

# CAMP iROCK '24

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING STRUGGLING READERS



United Way  
of Pickens County

[www.uwpickens.org](http://www.uwpickens.org)

# CAMP iROCK IS AN EPIC SUCCESS BECAUSE OF YOU!



Every year, I tell you *this* Camp iRock was the best EVER, but believe me... this year really was EPIC. Right before Camp iRock started, we learned that **92% of the inaugural class of Camp iRock 3rd graders graduated from high school this spring.** Talk about validation! Nothing is more rewarding than knowing that **your** steadfast commitment to struggling readers has paid off in such a big way. We think YOU ROCK.

I would like to introduce you to Isaac Turner, one of the super star graduates from Daniel High School's Class of 2024. Isaac is the son of Amy Turner, Director of Federal Programs for the School District of Pickens County. Like me, Isaac was adopted when he was two years old. Because Isaac didn't have the necessary reading skills or confidence to excel in school, he was invited to attend Camp iRock in 2015. He was in the 3rd grade.

At first, Isaac wasn't sure he was going to like Camp iRock. But he ended up loving it and because he was at the same level as his peers, he didn't feel insecure. Isaac sailed into 4th grade and every grade thereafter. Not only did he excel academically, he was gifted both in football and soccer. When Daniel High School won the state soccer championship this year, it was Isaac who scored the winning goal, giving him his sixth state championship as a Daniel Lion.

This fall, Isaac is headed to Union Commonwealth University in KY, on a substantial scholarship. Not only

will he be playing football at Union, he will also be studying Criminal Justice. Three years ago, Isaac had a life changing experience that helped solidify his interest in making a difference by helping others.

While on a family vacation, Isaac and his brother were part of a small team that helped save the lives of two people who were drowning in a glacier lake in Alaska. Immediately afterwards, Isaac told his parents that he knew exactly what he wanted to do in his life... help others!

We know Isaac will continue to do amazing things. His family is proud of him and so are we. He wants you to know just how much he appreciates the opportunity YOU gave him to shine.



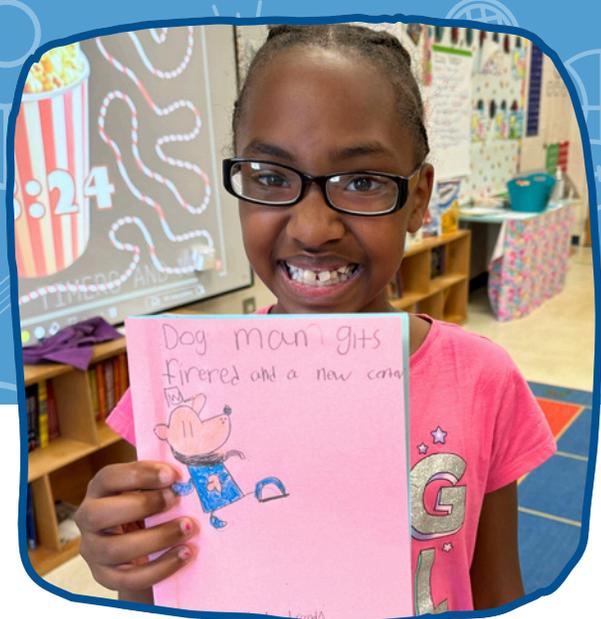
**From Camp iRock to graduation, Isaac is a shining example of how your support is creating bright futures!**

Thank you for believing in Camp iRock and supporting struggling readers. Their futures are brighter, because of you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Julie' followed by a simple smiley face drawing.

Julie Capaldi, President  
United Way of Pickens County

# A NEW OUTLOOK



**Because of you, Brandi's whole outlook changed. Her future now has unlimited potential!**

Hate is a strong word. But that was the EXACT word 8 year old Brandi used to describe her experience at Camp iRock.

When Brandi came into Ms. Duvall's 3rd grade class, she did not hesitate to express her distaste for reading and writing. Every day, Ms. Duvall searched for ways to bring out the love for reading and writing she just KNEW was in Brandi.

Our Camp iRock teachers are the BEST. It is not just a summer job; it is a passion for teaching...for reaching the children who need them the most.

Each day, Brandi would work with her Call Me MiSTER mentor to break down articles on topics ranging from the summer Olympics to safari animals. Ms. Duvall would also provide Brandi quirky prompts to respond to, one of her favorites being, "If you were a principal for a day, what would school look like?"

Through the power of these engaging exercises, Brandi's love for reading and writing grew beyond the limits of what she thought was possible. By the end of Camp iRock, Brandi was drawing inspiration from books, writing her own short story: a unique twist on her new favorite book, "Dogman," which Brandi chose at the family night book fair. Every child who attends Camp iRock selects ten books to take home for their very own personal library... thanks to donors like you. For many campers, this is their first book of their very own EVER.

Brandi grew academically and even became what Ms. Duvall calls "the class mom." Before Camp iRock,

Brandi adamantly refused to help others who were not her "friends." However, she displayed astounding maturing during camp. Whenever Ms. Duvall was conducting read-a-longs in front of the class, Brandi would gently tap on the shoulders of those who were not paying attention and tell them "to listen."

"Brandi truly became a leader in the classroom," said Ms. Duvall. "Her motherly behavior continued as Camp iRock's environment empowered her to show integrity."

Ms. Duvall recalled that when one of Brandi's classmates could not remember her password, Brandi took it upon herself to log into her own account on her classmate's computer, allowing her new friend to read online. Brandi did this every single day for weeks before Ms. Duvall realized what was happening. Nothing better demonstrates how Camp iRock builds character like helping others.

Because of your investment in United Way of Pickens County's educational initiatives like Camp iRock, children like Brandi are transforming their lives and learning to love school. Because of you, Brandi's future has unlimited potential. Maybe one day she will be a teacher and inspire struggling students, just like Ms. Duvall.

# AN INSIDER'S PERSPECTIVE

BY KEYLA ZHAO, SUMMER INTERN



Camp iRock amazes me. For the second year in a row, I was the United Way intern at Camp iRock. I spent time in the classrooms, witnessing the incredible impact camp had on each student. I also formed connections with the teachers, MiSTERS and Counselors, not to mention the Reading Buddy volunteers. I gained a new appreciation for the passion and commitment they have for their students. They are SUPERHEROES just like United Way donors! I saw remarkable growth, even from what seemed like the most hopeless of students. It is safe to say that Camp iRock is a magical place where students not only discover a love for learning but also become better people.

## HENRY

For Henry, Camp iRock was a place where “I can’t” turned to “I can!” Before coming to Camp iRock, Henry struggled with writing. His sentences would often become jumbled, and he found it difficult to express his thoughts clearly. He was frustrated and reluctant to write, repeatedly expressing, “I can’t do it.” His teacher recognized his struggles and put in extra effort to support him. During free writing sessions with his Call Me MiSTER, he received one-on-one assistance to help turn what seemed like a clutter of letters into meaningful sentences. Soon enough, Henry’s sentences slowly became legible, and he started enjoying what he wrote. At the end of the camp celebration, he proudly showed his parents his writing booklet with a big smile.

## JAMES

Initially, James was a shy 1st grader who had a difficult time opening up. However, the teachers’ dedication to forming meaningful bonds with each child helped James gradually come out of his shell and thrive like never before. His Call Me MiSTER made a point to engage with him daily, discussing the books they read together. A book on vegetables, part of the plant-themed activity, particularly captivated James. He would eagerly ask questions about vegetables every day and even share how he felt when reading them. His feelings were nothing but enthusiasm and curiosity. James even grew a plant of his own, checking its progress daily. Little did he know, he was growing just as rapidly as his green bean plant, jumping 17 points on his MAP test! James wants to be a teacher when he grows up. He even wrote a book about becoming a teacher!

## JASMINE

Jasmine came to Camp iRock in tears. She resisted doing any work, believing that she was beyond help. It wasn’t long before Jasmine discovered her love for reading... and writing. To prepare for Family Night, Jasmine’s teacher asked every student in her class to conduct an animal research project during their inquiry block. Through this activity, Jasmine became interested in Asian elephants. From then on, she eagerly embraced any opportunity to read, write, and share facts about these magnificent creatures. This also propelled her to try other reading and writing assignments that came her way. By the end of camp, the little girl who once refused to read and write had become a confident and curious learner, eager to share her discoveries with the world.

# THE BEST BUDDIES



Reading Buddies are amazing people from all walks of life who donate an hour or two of their time each week to read with a child who needs them. Some of our campers just need a little love and attention from an adult they can count on.

The Reading Buddies love the children and it's hard to decide who benefits the most... the kiddos or the adults! **This year we had 25 Reading Buddies who served 110 hours at all 3 sites.** Isn't that amazing?

The Reading Buddy stories really touched our hearts, especially this one from Shelley and Ron Fones:

“As I was reading with a child in the hall, I looked across into the door of another classroom. My husband, Ron was sitting on the floor with children lying on their tummies around him. He was reading a book to the kids and asking them questions. It was a wonderful picture of a 76-year-old man who was an Army troop commander and Green Beret beaming with joy to be able to encourage elementary school children.”

We are so grateful for all of these amazing volunteers!

## JOIN THE GROWING READING BUDDY PROGRAM

What do you do when something is so impactful and changes the lives of children? You expand it! So many of our Reading Buddies want to continue working with their little buddies when school starts in the Fall. Thanks to the Reserve at Lake Keowee community, we were able to pilot a successful year-long Reading



**The extra support Reading Buddies provide makes a difference, both at Camp iRock and throughout the school year. Join the team! Visit [uwpickens.org/reading-buddy](http://uwpickens.org/reading-buddy) to learn more.**

Buddy program at Pickens Elementary. We are thrilled to announce that starting this Fall, three additional Pickens County elementary schools will welcome Reading Buddy volunteers into their classrooms.

We are incredibly excited about this and are actively looking for volunteers for the upcoming 2024-2025 school year. Reading Buddies spend an hour or two with a few students each week. They provide extra support to help struggling readers become confident with their abilities and learn to LOVE reading.

If you would like to join our team of fabulous Reading Buddy volunteers, we would LOVE to have you. You can learn more and apply on our website, [www.uwpickens.org/reading-buddy](http://www.uwpickens.org/reading-buddy), or reach out to our new Director of Education, Anna Spatafora, directly at 864-826-8107 or [aspatafora@uwpickens.org](mailto:aspatafora@uwpickens.org).



## CALL ME MiSTER: A LOVE STORY

Camp iRock is so much more than just improving reading... it's about propping up struggling children and encouraging and loving them. The Call Me MiSTER team leader, Winston Holton received this email from a mom. There is nothing we could say that illustrates the power of Camp iRock more than this!



My name is Brandi Crum and my son Nicholas participated in Camp iRock at West End Elementary School in Easley. Nicholas had a Call Me MiSTER mentor, Mr. Gray, in his classroom for Camp iRock. I am hoping you can help me get in touch with Mr. Gray, whether by email or phone.

First, I would like to tell you how blown away I have been by the YMCA counselors and mentors that I have interacted with during Camp iRock. They have been outstanding. Each day that Nicholas was there he would come home telling me about quite a few of the MiSTERS that he played games with during recess or that he was telling jokes with or just cutting up and acting silly. He had the absolute best time with them and I can see why. They were excellent young men that care about the children they are mentoring.

Secondly, I would like to give you a brief background of how Nicholas came to Camp iRock. Nicholas was in first grade during the pandemic, and digital learning just didn't provide the instructions that he needed to lay the foundations for learning to read. During the 2022-2023 school year, he began 3rd grade and had three different teachers.

At the end of the school year, he still wasn't scoring the minimum needed on his MAP test to be promoted to 4th grade. He attended Camp iRock in 2023 and improved but not enough to pass to 4th grade. Nicholas repeated 3rd grade at McKissick Academy of Science and Technology. It was his "3rd Grade 2.0" year!



Because Nicholas was still in the 3rd grade, and still needed extra help, he was invited to attend Camp iRock this summer. For the first couple of days, he didn't want to give up his summer break and was reluctant, but after that he was okay with it...he was having fun!

When my husband went in to wake Nicholas up for Camp iRock on the day before the finale celebration, my husband mentioned that Camp iRock would be over in a couple of days and then he could enjoy his summer, sleep late and play. That's when it hit him... this year's Camp iRock was coming to an end... and he cried.

When my husband was dropping him off, he tried to remind him it was the last day and Nicholas wouldn't let my husband finish his sentence, almost like if his dad didn't say it, then it wasn't true. Nicholas increased his MAP score by 10 points during Camp iRock. And when it was time for me to leave, much to my surprise he asked me if he could stay for the rest of the day. Not go home and have a relaxing day playing PS5 and doing all of the things that kids do. He wanted to stay...with Mr. Gray. Nicholas really connected with Mr. Gray and he would like to keep in touch with him. He is afraid that he will never see him again. I cannot thank Mr. Gray enough for his mentorship with Nicholas in particular. Investing in these children, giving his time, his attention, his care and being such a great role model for these kids.

I know it is short notice but Nicholas is going to be baptized this Sunday and he would LOVE to have Mr. Gray attend. Is there any way for you to forward this information to him or forward my contact information so I can hopefully keep in contact with him?



The following Sunday, Mr. Gray did indeed surprise Nicholas at his baptism. Could anything be any sweeter? We don't think so!

Because of the generosity of hundreds of funders and donors just like you, we have been able to increase the number of Call Me MiSTER mentors... and hire, for the first time, a Camp iRock Call Me MiSTER coordinator, Mr. Spencer.

He was just what we needed to create a new program called IPLAY (Preparing Leaders as Youth), a targeted, focused initiative designed to develop students' character traits, critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity & imagination, risk-taking, fine motor skills, teamwork, leadership, and community. There were four activities: leadership, coding, art and music. The kiddos LOVED it. We all did!



**Your support provides meaningful relationships between children and mentors, like the one between Nicholas and Mr. Grey.**

# YOU HAVE THE POWER TO CHANGE A CHILD'S LIFE



**Your support is needed...urgently and right now...to write the next chapter in the story of a child in Pickens County who is struggling in school and in life.**

Right now, a child is broken and his story will not have a happy ending. The stigma that surrounds a child who cannot read is heartbreaking. Because she is having such a hard time in school...she feels stupid... and she is NOT stupid, she needs help. She needs YOU.

Did you know that if a child isn't reading proficiently by the end of 3rd grade, he may NEVER catch up? Third grade has been identified as the FINAL year children are learning to read. After 3rd grade they are reading to LEARN.

If they are not proficient readers when they begin the 4th grade, as much as half of the curriculum they will be taught will be incomprehensible.

Through your generous support to United Way of Pickens County's personalized educational programs like Camp iRock, children can thrive...miracles can happen...all because of YOU.

Every child's story deserves a happy ending, don't you agree?

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## My next gift to help a struggling child!

YES! I will help a struggling child and support the work of United Way of Pickens County. Enclosed is my gift of:

\$ 50    \$100    \$500    \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to help as much as possible.



Scan with your phone's camera  
to donate securely online.

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