
Camp Common Ground’s mission is to bridge cultural divisions and foster inclusive and diverse communities in the Bay Area, starting with our middle schools.

We live in a divided country. People from different backgrounds often stereotype and fear one another, which can lead to hate and even violence. We aim to disrupt that cycle.

We cultivate meaningful relationships between youth of different backgrounds, so they respect cultural differences and fight the stereotypes they may harbor. Our youth take the skills they learn with us and lead efforts that bridge gaps between their peers of different backgrounds. Through their efforts, the youth leaders we train create schools where youth of all backgrounds feel a sense of belonging. In this way, we also aim to ultimately disrupt larger societal norms of segregation and exclusion.
ABOUT

Who Are We?

Our Team.
Zach and Ron, the co-founders and directors, are public middle school teachers in Oakland and San Francisco. They are Ivy League graduates, and together, have over 13 years of experience teaching in public schools, as well as experience in management consulting, and the education technology startup world. More importantly, Zach and Ron are from very different backgrounds themselves, and every day attempt to do the difficult work that they ask their youth to do. Ron, raised by a single mom, grew up in Detroit in a lower middle class black family. Zach is from an upper-middle class Jewish family from Connecticut. They met working at Camp Galileo in Oakland and formed a deep friendship. They co-founded Camp Common Ground in 2015 and have served as the directors ever since.


1. **Schools Nominate Youth Leaders.** Bay Area middle school leaders and teachers nominate youth leaders who want to bridge gaps between peers at their school.

2. **Overnight Camp.** At a two-week overnight summer camp, youth leaders are trained to be “Commoners.” They learn the empathy and leadership skills they need to build relationships across difference. They leave with a “Plan for Disruption,” a plan that outlines how they will use these skills to stand up against identity-based exclusion at their schools the following year.

3. **School-Year Weekend Retreats.** After camp, Commoners attend 4 leadership retreats to iterate on their plans. Each youth leader reports on their progress, receives feedback from other Commoners on next steps, and receives support from their Leadership Coach on what they can do to maximize their impact at school.

4. **Make School Cultures More Inclusive.** We measure our impact on school climate, and school leaders send a new cohort of youth leaders each year to sustain the new, inclusive social norms their Commoners have built.

5. **Trickles Up to Change Societal Norms.** These changing social norms trickle up to Bay Area high schools, and Commoners become advocates of inclusion, leading efforts to cultivate diverse identity safe environments wherever they go.
IMPACT

Who Do We Serve? Our Youth.

Every summer we serve 40 youth from around the Bay Area who are from racially and economically diverse backgrounds.

Demographic data based on 2018 campers

CAMPER RACE

Mixed Race 22%
Latinx 6%
African-American 8%
Asian-American 6%
White 39%

CAMPER HOUSEHOLD INCOME

<$20,000 10%
$20K-$30K 10%
$30K-$40K 10%
$40K-$60K 21%
$60K-$80K 17%
$80K-$100K 28%
$100K+ 10%

Demographic data based on 2018 campers
IMPACT

What makes Camp Common Ground unique?

Our research-based curriculum rests on “intergroup contact theory,” the primary intervention shown to reduce racial bias, which involves bringing groups of “the other” (for example, different cultural or racial groups) together. We intentionally target middle-schoolers (ages 11-13) because this is developmentally when divisions around identity become entrenched, and structurally when affluent parents begin to pull their children out of Bay Area public schools.

**LASTING IMPACT YEAR-ROUND**

Unlike other leadership programs that provide a one-time experience, we meet with youth **multiple times throughout the school year** and invite them for a second summer of programming. This ensures that we give them the necessary support to see lasting impact in their schools.

**SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS TO WIDEN IMPACT**

We partner with the schools that our youth attend. Our investment in the leadership of 40 youth **changes the lives of over 4,000 middle schoolers**. Those 4,000 grow up feeling more confident in their own identity, and knowing how to develop positive relationships with youth from other backgrounds.

**RESEARCH-DRIVEN MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION**

With the support of researchers at UC Berkeley’s Schools of Education and Public Policy, and the Greater Good Science Center, we have designed research-based instruments to measure our outcomes with fidelity.
We administer surveys with sub-scales from validated instruments on empathy, perspective-taking, diversity attitudes, leadership and self-esteem. Some examples of outcomes have included:

**After camp, nearly 25% more youth reported that they tried to put themselves in someone else’s shoes than did at the start of camp.**

**In a post-then survey, only 10% of youth felt that they could be honest with others before camp, and after camp, 92% felt that they could.**

Families have described the impact on their children as “night and day,” “astonishing,” and “transformative.”

Youth have described how they “can bring back these conflict resolution skills to school,” how they went from “being a follower to being a leader,” and how Camp Common Ground is like a “family” where they have real friends.

Middle School principals have given testimonials expressing the need for programs like Camp Common Ground at their schools.

We track the change that our youth leaders make as a result of implementing their Plans for Disruption.

Researchers at UC Berkeley’s Graduate Schools of Education and Public Policy support the development of our measurement and evaluation plan. We will track longitudinal outcomes that assess changes in bias towards others from different cultural backgrounds and student belonging at school. We also track which additional leadership opportunities our youth pursue in their schools. For example, Commoners have run for student leadership positions, and they have credited Camp Common Ground for giving them the skills and confidence to do so.
Are we a cost-effective organization? Our hybrid revenue model.

With backgrounds in the private sector, we spend each dollar carefully. With our sliding scale tuition model, we cross subsidize for our youth coming on scholarships with the earned revenue from full-paying campers. With this model, we cover nearly 50% of our costs through earned revenue alone. Additionally, as a social enterprise guided by lean startup methodology, we carefully pilot and iterate on new initiatives before growing, in order to avoid a bloated infrastructure.

How can you make a difference?

You can think of your donation in two ways:

1. Sponsoring campers. Full tuition for 1 camper is $2,600, and about 70% of our campers are on at least some level of scholarship. Consider sponsoring a whole cabin of 8 diverse youth for $21,000. Full tuition for 1 camper is $2,600.

2. Changing school climate and social norms. Invest in us, and become a Partner in our Vision, of a Bay Area that has new social norms, in which youth actively include those from different backgrounds and build lasting, meaningful friendships across cultural, racial, and socioeconomic lines. We need $250,000 over the next 2 years to achieve this goal.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Resources Required</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>27 youth leaders, 2 week summer camp</td>
<td>$50,000 budget, 2 Co-Directors, 6 Summer Staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016-2017</td>
<td>31 youth leaders, 2 week summer camp, 3 school year leadership retreats</td>
<td>$65,000 budget, 2 Co-Directors, 6 Summer Staff</td>
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<td>2017-2018</td>
<td>36 youth leaders, including returning campers, 2 week summer camp, 4 school year leadership retreats</td>
<td>$80,000 budget, 2 Co-Directors, 8 Summer Staff</td>
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<td>2018-2019</td>
<td>40 youth leaders, 2 week summer camp, for new and returning campers, 4 school year leadership retreats, Measured impact on ~500 students at 3 middle schools</td>
<td>$90,000 budget, 2 Co-Directors, 1 Operations Director, 8 Summer Staff</td>
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<td>2019-2020</td>
<td>44 youth leaders, 2 week summer camp, for new and returning campers, 4 school year leadership retreats, Measured impact on ~4,000 students at ~25 middle schools, Sustaining model of impact at 1-2 partner schools with piloted “Common Grounds Club”</td>
<td>$160,000 budget, 2 Co-Directors, 1 Operations Director, 3 School Leadership Coaches, 8 Summer Staff</td>
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IMPACT

How do our youth impact their schools?

OUR COMMONERS HAVE CHOOSEN TO DISRUPT NORMS that exclude students with Autism, black students at predominantly white schools, students with a language barrier, queer students, girls who want to play sports, and boys who “look like girls.” Campers iterate and implement these plans with support from staff during four leadership retreats spaced throughout the school year, including a final presentation to their families at our spring potluck.

RETURNING CAMPERS GAIN THE SKILLS TO LEAD SCHOOL CLUBS OR NEW INITIATIVES in an inclusive and equitable way. They observe and analyze the “Year one” campers (those coming for the first time) over the summer to discern three social norms among their fellow campers that need disrupting. Then they work together to create programming for a school-year reunion to disrupt those norms.

THEM USE THEIR LISTENING SKILLS such as asking elicitive questions, paraphrasing for feelings and needs, and non-violent communication to resolve conflict, in order to support the marginalized student, and disrupt the social norm keeping others like that student on the margins.
What’s the impact on our youth?

“I thought I was a follower, but now I know I can be a leader.”
- Veronica

“I really thank this camp, and love this camp, because I really grew a lot. It helped me... empathize, really see through other people’s eyes.”
- Justeis

“We are like family here.”
- Xavier

“I can take back to school what I learned here about conflict resolution and not judging people because you don’t know what they’re going through.”
- Ah’maya

“Everyone in this community is very close and we all love each other. I learned how to be a better listener and empathizer, and I learned to have a lot more patience, and that really helps as a leader.”
- Robbie

What do parents say?

“She felt bonded with the other campers and appreciated the diversity. It helped her see that things and people aren’t always what they appear at first glance. She has shared with me that this is one of the best experiences she’s had in her life.”

“He had been impacted by some bullying and it seemed as if he was beginning to protect himself more and more with some stereotypical “boy” behavior...One of his first comments to me was ‘Mom, I learned to converse so openly and vulnerably!’”

“The impact was astonishing. My child came home with more confidence and social comprehension than I had ever thought she would develop in her teen years. She made great friends that gave her a sense of belonging that she has never really found among her age group...I feel like shouting the recommendation from the tallest mountain.”
- Robbie
While we focus on racial and economic diversity, we also are firm that Common Ground values mean being inclusive of all forms of diversity, from body type to family structure, and even as a small program with a modest budget, we have made accommodations to support campers who are hard-of-hearing (with an interpreter), in Autism magnet programs (used to small class sizes), and campers with significant anger management issues. Below are letters from some of those campers.

**Brandon’s Story**

Brandon wouldn’t make eye contact with Zach during his interview. He sat outside a coffee shop with Zach and his grandma, and quietly mumbled about why he’d like to come to camp. Brandon lived with his grandmother, a long-time Oakland resident in her 80s. She didn’t do technology, so we hand-delivered a paper application, and she wanted to meet Zach in person, so we changed the normal phone interview into a coffee date. Brandon certainly did not think of himself as a leader, nor capable of speaking in front of a crowd. By the end of camp, we couldn’t get him to be quiet. His bunk makes shared how funny he was at night, always cracking jokes, and he became very close with the most outgoing boy in camp. He also took the leadership training seriously, and can be seen reflecting in his leadership journal below. On the last day of camp, he wrote the note to us below.

Brandon (left) writing in his leadership journal

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Thank you Ron for helping me learn how to deal with conflicts. Thank you Zach for helping me become a leader.
CAMPER STORIES

Luis’s Story

Luis was a shy boy from Roots International Middle School, which has a student population that is almost entirely Latinx and African-American. At camp, he consistently got out of his comfort zone, made new friends, built confidence, and even learned to swim (see him with Ron, who taught him how!). In his exit interview he said he was ready to go back and make change at his school. In the fall, he joined student council and ran for student body president.

Michael’s Story

Michael had a difficult 8th grade year, and was nearly suspended for anger-related issues. He was convinced he wouldn’t make it through two weeks of overnight camp. In his exit interview, he shared, “I grew with sharing about myself to other people in general, being around others for longer periods of time more comfortably, and a better understanding of how people have things that you can’t always see at a first glance. It was a very eye-opening experience.”
One important experience is the “Commoner Color War,” in which we modify the classic camp Color War to focus on privilege, discrimination, and division. Campers are divided into one of four colors around the campfire the night before, and in the morning arrive decked out in their team’s color. The color teams compete throughout the morning in different games and contests. However, without acknowledging it, the rules of the competitions and the counselors’ attitudes systematically favor the Blue and Red groups and disadvantage the Green and Orange groups, creating a sense of unfairness. At lunch, the Green and Orange groups must serve food to the Blue and Red groups, and those privileged groups get to spread out and sit at all of the picnic tables, while the disadvantaged groups sit on tarps on the ground. The Camp Directors leave the camp grounds temporarily, giving the campers an opportunity to redesign the system if they seize the moment. Our first summer, when the Camp Directors arrived back at camp after lunch, the campers had all washed off their colored paint, changed out of their colored clothing, and were sitting together at the same tables, wearing their black Camp Common Ground t-shirts, and looking at the Directors with defiance.