

## **Kara Kirtley**

"If you can dream it, you can do it."- Walt Disney

WOW. As I near the end of my days as an "Emerging Leader" and prepare to step out into the big world, this is all I can think. Wow. The Emerging Leader Institute.

Before "going through the institute", I looked at these words and thought "hmm- that could be something helpful. I may learn a few pointers on how to be a better leader in my leadership positions. Something good to put on my resume". Boy, I sure wasn't ready for what was coming.

The first thing scheduled for the "Emerging Leaders" was orientation. This was a "meet and greet" session that we attended where we played games to get to know each other and learn more about what the institute was about- and had FREE FOOD!!!. When classes started, we began to meet twice a week to hear speakers who spoke about subjects ranging from our Myers/Briggs Personality Type to Conflict Management. Throughout these sessions, we also met once a week with a small group to discuss things we were learning in class- and our individual projects. Our individual project was something that we designed by ourselves- a leadership project that we did individually that focused on an area that we were passionate about. I decided that my individual project would be to form some type of support group for people with Attention Deficit Disorder. I would do this through working with people at UK who work with students with disabilities, and talking to CHADD, which is Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorder. I hoped to bring in a group of people or students with ADD to discuss the problems they were facing, and let them give each other suggestions, and maybe bringing in a speaker or two. As a class, we also decided on one large group project we

would complete at the end of the year. Our project is something we take great pride in- to spend a day at Bellwood Home with children who have no families or homes.

"Experience is not what happens to a man, it's what a man does with what happens to him."- Aldous Huxley

From the first day, on orientation, I realized that ELI would be an experience like nothing else I had ever experienced, one that I would remember the rest of my life. Through Presentations on Life Management, Communication, Diversity Issues and others, ELI has been the single most influential aspect of my college career so far because it has opened my eyes to new ideas and ways of improvement and challenged me to challenge myself unlike any other class could. Unlike other "traditional" classes, where you sit in a boring classroom for hours and learn about one subject, ELI truly empowers students to reach further, strive to be better, and to begin the internal search for excellence. ELI pushed me "to my edge" and "outside my comfort zone"- as Lance Brunner (a speaker on Mindfulness and Creativity) would say. Lance Brunner taught us that the only way humans can learn is through being pushed to the edge of our comfort zone (where we feel a little uncomfortable)- and I was pushed to the edge of my comfort zone several times throughout the semester. I felt very uncomfortable when we spoke about conflict resolution- because I realized I handle conflict in a negative way. I felt uncomfortable when we spoke on diversity issues because, even though I thought I was not racist, I realized that I still hold stereotypes on certain groups of people. Only through feeling uncomfortable in these situations have I learned things about myself that I can strive to improve. Through ELI, I began to gain the confidence I need to not only be a

better leader, but a better person. ELI planted the seed inside me to strive to be the best I can be.

"If you don't know where you are going, you might wind up someplace else."- Yogi Berra

ELI helped me clarify where I want my life to go. Even though my individual project fell through, I am still determined to help people with Attention Deficit Disorder. I have learned several things through the falling through of my project that I will do differently next time and hopefully make my project more successful. The skills that I have learned in ELI will never be forgotten, and, in the back of my head, I will always hear a voice saying, "look for a better way- search for improvement. Strive for growth." Now, I honestly know that I can make a difference. Regardless of whether I will hold a leadership office in the future or not, it doesn't matter. I have learned you do not have to hold an office or even be in a leadership position to be a leader. I also learned that good leaders need good followers and I have learned how to be a better follower. Don Coryell said "The country is full of good coaches. What it takes to win is a bunch of interested players." ELI has given me hope for a brighter future and instilled in me knowledge that will prevail in all areas of my life for the rest of my being. All I can say to anyone who is contemplating applying to the Emerging Leaders Institute is *GO FOR IT*. You won't regret it.