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# Camping: A positive developmental context for youth with disabilities/serious illness

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CAMPING: A POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTAL CONTEXT FOR YOUTH WITH  
DISABILITIES/SERIOUS ILLNESS

by

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The Ohio State University  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	4
Introduction	5
Purpose	6
Statement of objectives	6
Justification	6
Constraints	7
Glossary	7
Introduction	9
Literature Review	9
Youth development	9
Support	10
Safety	11
Empowerment	12
Positive values	12
Skill building	13
Positive identity	13
Children with Disabilities/Serious Illness and Youth Development	14
Support	14
Empowerment	15
Positive Identity	16
Youth Development and Camp	16

Support	17
Safety	18
Empowerment	18
Positive Values	18
Skill building	18
Positive identity	19
Camp for Children with Disabilities/Serious Illness and Youth Development	20
Support	20
Safety	21
Empowerment	21
Skill building	22
Positive identity	22
Summary	23
Professional and Research Implications	24
Introduction	24
Support	24
Safety	26
Empowerment	29
Positive values	32
Skill building	34
Positive Identity	35
Conclusion	36
REFERENCES	37

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## PART ONE

### *Introduction*

Camps are supposed to be fun and full of adventure. They are places to make new friends, to learn, and grow. Camps come in many different forms, such as day sports camp, overnight week long Boy Scout or 4-H camps, or summer long religious camps. Camps for children with disabilities and/or serious illness are just one of many different forms of camp. Camps for children with serious illness and disabilities help children grow and experience things that they may not be able to in life outside of camp. This segment of camps is ever growing.

The Association of Hole in the Wall Association Camps is an organization that allows kids with serious illness and/or disabilities to experience camp. It started over 20 years ago with one camp, to serve youth with serious illness. Today it has a family of camps that have served over 119,000 campers (“About Us”, 2007). The purpose of the Hole in the Wall Camps is to provide campers with a joyful, laughter-filled environment that enhances their self confidence through support, motivation, and encouragement. (“About Us”).

Opportunities for positive youth development are very important for children growing up. They can be provided through family. They can be taught and learned at school and can be encouraged by a community. There are many areas in a child’s life that provide for youth development, one of which could be camp. That is why this paper will examine positive youth developmental assets and how they can be applied to as

camp and more specifically to camp for children with disabilities and/or serious illness, specifically a Hole in the Wall camp.

*Purpose*

Flying Horse Farms is a provisional member of the Association of Hole in the Wall Camps in Ohio that is scheduled to open in 2010. Its purpose is to provide a common camp experience for children with serious illness, whose lives might otherwise be consumed by hospital visits and medical environments. Flying Horse Farms counselors are going to need training in developmental programming so that the camp is prepared for its first year. Therefore, the main focus of this paper will be to develop a knowledge base in the area of camp programming is based upon youth developmental assets. Specifically this paper will focus upon the assets of support, safety, empowerment, positive values, skill building, and positive identity. This will allow campers grow through youth development opportunities at camp once it opens.

*Statement of objective.* The research on youth developmental assets will be covered in a broad context and then will be narrowed to examine how these assets apply to camps for children with disabilities and/or serious illness. Once these areas have been reviewed, they will be used to design a camping program that incorporates different assets of youth development.

*Justification.* The paper will examine how elements of youth development can enhance the camp experience, so that new camps for youth with disabilities and/or serious illness, such as Flying Horse Farms, can start with a solid knowledge base of what works and why it works. Also, even though the paper is geared toward these

specific types of camps, part of its recommendation could be modified to fit the purpose of any camp.

*Constraints.* Some limitations of these findings and recommendations are the lack of depth in the research of camping for youth with serious illness and/or disabilities. It is often difficult to implement and evaluate the theoretically designed camp programs in real life. This is not to say that the recommendations in camp programming won't work, but that they may not work in every instance.

*Glossary.* The following terms refer to areas of interest identified in the following literature review and subsequent programming plan of this paper.

**Camp:** “a place usually in the country for recreation or instruction often during the summer .... a program offering access to recreational or educational facilities for a limited period of time” (“Camp”, 2008, para. 2).

**Disability:** “lack of adequate power, strength, or physical or mental ability; incapacity.” (“Disability”, 2008, para. 2).

**Serious Illness:** Chronic or life-threatening illnesses such as spina bifida, craniofacial disorders, sickle cell anemia, hemophilia, kidney disease, epilepsy, heart disease, rheumatic disease, diabetes, and cancer (“The Campers Who We Serve”, 2007, para. 1 & 3).

**Hemophilia:** Hemophilia is a blood disorder where a protein in a person's blood is missing, and it is needed to help with clotting; clotting is important, because it stops bleeding (Wyeth Pharmaceuticals Inc., 2007, para. 1).

Symptoms of hemophilia include bruising, pain and swelling in joints and

muscles from bleeding, and bleeding with no apparent cause (Wyeth Pharmaceuticals Inc., 2007, para. 3).

Sickle Cell Anemia: Sickle Cell Anemia is blood disease where red blood cells have a sickle shape (National Heart Lung and Blood Institute, 2008, para 1). “Sickle-shaped cells don’t move easily through your blood vessels. They’re stiff and sticky and tend to form clumps and get stuck in the blood vessels.” (National Heart Lung and Blood Institute, 2008, para. 3). These clumps could block blood vessels, which could cause pain and damage to organs (National Heart Lung and Blood Institute, 2008, para. 4).

Youth Developmental Assets: “developmental assets represent a conceptual model of essential socialization experiences for all young people.” (Benson, 1997, p. 28).

Character: “Character is the entire set of positive traits that have emerged across cultures and throughout history as important for good life.” (Park, 2004, p. 46).

## PART TWO

### *Introduction*

The literature review will define certain youth developmental assets (i.e. empowerment, safety, support, positive values, skill building, and positive identity). It will analyze how these assets apply to youth development in the areas of: Children with disabilities/serious illness, youth development at camp, and youth development at camp for children with disabilities and/or serious illness.

### *Literature Review*

#### *Youth Development*

Youth development is important for many different reasons. Nicholson, Collins, and Holmer (2004) mention that youth development organizations concentrate on helping kids grow emotionally, physically, and mentally. They suggest that youth programming can help children adjust to the world around them (Nicholson et al.). Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, and Hawkins (2004) discuss that youth development programs may aim at preventing drug use, pregnancy, and school failure. However they state that the youth development community is not focusing on problems primarily, but wants to go beyond just the prevention of problems (Catalano et al.). Damon (2004) states that “The positive youth approach aims at understanding, educating, and engaging children in productive activities rather than at correcting, curing, or treating them for maladaptive tendencies or so-called disabilities” (p. 15). Damon goes on to say that it is with positive youth development assets that potential can be maximized and harmful behaviors can be stopped before they develop.

Youth development covers many different subject areas, and because of that researchers have developed a number of frameworks that they use to encompass youth development. Eccles and Gootman (2002) break youth development down into four parts: physical development, intellectual development, psychological and emotional development, and social development. Lerner, Fisher, and Weinberg (2000) discuss the five C's of youth development which are connection, confidence, character, competence and compassion/caring, which are outcomes of youth development.

Based on years of research, the Search Institute, a nonprofit organization that promotes the healthy development of children and adolescents, proposed a framework of 40 developmental assets (Benson, 1997). These assets are the building blocks of positive youth development (Benson). Many of the other youth development models are similar or overlap the 40 developmental assets. According to Benson, these 40 assets are separated into eight areas: support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity (Benson).

*Support.* Support is defined as “to bear or hold up . . . . to sustain or withstand . . . . to undergo or endure”(Support, 2008, para. 2). As Benson (1997) mentions, support for youth can take many forms, including parents, neighborhoods, and school environments. “Support refers to a range of ways young people experience love, affirmation, and acceptance. These experiences include both demonstrative forms of verbal and physical approval, symbolic gestures showing that young people matter”(p. 35). Scales and Gibbons (1996) discuss how parents play the most significant role in a young person's

life, while non-parental adults, such as teachers and relatives, play an important role also. Scales and Gibbons go on to say, “Both satisfaction with the support network and the total number of supportive relationships may be important to adolescents’ positive outcomes.” (p. 372). Nicholson et al. (2004) iterate that the most successful youth development groups are those that create a place where children feel supported.

*Safety.* Benson (1997) state that safety is very important to children, and that safety allows them to feel valued. Benson as well as Jennings, Parra-Medina, Messias, and Mcloughlin (2006) bring up the importance of safe environments. Studies have shown that “young people who grow up in violent communities or violent families are more likely to become involved in substance abuse.”(Benson, p. 40). Thus, providing a safe environment endows children with a needed foundation for proper development and growth (Benson).

By using the term safety, Singletary, Smith and Evans (2004) and Nicholson et al. (2004) encompass two areas: physical safety and emotional or psychological safety. A survey conducted by Singletary et al. (2004) stated that ensuring the physical and psychological safety of youth was the most influential practice in helping them learn skills. When referring to a 4-H setting, they defined physical and psychological safety to include:

1. “Keeping youth from hurting each other’s feelings.
2. Keeping youth from bullying each other.
3. Managing conflict between youth.
4. Making sure that the facility where we have 4-H is safe.” (Singletary et al., 2004, p. 3).

Nicholson, Collins, and Holmer (2004) discuss how organizations that excel in youth development make children feel safe emotionally and physically.

*Empowerment.* “Empowered young people feel good about themselves and their skills. They grow up feeling treated with respect, knowing their strengths, and sensing that they can make a difference in the world” (Benson, 1997, p. 39). Yet, there are many components to empowerment that have to be in place for the outcomes above to take place. Jennings et al. (2006) identified six components that they have found to be important in the development of empowerment. They include:

1. “A welcoming and safe environment,
2. Meaningful participation and engagement,
3. Equitable power-sharing between youth and adults,
4. Engagement in critical reflection on interpersonal and sociopolitical processes,
5. Participation in sociopolitical processes to effect change, and
6. Integrated individual- and community-level empowerment” (p. 41).

One of Benson’s (1997) forty developmental assets that falls under empowerment is service to others. Nicholson et al. (2004) confirms the importance of this when they talk about how adolescents want more than attention; they want to use their skills to help the people around them. The idea of youth being resources instead of problems in today’s world is mentioned by Damon (2004). This goes along with one of Benson’s forty developmental assets, youth as resources, which is a key part of empowerment.

*Positive values.* Benson (1997) breaks positive values into six developmental assets that include caring, equality and social justice, integrity, honesty, responsibility, and restraint. Caring is about wanting to help others (Benson). Honesty is about telling

the truth (Benson). Benson describes integrity as standing by one's beliefs, and mentions that responsibility is accepting what one has done. Equality and social justice are described as helping out a social cause (Benson).

It is not only important to know what positive values children need, but also where they can learn them. Benson (1997) mentions that positive values, such as caring can be learned from modeling. Park (2004) confirms that biological factors, parents, role models, close relationships with friends and family, and positive institutions help to create good character. Park also mentions that "society as a whole can contribute significantly to character development by setting a moral atmosphere where moral behaviors are rewarded and stories of morally good deeds are frequently shared." (p. 46). Park goes on to say that developing good character in children is very complex.

*Skill building.* Skill building can be defined as "A sense of progress in developing skills and abilities. Whether in school, sports, arts, or a job, young people are engaged by—and benefit from—activities in which they experience an increasing sense of competence and productivity" (American Camp Association, 2006, p. 10). An important part of skill building that Benson (1997) mentions is achievement motivation, which means that kids want to perform well. Skill building can also include social skill building. Benson (1997) talks about how youth should have interpersonal competence, peaceful conflict resolution skills, resistance skills and cultural competence. It is with these skills that youth can build friendships (Benson).

*Positive identity.* Benson (1997) mentions four parts that he considers the foundation of positive identity: personal power, self-esteem, sense of purpose, and positive view of personal future. In essence, it is a view of one's self. Benson (1997)

goes on further to say, “Without these assets, young people can become powerless victims without a sense of initiative, direction, and purpose.” (p. 51). Skylar et al. (2007) finds that youth gained personal competence when they accomplished a challenge. Nicholson et al. (2004) mentions that it is hard for some children to have this sense of positive identity, because they have been minimized in society for numerous reasons, such as race, gender, and sexuality. Nicholson et al. goes on to discuss that good youth development organizations create an atmosphere that lacks discrimination.

#### *Children with Disabilities/Serious Illness and Youth Development*

This section of the literature review examines specifically the asset development of children with disabilities and/or serious illness with regards to the assets of support, empowerment, and personal identity. This literature review did not find any information in the areas of safety, positive values, and skill building specifically for youth with disabilities and/or serious illness. Based on a study of a specialized camp for children with cancer, Eng and Davies (1991) emphasized: “The findings of this support the view that children with cancer, despite the trauma of having this illness, are still normal children.” (p. 90). This reiterated that there may not be a need for separate research in the areas of safety, positive values, or skill building. Although children with disabilities have the same developmental needs as children without serious illness and/or disability, there may be “barriers-to-entry” in acquiring Benson’s developmental assets.

*Support.* Children with disabilities and/or serious illness’ need for support is as important, if not more so, than children without disabilities and/or serious illness. Alderfer, Wiebe, and Hartmann (2001) performed a study to find out if children with serious illness were less accepted by their peers than children without serious illness.

Alderfer et al. (2001) concluded that children with serious illness were indeed accepted less than children without serious illness. Nicholson et al. (2004) mention that children with disabilities may feel isolated, which could push them to participate in unhealthy actions. This finding reiterates the need of children with disabilities and/or serious illness for supportive relationships. Wilhite, Devine, and Goldenberg's (1999) study found that perceptions could have a negative affect on how youth with and without disabilities interact. Devine and Wilhite's (2000) study recommended that to develop positive support for children with disabilities by peers, and others, programs should promote acceptance, concentrate on promoting the abilities that have nothing to do with the disability, and to have people with and without disabilities socialize together more. These constructive interactions could help youth with and without disabilities develop mutually supportive relationships.

*Empowerment.* Empowerment is important to youth with disabilities and/or serious illness, because it provides them with a sense of value. Henderson, Bedini, and Hecht (1994) concluded that empowered women with disabilities had a sense of control over their lives which could help them have an enhanced self identity. Even though Henderson, Bedini, et al. (1994) study was about women with disabilities it could be applied to youth. Dattilo, Kleiber, and Williams (1998) discuss the components of self-determination, some of which are making decisions and developing self awareness. They go on to say that these components can lead to intrinsic motivation which includes listening to positive feedback (Dattilo et al., 1998). These components compare very closely to Benson's (1997) idea of empowerment. Dattilo et al., (1998) goes on to say

that communication is a key part of self determination, and that self determination could help people with disabilities improve their independence.

*Positive identity.* A positive identity for children with disabilities and/or serious illness is important so that they have a holistic view of themselves rather than the narrow perspective of their disability and/or illness. Briery and Rabain (1999) discuss how problems may occur due to a child's perception of their illness. This finding underscores that a child's perception of his or her illness can affect one's identity. Henderson, Bedini, and Hecht's (1994) study concluded that there are many factors that affect self identity with people with disabilities, including the type of disability and its severity, how the disability affects their everyday life, and how society perceives them.

#### *Youth Development and Camp*

This section of the literature review will examine how the youth developmental assets of support, safety, empowerment, positive values, skill building, and positive identity relate to camp. They will be reviewed in the next section. Henderson, Bialeschki, et al. (2006,2007) mentions that there are many important components to youth development at camp, some of which are supportive relationships, positive social norms, physical and psychological safety, and opportunities for skill building. "Camping for children is not inherently good unless the camp program is designed with particular goals and objectives in mind."(Henderson, 2001, p. 20). Thurber, Scanlin, Scheuler, and Henderson (2007) propose that a high-quality camp experience is well situated for positive youth development, because it is staffed with caring and supportive people and promotes a positive peer culture.

Camps can be influential when they provide experiences in community living with a focus on youth development and recreation. Camps provide an intensive experience where young people interact with adults and other children while participating in activities that are structures and often new and different (Henderson, Thurber, et al. 2006, p. 3).

Henderson (2001) discussed how difficult it is to measure any changes that take place at camp in children's values, skills, knowledge, and attitudes, due to the short duration that children actually attend camp. Henderson, Thurber, et al. (2006) developed a Camper Growth Index to help measure the changes that take place in children at camp. The Camper Growth Index measured four areas that included: positive identity, social skills, positive values and spiritual growth, and thinking and physical skills (Henderson, Thurber, et al., 2006). These areas either are identical or overlapping with some of the assets that Benson (1997) defined as fundamental to youth development. Thurber et al. (2007) used the Camper Growth Index in their study to show that camp helps to improve positive identity, social skills, positive values and spiritual growth, and thinking and physical skills for children.

*Support.* The youth support at camp may be important because of the lack of familiarity campers have with the camp environment. Bialeschki, Schmid, and Tilley (2006) discuss how to build supportive relationships at camp. These types of relationships have many building blocks that include: hiring and training staff to accommodate supportive relationships, gathering places, one to one time, and follow through (Bialeschki et al., 2007). The American Camp Association (2006) report,

“Innovations”, found that ‘getting to know you’ discussions help to start the development of supportive relationships.

*Safety.* Since campers are in a new environment they have to feel safe. The American Camp Association (2006) report, “Innovations”, found that only 41% felt physical safe constantly and 61% felt emotional safe constantly. The report by the American Camp Association (2006) goes on to say that some of this is due to campers being in a new environment, meeting new people, and trying new things. The report goes on to well lit areas, clear communication, and campers helping make the rules helped to improve the safety that campers felt at camp (American Camp Association, 2006).

*Empowerment.* With empowerment campers can make decisions and feel valued. The American Camp Association (2006) report found that in the area of youth involvement campers felt more involved if they help decide what activities they participated in, and when older campers could mentor younger one.

*Positive values.* Positive values at camp can help to transform a child’s perception of how he or she acts. Part of the Camper Growth Index developed by Henderson, Thurber, et al. (2006) included as a component, positive values. Thurber et al. (2007) used the Camper Growth Index in his study of camp, and found that there was a slight change in campers as it pertains to positive values.

*Skill building.* Camps may be instrumental in providing skill building of many types that aide in youth development. These skill building types include: competency, social, and constructive use of time (Benson, 1997). Ramsing and Sibthorp (2008) state that at camp a skill building approach can be a mix of competency building mixed with social behaviors and motivation. Klem and Nicholson (2008) developed a study to

examine if 4-H camps in Missouri were effective in helping campers learn life skills, and found that both campers and their parents believed strongly that these camps were effective in this regard. The American Camp Association (2006) discovered that in order to help campers with skill building it was important to track progress and set goals and provide different activities for different age groups, so returning campers could have different experiences each year.

*Positive identity.* Camp may be a place where positive identity is promoted to allow campers to grow their sense of self. Marsh (1999) conducted a meta-analysis that examined how camp influences assets pertaining to self, such as self-esteem. The result showed that camp was a positive influence on these assets (Marsh). If a camp were to concentrate on these assets of self, the influence therein would be more likely to take place (Henderson, 2001). Henderson also talks about how many activities at camp help children feel better about themselves. Marsh discusses how “Camps that enhance self also provide an environment in which the camper feels some sense of control over the experience. This control is accomplished by involving campers to some extent in the planning or management of their camp experience.” (para. 14). The control that Marsh speaks about can be viewed as personal power, which is one of Benson’s (1997) assets that help to define positive identity. A report published by the American Camp Association (2005) presents the results of their study which includes the finding that camp helps to build self-esteem and a sense of independence. Zarbock (1996) stated that “In some cases, camp literally gives kids a reason to live.” (p. 234). This could be interpreted as a sense of purpose which is one of Benson’s (1997) 40 developmental assets which he considers it part of positive identity.

### *Camp for Children with Disabilities/Serious Illness and Youth Development*

This section of the literature review will examine how the youth developmental assets of support, safety, empowerment, skill building, and positive identity relate to camp for children with disabilities and/or youth development. In the literature reviewed there was no research on positive values for camp for children with disabilities and or serious illness. “People with disabilities can experience the same outcomes of camps as other individuals. Inclusive camping programs should be developed that address the similar and distinct needs of a variety of individuals.” (Henderson, 2001, p.20). Brannan, Arick, and Fullerton (1997) studied specialized camps for people with disabilities and reported that counselors and parents noticed improvements in independence, skills, communication, as well as self-esteem from the camp experience. The improvements that took place at camp continued after camp (Brannan et al., 1997). Adam’s study (as cited in Ramsing and Sibthorp, 2008) found that the benefits of camp outweighed the concerns for campers with medical illness.

*Support.* Support at camp for children with disabilities and/or serious illness is important, because it can help build up other assets. Eng and Davies’s (1991) study found that children with cancer enjoyed the specialized camp, because they got to talk and share with people similar to them. Hill and Sibthorp (2006) had similar findings when they examined autonomy support at diabetes camp. Campers created friendships with people similar to themselves, and shared their experiences. Sheldon and Mendenhall’s (1995) case study presented a great example of how support can come in many different fashions. In the case study a therapist first had to figure out why a camper

was not participating in certain programs, and then supported him by offering alternatives that would fit his needs (Sheldon & Mendenhall, 1995).

*Safety.* Campers that are disabled and /or seriously ill must feel safe to participate at camp. Boutaugh and Patterson (1977) talk about how new campers at a hemophiliac camp put off going to the infirmary, because of fear. So, to help alleviate that fear, the medical staff would take part in activities and meals with campers, and dress more in a camp style (Boutaugh & Patterson, 1977). Sheldon and Mendenhall's (1995) case study examined a boy at camp that had ADHD, and they found that psychological safety to him was not getting his hands dirty or wet.

*Empowerment.* Empowerment allows campers with disabilities and/or serious illness choices and value that they may not experience outside of camp. A study by Hill and Sibthorp (2006) examined campers at diabetes camp as they were given many choices at camp such as food, programming, and illness education. Measurements showed that campers were more empowered (Hill & Sibthorp). An article by Zarbock (1996) talks about how children with illness concentrate on what they can't do, and camp allows them to discover what they can do. This can be connected to Benson's (1997) empowerment, because children have to feel valued so they can try things. Ramsing and Sibthorp (2008) found that programming which was supportive, satisfying, and self-directed was more likely to increase empowerment. Sheldon and Mendenhall's (1995) study showed that by offering alternatives for campers, they were more likely to participate, because they could choose an activity that met their needs. Witman (1993) asked youth going through an adventure program for treatment to rank what they thought was most valuable about their experience. Out of sixteen components aspects of the outdoor

program, they ranked helping or assisting others first. This is very similar to Benson's service to others, which is part of empowerment.

*Skill building.* Skill building does not only involve learning, but should also help with motivation. Coale (1999) examines a camp that is for both children with and without disabilities. Its purpose is to help these children learn new computer skills. It included a field trip to a NASA research center for campers to meet people with disabilities that work in the technology industry (Coale, 1999). Farias-Tomaszewski, Jenkins, and Keller's (2001) study found that skill building where participants felt that they were being challenged and then accomplished those challenges were more likely to have improved self-confidence. Witman (1993) also found that taking risks, and accomplishing them ranked second for kids that participated in an adventure treatment program.

*Positive identity.* Positive identity is important so that campers with disabilities and or serious illness have a positive sense of self. "Camp experiences contribute to learning new strategies and to an enhanced self concept." (Eng & Davies, 1991, p. 90) Farias-Tomaszewski, et al.'s (2001) study found that therapeutic horseback riding could help people with physical disabilities with their self confidence. They go on to say that to help with this, participates in therapeutic horseback riding must have a sense of accomplishment in their achievements, and the facilitators should notice these achievements and promote the achievements (Farias-Tomaszewski et al., 2001). These components can help with personal power and self esteem which Benson (1997) list as part of positive identity.

*Summary*

The literature review shows that youth development as assets are important to any child. It also demonstrates that youth development can take place at camp. The literature gives some examples of how it can take place, whether it is for camp in general, or for a camp for children with disabilities and or serious illness.

## PART THREE

### *Professional and Research Implications*

#### *Introduction*

Part three will take the form of a camp-programming plan that facilitates support, safety, empowerment, positive values, skill building, and positive identity. The plan will concentrate specifically on residential camps for children with disabilities and/or serious illness. It will discuss how the developmental assets mentioned above can become a part of many different types of programs at camp, and how they are intertwined. Finally, the conclusion will identify what can be done in the future to improve on camp programming.

#### *Support*

Camp is a great place to build support, because there are so many layers through which it can develop. Support at camp can start at the basic unit, the cabin, which is the group of campers and counselors with whom campers eat, sleep, and participate in most activities. At the beginning of camp, cabin counselors have to be welcoming and open to campers to help build rapport and trust. To help build rapport, counselors have to be informed about their campers. Camper applications can bring to light many different aspects of each camper, such as things the campers enjoy, eating habits, behaviors, and possible illnesses and/or disabilities. Also if the camper is returning from the previous year, any past camper notes could also help counselors get a sense of the campers they will have before they arrive, so that the counselors can formulate a plan to build supportive relationships and handle situations as they may arise.

Since campers are away from their families, it is important for the cabin to act as that type of support. That can begin with communication; the campers get to camp

knowing few people, and building relationships quickly will help with the camp experience. This can be started with a number of ice breakers within the cabin, so that campers and counselors can learn each others, names and a few things about each other.

Counselors can also build support by isolating or downplaying certain situations, such as bed wetting. Bed wetting is something that some campers still do and they do not want other campers to know about it. Hopefully this type of information is provided on a camper's application so that counselors can be prepared with spare bedding if the need does arise. If the need does arise, a morning bed check by a counselor as the rest of the cabin is walking to breakfast would be a simple way to handle the situation without everyone in the cabin finding out. Counselors also have to communicate in an honest way so that the campers understand why they can or cannot do certain things, such as when a counselor asks a camper who has hemophilia to stop rough housing or to sleep on the bottom bunk for their own safety. Yet these types of communication should not be isolating to the camper. For example, rather than directing a camper with sickle cell anemia to wear a sweater or jacket to keep them warm, ask the entire cabin to wear a jacket or sweater to stay warm.

Activities throughout the day can also help build support for campers. Counselors should try to encourage campers to try new activities and celebrate those accomplishments, such as catching their first fish, passing the swim test, or attempting to climb the rock wall. The encouragement and the celebration should come both from counselors and campers. One way of doing that is through group building exercises. It is this teamwork, encouragement, and celebrating accomplishments in activities that help to build relationships and strengthen support for the campers.

Cabin chat is another opportunity to help build supportive relationships at camp. Cabin chat every evening helps campers wind down, talk and share their experiences of the day, whether they are accomplishments or challenges. It is also a time that allows campers to talk about broader topics, such as what they want to do when they grow up. It is in this forum that campers and counselors can share and build trust with each other.

Yet the campers and counselors in a camper's cabin are not the only people with whom a camper can build a supportive relationship. They are just the most likely since they are the people that spend the most time with a camper while they are at camp. Program staff can also provide support for campers while they are participating in the staff's program planning area. This could take many forms, such as helping a camper properly hold a bow and arrow, encouraging a camper to join a skit in drama, celebrating a successful pop bottle rocket launch, or providing activities that allow everyone to participate, such as chair hockey. Campers, in general, also provide a layer of support. Since the camp would be for campers with serious illness and/or disabilities, campers would be able to meet and develop relationships with other campers with whom they have similar traits. They may feel like they know someone else going through what they are going through. The life experiences shared among the campers with disabilities and/or serious illness allow them to have a connection they might not have with people outside of camp.

### *Safety*

Safety is both physical and psychological; camp can provide both to campers in many different ways. One of the simplest ways of providing safety is by establishing rules and enforcing them. Yet this is not to say that camp should have a lot of rules. If

there were too many rules, it could be overbearing on campers by taking away too many freedoms and diluting fun. Rules can provide physical safety, such as: no fighting, no running at the pool, always be with a counselor, tell someone if you get hurt, no going out in a boat without a counselor, and no running with a fishing pole. These physical safety rules are in place to protect campers from getting hurt, but if they do get hurt, then a counselor is close by to help.

Hand washing is also very important to physical safety. This is especially true at camp for children with serious illness; it helps fight disease and infection which can seriously affect children with serious illness. Physical safety should not stop campers from doing activities that may be of a higher safety risk, such as horseback riding or attempting a high ropes course. These types of activities just need to involve more protections, such as counselors being at all stations on a high ropes course, allowing only counselors to switch and lock a camper's line, and then double or even triple checking a camper's lock and line. With horseback riding it may include two counselors, one to guide the horse and one beside the horse to make sure that the camper is safe if they were to fall. Another option may be to have one counselor on either side of the horse if a camper is disabled from the waist down and has trouble staying in the saddle. Physical safety could be asking campers not to rough house, because a bruise to a camper that has hemophilia could cause internal bleeding. These precautionary measures help to protect campers from injury which is important for campers with disabilities or serious illness.

Psychological safety is also very important at camp, because campers are away from their families for a period of days. Trust in the camp staff is important to the psychological safety of the campers. Without trust, campers may not feel

psychologically safe enough to try new activities or be open to sharing problems that they may be encountering with counselors. A great example of this is a trust fall; if a camper does not feel safe psychologically that people will catch him or her, he or she will not participate in it.

At a camp for children with disabilities and/or serious illness, psychological safety is important with camp nurses and doctors. Campers are in an unfamiliar atmosphere, away from family. They have to trust nurses, doctors, and counselors that they barely know to give them the correct medication at the correct time, and to know what do in an emergency. If they do not have that trust psychologically in the medical staff at camp, it could be very harmful to the camper. That is why supportive medical staff that are good at relationship building are important to a camp for children with disabilities and/or serious illness.

Because of food allergies, campers have to feel psychologically safe to try the camp food. Campers have to trust that the camp knows about their food allergies, and that the camp food will be prepared so that the camper will not have to deal with that allergy. If for some reason, that some camp food did cause an allergic reaction the camper must believe that the staff would know how to medically treat it quickly. If a camper does not feel safe in that way, he or she will not eat. That is why it is recommended to have a variety of food, some of which that are pre-packed and individually sealed, that the camper recognizes, so they feel safe eating it.

Young campers away from home may have trouble going to bed in the evening, because they do not feel safe about the sounds of the night. A night light for the cabin or soft peaceful music that could cover up other noise could help young campers with this

psychological safety. Having a counselor awake in the cabin to talk to the campers could also help.

Building a relationship with other campers may be tough for campers that have disabilities or serious illness, because of the psychological safety needed to open up to others. That is why it is important for counselors to talk to campers about not allowing put-downs. This should create the psychological safety that campers with disabilities or serious illness need to open up to others without the fear of being put down.

### *Empowerment*

Safety is a cornerstone of empowerment. Campers will not feel empowered to participate if they do not feel safe in participating in the activity. This is why it is important to take numerous precautions such as the ones mentioned above to allow the campers to feel both physically and psychologically safe.

Empowerment is also about making campers feel valued and that they can contribute to camp. Counselors and staff can do that in many different ways. One of the first ways to empower campers is to allow them to choose from a number of options during a given activity period, such as court sports, fishing, or arts and crafts. Counselors are empowering the campers to choose something that they may enjoy, instead of giving them no choice in participating in an activity that they may or may not enjoy. This does not mean that every activity period should have a choice. If that were so, then the campers might opt to not try new activities, but go with what is familiar, which makes it harder for the camp to promote skill building.

It is not just activities in which the campers should be empowered to participate, it is all types of programs. Counselors can do this by giving campers roles in different

programs, such as letting campers play an active role in a flag ceremony or having them read aloud part of a story during inspiration time. Counselors could also encourage campers to participate at meals by letting them set the tables and clean up afterwards. This allows campers to feel that they are contributing to camp.

Encouragement by counselors could be just the thing that helps to motivate the camper to try new activities. It helps campers feel valued and helps them value themselves. For example, the campers may believe that if the counselor thinks I can do it, maybe I can. This is very important at a camp for children with disabilities and/or serious illness; campers with a disability may not feel that they can participate in an activity, like a high ropes course. Camp should be a place where campers should not be handicapped by a disability, which is why counselors have to be able to accommodate for that disability and encourage the camper to try. This is also related to psychological safety, because if there are no put downs, then just trying is an accomplishment and is celebrated, instead of perceived as failure. That is why using positive, encouraging words can help empower kids at camp to try and succeed at any activity. Camp should be a positive place where people celebrate accomplishments, big and small, and encourage each other to participate, try, and accomplish. This type of positive atmosphere will help campers feel valued and empower them to do things they thought they could not or were too afraid to try, like singing in the talent show or shooting a bow and arrow.

Campers can be helpful and contribute to camp through service. This service can come from keeping camp clean. Since camp is a part of nature, it is important for counselors to help campers understand the importance of having a clean camp, and how campers play a major role in it. This can start with the moral of leaving no trace, which

means leaving camp cleaner than when they arrived. It gives campers the responsibility to keep camp clean so that the next group of campers also has a positive experience. Keeping the outdoor camp clean also helps to protect the environment around them. A daily “cleanest cabin area award” could add incentive to cleaning and keeping areas clean, while also encouraging healthy competition. If a cabin could not win one day, then they could try hard the next day. Since the environment helps to enhance camp, it is important to teach campers about environmental issues, such as recycling, and why they are important. It would also be helpful if camp participated in programs to help the environment, such as composting food and recycling where campers could contribute to the programs. Counselors could also encourage campers to try and start environmental programs outside of camp.

Rules and how they are put in place can help to keep campers both physically and psychologically safe, and also help to empower them. Campers could take an active role in developing cabin rules that not only help campers stay safe, but also help them get along. Since the campers with the counselors help generate and decide on the rules, the campers will value them, and be more likely to follow them since they decided on them. There may be some rules that may seem offbeat, such as a passing gas rule, but if campers value it and it doesn't overreach other camp rules, then it helps empowerment.

Cabin chat is another place to empower campers, by talking about the events of the day. It allows the cabin to celebrate each camper's accomplishments, and discuss the challenges that they had. As a result the next day campers will have a renewed sense of value, which they can use to try new things.

As campers get older and continue to come back to camp, they can help with camp, and take junior leadership roles at programs to help them proceed smoothly. They could also become a counselor in training, and help out in the cabins. This allows older campers to give back some of the benefits that they received from the camp when they were younger.

### *Positive values*

Counselors can help promote positive value, in campers by leading through example. Positive values can also be built into many camp programs such as campfire skits, inspirational stories, flag ceremonies, and camp legends. Positive values, such as equality and social justices, take on an important role in a camp for children with disabilities and/or serious illness. Campers and counselors have to understand that just because a person is disabled or has a certain illness does not make them different or allow people to treat them differently. This asset also includes encouraging a commitment to racial, sexual, age, and religious equality. One of the first things that campers and camp staff should learn is that any type of discrimination is not tolerated at camp. Camp should be a place where campers are built up, while discrimination of any kind just tears people down. That is why there should be a camp “no put down rule” in place. If everyone at camp is equal then it creates a level playing field for interacting and developing relationships.

Learning to care about other people is also an important value that can be acquired at camp. This can be expressed through a camp story about warm fuzzies and cold pricklies, and how caring people should only pass out warm fuzzies which are words of encouragement or compliments and not cold pricklies which are put downs. At camp

these camp stories serve as examples of behaviors that should be followed throughout camp. Everyone should be passing out warm fuzzies to each other, which is a great example of campers caring about others. It is also a creative way to tell campers about the no put down rule that helps to create psychological safety. Caring for others at a camp for children with disabilities and/or serious illness is important because it helps campers place more value on themselves and less importance on their disability or illness.

The value of responsibility and integrity can be enhanced in campers in many different ways. One way is through campers making cabin rules. By allowing campers to make and decide on the cabin rule, they are creating ownership in those rules, which should lead to standing up for them and being responsible for them. Responsibility also comes when counselors talk to campers about the responsibility of keeping camp clean. Since the camp environment is a part of nature and was clean when they arrived at camp they should keep camp future campers. A flag ceremony that involves stories about the American flag and what it stands for can help instill a sense of national and patriotic responsibility in campers. Cabin chat also helps to build on integrity and responsibility since campers share and think about the events of the day and how they acted. Campers have to stand up for their actions and take responsibility for them. This makes them want to work hard the next day to do better.

Another value, honesty, is an important part of camp. Without it there is a lack of trust, and without that trust, it becomes very hard to develop positive relationships. Teamwork also breaks down without a sense of honesty and trust. Yet total honesty at a camp for children with disabilities and/or serious illness is a fine line. Counselors need to be honest with their campers, but the whole truth can sometimes be very harmful to a

camper's psychological safety. A camp for children with disabilities and/or serious illness is a place for them to have fun, try new things, and not have to worry about their disability or disease; that is why total honesty may not be helpful sometimes. An example of this is a counselor asking two campers that have hemophilia to stop rough housing before one of them gets hurt, because a bruise could lead to internal bleeding, which could put the camper at serious health risk. That could be very harmful to a camper and how he or she feels about his or her illness.

### *Skill building*

Camp is all about skill building and trying new things. One part of constructive skill building at camp is developing activities that are fun, exciting, interesting and challenging. That means developing programs that include many different activities. This allows for returning campers to try new things each year and not get bored with activities, because they participated in the same activities in previous years. This may mean doing finger painting with young campers, leather bracelets with the middle group of campers, and pottery with the older campers. This challenge and variety could also be provided at the pool and with court sports, by just trying different games. Yet some activities are hard to change, such as archery and fishing. To allow for continual skill building in these activities for all campers archery could increase the distance to the target for older campers. In fishing, campers could start out with bamboo poles; as the campers return and get older they can move to rod and reels and fishing off of a boat instead of fishing off of a dock. At a camp for children with disabilities and/or serious illness, inclusion is very important to skill building; a disability or illness should not limit a camper from participating in an activity or building a skill.

A second part to constructive skill building at camp is through encouragement and celebrating achievements. This creates a supportive relationship with campers and counselors and empowers the campers to try activities and programs, which leads to skill building for campers in those activities. This also helps with a camper's self-esteem.

### *Positive identity*

Self-esteem is a critical part of positive identity and is based on worthiness and competence. One way to help with this is the rule about "no put downs". If that is followed and the camp stays with a positive tone, by passing out warm fuzzies, it should be very helpful for the campers' self-esteem. Stories during inspiration time, that are uplifting and talk about people that have overcome the odds, can also help with self-esteem. Also campers and counselors celebrating campers' achievements in programs, as mentioned above, should help with self-esteem as well. This can be related to what was mentioned in skill building: activities should be challenging and allow campers to succeed.

Personal power can also be improved at camp. Since campers are away from their families they do not have the same help that they may be used to, which may cause them to become more independent. Also by allowing campers to choose some of the activities in which they want to participate in allows them to have greater control over what happens to them. The same thing is also true about allowing campers to make the cabin rules. Counselors are allowing campers to have greater control.

Sense of purpose is a topic that can be discussed in cabin chat. In a camp for children with disabilities and/or serious illness, a sense of purpose is important as a driving force for these types of campers. It is important for counselors to communicate to

the campers that there are no limits to a sense of purpose, not even disability or illness, and that they can contribute to something greater than themselves.

### *Conclusion*

The youth developmental assets discussed throughout the paper are not silos unto themselves, but are part of an intertwined network that together create positive youth development. Safety is a very important part of empowerment, and psychological safety is helped by supportive relationships; positive values such as caring helps to build supportive relationships. Also a camp for children with serious illness and/or disabilities should have programming that is very similar to any other camp, and it should be connected through the youth development assets discussed.

More research still needs to take place. The recommendations above for helping build a strong youth developmental knowledge base for a new camp that is for children with serious illness and/or disabilities are a starting point. Each camp should adapt its own programming to meet the needs of its campers. Then there is a need for research to be done on how different parts of camp affect different developmental assets, which would be more specific than the research done which states that camp in a general sense helps build positive youth developmental assets in campers.

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