

Camp – A World of Good for our Youth

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As parents, we all search for that ideal experience for our children . . . *the one* that will enrich their lives and make a positive difference. Often, this search is heightened as the school year nears an end. “What am I going to do with Tommy (or Suzie) all summer?”

Last summer, parents packed up over 10 million “Tommy’s & Suzie’s” and sent them off for a week of camp. They assumed that Tommy, or Suzie, would have fun and that they would return safe and happy. Many parents even assumed that Tommy, or Suzie, would be a better person following their camping experience. Until now, no one knew for sure if camp truly does a child a world of good.

The American Camping Association (the accreditation body for over 2,200 camps nationwide) is completing a three-year research project to more fully determine the value of a camping experience in the life of a child. This study has encompassed 100 randomly selected camps from across the country. Preliminary results of this study indicate that a week at camp can provide many anticipated positive outcomes for a child:

- Social competence
- Increased self-identity
- Increased positive values
- Gained cognitive skills
- Participation in adventuresome outdoor activities
- Learned motor skills
- Learned from adult role models
- Served or helped others
- Spiritual growth

As parents, it is comforting to know that our child can have his, or her, life so enriched through camp! All youth serving organizations (4-H, Scouts, Y’s, Boys’ & Girls’ Clubs, etc) strive to offer quality programming that results in positive youth development benefits for the youth they serve. These organizations have rich traditions of offering camp as a key component of their program delivery strategies. Research seems to indicate that:

- ✓ Camp is a safe and nurturing environment for children
- ✓ Camp is a caring community
- ✓ Camp is a vital element in a child’s education
- ✓ Camp is for everyone
- ✓ Camp is fun
- ✓ Camps can partner with parents and schools

The best news may be that camps accomplish all these wonderful things in the lives of our children without them really realizing that they are changing for the better. Through their cabin experience, they gain a sense of community, shared values, contribution, commitment, and compassion. On a nature hike, they connect with the natural world in which they live without the influence of computers, television, or movie screens. They experience growth by taking healthy risks and stepping beyond their comfort zones. They build character, becoming more competent and more caring. They learn to resolve conflicts, value diversity, and to share in the success of the group. Fun becomes the foundation upon which courage, self-respect, cooperation and responsibility are constructed.

It may be winter, and next summer may seem far away. But now is an ideal time to consider the value of camp in your child's life. Why not suggest a week of camp as a gift from relatives, or from you this Christmas? Many parents choose a week of camp as a special birthday present. Remember, "*Camp gives kids a world of good*".