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Being the only kid in school who stutters is hard. Having five speech therapists, three bullies, and even three schools throughout my lifetime just adds to the toughness that is life. I struggled with insecurities with my stuttering and had low confidence at times. I felt so alone being the only one in school who felt “different.” Having a condition that makes your voice heard in a different way than others just makes you not want to speak at all. I’ve experienced way too many “Spit it out’s!”, “Why do you talk like that?”, “You aren’t alone. I stuttered when I was a kid, also.” It was hard for people to understand about why I felt so alone. Luckily, there was someone who didn’t make me feel alone.

Some people think what makes a hero is some tall, strong, mighty figure. But mine is a five-foot-one woman named Julie Raynor. She has not only helped me, but even more kids who have speech impediments, too. She is a co-founder of the camp I go to called Camp Shout Out, a camp for stutterers like me, in Muskegon, Michigan. When I first heard of Camp Shout Out, I fell in love with the idea. The idea that kids my age come to hang out, talk about their speech impediments and insecurities (and ways to overcome them) made me overjoyed, yet nervous. I was anxious because I heard that everyone there was very close and were best friends. But, once I got familiar with everyone, I quickly realized I should not be nervous. These people would be my friends for life. Not only has camp given me best friends, it has given me five key ideas to live by: to be attentive, assertive, confident, effective, and proactive. Julie has not only

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empowered me with confidence, but she has also helped other campers gain confidence, also.

I could say that Julie has built my confidence, she had established a program for speech therapists and graduate students. They come to study and help the campers with their speech impediments. From the three years I have been going to camp, I can say that they both had helped tremendously with my courage to speak.

The dictionary definition of a hero is a person who is admired for courage and outstanding achievements. Because of her dedication to this camp, she fits right into the definition. She has won awards from MEA Exceptional Person in Community Service, Michigan Lottery Excellence in Education, and National Life Group LifeChanger of the Year.

To it sum up, I love seeing Julie and everyone at camp I get filled with confidence. It is a remarkable feeling knowing that there are other people out there who know what I have been going through. I'd like to not only to thank Julie, but all of the people who get together for a week in the beginning of August to become the best version that we can be. The only reason it's possible is because of My Michigan Hero, Julie Raynor.