

Setting the Bar for Camp Standards

More Than 300 Items on Accreditation Checklist

By LIBBY CARTY MCNAMEE

What does it mean if your child's camp has the official stamp of accreditation?

According to the American Camp Association, camp accreditation is a voluntary process. It aims to educate camp owners and directors in camp operations, program quality and health and safety practices for campers and staff.

The accreditation program also establishes guidelines for necessary policies and practices for camps nationwide. Founded in 1910, the ACA is the only nationally recognized body that accredits all types of camps.

A Close Look at Camps

What does the accreditation process entail? The ACA has over 300 standards on the various topics of site and food service, transportation, health and wellness, operational management and human resources. And there's more! The standards address program design and activities such as aquatics, swimming, boating, climbing, rappelling, ropes courses, horseback riding and travel.

Although they have not yet been officially adopted, the ACA has issued a draft of its revised standards for 2006 based upon feedback from online hearings, its message board, emails and letters, and meetings. They have received the most feedback on those proposed changes dealing with playgrounds, staff screening and camper supervision ratios.

In a summer camp survey by the ACA, nine out of ten camp directors across the country said they continue to seek accreditation because they believe it helps them maintain a safe,

quality environment for their campers and staff.

Attention to Detail

John Edwards, director of Westview on the James Camp and Retreat located in Goochland, heartily embraces the ACA standards. "I can't imagine trying to operate a camp without them," he says. "There are so many details to remember. They help keep you focused on what is important."

Deborah Matheson, one of the directors of Camp Rim Rock in Yellow Spring, West Virginia, also wholly supports the ACA accreditation process.

"Their standards cover every area of operation," she asserts. "They are great guidelines to make sure you don't forget to put something in place."

Matheson praises the ACA resources available to those camps that have met the criteria. "As ACA members we are privy to so much information, such as articles and conferences that create new opportunities for development in the field," she says.

With over 2,300 accredited camps, the ACA's Find-A-Camp Database provides an organized list of those camps that meet established industry and government standards, as well as 11 separate ways to search for just the right camp. Currently there are over 70 accredited residential and day camps in Virginia and West Virginia.

To search the database or find more information, please refer to www.acacamps.org. The regional ACA office can be reached at 800-347-7523. **RPN**

(Photo: American Camp Association)

