After 30 years of serving Charlotte’s at-risk youth by providing overnight summer camp experiences for 5 consecutive summers to 4th-8th grade CMS students, Bruce Irons Camp Fund changed its name to WAYFINDERS and began serving our scholars through the 12th grade in 2019.

“Helping opportunity find every child,” our new tagline, means that our job as a community is to fix something that is wrong with the world. Although we provide kids with experiences like summer camp that will help them grow, what we do through mentoring, access to opportunities, and the building of social capital is about fixing the world, not fixing the child. We remove obstacles to opportunity so that our scholars can flourish and reach their full potential — so they can become WAYFINDERS. As a visual metaphor of this, our new logo evokes a compass, which is also a nod to our rich camp heritage.

WAYFINDERS’ MISSION is to ignite students’ potential by expanding their confidence, connections, and horizons. We achieve this through summer camp experiences, year-round enrichment programs, and mentor relationships for self-motivated, underserved students.

Our VISION is that every child, regardless of zip code, has access to transformative life experiences through camp, mentorship, and educational opportunities.

Eight years ago, Chris was a bright, self-motivated 4th grader. He did well in school, but his parents couldn’t afford things like summer camp, swim lessons, and theater outings. As a Wayfinders scholar, Chris was matched with his mentors, Melissa and Steve, who helped him prepare for his first summer at camp. Two years later, Chris’ younger brother, Chalin, was also chosen to join the program, and Melissa and Steve became mentors to both boys. Thanks to Wayfinders, Chris and Chalin spent three summers attending Eagle’s Nest, a traditional summer camp near Brevard, NC, where they hiked to breathtaking vistas, tried pottery and horseback riding, and learned to make friends across difference. In middle school, the boys attended UNC Greensboro’s All-Arts, Sciences, and Technology Camp where they studied forensics, biomechanics, and code-writing. For the first time, they were exposed to life and learning on a college campus, giving a glimpse of what was possible in the future.

During the school year, Melissa and Steve took Chris and Chalin to the theater, concerts, movies, and lectures. In time, Melissa and Steve built a relationship with the entire family, sharing meals and special occasions together. This past holiday season, as part of the “Wayfinders Gives Back” community service program, Melissa, Steve, Chris, and Chalin prepared a meal for 70 people at the Ronald McDonald house. With each new experience, Chris and Chalin’s self-esteem, confidence, and willingness to try new things grew.

Chalin, now in 10th grade, dreams of becoming an architect. Last year, Melissa and Steve arranged for Chalin to shadow 5 local architects over spring break. This summer, thanks to Wayfinders, Chalin has a paid construction internship at Blythe Development and will return to Eagle’s Nest as a Junior Counselor. Chris, now a 12th grader, wants to be a mechanical engineer. Knowing this, Melissa helped him apply to the Rebuilding Opportunities in Construction (ROC) program at his school and connected him to a paid construction internship last summer. This fall, Chris will begin his college career at Central Piedmont Community College tuition free thanks to the Opportunity Scholarship, and thanks to the guidance of long-term, caring mentors.
The Wayfinders program model combines summer camp experiences and year-round enrichment and mentoring to motivate scholars to be successful in school, increase self-confidence and access to educational opportunities, and improve leadership skills.

**IMPACT**

**INDIVIDUAL SOCIAL CAPITAL**

121 scholars matched with a summer camp/leadership experience

119 Adult Volunteer Mentors

109 theater tickets for scholars

**SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

63 scholars attended swim lessons and social enrichment programs

90% of scholars enjoyed trying new activities at camp

99% of parents reported increased self-esteem in their child after camp

96% of parents reported increased responsibility and maturity in their child after camp

**COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS**

100% of scholars entered 9th grade on-time

79 scholars attended a financial literacy workshop/career exploration experience

**SCHOLARS SERVED**

67% African-American/Black

29% Hispanic/Latino

2% Asian

2% Caucasian/White

130 Scholars served in 2019

12 CMS School Partners for 4th grade selection

50:50 Female - Male ratio

95% Scholar Retention Rate

Wayfinders partners with Communities in Schools (CIS) and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) staff members to select low-income CMS students who demonstrate strong academic effort, leadership potential, and good citizenship.

We are grateful to all our generous donors and friends for their support.

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