

## Preface

Organized camping has been an integral part of children's lives for over 150 years. Despite the fact that there are over 8000 camps in operation in the United States, and 10 to 12 million children attend camps each year, the research and clinical disciplines have only recently begun to pay serious attention to the effectiveness of camps as an outcome-based intervention for youth. Camp has become much more than summer recreation for children; many working in the camp industry would say that camps are in the business of child development. Over the years, camp professionals have been increasingly committed to the development of intentional practices with the goal of effecting positive developmental outcomes for children who participate in camp programs. In this issue of the *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, we are pleased to present mental health professionals with a comprehensive overview of the mental health issues involved in camp operations and camp programming. We endeavor to present critical issues to consider when consulting to camps, an activity that mental health professionals are increasingly undertaking. Effective and meaningful camp consultation requires, in addition to child clinical and/or research skills, a thorough knowledge and understanding of camp culture, programming and outcome research. Only in the context of this understanding are clinical approaches useful in the camp setting.

We begin this issue (Part I) by introducing foundational issues involved in camp programming and outcomes. In the first article, Dr. Ron Ramsing explores the origins of summer camp and details the progression of how camp programming has been conceptualized and organized. What started as a recreational experience in the "great outdoors" has more recently been viewed as an effective intentional practice for promoting development in many areas including, but not limited to, self esteem, self efficacy, moral reasoning, and social problem solving. In the second article, Dr. Karla Henderson and colleagues provide an overview of camp research issues. The multidisciplinary nature of camping has made systematization of information, methods, and outcomes difficult to piece together. Researchers are now finally attempting to more systematically study and conceptualize the benefits of camp and the mechanisms by which they occur with more scrupulous techniques. Only with this detailed approach can the developmental benefits on camp can be maximized and appreciated.

In support of this movement, Dr. Deborah Bialeschki and colleagues describe exciting and innovative research undertaken by the American Camp Association on the developmental outcomes ascribed to the camp experience. The Association has recently published the applied results of three studies: *Youth Development Outcomes of the Camp Experience*, *Developmental Supports and Opportunities for Youth's Experiences at Camp*, and *Improving Youth Experiences in Summer Programs*. The authors of this article summarize these studies and discuss research needs moving forward.

As service delivery in camps shifts toward a benefits and outcomes approach, many camps are integrating the consultation services of mental health professionals to improve programming. The camp experience begins with caregiver intention and desire to send children to camp. With greater knowledge of the potential benefits of camp, mental health providers can assist parents in making decisions regarding the use of summer time as an opportunity for growth. Dr. Chris Thurber provides a comprehensive overview of the myriad options parents have in selecting a camp, and makes suggestions for how mental health providers can assist parents in making these important decisions.

As the camping industry becomes more competitive and parents have fewer dollars to spend on summer camp, camps have strong motivation to ensure the success of their programs. Additionally, many summer camps are developing inclusion programs, paralleling the up-rise of inclusion programming in the schools. Camp is also being used as an intervention tool to address specific clinical problems and special needs.

All of this forms the impetus for camps to engage the services of clinically trained professionals. Thus, Part II of this issue is dedicated to the most important issues in camp consultation. In first article of this section, Bob Ditter, MEd, LCSW, overviews the areas in which mental health professionals typically consult, and through case work, explores the role of the provider in improving camp practices. Effective staff training is essential for programming success: Dr. Ethan Schafer outlines important issues to consider in staff training in the next article. The issue then proceeds with a discussion about helping to ensure staff success and longevity in Drs. Karen Paisley and Gwynn Powell's article on stress management and burn out prevention. We then turn to the topic of homesickness, the leading cause of camper failure. In the next article, Drs. Chris Thurber and Edward Walton describe their research on homesickness prevention and provides guidelines professionals should consider in their consultation to camps around this important issue. In the final article in our section on clinical consultation, Alice Cohen, MSW, and Dr. Karen Carlson describe the unique features of camp organization and culture that need to be considered to help camps develop and maintain effective behavior management programs.

Part III of our issue on Summer Camp Programs takes a detailed look at several models of camp programming that address specific developmental issues and special needs. Howard Blas, MSW, describes a religious camp program that has both specialized and inclusion programming for children

with developmental disabilities. In the next article, Dr. Alicia McAuliffe-Fogarty and colleagues describe how a benefits-based approach to camping can greatly enhance medical outcomes in medically involved children, using a camp program for children with diabetes as an example. Dr. Karen Carlson and Matthew Cook, LCSW, explore adventure-based counseling in the next article, an intentional practice used in many camps to effect positive outcomes and help to diminish negative behaviors. In this case, the use of adventure-based counseling at a camp for seriously ill children is described. In our final article, Professor Sarah Taylor Agate and Christine Davis Covey introduce family camps, which provide recreation and/or intervention experiences for the family unit. Family programs are gaining in popularity. This article emphasizes the need for controlled outcome research on this very promising avenue of camp programming.

Camps are facing many challenges today, as are all organizations concerned with youth developmental outcomes. Limited resources and the growing challenges involving children has necessitated that all agencies, camps included, use intentional and evidence-based practice. Moreover, these practices need to be routinely evaluated for effectiveness. Mental health practitioners and researchers, both within the camp discipline and outside of it, are extremely important to the continued growth of summer camp as a meaningful developmental intervention. Research is suggesting more and more that camp holds as much potential for therapeutic and developmental benefits as other community-based agencies, including schools. Given the small number of mental health professionals who dedicate their entire careers to camping, we call upon community professionals to help improve camp practice and outcome research. We hope that this issue will inform and inspire professionals in the community to help advance the standards of care for youth participating in camp programs.

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