2026

CAMP RISE

PROGRAM REPORT



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Dear Partners, Supporters, and Friends,

We've wrapped up another summer of Camp RISE — the only known paid career exploration program in the nation for youth ages 10–13. This summer was filled with new friends, exciting field trips, hands-on career exploration, and plans for the future. Throughout the summer, our campers explored careers in Milwaukee's top industries, with Career Day serving as a highlight. Nearly 40 employers joined us to share their careers, experiences, and the journeys that led them to where they are today.

Camp RISE launches workforce development before traditional workforce programs begin. By engaging youth ages 10–13, we help young people build the confidence, career awareness, social skills, and workplace habits that prepare them for future success in Earn & Learn, education, and the workforce. Our campers made positive impressions wherever they went this summer, receiving compliments on their curiosity, behavior, and ability to clean up after themselves while out in the community. Parents and guardians saw these good habits reflected at home, too. The mother of one camper shared that her child now makes his bed every day!

These may seem like small moments, but they represent something much bigger: campers are developing the responsibility, independence, and life skills that will serve them throughout their lives. The outcomes detailed in this report showcase the meaningful steps our participants took this summer toward their future success in the workforce.

We welcomed 97 returning campers this year, representing nearly one-third of our total participants. For campers who age out of Camp RISE, the journey doesn't end. They receive priority for participating in Earn & Learn beginning at age 14, allowing them to build on the foundation they developed through Camp RISE and continue along a pathway toward education, career, and workforce success. This summer, 45 participants moved on to Earn & Learn, gaining valuable paid work experiences in the community.

With hundreds of applications received in 2026, Camp RISE continues to demonstrate strong demand among Milwaukee youth and families. And as we look ahead to 2027, we are preparing for what promises to be a flagship year for Camp RISE.

In 2027, Camp RISE will expand to serve even more youth while providing deeper and more intentional career exploration experiences. We will strengthen connections between Camp RISE and Milwaukee Public Schools programming, creating greater opportunities for young people to see how their interests, education, and future careers can connect. Our goal is to make career exploration a meaningful part of a young person's journey well before they enter the traditional workforce.

Together with our dedicated community partners, employers, and sponsors, we are investing in Milwaukee's future workforce by building guided career pathways that begin early and grow with young people over time. With your continued support, we can connect even more youth with local employers, mentors, and career experiences - helping launch the next generation of Milwaukee talent on their Employ Milwaukee pathway to success.

Stay tuned for an exciting 2027! We look forward to sharing more about what's ahead and, together, creating even greater opportunities for Milwaukee's youth.

Sincerely,

Julie Cayo

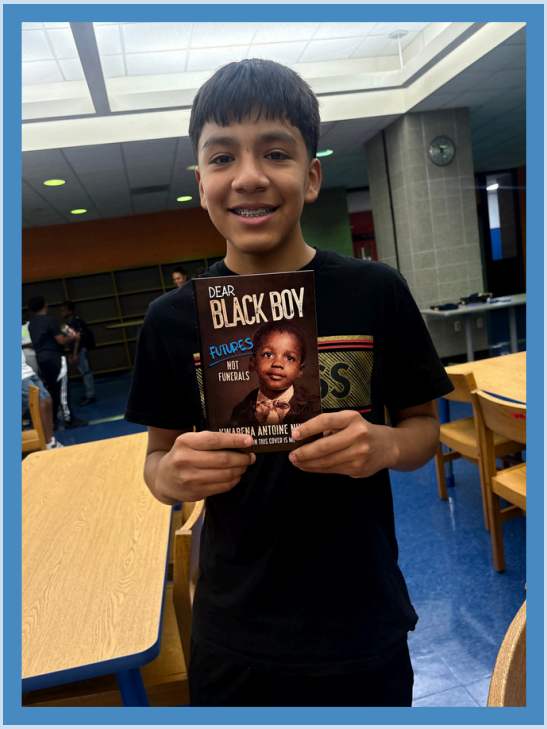
Julie Cayo
President and CEO
Employ Milwaukee



ABOUT OUR CAMPERS

Camp RISE exclusively serves Milwaukee Public Schools students between the ages of 10-13. Youth live in neighborhoods marked by low-income households with higher rates of poverty and violence.* Twenty-nine percent of campers this summer were returning youth from 2025, highlighting the strong impact of the Camp RISE experience and the shared desire for continued exploration and growth from both participants and their guardians.

To promote financial literacy, increase youth engagement, and invest directly in the community, campers who successfully completed the program earned a $700 stipend. This earn-and-learn approach is innovative for this age group, as paid career exploration for youth ages 10-13 is not typically offered in other workforce programs, where federal funding for youth payments begins at age 14. **Through Camp RISE, these young participants are launching their journey on Employ Milwaukee's opportunity pathway, which will provide them with continued growth and support throughout their teen and high school years, ultimately preparing them for success in the workforce.**





*as determined by City of Milwaukee Community Development Grants Administration Five Year HUD Consolidated Plan 2025-29, which defines "areas of low income concentration", as those census tracts where at least 51% of persons are considered low-moderate income according to HUD's standards of 80% or less of the area median income.

633

Applications Received

351

Youth Engaged

86

Number of Milwaukee Public Schools attended by campers

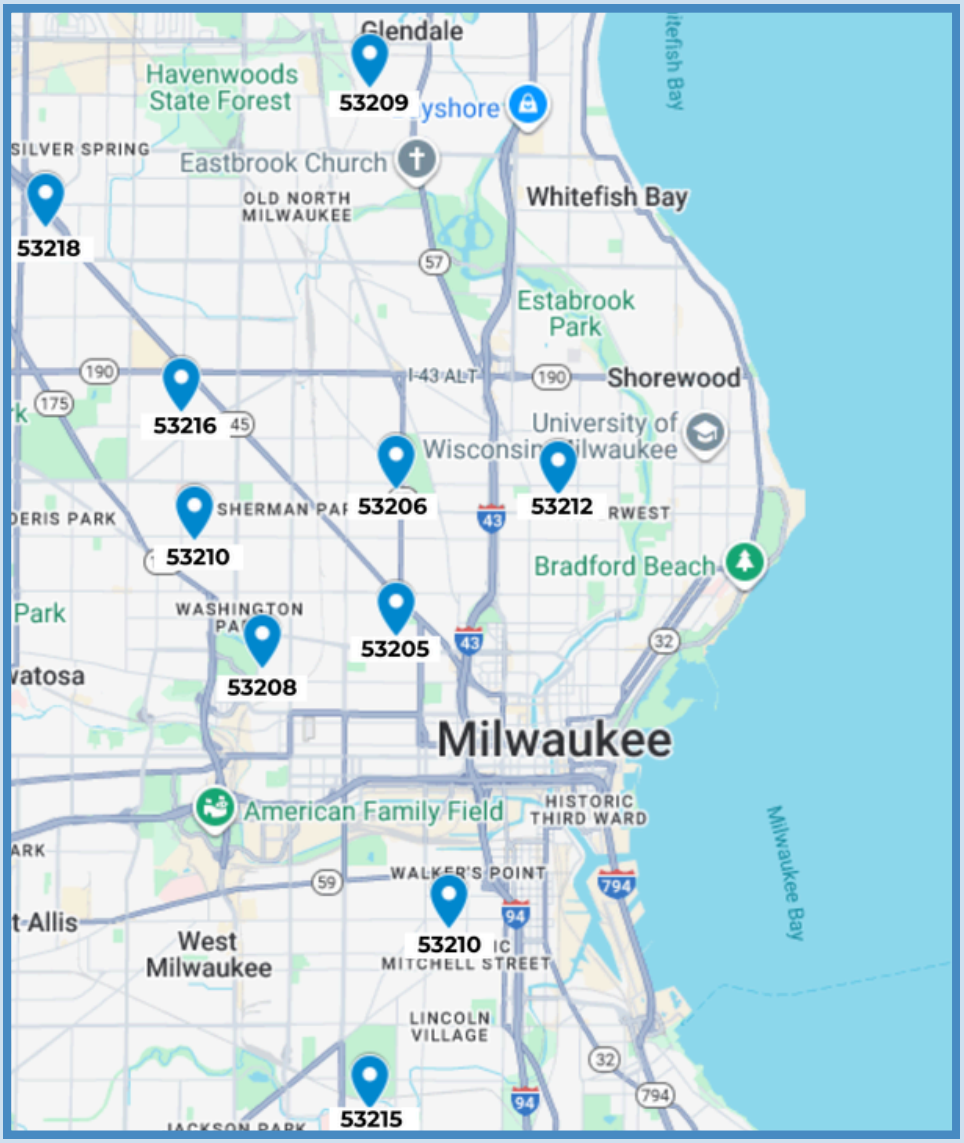
92

Participants eligible for Earn & Learn

$195,700

Earned by campers

Top 10 Camp RISE Participant ZIP Codes



CAMP RISE IS WHERE MILWAUKEE'S WORKFORCE PIPELINE BEGINS

Milwaukee's future workforce is being shaped long before young people are old enough to enter the labor market. Research consistently shows that early exposure to careers, positive adult mentors, and work-based learning opportunities helps youth build confidence, develop aspirations, and make stronger connections between education and future employment. For many young people, however, these opportunities do not begin until high school.

Camp RISE closes that gap by introducing career exploration, life skills, and employer connections to youth ages 10-13, years before traditional workforce programs begin. Through hands-on experiences and interactions with local employers and community leaders, campers gain exposure to Milwaukee's key industries while beginning to understand how their interests, talents, and education can translate into future careers.

As a workforce development board, Employ Milwaukee uniquely connects youth to employers, industry leaders, and career pathways that continue throughout adolescence and into adulthood. Camp RISE serves as the first step in that journey, helping young people stay engaged, build confidence, and develop a sense of possibility before entering high school. By investing early, we are strengthening Milwaukee's future talent pipeline and helping prepare the next generation of workers, leaders, and community contributors.



Expose & Explore — Ages 10-13

Experience Through Earn & Learn — Ages 14-15

Enhanced Training & Work-based Learning — Ages 16-18

Launch & Upskill — Ages 18+

Camp RISE provides a well-rounded experience centered around three core areas: Career and Interest Exploration, Life Skills and Enrichment, and Civic Awareness and Engagement. Each area is designed to support personal growth, strengthen practical skills, and encourage a sense of community responsibility. Through engaging activities and hands-on experiences, campers gain valuable skills, explore future career pathways, and build the confidence and knowledge needed to become active and informed members of their communities.

CAREER INTEREST & EXPLORATION

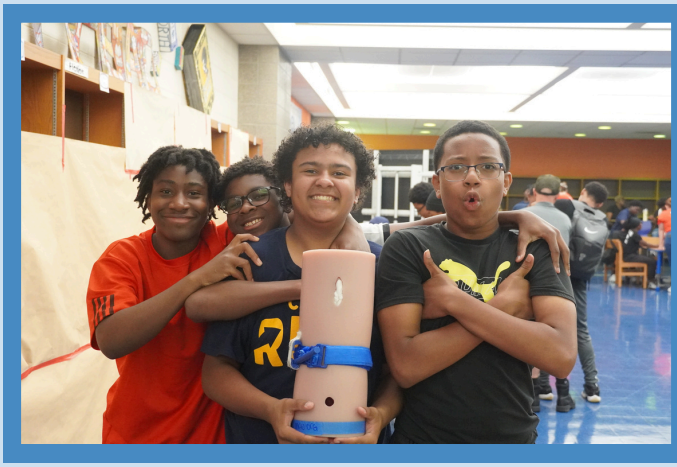
Camp RISE exposes youth to a wide range of career pathways through hands-on activities and interactions with professionals. This year, a strong focus was placed on exposure and representation, helping campers see that meaningful careers are attainable. During Career Day, nearly 40 employers and professionals shared their experiences, career journeys, and advice with youth. Campers had the opportunity to connect with professionals who look like them and come from similar communities, helping them envision new possibilities for their own futures.

Career and Interest Exploration activities and partners included:

- Froedtert Hospital (Healthcare)
- Milwaukee Health Department (Civic)
- Milwaukee Fire Department & Bell Ambulance (Healthcare)
- Adidas (Retail, entrepreneurship)
- Barbers & Cosmetologists (Cosmetology)
- Culinary Arts Professionals (Hospitality)
- Local Entrepreneurs
- Sherman Phoenix (Entrepreneurship)

"It was really inspirational to the youth to be able to see people who look like them or come from the same areas and how they got to where they are now,"
- Special Projects Manager, Romell Greer





90%

of campers learned something new about a job or industry

90%

of parents reported that their child expressed interest or curiosity in a career since participating in Camp RISE

75%

of campers felt more confident about choosing a career path

77%

of campers respondents learned new skills and knowledge

LIFE SKILLS & ENRICHMENT

Camp RISE equips youth with essential life skills through engaging workshops, practical activities, and motivational speakers. These skills, including communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, are valuable in both personal and professional settings now and throughout the rest of campers' lives. Enrichment activities also tap into campers' creativity and help them gain confidence in their abilities, laying the foundation for long-term success and personal growth.

Campers heard from speakers on social-emotional learning, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship, even creating their own mock businesses and presenting them to the group.



Guest speakers included:

- Kwabena Nixon, award-winning author, poet, speaker, and CEO of Be Inspired Works
- Muhibb Dyer, motivational educator specializing in dropout recovery and trauma mitigation
- Ed Hennings, local entrepreneur, author, motivational speaker, and policy reform advocate whose talks are shaped by his previous experience being incarcerated
- Gideon Verdin, TMJ4's Northern Milwaukee County Reporter
- Dr. Denise Pitchford, Director at Shalom High School, which educates young people returning from correctional institutions
- Mike Taylor, professional basketball player and entrepreneur
- Kinishewa Quinn, entrepreneur and CEO of Lotus Accounting & Tax Services
- City of Milwaukee Health Department
- Associated Bank provided financial literacy education



Life Skills and Enrichment activities included:

- Professional phone call etiquette
- Mock interview workshops
- Team-building exercises
- Communication workshops
- Problem-solving challenges
- Art and creativity sessions
- Personal development workshops
- Leadership training
- Confidence-building activities

CIVIC AWARENESS & ENGAGEMENT

Civic Awareness and Engagement activities offer campers meaningful experiences to connect with their city and understand the critical services that shape their community. Campers heard from firefighters, police officers, and local government employees over the course of the summer.

Campers also participated in activities with these community members; participants rolled up their sleeves for park clean-ups with the Milwaukee Police Department and celebrated the successful completion of camp with Mayor Cavalier Johnson. These activities not only gave campers a greater appreciation of their city but also instilled a sense of ownership and responsibility for their community's future.



By engaging in these activities, campers were empowered with the knowledge and confidence to become active contributors and potential leaders in their communities.



CAMPER SPOTLIGHT

Ana

For Ana, 11, Camp RISE was more than just a summer experience. It was an opportunity to build confidence, develop leadership skills, and discover new possibilities for her future. Through her time at camp, Ana learned to speak up for herself, take responsibility, and manage her money. Most importantly, she discovered that she wasn't as shy as she once thought and gained the confidence to become a leader and help others.



Camp RISE also introduced Ana to new career opportunities, including banking and construction. While she dreams of becoming a meteorologist or nurse someday, the experience helped broaden her understanding of different career paths and the skills needed to succeed.

Reflecting on her summer, Ana shared how much the experience meant to her, especially the encouragement she received from camp staff. “You learn real-life stuff every day, and every day Romell talks to us in the morning, which helps motivate us,” she said. “This camp helped me a lot and was the best camp I ever went to.”

94% of parents say their child’s confidence and self-esteem improved through Camp RISE

AMBASSADORS & CAREER ROUTES

Camp RISE Ambassadors welcomed guests, speakers, and civic leaders to camp, including Mayor Johnson. Ambassadors spoke with guests and ushered them through the camp experience – such as sharing vision boards they created at camp, what they've learned and what they want to pursue as a career. Ambassadors are selected by their counselors and peers and are current participants who have completed at least one year of camp.

New this year, Career Routes were created to deepen career exploration and enhance industry-connected pathways for campers aged 12-13, as many of them have already completed a year or more of camp and have a base level of understanding of Milwaukee's top industries. Career Routes dive in deeper, focusing on specific, hands-on opportunities for campers, which this year included a Stop the Bleed training with Froedtert and an opportunity to build prosthetic dog legs and design racecars at Milwaukee School of Engineering (MSOE). After the experiences, campers reflected on what they learned with staff and peers.

Through structured, age-appropriate experiences, Career Routes helps young people begin to understand how school connects to work, what skills employers value, and how their interests can translate into future careers.



Campers were chosen by their counselors based on their character, attendance, and determination at camp. Each Camper of the Week received a $25 Visa gift card and a chance to win other prizes, like iPads, computers, and gift cards, at an end-of-summer raffle.

IMPACT & OUTCOMES

94%

of parents noticed positive changes in their child's social skills

94%

of parents reported an increase in their child's confidence and self-esteem

99%

of parents observed overall positive changes in their child

99%

of parents would consider re-enrolling their child in Camp RISE next summer



THANK YOU

to our generous funders and partners who made Camp RISE possible.

City of Milwaukee Community Development Grants Administration

MPS Milwaukee Public Schools

Employ Milwaukee Workforce Development

MKE REC A department of MPS

Herb Kohl Philanthropies

Cudahy Foundation

Northwestern Mutual Foundation

Milwaukee Admirals

Forest County Potawatomi Foundation

We Energies Foundation

SWARMM Events

Berman Family Foundation

Interested in sponsoring or partnering with Camp RISE? Email us at CampRISE@employmilwaukee.org to learn more about how you can get involved.

Employ Milwaukee

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To support Camp RISE:



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