



Challenges

Supervisor provides role model for youths



Frank Holjes

For more than 20 years, Frank Holjes has been making a difference in the lives of children. Seventeen of those years have been spent working at the Wilderness Center.

"I came in 1987 as a supervisor for the residential program," says the 44-year-old Holjes. "It was in the beginning before it started to expand. I wanted to be a part of that."

He got his wish, having joined the staff when there were a little more than a dozen boys living in cabins and having stayed to see the most recent expansion including a gymnasium/multi-purpose building, dormitory to house both boys and girls, and greenhouse.

As day-shift supervisor, he says the new facilities are more self-contained and easier to supervise. "My philosophy is to be fair, firm and flexible with the kids," he says. "I'm from a family of 14. I learned an awful lot from my parents about being a role model, keeping organized, and keeping kids in the forefront."

Working with children has been the easy part, Holjes says. Supervising adults took some adjustment at first, requiring a different approach. "I've been very lucky with the direct-care staff I've worked with over the years," he says. "They have been very dedicated."

That dedication is important when dealing with youths who have lost trust in the adults in their lives.

"I think what happens when they come here is that we have to rebuild that bridge as far as them trusting adults or people in general," Holjes says. "My job is being a role model and giving them the tools they need to succeed whether back home, in foster care, or in an independent-living program."

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Lehman building an exciting “new” vocational program

Former landscaper and scoutmaster, Kendall Lehman is a perfect fit as the Wilderness School’s vocational skills instructor.

For more than four years, Lehman has been a part of the school’s staff—first as a counselor on the weekend shift and then handling maintenance. So when an opening came early last year for someone to re-ignite the vocational program, Lehman stepped forward.

“It’s perfect,” he says of his job. “It is a perfect fit for me, having always been an outdoor person, being out here in the mountains.”

In less than a year, Lehman has put the program into full gear, teaching youths everything from how to tear apart and reassemble a gasoline motor to building a wooden rocking horse.

“The one thing I’ve found out is that if I go in with enthusiasm, they will meet me with enthusiasm no matter what it is we’re working on,” he says, describing projects that include basic welding, wood shop, and engine repair. “We’ve even remodeled the conference room, adding chair rail, new woodwork, and a fresh coat of paint.”

Lehman holds two sessions a day in his shop, working with both males and females in the program.

“It shocked me that the girls like to come up to the shop as much as the guys,” he says. “Generally the largest group I’ll have at one time is three or four students, so I can really give them some personal time.”

It’s during that personal time that Lehman really appreciates the impact

that he and his fellow staff members have on the youths in their charge.

“The object isn’t to get the chair out or whatever it is you’re working on. It is to work with that kid,” he says. “That’s where you have to blend things in [to round out the learning opportunity]. That’s what they call up here ‘the whole package.’”



Kendall Lehman assists a student on a project using a bandsaw.

DuBois office moves; REFOCUSES SERVICES

Following its recent move within the same office complex, TresslerCare – Northwest Region continues to serve at-risk youth through its Recovery, Accountability, and Prevention Program (RAPP).

This community-based and family-focused support and intervention service enables youths to recover from adverse situations or conditions, fosters accountability for behavior, and empowers positive decision-making skills.

“With this program, we give youths the opportunity to stop patterns of substance abuse, sexual abuse, victimization, and violence,” explains Rod Burlingame, program manager.

“We also work on developing their accountability within the family, school, and community, and emphasize the BARJ principles where appropriate. At the same time, we help parents and guardians create the necessary family structure to hold youth accountable and provide support.”

TresslerCare – Northwest Region’s revamped program continues to offer individual family and parent-skills training and support, which was an effective element of the former Day Treatment program.

Now located at 215D, 90 Beaver Drive, DuBois, TresslerCare – Northwest has expanded RAPP to include service to Clearfield, Jefferson, Elk, Clarion, and Indiana counties. The expansion of the service followed the December closing of the Day Treatment and Alternative Education programs.

Home-based services *expand to* Mifflin County

Following a continuing trend to provide services to youths and their families in their homes, Mifflin County is partnering with TresslerCare to offer the MIFFLINfamilies Program.

Modeled after the successful PERRYfamilies Program, services began in February. The program came into being after Mifflin County juvenile probation and children and youth services staff members expressed an interest in bringing the program to their county.

"In our initial meetings, they expressed interest in our home-based services for aftercare and prevention. They wanted to get kids out of residential care more quickly," explains Craig Smith, TresslerCare's executive director. "They can do that by having an integrated service ready for the kids when they are discharged back home to their families. It is a win-win for everybody."

According to Stacey Dorman, a Mifflin County juvenile probation officer, the services have been a long time coming.

"We're limited in our services for delinquent kids," says Dorman. "There are a lot of services for mental health, but when it comes to delinquency issues and issues within families, we are very limited in what we can offer in terms of family counseling and extra support."

With a base of operations now present in Lewistown in the Juniata Valley Regional Business Center, where

children and youth services is located, county staff will have ready access to staff of the MIFFLINfamilies Program.

The importance of establishing this "home base" in the county to house the family therapist and the case manager can't be stressed enough, says Smith.

"Our presence provides better communication among all parties and the opportunity to address issues and concerns in a more timely and effective manner," he says.

In addition to weekly individual and family counseling sessions, casemanagers keep in regular contact with the school to ensure youths are doing well academically and behaviorally.

The positive results experienced by the PERRYfamilies Program were a good indicator for officials considering the program.

"It has been amazing to see the decrease in truancy for kids involved in the PERRYfamilies Program. Some have gone from 20 to 40 days truant to one or two in a school year," says Joan Lotz, clinical director for both the Perry and Mifflin programs. "A good half or more of the youth involved are from two-parent families. When that is the case, we have been very successful getting the dads involved and helping hold the child accountable."

Both programs stress skills building, specifically in areas such as anger

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management, drug and alcohol abuse, conflict resolution, and assertiveness training.

According to Smith, the expansion into Mifflin County and possibly Juniata County in the months ahead is a stepping stone to increased referrals for the Wilderness School residential program.

"The more areas in which we can provide aftercare services, the better our referrals will be for our residential and wilderness programs," he says. "We can involve our staff sooner in the process, be much more involved in the treatment planning, contact the birth family before discharge, and nail down a solid plan as far as treatment and expectations."

TRESSLERCARE *Regional News*

TRESSLERCARE — CAPITAL REGION

- TresslerCare Foster Care and Kinship Foster Care held a joint Christmas party for families on Dec. 5. About 150 people, including foster parents, children, and staff members were involved in the celebration.
- The spirit of giving was alive and well during the holidays, thanks to the generosity of area businesses, churches, and Diakon staff members, who donated numerous gifts for children in all TresslerCare programs. Donations came from the congregation of Zion Lutheran Church, Hummelstown; KPMG, Harrisburg; Manor at Oakridge, Harrisburg; KinderCare, Camp Hill; Playful Beginnings, Mechanicsburg; Prelude Services and Diakon staff in Mechanicsburg.
- **Amanda Shaffer**, program manager of TresslerCare's Specialized In-Home Treatment Program, recently earned her certification as a sex offender treatment specialist. In addition, the Association of the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA) accepted Shaffer as an affiliate member.
- Increased referrals to the Specialized In-Home Treatment Program resulted in the hiring of **Brian Mader** as a casemanager II in January. Mader brings experience working with youth with sexual behavior/offending histories from previous employment at Cornell Abraxas.
- Four staff members from TresslerCare's Specialized In-Home Treatment Program attended the annual conference for the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA) in October. In attendance were **Amanda Shaffer**, program manager, **Shanen Turk-Geller**, individual therapist and co-therapist of Thursday's Growth and Responsibility Group, **Juanita Jones**, individual and family therapist, and **Jane Yeatter**, program director.
- **Ralph Palmer**, who previously worked with families in the Franklin County area, has rejoined the TresslerCare staff as an individual and family therapist with the Specialized In-Home Treatment Program.
- **Diane Edmond**, counselor with TresslerCare's Foster Care Program in Mechanicsburg, and her husband, Byron, welcomed the birth of their daughter, Kensington Mariah, on Dec. 20.
- **Marilyn Sutton**, assistant program director for TresslerCare Foster Care, recently celebrated her five-year anniversary with the organization. Sutton started with TresslerCare in 1999 as a casemanager in Treatment Foster Care. In 2002, she was

promoted to clinical supervisor, a position she held until the fall of 2003, when she accepted her current role.

- **Shanen Turk-Geller** also recently celebrated her five-year anniversary with TresslerCare. Currently a part-time individual and family therapist with the Specialized In-Home Treatment Program, Turk-Geller joined TresslerCare in 1999 after earning her MSW. She initially worked as a family therapist in the Aftercare and Prevention Program and then in her second year was a full-time therapist, splitting her time between the Specialized In-Home Treatment Program and the Wilderness School.
- **Mandy Musser-Taccino** has joined TresslerCare as an administrative secretary. Musser-Taccino previously worked for Select Medical Corporation as a data management specialist. She is a graduate of the Computer Learning Network's Web Master program.
- **Shelly Duckworth** has joined TresslerCare as a casemanager. Duckworth brings experience as an intensive delinquency prevention therapist with Methodist Services for Children and Families. She also has worked as a psychiatric assistant in the male adolescent residential unit of a psychiatric hospital. Duckworth is a Certified Family Life Educator and is currently working on her master's degree in psychology at Shippensburg University.
- A former TresslerCare intern, **Angie Vicchiotti** has joined TresslerCare as a casemanager. Before joining the agency, Vicchiotti worked for The Children's Home of York as a foster care casemanager. She is a member of the National Association of Social Workers.
- **Marcia Drew** began as a clinical supervisor with TresslerCare in January after serving as a mental health professional with Cornell Companies, where she provided individual, group, and family therapy. Drew also served as family group conference coordinator at the Parenting Academy, where she worked with referrals from Dauphin County JPO and CYS. She completed her MSW at Temple University in Harrisburg.
- **Shauntae Lachini (nee: Stancil)** clinical supervisor with TresslerCare, married Rick Lachini on Oct. 9.
- **Karen Mauger**, administrative secretary, recently marked five years of service with TresslerCare. According to her coworkers, Mauger is an asset whose dedication to her job is reflected daily in her loving attitude toward foster children.

- **Patrick Leister** recently joined TresslerCare as casemanager for the MIFFLINfamilies Program in Juniata County. Most recently Leister had worked as a TSS for PA Counseling and as a substitute schoolteacher. A soccer coach for East Juniata High School, Leister is a graduate of Susquehanna University from which he earned a bachelor's degree in psychology.

TRESSLERCARE — LEHIGH VALLEY REGION

- **Cathy Balliet**, a foster and adoptive parent, recently joined the staff of Foster Care as a casemanager. Balliet will be familiar to those who worked with her when she served Diakon Adoption Services as a case manager.
- **Tami Zook** recently joined Diakon Adoption Services and the Foster Care program, sharing time between the programs as a resource family recruiter for the Lehigh Valley region. Zook, a former business owner, currently is pursuing her MBA and plans to graduate in May.

TRESSLERCARE — WILDERNESS CENTER

- All wilderness instructors completed the Wilderness Medical Associates' eight-day Wilderness First Responder Course during January in preparation for the 2005 course schedule. All nine current instructors and three supervisors passed the course and now are certified wilderness first responders.
- **Will Hicklin** recently joined the Wilderness Challenge program as a climbing specialist. Hicklin is a former course instructor, former supervisor of the 28-day GIG program, and a counseling specialist in the Weekend Alternative Program.
- **Brad Strohm and Will Hicklin** of the Wilderness Challenge program completed a rock site management course at the program's two major rock-climbing sites, Pole Steeple and Schaffer Rock. Leading the course was Marty Molitoris, an AMGA certified rock climbing guide and director of Alpine Endeavors. Both Strohm and Hicklin earned certification as rock site managers for these sites, assuring that the set-ups used by the Wilderness Challenge program are up to date and in accordance with latest industry standards.

TRESSLERCARE — SOUTHEAST REGION

- **June Humpton**, clinical director, TresslerCare Southeast Region, and **Shane Davis**, casemanager, Bridge Program, recently were honored for five years of service to the agency.

Research confirms *Wilderness Course* benefits

The Wilderness Challenge Program is making a difference in the lives of at-risk youths, and it has the research to prove it.

Last fall Dickinson College senior Alex Casadonte chose the program as the subject of his senior research project.

"I chose to do the research project at TresslerCare because I am very interested in any sort of outdoor activity," says Casadonte, a psychology major who enjoys rock climbing, hiking, and camping. "The idea that something I do recreationally can be used as a treatment or therapy for a variety of either behavioral or mental disorders is very interesting."

Casadonte conducted his research from mid-September through late-November, interviewing 14 youths in their first days in the program and again the day before graduation. Program instructors also had the youths complete two questionnaires provided by Casadonte.

"The purpose of the research was to determine whether a significant change

occurred in the participants from when they entered the course until they left the course," he says.

When the results were in, the youths demonstrated significant improvement in the categories of Emotional Control, Self-Confidence, Achievement Motivation, and Locus of Control.

"Emotional Control showed the greatest improvement, with an increase of 0.93 points on an eight-point scale," Casadonte says. "During the course, a large emphasis is placed on how well the participants are able to retain control of their emotions and behaviors and still make responsible decisions. Clearly, this marked increase indicates that the course leaders have been successful in helping the youths to develop this particular ability."

The fact that such positive results were measured with only 14 participants is a sign that the Wilderness Challenge program is working, according to Casadonte.

"Using a valid and reliable measure and administering standardized tests," he says, "I determined that the

TresslerCare program is not merely an effective treatment program for at-risk youths, but is in fact a highly successful one."



Dedication marks **COMPLETED RENOVATIONS**

In November, following a successful \$2 million capital campaign, the TresslerCare Wilderness Center near Boiling Springs dedicated its newly completed dormitory, gymnasium, and multi-purpose building with nearly 150 donors, clergy, and congregation and community members in attendance.

The expansion project has allowed the center to create a greenhouse-based horticultural therapy program and to expand its residential programs to include females.

"The gym space will be invaluable as far as providing recreational activities for the kids," says Craig Smith, executive director, adding that the renovations increased classroom space as well. The Wilderness Center houses four TresslerCare programs: Wilderness Challenge Course, Wilderness Challenge+Plus short-term residential program, the longer-term Wilderness School residential program, and the Weekend Alternative Program.

Greenhouse claims top award

A statewide engineering organization recently honored Skelly and Loy, Inc. for the state-of-the-art waste treatment system the company designed for the Wilderness Center's new greenhouse.

The greenhouse serves a dual purpose for the center—underground it stores treated wastewater, while above ground it provides a 15,000-square-foot growing area for the center's horticultural program.

The American Council of Engineering Companies of Pennsylvania (ACEC/PA)

presented the 2005 Diamond Honor Award to the Harrisburg firm for the "Zero Discharge Wastewater System." The treated water produced by the system is used in the greenhouse.

The project took top honors from among all projects submitted by Pennsylvania firms in the Water Resources—Wastewater Treatment/Disposal category. Having earned statewide recognition, Skelly & Loy submitted the project to ACEC for national consideration.

GREENBELT ASSOCIATION *dedication recognizes* TresslerCare

After nearly a year's worth of volunteer effort, the Capital Area Greenbelt Association in Dauphin County recently dedicated a footbridge that improved safety for the many bicyclists and pedestrians who use the 104-year-old trail.

"We started setting the poles in September of 2003, and we finished in the summer of 2004," says Norm LaCasse, past president and founder of the Greenbelt Association. Building the footbridge became a necessity for LaCasse and his volunteers when they relocated a portion of the trail under Interstate-83.

"The parkway had been on a street that was a connector between two major

roads," LaCasse explains, adding that they wanted to relocate that section of trail off the road to increase safety for people using it. "In order to do that we had to cross a stream in two places," making it necessary to build the footbridge.

During the dedication, LaCasse recognized youths from TresslerCare's Weekend Alternative Program for playing a significant role in construction of the footbridge.

"The kids were involved in every facet of the construction," he says, adding that almost every Saturday six youths helped with the project.

"It looks great. It was quite an undertaking."

Youths in TresslerCare have been working with the Greenbelt Association for several years as part of a large community-service project and have had a hand in many of the trail's improvements.

"Anywhere you go you can point to something they've done," says LaCasse. "They have been a huge help for us. If it wasn't for them a lot of things wouldn't get done."

