

ACA, Ohio Grant Program End-of-Year Report

Camp Oty'Okwa

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Camp ACA #: 1002

Overview of Program

Life Skills Camp provides workshops on various topics related to living independently as an adult. Tailored for youth and young adults aged 14-21, it provides an opportunity to attend camp while gaining practical skills for everyday life. Life Skills Camp serves youth who are in the foster care system, those too old to attend traditional camp programming, those who have been exposed to crime or trauma, and anyone else who may benefit from assistance in developing skills for living on their own. Many youth coming from challenging backgrounds and those living within the foster care system will emancipate from custody as an adult with minimal familial or other support and may lack the skills to be able to succeed on their own. The goal of this program is to enhance their learning to have the skills to be able to meet their own needs and be self-sufficient in the community as an adult.

Camp sessions consist of week-long residential camp sessions during the summer and weekend camps throughout the school year. An example camp weekend may include workshops on communicating appropriately, sewing, setting goals, basic car maintenance, cooking, creating a budget, healthy relationships, and a nature hike, and week-long summer sessions are able to include many more activities and workshops throughout the campers' time at Camp Oty'Okwa. Ideally, individual campers will attend multiple times throughout the year to continue building upon previously-learned skills and continue developing the confidence and competence to have healthy, informed, and self-sufficient lifestyles as adults.

Summary of this Year

Life Skills Camp had a successful first full year of summer and weekend camp sessions. We were able to purchase a wide variety of program supplies and materials to support workshops teaching skills for independent living to youth and young adults from all over the state. The ACA, Ohio grant made it possible to purchase a significant portion of these supplies, and the program's success was enhanced

by being granted this valuable resource during our inaugural year. We are so grateful to have had this opportunity to expand our programming at Camp Oty'Okwa and be able to support the growth of Life Skills Camp throughout the year.

Life Skills Camp served 73 youth and young adults during our 4-day to 6-day camp sessions during the summer, with 52 of those campers currently living in foster care or a group home and 67 of them identified as being exposed to some form of crime. Life Skills Camp has also served an additional 69 campers during our weekend camps throughout the rest of the year and we plan to serve an estimated 15 additional youth during weekend camps before the end of 2019 as we have one weekend session remaining this year. Campers attended from 15 different counties throughout Ohio and were referred by Children's Services agencies, group homes, counseling centers, schools, and parents/guardians.

During the summer, each Life Skills camper participated in:

- basic car maintenance and changing a tire
- workshop on healthy relationships
- cooking multiple meals – some identified that they had never cooked anything, didn't know how to boil water, or had only used a microwave
- exposure to gardening, composting, and sewing
- multiple groups used power tools and hand tools to build wooden shelves, garden containers, etc.
- all groups attending week-long (6-day) sessions went canoeing, many for the first time ever – a good lesson in teamwork and communication
- all groups were divided into small cooking groups and given a food budget to cook for the whole group for one meal. They went to the grocery store to compare prices and options, adjust their menu to stay within budget, buy their meal items, and then cook their meal for dinner during the week
- Workshop on goal-setting where they were challenged to create personal goals related to school, family, career/job, friends, and health/well-being
- Workshop on job search – applications, interviews, identifying and communicating your strengths, etc.

The young people that participated in Life Skills Camp are all in very different stages of learning how to live independently as they approach adulthood. Some have never boiled water, never done laundry, and never even thought about getting a job. Others are in career prep programs at school, do their own cooking at home, or take care of younger siblings. It is an ongoing challenge to identify the unique needs of each camper quickly in order to accommodate the learning needs of each individual. Having the materials and supplies to provide a wide array of workshop options allowed Life Skills Camp to better address these differences and quickly tailor learning opportunities to the campers attending during a given camp session.

The funds from the ACA, Ohio grant were utilized to purchase a variety of supplies for the Life Skills Camp program. Items purchased included:

- Blankets, sleeping bags, sheets, pillowcases, and pillows
- Sewing machines and fabric for sewing projects and other art/craft projects
- Cooking items, including crock pots, utensils, baking sheets, pots and pans, a mixer, a blender, kitchen towels, and storage containers
- Hand and power tools including a circular saw, jigsaw, drill, sander, and hammers
- Construction materials including safety glasses, wood, and nails
- Notebooks, pens and pencils, markers, calculators, and dry-erase markers for teaching workshops
- Books about home repairs, cooking, and career options
- Gardening tools, potting soil, plant starts, and fencing

Here's some feedback from one guardian after her nephew attended Life Skills Camp:

"Tommy made his first homemade lasagna dinner last night. He talked about going to the grocery store and how they stayed within the budget with .11 cents to spare; counselor spent \$10 on snacks as a reward. He had so much confidence in the kitchen, and he really enjoyed making it! His dinner turned out awesome. We ate out on the picnic table and had a great family moment. Thank you!!" – Tommy's Aunt



Here's some feedback from campers who attended Life Skills Camp:

"Teambuilding was super helpful – I think everyone could use some of that." – age 16

"Finding a buddy was the most helpful because it taught me to be myself and to be a leader." – age 16

"The most helpful was sewing because I think it's something I could do on my own now." – age 16

"Learning about unhealthy and unhealthy relationships was helpful because it made me realize I have a lot of unhealthy relationships." – foster care youth, age 16

"I learned cooking and budgeting and the staff really helped us figure out and budget our money for our dinners we prepared." – foster care youth, age 16

"I liked learning about car maintenance because nobody has actually physically showed me how to check a car and change a tire. I'm about to get a car so it was very helpful to know." – foster care youth, age 17

"I liked learning about healthy relationships because I now understand that I don't have to have a lot of friends or people who like me – I can be myself." – age 16

"The most helpful workshop was meal planning and budgeting those meals. I did not have prior experience and going to the grocery store helped a lot." – foster care youth, age 18

"I feel like Life Skills is a really good experience to have because it gives you a taste for the future and how it feels to be a grown-up and have responsibilities and being able to acknowledge them and know that this is what the future is going to be and it really does help with that." – age 16

Enjoy some pictures from our year!



Preparing the gardens for planting in the spring - we planted zucchini, yellow squash, cucumber, watermelon, peppers, and tomatoes – what a feast!

Cooking – campers cooked almost all of their own meals with guidance from camp counselors and went to the grocery to shop for items on a budget.



Building a bench on the front porch of a cabin



Hiking to a cave and climbing around at camp



Changing a tire



Washing the never-ending dishes – how did we use so many?



Doing yardwork – clearing a place for our compost bin.



Learning how to jump-start a car and perform routine maintenance like checking and filling fluids.

Carving pumpkins for Halloween camp weekend and enjoying the last warm days of the season!



Sanding a shelf they built – campers learned to safely use hand tools and power tools to build and fix things.



And of course – building a campfire and having s’mores!

Thanks ACA, Ohio!

We look forward to many more great years of Life Skills Camp at Camp Oty’Okwa!