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Camp Dreamcatcher

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

October 4, 1999

Cuttino Mobley
2 Greenway Plaza
Suite 400
Houston, Texas 77046

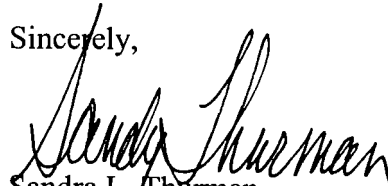
Dear Mr. Mobley,

I wanted to thank you so very much for making time in your hectic schedule to visit Camp Dreamcatcher. The time you and your family shared with the campers was truly the highlight of their week, and your support on such notice meant so much to all of us.

As we continue in our shared struggle to create a more compassionate and loving environment for children affected by HIV and AIDS, your generosity of time and spirit has set a shining example of leadership.

Thank you for helping to make dreams come true.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sandra L. Thurman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Sandra" being more prominent.

Sandra L. Thurman

Director

Office of National AIDS Policy

cc: Leslie Alexander
Rudy Tomjanovich

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

October 4, 1999

Coach Rudy Tomjanovich
2 Greenway Plaza
Suite 400
Houston, Texas 77046

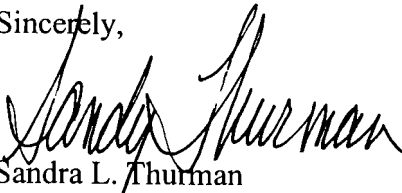
Dear Coach Tomjanovich,

As you may know, Cuttino Mobley recently paid a very special visit to Camp Dreamcatcher, a summer retreat for children affected by HIV and AIDS.

Mr. Mobley's visit has set a shining example of leadership in our shared struggle to provide children with role models of strength and commitment. He has certainly inspired hope and given these children a vision for a brighter future in the face of AIDS.

The support of community service in the Houston Rockets Organization is indeed admirable and will continue to highlight the vital importance of role models for generations to come. I would like to thank you, Mr. Mobley and the Houston Rockets for your generosity of time and spirit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sandra L. Thurman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Sandra" being more prominent and the last name "Thurman" following in a similar style.

Sandra L. Thurman
Director
Office of National AIDS Policy

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

October 4, 1999

Leslie Alexander
Owner
Houston Rockets Organization
2 Greenway Plaza
Suite 400
Houston, Texas 77046

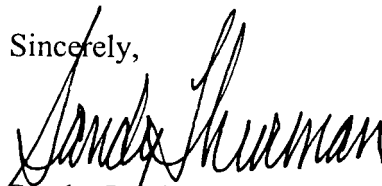
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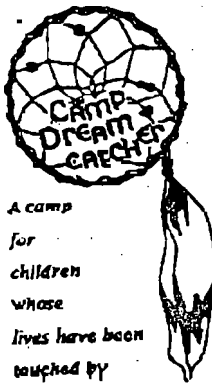
Sandra L. Thurman
Director
Office of National AIDS Policy

From: Lisa A. Berg on 07/06/99 02:40 PM
To: Sandy Thurman.
cc:
Subject: Thank you for even trying...

Sandy, the following pages are highlights of Camp Dreamcatcher. This is the group that you have talked with me about, and the camp that you are going to see if you can help out in getting a celebrity guest to visit the kids. Their two dreams are Will Smith (since he's from Philly) and Magic Johnson. ANY other sports celeb would make them happy as well.

Thanks again for even thinking about it.

My number is 67937.



A camp
for
children
whose
lives have been
touched by
HIV/AIDS

Patty Hillkirk,
Founder, Director

Kim Levan,
Assistant Director

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347 N. Union Street
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Pennsylvania 18348
(610) 925-2441

March 15, 1999

Contact: Patty Hillkirk
610.925.2841
Jeff Damman
610.925.1976

Dreams Come True for Children at Camp Dreamcatcher

Camp Dreamcatcher, a summer retreat for children who may be coping with the HIV/AIDS infection of a family member, the death of one or both parents, or their own HIV/AIDS infection, will take place August 8-14, 1999. Eighty children, ages 5 through 13, from Pennsylvania, Delaware and New Jersey will attend. The camp is located on the grounds of Paradise Farm Camps (owned and operated by the Children's Country Week Association) in Downingtown, PA. The camp, now in its fourth year, provides a supportive and nurturing environment, a place to interact with children facing similar challenges, and an opportunity to experience a fun-filled camp week!

Approximately 8,000 children have been diagnosed with HIV/AIDS in the United States and an estimated 30,000 American children have already lost a parent to AIDS. In our region alone, there are hundreds of families facing the devastating impact of this disease.

Initially under the guidance of Family Service of Chester County, a committee of concerned men and women developed the now independent Camp Dreamcatcher. The camp represents a collaboration of many individuals and agencies providing HIV/AIDS related services in the suburban Philadelphia area. Professionals in such fields as social work, psychotherapy, medicine, art and music therapy, massage therapy, dance and storytelling volunteer their time and expertise to provide a specialized program with a full range of activities for campers. Swimming, hiking, campfires, basketball, fishing, boating, etc., will be available through the week, in what promises to be an unforgettable experience for the children.

There is no charge for Camp Dreamcatcher. All funds are raised from foundations, corporations and individuals, garage sales, raffles, etc. Several firms also make substantial in-kind contributions.

In addition to the summer camp experience, under the auspices of its camp staff, several outings for campers are held during the school year. And on tap for the Fall of 1999 is the first "Caregivers Retreat" in recognition of the need for parents and guardians of the campers to have their own relaxing respite.

Chester County

and the region

The Inquirer

Thursday, August 13, 1998

Inside

The City & Region pages tell. These pages are designed to
\$15 million shopping at
the West Phila. Expo.
Gov. Ridge welcomes
concern that the sport
Olefiner, RZ. Weather.



Playing a possible game of Go Fish after a swim at Camp Downstream are (from left) Renee Bellows, 10, counselor Meghan Fisk and Larne Ignace, 5. The one-week camp near Downingtown is in its third year. It is for children ages 5 to 18 who have more than bug bites to worry about.

Children hope camp, at least, is forever

Around a summer campfire, 65 young people linked to AIDS try to catch hold of their dreams. Some will.

By Allen Shaw
Special Contributor
DOWNINGTOWN — The 65 children come to Camp Downstream for a week of peace and a chance to learn, work and grow.

They painted, sang, little girls and boys on canvas aprons — the images of their dreams.

As they splashed in the pool, sang songs and made new friends, they remembered loved ones who had died. And they understood the possibility that they, too, might die.

At this week-long camp, which ends tomorrow, the biggest worries are not homelessness or big bills. Here, where the tension can be relaxed with a pair of latex gloves and some campers swallow a small amount of pills each day, thoughts turn to something deadly: AIDS.

A child of the 5- to 18-year-old campers are infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. The rest have family members who are infected or who have died.

But this is no funeral.



Tary Spenser, 6, gets help with a drawing from counselor Taj Brown, a student at Lock Haven University. They are discussing a topic.

The three-parent camp is called Chester County gives the children a week of fun in a therapeutic environment. Most counselors are gay, but which campers have AIDS and which do not.

Christian, 12, came from Philadelphia with his twin brother, their younger brother and two sisters. Their mother is

HIV-positive. Christian said he lived camp because he could make friends easily, play basketball and swim. Plus, he said, it gives him a chance to learn.

Christian does not talk about his family life much at school or with his friends at

See AIDS on 6A



Taking a break from basketball, Shante Williams, 11, looks on a date. He wanted to be there a few minutes.

In Chester County, a special camp where dreams will endure

CAMP DREAMCATCHER

Christian does not talk about his family life much at school or with his friends at home.

He said he does not think much about his mother's being sick except when he has a cold. "When I catch a cold, I have to stay far away from her, because if she gets it, she could die."

Once, Christian met his mother and asked him if it would be all right if her best friend ruled him and his brothers and sisters. If anything happened to her, he told her it was his.

"I don't really think about it," he said. "Everybody is going to die sooner or later."

At the start of camp, the campers were divided into three groups. Each group of Brown Bears or Black Bears or Greyhounds decorated a wagon.

The idea, said camp director Patty Hillkirk, was for the children to make the wagon their own — places where they would go for privacy, or to resolve a conflict. They also stood for something more.

"We have to have a purpose for our lives," said one camper.

Camper Belfiore, 10, a camper from Pennsylvania, said he would like to be a doctor.

"It's me and my mom," Belfiore said. That would be her adoptive mother, who brought Belfiore, two other girls and a boy here from Romania in 1992. All are HIV-positive and have attended Camp Dreamcatcher for three years.

Asked what she thinks of HIV, Belfiore said: "It's OK. I got to come to camp because of it."

A few of the campers have full-blown AIDS. Most, however, are not showing signs of illness. Still, they are treated as if they have it.

ing the disease a chronic but manageable illness for many, some children can expect to live into their 20s and beyond, experts say.

More than 2,000 U.S. children have been diagnosed with AIDS, and an estimated 30,000 have lost a parent to AIDS, according to the Centers for Disease Control in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, where most of the campers live. 945 cases of pediatric AIDS were diagnosed between 1980 and Jan. 31, 1995. Of

them, nearly half have died. Before 1980, when regular screening of blood U.S. children transfusions, many made from blood donors who were infected with the virus, were introduced, the rate of transmission was 100 percent.

In 1984, 9 percent of women who were infected with the virus were taking the drug AZT, which caused the transmission rate to drop dramatically, to 3 percent, said Dr. Julia Spector, a pediatric infectious disease specialist at Hackensack (N.J.) University Medical Center.

In recent years, the increased use of "cocktails" — combinations of three or more powerful drugs — are keeping HIV-infected children healthier longer.

Now, kids we were discussing death with a year ago are fighting fluently, have normal 7-11 counts, or are asking for doctor's notes on permission forms for camp and school track team," she said.

From the school track team, she said, "I know the children really differently in children, promoting physical, emotional, social, and psychological development."

"We used to think there were no long-term pediatric AIDS cases," Spector said. "Now we know that's not true. We have no idea how long these kids can live."

Hillkirk, a West Chester psychologist, runs Camp Dreamcatcher on the grounds of the 300-acre Paradise Farm Camp with the help of donations. It costs about \$400 per child for the week. Campers do not pay anything.

She said the concerns of children with HIV tend to center on taking medication, missing play, being tired. Some are not aware they have a long time, but they know they are sick.

Many of the campers who were referred here by social workers, died with more than illness. They have been family members. They have been placed in foster care, and some were adopted. Some were abused or live in poverty.

This year, 22 campers showed up without bedding. That's not unusual, Hillkirk said. A checklist of items goes out, but some campers arrive with only the clothes on their backs.

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For The Inquirer / MINDA SCHUMAN

Seeing eye to eye are Patty Hillkirk, founder of Camp Dreamcatcher in Chester County, and camper Dani Belfiore, 8. The camp, in its third year, is for children whose families have been affected by the AIDS virus or who have contracted it themselves. B1.