

## Facilitating Summer

*Mikhail Troyan*

**As I finished my first year at Princeton, I was encouraged to look at internships for the summer.** The only issue was I had no prior internship experience and didn't know what to look for. However, as I scrolled through the internships provided through the university, a listing for a facilitator at the Princeton-Blairstown Center (PBC) caught my eye.

The place looked beautiful, and it gave me nostalgia for the summer camps I'd attended during high school. And, as a low-income student from a small town in Upstate New York, I loved their mission to serve kids from under-resourced communities and give them experiences they may never have had before. Reading the description of the problem-solving activities to help build social-emotional skills, the internship sounded like such a fun and rewarding job. I decided to apply, and I was ecstatic to receive the position.

I believe, from the camps I've attended and the camping trips I've been on, that being in nature is the best environment to learn and become closer with the people around you — so I'm a big fan of the outdoors. But several people asked, "What does this have to do with your computer science major?"

A lot, as it turned out.

Building such great connections with the kids made it not feel like work. It just felt fulfilling to know I was making a lasting impact on their summers and hopefully their future educations. I really enjoyed devising new ways to deliver the team-building activities and literacy lessons so that all the kids enjoyed them. I used some creative freedom, but each activity was designed to ensure that everyone got involved and allowed kids with varied strengths to shine

in different leadership roles. I often saw the active kids do great with the physical part of each activity — but they wouldn't have been able to succeed without the kids who liked to problem solve. Seeing the impact I could make in a teaching role made me want to involve education in my computer science career.

Due to COVID, we weren't able to host youth on PBC's campus for a residential program. But PBC

she was sitting alone. I learned she was very similar to me when I was in middle school: shy and curious. Her interests included computer science and skateboarding. What impressed me the most was, as a rising seventh grader, she already knew she wanted to go to Harvard. (I didn't even know Princeton was in New Jersey until I got accepted.) Although she was in my group every day, she didn't say much, giving one-word answers or just nodding. On the last day, I told



brought its Summer Bridge program to students' communities in Newark and Trenton, New Jersey. I felt the program we provided was on par with previous summers, if not better in some respects. For example, having the kids compare water and soil samples from their parks to PBC's campus made them much more cognizant of the importance of environmental awareness and education.

My favorite part of the summer was actually the first week of the program. This quiet little girl who hurt her ankle on the first day wasn't enjoying the program. I helped her become more involved by setting up activities in ways that she could excel as a problem solver for her team, and I sat with her at lunch when I noticed

her to have a nice summer and that she'd done awesome that week. She replied, "I'm gonna miss you." At that moment I definitely knew I'd made the right choice with what I wanted to do over the summer.

PBC is truly a place to grow. I saw this in both the kids and in myself — and none of us will ever be the same.

*Mikhail Troyan is a sophomore computer science major at Princeton University. He spent the summer of 2021 as a facilitator with the Princeton-Blairstown Center's award-winning Summer Bridge Program. The Princeton-Blairstown Center is a 114-year-old youth development organization that serves young people, primarily from historically marginalized communities, by nurturing their social-emotional skills through experiential, environmental, and adventure-based programming.*