

Special Educators' LETTER

Published by St. Stephen's Lutheran Academy at Glade Run Lutheran Services

Summer 2013



The gardens used to grow fresh vegetables located on our grounds just west of St. Stephen's Academy.

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Feedback From Our Students

Dear Colleagues,

I hope this second edition of the *Special Educators' Newsletter* finds you transitioned from a successful school year into a rejuvenating summer. With St. Stephen's graduation ceremony tomorrow, I find myself reflecting on the advocacy of school partners to make this day possible for these 16 young adults: Thank you!

To me, child advocacy is a matter of endurance as much as it is any single effort. I remind myself often that daily challenges are part of a bigger growth

process. The small acts build the large ones; advocacy happens here brick by brick.

In this issue, we showcase two student led groups that provide such small acts, *Jaguar Leadership Development* and *The Bully Club*. Glade Run's Director of Autism, Jaime Grace, reports on new experiences shared by campers here. I also interview a student about his participation in our fresh fruit and vegetable subscription program.

We picked these inspiring stories to show the small opportunities that create life impacting change. How do you see it? What does advocacy mean to you? Email me at awilliams@gladerun.org, and we will share your contribution in an upcoming issue.

Regards,

Amy Williams

Principal, Supervisor of Special Education

St. Stephen's Lutheran Academy at Glade Run
P.O. Box 70, Beaver Street
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Special Educators'
LETTER

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Jaguar Leadership Development

Dear Colleagues,

At the start of our second semester for the 2012/2013 school year, we began a series of RTII groups for 20 of our more challenging elementary and middle school students. This process was entitled the *Jaguar Leadership Development* series, and its goal was to provide an additional level of support to those students struggling to use their recognized leadership traits in a positive manner. The series was designed to adopt the leadership concept embedded in our high school Tertiary Program, which has been extremely successful over the past 3 years.

The Jaguar Leadership groups were developed to serve as a supplemental “push-

in” intervention to address the behavioral needs of some of our elementary and middle school students. The students who participated in this intensive program were selected through several sources, including our PBIS (A.S.K.) point system, Safety Room and Sanctuary Room data, incident report data that documented restraints, AWOLS, physical aggression, and property destruction. The initial groups were offered to students who have seriously disrupted our educational environment through chronic defiance of classroom rules and expectations, disrespect, and dangerous and aggressive behaviors.

The groups were presented in a very positive light, offering the students a special

opportunity to learn how to transfer their existing strengths into becoming a leader. We developed a curriculum using both the Life for Learning program and the Heartwood series that focuses on early recognition of leadership traits and the processes to develop those traits into healthy leadership skills. Our belief is that every student has the potential to be a positive leader.

We have recently concluded the first series of groups, and were pleasantly surprised with the results. The participating students freely joined in during discussions, expressing their thoughts and views while learning about the concepts of leadership: courage, loyalty, justice, perseverance, respect, hope, honesty, and love.

Overall, the students expressed that they greatly enjoyed the groups, and staff feedback indicates that some of the participants are demonstrating the skills they learned during the program.

Using the Global Attainment Scale (GAS) to measure our outcome, the average change in GAS score was 2.5; most students ended with a final score between .5 and 1.5.

Regards,

Linda Cumer
School Counselor

The Bully Club

Dear Colleagues,

The students at St. Stephen’s Lutheran Academy participate in a bully-free zone initiated by the Student Council representatives. This last school year, a “Bully Club” grew from 11 original student council representatives in September to 32 high school students represented in every classroom. Participating students committed to this voluntary program do so in order to create a bully-free atmosphere.

Members meet once a week during school pride time for discussion and brainstorming to solve bullying issues through various hands-on activities, usually initiated by the students. Activities include using yarn to illustrate emotions and actions affecting others through making parallel

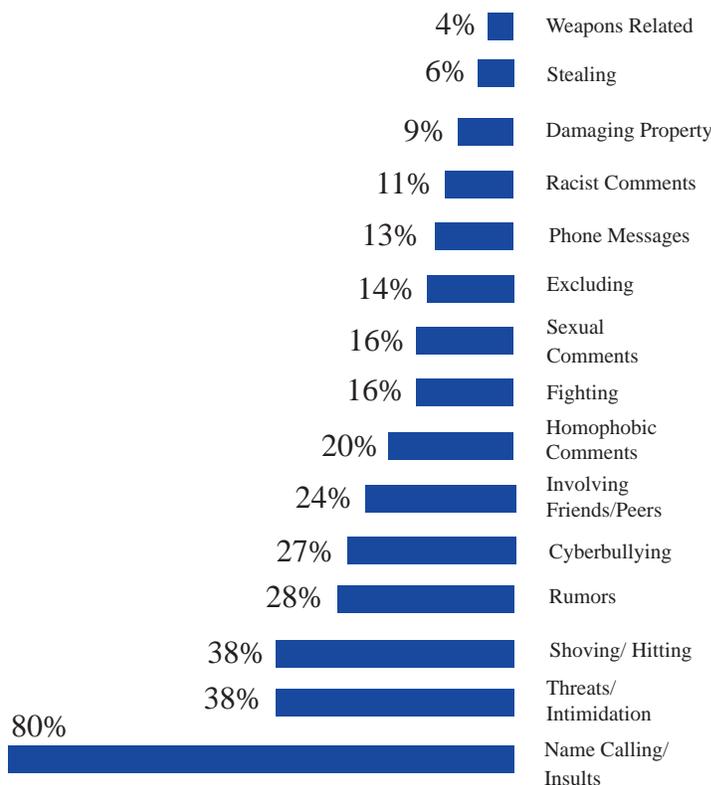
webs; playing games to raise victim awareness by saying both positive and negative things about each other with a follow-up to reflect on feelings from their peers’ positive or negative comments; a game that connects students and relates common experiences entitled *If You Only Knew Me*; writing *Random Acts of Kindness* about someone at St. Stephen’s Academy and other various team-building activities.

While all children face bullying at some point in their lives, children with disabilities are at a higher risk of bullying than typical children.

Regards,

Maria Fraiser
Special Education Teacher

Types of Bullying Reported



*Multiple types of bullying can be selected. Source: StopABully School Reports from September 2011 - April 2012.

Summer Adventures Camp

Dear Colleagues,

This June kicked off the start of our fourth annual specialized summer camp, provided through the adventures program at Glade Run Lutheran Services. Originally, we started with one session for three weeks in August, but with each passing summer we've expanded to now offer a three week sessions in June, July, and August.

The camps are specially designed for children with autism spectrum disorders between ages 8-18. The focus is to teach and promote the development of social skills through daily animal and horticulture activities. The campers enjoy riding lessons, planting and gardening activities in the greenhouse and outside gardens, sloshing around in the creek, arts and crafts, visiting our menagerie of small animals, and playing a variety of fun indoor and outdoor games.

At the end of each session, the campers perform a horseback riding exhibition for their friends and family members. It's a lot of fun for the campers to show off their skills and tricks riding their favorite horses.

We continue to be amazed at the therapeutic effect interacting with the animals and spending time in the greenhouse and gardens has on the campers. Within minutes, campers often become centered and calm. They treat the animals with gentleness, patience, and kindness. They also care for the plants and flowers with a newfound respect and green attitude.

The campers practice friendship skills in a safe and nurturing environment, where they are surrounded by attentive adults, friendly animals, and green pastures. It is time well spent making fun summer camp memories!

Regards,

Jaime Grace
Director of Autism,
Glade Run Lutheran Services

My Interview with Nick



Dear Colleagues,

Beginning in June, Glade Run Adventures delivers weekly crates of local fruits and vegetables to subscribers in and to the north of Pittsburgh. Our residents help grow, pack and deliver these crates to customers as part of an assisted employment program. Named the *Adventures Cooperative CSA*, it is a wonderful opportunity to provide the community with a wholesome food option and to provide invaluable work and life skills to those who most need it.

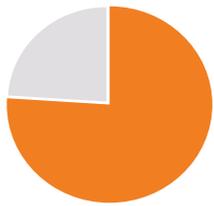
Recently I sat down with Nick, a participant and St. Stephen's Academy student, and asked him to share his experiences. Nick's favorite activities include "...watering the plants, packing the crates, placing the hay for crops, and getting the animals used to [the] humans." These are all essential tasks. Nick is also looking forward to the farm markets beginning soon on Fridays, so he may start "...learning how to sell them (crops) at the market and dealing with customers."

Our CSA program helps give kids like Nick the experience and confidence to start young adult life on the right path. Deliveries run through October and it is not too late to add subscribers at a prorated amount. For more information, please contact Julie at the adventures program at (724) 452-4453, ext. 1236.

Regards,

Amy Williams
Principal, Supervisor of Special Education

St. Stephen's Lutheran Academy By The Numbers



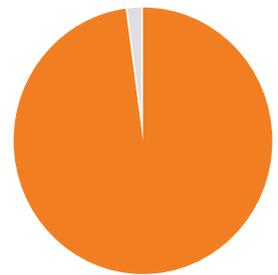
77%

of students believe we've helped them become better students



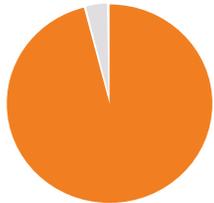
95%

of students believe they've learned new things



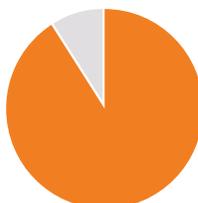
98%

of students believe St. Stephen's staff has helped them make good decisions



96%

of students have fun at St. Stephen's Academy



91%

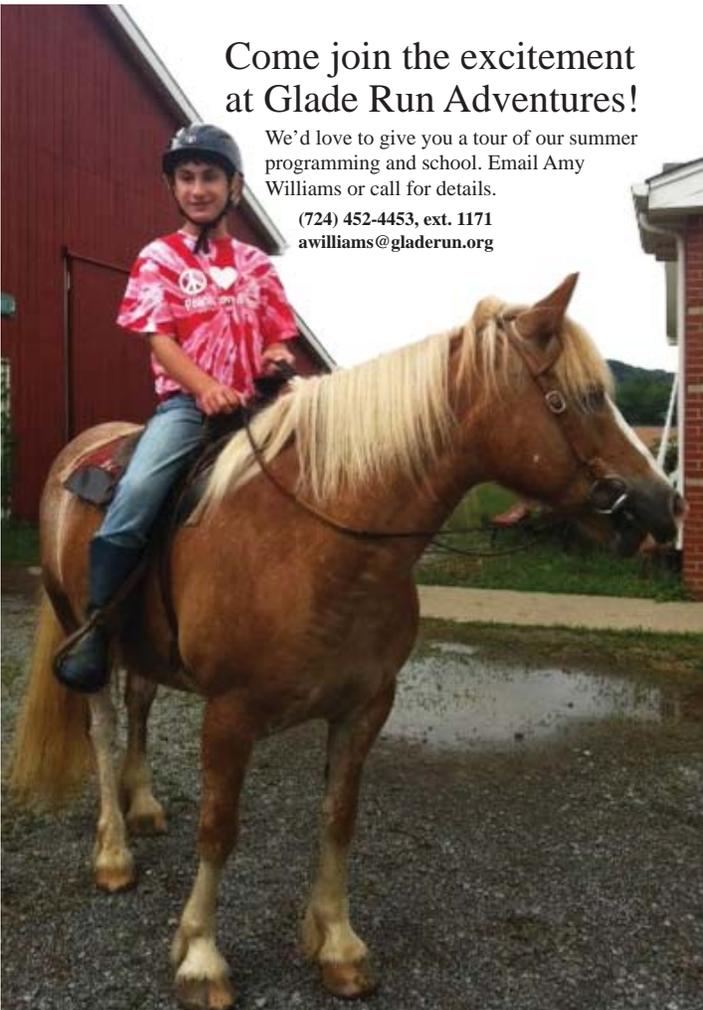
of students feel respected by St. Stephen's staff

* Compiled from internal 2012-13 student surveys.

Come join the excitement at Glade Run Adventures!

We'd love to give you a tour of our summer programming and school. Email Amy Williams or call for details.

(724) 452-4453, ext. 1171
awilliams@gladerun.org



What do you like best about St. Stephen's Academy?

"I like the classes and activity we get, it just seems like all the staff at Glade Run care about us, even when we are agitating!"

"The staff because they respect me and help me as much as they can."

"Being able to make new friends and learn about new and exciting things."

"It's set up as a calm and relaxing, yet educational environment."

"The focus on being a community, and the encouragement of seeing others as peers."

"The staff is definitely the best things about this place. They're willing to talk to you whenever you need them to...they easily cheer you up and make you smile on bad days, and they're easy to talk to and get close with."

"They are always willing to help."