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Flexibility of Degree Completion Program Helps Student Obtain Degree

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Office of University
Communications

September 30, 2016

Zach Fisher ('12) Finds Course Material Relevant to His Job at YMCA

Zach Fisher ('12) of Durham, N.C., has worked in several positions for the YMCA from summer camp counselor to full-time director. He put off finishing his degree, because he just didn't think he had the time. Then, a chance meeting motivated him to go back to school.

Zach Fisher and his daughter, Maia, competed in a YMCA Triathlon event.

"I was introduced to Gardner-Webb through a YMCA conference where I met Cam Corder, the CEO of the Cleveland County Family YMCA (Shelby, N.C.)," Fisher related. "Cam introduced a seminar on the Degree Completion Program (DCP) at GWU and recognized people who were part of DCP. Amongst the 10 or so Y staff who stood up, they were all ages and at all points of their Y career. I lost my insecurity and applied for the program."

He chose the healthcare management degree, because it was relevant to his career and offered completely online. "I valued the ability to take classes on my time and schedule," he reflected. "I thought it would give me a good education in business, management, human resources, and finance. I spent so many years spinning my wheels just getting credits, but not working towards anything. DCP sets you on a specific path with a counselor to help guide you through it."

After graduating from GWU, he accepted new opportunities with the Y and faced personal challenges as he and his wife cared for their son. From birth, Luka battled a rare disease and spent many days in UNC Children's hospital. Doctors searched for a specific diagnosis and kept him alive through the help of medicines, transfusions, and tests. At 20 months, Luka received a bone marrow transplant, but passed away from complications.

In Luka's memory, the family started Luka The Lion Foundation (<http://www.lukathelionfoundation.org/>) to support children with rare diseases.

"Throughout Luka's life he inspired us with his personality and unwavering bravery in the face of so many medical obstacles," Fisher offered. "This very quickly earned him the nickname, 'Luka The Lion.' Through the foundation we have been able to provide specific

After their son, Luka, died from an undiagnosed disease, Zach Fisher and his wife, Julia, started the Luka The Lion Foundation to support children with rare diseases.

resources and help to families and patients at UNC Children's who are fighting rare diseases. It has been such a powerful and meaningful way to keep Luka's spirit alive, and a way for us as his parents and family to always #ROAR."

As membership and volunteer experience director for the Lakewood YMCA in Durham, Fisher oversees the front desk staff, playhouse and nursery staff, and shift coordinators. "I view my role as the stage manager of sorts for our members and staff, working to create the most efficient, comfortable, and welcoming environment," he described. "I draw on my classes quite often, more so in my role as a membership experience director, where I am directly leading and supervising teams of staff, as well as preparing the budget for my facility."

He continued, "The course material has also helped me in my group and project management skills, as we always have several projects that are ongoing and each has separate teams to work with. In five years, I would like to be just where I am now. I would love the opportunity to continue to grow the Lakewood Y community, get to know our members better, and continue to get better at my job."