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AT Camp
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Point





On a hot summer day, the waterfront on Lake Abenaki is the place to be.

BY Anne Richter Arnold PHOTOS BY Jim Mauchly/Mountain Graphics

Camp Exclamation Point

CREATING MAGIC IN KIDS' LIVES

For many of us, summer camp evokes fond memories of exciting experiences and warm, fun-filled days. It can be transformative—perhaps a child's first time away from home, as well as a time when we learn what we can do, face personal challenges, and feel the joy of success.

For campers at Camp Exclamation Point, Inc. (CAMP!), the experience is life changing. This one-week residential program held at Camp Farnsworth in Thetford was created to empower underserved rural Vermont kids. Most of the campers are entering grades three to eight, along with a few older campers participating in a Teen Leadership Program.



Clockwise from top left: Staff teach woodworking skills as campers help construct the week-ending carnival. Sturdy tents at Camp Farnsworth. Hair braiding. Fun with feathers. Making tie-dye shirts at the ever-popular art room. Camper lending a helping hand . . . or two!

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CHANGING CHILDREN'S LIVES

Managing Director Scott Moore sees this one week as an essential way to create a better life for these special kids. “The campers have limited opportunities for an experience like a residential summer camp because of a lack of financial resources, rural isolation, and disruption of life and education. Many of their families are involved with agriculture and move often to follow available work. Because of that, they may be on the edges and not as mainstream as other children. Can you imagine living today without electricity or running water? Sadly, some of our campers live in situations like that.”

Scott continues, “We also seek out children currently enrolled in the Vermont Migrant Education Program. Our program originated when the Vermont Migrant Education Program discontinued its original summer-camp program. A number of that staff decided to create a volunteer-run program to continue providing the same support to children. This became Camp Exclamation Point.”

Potential campers are referred from the Vermont Migrant Ed program, school guidance counselors, and social service organizations. Once a camper has been invited to attend, he or she can keep coming back each year until they age out of the program. CAMP! also welcomes their siblings when they reach camper age, which can be a great help to parents.

OPENING DOORS AND DISCOVERING LIFELONG INTERESTS

As program director, Eric Thomas seeks to find ways to build self-confidence. “Our programs offer a breadth of experiences that can enrich a camper’s life and help them grow. At camp, they may try something, say an art activity, that they might be reluctant to do in school. They can learn to paddle a canoe, which could be a limited option for them otherwise. We teach them to swim so they can be safe around water. We encourage them to learn about the natural world and to be a good steward of the environment. Our staff members bring a wealth of talents to camp, and they delight in sharing them with our campers. An introduction to these things can open doors for them later in life and help them discover a lifelong interest.”





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— Eric Thomas, program director



Clockwise from top left: (From left) Head Counselor Lindsay Mitchell, Managing Director Scott Moore, and Program Director Eric Thomas. There are always interesting insects to observe in the Nature Room. Swimming lessons are an important part of the program. Campers and staff revel in the sometimes goofy fun of CAMP!



CAMP! DRIVING PRINCIPLES

Community: To provide a safe and welcoming environment for kids to be kids, where good citizenship is modeled and encouraged.

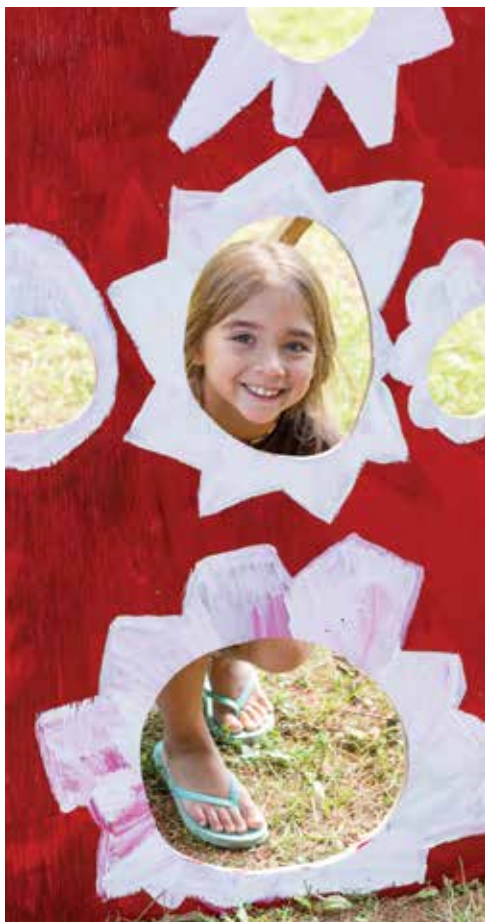
Continuity: To create a stable and rewarding experience that our campers enjoy returning for each summer and to make this experience available to their brothers and sisters.

Choices: To empower children to make meaningful personal decisions, learn responsibility, and build self-esteem.

Core: To offer a program of experiences and activities in art and music, natural science, physical activity, water safety, nutrition and hygiene, and literacy.



Clockwise from top left: T-shirt styling in the Dining Hall. A CAMP! fortune-teller. One of the many games at carnival.



Scott believes the programming is key to the camp's success. "I think that this is part of the beauty and magic that is Camp Exclamation Point. We offer a Core Program that all campers experience every year. Each camper will take a class (which we call Choices) in art, nature, and swimming lessons. We sing songs every day, multiple times a day, so that they experience music. We have been graciously granted a visit from the Children's Literacy Foundation (CLF) every year for multiple years. Because of this, every camper gets to take home a couple of books each summer, and some of the kids might never have had a book to call their own."

MEMORABLE AND MEANINGFUL

Professional storytellers Simon Brooks, Odds Bodkins, and Angela Klinger come year after year to donate a night of storytelling for the kids. The staff of 85 volunteers brings programming of their own choice. The kids are always able to learn something new, from archery, origami, and magic to tap dancing, bottle rockets, bread making, and basketball.

Many campers come back and become a part of the leadership team. Eric says, "It is tremendous to see kids go from being campers to participating in the Teen Leadership Program to becoming Junior Counselors and then staff members who return year after year. They want to give



back to the community that means so much to them. We now have two former campers on our Board of Directors. It has been wonderful to see CAMP! have this impact on people.”

Scott has two goals for the campers. “I want them to discover a sense of self-worth that they might not have and to help them build self-confidence. The other goal is to teach them that they have choices in life. Often children in our population feel like they don’t get much of a choice. We try to instill in them that life gives them information; it is what they do with that information that matters. We use Choice Theory by William Glasser in our interactions with the kids. We try to teach them to self-evaluate, so

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Juggling is just one of many skills campers can be introduced to.

“Camp is magic. Take a group of people and unite them with the goal of creating an environment where everyone is loved and accepted, where they truly enjoy each other’s company, and you can’t help but create magic. Where else can you make a difference in the life of a child?”

— Scott Moore, managing director

that the behaviors they choose help get them the results they are looking to achieve.”

Eric says, “If nothing else, we want our campers to have had a wonderful week at camp. This is a time for them to have fun, to try new things, to grow as individuals, and to make new friends. We want this to be a memorable and meaningful moment in their

lives, something that they will look forward to coming back for and something that will impact them positively as they grow into adulthood.”

Scott agrees and adds, “The only cost to campers’ families is a \$30 registration fee. The real cost of CAMP! is funded each year by generous grants and donations from foundations and individuals.” ←



To see more photos, visit www.hereinhanover.com.

For more information about Camp Exclamation Point or to make a donation, go to www.campexclamationpoint.org.



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