

SAN JOSE

NCCJ Camp Anytown, USA

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“Being around different ethnicities and backgrounds, you hear and see what things certain people go through, and you learn, you experience, why not to do things that are hurtful.”

-- *Shaniquea, age 15*

Mission: Camp Anytown is a youth leadership-development program specifically designed to address and reduce inter-group prejudice and conflict, and to prepare youth to be leaders of a diverse community.

Overview: Camp Anytown is an intensive four-day, three-night residential leadership-development retreat for high school and college youth. Twenty-five to 30 Anytown camps involving 1,500 participants are held each year throughout Silicon Valley and in locations north of San Francisco from Marin to Mendocino. Each Anytown retreat focuses on one or two schools and includes training for faculty and staff as well as for local police officers and other adults, all of whom participate in the retreats. Anytown retreats are based on respect, acceptance and responsibility – core values that promote non-violent communities. There are several components of Camp Anytown retreats:

- Students selected for participation are seen as community leaders (formal, informal, gangs).
- Participants are encouraged through training and support to leverage their skills for the benefit of the student body.
- Each camp has a one-to-five ratio of trained adults to youth participants.
- Anytown focuses on enhancing faculty-student relations, police-youth relations, conflict-resolution skills, citizenship values, and interfaith and inter-cultural respect.
- Alumni are encouraged to return to Anytown as trained student counselors.
- Ongoing assessment, evaluation and re-evaluation of curriculum is based on participant feedback.

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Results:

- Eighty-eight percent of Anytown student participants said they achieved increased insight.
- Ninety percent of student participants said their leadership abilities increased.
- Eighty-six percent of graduates report that their behavior changed after six months to a year.

Key Elements of Success:

- Carefully selected retreat groups help break down stereotypes that divide society.
- Students are trained as youth leaders and future counselors.

- Retreats offer training in non-violent conflict resolution.
- Exercises operate on an interactive, emotional level that develops empathy, not just intellect.
- A low ratio of adults to youth intensifies the retreat experience.
- Parents and other adults are incorporated into the retreat curriculum.

Target Population: Camp Anytown includes high school youth who represent all social groups. NCCJ carefully structures the camps to include an even number of young men and women, and a balanced representation of ethnic, cultural and religious groups. The goal is to promote real-world interaction.

Evaluations: Creating Safe and Supportive School Communities School Climate Survey, The Impact of Camp Anytown on Student Resiliency and Achievement at Santa Teresa High School (A longitudinal study), Michael Payne-Alex and Kathleen Ann Gonzalez, San Jose State University, May 2003.

Highlights:

- One hundred percent of Anytown respondents at Santa Teresa High School in 2003 said they felt that the program increased their ability to be a leader for positive change and to better address segregation at school.
- Seventy-five percent of respondents said that Anytown changed their behavior and how they relate to others.

“You experience Camp Anytown like a roller coaster. It is very emotional. Topics come up that people have never talked about their whole lives. One of the main subjects we have a hard time dealing with is gender roles, how they are portrayed in our society. Males have a hard time dealing with this. The second time I went, as a Student Counselor, I was able to help them, and to say it is OK, the emotion you are going through—you are not a sissy for crying and showing your emotion.”

- Scott, age 17