

# Expanding Horizons at 4-H Teen Camp

**Held Annually at the Elizabeth L. Evans Outdoor Education Center, Owned and Operated by Canter's Cave 4-H Camp**

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## Overview

Southern Ohio 4-H Teen Camp offers a unique 4-H camping experience for teens ages 14-18 in which youth have the opportunity to try new things and interact in a positive environment. This allows older youth to stay involved in 4-H camping programs. Teens are able to gain valuable life skills including communicating and working with others, public speaking, socialization and leadership skills. The camp is led by trained counselors and staff who plan the camp. Teens participate in a positive social experience while taking part in unique leadership opportunities.



## Designed by Older Youth and Young Adults

Counselors are either graduating seniors and/or college students who were former campers and counselors at the camp and must comply with Ohio 4-H Volunteer Standards.

Adult staff members return to camp each year to provide guidance to the camp process and provide adequate supervision.

The counselors and staff arrive a day ahead of the campers and develop the camp program, while also establishing a working relationship.

Once a theme is established, activities and programs are designed to complement it.

## Special Activities for Older Youth

Special activities are a part of the program each year including: high ropes, cliff rappelling, guided canoe trips, shooting sports (rifle & shotgun), outdoor cooking, water slip-n-slide, make-your-own-omelet, and a steak cookout.

A Teen Camp tradition for more than 40 years is a special ceremony at Boone's Cave where each first-year teen camper receives a new penny from their camp counselor.

These core elements of history, tradition and positive social experience have resulted in lasting memories and life lessons for thousands of youth.

Teen Camp gave me one of my first true looks into life after high school and into the real world. It opened my eyes and I never looked back.

**Tara Evans Salyers**

*Former Teen Camper and Counselor*



Teen Camp has given me lifelong friends that I wouldn't trade for the world. The experiences and skills that I have gained from camp continuously help me in my day-to-day life. Once it was over I could never wait for the next year.

**Robbie Mar Hoover**

*Former Teen Camper and Counselor*



## Renewability and Collaboration

Southern Ohio Teen Camp has proven to be a successful program for more than forty years. The camp format can be easily replicated but the key to success for this camp has been the commitment of the camp staff and personnel involved as well as the ownership that is felt by both the campers and counselors. This buy-in and cooperation by all of the parties involved has helped to make this camp a success.

## Flexibility and Choices

The structure of the camp allows teens to make choices and this is a very important aspect. Teens lead such busy and structured lives today that it is important to allow them to have time to have fun and relax while still taking part in positive, educational activities. Having the opportunity to make decisions enables the teens to take part in activities that interest them and helps create a sense of ownership in the process.



## Impact of Program

Of those surveyed:

- 98% indicated that they plan to return to Teen Camp the following year
- 100% of the campers indicated that they learned something new at camp
  - I. Yielding more than 40 different responses such as cliff rappelling, nature facts, speed stacking, swing dancing, high ropes, key log rolling, dancing, how to cook an omelet, how to take a catfish off a hook and how to canoe
  - II. Campers indicated many life skills learned such as teamwork, communication, leadership, how to be outgoing, not to judge a book by its cover, plans sometimes change, the little things matter the most, making new friends, respect for people, that fun can be anywhere and people come in your life for a blessing or a lesson.
  - III. Participants were able to leave camp with a more positive attitude and outlook on life while also developing meaningful, positive relationships with others

A camp setting works well as the delivery method because studies have shown camp that increases a child's self-esteem by making them feel competent and successful (Burkhardt et al., 2005) Youth in a camp setting are challenged to think beyond the norm and take risks in a safe and supportive environment. By doing this, youth gain confidence and creativity. Youth are able to realize not only how their lives have been impacted, but how other people's lives have been impacted by their actions

By placing youth in positions where they are able to take on important responsibilities and know that their opinions are valued, they are able to gain self-confidence and commitment to a greater cause. In giving youth a voice and the power of choice, these programs allow and encourage them to be committed, caring contributors to the community (Kellogg Foundation, 1999). This is an important part of helping youth to discover their own personal beliefs and goals.

