



Transforming the Middle School Experience

LIAM WULFMAN



A pint-sized kid, Liam was completely stressed starting middle school as a sixth grader; the towering, giant-sized kids scared him.

Then, he saw a sign about trying out for the ski team. Liam seized the opportunity, and in the process, it dramatically changed his life as a middle school student.

He met kids from the different grades and made small footholds into friend groups. He ended up with more of a social life because of it. The team became his family.

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Every single activity the team pursued was brand new to him. Skiing. Mountain biking. Roller skiing. (Of course, that was a first!) In fact, he had never really done anything outdoors before the Loppet program. Liam confessed, "I was not the fittest kid."

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Joining the team transformed Liam, now a junior at Southwest High School in Minneapolis. In addition to learning new outdoor activities that he could pursue for the rest of his life, Liam learned about commitment and being accountable to his teammates. He also gained strong leadership skills.

As he progressed through middle school, and became a more competent skier himself, he was able to pass on those skills to his younger teammates. He enjoyed teaching them new things.

"I feel really good about teaching somebody something new because I have experienced so much joy and happiness doing something new. I really like the idea of passing that on."

As an Anwatin ski team member, Liam initially met with his team three to five times a week during the winter. Then, as the program expanded to include such activities as mountain biking, the commitment became year round. At the time, Liam thought that the time commitment was a challenge but upon reflection he sees it as a valuable tool for school and athletic success.



"The program was a good way to start thinking about commitment...it definitely was a big help because you show up, you are part of a team, and you work together, you train together," said Liam. "It really helped for school, too. You have to commit to school, like anything else, or even more. You have to work hard and put in the hours to get good grades so you can have a future to work with."

"If you live in Minnesota - Get Outside!"

"Just being outside every day, with the sunset, that made me feel amazing. The whole sky filled with purples, dark reds, and deep reds; the whole spectrum there is really beautiful and we got to see that every day after school. It killed the stress," reflected Liam.

Liam misses being outside every day particularly since his sport-of-choice is an indoor one: swimming. Liam currently swims for his high school team, spending two hours a day in the pool, six days a week, and competing one to three times a week. He believes that his experience on the Anwatin Ski Team provided the foundation for being successful in school and the pool.

Liam says that the middle school program teaches youth about health, well-being, leadership and commitment. "It's something that kids will remember forever. It impacts lives going way into the future. I was greatly impacted by it."

The Loppet Foundation provides opportunities and creates passion for year-round outdoor activities and adventures in the Minneapolis area, especially among inner-city youth.