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All I can see are enormous, crushing, white waves and the rest of my group is far away. I was breathing hard, my heart was pounding, and I was terrified.

The thought of white-water kayaking seemed pretty easy because it was my fourth year facing City Kids challenges but I was still anxious about being in a small plastic boat surrounded by such strong water. Our first day of training, we were in a pool and the lesson flew by with ease. I thought I was all ready for the awaiting rapids. The next day was our first day on an actual river. I had to learn all new techniques for moving water, which brought on new challenges, but I worked until I mastered them. I definitely thought I was ready to take on the canyon but little did I know, I wasn't.

The Snake River Canyon contains class 3+ rapids. I had been down the canyon before multiple times in a large rubber raft full of people and it was scary then—but now I faced it alone in my small plastic kayak. Going down the river, I learned the hard way that keeping control over your boat and being conscious of your every move is crucial to staying afloat and in your boat. You have ultimate control of your destiny. I soon reached this conclusion after swallowing mouth full's of extremely salty river water and was now determined to stay upright out of the freezing cold water.

Going back to school after being in Wyoming, I realized that the lessons I learned on the river apply to my everyday life. I had to keep getting back in my boat after every flip just like rewriting a paper after being unsatisfied with my performance. Or when I was under the pressure of the huge waves I had to paddle my hardest—similar to when I am in a difficult class and I am striving to fully grasp the subject.

On my way out of the canyon, my heart beating out of my chest and my arms aching, I get to the last major rapid. I picked my direction and began to paddle as hard as I could ready to reach the end. As I pushed through the first two waves, the excitement of being through washed over me, and I was ecstatic. I took a deep and soothing breath of relief and ... I flipped. This experience taught me to never let my guard down in difficult situations and to always push through to the very end with everything I have. I believe this willingness to never give up is a trait that a lot of great leaders have. Also, I learned that being scared sometimes is not a bad thing; it just depends on how you handle that fear. Being strong in tough situations is what makes people trust leaders because their fearlessness makes people feel secure and that they can be lead by that person.

City Kids has encouraged my growth as a leader because it has caused me to push myself to my personal extremes. I've had to step out of my comfort zone to reach my goals and because of it, I have gained new outlooks on how to face any challenges thrown my way. Even as a JET, I have learned through my dealings with children, how to set an example and be the best person I can be. I have learned from City Kids how to handle stressful situations in groups or on my own with confidence and ease.

In college, I will use the leadership qualities I have gained from City Kids in my classes with things like group projects and class work. This way I will not need to depend on anyone else for my grade and I can take ownership of my learning. In my future career, my leadership skills will help me achieve success in company endeavors and work my way up to a high position in the company. In my community, I will be able to make it a better place to live. I will be a person who hears opinions and is someone to take action towards helping them.