

What a summer it was!

by Carl Foster, Board Vice President

As the LBH enters its 19th year, we are pleased with our ever expanding menu of services while we remain committed to our original mission of providing as many quality services as possible to as many children as possible. The first thing I want to do is to give a huge standing ovation to our summer staff of local college students who were the heroes of the 2009 Summer Camp program. Their comments, thoughts, and observations are featured further on in this newsletter.

Our camp was originally designed to give all the children in our year-round programs a place to go and something constructive to do during the summer months. You know the saying "idle minds. . ." For the past two summers we have succeeded in keeping our kids busy, out of trouble, off drugs, and better prepared for school.

This year's program presented some major differences and new challenges. To begin with, this summer our families were faced with more welfare issues compared to last year. One example is the increased number of the campers arriving in the morning not having had breakfast. To address this problem, we more than doubled the number of shopping trips we made with their parents. While the kids played, we packed up the parents and went grocery shopping. I was struck that none of them asked for any extras or nonessentials. They all needed basic family food items plus the usual laundry supplies, diapers, essential clothing, and lots of help with utilities and other daily survival issues. Also, for the first time we had dads as primary caregivers and lone nurturers of children who didn't have moms in the picture.

The strained economy has hit our families hard. We've thought for a long time it would be great to have a group specifically for fathers. In a mixed blessing scenario, we've been able to work with more of the dads of our campers since their being unemployed has left them more available time during the day. Our new Dads Group provided an opportunity for some of these men to meet, talk, and even work with some of our summer staff on job searches. By September, we saw results from that assistance. As dads started going back to work, our weekday meeting numbers dwindled, but we didn't mind. It was a good problem to have! Since some of our dads worked evenings while others worked days, it grew tough to schedule a good time for all.

The Moms' Lunches were also a hit. We're also delighted that our mentor families and our client families have so much in common and talk so freely among themselves. Overall, we've provided more services to more families this year than in any single year in the agency's history.



If our 2009 summer camp had a theme, it was water! We swam in it, slid down it, and smushed beach sand between our toes! We probably set a record for the use of sun block! We made three trips to the ocean, weekly visits to neighborhood pools, and lots of time on our home-made LBH Backyard "Water Park." Our campers saw every kid-friendly summer blockbuster movie, rode lots horses, got attacked by jellyfish (OUCH!), and did their best to drive up McDonald's stock prices.

But, it wasn't all fun and games. Unlike last year, this time we had several campers with special needs, some requiring lots of trips to visit therapists, including some young people who needed daily therapies. This year we were able to offer free transportation for the kids to their appointments. The parents loved it.



We also added a teacher from a local charter school for summer tutoring. All of our older kids got books for the summer and we had mandatory reading times at the LBH. We also had weekly Lunches with Steve, a certified drug and alcohol counselor who offered fun, frank, and age-appropriate talks with our kids about avoiding alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. He also shared the experiences of people who have abusive habits. At the LBH, we don't believe people just "decide" to abuse drugs or develop risky lifestyles for no reason. We think situations and perceptions contribute to susceptibility of these negative life choices. We spent this summer identifying and addressing some of the contributing factors to self-destructive actions. To that end, we discussed morality and socialization, and we hired a local actor with therapeutic experience to help the kids act out moral dilemmas. We talked about the situations that lead kids to get kicked out of school, and about "putting on the breaks" (exhibiting self-control and being less impulsive and reactive), as well as trying to consider the consequences of our actions. The discussion of moral dilemmas and acting out emotionally challenging situations paid big dividends for our kids.



Maybe the most important thing we did all summer was walk with each child through their neighborhood and talk about what "you" saw. We asked them such questions as, "What caught your attention? Did anything frighten or concern you? Who were the people you met?" Our aim was to give their environment some perspective.

The summer of 2009 was a great one for the LBH because it was a great one for our kids!

Not your average summer job!

As we did last year, we asked our summer associates to write about their experiences, and here is some of what they said.

Training with the children's psychiatrist really changed my perspective on how to deal with children. We learned that yelling and scolding is not as effective as eye contact, physical contact (hold their hands when you speak to them), and a soothing tone of voice when trying to get a child to behave or follow instructions. Providing a constant structure for the children was an interesting concept too.

The LBH uses manufactured structure to teach basic socialization like "no shoes" in the red carpet room.

There isn't anything different about the red carpet. It's just a method to help teach following a rule. Each day the kids walked in, took their shoes off, placed them in the cabinet, sat down, and waited for instructions.

Although some of these practices at first seemed silly to me, I now know that they work. It is a great feeling when you see the progress of a child's social and behavioral skills right before your eyes!



One boy in particular with whom I worked is an extremely hyperactive child. I saw Brian make progress over the course of the

summer. He struggled with impulse control and would sometimes accidentally hit another child just because he was running around or couldn't stay still. Now Brian has the ability to recognize when his "engine" is running too hot, and with a little guidance can cool it off even if it takes a time out or two. He is a great boy who is improving everyday and it's a rewarding feeling helping him at the LBH.

The LBH has been a terrific experience for me. I am very happy to have been part of

the staff and what we do for the DC community. I have become so much more aware of the struggles that occur within families and how they negatively effect the generation growing up today. When I looked at the kids in my group, I saw a story in every single child. I realized the great responsibility I have.

Charles "Mr. Chuck," "Kindergarten Cop" to Dir. Foster – Junior, Catholic University

I started working at the LBH at the start of the summer, but it felt like I had been here for years. I never knew it was possible to connect with a group of kids so fast and have such an impact their lives – and they on mine. I was the leader of the group, yet they affected me in ways they couldn't possible know. Everyday I went home exhausted from all the emotions children present during camp, which is not a bad thing. In my mind, exhaustion means you are actually working and putting in the effort to try to make a difference. My kids went home wiped out every day, so I knew they cared as much as I did.

Everyday, I tried to think of new ways to get through to them. For instance, I know Eric is a great kid and all he really wants to do is please people, even if that means he doesn't get what he wants. To help him succeed in this group and to contribute to his personal growth, I made sure our activities were interactive and require all of the kids to work together. When

we did this and it worked, Eric's behavior and enthusiasm were captivating. Honestly, I wonder sometimes what he is going to be when he is grown up, and the possibilities are endless. The possibilities for all my kids are the fuel that I ran on and kept me going, even during those times when their behavior wasn't what

I wanted it to be and they seem uninterested in what we wanted them to do – the times they would rather play, skateboard, or watch movies.

All of these kids really need a little assistance and guidance just to manage the issues of their everyday life. Their potential is endless. Marquette was another unique individual I got to know. He was caught between two age groups, his older brother and his brother's friends, juxtaposed to the younger kids in our group. This tore him apart, and it tore me apart to see him struggle to fit in. So I tried to create an environment in which he didn't have to fight to fit in, or even think about fitting in; he was just simply IN.

The experience of this summer and the growth of my kids are the memories that will help me become an effective teacher in future years. Even though I was supposed to be guiding them, they guided me more then they know and they are going to be the ones feeding my ambition when I follow my dream to become a teacher.

Tim Brady, Junior, Catholic University

I first decided to apply to the LBH as a "just in case something big happens" job. Living about an hour outside of DC (on a good day!), I was never planning to work in the city. Between my reservations about the commute and my parents' wish for me to live at home, I was ready to say "no" to an interview and just walk away from the opportunity to work at the LBH. Carl (Foster), though, talked me into coming to visit the LBH for an interview, and I knew I would accept a job offer the moment I stepped in the door.

This summer reassured me that I made the correct decision in choosing to work at the LBH. There were rough moments, as with any job, but it was



rewarding to be involved in so many children's lives and see the good that the LBH is doing for these children and their families. Working with the girls' group was a learning experience, and definitely a good one. Being able to take the girls to their first concert – *Beyonce* – and see the joy and amazement on their faces was worth the late night drive home. It wasn't only their first concert. For almost all of the girls it was their first ever late night out without their families.

It felt amazing to help these girls do things I take for granted, such as going to *Subway*, taking the *Metro*, or going *bowling* for the first time in their lives. It was so rewarding. This job provided the opportunity to make a difference in these girls' lives, as well as the other children at the LBH, and that is what made it so important to me.

Being a part of the *summer camp* at the LBH has truly been a life-changing experience. While I can hope that I had an impact on at least a few of the girls in my group, I know for certain that they had an impact on me. Over the summer, I had the opportunity to get to know *twelve very different individuals*, and I am so thankful for the time I was able to spend with them. These girls taught me a lot about them, but also a lot about myself. Watching them grow, change, learn, and form new friendships has been an awesome experience, and I feel so lucky to have been a part of it.

The LBH truly has the capability to change the lives of those who walk through its door, whether you come to the LBH for services, to work, or for anything in between.

PS – When I told Director Foster one of the girls called me “strict,” his response was, “I love it – be stricter!”

Lauren Morency, Sophomore, Catholic University

At the LBH the staff is trained to help the children develop better *self-control, verbalization, and socialization skills*. The LBH techniques seem easy to follow for some children, but more difficult for others. The LBH has a working relationship with a *child psychiatrist* in the neighborhood. When a child needs special attention they go to *The Doctor*. One of the kids getting special attention is progressing very well. He acted up once in a while, but watching his progress was exciting because I saw how *the techniques we used are helping him*. Another child is taking longer to progress. He worries me, but I think, slowly, he will start to make a change because there were times when he behaved quite well. This child can be gentle and sweet, however in a group he can be loud and disruptive and lose control when frustrated. When I separated him from the group, talked to him softly, and discussed the consequences of his actions, like missing out on group activities, he understood and tried to manage his behavior. I saw him trying – the wheels spinning in his child-sized brain. At the LBH I learned that talking to a child one-on-one works better than talking to the whole group. If the child knows the reason for the time out, what is expected of them, and we keep the situation calm, they learned. They adjusted. They improved.

Rewards and punishment both work. But when do you use which? This summer, the kids all had *book bags* – even the little kids. The bags went home every evening and came back every morning. Each night I gave them homework. The kids who did their homework got to sit up front the next day. They also got stickers. More and more kids remembered their homework. We taught them to try. They made an effort; even if the homework wasn't done correctly, they all tried.

The punishments were also interesting. If they misbehaved, it was time out away from the group. They were close enough to hear the fun, but they couldn't

participate. Before they came back to the group, they promised to modify their behavior. It worked. It's so rewarding.

*Evelyn Jimenez, Sophomore, Trinity University
(LBH Summer
Camps '08 &*

The LBH truly has the capability to change the lives of those who walk through its door . . . '09)

When I was asked to come back to the LBH for a second summer camp, I got excited. I was eager to see which kids would be back from last year and equally excited to meet new kids. I saw many faces from last year, but I focused in on one kid in particular – *Marquette*. When I first met him last year he was hyperactive and he always appeared to be uncomfortable. At times he seemed almost uncontrollable. He could never sit still. This year he was calm, mature, and responsible. He participates in the LBH during the school year too. It's obvious the services we provided last summer continued through the school year and made a big difference in this child.

There were other changes from last year. This summer had many new children, new staff, more trips, new activities, and the kids even had a *sleepover*. Still some things remain consistent: the cozy and loving feeling of the LBH, the kids positive reaction to the LBH atmosphere, and how happy they are to be at summer camp at the LBH.

At the LBH each child feels happy, safe, and comfortable. Some of the kids were new to the LBH, others have been here most of their lives, and they were equally comfortable.

Something that always reminded me of last summer is the way I felt when I left the LBH every afternoon. I would have never imagined the extent to which these children have changed my life. My sister gets out of work everyday and does not think about it until the next morning when she reenters her office. I couldn't do that at my work since these kids became part of my life. My family and friends asked me about “my kids” all the time, and that is something that I love. In fact, they have taught me so much that I don't think I am the same person that I was before knowing the LBH.

*Julia Caruana, Senior, Catholic University (LBH
Summer Camps '08 & '09)*



Stepping out with the LBH kids!



A "little horsing" around at the LBH



Making four-legged friends at the annual Virginia Gold Cup



Water, water everywhere, and how we all did play!



Lunch with law firm Fulbright & Jaworski partner Billy Jacobson



LBH summer camp kids enjoy a field trip lead by Director Carl Foster at the CSPAN studios



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