

**YSMP 2023 Testimony**  
**By Charlene Lei**

Hello, everyone! My name is Charlene and today I will be sharing my 2023 YSMP experience. So, this is my second year going to YSMP and wow, it was a great experience, way different than I expected based on last year. There were definitely challenges that we faced, but we were reminded to stay faithful. On this trip, I realized that as a team we were able to spiritually grow together and bond.

A challenge that was unexpected based on what Pastor Hoyt, the local pastor in White River had told us about past years was when there were three scorpion stings. Based on past years, Pastor Hoyt said that the average number of scorpion stings per year was 0.8! So 3 people getting stung was A LOT and I was one of them! Despite this, we still kept strong, knowing that we were there to serve, and we couldn't give up just because of a sting.

During YSMP, I really felt the power of the Holy Spirit, whether it was during VBS or when we were going door-to-door in the neighborhood. I would like to thank my partners for VBS, Brian and Elijah. I really wouldn't have been able to do anything without you guys. As a group, we felt the LORD working in us and our class. Teaching kindergarten, I never thought that they would be so mature and willing to learn about Jesus. They all wanted to grow closer to Jesus and said that they loved Him. This is when we really felt how the Holy Spirit answered our prayers. Sharing the Gospel with them daily, we really saw how engaged they were and how much they actually paid attention. I really saw a difference at the end in the children who came all three days of VBS. One specific person that stood out to me was a little girl named MaryJane. On the last day, she came up to us and said that she didn't want to leave us. This made me pretty emotional considering she was a kindergartner, and I thought most of the kids only came because of their parents. But this showed how God brought each of the children there for a purpose. The purpose was for us to share the good news of Jesus Christ with them, no matter their age, and help them become the next generation of disciples.

During worship each night, I realized how much energy all the participants had. It stood out to me when we were dancing and singing children's songs. The energy gave us positivity and happiness to teach our classes. While going door-to-door, we realized how broken down the neighborhood was and the conditions they had to live under. This gave me a perspective on their lives and showed me how privileged I was. Despite their conditions, we saw that they still had a very caring and accepting heart. Although some of them might not have wanted us on their property, they still took the time to listen to our invitations and prayed with us. I was so touched by some of the stories we were told during the door-to-door evangelism. One young girl was working a full-time job, taking care of people because she needed to support her dad, who was in the hospital in Phoenix. We were surprised because we thought that she would be a student, but instead, she was working. I also noticed that many people living in these neighborhoods lack education. This stood out to me because everyone who lives in our

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neighborhoods gets an education. It showed me how different people of the same age could be living their lives.

I am so glad that we were able to partner with CBCWLA again. Although we didn't know each other in the beginning, through the course of the week, we were able to get closer together.

Personally, I didn't want to leave and got emotional leaving them. At times, it felt long, and the week was tiring, but thinking back, it was actually pretty short.

The main theme for VBS this year was "Twists & Turns," and the theme verse was Psalms 25:4, "Make your ways known to me, LORD, teach me your paths." This verse reminded me to seek God when I need help and to ask Him what He wants in my life. Given a different takeaway message every day, we noticed how God was speaking to us. One was when Brian talked about not having fear because God was with us. The story being used was when the disciples went to sea, and Peter walked to Jesus on the water. Although he was frightened, Jesus told him to stay calm. This lesson also reminds us to still have faith in God when we are in doubt. Another was Justin's about staying bold like Peter and the Disciples were, even when they were arrested and put into custody. As missionaries, we were called to continue to serve and follow the Great Commission no matter the circumstances. The Great Commission is stated in Matthew 28:18-20: "And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'"

YSMP has helped me get closer to the LORD and realize how different it is to live as an Apache. I've seen the kindness that they show. For example, on the Sunday we were there, after service, they made us Apache tacos. It showed me a very different experience than last year and has helped me make new friendships and grow closer to the church community. Another thing I learned was how important it was to work as a group. I noticed how much we were able to accomplish in a short time period, such as cleaning up after dinners before VBS. If we were to do this by ourselves, it would take much longer to finish. At the end of the day, we were all there for the purpose of sharing the wonderful news about the salvation just by proclaiming Jesus Christ as our LORD and Savior.

Given this, I recommend you guys to go to YSMP in the future. You get to experience spreading the word of God to people who are less privileged than you, and you get to see how they grow in just a couple of days. Since this is a short-term mission trip, you won't get separated from your family for too long. Take this as a calling from the LORD to serve Him. I ask that you guys can help us pray for those seeds that we have sown back in White River. May they have good soil and continue to grow. Thank you all for giving me this chance to share my experience at YSMP 2023! I'll see you guys in YSMP 2024!!