

# Newsletter

Volume 9

May 2016

## A Blessed New Partnership!

### 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 Vermont children who have experienced the incarceration of a parent or caregiver

### 2016 Camp Dates

**Ages 8-11: Aug 7-12**

**Ages 12-14: July 17-22**  
(returning campers only)

**Ages 14-17: July 24-29**  
(returning campers only)

**All camps held at:**

**Bethany Birches  
Camp, Plymouth, VT**



*2015 campers on Bethany Birches pond trampoline*

We were very blessed in finding our new camp home at the Bethany Birches Camp last year, as we struggled through the transition of losing our previous home at Covenant Hills Christian Camp. With a lot of prayer and a giant leap of faith, we began our new partnership with Bethany Birches last August. Our 8-11 year old campers arrived and literally took to the place as ducks to a pond. Without any hesitation, they went from sleeping in screened cabins with bunks, to sleeping on

floor mats in open shelters with canvas flaps. Veteran Camp Agape volunteers especially enjoyed the opportunities for quiet conversation and fellowship as campers prepared all of their meals at the shelter campfires, rather than trying to battle the noise and repressed energy of the dining hall. The leadership and staff at Bethany Birches provided a program and a camp climate that served our mission exceedingly well. We look forward to the 2016 camping season, as we settle all three of our camp sessions into the Bethany Birches program. As one of our founders, Con Quinby, likes to say:

**“God is good. All the time.”**



Check out: [www.bethanybirches.org](http://www.bethanybirches.org)

## Statistics to Think About

- \* 1 in 17 children in VT (6% of all children from birth to 18 years) experiences a parent's incarceration.
- \* On any given day, 1600 VT children have a parent in prison.
- \* Over the course of a year, parental incarceration affects 6000 VT children.
- \* 57.8% of VT inmates experienced the incarceration of a parent or loved one when they were a child.

*From Report to the VT Legislature on Act 168, submitted January, 2015 by the VT Agency of Human Services*



## These Are Our Children

Parental incarceration is different than other forms of absence of a parent. There is an unshakeable cloud of stigma and shame that accompanies the child through no fault of their own. They don't have opportunities to talk about it. Children often feel that they caused it. Most often, they struggle to balance their anger and sense of abandonment with their continuing love for the special person that is their parent. Their lives are disrupted, chaotic, often complicated by poverty and ongoing trauma. They are more likely than their peers to have anxiety, depression, PTSD, ADHD, and serious behavioral challenges. It is not hard to see why they have a 75% likelihood of being incarcerated someday themselves.



## 2015 Financial Summary and 2016 Budget

### 2015 EXPENSES

Bethany Birches contract (facilities, meals, staff).....\$17,760  
 Stipends to expand staff.....\$1500  
 Camper gear, supplies.....\$3758  
 Older Campers Program(19)....\$8215  
 Printing, Mailing, Insurance..\$3,270  
 Transportation.....\$444  
 Camp Deposit for 2016.....\$2067  
 Total Expense.....\$37014

### 2015 REVENUES

Individual Donors .....\$10,953  
 Congregations.....\$10,995  
 Fanny Allen Corporation.....\$7,500  
 Family Foundation (3).....\$4,550  
 Other.....\$1,500  
 Total Revenues.....\$35,498

### BUDGET for 2016

Bethany Birches (44 campers).....\$18,603  
 Stipends to expand staff.....\$1,500  
 Camper gear, supplies.....\$3,000  
 Older Campers (25).....\$10,125  
 Printing, Mailing, Insurance.....\$3500  
 Transportation.....\$1,000  
 Deposit for 2017 season.....\$2200  
 Total.....\$39,928



## A Not-So-Sunny Day on the Lake

A friend, who is a professional fundraiser, once asked me “What are the statistics that prove Camp Agape's success?” I responded that Camp Agape did not have statistics, but plenty of stories, powerful stories that illustrate how Camp Agape makes a difference in the lives of the campers. In the company of other kids who share the common experience of an incarcerated parent, the fun of singing the “Pizza Man” song, the whoops of delight jumping off the dock into the pond, the satisfaction of building a bird house, the silliness of dress up, the comfort of camaraderie around the campfire. These, and so many more, tell the stories of everyday camp life, stories of moments that brighten the lives of these kids, lives that are challenged by their family situation.

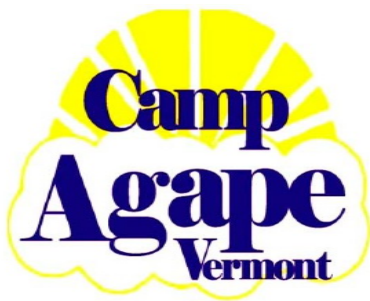
Building self-esteem through discovering one's strengths is a large part of what Camp Agape sets out to do. Compassion for one self and others is another. Here's a story that happened last year that I believe reflects both of these. A group of the older campers and counselors set out in canoes on the Marshfield Reservoir. The morning was forecast to be sunny and storm-free. Shortly after we arrived at our destination, a small, tree-covered island, a sudden rainstorm forced us off the sand beach to take shelter on the island's small hill. As the storm blew longer and we got colder, the campers went into action on their own. The boys made shelters under the pine boughs. The girls took it upon themselves to form human huddles to share body warmth,

putting the coldest camper in the middle for maximum warmth. I was one of them. To the campers' credit, there was no whining or complaining, nor had their sense of humor been dampened. The boys kept running up to the huddle to inform us, very dramatically, of the storm's progress. We just might be doomed by a tornado or tidal wave, we were warned. When the huddlers attempted to sing a song with the odd effect of chattering teeth, we all got to laughing pretty hard, which served to warm us up – a bit. By some God-sent miracle, one of the counselors found a camping stove and packets of cocoa in the bottom of his back pack, forgotten from a previous hiking trip. A happy roar went up among the campers. Some of us were particularly cold, including yours truly, and the campers, with no prompting from the counselors, readily agreed that the coldest were the first to be served the hot liquid. On the paddle back to shore and dry clothes, the pre-teen boy who was my paddling partner in the bow, turned around several times to ask if I was OK. I was not there that night for a discussion of the day's event, but the counselor I saw the next day said that the campers felt very upbeat about the way they had coped, individually and as a group, for those long two hours on the stormy island. Although the campers may not have used these words to describe their conduct, I believe it could be fairly described as resilient, courageous and compassionate. It was a true Agape experience.

*Linda Prescott, long-time volunteer and new board member*



*A group of older campers visited the Mud Studio in Middlesex for a mask-making workshop.*



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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

With generous assistance from the Fanny Allen Foundation

## Camping Plans for 2016

This summer, all of our camp sessions will take place at the Bethany Birches Camp in Plymouth, VT.

### **8-11 year old Camp Agape ~ Sunday, August 7 to Friday, Aug 12**

We will be the only program at Bethany Birches that week. We hope to bring 44 campers and up to 19 volunteers. Special programs will include visits from CLiF, Bruce and Hobbes, the VT weavers, and therapy dogs.

### **12-14 year old Older Kids ~ Sunday, July 17 to Friday, July 22**

Our 15 middle school Older Kids will be housed together in their own shelters, cooking and eating their meals together, but will participate in the activities of the full Bethany Birches middle school camping program.

### **14-17 year old Older Kids ~ Sunday, July 24 to Friday, July 29**

Our 10 high-schoolers have been camping together for years now. They will have their own shelters and join the full Bethany Birches program.



- ♦ VOLUNTEER
- ♦ DONATE
- ♦ PRAY

Visit our website:

[www.campagapevermont.org](http://www.campagapevermont.org)