



GRANT REPORT ON CAMP DREAMCATCHER'S THERAPEUTIC AND EDUCATIONAL SESSION

Our 20th Therapeutic and Educational Camp Session was held August 23-29, 2015. The program served 117 HIV/AIDS impacted youth between the ages of 5-17, and 14 young adults, between the ages of 18-25. 85% of the campers were African American, 10% Latino/Latina and 5% Caucasian. 96% of the campers come from low-income households and most do not have access to free therapeutic and educational programs in their own communities. 35% of the children served are HIV/AIDS infected themselves and 65% have an HIV/AIDS infected family member or have lost a family member to an AIDS related complication. 65% of the children and counselors have been attending our programs for 8-20 years. The campers came from PA, DE, NJ, NY, VA and MD. 241 counselors, medical personnel, professionals and community members volunteered for the session.

The following Program Goals were achieved during the camp session:

- To improve the physical and emotional health of the children. The strategies offered to achieve this goal include a variety of therapeutic modalities provided during the week and at weekend retreats. For example, 64 therapeutic sessions (psychotherapy, music therapy, art therapy, sessions with our therapeutic dog, yoga, acupuncture, mindfulness meditation and massage) were offered during the camp week. 14 therapists facilitated sessions during the camp week.
- To offer educational sessions that explore issues, problems and concerns common amongst HIV/AIDS infected and/or affected youth. During the camp session, 50 age appropriate educational sessions were offered on depression, HIV/AIDS, grief, body changes, body image, sexuality, abuse, addiction, conflict resolution, anger management, puberty education and suicide prevention. New programs included those facilitated by the **Adolescent Awareness Foundation, Minding your Mind** and the **Chester County Public Defender's Office**.
- To increase HIV medication adherence. One of the most challenging issues we face is the low rate of compliance with HIV medications, which research has indicated to be as low as 29-41%. Group sessions to explore this issue are offered during the camp session and weekend retreats.
- To increase knowledge about HIV/AIDS and to explore attitudes and values regarding this issue. The strategies offered to achieve this goal include our counselor training, HIV/AIDS education and outreach to schools and community groups and presentations by our Teen Speaker's Bureau and our Leaders in Training program participants.
- To give the children and adolescents attending our programs the chance to feel free from the secret of HIV/AIDS and have fun – just like any other kids! During the camp week, we offered 140 recreational programs. These included swimming, basketball, lacrosse, arts/crafts, fishing, moon bounces, concerts, dodge ball, go-kart racing, canoeing, archery, visits from a local pet store and our annual dance and talent show. New programs included a science program from the **Franklin Institute**, a production of the *Wizard of Oz* with the **Hedgerow Theatre**, a visit from **Alpacas on the Go** and the return of the much loved **horseback riding program!**

The following quotes were taken from the 2015 camper evaluations and illustrate the positive impact the session has on the children:

"Camp Dreamcatcher is like a dream that I never want to wake up from." – 12-year girl

"Camp Dreamcatcher helps me with my problems and help me to take my medicine and it's fun."

"It's so nice to feel not alone." 10-year-old girl

"I think Camp Dreamcatcher is important because it helps a lot of people including me express their feelings." 11-year-old girl

"I feel like I can be myself." 13-year-old girl

"I had somebody I can talk to and learned that I'm always going to be perfect just the way I am."

"I know that I'm not the only person living with this disease."

"It is easier to take medication at Camp Dreamcatcher because I see other people take medicine too."

"It is important to have a place like Camp Dreamcatcher because you should know you are not alone."

"You don't get bullied or laughed at for expressing yourself everyone is welcomed at Camp Dreamacatcher. I feel safe and comfortable. I feel you can learn about yourself at Camp and feel included."

"I have learned how to turn the negative things about me into a positive learning experience."

"I receive love at Camp Dreamcatcher."

"It's important to have a place like Camp because it gives you a break from what you do at home and gives you surprises. I feel taken care of. I like that we are different colors." 6 year-old

"My dad is in jail and I was able to talk about him not being around. I learned that you need to be respectful. Camp Dreamcatcher is a great place because there is no other place like it."

"Before I came to camp I felt nervous because I didn't know what the people here would be like but then I was sad to go. It is easier to talk about my feelings and problems here because more people can look at you and you can talk about anything. People understand you at Camp Dreamcatcher."

"My sister is HIV positive and it was helpful to learn about the HIV. I love Camp Dreamcatcher."