

MEETING

AUTUMN 2003

# Challenges

## Foster care youths share baseball and life lessons

In July youths from the TresslerCare Wilderness Center and Foster Care – Mechanicsburg programs shared a game of baseball and received some advice for life from former Pittsburgh Pirate Bob Robertson.

The group gathered at Doubleday Country Inn and Farm in Landisburg, Pa., where everyone donned old-fashioned baseball uniforms. Robertson's goal was to

teach the kids you can do anything if you try.

"I want to let them know that a kid from Mount Savage was fortunate enough to play in the major leagues and World Series and have a World Series ring and find myself with a locker next to Roberto Clemente's," he told a local newspaper. Yet, "it doesn't matter how big your name is if you don't have the kindness and rapport to sit down with the kids. You have to give something back."

Robertson began his career in 1967 with the Pirates, playing for the team through 1976. He later played for the Seattle Mariners and the Toronto Blue Jays. He played first base most of his career, taking part in the 1971 World Series when the Pirates defeated the Baltimore Orioles four games to three.

Craig Smith, TresslerCare executive director, regards the annual baseball outing as an opportunity for youths to enjoy an activity while learning that perseverance and hard work pay off.

"These kids have difficult challenges in their lives," he says. "The idea is to bring them out to play ball, have

fun, and see that being successful requires you to work hard, deal with adversity, and be persistent."

Despite the heat of the day, the youths enjoyed the event.

"It's neat to wear the uniforms and play with a guy who won the World Series," remarked one youth. Following the game, Robertson joined the youths for lunch and an autograph session. Commerce Bank sponsored the outing.



Bob Robertson with TresslerCare youth.

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# Clinical director enjoys opportunity at Wilderness School

*Deanna Davis was attracted to her new position as clinical director of the TresslerCare Wilderness School because she appreciates the philosophy and direction being taken with school programs.*

“It was an opportunity to be a part of that advancement,” says Davis, who previously was clinical supervisor for TresslerCare Foster Care – Mechanicsburg.

As the individual responsible for assessing youths for their ability to fit into the Wilderness School residential program and guiding their referral, Davis will be right in the thick of things as the school enters a new stage of its development.

Set to accept females for the first time this fall, the Wilderness School is looking to implement a structured independent-living curriculum on campus for males and females, she says.

“We want to expand the current life-skills curriculum to consistently include the four different components of independent living: preparation for future education, preparation for future employment, life skills, and housing,” she notes. “Preparing youths for the inevitable future of living independently is a necessary tool for every program.”

While youths currently live in cabins during their stay at the Wilderness School, those cabins are being replaced by a new residential building consisting of three dormitory-style wings, providing room for up to 16 youths each.

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“One wing will be specifically for females, the other two for males. Males and females will be constantly supervised at all times, as they are in any coed residential program,” Davis adds. “The primary time they will be together will be in the classroom and the dining hall. Outside of that there will be very little interaction.”

Although new enrollees in the residential program generally spend the first four to five months on campus and then participate in the 31-Day Wilderness Challenge, the process will be reversed for the first group of females to enroll this fall.

“We want to bring in a group of females all at once,” explains Davis. “We’re scheduling them for a course in September and by the time they graduate, the residence will be completed.”

Also beginning this fall is a drug and alcohol group-counseling component, organized by Diakon’s Family Life Services. “They have worked out an agreement with Cumberland Perry Drug and Alcohol Commission for two members to facilitate weekly group sessions for our youths,” Davis says. “We are very excited to have this specified drug and alcohol group therapy component available for our youth.”

The Wilderness School will also be working with the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence to hold an educational series regarding interpersonal relationships with females, breaking the domestic violence cycle, and other domestic violence factors specific to adolescents.

“The intent is for the same group of individuals to meet quarterly for three sessions,” Davis says. “The next time, we would be able to involve our female youths.”

# Kinship Care offers children permanency

*Without the financial assistance available with the Kinship Care program, many grandparents, aunts, uncles, and even church members would be unable to take additional children into their homes.*

Although Pennsylvania is just beginning the process of defining kinship care and determining regulations, Foster Care Services - Topton and Mechanicsburg are off and running with Kinship Care programs.

"I definitely think it's going to explode," says Lauren Roth, director of foster care and pregnancy services on the Topton campus. "The goal of the child welfare system is to reunify. If they can't reunify, the next best plan is relative care and that's what we're doing here."

Roth and her team of five case managers began to develop their Kinship Care program when Berks County Children and Youth Services expressed a need. Operating since July, the program has received referrals from Berks and Lehigh counties.

"What they wanted to do was make an attempt to keep children with their kin, whether blood-related or any type of prior relationship with the child," Roth says. "What we're doing is approving families to become foster families for children they already have a relationship with. The children get to stay with people they know."

Should a child not be able to return home, Kinship Care offers an alternative. "It is a good program because a permanency plan can be made for that child in the relative's care," says Roth. "We can eventually look at permanent legal guardianship, adoption, or long-term foster care in the relative's home."

Without the financial assistance available

with the Kinship Care program, many grandparents, aunts, uncles, and even church members would be unable to take additional children into their homes.

Although kinship placements are supervised like any foster-family arrangement, the families themselves are often faced with a unique challenge—how to deal with the children's parents.

"They are put in a tough spot, having a prior relationship with the birth family," says Roth. "They need to comply with the regulations and our agency or we are not going to be able to supervise the case adequately, but they also need to maintain a relationship with the relative whose children they are currently supervising."

For more information on the Topton-based Kinship Care program, call (610) 682-1504, or on the Mechanicsburg program, (717) 795-0320.



# TresslerCare Wilderness Center High Ropes Course Reopens

After a four-year hiatus, the Wilderness Center once again is offering a high ropes course for team building and individual challenge experiences.

The high ropes course is similar to the initiative course, except it is 50 feet in the air, says Jason Brode, director of Wilderness Services.

“The state-of-the-art design took us about two months to build before we had it inspected and opened it in June,” he says. “One of the neat features is that it has a giant swing—like a pendulum—on it. The swing is actually the exit from the course.”

The course was designed and built by Jeff Brown, the Wilderness Center’s outgoing climbing specialist, and Brad Glenn, the current climbing specialist. “Brad is in charge of the training, upkeep, and maintenance safety of the ropes course,” says Brode. “Although the course is a challenge component of our wilderness course program, it is available to special groups who might want to use it for team building and challenge activities.”



## City Island site for family fun

On Thursday, August 14, nearly 200 people gathered on City Island, Harrisburg, for the annual TresslerCare Foster Care family picnic. Enduring the hot summer night, families enjoyed a picnic lunch, the arcade, water golf, batting cages, train rides, carousel, crafts, and bingo.

## Team building use on the rise

Use of the Wilderness Center facilities for team building and challenge activities is on the rise in recent months. More than 650 people representing groups as diverse as sports teams and government agencies have come to the Boiling Springs location to benefit from their team-building training services.

"We're providing services for schools, churches, community groups, and professional companies and organizations that utilize experiential and wilderness resources to develop positive team and interpersonal skills," explains Brad Glenn, climbing specialist/coordinator for special group services.

Members of the Lancaster County Juvenile Probation Office recently visited the Wilderness Center for firsthand experience they can share with their clients.

"They came in wanting to have a good time and learn more about our program. They went away with a new perspective and some new observations about the way they work as a staff," Glenn says,



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referring to the group's experience on the low-challenge course, tower and zip line.

"It was really eye-opening for them to see the dynamics their clients are going through [when they are here.] They had positive things to say."

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## Campaign continues steady progress

Currently at \$1.7 million, The Wilderness Challenge: A Chance to Succeed capital campaign maintains steady progress toward meeting its more-than-\$2 million goal. Construction of the first phase of Wilderness Center facilities is expected to conclude this fall.

Anyone interested in learning about the Wilderness Center's mission and programs may visit the campus for a regularly scheduled tour.

To learn more, contact Jamie Pulaski at (717) 795-0470.



## REGIONAL NEWS **TresslerCare *Capital Region***

- TresslerCare's Perry County office is now open at 14 West Main Street, New Bloomfield. Suzanne Dell is providing family therapy. She has a master's degree in counseling and worked for the TAPP and Specialized In-Home Treatment programs for three years. Desiree Fasnacht, who recently joined TresslerCare, is a casemanager II for the PERRYfamilies Initiative. A native of Perry County, Fasnacht has a bachelor's degree in psychology from Dickinson College and has had experience at both Keystone Residence and Abraxas.
- Kathy Selgas, who has been a casemanager with the Specialized In-home Treatment Program for three years, and April Brent, who has been with the program for one year, resigned their positions this August. Selgas has been accepted in the graduate department at Shippensburg University and will be returning to obtain her master's degree in counseling. Brent accepted a position as a school guidance counselor. TresslerCare extends much gratitude to both of them for their hard work, professionalism, and efforts to make the program stronger.
- Amanda Shaffer, who is transferring from TresslerCare's Wilderness School program, and Ramona Pomian, recently began work as casemanagers with the Specialized In-home Treatment Program. They will join Jane Yeatter, Juanita Jones (family and individual therapist) and Shanen Turk-Geller (individual and group therapist) at the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA) Conference in St. Louis in October. High quality staff training remains a strong component of TresslerCare's specialized services.
- Community safety remains an over-riding consideration when providing community treatment to youth who have sexually acted out. Unfortunately, this sometimes requires that treatment staff request a court review and recommend discharge from the program. While it is the intention of the staff to recognize signs of increasing risk and prevent further victimization, it is difficult for the courts to place youth in more restrictive settings without evidence of further delinquent behavior. TresslerCare staff is working to improve efforts to document concerns, and the courts are getting better at recognizing the need to establish creative interventions.