December, 2013

## Dear Friends of Camp Agape

We are so appreciative of your ongoing support as we begin to plan our NINTH summer of providing a loving camp experience for children with a parent in prison. As the snow outside swirls around in the icy wind, nothing brings a smile to the face like imagining our campers rolling down a grassy hillside in the sunshine. This contrast of weather is an apt metaphor for the role of the Camp Agape experience in the lives of our campers. Neuroscientists are learning more and more about the chilling lifelong effects of the chronic stress brought about by adverse childhood experiences, and the regenerative and resilient effects of stable trustworthy relationships with compassionate adults in the lives of children undergoing stress. In simpler words, we have heard this confirmed over the years by our campers: “This isn’t camp, it is heaven.” “This is the first time in two years that I have felt safe.” “At camp, I can just be me - the real me.”

This past summer, we served 59 children. There were forty children between 8 and 11 years of age, and nineteen youth between 12 and 15 years of age. We can only offer the briefest of snippets to give you a sense of the campers we serve.

* A four year camper was having a particularly difficult time. Her mother will be released soon, and she is torn between her love for her mother, and her dread of returning to a life of chaos. She asked for a Bible to take home, and wants to begin attending church.
* A very impulsive and often abrasive girl found a sense of competence and peace while weaving on a loom.
* A four year camper with an explosive temper, and a year of loss and uncertainty, was able to walk away from two potential fights on the last day of camp. He led three other boys in singing camp songs for the entire hour-long journey home in the camp van.
* A worried camper shared that the cardiologist said her mother would die if her mother “did crack” again.
* A teenage girl became homeless while at camp. She didn’t know where she would be going at the end of the week.
* A young man back for his seventh summer at camp, had been one of the most challenging campers in the past. This year, he was relaxed, cheerful, and always ready to help. He is talking about going to college.

You might ask: “What can we possibly offer children living with such chronic and toxic stress in their lives?” What we have to offer is our friendship, our reliability, and the unconditional love and acceptance that we have experienced ourselves when we have been truly open to the presence of Christ in our lives. This is what we attempt to offer the children. It is only possible through your continued prayers and support.

## Thank You

The Camp Agape Board of Directors

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