



A Message From Sam Giacobozzi, Executive Director

For years, I admired Break Away from a distance. In 2004, I attended my first ABCs as a participant, the following year, I returned as a Site Leader, and in 2006, I came back as an Intern. When I graduated the next year, I was hired as the Programs Director and I spent the next 5+ years with the help, guidance, and support of the many folks who made sacrifices to shape Break Away into something we were deeply proud of.

I have written a version of this letter before. When I left Break Away in 2012 to head to grad school, I was filled with the gratitude of a person who had been truly seen and mentored by the staff, volunteers, and constituents who had crossed my path. I'd been given opportunities I hadn't even conceived of - both professionally and personally; worked side-by-side with curious and community-driven individuals; and experienced a total shift from a passionate but inexperienced new professional to a more thoughtful, far-savvier, confident version of myself heading into a social work program.

Years later, grad school hadn't convinced me of a more meaningful or impactful expression of work, but had transformed me in other unexpected ways - including a sharpened view of Break Away's approach to social justice as a tool for community building. In 2014 I returned to Break Away, where I had the gift (and incredible responsibility) of leading the same organization that had given me so much - now in the role of Executive Director.

As I prepare to leave again, I write with the same feelings from all those years ago. Of a person transformed. Changed. Deepened. I believe in the power of words, but even words can't articulate all that Break Away has meant to me in the last 15 years and it scares me, if I'm being really honest, that nothing else will ever come close. I've had the chance - alongside many, *many* other dedicated people - to deeply influence the organization, culture, and future of Break Away. The significance of what we were able to do isn't lost on me.

At the last ABCs, during our final night together as a community, I sat in the back and watched (read: silently wept) as conference participants - prompted to create art about their relationship with nature, a capstone to our topic for the week - bravely stood and shared some of themselves with a group of 100+ people. Vulnerability and authenticity from each individual, met with powerful tenderness and support from the rest of the room. *Who else gets to create something like this*, I thought?

What an incredible gift to have done this with my life. To build something akin to a society of active citizens in the quest to create a different world. Now in 2019, as I leave for a second time, it feels similar, but with a much clearer knowledge that I'm handing something magical over to the next generation of leadership.

Understanding that you never really *leave* Break Away, I look forward for what's to come.

Thanks for all of it.

Love,
Sam

P.S. I'll be around for a while longer but please, [stay in touch](#).