 17 years old. Now.
I am stubborn.
But mom says that I am strong-minded.
I am alone.
But mom says I am independent.
I've replaced the words of encouragement
With hurtful thoughts,
A new skill that I picked up.

Summer. 18 years old. Next year.
Next season when the spring flood rolls in,
I hope I will allow the water to flow,
To hydrate all of the rocks and soil in my riverbed.
Yet somehow I feel that those skills are now habits,
That those thoughts will be constant.
Unavoidable. Dry spells.
A reminder that even if I get my rapid back,
It is inevitable that it will dry out once again.

I wish I could remind myself
That although the world does not revolve around me,
I am worth it,
And the flowing waters of my rapid bring life beneath the surface.
I know my family will not always be there to provide fresh water.
I will have to find it on my own.
Someday I will learn to appreciate myself again.
I will uncover my summer rapid.
Maybe next season.

Azteca Valdivia-Espinoza

Para mi padre

I was always a joyful cub
Running around with four other cubs – Nathan, Ana, Julian, Andrea
Playing in and around the tiny, cold creek
Running around the magnificent den - La casa de Tita
No clue when trees were falling, what storms were coming
¿Porque?

My Mother bear - A strong independent woman
Ensuring me love, hope, and peace
Volunteering for the community
Answering every ring her phone would sing ¿Porque?

“Ale, nunca se sabe si nos iremos de este lugar algún día”
Instability came around
Crawling from one den to another
Will I ever have a place to call home?

One specific moving adventure
I recall vividly the wind was swirling
The wind in a humanly shape stole all of my clothing
All the hard hours my momma bear had worked - GONE
It was just a whirl of inconsiderate wind

Observing around me - No papa bears in sight
All the cubs around me believing
Will we only ever have strong mothers?
Mom, are we alone?
Millions of questions,
Too young to understand
This has to be normal
Papa bears must just leave once you're born
I waited and waited and waited
Where was my papa bear?
I just wanted love, attention, support

There were moments when my father daughter
time
Would never come.
Days turned into weeks
Wondering when the time would come

Splashing around, running around when I would hear
“Ale, alístate, tu papá va a llegar por ti”
Feeling like a bright light slowly being shut off
Sitting in front of the window watching every car pass
Hoping the next would be red, just as my fathers was
Pensando “mi papá va a estar en el próximo carro, yo lo sé”
Waves of sadness would crash over me
As I crossed the creek back to my den
What did I do wrong? What did I say?

As the year of my Minnie mouse birthday party rolled around
I was extremely excited - it was a marvelous day
My momma bear decorated
Bought a cake; Piñata full of candy
I was wearing a Minnie Mouse dress. plastic high heels
Cheap, rubbed-on makeup, clip-on earrings
What could possibly go wrong?

Later in the day I asked my mom if my papa bear was going to come
No answer - I knew
That day I fell asleep on the couch waiting for my papa bear
Woke up yearning for his presence
Maybe it's me?
Maybe I said something wrong?

While I was waiting, he was waiting
My papa bear was reaching for love, attention, support
¿De quien?
From the man who brought him into the wonderful world.
My papa bear was reaching for the impossible
Like a fish swimming in the air

Waiting and waiting to receive what was never inherited
My papa bear wanted affection
How was my father supposed to show me
without experiencing the four letter word?
LOVE
Impossible, ¿verdad?

Late elementary my father came running back to our den
My father was ready to be a part of the family
Realized his two beautiful cubs needed him
Azteca y Xochil
Once he sprang in my life, he created the best views possible
Helps my mother get fish
Takes our family to visit our country, Mexico
¿Porque?
“quiero que conozcan donde yo crecí”

My bear is extremely hard working - dedicated to our family
I know if I need anything under the sun,
My father will make it happen
My father is now attending trade school to earn a degree
¿Porque?
“Azteca, necesitas estudiar”
My father manages to be a father, work a full-time job
Full time student
And rebuild our wonderful home one room at a time during his free
time

My father creates comfort, laughter
“nickel, nickel, nickel”
Love, attention, support
I admire him, I love him

My bears were the first in their families to purchase a den
First to further their education after the birth of their cubs

I will grow to be like my parents
Intelligent, positive, compassionate, and helpful
I will be the first to go to college directly after high school
I will build my own business inspired by my father
I will become a nurse practitioner inspired by my mother
I will have an inseparable relationship with my parents
¿Porque?
Los amo



Wilfredo (Willy) Alvarez Lopez

Being Alone is Not an Option

People always tell me that I have my head in the clouds. They don't know that it is an escape for me from my negative thoughts. It is hard for me to share my feelings with people I don't know. This summer, I met 12 new people that I would have to live with for 33 days. Instead of getting to know the people I would be with, I retreated to my own world in my head. Others' persistence to know more about me helped me to open up about myself. By the end of the summer, I was able to be vulnerable and connect with others, and it made me want to be more vulnerable with my dad after the course.

The week before I left for ARC was the most horrible week for me. I said goodbye to my family in El Salvador and I went to the emergency room for a bacterial infection. It would be something I would remember for a long time because I felt pain emotionally and physically. Luckily I was recovering and felt better physically. I was ready to join ARC physically, but I can't say the same thing about my mental health. During my first days at ARC, I was processing my experiences in El Salvador and in the hospital, and I felt sad. I would sit on rocks in silence and reflect about how the other students were vulnerable but I was unable, or unwilling, to be so myself.

"Pay attention! Take care of yourself." These comments made me feel more incapable of taking care of myself and I felt no compassion. I had a block in my head that made it hard to pay attention and to take care of myself. I felt like I didn't matter. In the second expedition, on the evening of the second day,

I finally expressed my feelings to my instructor Cristina. She persisted to know more about why I was behaving badly. We made a contract which put pressure on me to share about myself. I talked about my behavior and about all my stress - my explosion of emotions. I told her what I was feeling and why I was feeling like that. She gave me a hug and I felt much better after sharing how I was feeling. The next day, we started solos and I reflected. I think if I had expressed my feelings the first day, the contract would not have been necessary. After this, I listened less to comments that made me feel incapable and started to listen to comments that made me feel supported and appreciated. Finally, I felt like I was not alone because I shared and people listened to me. I really appreciate the time at ARC because I was able to be more vulnerable. This is very helpful for people who don't know how to share and be vulnerable, like me.

I want to be more vulnerable with my dad because, as an older person, he does not like to be vulnerable. I want to have a healthy relationship with him for the rest of the time that he is around. I hope to share my feelings and listen to how he is feeling. I want to complete my goals, and for this I want to share about myself with my counselor at school and at Summer Search. ARC taught me that being vulnerable with people who want to support you to complete your goals is necessary and it feels good.

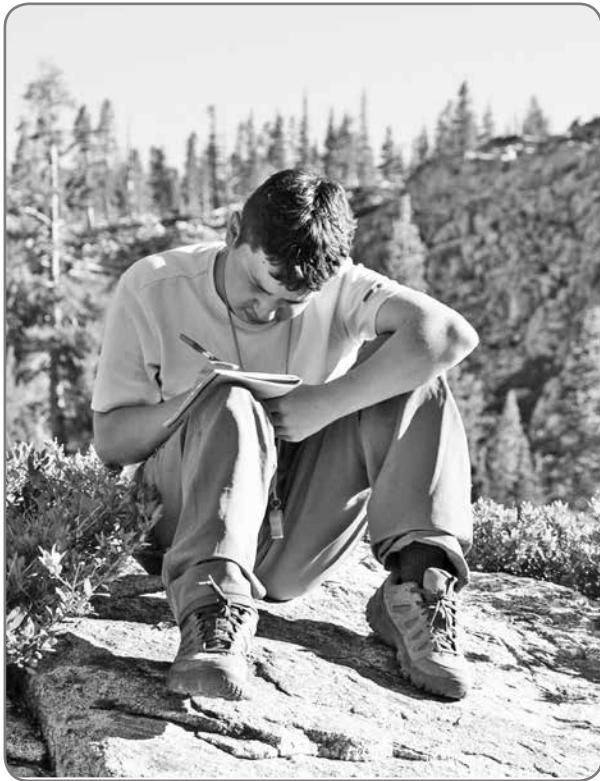
Thank you ARC.



Month-Long Summer Literacy & Leadership Course

Our summer program is tailored for the needs of today's youth, consisting of outdoor expeditions interspersed with intensive academics at the UC Berkeley Sagehen Creek Field Station and UC Merced Yosemite Field Station.

ARC's unique integration of academics and outdoor education includes an English Language Arts curriculum aligned with Common Core and the California State University Expository Reading and Writing Curriculum. We focus on reading comprehension, building vocabulary, improving grammar, thinking critically, and public speaking. The Environmental Science curriculum is organized around place-based education standards, introducing students to the natural world and to conservation concepts. Through ARC's programming, students develop positive social and cooperative skills, raise their overall academic performance, learn about their role in stewardship and conservation of our natural environment, and become more engaged members of their communities.



In this program, youth participate in:

- A daily English curriculum, incorporating journaling, grammar lessons, independent and group reading, and vocabulary building
- The writing of a metaphorical poem, a formal thank you letter, and a personal growth essay
- A public speaking event of self-reflective poetry
- Interviews with adult community members
- Backpacking expeditions, including a final youth-led expedition and a solo overnight wilderness experience
- Rock climbing, ropes course activities, and whitewater rafting
- Daily leadership activities integrating our identity and community exploration curriculum with our four core values: service, growth, compassion, and determination.



Young Professionals Board



Alexis Angulo, Vice Chair

ARC Poem Title: *The Determination of My Roots*
 College: Dartmouth College (Graduated 2020)
 Major: Government & Latin American Studies
 Today: Works as Project Assistant at the Families and Workers Fund and joined the ARC Board of Directors in 2022

GRADUATED ARC
 SUMMER COURSE
 2015



Gus Garcia, Member

ARC Poem Title: *Another Layer*
 College: University of the Pacific (Graduated 2022)
 Major: Political Science
 Today: Serves as a Project Associate at Valley Vision, a research and advocacy-focused non-profit based in Sacramento

2016



Jasmine Marquez, Member

ARC Poem Title: *I Am Life*
 College: University of California Merced (Graduated 2014)
 Major: Molecular Biology
 Today: Is the General Manager at La Belle Medical Spa in Merced, responsible for HR, business development, and customer relations

2007



Vera Ram, Chair

ARC Poem Title: *I Am What I Want to Be*
 College: University of California Merced (Graduated 2016)
 Major: Biological Sciences
 Today: Works for the federal government in Sacramento and joined the ARC Board of Directors in 2022

2010



Yami White, Member

ARC Poem Title: *The Real Me*
 College: Sierra Nevada University (Graduated 2014)
 Major: Biology
 Today: Works as an Eligibility Certification Specialist with a focus on cost allocation for Washoe County

2008



Sandesh Maurati, Member

ARC Poem Title: *Unrooted*
 College: Fresno City College
 Major: Emergency Medical Training Program
 Today: Studying to be an EMT and recently moved to Fresno from Napa

2016

The Young Professionals Board (YPB) provides a professional network for ARC alumni and promotes ARC’s mission. It was founded in January 2020 by Jasmine Marquez and Yami White. Today, there are six members of the YPB. They meet bimonthly on Zoom and gather for a retreat each year. For their 2022 retreat, the group visited Big Trees State Park and hiked on the Arnold Rim Trail.

Recently, the YPB’s Vice Chair, Alexis Angulo, was interviewed by Teen Vogue about his relationship to the outdoors and his experience with ARC. Alexis was quoted in the article saying, “Before coming to ARC...I’d never hiked. I’d never been rock climbing. These were foreign experiences to me,” Now, Alexis is part of the ARC YPB and Board of Directors to ensure that outdoor adventures are accessible to more deserving young people in the Central Valley, Tahoe, and beyond.

scenes from the summer



scenes from the summer



S.H. COWELL
FOUNDATION



YOSEMITE
+ SEQUOIA
FIELD STATIONS
UC MERCED

SUPPORTED BY
TAHOE TRUCKEE
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION



THE STRONG
FOUNDATION FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL
VALUES



Raley's



Golden1
Credit Union

Adventure Risk Challenge would like to thank the following organizations and individuals for their generous support and collaboration during our Summer Immersion Courses in Tahoe and Yosemite:

Key Summer Partnerships: Yosemite-Wawona Elementary Charter School - Stacy Boydston and School Board Members; UC Merced Yosemite & Sequoia Field Stations - Breezy Jackson, Marlon Spinneberg; Sagehen Creek Field Station - Ash Zemenick, Dan Saylor; Calvin Crest - Haley Woods; The Tucker Family; Yosemite National Park; Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation - Clay River, Bill Tucker; Project Discovery; Southern Yosemite Mountain Guides; NASTC; ETC; Summer Search; Sierra Community House; KidZone Museum; Sierra College - Mariana Jimenez; Gather Tahoe Catering; Dos Palos Oro Loma Joint Unified School District; Firebaugh-Las Deltas Unified School District; and Tahoe Truckee Unified School District.

Our Dedicated Summer Volunteers: Brad Altman, Patty Baird, Trisha Baird, Belinda Braunstein, Jackie Garcia and the Yosemite Leadership Program summer interns, Tara House, Barbara Ilfeld, Chawntay Mackinzie, Kasey McJunkin, Liz Tucker, and Katie Zanto; our Community Interview Day participants; the ARC Advisory Council; and the ARC Board of Directors.

Without all of you, this extraordinary program would not be possible!