



A Roaming Residential Camp

*The logistics of
a camp without
a home base*

By Laura Goss and Alvin Koposko

Parents, campers, and camp directors are already planning for the 2020 summer camping season. Parents are wondering about the cost of camp, while teens are thinking about the late-night cabin chats and fun activities they will participate in. Camp directors are working on schedules, hiring staff, calculating camp prices, purchasing canteen items, preparing facilities, advertising, and so much more. For many camp directors, preparation is focused around on-site planning at their personal facility. However, some camp directors have additional areas to explore, as not all have just one location or a camp facility as a base. What does one do in this situation?

Alvin Koposko, Director of Sports/Fitness & Outdoor Recreation at Hurlburt Field in Florida, is tasked annually with coordinating Florida Water Adventure Camp, a 12-day camp that is always on the move. Can you imagine caravanning across Florida with 42 high school students? Logistics—as well as safety—are the biggest obstacles for running a roaming residential camp. One must coordinate transportation for youth,



equipment, food, and teaching supplies, along with multiple facilities to support lodging for a large group.

Georgia 4-H and Hurlburt Field Youth Programs are able to accomplish the logistical challenges through a partnership that allows the team to specialize in given areas of camp coordination. Georgia 4-H manages the grant application submission, which provides the funds for all camp programming and coordination. The University of Georgia also manages advertising, the application process, and transportation for the teens, including airfare and a charter bus. This allows the Hurlburt staff to focus on quality programming and in-state logistics. In order to plan effectively, one must rely on a team of people to pull off an exceptional camp experience, including a planning team and an on-site team to carry out the plan.

Playing And Staying

In 2018, two separate groups of teens participated in 12 cell-phone-free days, sleeping in tents, eating at picnic tables, kayaking rivers, swimming in springs, and exploring Florida's natural areas. Youth visited

Florida Caverns, Fort Cooper, John Pennekamp Coral Reef, Myakka River, Suwannee River, and Edward Ball Wakulla Springs state parks. Campers not only participated in hands-on experiences, but enjoyed lodging at the parks as well. State parks are an excellent resource for camp directors because the parks offer educational programs as well as ample housing, including lodges, tent camping, yurts, and group sites. Lodging there helps conserve funds while providing teens with an outdoor camping experience underneath the beautiful Florida sky. Another great benefit of partnering with state parks is the safety features, such as nightly closures of the entrance gates.

Support Staff

How does one maneuver teens across a state? Florida is blessed with a massive spring system along with an abundance of rivers. This system allows teens to explore their surroundings up close through kayaking, snorkeling, and swimming; however, the water system also provides a great means of travel. Some camp lodging and activities are conducted right on the

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shoreline of the river or the next park downstream. While teens kayak the springs or participate in teambuilding challenges in the swamp, a portion of the staff members drive the equipment trailer to the next location to prepare for the campers' arrival. The team is able to accomplish set-up and breakdown by using paid staff members along with vendors, like a charter bus company, to support the entire team. Therefore, in a roaming camp, it is essential to designate staff members with specific roles, such as camp set-up and breakdown and program-oriented counselors. The necessary equipment includes cooking supplies, first-aid supplies, tents, sleeping supplies, and camper belongings. If campers are unable to kayak or hike to the next adventure, they ride on a charter bus to the next point of interest. Having a bus for the group for the duration of the camp ensures safety in case of bad weather or schedule changes. A bus also helps with the overall coordination of the participants and camper belongings. It is one of the more significant contracts for the camp; however, the benefits outweigh the costs for camper safety and logistics.

The Risks


Another aspect in planning is ensuring that campers are prepared for a high-adventure camp. While some teens easily adapt to the elements—bugs, mud, humidity, heat,

wildlife, and the like—others have a harder time. When planning a mobile camp, staff members must ensure that youth understand what they are getting into. Campers are provided with an extensive packing list, an informative letter, and a female care handout. Staff provides bug spray and sunscreen to campers as needed, but while campers are roughing it in the woods, they must also take proper care of themselves. Particularly, due to the nature of activities based around water and Florida's hot and humid climate, it is crucial that teens bring several bathing suits to help prevent yeast infections, rashes, and other health concerns. Staff also helps prepare and ensures that youth are well cared for by selecting camp mentors. These are former campers who help lead, guide, and communicate with the new campers. Staff members have found that not only does this provide tremendous leadership skills for those selected, but younger teens are provided with a role model in their same age group and someone they can reach out to if a concern arises.

The Rewards

A camp that moves locations means every day will be new and exciting. Campers are able to experience a wide range of activities that will widen their knowledge and expand their comfort zone. While staff members could teach about the

environment in a classroom or out on the camp lawn, the possibilities are endless when youth actually go into nature. Florida Water campers, through their travels, are able to follow a drop of water 800 miles—from Northwest Florida to the coasts. They see up close how water moves through the eco-system. All Florida State Parks provide unique experiences, from air boating in the Everglades to snorkeling a blue spring to even hiking among cypress trees. However, it is the combination of the different parks and ecosystems that creates a well-rounded experience for the campers.

In boarding their planes for home, campers are taking so much more than dirty socks and wet bathing suits. They pack up memories, skills, friendships, and, most of all, a sense of belonging. A camp director in charge of coordinating a roaming camp can prop the feet up knowing that a well-rounded, safe, hands-on experience for teens has been provided. If you wish to offer a camp on wheels, consider partnering with local and state agencies, as this provides additional resources to teens and staff along with decreasing planning pressure on one team. Collaborating with agencies creates a comprehensive experience that benefits all those involved. 

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