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Therapeutic Vacation Camps – Orr Shalom-2011

Name of program

Therapeutic Vacation Camps – Orr Shalom

Year of activity

2011

Name of the report's writer

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Status of program

Orr Shalom's therapeutic overnight camps are a critical program. They provide Orr Shalom children living in family group homes with a safe and supportive environment during vacation time where they can also grow, explore, and build self-confidence while having fun and making new friends. In 2011, a total of 70 orphans and children who cannot safely go home even for a short time participated in the camps. Days at the camp are very structured and include a variety of activities according to five different age groups. In addition to educational, values-based and fun activities run by the counselors and counselors-in-training (older Orr Shalom teens), the children also enjoy stimulating and fun day trips to cultural venues, and hikes with qualified tour guides which enable them to discover Israel's nature, and are part of building a strong, Jewish identity.

Main achievements during the last year of activity

and in some cases even personal counselors for children who require it. The camps are managed by the Camps Manager and Director, a clinical psychologist, with oversight by the Director of the Family Group Homes program.

In 2011, the camps made a real and critical impact by providing all the children who needed the service with:

- A safe, structured, educational and enriching environment for who have no other framework during vacation time
- Opportunities to develop valuable social and leadership skills and to encounter new experiences
- Recreational activities to which other normative children have access and enjoy as a matter of course during vacation time.

A total of 70 children benefited from the camps. About half of the children attended all the camps, while the other half attended the camps they needed:

The camps are led by the Camps Manager and staffed by a team of counselors who are trained and supervised by Orr Shalom. The staff includes experienced counselors, all of whom maintain a connection with the children in the Orr Shalom homes attending the camp, and sherut leumi volunteers. There is a high staff-child ratio at all camps to guarantee the care and supervision that these children require.

In 2011, we had to deal with the challenge of finding a new home for the camp after the Yemin Orde fire, as well as replacing the much-loved Camps Manager who left. Both of these challenges were not easy to resolve, but we managed to find both a new location in Kfar Hasidim, as well as a new Camps Manager who proved herself during Sukkot and Chanukah.

Evaluation

Evaluation after each camp takes the format of three meetings: 1. The counselors with the Camps Manager. 2. The Camps Manager and the Camps Director 3. The Camps Manager with Kfar Hasidim's Manager. The conclusions of these meetings are written in a report by the camp's management team, and the camp's staff aims to implement the conclusions in the next camp. The staff is continually looking how to upgrade, examining what worked well and trying to improve what did not.

In addition, the final report includes a comprehensive and confidential report on every child who participated in the camp. These reports are sent to the Orr Shalom house parents and therapeutic staff in the homes in which they live, and form an integral part of the annual therapeutic treatment plan of the child.

This year, due to the Matanel Foundation grant, we were able to increase the number of children who were able to attend the camps to an average of 45 children each camp, the number of children who needed the service.

In addition, we were able to improve the range and quality of activities on offer including arts and crafts, workshops including sculpture, science, drumming, yoga, tai chi, light and

puppetry, sports including ice-skating, horse-riding, fishing, swimming, cycling, outdoor training activities such as rope-climbing, rappelling, cookery, music as well as stimulating and fun days out to water parks, movies, bowling, zoos, solar garden, wildlife restoration park, environmental festival, air-force museum, science museums, archeology museum, ocean archaeology museum and challenging hikes through nature with qualified tour guides.

Training now includes two training days before each camp for all the counselors including therapeutic training by professionals eg how to integrate new children, the importance of boundaries, how to deal with extreme cases as well as time to prepare informal educational activities. There is also a special training day for the national service girls which started this year. In addition, the Camp Director is a clinical psychologist, and he provides consultations on an ongoing basis to all the camp's staff.

Others

In 2012, we intend to focus on continuing to improve the quality of the camps. Some issues that we wish to look at include how to ensure the feeling of "family" at the camp ie they are part of one large group although they are split into smaller groups according to age. How we ensure that the children feel comfortable with all the counselors, and not just the counselors of their group; placing an emphasis on education wherever possible eg dealing with behavioral problems in an educational way; educational and enriching activities by counselors who are particularly talented in a certain field; professionalizing the staff – discussing important issues, aims, long-term thinking in preparing the team in addition to bringing in professionals who talk about specific issues; maybe creating a Children's Council at the camp comprised of representatives of the different groups and managed by the counselors-in-training.

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