

## June Student Trustee Report

Jeff Ferguson

### STUDENT TRUSTEE REPORT

At this time, Student Trustee J. Ferguson made the following remarks.

*“Good evening, Mr. Chair, Mr. Director, Trustees, Staff, Ladies and Gentlemen.*

*The air was cool and the moment was quiet. This day was different from the rest. It had taken a lot of courage, but I decided that this would be the day, the day that would make me, or break me. They made their way into the Mess Hall as usual. They had just finished their morning program and workshop and were just as eager to eat as I. I’m not quite sure what made me do it, or what it was that gave me the courage to do so, but none the less, today was the day. As they shuffled into their tables, one of my heroes raised his hand, and in doing so brought a room of three hundred teenagers to complete silence in mere moments.*

*It was almost as if his love was what commanded such strict obedience. We didn’t respect him because of what he was, we respected him because of who he was (he, was one of us). It was at that time that he introduced my reflection, during which, the entire room responded with absolute science.*

*I paused, took a deep breath, and said to myself, “Okay Jeff, this is it”. With that being said, I spoke these words before my peers,*

*“This year is my fifth year coming to Arts Camp. After my first visit, my Dad asked me what Arts Camp was all about. I said that “The notion of Arts Camp is a notion that can only be understood by those who have experienced it”.*

*It is more than just a place. Arts Camp can only be defined as a notion. This notion is simply acceptance. No matter who you are, what you wear, or what you like, you will never be judged. Through this very notion of acceptance and heartfelt traditions, it is us, the campers, the counselors in training, and the counselors which create this heartfelt place we know as Arts Camp.*

*If I can give one piece of advice to you about Arts Camp, it’s to think outside the box and step outside of your comfort zone because you will never be judged for it. Always remember, if you wish to walk on water, you must first step outside of the boat.”*

*As I began to catch my breath, every camper, counselor in training, and counselor rose to their feet. I had done it.*

*That day happened two years ago, and is still one of my proudest moments. I had always loved to write, but it wasn't until the beginning of that year that I really committed to writing everyday. No matter how much I wrote, I never shared my writing with others.*

*If you asked any camper, counselor in training, or counselor about Arts Camp, I'm pretty sure that they'll all tell you the same thing. They'd tell you that Art's Camp is their home and that they just happen to be away from it for fifty-one weeks of the year.*

*Some of you are probably wondering, how such a place could become so bound to one's heart. Well for me, it was a matter of stability. Going between my Mom and Dad's house wasn't great, but no matter how stressful things got, I could rest assured that Arts Camp would always be there. But it wasn't just the place, the scenery, or the walls. It was the family. It was the campers, the councilors in training, and the Counselors. It wasn't about those who were my family, but about those who became my family. They were the ears that would always listen, the ones that made me comfortable enough to tackle my greatest fears. Some years they were the crutch that I so desperately needed to lean on.*

*I have many journals, but my favorite one has a quote plastered on its cover that reads: "Life isn't about finding yourself, it's about creating yourself". Truer words have rarely been spoken; Arts Camp isn't a place where people find themselves, but a place where people create themselves.*

*It's interesting to think about the fact that the only way you can be yourself is when you're not trying. It is because of Arts Camp's notion of acceptance that many people start being themselves for the very first time.*

*That is why Arts Camp is something that can only be understood by those who experience it. To outsiders, it may appear as merely a place where students in the board practice artistic skills, but in truth it is so much more. No evidence towards my point could be greater than the tears that are cried each year by those attending the candlelight ceremony, a sacred ritual for providing closure, for those who will not be returning the following year.*

*But above all, Arts Camp's greatest attribute is its ability to produce student leaders each year. Although we must never lose sight of the fact that no one is perfect, if you would like to gaze upon the finest student leaders in the board who exemplify the essence of character education, look no further than the counselors and counselors in training at Arts Camp.*

*It was the counselors, counselors in training and teachers of Arts Camp that taught me how to be a leader. I can say with confidence, that if not for the life changing experiences that Arts Camp provided, I would not be speaking before you tonight, because I wouldn't be sitting on this board.*

*Isn't it amazing that so much comes from such a place, where the common view is that it's just a place where kids go to do art? If I may be so daring as to provide more food for thought; isn't it also ironic that when many school board and provincial budgets are tight, the arts are one of the first things to go before the chopping block; yet it is places like Arts Camp that produce the type of student leadership that public education so desperately wants.*

*It took five years of Arts Camp for me to be comfortable enough to step outside of my comfort zone.*

*Before every meal at Arts Camp there is something called a reflection, a time dedicated to those who sign up to express themselves before the entire camp. So I decided to sign up for a mid-week lunch refectioin to share my art, that being the art of writing.*

*As I sat before a lake, I attempted to do something that no one in the history of Arts Camp has ever been able to do. I decided that I was going to describe the entirety of Arts Camp in words. It was then that I discovered that Arts Camp wasn't just a place, but a notion of acceptance. The passage which was previously read was the reflection I gave that day and the moment when I conquered so many of my greatest fears.*

*Today students are forced to live in a cruel world. A world that gets harder to grow up in with each coming day. Many students are forced to endure bullying, prejudice, and racism. Many students in the Board never become the leaders they could be due to the fear of rejection from their peers, a mere reality that simply does not exist at a place like Arts Camp. I come before you this evening as I did the last, with new questions and a new challenge. Why can't York Region school be based on the same principal of Arts Camp's notion of acceptance? Why can't students in the board try new things, go out on limbs and tackle their fears as they do at Arts Camp?*

*Can you imagine what the Board would be like if students traded prejudice for acceptance? Imagine a system of education where students learn by helping their peers realize their full potential. Imagine what we could accomplish as school administrators, if we were to learn through our colleagues in the same way. How do we accomplish such a task? Well, the answer is simpler than you may think. It is a choice.*

*We must decide to live and work with the notion of acceptance, because it is then, and only then, that others will do the same. Although the challenge I have laid before you may, in many ways, seem insurmountable, we must never forget that "every great achievement, was at one time, considered impossible.*

*Thank you."*