

Five lessons learned:

Rand Kazanji ('09 B.B.A.) is ready for some R&R.

But she's not thinking about a week in Cancun or a getaway jaunt to Key West. Kazanji, UM-Dearborn's assistant director for orientation programs, has something a little more rustic in mind.

This summer, you'll find her at North Star Reach's Camp Michitanki, a weeklong camp for kids who have undergone organ transplant operations. This will be her seventh year as a volunteer counselor.

"I grew up learning that you should use your abilities to help support others," she said. "UM-Dearborn not only reinforced that idea, but provided

tangible opportunities to serve my community with events like the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service. Philanthropy has always been important to me, and volunteering my time is an essential part of giving back."

And, like many volunteers, Kazanji has found that giving back to others is its own reward. Here, she shares five lessons learned at Camp Michitanki.

1. Take things one step at a time

One year, I had a girl who had never been in a lake. She was afraid of the water—wouldn't even go near the sand. But I stayed with her and slowly got her

more comfortable. "What if we try the sand? Let's dig our feet in the sand." "What does it feel like for a toe to go in the water?" By the end of the week, she was ankle-deep in the water and had this new sense of empowerment: If I keep taking steps toward my goal, I'll eventually get my feet in the water.

2. Make the best of your situation (even when spiders are involved)

My first camp year, I was the cabin counselor for the oldest girls, who are 14–16 years old. One of the activities the older girls get to do is get out of the cabins and camp outside. We had tents, sleeping bags. We were going to have a bonfire. What an exciting thing!

But the girls were not having it. We opened up the tent and there were spiders everywhere. It was pitch black outside; they couldn't find their flashlights; they couldn't sleep. It would have been easy to pack it up and head back to the cabins. But it was important for them (and for me!) to see that this was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. They had already shown so much resilience in their lives; I

knew they could make it through one night in a tent.

3. Give yourself a high five

We have what's called a "High Five Contract" at camp, which allows kids to find success by focusing on five core areas: safety, respect, commitment, challenge by choice (or how to challenge oneself) and having fun. It's easy to apply that to camp life, but it's also important to think about these ideas outside camp. What's important to you? What are the five things you need to focus on to feel satisfied?

4. Share your story

I didn't know what to expect that first summer, but camp quickly became an annual tradition. I started sharing camp stories with people because it's an important part of my life. And that's when I realized—when people see how impactful the experience was for me, they want to volunteer too. Several of my UM-Dearborn classmates and alumni now join me for a week at camp.

5. Rewards come in all forms

Camp is hard work. You don't get any sleep, and you're running around in the heat all day chasing kids. But you get to witness these special bonds kids form with each other; they've had this experience they didn't think they'd get to have. And when you come back year after year, you get to see these same kids grow and develop and learn about themselves. You get to see their resilience in action. It's camp magic. And I leave with a sense of rejuvenation and joy.

