

Challenges

Youth learn value in community service

Nearly every Saturday of the year, youths from the TresslerCare Wilderness Center can be found planting trees, spreading stone, and installing piping in a large community service effort supporting the Capital Area Greenbelt Association.

"We do a little bit of everything," explains Norm LaCasse, past president and founder of the Capital Area Greenbelt Association. "Whatever needs to be done, the kids do it."

The Capital Area Greenbelt is a 20-mile greenway that surrounds Harrisburg. According to LaCasse, the 102-year-old greenbelt was never completed and was abandoned in the 1970s. "I rediscovered it about 12 and a half years ago. We formed an association to restore the parts that were uncompleted and then finish the greenbelt," he explains.

For at least five years, youths from the Wilderness Center have swung shovels and slung picks—some for the first time ever—in an effort to support the restoration effort. Although the youths initially participated only one Saturday a month, as many as 15 students now show up every Saturday ready to work. In fact, in the last year, they have dug ditches, spread stone, and planted trees for more than 1,000 hours.

LaCasse, who has built a special relationship with the youths, explains the project before they get started each week, helping them to understand how they are making a difference and often explaining the historical significance of what they are doing.

"We'll start in the morning when

they come, and by 3 o'clock, we will have finished the project," he says. "If you break up a project so they can start and finish that day, I've found they take a lot of pride in that."

At the end of the day, LaCasse takes pictures of the crew and their completed project. "A couple of weeks later, I'll bring the pictures in and they see that they've contributed to society," he says. "They can see that they've accomplished something that they didn't think they could even do."

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Photo: Youths from TresslerCare Wilderness Center programs contributed more than 1,200 hours of community service last year to the Capital Area Greenbelt Association in Harrisburg. Here, students from the center work on clearing ground as they continue efforts to conclude the greenbelt project, which was begun 102 years ago.

Agency finds strength in diversity

TresslerCare Southeast Region has found success by matching the diversity of its staff with the diversity of its client population, says June Humpton, LPC, CAC, NBCC, director of clinical services.

A little more than two years ago, Humpton and her staff began to seriously discuss the fact that the diversity of their client base was not reflected within their staff members. "I felt there was a need to have better representation," says Humpton, adding that she has gradually rebuilt her staff to where she now has three African Americans and three Caucasians, including herself, on board. "It is the only thing that makes sense because it reflects our client population mix."

The Chester County office of TresslerCare provides an AfterCare and Prevention Program, as well as the Bridge Program. "We dovetail with the Wilderness Center," she

explains. "When someone comes back from a placement, we strongly recommend aftercare services to integrate them back in the community. We also work with youths before they are placed to see if their behaviors can improve, trying to keep them in their homes."

Humpton says her office's caseload has increased as her staff has become more diverse. "One of our reasons for success has been our multicultural approach to case management and therapy," she says. "We meet the kids where they

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Jennifer Myers, an African American therapist with TresslerCare Southeast Region, was an intern with the agency before she was hired part-time; she also is the most recent addition to Humpton's staff. "Because she was so successful with families and her techniques were so excellent, I hired her," says Humpton.

Humpton believes being aware of cultural differences helps to make her staff members successful. "It is an inroad to rapport," she says.

Being able to understand their clients and bridge any gaps between them is an important step, according to Humpton. It is also important that they present an image of the way the world is today.

"It is kind of an up and coming way of seeing a world view. It's not just black and white. It is an integrated staff; it is an integrated world," she says. "As a program and an agency, the closer we come to a multicultural community of workers, the stronger we become."

31-Day Wilderness Challenge

Program challenges youth to overcome limitations

As a camp counselor throughout his young adult life, Jason Brode knew that he wanted to work with experiential outdoor challenges and rope courses in a year-round community. So when he joined the TresslerCare Wilderness Center 10 years ago, he found what he had been looking for.



"I was searching for a way to do more work, hands-on learning, and creativity that focused on experiential growth," says the director of Wilderness Services. With the Wilderness Center, "I found the openness to take some chances, do some experimenting."

When Brode first joined the Wilderness Center he worked with the residential program. Since that time, he has helped to develop and run the Weekend Alternative Program. Today, he heads the 31-Day Wilderness Challenge, which has operated for more than 20 years and was the first outdoor challenge program that TresslerCare offered.

"It is a mobile wilderness challenge," he says of the program that runs year-round. "The youths live outdoors for 31 days. They carry everything they need on their backs, cooking and living outdoors."

The program is a great investment, according to Brode. "It takes the youths out of their familiar territory and challenges them to overcome self-imposed limitations," he explains, adding that the program accepts participants ages 12 to 18, both male and female. "In the end, 89 percent of the kids do all the challenges—challenges that most adults would struggle with."

The experience includes rock climbing, repelling and a Tyrolian Traverse that extends from one rock edge to another, over a 60-foot drop. The youths also complete the 50-foot Alpine tower and go canoeing and river navigating with a partner.

The challenges culminate with a 72-hour solo experience in the woods. The staff rotates, talking to each participant about his or her experience. "We do five checks a day. Three are visual

and two are emotional," explains Brode. "We take that time to talk about decision making and transition issues. That is an important aspect, if they can take what they learn here and apply it to their environment."

The program provides a variety of options for youths. "We have some youths who will follow the program by going to rehab. The challenge begins the process of confronting difficult issues that they have inside themselves and prepares them for a rehab center and dealing specifically with drug or alcohol issues," Brode says.

"It also is the first third of the Wilderness Challenge+Plus Program. It gets their attention and lays the groundwork for the family and follow-up counseling."

In recent years the program has begun to place more emphasis on



Programs changed with society's needs

content as opposed to itinerary. "It looks at choices youths are making, and if they are meeting their needs by making these choices," Brode says, adding that the program meets the Balanced and Restorative Justice principles of Accountability, Competency Development, and Community Protection.

"We are really trying to empower the students to be responsible and accountable for their decisions," he continues. "We want them looking at their relationships and meeting their needs in relationships without doing things that are illegal, counterproductive to those relationships, or harmful to society."

For referrals to the 31-Day Wilderness Challenge, contact Jason Brode, director of Wilderness Services, at **717-258-3168** or brodej@diakon.org.



Twenty-five years ago Bill Love began working with TresslerCare as a part-time counselor in the Foster Care program, looking for balance in his life as an administrator for the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections. He continued with both careers, cultivating his combination of strength and gentleness, and working to make a difference in people's lives.

"I have watched as TresslerCare's programs have become more complex and the staff better trained," Love says of the programs for young sex offenders in which he specializes. "I think it is proof of TresslerCare's commitment to change and to stay abreast of what has gone on around us."

It also has to do with understanding the need for real treatment, real support, and getting the right people involved. That is exactly what TresslerCare has delivered, according to Love, since he started doing group counseling with Jane Yeatter more than 20 years ago.

"I feel supported and encouraged being in a program that provides an atmosphere where we are committed to treatment," says Love, MED. "It is also important for

me that I keep learning and staying aware of what's going on and what's being said."

All of these things together have made Love an excellent co-therapist for TresslerCare's two Growth and Responsibility Groups and one STOP Group. "All three groups work with adjudicated or dependent sex offenders—young men and, in some cases, young women who have been referred to us for sexually acting out," Love explains.

The Growth and Responsibility Groups deal with youths ages 13 to 17, while the STOP Group focuses on younger boys. "In each of the groups they are learning the dynamics of their sexual behavior—things that contribute to the acting out, ways to manage them, as well as accepting responsibility and learning prevention," Love says. "We do a lot of cognitive work, a lot of educating, and helping groups learn how to set boundaries."

The groups, which have male and female co-therapists, are ideal for youths dealing with these issues,



Bill Love

according to Love. "It sends a real positive message to the men we are working with to see men and women work in a shared, cooperative way," he says. "It is important for kids to see males and females dealing with this issue without judging and also being capable of talking about these issues in a professional, appropriate way. That in itself is an education."

In addition to weekly group sessions, many of the outpatient youths are involved in family counseling. "Once we are working with the kids, we find that we need to work with the parents. The parents need to get to the place where they understand the behavior," explains Love. "We make an effort to meet with family members and talk about what is going on."

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A lot of what is done in the groups focuses on public safety. "I think it is important not only for victims, but also for families and the young men," says Love. Whenever possible with youths who are involved in outpatient group services, Love counsels a family prior to the child's return home so family members understand what they can do to keep the family safe, as well as the young man and potential victims.

"TresslerCare is probably the only program where we safely keep the kids in their homes and communities and provide the support and resources of total comprehensive wrap-around services," says Love. "That involves the probation officer, the school, the family, while tapping into community resources."

Love and his co-therapists consistently hear positive comments on the quality of treatment they provide. "We are an intense program. The therapists know the sex offending issues very, very well," he says. "We keep everybody involved. The counties and organizations we work with know that when they call one of us, they are going to get it straight and that we know what we are talking about."

Zion Lutheran Angel Tree brings Christmas to TresslerCare

Since the early 1990s, members of Zion Lutheran Church in Hummelstown, Pa., have joined together to give children in TresslerCare Foster Care, TAPP, and Wilderness Center programs a Christmas they will always remember.

In early December, volunteers from the church coordinate an Angel Tree that results in the donation of more than 100 gifts for children who, ordinarily, would not have much under their tree on Christmas morning.

"The church just gives and gives. It's amazing," says Skip Wachter, a congregation member who has helped to coordinate the project in recent years.

The approximately three weeks that it takes to buy, wrap, and deliver the

gifts is a project for young and old alike, says Lois Miklas, co-coordinator of the project. "We use it as a way to make kids aware of doing something for someone else."

In past years, youths from the Wilderness Center have helped with a spring clean-up at the church property. Organizers are hoping that project can once again bring everyone together.

"It was great to meet those kids who, before, were just names [on gift tags]," says Miklas.



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REGIONAL NEWS

TresslerCare Capital Region

■ The Wilderness Challenge: A Chance to Succeed, the capital campaign launched to expand and improve the Wilderness Center facilities, stood at more than \$1.1 million at the end of 2002. More than halfway toward its goal of \$2 million, the campaign is now actively engaged in the “community phase,” seeking contributions from the community at large, as well as local businesses.

Although the campaign is expected to continue until June 2003, work already has begun on the expansion of living facilities at the center, as well as infrastructure upgrades. Other projects associated with the campaign are expected to begin later this year.

- TresslerCare recently hired two casemanagers. Tony Saporito, who began in December, is a casemanager with TresslerCare’s foster care program. Saporito earned a bachelor’s degree from Western Kentucky University. David Kot, who also joined TresslerCare in December, is casemanager for TresslerCare’s Kinship and Fost/Adopt Program. Kot earned a bachelor’s degree from the University of Pittsburgh and is currently enrolled in a Shippensburg University graduate counseling program.
- Red Crown Bowling Alley, Harrisburg, Pa., was the site of TresslerCare’s Annual Foster Care Christmas party. More than 170 people, including foster families, counseling staff, and TresslerCare staff members, turned out for the celebration.