

# WILDERNESS CENTER SUMMIT



Diakon Wilderness Center ♦ 717-960-6700

Winter 2009

## Adventure trip builds confidence

**B**y staying focused and pushing themselves to be better men, six participants in the Diakon Wilderness Center's Flight Program experienced a trip this summer that most of them previously could only have dreamed about.

For nine days, the young men hiked, camped, and visited some of the most memorable destinations in the western United States. In Utah, they explored Zion National Park and Lone Rock at Lake Powell, and in Arizona, Wupatki National Monument, Slide Rock State Park, Sedona, and the Grand Canyon.

The Flight Program is a mentoring and training opportunity for former Diakon Wilderness Center students designed to help them become successful, contributing members of society.

"The focus of the trip was getting them out of their comfort zone, their home environment, and experiencing something completely new, beyond anything they've ever done before," says Rob Kivlan, supervisor of the program. "Everyone is going through struggles, and we're able to talk more as a group. We didn't have to worry about violence in neighborhoods or other negative influences."

Among the trip highlights was a four-day hike down and back from the Grand Canyon to the Colorado River.

"We slept under the stars and in a cave at one point," says Kivlan, who led the group along with Sean Morgan, counselor. "Everyone pushed themselves to their physical, mental, and

emotional limits during the hike. We realized we are capable of more than we think."

Funding for the trip came partially from the Flight Program's Pennsylvania Department of Health grant and money the young men raised during a two-day hike-a-thon in the Pennsylvania Grand Canyon earlier in the year.

"We had more than 60 people sponsor us for the hike and ended up raising more than \$4,000 in two weeks," says Kivlan. "[The trip] would not have been possible without the help of all the donors."

Adventure trips such as the Grand Canyon experience provide an opportunity for Flight participants to realize there is a world outside their neighborhoods and communities where they can flourish, says Kivlan.

"Many of them want to leave their environment, but they are terrified" by the unknown, he says. "The trip taught them that if they have the courage to hike the Grand Canyon, they have the courage to go after what they want in life and be successful."

## Flight students get on track with education

**W**hile many at-risk students fail to complete their education, participants in the Diakon Wilderness Center's Flight Program are well on their way to changing that expectation.

Half of the students are currently enrolled in college, while the other half are completing high school, finishing their GED, or applying to trade school.

"Continuing their education is an expectation for involvement with the Flight Program," says Rob Kivlan, supervisor. "Our goal is to set these guys up for the best chance at success."

Although Kivlan does not expect all the students to pursue four-year degrees, he and his team of counselors push the young men toward a vocation of their choice, enrollment in the military, or some other avenue that will provide a solid foundation for their future.

The staff help complete applications, handle enrollment fees, guide them through the financial-aid process, and even provide transportation to GED classes and testing sites. The program also provides each student with a laptop computer and supports them with financial aid.

"We're trying to go the extra mile for those who want to succeed and break the cycle," says Kivlan, who recently witnessed the induction of a Flight participant in Phi Theta Kappa, a college honor society. "What an honor, what a privilege it is to see one of these kids succeed in that realm."



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## Endowment funds available in 2010

The dream of a college education is now within reach for the children who benefit from Diakon programs.

Beginning in January 2010, the Diakon Lutheran Fund's Youth Scholarship Fund will award up to \$5,000 per applicant each year to youths who need assistance with education-related expenses. To be eligible to apply, a youth must be a current or previous participant in any of Diakon's children or youth programs, be between the ages of 16 and 25 at the time of application, and have exhausted funding available

through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

"The money can be used for tuition, room and board, computers, even clothing, anything they need to be stable in school," says Corey Carothers, administrator of the Diakon Wilderness Center.

Each year, the Diakon Lutheran Fund Board of Directors will determine the amount of money available for scholarships, based on the endowment's investment performance. For 2010, the board has approved \$55,000.

Carothers is making sure the center's

staff is building awareness of the funds during daily interventions with youths enrolled in its programs.

"What it does is begin the process of instilling hope in the older kids who previously didn't consider school because they saw it as so far out of their reach," he says. "It could be enough to let them take that leap of faith. It lets them realize that the successes we talk about so much are within their reach."

To learn more about the fund or how to apply, contact Corey Carothers at (717) 960-6705 or [carothersc@diakon.org](mailto:carothersc@diakon.org).

## Center Day Program gets off the ground

Since August, the Center Point Day Program has been challenging young adults to change behaviors and prepare for a productive future.

The newest Diakon Wilderness Center program, operating Monday through Friday, is an alternative to residential placement and an opportunity for youths to change the role they play in their community, says Jeremias Garcia, the program supervisor.

"What's unique about the program is we are able to walk through life with these students on a daily basis. It's just not a school," says Garcia, explaining that staff assist students and their families in daily life situations so they can build futures of hope and success. "At

Center Point, we believe it's not about what you've done, it's about the next thing you're going to do."

The program, which works closely with Juvenile Probation and Children and Youth Services, currently serves males ages 14 to 21 who live in Adams and Cumberland counties.

Each day, participants talk about the goal they had set for the previous day before participating in school, skill-building projects, competency skills, and community asset building; afternoons are filled with vocational projects, drug and alcohol meetings, community service, job training and exploration, secondary schooling, and services that provide reparations with families.

"At the end of the day students write in their journals and establish goals to be accomplished every evening," says Garcia. "We want students to learn, practice, and achieve daily goals that give them a sense of purpose and growth that they are able to facilitate in their home and community. If you change a person's role, you'll change behavior."

Participants must attend the program a minimum of 10 weeks, during which they work toward various accomplishments necessary to advance them in getting off probation.

"We give them the choice to do well. They can become whatever they want."