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Learn & Serve Makes Lasting Impact in Participants' Lives

By Marie Lanier

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This year has been unlike anything we expected at SIFAT. When 2020 began, our Learn & Serve staff members were talking to schools, universities and churches to schedule spring retreats and summer experiences.

Learn & Serve provides opportunities to people living in the United States to gain a holistic view of the developing world through simulated experiences. Visiting the SIFAT Global Village may be someone's first time seeing how the majority of the world lives and understanding some of the daily struggles. Our programming highlights the appropriate technologies that community leaders in SIFAT training study. Participants in Learn & Serve events see how these technologies can truly make a difference in the lives of the poor and learn how our training alumni are implementing these things in their ministries throughout the world.

Because we could not host campus events this spring and summer, our campus staff focused on maintenance projects and facilities updates to improve our campus. Our staff deep cleaned and painted our lodging facilities, repaired porches and steps, performed general maintenance, and worked on our landscaping and grounds. With your financial support, we have been able to keep our staff employed during the pandemic.

Our campus makes a difference in the lives of youth, college students and others who take part in Learn & Serve programming. Jack Parkinson, who is currently a junior at Texas A&M University, recently shared what he wrote a few years ago about how a week at SIFAT as a ninth grader positively impacted his life for the future.

My Week at SIFAT ***by Jack Parkinson***

I had the opportunity to attend SIFAT's Learn & Serve Summer Experience when I was in the ninth grade. I went alone, so I did not know a single person when I arrived. This was very scary at that age, and I was nervous and unsure if I wanted to be there. But looking back, it presented a great opportunity for me to grow. I had grown up in the church and knew what Christianity was about and would even call myself a true believer of the gospel, but was definitely lacking in my personal relationship with Christ.

My experience at SIFAT will be one I

always remember, as it was an incredibly defining moment in my faith. I got firsthand experience with the life of poverty from which too many people on the earth suffer, which taught me compassion. I also learned how much of a family the Christian community is and what it is supposed to be, as I was taken in by the staff and the other youth groups that were there.

However, the biggest reason SIFAT was so special to me is



Learn & Serve participants build a sack garden, which is can be used to grow food vertically in urban areas.

because that is where I first met God. He was there, present at the camp. For the first time I felt like I could feel His presence and hear His voice. I left after a week as a completely new person, and I have carried what I learned there with me ever since. SIFAT is an organization that loves people and follows the will of God. He works through the people involved and changes lives.

You can Experience SIFAT's Campus

Thank you for continuing to support SIFAT! Your donations make a difference in lives both in the USA and around the world. During our Learn & Serve Summer Experience, students like Jack are exposed to not only the physical needs that SIFAT meets, but also take part in Bible studies, small group discussions and worship.

Our campus staff can work with your group to customize a retreat for your group throughout the year, whether it is a one-day school field trip or a multi-day youth retreat. Although we are not currently open for visitors, SIFAT continues to monitor the current guidelines for camps and large groups, as well as the coronavirus situation in our area. When it is safe, we will reopen with new policies to keep our staff and participants healthy.

How can you help SIFAT's campus now? Talk to your youth group leaders and ask if they have called to schedule a 2021 retreat or Summer Experience! Plan a tour with a group from your church or community. Share your stories with others about how experiences at SIFAT have been a meaningful part of your life.



The Challenge Course is a series of team building exercises and low-ropes course elements that helps groups work together.



Most mornings of the Summer Experience start with worship in our outdoor chapel overlooking Mad Indian Creek.



Josiah Corson (right) leads participants in a debriefing after the Slum Experience to discuss the event and what they learned as they met their basic human needs while facing obstacles similar to the 1 billion people living in urban slums.



Participants in Global Health Day retreats and Summer Experience spend time learning appropriate technologies in our demonstration gardens, such as how to build urban gardens when soil and space are limited.