



# Newsletter

Volume 5  
Spring 2012

## PARTNERS WITH:

- The Permanent Fund for the Well-Being of Vermont Children
- Kids-A-Part, The Lund Home
- Mobius, The Mentoring Movement

## The Mission of Camp Agape

To provide a free summer camping experience, in a setting of *agape* (the kind of unconditional love God has for each of us) for children in Vermont who have experienced the incarceration of a parent.

2012 Camp Dates  
Week 1—July 7-12  
Week 2—August 5-12  
at  
Covenant Hills  
Christian Camp  
Cabot, Vermont

## ANTOINE’S STORY

Antoine arrived at Camp Agape in 2008, a reticent, wary nine year old with three years of loneliness and anger just under the surface. He hadn't seen his mother since she began serving her prison sentence in Vermont when he was just six years old. Antoine lived in New York City with his "godmother" Tina, whose minimum wage job was the sole support for a household of seven. She had done a good job caring for Antoine, but she had just about reached the limit of her ability to tolerate his explosive behavior. Meanwhile, in Vermont, Kids-A-Part facilitated weekly telephone calls between Antoine and his mother. With the kind of amazing collaboration that is possible in Vermont, Kids-A-Part started looking for someone able to enroll as a Fresh Air family for Antoine. He could come to Vermont on the Fresh Air bus, visit his mother, and attend Camp Agape. I volunteered. The Vermont Department of Corrections transferred Antoine's mother to the closest facility just for his visit.

Antoine was the last child off the bus. I was in awe at the

courage it must have taken for him to leave New York City and get into a car with a white stranger in rural Vermont. Every morning for a week, I walked him down the street to the women's prison to get re-acquainted with his mom. Every day, it was terribly hard for him to go for the visit, and every day, it was terribly hard at the end to say good-bye. It was especially hard to stop the visits and go to this strange thing called Camp Agape.

Amazingly, he quickly bonded with two cabin-mates. They had nicknames and called themselves The Three Musketeers. They brought out the best in each other, and sometimes, the worst. Their volatile behavior was a constant challenge to maintaining safety and *agape* simultaneously. That first summer, I asked Antoine what he wanted to do with his life. His answer: "Nothin". "How will you support yourself?" "I'll step off the curb and get hit by a car. Then I'll sue."

Since 2008, Antoine has been reunited with his mother. He

has had periods of further abandonment, homelessness, and multiple school changes. At times, he has been enveloped in fog from attempts to use medication to treat a childhood of chaos and loss. In spite of all this, he is a good student, and now wants to be



*Only God knows what life holds for these three boys. But we can give them this moment.*

a lawyer someday. He habitually bows his head before meals. He says thank you often. When anyone is hurting, he is empathetic. He has returned to Camp Agape and his "Fresh Air home" many times. One year, when leaving camp, he said: "Camp Agape is the only place in my life that my anger doesn't blast everyone."

*Beth Ann Maier*

# 2nd Annual “End of Winter” Camp Reunion

If it is the end of winter, the camp season can't be far behind. Once again, we gathered in South Burlington, this time at Faith United Methodist Church on Saturday March 24th, for a day of fun, laughter and remembering. We had a visit from last year's dynamite directors, Liz and Bill, a visit from cherished Covenant Hills counselors Lauren and Anthony, and a visit from Salley Gibney (see accompanying article). We sang favorite camp songs, made “I Care About You” cards, decorated cupcakes, played dress-up, and thoroughly enjoyed being together again. We remembered who we are when we gather as Camp Agape; that we are loved by God and each other in a community where we are all valued and respected. Year to year, we have the pleasure of seeing this identity take root and blossom in our campers.



**Salley Gibney offers encouragement while Bill and Anthony lead songs.**



**Five minutes before, these two were fighting at high volume over the piano. They are both very strong at persisting till they achieve their desires, a strength that will both help them and hinder them in their lives. They were willing to each have two minutes for a solo, and then discovered that they liked duets better. That's Camp Agape Power!**

**Dress-up has been a favorite activity for all ages at camp and at reunions. Everyone loves to dress up Anthony.**



## I Matter...You Matter

Salley Gibney, founder of the You Are Never Alone Foundation, has been present at Camp Agape for many years, and is a big favorite with campers and staff alike. She shares her “caring coins” with the campers and encourages them to share coins with others in their lives. She tells them stories about the many places and people she has met through the coins. One camper, upon receiving her coin, said: “I’m never going to take this off.”

This year, Salley shared the “I Matter...You Matter Movement” at camp. She led the children in a discussion

about the effects of bullying on themselves and their friends. They made a circle and tossed a ball to each other. As they received the ball, they would step into the circle and say: “I am special because...” One child who initially refused to participate, was able to enter the circle and say: “I am special because I am me.” You can learn more about Salley’s work at: [www.youareneveralonefoundation.org](http://www.youareneveralonefoundation.org).



**A camper shows off her “I Matter” coin. At left, an “I care about you” card made at the reunion.**



# Camp Agape Vermont 2012—Come and See!

## Camp For 8-11 Year Olds

We will be holding two sessions of camp for 8-11 year olds. We staff cabins with two to three staff people for every five children. We supplement the cabin staff with camp directors, a chaplain, a consultant skilled in problem solving with children, relief counselors, an arts and crafts facilitator, and special activity people such as fisher-people, musicians, and storytellers. CLIF (Children’s Literacy Foundation) will come to visit, bringing storybooks to life, and guiding the children in choosing new books to take home. The children will build and paint memory boxes. They will scrapbook, dress up, make play-do and jewelry, drum and sing, fish, swim, canoe, sit around campfires, and sleep out under the stars. They will have moments in their day when they may turn their attention toward God. They will share all of this

with other children who have had similar life experiences and do so in a setting of *agape* - unconditional love and acceptance.

## Older Kids 12 Years and Up

Children older than 11 years old, who attended Camp Agape previously, have two choices in 2012. They can attend a new Camp Agape session at Covenant Hills that is tailored just for them, or we will tuition them to one of the many camps offered by Covenant Hills open to everyone. The Camp Agape session for older kids is now almost filled. We have several attending other programs, and are excited to have two 15 year old long-time Camp Agape campers who have chosen to attend Leadership Camp. This may lead them to be Counselors-In-Training next year. It is especially heartening to see the formative influence that Camp Agape has had year after year on these older children.



## 2011 Financial Summary

### EXPENSES

Covenant Hills contract (facilities, meals, staff).....	\$24,481
Stipends to expand staff.....	\$2717
Camper gear, supplies.....	\$3259
Program Coordinator.....	\$7751
Graduate campers (14).....	\$4865
Insurance, Mailings, Storage.....	\$4758
<u>Total Expense.....</u>	<u>\$47,831</u>

### IN KIND DONATIONS

Handmade Quilts.....	\$11,400
Donated Supplies.....	\$3800
Volunteer Hours @\$10/hr.....	\$27,570
<u>Total In Kind Donation.....</u>	<u>\$42,770</u>



### REVENUES

Individual Donors (100).....	\$29,076
Churches (28).....	\$15,418
VT Permanent Fund.....	\$10,000
Service Clubs (1).....	\$350
Prisoner Group (1).....	\$100
<u>Total Revenues.....</u>	<u>\$54,944</u>

## 2012 Challenges

### CAMPER RECRUITMENT

At press-time, the July session is almost completely filled. The August session has many openings. Recently, there has been a promising surge of calls expressing interest.

If you know a child, age 8-11 with a parent in prison in VT, please encourage their caregiver to call us soon.

### STAFF RECRUITMENT

We have been blessed over the years to attract wonderfully gifted, energetic,

and loving volunteer staff. However, these people move on in their lives to other pursuits and responsibilities.

If you can offer a week of your summer in any capacity at camp, or know someone who can, we would love to talk to you. We promise you it will be one of the richest experiences ever.

### FINANCIAL SUPPORT

One of our faithful founders made a very significant three-year financial commitment to Camp Agape that was

completed at the end of 2011. With the recession and slow recovery, churches and individuals have had reduced funds to expend for charitable organizations. We are seeing an even deeper effect in 2012, than in 2011. We ended 2011 with an intentional surplus, knowing that we anticipate a deficit in 2012. We must find new donors and are exploring other grant opportunities.

If you have the ability to help fund Camp Agape, we need your support more than ever. Please tell your church of our work and our need.

### OUR HOPE

As we begin our seventh summer of Camp Agape, we have never been without challenges. Each year, we ask: “Can we possibly do this again?” Every year, we get what we need, and the children grow and flourish. Thanks be to God.

# Camp Agape Vermont

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Please  
VOLUNTEER

Please DONATE

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*An ecumenical ministry of:*

*The New England Conference of the United Methodist Church*

*The Episcopal Diocese of Vermont*

*The Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ*



## Be Part of Camp Agape

- VOLUNTEER
- DONATE
- PRAY

*“Do your little bit of good where you are; it’s those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.”*

*Desmond Tutu*

- ◇ Do you have a special skill or activity to share with campers?
- ◇ Can you spend a week being a friend and mentor at camp?
- ◇ Can you gather good new or nearly new books for our campers?
- ◇ Can you organize your church to contribute funds or supplies?
- ◇ Can you come help with fishing or carpentry times?
- ◇ Do you have legal, organizational or fund-raising talent to share with the Camp Agape board?

Call or email today. We need you.

Visit our website:  
[www.campagapevermont.org](http://www.campagapevermont.org)