



## **All in the Family: Parents and Kids find Inspiration and Self-Realization in State Leadership Programs**

“It was life changing. I really believe that.”

That is how Kim Coble '04 describes the effect that participating in Maryland Leadership Workshops (MLW) has had on her two children.

Coble, vice president of Environmental Protection and Restoration for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, was so inspired by her own experience in Leadership Maryland, that she wanted her kids to have the same learning opportunity and exposure to diversity at a young age. So she registered them both for MLW, the division of Leadership Maryland that provides leadership development for middle and high school students.

“Leadership Maryland greatly expanded my appreciation for the state of Maryland,” she said. “You get exposed to things that you aren’t normally in your day-to-day life. My kids were at an age where I really wanted them to tap into their own skillset and I thought that MLW would help them do that. I was intrigued by a program that had a very creative approach to building leadership skills.”

In Leadership Maryland, Coble benefited not only from the increased knowledge and appreciation of the state, but also from being able to take an introspective look at her own leadership skills and talents. This was a benefit she hoped to see her children gain as well when she introduced them to MLW, and she was very happy with the result.

“They started to really see their own leadership strengths internally,” she said. “They felt confident in drawing on and applying those skills. Their confidence in themselves went way up.”

This continuum of leadership – the opportunity to provide these life-changing experiences to adults and grade-school students alike – is exactly what Leadership Maryland and MLW envisioned when the organizations merged in 2017.

Betsy Pakenas '14 was also inspired to send her children to MLW after completing her Leadership Maryland class year.

“Leadership Maryland broadened my perspective of the state,” she said. “I went to places I’d never been to and I grew up in the state. There were places I saw and experiences I had that helped me appreciate the variety of opinions and cultures right here in our own state.”

Friend and classmate Jason Israel '14 recommended that Pakenas send her children to MLW, and her 14 year-old daughter and 16 year-old son are now in their second summer of the program.

“I loved the thought of my children getting exposure to other students across the state the same way I did with Leadership Maryland,” she said. “Plus, it’s a camp about leadership. All of us could use a fine-tuning of our leadership skills.”

Pakenas saw the effects of the program in her daughter immediately. A month after returning home from the sleep-away camp, she applied her new leadership skills and initiative to start a Harry Potter Club at her high school. She also started an all-girl band for which she plays drums and books gigs around town. Her mother describes her now as “fearless in making things happen.” Her brother is looking to start a radio station at school.

Jason Israel’s recommendation of MLW was a passionate one, as he attended the program himself twice as a middle school student and returned as a staff member while he was a senior at the Naval Academy.

“At MLW, we truly believe that leadership skills can be developed through training and practice,” said Israel. “Because I’ve had that, it’s one of the reasons I went to the Naval Academy and one of the reasons I’ve sought leadership positions in my career.”

Israel described his experience at MLW as rewarding but demanding, with some of the workshops aligning with graduate school-level material.

“MLW challenges young people in a way that I don’t think they’re challenged in school,” he said. “That’s the big experience. MLW provides difficult problems and advanced workshops and makes everybody step up to levels that they don’t normally step up to. At the end of the week you feel like you’re a family. You’ve been through these trials together and you’ve had to work together. That’s the magic.”

Israel’s experience both attending and staffing the program pushed him to join the military, an experience that later affected his decision to join Leadership Maryland. His military career sent him around the world for over a decade, so he was very interested in the opportunity to become reacquainted with his home state.

Israel says Leadership Maryland presented him with endless opportunities and introduced him to incredible people who all work together to share and contribute to each other’s success.

“You learn just as much, if not more, from your classmates as you do from the actual program,” he said. “Going through the Leadership Maryland network, I found a lot of different opportunities. Alumni will often work to connect each other to opportunities. For example, I’m on the board right now for an organization run by one of my classmates.”

Now that the two programs have officially joined forces, Leadership Maryland and MLW look forward to sharing many more success stories from participants of all ages. Kim Coble offers the following message for parents considering MLW for their child:

“There is no doubt that MLW had a profound effect on my children. They gained self-confidence and were exposed to people and issues that they wouldn’t have been otherwise, especially as high school kids. Teenagers tend to be very focused on their immediate circle of friends and they don’t branch out a lot. Attending MLW exposes you to other kids from all over Maryland. You meet kids from all different backgrounds, lifestyles, religions, races, economic situations, and educations. MLW is simply a great experience for a kid and your kids should definitely attend.”

To learn more about Maryland Leadership Workshops, visit [MLW.org](http://MLW.org). To learn more about Leadership Maryland, visit [LeadershipMD.org](http://LeadershipMD.org).