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TOP STORY

Camp at Center for Courageous Kids fosters lifelong memories

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Campers play a game in the barn area on Tuesday, June 5, 2018, at Center for Courageous Kids. (Austin Anthony/photo@bgdailynews.com)

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Austin Anthony

SCOTTSVILLE – While many college students use the summer to relax or travel, there’s nothing Western Kentucky University senior Johnny Mollman would rather do than work as a camp counselor for the Center for Courageous Kids.

“It’s like the best job in the world,” said Mollman, who spends his summer days playing with the campers as they fish, bowl and ride horses. He likes the welcoming feel of the 168-acre camp geared toward children with serious illnesses and forming friendships with campers.

“You can do something so small and the effect is multiplied,” he said.

The summer camp schedule is heating up this week at the Center for Courageous Kids. The center offers year-round camping opportunities for seriously ill children and their families at no cost.

This week’s camp is for children with asthma and their siblings. Other camps throughout the summer are geared toward children with diabetes, physical disabilities, blood disorders and other health conditions.

The center’s campgrounds offer everything a summer camp for kids should, including a dining hall, swimming pool and lodges. What sets the camp apart is its medical center and round-the-clock medical team, which allows kids to enjoy their camp experience safely.

Sarah Keltner, the center’s communications director, said the center has worked with 30,000 kids from 45 states and 10 countries. Every game or fun activity campers participate in comes with an educational component, and with a 3-to-1 camper to counselor ratio, the kids also get to connect with their counselors.

“Our long-term goal is to impact these kids’ lives long after they leave camp,” Keltner said.

That’s true for Isaiah, a camper who’s visited the camp for five years and feels like he’s come out of his shell. The Daily News is protecting campers’ privacy by not using their last names.

“I look up to my counselors as a big brother or big sister,” Isaiah said, adding that they’ve pushed him to try new things and overcome his shyness.

He's learned to "be more courageous and to do more active things," he said.

Ruby, a younger camper who's returning for her second year, said she enjoys the camp's counselors.



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"They make me feel happy," she said.

College students come from universities across the U.S. to work as camp counselors each year.

For some, it's a chance to get experience working with kids with potentially life-threatening medical conditions before they go into child-care related careers. For others, it can be a transformative experience that motivates them to return to college and switch majors to work with kids.

Caroline Gillespie, who studies at Elon University in North Carolina, has always loved working with children but isn't sure what kind of career to choose.

“I’m hoping that this summer and this camp will help me narrow that down,” she said.

Between the variety of summer activities and the training she’s receiving in managing and understanding childhood behavior, there’s a lot to learn and enjoy.

“It’s more than just a camp,” she said. “It’s a learning experience.”

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