

## Camp Lookout

*by Jerri Arnold-Cook, Bonner Scholars Director*

### **Purpose**

- Provides ten free, week-long, overnight, Christian camps for eight- to-twelve-year-olds, teaching the importance of service, faith, and personal growth.
- Provides a summer work program and vocational experience for college students in which they serve as role models for campers, allowing both to learn the value of service.

### **Background**

Camp Lookout began at a local camp in the early 1970s when a baseball coach and a child welfare agency wanted to give children a camp experience. When the camp was no longer available, twenty-five college students volunteered to host twenty-five children in their dorm rooms for a week. The children played in the gym, visited the campus museum, ate in the cafeteria, and had a cookout.

In the 1990s, Camp Lookout expanded from one to three weeks and became totally staffed by Bonner Scholars. In 1992, singer/songwriter Andy Williams hosted a benefit and donated over \$40,000 to help establish a campsite. A local resort donated the cabins, and the Bonner Pavilion was constructed. In 1997, Camp Lookout became a summer work site, allowing camp to be expanded to ten weeks. In 2001, camp operations expanded to serve 500 children.

### **How It Works**

The camp is held for ten consecutive weeks during the summer. Since College of Ozarks is a work school, Camp Lookout is part of the college summer work program for the students who serve forty hours a week for twelve weeks to earn summer, fall, and spring room and board. Each summer up to fifteen Bonners work at the camp. The Bonner Foundation provides a \$1,100 scholarship to help defray the cost of their fall room and board, and the college covers the difference. In addition, camp coordinators who work more than forty hours per week receive an additional \$1,000 stipend. (Not all coordinators work over forty hours per week.)

#### **Student Leaders**

Student leadership positions are selected in February. Camp leaders attend weekly meetings during the spring semester to plan Camp Lookout. Members spend sixty to seventy hours working during the semester, depending upon their role.

#### **Compensation**

The college provides camp staff members their summer room and board, along with a credit of approximately \$2,900 to their college account, which covers their fall room and board.

#### **Training**

The first week of the summer, students spend forty hours training, worshiping, and reflecting on their own faith. During this time the students earn their American First Aid and CPR certification. They participate in team-building exercises, learn how to handle the American flag properly, and become familiar with the camp and its rules.

Camp Lookout is run on three shifts. At the end of each shift, the staff members gather to reflect on the day and pray for the incoming group of counselors. At the end of the first and second six weeks of camp, the staff members have a mini-retreat to reflect and make suggestions for improvements.

#### **Camp Activities**

Students' patriotism is encouraged through the teaching of the proper care of the American flag, as well as by daily recital of the Pledge of Allegiance.

Students' spiritual growth is encouraged through activities, skits, crafts, and devotional materials. Staff members are assigned a prayer partner and a prayer angel—someone they pray for privately and encourage throughout the summer. Every week, the camp director presents a devotion to the staff, and staff members spend 30 minutes with their prayer partner. Bible studies are held for student participants but are not a required for participation in or employment at Camp Lookout.

### **What Makes The Project Unique**

The staff works with the Division of Family Services in two local counties and three crisis ministry programs to identify children who might participate. During 2002, the camp served 450 children, 71 percent of whom were participants in free or reduced school lunch programs. Camp Lookout budgets to purchase clothes for some children.

### **Benefits**

Camp Lookout is designed specifically for children whose parents could not otherwise afford to send them to camp. Each child is provided with soap, shampoo, a toothbrush, toothpaste, lanyard, a camp t-shirt and a Bible, if they do not already have one.

Children sleep in air-conditioned cabins along Lake Taneycomo, have three meals a day and an evening snack in the college cafeteria and worship in the college chapels. Campers play games in the Bonner Pavilion and swim in the college pool. The children also get to spend one day at Silver Dollar City, a local theme park.

Camp Lookout offers students a way to support themselves and provides numerous opportunities for leadership and civic and spiritual growth. Students act as counselors in cabins and have input in every aspect of planning camp, from the development of staff training to the campers' activity schedule.

Children at Camp Lookout get a lot of one-on-one attention. There is a camper-to-counselor ratio of six to one, and during activity hours, there are five to six extra staff members available to assist the counselors.

### **Timeline**

#### **January**

Dates are set for camp, and promotional materials are sent to press. Budget requests and capital expenditure/purchase requests are due. Applications for all Camp Lookout positions are available. Letters go out to all previous Camp Lookout employees, notifying them to begin praying for camp staff and offering them the opportunity to apply for leadership positions.

#### **February**

Applications for Camp Lookout leadership positions are due and the screening process begins. The camp director, camp assistant director, the campus ministries staff, dean of work, dean of students, and residence hall staff screen applicants. Interviews are conducted for the leadership team. An all-campus information meeting is held to help inform students of Camp Lookout opportunities. Advertisements concerning Camp Lookout openings are distributed on campus and placed in the campus newspaper.

#### **March**

Camp Lookout applications are sent to all previous campers, Stone and Taney County Division of Family Services, local crisis ministries, and at-risk programs. A leadership, team-building and vision retreat is held. Camp applications are processed. Weekly meetings are held with leadership team members and committees to plan Camp Lookout. The staff contacts local businesses and solicits their support.

#### **April**

Camp staff interviews are held, staff requests are submitted to the dean of work, and camp promotions are sent to the community at large. Camp shirts and supplies are purchased.

#### May

Camp is opened and cleaned. Craft kits, morning day starters, and staff training materials are produced. Staff training occurs.

#### June, July, August

Week-long camps are hosted. One-on-one meetings with staff members are held to assess staff performance. Staff members clean Camp Lookout and take inventory.

#### September

Bills are paid and all those who contributed to camp receive thank you letters. Actual staff expenses are compared with the staff budget, and camper statistics and financial reports are produced.

#### October

There is a Camp Lookout reunion, and staff members are approached about serving on leadership teams.

### **Resources And Partners**

#### College of Ozarks

- The Bonner Community Service Program is responsible for all aspects of Camp Lookout, and many other departments on campus play a key role in the camp's success.
- The College helps with the maintenance of the grounds, vehicles, cabins, and laundry by building these expenses into their yearly budget.

#### Community Partners

- The Stone and Taney County Division of Family Services, Love in the Name of Christ, the Hiding Place, Christian Action Ministries, and Boys and Girls Clubs help identify children who would benefit from Camp Lookout.

#### Others

- The Silver Dollar City Corporation, Pippin Wholesale, and the local Walgreens store give us discounts. Two local nursing homes allow the children to come visit and sing for them each week.

### **Evidence of Success**

Every summer, Camp Lookout changes the lives of children, their parents, and staff members. Parents have written letters describing the lasting changes in their children's behavior. By stressing manners and the golden rule to children and investing time and care in them, the children's self-esteem increases noticeably. Staff members grow because of the challenges they have faced and overcome at Camp Lookout. Lasting relationships between staff members and between children and staff members have developed.

Staff members who attended camp as children have fond memories of how they were treated, relationships they formed, and games they played.