



Courage, Character, and Choosing to Matter – Gabe Guefen

Dear Julie,

I don't know if you remember me but my name is Gabe Guefen and I attended your academy this summer at the St. Mary's location. When I left for camp I was shy and not very outgoing. I was always afraid to go up to new people and introduce myself and I was often afraid to share my ideas with others. Well, the words shy, not very outgoing, and scared don't really describe me anymore. After attending your camp I learned so many life skills that normally would have taken me years to learn. Thank you so much. You changed my life.

I learned about choosing to matter and I always loved doing community service but I never really understood the impact I had on others. Your camp taught me that. I had so much fun and I met so many new friends some of which I still keep in contact with. I learned many new skills from great coaches as well. On the second day of camp you were taking photographs while my team was playing a scrimmage. You took the time to come up to me and ask me how I was feeling and you told me that you thought that I was really brave for what I was going through. Those five minutes you took to talk to me meant the world to me. I couldn't believe that you actually knew who I was and the fact that you took the time to come talk to me was so special. I could not have been happier or more excited. You gave me the confidence that I never knew I had and inspired me in ways that I could have never imagined.

I have a really cool project that I am doing for my I am the change project that I am super excited about and I wanted to share it with you. I am starting a soccer camp for kids with arthritis age 7-14. I am holding it at Rancho Park in Los Angeles California on December 20-21 from 9-12. I have secured sponsors like Fiji Water, Morry's Fine Foods, Internal Groove, Matt Gee and Associates, and Scholastic Books as well as many more to make donations to my camp. Scholastic is donating books. I want each child to leave the camp with a copy of the book "Oh the places you'll go!" By Dr. Seuss.

I am calling my camp "Camp Courage Dare to Dream BIG!!" in honor of the courage kids with arthritis must have every day. One of the activities that we are planning on doing is a shooting drill that I did at your camp with a little twist. Instead of knocking down cones the kids with have to knock down posters. Written on these posters are obstacles that kids with arthritis must face everyday such as "I can't carry my books at school", "Kids laugh at me because my joints are deformed or degenerated" or "I can't tie my shoes and I am 14 years old". Many of these also apply to me. The point of the exercise is to shoot down the obstacles that affect us every day. I have worked so hard on my project and I am so proud of what I have accomplished and you have inspired me to change the world.

Thank you for teaching me how to be an advocate for myself and my disease....and how to "Dare to Dream BIG!!" and to choose to live a life that matters.