

COMMUNITY

A children's camp for healing

by DONNA SNAPP

78 children, ages 6 through 17, from Citrus, Pasco and Hernando Counties, attended Camp Reach Out on April 7 through 9. All the children had experienced a significant loss within the past year.

HPH Hospice has offered the free camp to grieving children every year since 1993. The camp is designed to be fun for the children while helping them cope with their loss. Reach Out stands for Remembering Everything About Coping, Hope, Openness, Understanding, Trust. HPH Hospice staff, including bereavement counselors and registered nurses, are on hand, along with dozens of volunteers, to make sure the campers enjoy their weekend as they learn how to deal with their loss. Just meeting other children who also experienced the death of a loved one, and realizing they're not alone, can be a great relief.

Each child was assigned to one of eight

cabins, the Robins, Mal-lards, Wrens, Warblers, etc. and bonds started forming between the campers on the bus ride to the camp or in the dining hall on arrival Friday evening. After dinner, each cabin group rotated to the drum circle for music therapy, yoga to focus on body position and breathing, to play human foosball or start work on their mask art project to express their feelings.

The setting for the camp was the beautiful Lakewood Retreat in Brooksville, which offers all sorts of diversions, such as the lake, playgrounds, a large dining hall, game room, swimming pool, large multipurpose buildings, cabins, open fields and trails through the woods.

In addition to all the campground had to offer, HPH Hospice brought their own diversions, such as the Wall, the Skis, the Balance Beam and many others. As the children mastered each challenge, they learned to cope, problem-solve, build confidence and gain trust. Cabin leaders and cabin assistants and management team volunteers worked together to make sure each camper benefitted from the



A young camper tackles the climbing wall with some help from her new friends during Camp Reach OUT at Lakewood Retreat in Brooksville

games. Saturday afternoon was time for swimming, water slides, kickball, foosball and the game room.

After dinner on Satur-

day, campers went to a special building, lit only by candles, to complete a project in silence. Then the campers walked down a candlelit path to a tiki-torch

lit circle by the lake for a memorial service that took place at dusk. Cabin by cabin, the campers placed their written message to their loved one into a

nest, a safe and loving place, and took a gemstone in memory. As night fell, the rice paper messages were lit as the campers

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circled around the fire.

After breakfast Sunday morning, parents came for the closing ceremony, awards and a video of the busy weekend activities. Parents were given orientation and lunch was provided as Camp Reach Out 2017 was brought to a close. Children that were strangers on Friday were now hugging each other, exchanging phone numbers and promising to meet at the Hospice Counseling Center.

“HPH Hospice Camp Reach Out 2017 was a huge success, thanks to the efforts of the staff, the enormous support of the community, the Hernando Healthcare Foundation, and many, many others and the amazing volunteers who generously donated their

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Older campers enjoying the giant see-saw activity during Camp Reach Out 2017

time to make camp a reality,” said Megan Bruno, Bereavement Supervisor

and Camp Administrator. For information about programs HPH Hospice

offers throughout the year, call 727-876-3647.