

# THE TALON

## Camp Everytown fosters diversity

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Senior Zoe Kohl and junior Chloe Langston bond over an arm wrestling contest at Camp Everytown.

Around 2 p.m. on Saturday, October 10, 55 students talked excitedly as they got off the bus returning from the school's annual visit to Camp Everytown. This was no regular school field trip; many of the students getting off the bus were talking to people who were complete strangers before the three-night trip to Camp Harmon in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

At Everytown, students and faculty participated in activities based on the ideas of promoting acceptance of race, gender and sexual orientation.

Many of the students who attended the trip were nominated by their teachers because of their leadership potential or the contributions they could bring to or take away from Everytown. Others signed up after hearing from friends' stories of the camp's dramatic, personal effects.

"I've had many students say that it is the most impacting experience they've had," Assistant Principal Cristy Dawson said. "Although it's a pain to pay, recruit the members and find staff members that can do it and set the day, even with all those pieces in the process it's still worth it."

In past years Dawson has told students that they could not attend camp if they had already gone, but after multiple requests from previous attendees, she decided to allow three members to come back as Counselors-in- Training (CITs).

Junior José Villanueva was one of the three CITs who were allowed to come back for a second year, and according to José, it took a lot of convincing for Dawson to let him come back. But José was not willing to take “no” for an answer because of the experiences that he had taken away from the previous year.

“The first experience was pretty eye-opening for me,” José said. “I guess I was really blind when it comes to seeing from someone else’s perspective because I saw things my way, and going the first time kind of opened my eyes.”



Students who attended Camp Everytown pose for a group photo.

The trust between students created by the camp atmosphere allowed people to candidly share stories that they had never mentioned before to anyone. Many delegates connected on an emotional level as their understanding about topics such as abuse changed from just textbook statistics to personal, human stories.

“I learned how to not judge people on the surface and what they look like because a lot of the time you still have a lot of things in common,” sophomore Meg Nichols said. “Learning more about the friends that I already had and meeting new people were definitely my favorite parts.”

Many students felt that the stories that were shared in this particular group were moving beyond expectations and were connectable on a deeper level.

“I learned that you don’t have to be alone with your struggles,” José said. “A lot of times other people who you typically wouldn’t expect are going through the same thing, so you can have friends that can support you.”

Although some students come to Camp Everytown with the idea of opening up, many find it much harder to share their personal experiences than they expected.

“The whole thing is an issue of trust. You have to come to trust the people that you know that have gone and staff people that have gone,” Dawson said. “I don’t know people who go and say, ‘That was a waste of my time.’ It just doesn’t happen.”