

What does the Youth Center mean to me? This speech wasn't easy to write. So many memories come to mind when I start to think about the Youth Center. When I sat down to write this speech it brought a smile to my face thinking of all of the wonderful memories that I have of this place and about what it means for me to say that the Youth Center will be a part of my life forever. Through my years of working at the Youth Center it became less and less of a job and more and more like a family. We joked around, got mad at one another and had fun. My first summer working there, I had just finished my sophomore year of high school. That was one of the best summers I have ever had. I was nervous and shy at times but when I started to work I let the real me come out. I didn't care what the other staff thought of me or if I embarrassed myself in front of the kids who I was watching over. Rick always tells us that no matter what kind of day we're having we have to make sure those kids get the best day they can possibly have. I took this to heart and made it my goal for those kids to have the best 4 hours they could have. I was offered a job starting that school year to join the Youth Center's staff during the fall and I continued through the rest of the year. This is where I have to really take a moment to thank Rick and the staff. Because they gave me something I never thought I would get working at the Youth Center. I made the best friends of my life that year. The Youth Center brought together some of the best people you could ever ask for, people who I know will be lifelong friends of mine. As the year continued so did the friendships, and these people became more like my brothers. When I first started I was the one of the younger staff members and I looked up to the older staff to help me along the way. I was awarded staff member of the year which meant a lot to me as a new staff member. My hard work all year had paid off. The next year, as a senior, I was a bit older and I wasn't the young one at work anymore. I felt a sense of leadership beginning to grow, which was one of many abilities that I had gained here. We had more corner office meetings that year than I had ever had. For everyone who doesn't know what a corner office meeting is, it is when the boss feels like he needs to have a one on one talk with you. You never know what it's going to be about, it could be a joking talk or a serious one. It could be

personal or have nothing to do with anything. Many of mine were personal talks, some joking ones, and a lot of conversations about my work at the Youth Center.

My relationship with each of the staff members grew every year. That's really important to me. I felt wanted at the Youth Center and felt important. There are so many things in my time at the Youth Center that can't be put into words, from funny things the kids say, to what they do, to the goofy things the staff does to make each other laugh. This place is so much more than just a job. It truly is a place where you can feel comfortable and joke around and have great connections with the kids and still have a level for respect for each other. The Youth Center is a home to me and I don't know what I would do without this place. My senior year was my hardest year especially towards the summer. I was realizing that I would not be working there after school every day. I would be leaving for college that fall and was getting nervous and scared about it. We went on a staff outing to Mount Major that summer and got poured on by rain as soon as we were heading down the mountain. It was a great last trip with all of these people. My coworker Aisha and I really did appreciate how close we got with the staff to the point where I believe we can both say they are our second family. The last day the Youth Center was open in the summer, I was there for the whole day saying goodbye and getting a bit emotional. What really set me off was when Rick had a one on one with me outside and told me "This isn't goodbye it's only see you later. We will miss having you here every day, but I know that you are ready to move on from the Youth Center." He had brought me so far in my life and the Youth Center as a whole prepared me for a lot of things that I will use out in the real world. My personality grew and developed here and without them I don't know how ready I really would have been for college. My family helped a lot, but I think the Youth Center really helped me get ready to move on in life. When I left for school I wasn't homesick at all, I was prepared for my life to come.