When you are a teenaged girl with no true friends, there’s not much to do in the summertime. Without school occupying her time, Sarah wandered aimlessly with little direction. Her best friends in the summertime? Books.

But that was before Sarah and her mom Michele found Camp Starfish.

Sarah: Summers before I went to Camp Starfish, I mostly walked around town and I spent a lot of my time in the library. It was very boring and I didn’t really enjoy it.

Michele: Socially, Sarah could not keep up. She was more likely to spend her time in the library or under a tree in the yard reading a book than she would spend her time trying to make friends. No one has really known what to do with her. She seemed OK on the outside, so people would just leave her alone.

Sarah’s mom Michele always tried to keep her daughter busy during the summer months. Despite many planned trips and several attempts at traditional summer camps, Sarah was never ever to break out of her shell. She would return home “the same Sarah.” Both Sarah and her mom wanted something different.

Sarah: Before Camp Starfish, I didn’t really have any friends. I didn’t really have people to hang out with. I just sort of hung out by myself a lot. I was very depressed a lot when I was by myself.

Michele: I wanted her to be safe. Everyone had been letting her do what she wants and I wanted her to become her own individual. I wanted Sarah to be able to go somewhere where she could learn to be herself, learn to take care of herself, and learn that she’s a good person and that she has so much potential. Camp Starfish is that place.

When Sarah and her family visited Camp Starfish during an open house event, Sarah was hesitant and nervous.

Sarah: I remember thinking that I’d be really bored and lonely. I thought it would be the same [as other camps I’ve attended]. I was very negative about everything. As soon as I got to camp on the first day, I rode up on my dad’s motorcycle. Everyone knew my name; everyone sung to me. It psyched me up. I had never really had that before, where everyone was happy to see me. It was genuine and it felt good.

Sarah flourished at camp like never before, like nowhere else. With support from counselors and new-found friends, Sarah’s inward, depressed demeanor noticeably changed to a smiling, happy camper.

Sarah: Going to Camp Starfish was a way for me to be happy. Camp to me signifies happiness. When I was signed up to go to camp, I was given happiness.

Michele: She was a totally different person! Her face was clear. She was happy and energetic. It was just amazing! When my daughters and I got in the car, we said “who is that girl?!” I wished I could recreate what Starfish does at home!

The impact Camp Starfish has had on their lives has been exceptional.

Michele: People understand at Camp Starfish. They don’t judge her and think that she’s rude, disrespectful, moody, or mean. Those are titles that she gets in other programs that she has gone to. There is a small group of people in Sarah’s everyday life who understand what she’s going through. But, it seems like everybody at Camp Starfish gets it.

Sarah: No one will let you down at Camp Starfish. They are going to hold you up. They want you to succeed just as much as you want to succeed. I learned that going in with a positive attitude means that you’ll have a more positive experience. You should still try new things to better yourself. I did try new things like chicken parm (and I learned I still hate it). I started drawing again. I said I wasn’t going to swim, but I did, and I passed swim levels! Now I have healthy eating habits and better sleep patterns. Camp Starfish changed me.