



Camp Fire USA

sends kids down
the right trail

WO·HE·LO

BY SARAH ZUGSCHWERDT

When you were a kid, selling lemonade might have earned you a small handful of change. Not so for one Kent Camp Fire group. Serious candy and garage sales the year through pay for a fun and learning-filled agenda.

"I like the camping, I like going to the Tolt-McDonald [campsite and picnic]; anything where we camp away from the city lights because I just realized that I like astronomy," says Taylor Ford, 12.

"It makes me feel like I have something to look forward to when I have meetings every Thursday," 13-year-old Jeannette Natoli relates. She also likes going to Camp Fire's Camp Sealth on Vashon Island.

Spending the night inside Woodland Park Zoo "was cool because I thought we were sleeping outside, but we went in this big dome thing, and there were a lot of people sleeping in there," says Redmond Ford, 11.

This picture is just what Dr. Luther and Charlotte Gulick envisioned when they started the Camp Fire Girls program in Maine in 1910. The camp fire, they decided, was the original center of community life where work, health and love converged when people gathered around it. It was also the place where older adults taught the younger generation and prepared them to join the community as caring and confident adults.

At each level, the program leads youth on five different "trails" that extend from and lead to the camp fire, such as the trail to creativity and the trail to the future. All curricu-



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The boys and girls of a Kent Campfire USA group that meets at Benson Hill Elementary smile for the camera while holding signs that show what the group is all about.

For information about Camp Fire USA, visit www.campfire-usa.org and follow the links to the Central Puget Sound Council where there's an online interest form. Mary Olsen can also be reached by phone at 206.826.8945.

lum activities use research-based educational standards and are customized to a group's interests. In 1975, the program became co-ed; other additions have included Saturday Club, a program for children with disabilities; day camps in addition to longstanding resident camps, and some childcare.

To build leadership, members take turns leading the activities within the group. As students mature, they gradually assume more of the responsibilities of adult leaders.

"We actually have kids graduating from our programs who can lead events for two or three hundred people and do all the planning," says Mary Olsen, director of Camp Fire's group and older youth programs, Central Puget Sound Council.

For this Kent multi-age group, older students help plan activities for younger ones, such as writing a skit showcasing Camp Fire benefits, learning life skills that include planning, budgeting and decision-making, and developing social skills, strong values, volunteerism and self-esteem.

For the annual Camp Fire candy sale, group leader and parent Patti Ford explains "they're taught marketing skills to get ready for the candy sale. We practice doing change, being one-on-one with customers, and doing inventory, so they'll go out there and not just look cute, but know the behind the scenes stuff as well."

More than anything else, though, it's the family-like feeling of belonging and acceptance that's obvious in this group.

"It's meant that I get to do new things and go to camp and make new friends..." says 11-year-old Kandyse Bail-Russell enthusiastically. "I've become more social and being able to talk to more kids, and I've been able to listen better." Before Camp Fire, she says, "I didn't talk to as many kids."



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