

July 10, 2008

C.A.M.P. Adjusting Attitudes

Program aims to help youths who've run afoul of law

By Bob Fowler

Knoxville News-Sentinel

Nick Hendley thought he'd reached his limit. After hours of marching, wind sprints and helping tote a 400-pound telephone pole, he was exhausted and dripping sweat. Struggling mightily, the 15-year-old simply couldn't get over a 6-foot-high climbing wall of wooden boards. While National Guard sergeants ordered the Harriman teen to keep trying, other reluctant enrollees in C.A.M.P. also urged Nick on. Those participants in the Children's Attitude Motivational Program had good reason. Until Nick scaled the wall, they were stuck in limbo, perched at the crest of a pushup, their arms quivering as their backs bowed upward. Egged on by his campmates, Nick reached within himself, gulped down deep breathes and finally clawed his way up and over. It was a small victory in an ongoing rigorous program that's a mix of military drills and motivational lessons. The C.A.M.P. program, designed for youngsters who have run afoul of the law, seeks to get them back on track. Juveniles ages 13 through 17 – some of them now 18 – were assigned to the program by Roane County's two juvenile judges. Enrollees include those who skipped school, violated curfew, smoke pot, got drunk or smuggled knives into school. Those who complete the seven-week program can win favor in the juvenile court system. They can have their probations shortened or see their court records wiped clean. They will have earned it. "It's not a fun summer camp, but it helps the kids in a number of ways," says director Donna Forstrom, with the Roane County Anti-Drug Coalition. That group has teamed up with the Tennessee National Guard's Counter Drug Division and the Roane County Sheriff's Department to sponsor the program, now wrapping up its third year. "We've seen major, major attitude changes" in the participants, said Roane County Deputy Daryl Cook. "It's a complete lifestyle change for them." Each day, the students undergo physical training, hear cautionary talks from guest speakers and learn to assume responsibilities, such as making up their beds and eating well. "It's helping me get in shape and stay out of trouble so I won't have to come back," said Cody Lively, 17, of Rockwood. On probation for bringing two knives to Rockwood High School, he got into trouble again when he violated curfew and was nabbed out walking at 3 a.m. That desire to not repeat C.A.M.P.'s rigors is a strong motivator, said National Guard Staff Sgt. Ryan Burchfield. The truancy docket in Bledsoe County was 80 to 90 pages

long before students heard from enrollees in that county's C.A.M.P. program, Burchfield said. Now it's half that, he said. "Students there found out that, if they continued to cut up, they'd have to spend summer in C.A.M.P.," Burchfield said. "It's been a tremendous benefit," said Charles Lampson of Harriman, nabbed for public intoxication the day before his 18th birthday. "People who have an attitude, the sergeants got on it," he said. "I act better toward my peers and family." Participants this week are getting ready for a competition Friday in Rhea County with C.A.M.P. participants there from Bledsoe, McMinn and Grundy counties. The Guard's Counter Drug Division operates those programs. Forstrom became involved in C.A.M.P. and the Roane County Anti-Drug Coalition after her only son, Clayton Smith, died of an accidental drug overdose in November 2003. He was 17 years old. "I'm trying to turn a tragedy into something positive for other kids," said Forstrom, an Oak Ridge resident.