

WILDERNESS CENTER SUMMIT

Diakon Wilderness Center ♦ 717-258-3168

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Foundations students complete GEDs

I wouldn't have been able to accomplish this without being here," says Rich. "I'm grateful."

The Franklin County youth, who graduated from the Diakon Wilderness Center's Foundations Residential Program in July, was referencing his acceptance into Hagerstown Community College, the result of an interview completed prior to his graduation.

His story is just one of many as the Foundations program makes certain its students are well prepared academically. Foundations offers individualized programming to assist students who qualify with GED preparation and testing.

Recently, for example, six Foundations students, representing Blair, Delaware, Franklin, Mifflin, and York counties, completed GED tests as part of their academic program. In addition, at the end of the 2006-07 academic year, three students successfully completed their GED, earning them high school diplomas from their home schools. In fact, one Delaware County student has since applied to post-secondary schools as part of his continuing education.

And, during the summer enrichment academic programming, two students, including Rich, also completed their GED tests.

"Supporting kids' obtainment of

their GED goes a long way in setting them up for a successful return home. It's another life tool we can help them achieve for themselves," says Diakon Wilderness Center Administrator Corey Carothers.



Wilderness Center participants gain confidence by completing a variety of tasks.

Bridge Program expands into Lancaster County

There are so many teens out there who are struggling with issues such as drug or alcohol abuse," says Ron Davis, "and they need support to get through the conflicts in their lives."

Building a bridge to a better future for such at-risk youths is what the program Davis directs is all about. And now that

Chester County-based program— aptly name the Bridge Program—is



building those bridges for teens from Lancaster County as well.

A service to youths while in their homes, Diakon Youth Services' Bridge Program offers weekday support and intervention to help adolescents accept accountability for their actions while building a foundation of self-discipline and respect for family, teachers, and the law.

As a result of the Bridge Program's success in serving youths from Delaware and Chester counties, staff mem-

bers worked to expand the service to Lancaster County.

Licensed by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, the three-month Bridge Program serves male and female adolescents ages 12 to 18 who can be safely maintained in the community. It includes weekly home visits, including meetings with parents or other family members, individual counseling sessions, efforts focused on accountability including random drug testing and alcohol screenings, community service projects, and 24-hour crisis intervention.



DIAKON WILDERNESS CENTER
571 MOUNTAIN ROAD, P.O. BOX 10
BOILING SPRINGS, PA 17007-0010

First Foundations graduate furthers education

Like apples and oranges is how Kathleen Hearn, the mother of Zach Hearn, describes the changes in her son following his successful completion of the Diakon Wilderness Center's Foundations Residential Program. Zach was the first successful graduate of the Foundations program earlier this summer.

When Zach arrived in January, things were not going well at all. Although he had successfully completed the Weekend Alternative Program last year, Zach soon slipped into old habits, not going to school and violating probation. He apparently needed a "wake-up call."

Being at the Diakon Wilderness Center was a new experience for Zach. He

had always been interested in animals and wildlife management.

"Out there at the center, he saw a different way of living," says Ms. Hearn. Zach is talented and artistic, but had been using his gifts for the wrong reasons. He didn't trust himself and fell back into the "easy way" of doing things.

Zach thought he could find an easy way through the program, but Diakon staff wouldn't let that happen. With the consistent effort of his personal competency coach, Rob Kivlan, and Jim Kuntz, his case manager, Zach began to see that you can be successful if you do things the right way. He began to believe in himself, and to flourish.

While in the program, Zach earned his GED, also earning and maintaining the

highest levels in pursuit of this goal. When he returned home, Zach entered Diakon's Bridge Program for aftercare assistance. Through the program, he found a job and signed up for fall classes at Delaware County Community College. He has created his own clothing line, and is looking forward to studying how to begin his own business.

Since Zach's successful completion of the program, nine more young men have returned to their homes and communities as successful graduates.

"It is a dream," says Kathleen Hearn of the Diakon program, a comment made with pride and emotion. "If we could provide this experience for every young person, it would be a different generation."