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KY housing authority, YMCA team up for summer camp

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COVINGTON, Ky. (AP) — A group of 25 children who live in public housing in northern Kentucky got a chance to take part in some different activities this summer.

The Housing Authority of Covington and YMCA Camp Ernst joined up to restart a summer program aimed at giving the children a summer camp experience that included schoolwork and outdoor recreational activities.

Jon Adkins, education coordinator for the Housing Authority of Covington, said the children were resistant at first, but took to the activities quickly because of the structure and routine.

"Probably every child who is here with us would not have an opportunity to participate in a summer camp like this if not for this program," Adkins said.

Adkins told The Kentucky Enquirer that the program was revamped after a similar partnership with Camp Kern in Oregonia, Ohio, ended in 2009. Adkins reached out to the Camp Ernst YMCA to restart the program this year.

"The biggest change is that we have added an education component," Adkins said. "The statistics show that urban children who don't have anything going on in the summer will fall further behind other kids their age, so with that knowledge we felt we had to do something."

The day includes an hour of classroom work in the morning, split between reading literacy and math literacy. The schoolwork is followed by a morning swim, lunch and recreational activities that are divided into three categories.

The ropes course features a zipline, a giant swing, a climbing wall and a rope bridge. The lake includes a 100-foot waterslide, banana boats and canoes and the valley offers swimming, archery and horseback riding.

Heather Scott, a counselor for the group, said the children also interact with campers from other groups, which allows them to work on social skills.

"We really try to get them to know the other kids and the other counselors," Scott said. "The biggest change we have seen is the way they have come to respect each other"

Mark Hardeman, 10, says he has made several new friends from outside of his group, including one who shares his love for basketball.

"I don't remember his name, but I just call him Nash because he reminds me of Steve Nash (of the NBA's Phoenix Suns)," Hardeman said. "He's cool."

The program is paid for by the housing authority. Adkins said he hopes it will become an annual activity.

"We're looking for grants to sustain the program and to grow the program," Adkins said. "Next year my goal is to expand it to 50 children because it's a program that truly changes the lives of these kids during the summertime."

Scott, a fourth-grade teacher at Ruth Moyer Elementary School in Fort Thomas, attended Camp Ernst as a youth and also worked as a cabin counselor. She said the program has been a learning experience for her as well.

"They are different than the kids I usually work with, but they are good kids and it has been a lot of fun for me," she said.

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