



## **TRAIL BLAZERS – WHAT WE ARE ALL ABOUT**

Trail Blazers offers an outstanding decentralized camping program for disadvantaged and at risk youth from the urban centers of New York and New Jersey. As a group, our campers represent a diversity of races and cultural backgrounds. Most come from disadvantage backgrounds; some are foster children, and many of the rest are in single parent families. The vast majority receive some kind of governmental assistance.

Over the past 120 years, Trail Blazers had developed a camping program that emphasizes the growth of the “whole” child – emotionally, socially, intellectually, and physically. Our goal is to challenge each child to be the best person possible, and to help them meet these challenges. Social workers, teachers, and guidance counselors recommend children to attend Trail Blazers Camp because of its positive, far-reaching effects.

Briefly, Trail Blazers works with these few guiding principles:

- Interactions are encouraged that show concern for others, and that include sharing, cooperation, and settling differences in a peaceful manner.
- A healthy and practical lifestyle is “taught” through the practice of daily routines, which include skills in foods and nutrition, personal hygiene, responsibility for one’s self, and social interactions.
- The natural world is the medium for our work and recreation. We try to live as respectful, conservative users of natural resources.
- Traditional “winner/loser” competition is discouraged in favor of activities that allow each person to achieve excellence.

Trail Blazers is located in the midst of 1,000 acres of unspoiled natural land in northwest New Jersey. Each child is assigned to a smallcamp consisting of eight or nine children and two or three adult group leaders. Each smallcamp group lives in a secluded part of the property. Everyone sleeps in canvas covered shelters ranging from tepees to covered wagons.

While the entire camp comes together a few times each week, each smallcamp spends the vast majority of its time on its own. Each group, with the strong guidance of their group leaders, using democratic principles, plans and executes its own daily program. As a result, every person shares the responsibility for the quality of the group’s experience. Most often, a family-like atmosphere develops because of the closeness and intensity of the group.

Days are filled with activities that emphasize teambuilding, cooperation, and group and personal responsibility. Most activities are directly or indirectly related to living outdoors. Groups will plan, order supplies and prepare four or five meals a week over an open fire. They will go on hikes, learn how to swim every day on lake, participate in nature projects, community jobs, singing and stargazing. Each group also goes on an overnight backpacking trip, ranging in length and difficulty between 1 night and four nights, depending on age.

Daily life is not always easy for all groups or every child. Many of our children are still learning cooperative living and responsibility for one’s self. Some children can be incredibly argumentative, and others lash out physically when frustrated. Furthermore, many of our children have never been in the country and take some time to get used to the “wilderness.” To help deal with these issues each camp group has a pow-wow (campfire) every evening. During this time, children and staff listen to each other’s feelings and concerns. They explore their own values in an open, accepting atmosphere. In addition, pow-wow is a time for singing, story telling and quiet games.

Each of our staff members must be willing to dedicate him/herself to the purpose of our program – the child. We work very hard during the ten week season. There is a unique sense of dedication and purpose among our staff. The job is intense and the demands are great, and the high level of responsibility intrinsic to our unique program requires the staff to be mature, confident and giving individuals.