

SMOKE SIGNALS

CAMP OTY'OKWA
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Ohio

Summer 2017

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Another Reason for Children to Attend Camp...

Although I know that camp makes a real difference for all children, it is still exciting to see new research appearing that affirms programs like ours can have a significant impact. The Search Institute has recently published results of their work done with the Student Conservation Association. SCA is a nonprofit organization that recruits children and young adults to participate in programs that restore natural and cultural resources. Participants in the SCA spend time out-of-doors and in the woods working closely together for days at a time. They work on conservation projects and learn how to care for their environment. Through this work parks, natural areas, rivers, lakes and even urban environments are improved and enhanced. However, improvement and enhancement is not limited to just the land. The Search Institute also discovered that the relationships that developed between the youth and their adult leaders as they went about this work led to significant social emotional gains for the youth. Children involved in the SCA, having strong developmental relationships with their leaders, were **2X more likely to show significant gains in:**

Goal Orientation: setting & actively working towards goal

Teamwork: thinking & acting collaboratively

Social Responsibility: considering & actively helping meet the needs of others

Transcendent Awareness: awareness of the interdependence of living things

Stretch: openness to challenge

The parallels between the SCA and the program at Camp Oty'Okwa are numerous. Campers live in the woods for an extended time with other children their own age. Each small cabin group has two camp counselors who live with the group during their entire stay at camp. The group works together, plays together and close bonds develop among the children and between the children and their counselors. While discovery and learning are key elements in the camp experience, so too is caring for the natural environment and caring for others. For those of us who are fortunate enough to work in the camp environment, the findings of the Search Institute are not surprising. We experience these same results each time the children jump off the bus and crowd into the Activity Center to receive their cabin assignment. These results are measured in the outcome surveys the children complete after each stay at camp. This is camp, or more specifically, the Magic of Camp Oty'Okwa. This Magic helps children learn new skills, become more confident, heal from past trauma, understand differences and grow into healthy young adults ready to contribute to our community.

Many thanks to everyone who supported in any manner to make the Magic of Camp Oty'Okwa available to our children this past summer. Without your help, the opportunity for growth leading to positive outcomes does not exist. With your support, there is no limit to what can be achieved by those who experience our camp's programs.

*-David Schirner
Camp Director*



Samantha Ashton, from the United Kingdom, and Armando Polizzi, a local recruit from Ohio Wesleyan University both shared their experiences and talent with campers this summer.

BRITISH INVASION

As the number of children attending summer camp has grown in recent years, so has the need to hire additional staff members. For the most part, summer camp counselors are recruited from local colleges and universities and are those individuals who have an interest in working with children after graduation. However, we also look to collaborate with organizations such as Camp Leaders and Camp America to find counselors from around the world. Over the years, we have hired counselors who call Brazil, Indonesia and Spain home. This past summer we were able to recruit nine international counselors, all from the United Kingdom, to be a part of our summer program and work with our children.

The international staff recruitment program is a true benefit to the summer experience. Campers are able to explore various topics with people that come from different cultures. Younger campers

notice the differences in language; while everyone may be speaking English, the different dialects are obvious. Older campers note cultural differences and learn the value of diversity. The children pick up on traits they learn from their counselors and it is not uncommon for campers to return home talking like their counselor! This has been a critical aspect to the summer program for a few years and the nine counselors from the U.K. this past summer were able to help campers learn and grow.

Not only do the children benefit from this experience, the counselors benefit as well. The international staff members gain understanding from our campers' experiences, developing a world of stronger and more empathetic people. The entire summer camp staff grew from the cultural exchange too, as they spend the entire summer together. Overall, this program has been a huge success as a part of the Camp Oty'Okwa summer.



2017 SUMMER HIGHLIGHTS



GIRLS ONLY SESSION

Thanks to our annual fundraiser, Golf for Girls' Sake, and several community leaders, we were able to again offer a **girls only session** in 2017. This summer's session focused on empowering young girls with leadership training, hands on life skills, and prospective future career options for young women. We hosted a variety of female community leaders in various careers: among the volunteers were a carpenter, pilot, travel agent, paleontologist, Zumba instructor, attorney, mixed media artists and a STEM educator. A consistent benefit of the week is the increased participation from the girls!

CAMP LIONHEART

We once again hosted Camp Lionheart, a week-long session **for children who have suffered the traumatic loss** of a guardian or sibling. This summer was our largest yet, with 55 campers! In addition to daily grief therapy workshops provided by on-site professional grief counselors, the campers also get to just be a kid and participate in fun camp activities like campfires, a big game of "capture the mattress," luau, talent show, and a dance.





EDUCATION

at Camp Oty'Okwa

To keep campers engaged and curious, it is important that Camp Oty'Okwa provides new and interesting topics. We are continually leveraging partnerships and augmenting programming to address the issue of summer learning loss. We would like to express our gratitude to the many volunteers and funders who support our efforts!

LITERACY

We are proud of our ongoing partnership to provide a literacy session with Springfield Promise Neighborhood, The Wilson Sheehan Foundation and Lincoln Elementary in Springfield, Ohio.

Safelite Auto Glass sponsored an additional literacy week this summer. Highland Elementary and other Columbus City Schools students attended the 5 day experience, for many their first camp experience!

The literacy programming encouraged counselors and campers to share and explore a book together.

The books used this year were *My Side of the Mountain*, *Julie of the Wolves*, *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, and *The Hunger Games*.

Each book included a young protagonist who found him or herself in a dangerous situation in the wild. Some had direct parallels with the environment at Camp Oty'Okwa.

Each chapter of each book was supplemented by a hands-on activity or discussion question. These activities and questions were designed to help integrate the book into the daily routine of each cabin group. If the campers were reading about building a shelter to brave the oncoming winter in *My Side of the Mountain*, they could practice building their own shelters together at camp.

SCIENCE

This year's week-long science camp session at Camp Oty'Okwa was filled with excitement. Twenty-three campers from all over Ohio engaged in hands-on scientific lessons during each of the seven days of their trip.

Campers started their week learning about geology and archeology. Each took home a collection of fossils and rocks, including a unique geode. On the second day of lessons, they entered the amazing world of insects, followed by a workshop on propagation and gardening.

Campers were able to design and build their own insects, and take home-propagated plants. The next day focused on how trees use leaves to help them grow, exploring the science of thermal energy.

Safe sun-viewing and herbal salves made up the next day of lessons. Each camper left with solar glasses to prepare for the eclipse that fell on August 21st this year as well as a jar of salve for burns or scrapes.

The second to last day was split between yoga and scuba diving, exploring different systems of the body. The final day of science camp this year was dedicated to making cheese, always a favorite. Throughout the week, the campers had the opportunity to build aquatic robots through a grant-funded program known as SeaPerch. They learned how to measure, cut, solder, and build electrical components.



Camp also began efforts to incorporate more environmental education into the general summer programming. Using lessons and methods from the *Coyote's Guide to Connecting to Nature*, counselors and the environmental education AmeriCorps member at Camp Oty'Okwa helped campers explore the rich 737-acre "classroom."

Camp has plans to get even more environmental educators engaged in the summer programming next year, ensuring more campers leave with a deeper understanding of and respect for the nature world.

YOUTH CLIMATE ACTION TEAM

The Youth Climate Action Team (YCAT) finished their first term earlier this year. Each school began a project to make their communities and schools a better place, using the knowledge they gained through workshops on climate change and global responsibility at Camp Oty'Okwa.

Some of these projects included a survey of community member opinions about climate change, installation of LED light bulbs to reduce energy costs, environmental education lessons for elementary students, implementation of composting programs, and many other great efforts. The high school students involved in the YCAT program, all from local southeastern Ohio area schools, take time out of their days to meet, plan, and execute these projects, showing their dedication and willingness to make the world a better place.

The YCAT project is sponsored by the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency and is carried out by a partnership between Rural Action and Camp Oty'Okwa. The students of YCAT will meet again this November for even more hands-on lessons on climate and energy science. Stay tuned for more exciting news!

PARTNER AGENCY TESTIMONIALS: THE VILLAGE NETWORK



Timmy, age 6: "Camp is really fun. They let us play a lot and I like to go swimming. I make new friends and like talking to the counselors. I learn a lot of new things at camp."

Bianca, age 12: "I like to meet new friends and to go on hikes. The counselors are fun and they help you if you are sad or feeling homesick. I like to draw and swim while I am at camp."

After many years of support from the Ohio Attorney General's office, we have been able to serve hundreds of children who have been victims of crime each year. This summer, over 400 children that attended Camp Oty'Okwa are considered victims of crime. To outreach to these children and their families we partner with several social service agencies around the state. These agencies not only refer children to the program, but also provide year-round counseling and support to the children and their families. Many, like The Village Network, work closely with our staff to ensure the best possible care for the children we serve.

Here is what The Village Network staff had to say about Camp Oty'Okwa:

"Camp has been amazing for the children we work with at The Village Network. Many of the clients that we serve have not had the privilege to leave Franklin County. Camp is a way for them to have new experiences. Camp allows the clients to connect with nature, build relationships with other people, and learn more about themselves and their world.

Johnny is 9 now, and he has been my client since he was 7. From the first time he attended camp, he was in love. He passionately loves science, and is fascinated by animals, bugs, etc. At camp, he found a place where he truly belongs. Although his peer relationships are improving, his struggle with peers was never an issue at camp. At camp, he can be himself. His treatment needs diminish! In his early camp days, he would often find a way to sneak home tadpoles or frogs. It has always been a blessing to see his face so bright and full of life at camp.

Camp Oty'Okwa allows our clients to be their authentic selves. The majority of our clients suffer from complex trauma, which means they struggle in basic settings like home, school, and community. However, when they attend camp, as clinicians, we observe a side of the clients that has been buried. Buried under the weight of the world, these children have a chance to be free. There is a sense of safety and peacefulness that camp provides. Our clients get to engage with older staff, other than their clinicians, which is beneficial for social skills. The children also do not have to worry about food or a place to sleep. Our clients are allowed the ability to bond with individuals different than themselves which encourages growth and acceptance."

WEEKEND CAMP

Year-round fun at Camp Oty'Okwa



Thanks to on-going support from the **Ohio Attorney General** and the **Foundation for Appalachia**, we are able to continue to offer year-round programming for our summer camp youth. From October 2016 to September 2017, 497 summer camp youth have attended a weekend camp session. 47 of those weekend campers were underserved youth from Hocking and Athens counties.

For example, before summer begins we host several weekend programs at camp to provide leadership training for our older teenagers. We call our mid-May weekend retreat the Junior Ranger weekend. We invite leadership teens, as well as a few younger campers to enjoy some springtime hiking and crafts. Everyone is able to enjoy an overnight campout, at which they set up tents and cook over a campfire spending lots of time in the woods bonding with their friends. This weekend continues to be a huge hit every year!



NEW FACES AT CAMP



Rick Perkins, the newest full-time member of the Camp Oty'Okwa team has a passion for education and conservation.

In the spring of 2017, Camp Oty'Okwa added a new employee to the camp staff, Rick Perkins. Rick is managing the conferences, retreats and rental groups that utilize Camp Oty'Okwa throughout the entire year. Rick joins our team after a full career with the National Park Service, working at multiple National Park Service sites from Glacier Bay National Park in Alaska to Hopewell Culture National Historic Park in Chillicothe, Ohio! In addition to his National Park Service career, Rick spent over three years in the Bahamas directing a marine biology field station on Andros Island. Rick has been a resident of Hocking County for the past 16 years, attended Hocking College and Ohio University and obtained degrees in Outdoor Education and Field Biology. Rick currently works on numerous non-profit boards, including International Field Studies and Arc of Appalachia, where he can share his passion for direct education and land preservation. Rick is married and has two girls that love visiting him at camp.

After graduating college in Louisiana, Rudi Beutner moved back to Athens, Ohio to join AmeriCorps and serve as a nutritional specialist at Camp Oty'Okwa. An Eagle Scout, former camp counselor, and outdoor enthusiast, Rudi is looking forward to expanding the camp garden, promoting healthy options, and growing our local food sourcing resources!



David Conkle is a recent graduate from Ohio University, with a degree in Outdoor Recreation and Education and is a huge J. R. R. Tolkien fan. He chose to serve as an AmeriCorps member at Camp Oty'Okwa to assist with our year-round environmental education program, and is excited to contribute to the programs and traditions.



EVENTS



75TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Camp Oty'Okwa marked a milestone on July 1, 2017 as we celebrated our 75th anniversary! Generations of camp alumni from every decade since its inception in 1942 were present to reminisce, share and see what is new! Alumni enjoyed hikes, swimming in the pool, field games, a BBQ with a group of current summer campers and live music from Megan Bee, a camp alum herself!

Thank you to volunteers Jen Reeder & Michael Burdett for giving our Visitor Center an upgrade for this event, displaying fun photos and camp history throughout the years!

SAVE THE DATE : HOLIDAYS IN THE COUNTRY

Saturday, December 9, 2017

4:30-8:30 pm

You're invited! Join us for an evening of live music, delicious food, good friends, and a chance to make a difference in a young person's life. Our annual holiday banquet will feature fun for the whole family. Bring your co-workers and friends to celebrate the season at Camp Oty'Okwa. This year's family-friendly event will include:

- Live music from Just the DJ, Audie Wykle, and Folkwood Players
- A Silent Auction featuring items from local artists and businesses
- Delicious food including appetizers, a soup & salad bar, amazing entrees, and desserts
- Optional \$5 wine tasting from Rhoads Garden Center and Ravens Glenn Winery. 6 pours of wine per ticket. Must be 21+

All proceeds from the event benefit the camper scholarship fund at Camp Oty'Okwa.

Tickets are \$30 per person or get a private table for 6 for \$225.

Register online at www.campotyokwa.org





RENTING FACILITIES

at Camp Oty'Okwa

By choosing Camp Oty'Okwa for your group's next event, you are helping support Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Ohio's youth mentoring programs! Camp Oty'Okwa facilitates the needs of your group by offering overnight lodges, dining hall facilities and meal preparation for small and large groups, including conferences, church retreats, band groups and any other special event for your group. **We can accommodate groups from 20-200+ people!**

One such group event is the Myers Running Camp, with a four-year history of using Camp Oty'Okwa. Myers Running Camp was established to help young athletes involved in track and field and cross-country to improve their techniques and overall training performance. The camp's mission is to introduce these athletes to various training methods through a "learning and training" approach to running. The past four years, Myers running camp has trained nearly 400 participants at Camp Oty'Okwa. The leaders of the group are three brothers, Rob, Ben and Chad Myers. All three are recognized as accomplished runners in the running world and enjoy the camp's **facilities and Hocking Hills location** providing several running trail options! For more information on the Myers Running camp, go to www.myersrunningcamp.com.

For more information on renting camp please visit www.campotyokwa.org.



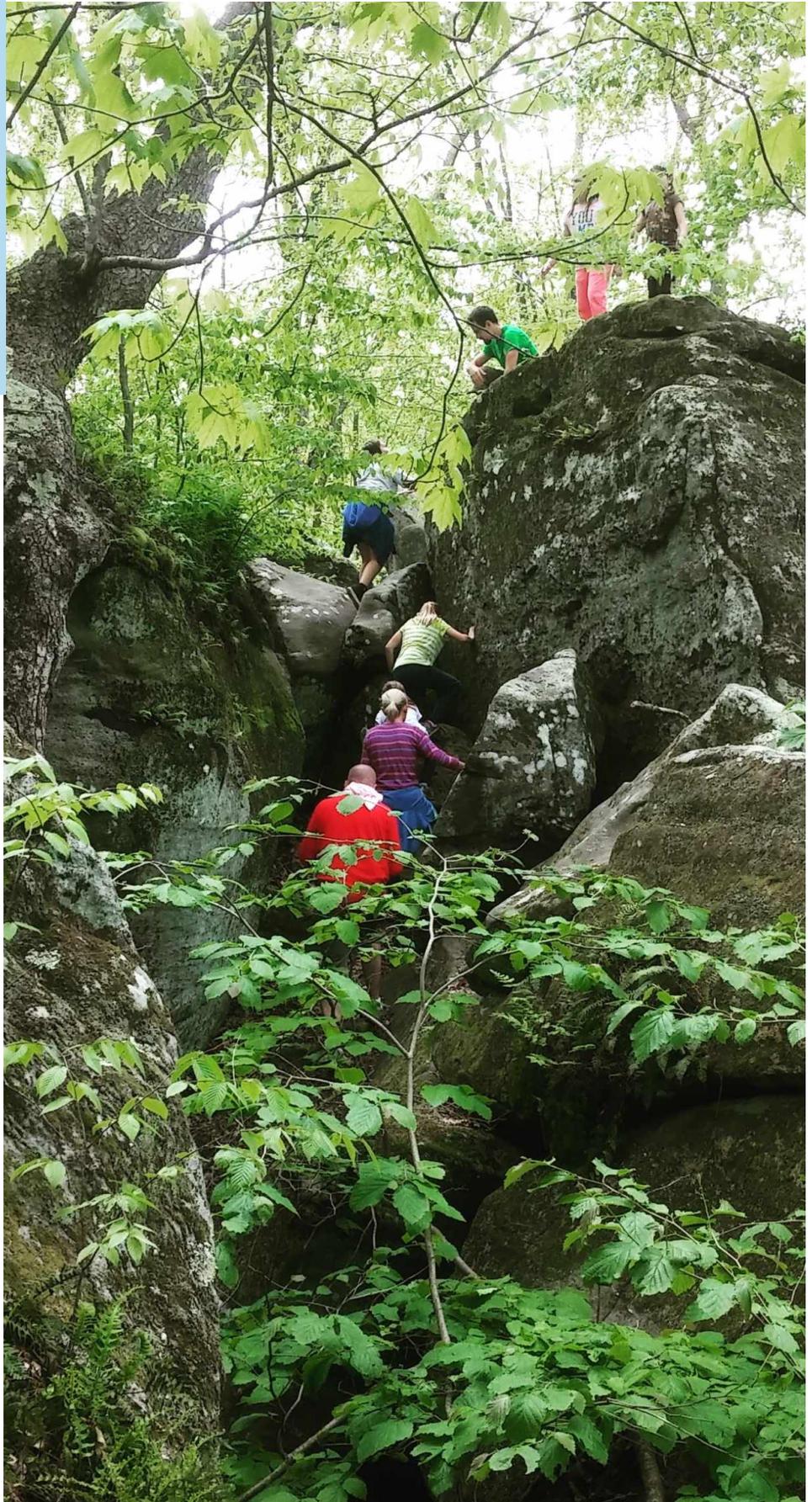
OUTDOOR CLASSROOM

a community resource

Bring your students to Camp Oty'Okwa! Or bring Camp Oty'Okwa to your school! We have a variety of year-round options to fit your programming needs.

Camp Oty'Okwa owns 737 private acres of natural classroom in the beautiful Hocking Hills in southeastern Ohio. Our environmental educational programming **meets Ohio Academic Content Standards** with experiential classes like "Survival," "Stream Ecology," and "Pioneer Living." We can adjust the curriculum for your grade level and classroom needs. Typically, schools visit us in the spring and fall, but we can also arrange winter activities and in-school experiences. The program focuses on inquiry-based learning and team-building. Our staff is ready to work with your entire classroom, provide lodging and several menu options for your dietary restriction needs.

Contact Al Marietta at amarietta@bbbscentralohio.org to discuss how we can accommodate your classroom.



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CAMP OTJ'OKWA



In 2017, our Summer Camp
Program served
over 900 deserving youth
from around the state of Ohio!

Expect to see more news from
us in the coming year!

We could not
do this work without you.
Thank you for your support!