

WILDERNESS CENTER SUMMIT

Diakon Wilderness Center ♦ 717-960-6700

Spring 2010

Weekend program for girls takes next step



For years, the Weekend Alternative Program brought boys and girls together to provide therapeutically beneficial services. But when Anthony Stukes became director of the program about three years ago, he decided it was time to end the obvious distractions and create a program specifically for young girls.

“We did a lot of research and decided to separate them completely throughout the weekend, with the exception of transportation,” he says, thus creating the Girls Weekend Alternative Program. “There were some distinct changes we needed to make in the curriculum.”

After two years in development, the program began last summer and recently has gained significant momentum, with 25 girls enrolled. Like the program for boys, the girls’ curriculum includes counseling, community service, and wilderness-based activities, but differs in the “Next Step Weekend.”

“It is very similar to independent living,” says Stukes, in which participants “discuss the challenges they face in regard to being a girl and the challenges they are going to face moving forward into womanhood.”

The program is based on the pillars of awareness, identity, empowerment, and connection. Participants are not allowed to make any excuses in regard to who they are or about being a girl, says Stukes.

“I challenge the idea that girls can’t get along with other girls,” he says. “The goal is to become a positive young woman. Young women can actively take control of their lives and better their situations without making excuses.”



Day program gains strength in first year

Not yet one year old, the Center Point Day Program continues to challenge a growing number of youths to change behaviors and prepare for a productive future.

Gaining strength in numbers and diversity, the program now enrolls 21 students, including females, from Adams, Cumberland, and Franklin counties.

“Seeing the passion and commitment counties have with students and entrusting us to work with them to make a difference is humbling and an honor,” says Jeremias Garcia, program director. “We look forward to serving as many students as possible so they can flourish in settings that used to be a struggle for them, and achieve goals they thought they couldn’t achieve.”

The program, which operates Monday through Friday, is an alternative to residential placement and an opportunity for youths to change the role they play in their community. In addition to providing schooling, staff assist students and their families in daily life situations so they can build futures full of hope and success.

Plans are under way for summer programming to include various wilderness-based activities, basketball camps, day trips, GED classes, and reading enrichment.



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New leadership guides Foundations program

Eugene LaRocca recently took on the role of program manager for the Foundations Residential Program.

A tai kwon do instructor at the Diakon Wilderness Center for several years, LaRocca is a familiar face on campus and a welcome addition to the staff, says Jason Brode, assistant administrator for Diakon Youth Services.

“The change in leadership gives us the opportunity to align more clearly our residential programs and commu-

nity-based support services,” says Brode. “We believe by putting the program’s emphasis on relationships and unique experiences, our students will learn to be successful.”

Anthony Stukes, Weekend Alternative Program director, will serve as acting supervisor for the weekend residential component of the Foundations Residential Program.



Wilderness Challenge 2010 experiences snowy but strong start

It may have started as a dusting but within a week, more than three feet of snow created some interesting challenges for youths enrolled in the Wilderness Challenge Program’s first course of 2010.

“Typically, we’d be around campus the first five days or so and then hike south on the Appalachian Trail,” says Anthony Brau, course supervisor. “On this course, we revamped it to keep everyone a little closer for supervision, safety, and emergencies.”

Despite having to shovel paths, create campsites and clear a place to sleep, the youths still focused on lessons,

learning how to build relationships, resolve conflicts, and be leaders.

“As the days went on, the snow kept accumulating, but those kids were troopers,” Brau says. “They really took to it and embraced the idea of the program.”

Faced with the snow, cold temperatures, and winds, the youths still found opportunities to incorporate the high ropes challenge, rock climbing, and other wilderness aspects.

“The Wilderness Program is intense; it is meant to be difficult—not only on the physical side, but also in dealing with relationships, peer interactions, and interactions with authority,” says Brau.

“We provide a living learning environment. You learn through conflicts and issues that come up from living in the woods.”

Upcoming 2010 Wilderness Challenge Course dates:

June 15 to July 15

July 27 to August 26

September 28 to October 28

For more information, visit www.diakon.org/dwc or call (717) 960-6700 to make a referral.