

CAMPLIFE! LINE

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CampLIFE!

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A Great November, A New Year

By John Gillis, CampLIFE! President



CampLIFE! had a wonderful November camp at Camp Buckner in Burnet, Texas. (See a picture to the right and more on page 3!) The campers (kids and moms) enjoyed many activities, including: fishing, kayaking, bounce house, basketball, archery, art, team building, high ropes course (including "The Screamer!"), and caving at Longhorn Caverns!

In addition to these activities, everyone participated in grief counseling, provided by Jan Upchurch of Scott & White Hospital (Temple) - with the highlight being a Christmas wreath with red, white and blue "hands" with special notes written to each of their deceased fathers.

One of the widows said, "The team activities make wonderful life lessons for me and my children. We love staying active at camp, each time inspires us to get active at home. Each CampLIFE! takes me to another healing stage."

Our diverse counselor base volunteered their weekend to provide this opportunity for these families. The counselors range from a Lake Travis High School senior, to college students (The University of Texas, Texas A&M, and

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Concordia University), and to corporate workers (AMD, Delta Airlines, Sandia Labs, lawyer, professor, professional artist and moms.) "It takes a village....", and I appreciate the diversity of our counselors in joining together to give to these families.

CampLIFE! is preparing for our next camp this Summer, looking ahead to many fun activities and continued relationships with these special HUGSS (Helping Unite Gold Star Survivors) families from Ft. Hood!

Be on the lookout for June camp registration on www.camp-life.org!

John



A Note From a Counselor...

Below is a note from CampLIFE! Counselor, Heather Reed...

During the last camp, in our group time our kids used modeling clay to form something that represented the person they had lost. Taylor formed several things one of which was a heart, because her daddy loved her. On Sunday we went back and picked up all of our art projects and went back into the big room to watch the slide show. In the middle of the slide show Taylor turned to me to show me that the heart she had made had broken right down the middle. I started helping her form the clay back together hoping to preserve the original shape of the heart. After a few minutes of working with it I could no longer see a crack in the clay and it was sticking together fairly well, so I quit working with it, not wanting to damage it again.

When the slide show was over, we picked up our art projects and started to head to the bus/cars. During this short trek Taylor again turned to me and asked, "is my heart still broken?" I replied, "well, I tried to fix it," to which she responded by touching and tugging at the clay formation and it quickly gave into her tugs and broke in the same exact place it had before. "Nope it's still broken." I was on the verge of tears at this point and ever so grateful for the opportunity to sit in my car away from the situation so that I could regain my composure before we went on to the caves. While I was sitting there without words and in complete non-understanding, I prayed for God to give me some understanding of this situation. He did give me a few pieces of understanding that satisfied my longing at least.

One, how cool it was that she had to ask me if her heart was still broken? I had worked on her clay heart for only a few moments, but we had all worked with her heart for the entire weekend, and just like the clay heart, her heart looked like it was ok, she was smiling and laughing all weekend. A lot of times it does not feel like it is ok to smile and laugh and have fun after you have lost a

parent, but this weekend it was. When Tre was writing a message to his father to add to the wreath for the HUGSS center wrote, "Merry Christmas, dad," "I will have fun," and "I will not forget you." All of these are very profound statements, but the one that struck me the most was "I will have fun." A lot of times we can get so wrapped up in our hardships and it doesn't feel like it is ok to have fun. Tre, however knew that he needed to promise his father that he would continue to have fun. I think again to Taylor's question "Is my heart still broken?" and I can only reply to that question by "I tried to fix it," but inevitably she still is broken, I cannot fix it no matter how much I may want to. I have to leave that to God's willing and capable hands. To know that his work is so much superior to anything that I can do is a source of great peace.



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Fundraising

CampLIFE! continues to operate due to generous grants such Texas Resources for Iraq-Afghanistan Deployment (TRIAD) Fund of The Dallas Foundation. The TRIAD fund is sending the second year money (\$23,400) of a two year grant totaling \$46,800. This grant combined with the Newman grant and in-kind donations provides CampLIFE the budget to host the camps and supply mailouts, photo cds and other expenditures. Please see the TRIAD fund website for more information about their programs and mission: <http://triadfund.org/getdoc/ff9e4aca-4ea8-4180-8bbd-ef5091789210/Grants.aspx>

One of the key features of CampLIFE! that continues to enhance the ability for our program to attract donations and grants is the fact that 100% of all incoming money goes to hosting and supporting the camps each year. Special thanks to all for you time and efforts to make this possible!!

CampLIFE! Counselors

Many thanks to the following volunteers for making our May camp a wonderful success!

Heather Reed
Megan Murray
Pete Dawson
Nicole Griesse
Sara Dawson
Adam Weaver
Ben Boehman
Kendra Smith

Kelly Coulter
Jessica Zertuche
Cole Cappel
Tammy Boehman
Chrisma Jackson
John & Carolyn Gillis
John & Lynette Gillis
Kim Coulter
Tim Toole

A Picture is Worth A Million Smiles, Laughs and Surprises!



From Page 2...

Finally, I thought about how I had quit working with the clay when it looked ok. I know very well that if I had taken the clay in my hand and squeezed it and worked with it I could have formed a new heart that was not so readily going to fall apart. I was so worried though about preserving Taylor's heart and the shape she had made that I did not want to intrude on that and form my own shape. Now in this particular situation I think that was the right thing to do, but it made me think about how we are with our own hearts and God. A lot of times when we are broken by what the world hands to us, we turn to God and tell him, 'look my heart is broken,' we want him to fix it, yet we also want to preserve our own shape and identity. We really are just asking him to pinch the clay together and to fill in our cracks. God can work with us there and form us back together in the same shape and it may look like we are ok, but we will still walk away and succumb to the world's touching and tugging just like that clay heart did to Taylor's tugging. However, when we surrender our hearts to God's forming hands and let him form us a completely new heart we are able to walk away complete. If we give our hearts to God and let him mold us how he wants us we will no longer have that huge break down the middle of our hearts and we will be able to withstand the pulling and tugging of the world around us.

In the same light, a lot of praise goes to HUGSS because of their continued efforts with these Gold Star Families because of their commitment not to just be there until the crack looks like it has healed but to be there when these families are feeling happy *and* when once again they feel the tugging of the pain of losing their soldier. For their commitment to being there for the new formation of these beautiful hearts that can carry on in this world.



We're on the Web!

Visit us at:

www.camp-life.org
