

Past campers make great counselors

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Alex Sorapuru and Cathy Leshner, group leaders at the Ripples Summer Day Camp, practice dance moves with the camp's 6-year-old boys troop known as the Mudbugs. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Alex Sorapuru and Cathy Leshner are veteran group leaders at the [Ripples Summer Day Camp](#) on the uptown campus of Tulane University. Their interaction with the energetic 5- and 6-year old boys is organic and not uncommon for counselors at Ripples who were once campers themselves.

Following a three-year stint as a camper, Sorapuru decided to become a counselor after he was too old to attend. Now 21, and a senior at Louisiana State University, he has risen through the ranks as a counselor-in-training to a junior counselor, counselor and now a group leader with the task of managing other counselors.

"I never really thought about being a counselor as a camper, but I knew that I wanted be a part of Ripples for a long time," says Sorapuru. "I have the most interesting conversations with my 5- and 6-year-old

group ... mostly about Legos, basketball, *Star Wars* and *Frozen*.”

Leshner, 26, shares a similar history with Ripples.

She became a camper at age 9 and has attended Ripples most summers since then. She, too, rose through the counselor ranks and is now a group leader.

“I’ve watched some of the girls who were in my 5- and 6-year-old group become counselors, and now they are getting the same headaches they used to give me,” jokes Leshner. “I really enjoy contributing to the growth and development of these kids even if it’s in a small way.”

Michelle Mirpuri, associate director of programs at the Reily Center and Ripples camp director, says the primary benefit of becoming a counselor after being a Ripples camper for many years is the acquired understanding of the organizational culture and values.

“Both Alex and Cathy have a talent for keeping the group focused on fun while also encouraging respect, positive attitude and teamwork,” says Mirpuri. “This is a skill that is difficult to teach in training, but is acquired with experience.”

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