



2019 Summer Summary

Ann Pickens
Summer Camp Director

Overview

Camp Winnataska Board of Directors,

Thank you for your hard work this year. Camp would not be what it is today without the love and support (and money and sweat) of our volunteers and you set the standard for that. We are at a point of excellence. Our camps have been consistently sold out for half a decade, our program and policy changes have been thoughtful and implemented with great intention over the past few years. Our campers and staff seem to be thriving. I believe Winnataska is rock steady and has created a base to be ready to for some exciting new things in the next few years.

I personally would like to thank Camp for the opportunity to serve as Summer Camp Director for the past four years. It has been one of the greatest honors of my life. I am thrilled about moving into the super-involved volunteer role and watching Aubrey Huynh thrive in her new position.

Follow the Glean,

Ann Pickens
Summer Camp Director



Staff

Camp's summer college staff is the backbone of Winnataska. This year we had twenty-two Comanches and eleven Blackfeet. This staff was characterized by their efficiency and responsibility.

Achievements, successes, goals accomplished:

- Staff phones were less present this summer, although still not entirely absent for program.
- Hut Staff responsibilities were adjusted as the summer progressed, allowing for more work to be accomplished during the day alleviating the need for staff to be working late at night after campers
- Having a larger staff allowed for more adequate responses to staffing emergencies. In particular as leaders went home sick one week, we were able to shuffle staff to cover camper supervision.

Issues, concerns, problems to be addressed:

- 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 bathroom did have working plumbing this summer; however, the work in the hut couldn't be completed by the staff when they arrived because the grout in the bathroom couldn't dry in the humidity. The staff stayed up until 2 and 3 am many nights of pre-camp working on their bathroom trying to get it operational before camp started.
- Pogue bathrooms were unusable at several points this summer. As we continue to grow and add positions around camp, this building needs to be able to house multiple adults.



Recommendations:

1. The Summer Camp Director and Program Director need to reevaluate the content of staff training to try and 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.
3. **Renovate or seriously repair Blackfoot hut bathroom.** While some effort was made by the Blackfeet during pre-camp this summer, it was too little too late to make a major change. This needs to be done during a time when the weather will allow for it to dry.
4. In addition to the one long off weekend, **staff need a day or two off from program** at another point in the summer.
5. **The Pogue bathroom needs to be in full working order** if we are to continue to house Program Specialists and babysitters there.

Leaders

During the summer, over 170 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:

- We had more leaders attend ropes training this year, which allowed for more Special Leaders in the program as the summer progressed. Having individuals learn that program for several years creates more confident staff members in the future.
- We continued to have a low number of incidents in the huts this summer. I full-heartedly believe this is due to having hut staff members present every time campers were in the cabin.



Issues, concerns, problems to be addressed:

- 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.
- The issue of leaders cancelling or not showing up for weeks increased this summer. This matches a general trend in our society of an inability to commit to plans, however in our case the result often means scrambling for a solution and shifting staff to cover gaps.

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. **Implement a policy for girl leaders that ties subsequent weeks to zero cancellations.** If a leader will all the assigned weeks of their summer when they back out of a week it will help them take more seriously their scheduling of weeks at camp.

Parents and Campers

Winnataska hosted over 1,600 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 continued to make an amazing. 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.
- Pulling between 4 and 8 of the oldest boy campers from the Seminole hut each week continued to result in fewer instances of older campers created 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:

- While parents love daily pictures, more parents are requesting to see their child "doing something" rather than simply sitting at canteen
- At two separate points this summer there was a communication breakdown between Ann, Mark, and the nurses. In both instances, adults nearest the situation had begun emergency protocol without clear communication to the rest of camp.
- Multiple times every summer we have unknown visitors drive on to camp property. This is a major camper safety concern. 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.
- The Pueblo bathroom is unusable. Having this space for oldest male campers has been key in disciplinary issues; however, without a working bathroom it is hard to put campers in the building.
- In weeks of intense rain, many camper belongings never really dry out.



Recommendations:

1. Look at templates for a more narrative update from camp to parents every day that would potentially include fewer photos but more information.
2. Susan Thorington, Aubrey Huynh, and the new camp doctor need to **review all safety protocol and communicate expectations** to the rest of camp regarding response chain and communication guidelines.
3. **The front gate needs to be locked when campers are present. Another solution is an automatic gate with the ability for the Camp Office, Health Hut, Aubrey, and Mark to open the gate remotely.** It will be frustrating to camp personnel and delivery vehicles to deal with the new system, but camper safety should be a priority.
4. **Pueblo's bathroom needs to be renovated.** This entire building has some serious disrepair issues, but the bathroom is the worst.
5. **Build covered drying lines to help with dampness in huts.**



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:

- Moving the laser tag equipment to shooting sports range full time, rather than at Rushton gave that program area a fun new element.
- Crafts created a STEM day for younger campers with rotations based around building things that taught various scientific principles. The campers (and Chico Directors) love it.
- Several nights (specifically Sunday and Wednesday) were greatly enhanced by the addition of lights to the Stockham Field.
- The improved mud course was huge hit with all age groups.
- Camp Race was successful, I would love to see it adjusted and have new activities added, as well as possibly some type of prize/trophy that became more of a treasured tradition.



Issues, concerns, problems to be addressed:

- Creating more camper choice in programming would be advantageous, there is no need for every camper to attend every program every day.
- 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.

Recommendations:

1. **Create wood-working projects for male huts' crafts.** The addition of wood-working would fit neatly into the structure of the craft program and appeal to many campers who currently are disengaged in this program.
2. **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.

3. **New totem poles at Indian Night site.** Our current totem poles are rotting away, this could be a great Eagle Scout project.
4. **Water at high ropes and Rushton.** Campers love these more remote locations of camp; however, we spend hundreds of hours of labor through the summer getting drinking water to these spots. Extending water lines to these locations would be ideal.

5. **Add mountain biking to Outdoors programming.** This seems like a natural way to get campers out and moving a bit more, with a little work we could designate different age appropriate trails.

6. **Build tent platforms at Rushton.** This could be a great Eagle Scout project.

7. **Ropes training needs to be conducted with someone from outside the camp family.** Bringing in someone from out of the camp family will help keep the training focused and the tone serious.



8. **Build a new Grail throne and benches.**
9. **Consider expanding the horse contract to include more horses.** During extreme heat the horses have a harder time working, having a few more horses would allow for the horses to have off days during those heat waves and result in camp not have to shut down the program as often.
10. **Better shelving in the Craft Hut.** With more campers, the storage in the Craft Hut is maxed out, building additional shelving units on the concrete outside of the proper hut would be ideal.