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WILDERNESS CENTER SUMMIT

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October 2007

Wilderness Center holds first Foundations Family Day

The Diakon Wilderness Center's first Foundations Family Day hit the mark and more, as a high number of families experienced what their students do while in residence.

"Our goal for the first Foundations Family Day was three to five families," says Rick Street, clinical director. "The fact we doubled those projections is a testament to the great work our program staff is doing to communicate with and involve parents in their child's treatment while they are at the Diakon Wilderness Center."

Nine Level II students from the 120-Day Foundations Residential Program had a total of 21 family members attend the event, held from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 15. The event offers an experience to families similar to what their children receive while in the program.

"We believe this experience will help the children and families have a more consistent perspective on the services provided by the Diakon Wilderness Center

and aid in the effectiveness of the aftercare planning process," says center Administrator Corey Carothers.

"Additionally, we hope families will gain benefits themselves through the activities, by finding security and hope in the realization they are not alone in the challenge of raising children and supporting them through the very difficult teenage years," he adds. Many family members finished the program by noting they found it to be helpful, adding that they were comforted knowing their children were in good hands.

Foundations Family Day will take place one weekend per month. Students' families will have the opportunity to participate in at least two of these events during their child's 120 days in the program. "This is just one way the program is attempting to consolidate the gains the children experience in an effort to increase success rates for the youths and families post-program," Street notes.

The next Foundations Family Day is Oct. 13.



A Family Day activity allowed those who caught the ball to share a reflection from the day.

Program builds relationships between the young and the old

The saying that a kind word goes a long way has never had more meaning than when describing the intergenerational program that pairs youths from the Diakon Wilderness Center with residents of Cumberland Crossings, a Diakon Lutheran Senior Living Community in Carlisle, Pa.

Since early summer, participants in the center's Foundations Residential Program have spent Tuesday and Thursday afternoons interacting with residents of Cumberland Crossings' nursing care center. Sally McClintock, community life director, suggested the afternoon visits as a way to build on the regular Sunday get-togethers with participants of the center's Weekend Alternative Program.

"The residents love when the youths come on Sunday and play bingo," she says. "With the weekday program, the youths take the residents outside or participate in some

sort of activity inside, depending on the weather." In addition to playing games, the residents and students enjoy the time getting to know one another.

"When [the youths] first came, they were reluctant and nervous to interact with the elderly population," McClintock says. "Since then, they have started to interact, and they now come in and know what to do."

A big part of what they do is sharing stories about their lives, comparing similarities and differences.

"It is a great opportunity for our male population," she adds. "They sit and chat about male activities, whether about the war or a business they owned. It really gives the residents an opportunity to share that experience with somebody else."

David Russell, residential care specialist, says that even though the youths are

earning community service hours for the visits, the benefits go far beyond that.

"It gives them an opportunity to deal with a different situation than they are used to," he explains, adding that some of the residents can't speak but are able to communicate with a smile. "I've seen some subtle changes with the students where they have developed relationships and want to know about [the residents]. Sometimes a real gentleness, a caring attitude, comes to the surface."

The program also helps students develop positive interpersonal relationships, encourages self-development, and contributes to society, he adds. "The students realize they can do things perhaps they've never done before. It is a very positive situation that will only get better."



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Weekend Alternative Program holds annual reunion

Bright sunshine and a warm reception greeted returning graduates to the 7th Annual Weekend Alternative Program Reunion, held at the Diakon Wilderness Center in August. Thirty graduates, along with family and friends, enjoyed an afternoon of reminiscing, activities, and the opportunity to talk with current WAP participants.

“It was our best turnout ever,” says Anthony Stukes, weekend program director. “It speaks to the lasting impact the program has on the lives of young people.”

Marvin Butts, counselor and organizer of the event, says graduates come back for many reasons. “The reason we hear most is simply that we cared about them, and whether or not they succeeded,” he says.

“No struggle, no progress,” WAP’s interpretation of the Frederick Douglas 1857 exhortation during the struggle to abolish slavery, served as event theme. “It is intended to remind the youths who enter the program that if they are going to accomplish

things for themselves, they must struggle with what got them there, and change it,” Stukes said during his remarks to the audience.

All returning alumni received a tee-shirt with a “No struggle, no progress” graphic, intended to remind them that although they successfully graduated from the program, the struggle to improve life continues. Activities included center tours, an alumni/staff basketball game, and a picnic prepared by the center’s food-service provider, Cura Hospitality.

One graduate, Alexis from Cumberland County, misread the invitation and showed up a day late. Disappointed, she asked if she could return the following weekend in order to share her experiences. The following Saturday, she spent the day with current female participants, telling them that, although others had wanted her to change, nothing could happen until she made the decision for herself. She now has a desire to succeed.

Her story was “very inspiring” says one of the young women who heard it. “It really motivates you.”

“That is why we do this,” says Corey Carothers, center administrator. “We celebrate the successes of the past, while showing the new group of participants that despite their current struggles they, too, can succeed.”

