

Success, Growth and Celebration Mark 10th Anniversary of Carolina United



Celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, Carolina United welcomed UNC students to Camp Oak Hill to participate in a five-day program designed to explore the meaning of diversity and leadership. By creating a safe and accepting space for discussion, the program intends to bring together participants from all backgrounds and experiences to unite them across their differences.

Carolina United was started by a small group of students in 2005 and has grown a lot over the years. This year, the program took place from August 10 to 14. There were 2 co-directors, 20 counselors and 74 participants ? the most participants the program has ever had.

Kate Kryder, co-curricular leadership program coordinator of the CLD in the Carolina Union, has been a part of CU for the past 6 years and said it has inspired her.

"I'm so grateful and humbled to be a part of the program," Kryder said. "I know that what I've learned from these students and what they've given to the program is so incredible. It's why I do what I do, I'm so inspired by that."

Throughout the week, students attended several sessions including construction of gender and sexuality, mental health, body image, healthy relationships and personal identity development. They were then put into smaller discussion groups to go deeper into these issues.

In this accepting environment, students are given the opportunity to share their own personal experiences and be vulnerable. Kryder said it's important to create this kind of safe and inclusive space for students to open up to each other.

"Everyone has a story. You never really know what someone is walking around with, what their perspective is and why," Kryder said.

This year's co-directors were seniors, Christina Townsend and Dwight Payne. They both went through the program as participants and then as counselors and now co-directors.

They spent a lot of time and dedication preparing for their roles as co-directors, but in the end they said it was rewarding and fulfilling to see their visions for the program become reality.

All participants were selected to attend the program by an application process. Townsend said that the program is unique because everyone who comes into the space knows what he or she is signing up.

"The fact that everybody is there and wants to be there and wants to contribute? even if they're scared to contribute, they still like in their inner hearts wants to contribute. That just makes it so unlike any other program that I think I've ever been a part of," Townsend said.

Townsend recalled a moment in CU, back when she was a counselor, which stood out to her. "It was the second to last day and then something clicked in my small group, and it was just amazing. The fact that my small group was finally able to come together? that was just the most beautiful CU moment. Everyone was finally okay to be themselves, and that was just the most beautiful thing."

Payne said he enjoyed his role as counselor the previous summer and decided that he wanted to continue his involvement with CU because of its impact on his life.

“CU is one of the few organizations I’ve ever actually been a part of where I can fully say that the mission is something I can give every single day and still get excited to contribute to,” Payne said.

Payne said he was challenged on a personal level and grew as a person from that experience in a key time of his life as he was finding his place at Carolina. “I started to view myself in this context of this bigger community in a much more comprehensive way,” Payne said.

Though CU follows a core curriculum, Payne said the experience is incredibly different every year because there are new, different people each time. “That’s one thing we actually discuss at CU is being present in the moment and recognizing that kind of unique set of circumstances and people we have,” Payne said.

Payne said the people who challenge him to grow the most are people who are different than him. He values surrounding himself with those people.

“I’ve found nothing more transformative than surrounding myself or even just by fortune been surrounded by people who challenge me. That’s when I track the most meaningful moments or periods of growth in my life.”

Carolina United provides sessions and time for discussions about these important topics of diversity and leadership, which might not otherwise be addressed outside of the program. The program hopes the lessons learned and the memories made are taken back with these students and staff into the world and applied.

Source URL: <https://carolinaunion.unc.edu/news-features/features/success-growth-and-celebration-mark-10th-anniversary-carolina-united>