

snapshots

MBU STUDENT PROFILES

Summer Schoolhouse

Caleb wakes before sunrise and breathes deep the cool air of the southern Utah desert.

Beyond the huddle of makeshift tarp-shelters, the rising sun illuminates his figure poised in silent meditation.

Soon it's time to begin another day of survival in the wilderness with nine drug-addicted, unstable teenagers. Likened to a scene from a "reality" TV show, the teens live together for months on end learning to work together in search of their future.

This harsh lifestyle is as real as it gets for participants in the Aspen Achievement Academy. >>

Caleb Schulten, like a growing number of students, spent the summer of his junior year in a unique service opportunity. Working with disadvantaged youth, he combined his passion for nature with his calling to serve. One of the first things he taught his youth was how to create fire—something that took weeks to master.



"We were like three parents dealing with nine teenagers who acted like elementary school kids... We tried to find things in them to compliment the amazing abilities that they did have."

Between his junior and senior year, Caleb weathered an internship with Aspen, an intense therapy program for troubled teenagers that provides a pathway to recovery through primitive survival techniques. These youth spend between three and twelve months in the program, traveling in groups of twelve – one leader for every three teens.

"We were like three parents dealing with nine teenagers who acted like elementary school kids," explains Caleb. "We tried to find things in them to compliment the amazing abilities that they did have."

During the course of the program, they live in the Utah backcountry and complete academic and substance abuse recovery curriculums. They camp under the open sky, cook their own food, and carry their possessions everywhere they go. A teen begins the program as a "mouse" – the lowest on the food chain – initially learning his role by silently observing the more experienced campers, known as coyotes and buffalo. Coyotes work as a pack as they learn about the typography, botany, and geology of the area. With each higher level the students achieve, the expectations of their leadership roles increase.

"It's all up to the amount of work they put into it. We're not going to fix them or do this for them. If they want more freedom, they will work for more responsibility."

Once a week a therapist travels to the camps and stays with the group for a night, holding individual sessions with the kids as well as a group session. Leaders are trained to expect the unexpected, which in Caleb's experience included suicide attempts, physical attacks, and students running away from the camp.

"For these kids, their whole lives they've been running away from their parents to drugs. From their emotions by closing themselves off...this is a place where you cannot run away. Pushing a kid's buttons until he runs is the best thing you can do, because once they run, they realize they can't escape."

When teenagers are placed in this isolated environment, they realize that they must live by a different set of rules and work their way up the ladder of recovery before they can go home. Out in the desert, with nowhere to run, they are forced to face their issues – many for the first time ever.



In order to deal with the demands of the job, Aspen's guides such as Caleb must have a unique ability to put their own lives on hold and make the students their first priority.

During his internship, Caleb gained several lifetime friends and a foundation of experience to better prepare him for future opportunities. These relationships have strengthened his faith

and expanded his appreciation for the primitive lifestyle. Upon graduation, Caleb plans to open his own interactive e-commerce business and supply funding for future adventures in the field of Primitive Technology.

"My time at Aspen was just a part of God's plan in my life. I love the wilderness; it is part of my calling. I have worked in church camps and wilderness canoe programs; I have taken classes from camps in Wisconsin, traveling to Canada and Lake Superior. God has taken me to the heart of the Amazon jungle and to the deserts of the Southwest in a pursuit of a primitive passion and love for living simply on practically nothing. He uses the wilderness as His schoolhouse." 