



Military Base to National Park

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Maura Blake, a student in a youth leadership program, writes about how the transition of the former army base, the Presidio, into a national park has improved her community.

Walking through the Presidio on my way to work, I take a look around my surroundings and see joggers running on a clean pavement; behind the joggers I see an abundance of flowers, plants, and trees. Behind that I see the marsh and bay filled with all kinds of animals ranging from crabs to seals, and beyond that, the Golden Gate Bridge.

This is the most beautiful view in San Francisco and it can only be found in Crissy Field, a national park on land that was once a military installation.

This year, I am interning at Inspiring Young Emerging Leaders (IYEL), a high school program that meets at the Crissy Field Center and brings a group of diverse students from different parts of the city to work for positive change in their environment.

This life-altering experience would not have happened if it were not for Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC).

In 1989 the BRAC commission – a group empowered to recommend which military bases should close or change – said the Presidio should be closed. By 1994 the Army transferred the site to the National Park Service. A trust to manage the newly designated park was created and by 2001 Crissy Field marsh and the historic air field were restored.

The area surrounding the Crissy Field Center was restored from a rundown military base to a clean and welcoming environment-- part of a National Park that brings animals and plants back to the city.

I, along with many others who enjoy Crissy Field everyday, take ownership over the site since it is a nationally owned trust.

What keeps me excited about working is the people I meet there who become as close as family to me. I would have never met them if it weren't for IYEL, because we are all completely different in every way, but our feelings for this program and the center are all the same.

The Crissy Field Center is not just a place to get food or use the bathroom; it is the command center for this National Park. There is a café, a bookstore, a media lab, an ecology lab, and a sustainable arts lab. There are classes available for the community.

When the military left the Presidio, a lot of businesses and companies offered to buy parts of the space. The view of the Bridge would bring in so much money, many people thought. Thankfully, the area was made into a National Park, which means it can't be touched because everyone owns it.

I suggest everyone walk down the Presidio to Crissy Field, and take a second to look at what it has become and how it has changed our community for the better.

--Maura Blake is 16 years old Junior at Phillip and Sala Burton Academic High School. She has been with I-YEL and the Crissy field Center for two years.

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