

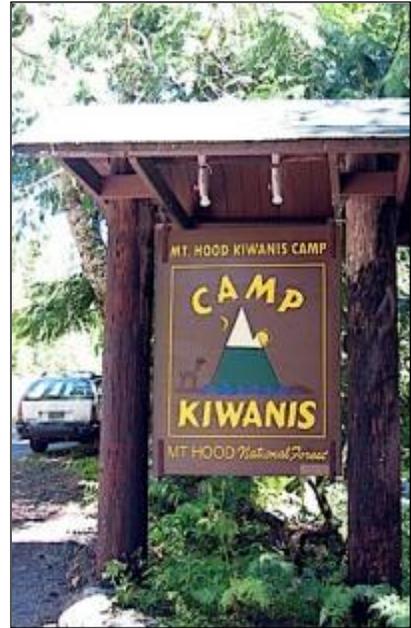
# Being a Counselor at Mt. Hood Kiwanis Camp



# Questions and Answers about Being a Counselor at Mt. Hood Kiwanis Camp

## Can you tell me more about your camper population?

At Mt. Hood Kiwanis Camp we provide a camping experience to individuals with disabilities. A large majority of our campers have developmental disabilities, are on the autism spectrum, or have Down Syndrome. Additionally, many of our campers have severe or complex disabilities. When we say this, we are referring to persons who have had multiple physical, cognitive, communicative, and/or sensory disabilities since birth or early childhood. Such challenges have a major impact on an individual's understanding of their world and the ways in which they communicate with others. Often these persons need assistance in many of the tasks of everyday life and continual supervision and support. Although people with severe disabilities all need intensive support, this support can take different forms. Let's look at two different individuals who come to Kiwanis Camp.



“Mary” has been physically disabled since birth and has limited ability to move, take care of her personal needs, and to



speak and respond to others. Mary is very bright and has a great sense of humor. Mary uses a wheelchair and needs help transferring from the wheelchair to her bed. Her physical disabilities are such that she cannot sit on a toilet, and thus she wears attends, which need to be changed several times a day. She needs help dressing, grooming, and needs to be fed at meals- all responsibilities of her counselor. Mary has needed this kind of assistance her entire life and she is used to and comfortable with people helping her.

“Evan” is a young man with autism. He is nonverbal and lets others know what he wants or needs through his actions. He has a hard time understanding spoken words. When Evan is at camp, we use a picture schedule of activities and icons of different objects or actions as a tool for communication. Sometimes Evan will point to a picture of what he wants but other times he will just go

and get it. He is very active and constantly moving. Evan is sensitive to lots of noise and we make sure he has a quiet space to go to when he needs it. In many ways, Evan shows us that he is happy to be at camp and having fun, but not in the usual ways of talking or smiling.



These are just two examples of the children and adults who come to Kiwanis Camp. We hold weeks for groups of adults and children ranging in age from 10 to 30+ (weeks are arranged by age). During your two week counseling experience, you will spend one week with two different age groups.

During Orientation at PSU and the On-Site Training at the beginning of your session, you will learn how to assist, supervise, and communicate with persons with severe disabilities.

## **How are the staff and counselors organized at the camp?**

A Camp Director and two Assistant Directors (AD's) oversee the entire program.

Program staff members oversee different program activities at camp such as adventure, horses, arts and crafts, etc...

As a counselor, you will be assigned to a group. Each group consists of about eight counselors. Each group is trained, supported, and supervised by two staff members, the Counselor Supervisor (CS) and the Assistant Counselor Supervisor (ACS). Approximately eight campers are also assigned to each group. You will be assigned as the counselor to one or two campers in your group.

## **Who will supervise me?**

The Counselor Supervisor's (CS) job is to lead your group through the camp activities, teach and support you and the other counselors, and help you meet the needs of the camper you are assigned. Our CSs emphasize teamwork and group problem solving. Under their guidance, you will become very close with the counselors in your group, you will watch out for each other, and help each other. Most of our CSs are masters level special education teachers or recreation therapists with many years of experience working with people with disabilities and specifically at Kiwanis Camp. At the end of the first week and the second week the CS will complete a written evaluation of you and meet individually with you. Their goal is to provide you with useful feedback and a successful learning experience.



The Assistant Counselor Supervisor's (ACS) job is to assist the CS in all tasks necessary to keep your group "running." They will run countless errands, handle logistics and training, and support

you in your counselor responsibilities. Our ACSs are usually former PSU counselors heading toward careers in teaching or counseling, who have had several years of experience at camp. It's likely that your ACS will be the same age or younger than you. They are supervising and teaching you because of their experience with our camp program and campers.

### **How am I assigned to a particular camper?**

Within your group, you will be assigned to be the counselor for a particular camper. Sometimes a counselor is assigned two campers. Sometimes two counselors are assigned to one camper. It all depends on the needs of the campers in the group. The Camp Director and Counselor Supervisor of your group are responsible for making these assignments. Although you will develop a special relationship with your assigned camper, you will also get to know all of the other campers in your group well.

### **Where will I stay at the camp?**

The camp has separate sleeping facilities for male and female counselors. There is a wide variety of types of lodging that you may be assigned to. These include: cabins, a yurt, platform tents with beds, to your standard camping tent. Lodging depends on the group that you are with. The majority of counselors will sleep in platform tents. All lodging is group lodging.

### **What is the food like?**

We have a great cook who provides varied, tasteful meals. Vegetarians are provided separate main dishes. Extra green salad and fruit are available at lunch and dinner. Cold water, coffee, and hot water are available throughout the day and evening. One night your group will have a cookout and Thursdays we have a barbecue. For special dietary needs (gluten free, vegan, dairy free etc), you will want to bring items to supplement the meals. There is a counselor refrigerator and cabinet to store your food.



### **What is the weather like?**

The camps are in the Mt. Hood National Forest at an elevation of 4,000 feet. It is always about 10 degrees cooler at camp than it is in Portland. When it's raining at camp, it's much cooler than in Portland. At night the temperature also drops. Please bring appropriate clothing.

### **What do the campsites look like?**

The camp is on 22 beautiful forested acres within the Mt. Hood National Forest. The wooded site is on the slope of Mt. Hood's Zig Zag Ridge. The Zig Zag River roars and tumbles down through the campsite. The terrain is hilly and rocky. We have gravel paths between camp buildings. Since we serve a lot of children and adults who use wheelchairs, counselors and staff get their exercise pushing persons in wheelchairs up hills and on gravel paths. We

help each other with this task.

## What should I bring?

In your Counselor Manual you will find a complete checklist of what to bring. You will receive your Counselor Manual at the Orientation Meeting. Generally, you will need to bring clothes for warm and cold weather, rain gear, sturdy shoes and/or hiking boots, modest swimsuit, towels, sleeping bag, extra blanket for warmth, and pillow. Except in the swimming pool area, staff and counselors must wear closed-toe shoes at all times (no sandals). The reason for this is that wearing sandals puts your feet at risk of injury when helping people in wheelchairs in rough terrain.

## I have medications to take. What do I do with them?

Because we have campers who can, and do, get into other people's belongings, all staff and counselors give their medications to the nurse who keeps them in a locked cabinet. You will be able to retrieve your medications from the nurse whenever you need them, but they **cannot** be left in your bunk area.



## What does a day at the camp look like?

The day begins about 7:00 a.m., or earlier, for counselors and staff. They might stop by the dining hall for coffee or tea on their way to the area where their group of campers are sleeping. Counselors and staff help campers get up, go to the bathroom, get dressed, and ready for the day. Some campers may need full assistance getting ready. When campers are ready, we all gather for songs and stretching at the flag pole before breakfast. Breakfast is at 8:30 a.m. Some campers with physical disabilities need to be fed and counselors and staff provide this assistance. After breakfast, the living groups rotate through different activities. Camp programs include adventure, arts-n-crafts, recreation/fishing, canoeing at Trillium Lake, horses, hiking, and swimming. All groups will rotate through activities daily. Lunch is at 12:30 p.m. After lunch, campers have a rest period. A counselor from the group stays nearby while the other counselors



take a break. This responsibility is rotated between the counselors in a group. In the afternoon, your living group participates in two more activities. Dinner is at 6:00 p.m. After dinner counselors spend time with their campers helping them write or draw pictures in their journals. At about 7:30 p.m. we have a variety of all-camp evening activities during the week. These include campfires, carnivals, and dances. At 9:00 p.m. counselors and staff help campers get ready for bed. Two counselors in each group are assigned night duty and sleep outside in the hall near the area where the group's campers are sleeping.

After the campers are in bed, the Counselor Supervisors hold a meeting with their counselor group to discuss the day, problem solve, and plan out for the next day. At about 10:00 p.m., counselors not on night duty are free to relax. As you can see from this schedule, being a counselor is pretty much a 24-hour experience.

## How are campers supervised during rest periods and at night?

The campers in a group all sleep in the same area. Each night two counselors from a group are assigned night duty. They get their sleeping bags and sleep near the camper's sleeping area. They are available to assist campers if needed. Every day after lunch campers take a one hour rest period. One counselor in a group is assigned to stay nearby during rest period. Thus, during the course of the week you will take one night duty and one rest period duty. Camp staff is nearby to help with the night time and rest period supervision.



## When do I get a break?

During the afternoon rest periods and nights that you are not on duty, you are free from responsibilities for campers. Because the program is so active, most counselors also take a nap in the afternoon if they are not on duty.

## What kinds of personal care tasks will I need to do for campers?

Each week most of our campers will need personal care assistance. They need help transferring in and out of their wheelchairs, dressing, showering and toileting or assistance with changing attends. We will teach you and show you how to do these tasks correctly and with consideration for the feelings of the person you are helping.



We know that helping another person with showering, toileting, and diapering is hard for anyone. For most counselors this is a new experience and it is only natural to be nervous or apprehensive. Remember, too, that about half of our camper participants are teens or adults, so you may also help persons the same age or older than you are with these tasks. Also, because we have more women *counselors* than men *counselors* at camp, but usually 50% men and 50% women *campers*, sometimes women counselors provide

personal care for male campers. All of these personal assistance tasks are done with many others around in the sleeping and bathroom areas and with help from our trained staff.

We want you to think about the personal care you will be providing at camp and ask us questions that arise for you. We also know that if you will step up to this challenge, you will move past being uncomfortable after a few days as you learn to do these tasks. This has been true for the

hundreds of PSU student counselors before you, who all started this learning process out of their comfort zone.

## How will I be trained?

Your training begins with an Orientation Session at PSU. At that time we will give you an overview of the entire program and then break out into smaller groups to start learning about persons with severe disabilities and how one provides personal care, supervision, and communicates with persons with severe disabilities.

At the Orientation Session you will receive a Counselor Manual which you will need to read before coming to camp. On-Site Training occurs at the beginning of your two weeks at camp. From Saturday morning until Sunday afternoon (when the campers arrive), we will continue your training.

We can't fully prepare you before the campers arrive. This is largely a "hands-on" learning experience, and therefore, once the campers arrive, the real learning begins. To make this training experience successful for you, you need to be a person who will accept coaching, suggestions and feedback throughout the week from your Counselor Supervisor and the other camp staff.



## How much time do I get off in between the two weeks?

On the Friday of the first week, counselors are usually free to leave by 5:00 p.m. Counselors then return by 12:00 p.m. on Sunday to start the second week. Thus you have Friday evening, Saturday, and Sunday morning off. On the final Friday at the end of the second week, counselors are also free to leave by 5:00-6:00 p.m.



## Can I leave the campgrounds during the week?

From Sunday to Friday of each week you will need to stay on-site at the camp. On Thursday night, the big campfire night, we suggest that you invite your family and friends up to see the program and to visit with you.

## Where and when can I smoke?

We have a designated outdoor smoking area at camp. We never smoke in the presence of campers. If you smoke you need to realize that although your Counselor Supervisor will arrange

a "smoking break" schedule with you, every time you take a smoking break, the other counselors in your group will need to supervise your camper for you until you return. This means that you will need to take as few smoking breaks as you can and make them as brief as possible. Every summer we have counselor participants who smoke, so know that these arrangements can be made.

### **What is the alcohol and drug policy?**

Any person in violation of the following policy will be asked to leave the premises immediately. Violation of the policy will result in termination from your student or volunteer experience and will affect your ability to receive PSU credit for the camp experience.

You will be in violation of the drug and alcohol policy if you:

- Have drugs or alcohol in your possession on campgrounds.
- Consume alcohol or engage in illicit drug use on campgrounds.
- If you leave camp and return intoxicated.

The "Alcohol and Drug Policy" form has a full description of our policy. You will need to sign and return this form as part of your application.

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**Thank you for your interest in our program!**

*Now that you have learned about being a counselor at the Kiwanis Camp, please complete the Applicant Self-Assessment as part of your Application.*