



Alicia Swift

How did working at Camp Tall Turf develop your leadership skills?

Learning leadership is something that is inevitable when you work for CTT, no matter if you try to learn them or not. At Camp, leadership is constantly displayed and lived by all the staff without thinking about it.

There were so many formative moments, but I will zone in on one. I will never forget my first campout experience. It was pretty overwhelming for me since I was a first-time counselor and I hadn't been camping on my own before, let alone being in charge of eight twelve-year-old girls. One of the nights the girls were terrified from scary stories – and admittedly I was a little paranoid myself. Despite my fears, I had to put on a show of singing songs and chanting to help the girls feel comfortable and safe.

Working at Tall Turf helped me to develop so many people skills and communication skills. I have learned to work beside many different types of people (different cultures, races, backgrounds, etc.) that I carry into my professional and personal experiences to this day. I currently work with Kalamazoo County Dept of Human Services in the Foster Care dept. The experience that I had at Tall Turf is a lot of the reason why I chose this career path and how I carry out the work associated with my job.

How was Tall Turf a turning point for your faith journey?

Working and living with so many of the staff members from CTT, has allowed me to experience being with many types of people who love practicing their faith and I love it. CTT has taught me how beautiful God is and that you can see, hear, smell, touch and feel God in every breath. Living in Nature is a beautiful thing and it was an amazing experience and period in my life. I have taught my children many of the songs, bible verses and studies that have stuck with me.

During the year I worked as a kitchen staff, I used to really enjoy my hikes through camp property on my free time. I also enjoyed sitting on the dock early in the morning when I first woke up. These were times when I really felt God. Getting in touch with God in this way, has been so powerful for me since it is not something I can necessarily get to easily in my everyday life. I appreciate those moments.

How did your experience at Tall Turf shape your understanding of reconciliation/justice?

The intentionality of racially diverse staff leading racially diverse groups of children is a model for what the world should look like every day. I loved being around so many different types of children and adults living and learning together at CTT helps to bridge gaps and makes coming together an easy and very fun, pleasant experience. As a



Black Woman, I have had LOTS of racialized experiences. I can say I have NEVER had a negative racial experience at CTT even as a camper.

Social justice and racial reconciliation are well-done components of staff training that help staff work with those who have had different experiences than their own. Building relationships between those who have had negative racial experiences and those who have not is important to build understanding. Much of the anti-racism training offered to staff is better than what is available in most large companies and government entities, but real experience building life skills cannot be replaced.