

## Camp New Dawn Transforms Grief into Hope

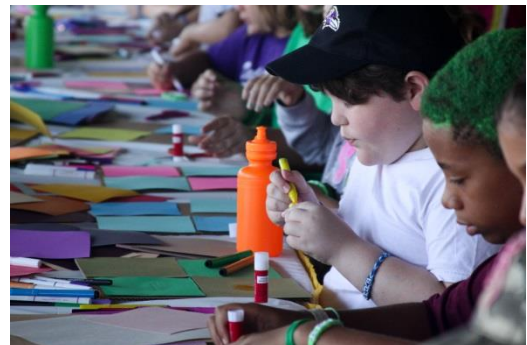


Teen campers led their younger camp friends in a closing ceremony that showed how, throughout the weekend, they began to transform stress, anger and regret into relief, gladness and joy.

In August Hospice of Queen Anne’s marked the 20<sup>th</sup> season of Camp New Dawn. With support from more than 100 volunteers, 77 young campers, ranging in age from four to 17, experienced how a weekend of fun and friendship makes it possible to transform grief into hope, joy and other life-affirming emotions.

Camp Pecometh in Centreville is home base for Camp New Dawn, a refuge for children and teens learning how to live with the loss of a loved one. A new addition in 2014 was an overnight family camp during which 14 families played and worked together to address issues related to the grief lingering after losing another family member.

Rhonda Knotts, MCC, grief counselor for Hospice of Queen Anne’s and director of Camp New Dawn, says, “The success of Camp New Dawn depends on the tireless service of a corps of adult and teen volunteers, who donate their time and open their hearts to make this a memorable experience for the campers who attend. From Saturday afternoon to Monday evening each camper has an opportunity to interact with trained counselors, adult buddies and activity leaders to express what it feels like to lose someone they love.”



Arts and craft activities at Camp New Dawn help campers express their feelings.



Camp Pecometh, home base for Camp New Dawn, becomes a safe place for children who are grieving a loss remember that they can be happy without feeling guilty.

Knotts adds, “Children and teens are often the forgotten mourners because they grieve differently than adults. Camp New Dawn can help these young people develop healthy coping skills that will benefit them throughout their lives.

Their parents also benefit because camp becomes a place where the children get support from other adults. While the children are at camp, their grieving parents and caretakers get a break so that they can tend to their own healing process.”

Camp New Dawn begins weeks before the campers arrive at Camp Pecometh as Knotts and Courtney Williams, manager of professional and volunteer services for Hospice of Queen Anne’s, interview and train volunteers. “I cry just thinking about the first training session this year. I looked out and saw a church hall filled with people who wanted to be part of the Camp New Dawn experience,” Knotts remembers. “Each year gets easier as more and more people volunteer to help with the many tasks entailed in making this a safe and healing experience for the campers.”



Camp New Dawn Director Rhonda Knotts was touched to receive a gift of the framed thumb prints of all of the 2014 campers.

Sarah Wade, wife of Camp New Dawn veteran volunteer Mark Wade, made her volunteer debut this year. “I saw through Mark how camp has a positive impact on the people who participate,” Wade says. “I asked my mother (Bonnie Niebuhr) to volunteer with me. We helped set up and supervise craft activities that were used to help the children talk about their feelings.”



Fun and friendship are the centerpiece of Camp New Dawn, a grief support camp for children, teens and the adults who are part of their healing experience.

In early 2014 Wade, who grew up in Caroline County, experienced the first loss of a close loved one when her grandfather died. “I knew that being at Camp New Dawn would be good for me,” she explains. “I was inspired to see how children who have lost parents and grandparents could cope with their feelings. They showed me that it’s ok to be sad, and that it’s ok to have fun and not feel guilty about it.”

Terrie Farmer, a kindergarten teacher at Centreville Elementary School, returned to Camp New Dawn in August for her second year as a buddy. “I was paired up with the same little girl again this year,” Farmer says. “She’s 11 now and I could see in a year’s time how much she has grown. I could also see how much more the children open up as they form bonds with other kids who have lost a loved one.”

Farmer, who volunteered with her 21-year-old daughter, Shelby, says, “This was something meaningful that we could do together.”

Being a Camp New Dawn buddy helped Farmer learn that sometimes being a good listener is more important than having the right words to say. “Sometimes I would just hug my little buddy and let her know that it’s ok to cry,” Farmer says.

Dale Doucet of Queen Anne knows Camp New Dawn through his younger children Justin and Samantha. “I found out about Camp New Dawn when my wife died in June 2013,” he remembers. “Justin, who was 13 when his mom passed away, didn’t want to talk about how he was feeling. Samantha, who was seven, was a social butterfly and talked about everything, but I worried about sending her to camp because she had never been away from home.”

Doucet adds, “When they came home that first year they both said they wanted to go back again. I saw that they had enjoyed talking to people who wanted to listen to them talk about their mom and how they were feeling.”

Doucet admits that the changes he saw in his children after they attended Camp New Dawn helped him move forward with his own grieving process. “Because I knew that Justin had someone other than me to open up to I didn’t have to worry about him as much,” Dale explains. “I’m thankful for the foundation he and Samantha have gotten at camp. They now know that it’s normal to be sad about missing their mother.”



A group of camp counselors and buddies released white doves during the closing ceremony for the 2014 Camp New Dawn hosted by Hospice of Queen Anne's.

As a single parent, Doucet says that he feels less alone thanks to the other adults who are there for his children at Camp New Dawn. “I have to be the parent who gives praise and discipline,” he says. “With Camp New Dawn to help Justin and Samantha I don’t also have to be a full-time counselor for them.”

For more information about Camp New Dawn, contact Rhonda Knotts, 443-262-4109, [rknotts@hospiceofqueenannes.org](mailto:rknotts@hospiceofqueenannes.org). Learn about the full program of grief support services offered through the Hospice of Queen Anne's Hope and Healing Center by calling 443-262-4100 and by visiting [www.hospiceofqueenannes.org](http://www.hospiceofqueenannes.org).