



## SOUTHEAST MINNESOTA 4-H REGIONAL CAMP

# Camp Counselor Evaluation

### PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Minnesota 4-H camping program develops leadership and responsibility skills for teen counselors. In Southeast Minnesota 4-H camp counselors participate in a formal three part training series in addition to their five day residential camp experience leading grades 3-8.

Camp counselors give leadership to all aspects of the camp program. This includes identifying needs of campers, finding the resources for planning camp, and implementing all camp activities. Camp counselors enhance their life skill development through participation in the three part training series and residential camp.

<b>Initial Training and Program Planning (10 hours)</b>	<b>Follow up Training and Program Planning (4 hours)</b>	<b>Pre- camp Prep (12 hours)</b>
Introduction to: camp counselor responsibilities, ages and stages of youth development, camper management, camp planning, building a high performance team	Continue program planning, building the team, increase their confidence in dealing with camper management	Create a welcoming atmosphere for campers by preparing for their arrival, organizing the finishing touches on camp, and continue team building

### EVALUATION GOALS

Expected outcomes for teens participating in the camp counselor experience were to:

- Develop self identity, goal setting, self motivation, problem solving, time management, emotional regulation, teamwork, and social skills.
- Be better prepared to deal with challenging situations.
- Learn how to design and deliver a quality camp experience for youth.
- Apply what they learn to real life experiences for today and the future.
- Experience meeting and working with people from a variety of backgrounds.

## METHOD

The evaluation purpose was to understand camp counselors' personal growth, ability to handle challenges, and overall skill development. The evaluation utilized three methodological strands: daily counselor self-assessment, large and small group oral reflection, and a written survey.

- **Daily counselor self-assessment:** Counselors gave daily reflection in 11 key areas such as: camper management, time management, engagement with campers and staff, problem solving, and leadership. These assessments were collected during all three phases and at the end of each day during camp. The data was analyzed to look at changes across the camp experience.
- **Large and small group oral reflection:** Conversations were facilitated twice daily as well as with program planning groups at the end of camp. Large group reflections were done at the end of the second camp counselor training and camp.
- **Written survey:** Camp counselors completed an adapted version of the Youth Experiences Survey (YES) 2.0 at the end of camp. This measure assessed identity experiences, initiative experiences, basic skills, teamwork and social skills, and negative experiences.

## KEY FINDINGS

Overall, camp counselors ranked all aspects of the training and camp experience highly. The results of our evaluations confirmed our goals were met and the camp counselor experience effectively enhanced life skill development.

SCALE OF 1 TO 4 (1 NOT AT ALL, 2 A LITTLE, 3 QUITE A BIT, 4 YES DEFINITELY)			
1. EFFORT	3.73	8. GROUP PROCESS SKILLS	3.44
2. LEADERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY	3.71	9. IDENTITY REFLECTIONS	3.4
3. IDENTITY EXPLORATION	3.62	10. TIME MANAGEMENT	3.37
4. PROBLEM SOLVING	3.55	11. STRESS	1.9
5. EMOTION REGULATION	3.53	12. NEGATIVE PEER INFLUENCES	1.3
6. FEEDBACK	3.5	13. SOCIAL EXCLUSION	1.3
7. GOAL SETTING	3.46	14. NEGATIVE GROUP DYNAMICS	1.2

Participation in the camp counselor experience gave youth the opportunity to practice real life skills such as taking initiative, leading activities, and seeing themselves as a leader (see Table 1). From the fourteen areas listed above, camp counselors assessed the top 5 experiences and skills gained from their experience at camp (see Table 2). These findings reflect that the 4-H camp counseling experience provides opportunities for youth to practice skills used throughout life. For instance, camp counselors learned to push themselves and had the opportunity to practice new skills.

**Table 2: YES 2.0 Top 5 Experiences and Skills Gained from Being a Camp Counselor**

SCALE OF 1 TO 4 (1 NOT AT ALL, 2 A LITTLE, 3 QUITE A BIT, 4 YES DEFINITELY)	MEAN
I DO THINGS HERE THAT I DON'T GET TO DO ANYWHERE ELSE	3.9
LEARNED TO PUSH MYSELF	3.9
OTHERS IN THIS ACTIVITY COUNTED ON ME	3.8
THIS ACTIVITY HAS BEEN A POSITIVE TURNING POINT IN MY LIFE	3.7
LEARNED TO CONSIDER POSSIBLE OBSTACLES WHEN MAKING PLANS	3.7

Counselors were also asked to assess negative experiences at training and camp such as; stress, negative peer influences, social exclusion, and negative group dynamics. Overall, these were the lowest scored items (see Table 1).

Items on the daily self-reflections were analyzed for changes over time. Six variables had statistically significant changes:

1. Manage camper down-time
2. Follow through on your responsibilities
3. Adjust with the flow of camp
4. Relate with campers individually
5. Relate with campers in cabin groups
6. Relate with other counselors and staff individually

Scores tended to peak on day two and again on day five. These two days are the second day of camp for the specific age group. This demonstrates that counselors report feeling more proficient as they experience camp.

Counselors were given opportunities to give qualitative feedback. These responses were very positive and serve as another method in determining how our goals were met. Counselors shared what they learned that they would use in the future. Some responses included:

*“To know your limits and that it’s okay not to do everything.”*

*“How to lead and how to use skills that I have to teach.”*

*“To trust yourself and your team”*

*“How hard I can push and what my limits are. I still use it in school.”*

All of these statements support the hands-on learning experiences that camp counselors gain during the camp experience. Counselors need to be immersed in the activity to learn these concepts, and camp provides a safe and supportive learning environment.

## **RECOMENDATIONS**

Overall, the camp counseling experience allowed youth to advance personal development, self-confidence, and leadership skills. The evaluation results confirm that the trainings provided for camp counselors increased their ability to be successful in their counselor roles. This experience

was an example of a quality youth- adult partnership. Based on the findings the final recommendations are:

- Increase the training time to allow more opportunities for bonding of counselors in order to create a high performing team. Counselors shared through their evaluations that more time was needed in the initial planning stages. We have decided to increase the initial training from one day to two days.
- Be intentional on evaluating the entire process of the camp counselor experience. We developed our evaluation, so it was naturally part of the program design. Reflection time was intentionally built into the rhythm of camp activities.
- It is important to give youth the chance to reflect on all aspects of the camp. Positive and negative experiences can have equally significant impact on the youth's personal growth. We chose to intentionally evaluate all aspects of the experience including negative experiences such as stress, social exclusion, and negative group dynamics.
- Create time for both individual and group reflection. This accommodates all learning styles, allows for a variety of feedback, and stimulates an environment of open communication. Specifically, individual feedback allows participants confidentiality to share issues or opinions that they may be uncomfortable sharing in a group.
- Use the indicators in the evaluations to frame counselor performance evaluations by staff after camp. We share this information with individual counselors for them to become aware of their strengths and weaknesses. This is another example of how the evaluation process supports the overall design of the camp counseling experience.

### **PROGRAM TEAM**

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