



Garrett's
Story





Garrett's Dad and my husband Micah and I have seen firsthand the profound impact Camp Encourage has had on our son, Garrett.

CHAPTER ONE

Garrett first attended camp at the age of eight. It was his first time away from home, and he was quite timid, preferring to play with Legos as a safety net rather than trying new activities. His counselor was wonderful, allowing him to experience camp on his own terms. When he returned home, Garrett created a bucket list of activities he wanted to try next time - ziplining, fishing, and archery - all things he hadn't done before.

CHAPTER TWO

That same year, Garrett attended Smores & Pours, where guests were invited to write postcards to campers. Garrett wrote to a future camper, encouraging them not to be afraid to try new things and assuring them that others would be there to support them. Unbeknownst to us, he also bid \$200 to sponsor Legos during the fund-a-need campaign. Everyone got a good laugh and we promptly retired his bid number for the night.



CHAPTER THREE

During Garrett's next camp session, with the help of supportive counselors and volunteers, Garrett tried everything! The camp slideshow showed him smiling, laughing, and thriving, and my heart overflowed with joy for him. Garrett carried this spirit of supporting others into his daily life. He became an incredible supporter for his friends and classmates, cheering them on and telling them they could achieve anything. His teachers even shared how much this meant to his peers.



CHAPTER FOUR

Garrett has attended Camp Encourage at least six times, and with each session, I watched him grow more independent. He transitioned from saying "I can't" to telling himself he could "do hard things" - and he did! He transformed into a fearless young man, trying

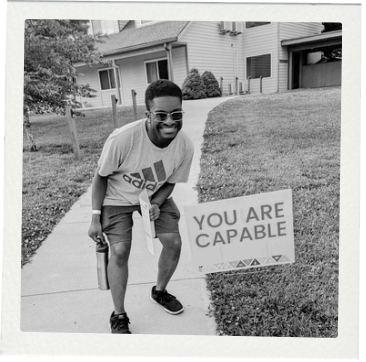
new things and embracing unknown spaces with an open mind. Even moving to Florida and attending a high school twice the size of his previous one didn't deter him. He embraced new routines, unfamiliar environments, and even learning from new friends who spoke multiple languages.



CHAPTER FIVE

As Garrett aged out of camp, he was invited to take over Camp Encourage's social media during a camp session for younger campers. He was excited about the challenge but less enthusiastic about bunking with two counselors he didn't know.

On the first night, he called at 10 PM, saying he couldn't do it.



The real issue, we discovered, was that he needed outlets to charge his phone, Fitbit, and earbuds overnight. We encouraged him to ask his roommates if he could use an outlet for his phone, and after much encouragement, he did. Garrett learned to advocate for himself in unfamiliar situations. Equally important, he captured the camp experience through the eyes of younger children, their laughter and joy, providing a full-circle moment that made a lasting impact.

CHAPTER SIX

We watched as our son emerged from his shell, made new friends, conquered challenges, and learned to accept autism as one piece of his whole self. "



Garrett attended Johnson County Community College, earning an Associate's in Liberal Arts, making the honor roll, and being inducted into Phi Theta Kappa. In a public speaking class, Garrett openly shared that he is autistic, calling it his "superpower."

THE CURRENT CHAPTER

Garrett is now attending the University of Kansas's Transition to Postsecondary Education (KU TPE) program, a two-year inclusive certificate program for students with disabilities. He lives on campus in a dorm with three roommates, independently managing his daily needs, classes, and responsibilities.

FUTURE CHAPTERS

After KU TPE, Garrett plans to continue at KU to pursue a degree in Mathematics. We are incredibly grateful to Camp Encourage for sparking this fire in Garrett and for showing him that he is strong, capable, and resilient. More importantly, he believes what we've always known - that he can do anything he tries because trying is half the battle.



This isn't the end of the story,
THANKS TO YOU.

**A CLOSING NOTE FROM
THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Deep thanks to Schylon,
Micah, and Garrett for
sharing this sweet story.
What a privilege it is to be
part of his life and to see
his narrative take shape.

To rewriting futures,
Kelly Lee

