

CAMP WINNATASKA

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2018 Summer Summary

Ann Pickens
Summer Camp Director

Overview

Camp Winnataska Board of Directors,

Winnataska has had an amazing centennial anniversary. I was proud to see our summer of camping go so well as we were looking back on the impact of 100 years of Christian camping at its best. My hope is that every camper who walked through our gates left with a renewed sense of being and purpose in the world. In addition to this summer's campers, we as an organization took the time on July 4th to celebrate this tradition and legacy. Our day was well spent thanking God for our past century, enjoy the fruits of that work, and dreaming about the next 100 years.

I would like to thank the board for your hard work this year. Our summer program would never be successful without your support and encouragement. I am consistently amazed at how Winnataska succeeds due to the contributions from various corners of the camp family. I firmly believe that we offer a unique experience when compared with other summer camps, and that is due in large part to the rooted in the community that we have created over the past 100 years. I have never been prouder of our camp family than on the Saturday morning of second week. My staff and weekly directors were physically exhausted and many of them ill, yet to the rescue came car after car of volunteers with cleaning supplies to help get the job done so that the staff could have a break and prepare for the next challenge.

It is my intention to return to Camp Winnataska for the Summer of 2019. Tricia Brice has also agreed to return as Program Director. I have thoroughly enjoyed the past two years serving as the Summer Camp Director and look forward to helping share Winnataska with a new set of campers next summer.

Follow the Gleam,

Ann Pickens
Summer Camp Director



Staff

Camp's summer college staff is the engine that drives Winnataska. This year we had fifteen Comanches and twelve Blackfeet. This staff was characterized by their teamwork and flexibility.

Achievements, successes, goals accomplished:

- Program rotations allowed staff to work in multiple programs as the summer progressed were implemented with success.
- Many of camps' extra duties were consolidated into tasks for the Hut Staff to accomplish while their cabins were in program. This allowed for program areas to have a consistent number of staff members all summer, without feeling down a person for cleaning/maintenance.
- Over 50% of the staff was certified in two areas this summer, allowing for more flexibility in scheduling.
- This staff overcame one of the greatest challenges in recent memory in dealing with the sickness that camp experienced 2nd week.

Issues, concerns, problems to be addressed:

- Winnataska relies on oral tradition to pass down many job responsibilities. Over the past 6 or 7 years we have intentionally tried to write down and formally train staff on many of these things, and as a result many program responsibilities have become more standardized from year to year; however, other staff responsibilities seem to still be dependent on oral tradition. (For example: how to execute individual night activities or specifically what staff should be doing at camp wide activities such as meal times.)
- Although we had staff certified in multiple areas, they did not all feel adequately prepared for multiple areas.
- Staff sets the tone for leaders, staff having phones gives leaders a mixed signal.
- The Blackfoot hut did not have a working toilet this summer. The boys used the gyvilion or office all summer, not out of convenience or preference – but because they could not fix their own toilet. While I know Camp Winnataska tends to believe that staff can handle their own maintenance issues, this is clearly past the skill set of the Blackfeet and we are now asking out paid staff to live without restrooms in their living quarters.



Recommendations:

1. The Summer Camp Director and Program Director need to reevaluate the content of staff training to include more of the content that has traditionally been passed down orally from staff to staff. Also the staff winter training and pre camp training need to be reevaluated in light of multiple program placements.
2. **Staff phones do not leave living quarters;** staff would follow the leader rules when they are on hut staff. Camp can purchase MP3 players for the programs that need music.
3. **Renovate or seriously repair Blackfoot hut bathroom.** The bathroom has been a problem for 20 years, it is at a point now that is an issue concerning the living conditions of our paid staff.
4. With the addition of a 7th week next summer, staff off time and rest needs to be reevaluated. **Each staff member should receive at least one if not two long weekends, rather than simply the traditional 20 hours off.**

Leaders

During the summer, over 190 leaders volunteered their time to be a leader at camp. Leaders are one of the most underappreciated and underdeveloped resources at Camp Winnataska.

Achievements, successes, goals accomplished:

- The leaders successfully transitioned this year to a system of not having their cell phones in the huts. It revolutionized leader/camper interactions as well as created a more engaging social experience for the leaders as they did not have devices to retreat to in their free time in the cabin. Multiple leaders approached directors throughout the summer to note how surprised they were that they liked being unattached to their phones for the week. The success and importance of this new system cannot be overstated.
- Having Hut Staff be more present in the huts resulted in fewer instances of bad decisions being made by the hut leaders. We had fewer incidents of leaders needed to be disciplined or even gently corrected this summer than we have had in past summers, and I full-heartedly believe this is due to having an experienced older staff member more present every time campers were in the cabin.



Issues, concerns, problems to be addressed:

- Our boy leader numbers saw a slight decline this year.
- The gap between Leadership training and actual camp sessions creates inefficiency in our training system. High school students are not retaining or taking seriously the topics covered in March because the summer feels and is so far removed from reality at that point. We also are unable to physically train the group in many elements of camp because camp is not physically ready at that point in the off season (for instance we cannot teach them to paddle a canoe or use equipment that is stored in winter storage).
- With schedules that seem to be becoming busier, leaders have a hard time attending training weekends. The make-up training is rushed and not as adequate.

Recommendations:

1. **Have a refresher or crash course leader training again just prior to camp.** It is logistically impossible to cover all of the information needed for leaders in a one day session, however bringing leaders back for a few reminders just as camp is starting would hopefully get them focused and remind them of the things that were discussed during the longer training weekend.
2. **Require all employees and volunteers to complete an element of online training** regarding issues such as harassment and sexual abuse. ACA offers a platform for this.
3. Emphasize recruiting boy leaders through high schools and churches, using camp alumni and friends as a resource. Many of our best male leaders come as recommendations from camp alumni. This targeting recruiting has helped in the past, but we need to stay vigilant.

Parents and Campers

Winnataska hosted over 1,400 campers this summer. Most of our campers hailed from Birmingham, although a large number came from Huntsville and the greater Atlanta area as well. Parent interaction begins months before summer arrives; much of the parents' camp experience revolves around our online presence and registration experience.

Achievements, successes, goals accomplished:

- Hut Staff being present in cabins made an amazing impact in just one year. Camper discipline problems plummeted. In 2017, there was at least one discipline issue a week that the Weekly Directors need to consult with the Camp Director. Having staff there as a preventative measure, able to address potential problems and mentor the leaders in dealing with hut dynamics, lowered the instances of serious behavior issues.
- New camper cell phone policy went smoothly and ensured better camper safety and privacy than we have had in past summers. There was one incident requiring a camper to be sent home for possessing a phone, and the parent was fully supportive of the policy and noted that it had been well communicated throughout the spring and summer.
- The second year of having between 4 and 8 of the oldest boy campers from the Seminole hut each week to help with the large age gap that is often present in that hut. It continued to result in fewer instances of older campers creating awkward situations for younger campers. The campers and leaders did better with the dynamics of a partially split Seminole/Pueblo as it has now become the norm rather than a novelty

Issues, concerns, problems to be addressed:

- The daily pictures continue to be one of the most valuable ways to communicate with parents. Winnataska faces a common problem, in that many parents expect to be able to see their child every day on these photos that are intended to be a cross-section of camp.
- Multiple times every summer we have unknown visitors drive on to camp property. This is a major camper safety concern. This summer we had an unknown vehicle drive in and to Mainside. The trespasser went in a bathhouse before we were able to catch up with the car. Our PSs, staff, directors, and Mark did exactly what should have been done and we still were reacting to something that could have been easily prevented.



Recommendations:

1. Investigate templates for a more narrative update from camp to parents everyday that would potentially include fewer photos but more information.
2. **The front gate needs to be locked when campers are present.** It will be frustrating to camp personnel and delivery vehicles, but camper safety should be a priority.

Program Areas

The staff worked hard to keep the campers happy while learning new things. Most days, the huts rotated through 7 periods. Each Program Specialist felt that they were able to build upon the successes of past years and in addition, add some new and exciting activities to keep campers engaged.

Achievements, successes, goals accomplished:

- Several Program Specialists (outdoors, crafts, ropes, shooting sports) worked on planning program prior to camp.
- Scavenger hunts or breakout boxes added a fun out of the normal routine for campers during Tuesday and Thursday rotations.



- The addition of laser tag guns to the half-day adventure and long canoe trip made Rushton Day a favorite for nearly all middle and older Mainside campers.
- Crafts created a schedule with multiple crafts each day this summer; the result was more campers engaged for the entire time they were at the craft hut. Older boys loved being able to build benches. Older boys also went to crafts fewer times this summer, which helped address some of their boredom with the program.
- Ropes created a more balanced program this year, bringing back a focus on character building through challenge elements that had been absent in previous summers.
- Shooting sports continued to excel this summer at scaffolding their activities, slowly building and adding skills as the week progressed.

- Birthday night was a huge success this year. Campers LOVED getting to dress up as 100 year olds and take part in the "old people" dance party.

Issues, concerns, problems to be addressed:

- Male campers continue to finish many planned crafts early and many do not show interest in additional projects.
- Older campers would like more of a challenge or additional activities in several program areas. This is something we strive for every year, but intentional planning for each age group needs to continue to be a priority.
- Outdoors continues to rank low on camper surveys. The mud course in Outdoors is beginning to bore campers who have attended for multiple years, it is not exciting for many prior campers.

Recommendations:

1. **Create stem kits and wood-working projects for male huts' crafts.** The addition of robotics or engineering kits would fit neatly into the structure of the craft program and appeal to many campers who currently are disengaged in this program.
2. **Extend the use of laser tag equipment beyond Rushton Day.** Laser tag could be integrated into other programs for the younger and middle and cabins at least once a week and continue an option during several other more advanced options for older campers such as longer horseback rides and paddling trips.
3. **Create "ninja warrior" style elements for the mud course.** This would refresh the mud course and help build excitement in the Outdoors program.
4. **Retool how the Breakout Boxes logistically work.** The general concept was fun, but the locks did not stand up well against the humidity and wear/tear of kids trying incorrect combinations.
5. **Offer more camper choices.** I do think exposure to all the activities is very worthwhile, but I also think that campers need to be able to choose some of their activities. I know we have tried this in the past with little success, but we need to continue to research how other camps accomplish this.
6. **The open field where the gym stood needs to be utilized.** Most people agree having the open green space has been a lovely addition to camp, we need to capitalize on it by flattening out the space to make it truly usable. The central location would create a wonderful field for games. The addition of permanent lights would make it a key piece of night activities and allow for more creativity in our night activity programing.

