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## Youth Development Outcomes of Adventure Program Perceptions

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## **YOUTH DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES OF THE CAMP EXPERIENCE: RESEARCH IN-PROCESS BY THE AMERICAN CAMPING ASSOCIATION**

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Project Director

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### **Understanding the Need**

One of the greatest challenges in youth development is clearly identifying how schools, youth-serving agencies, camps, and others can each play an effective, complementary role in helping young people on their journey to productive adulthood. Positive youth development is an interrelated process that involves all of the influencing forces in a child's life, working together to build children's resilience to the stresses and challenges they encounter in the everyday world.

### **Defining Camp's Value**

To address this need, The American Camping Association (ACA), in partnership with its accredited camps sponsored by religious denominations, youth serving agencies, municipalities, and independent owners, and Philliber Research Associates propose to conduct a first-of-its-kind national assessment of the impact of camps on American youth. This research project will do the following:

- Document the outcomes achieved by campers who participate in camp programs
- Determine the inputs/activities that camps use to create positive youth development experiences
- Analyze the strength of the relationship between the provision of inputs by the camp and the manifestation of the outcomes in campers
- Develop a validated tool individual camps can use to replicate appropriate parts of the study

### **Goal: Building Knowledge**

The research will encompass 100 camps randomly selected from various strata of ACA's accredited camps. A total of at least 5000 campers will complete three sets of surveys in 2002/03. Several youth development outcomes will be measured through pre-, post-, and follow-up surveys of campers and their parents, staff observational checklists, and focus groups with a sample of participating camps. The outcomes under study include increased positive identity; improved social skills; increased positive values; and learning new skills including cognitive, and psycho-motor skills.

Surveys and checklists have been tested for validity and reliability. A full field-test of the process was conducted at 21 camps during the summer of 2001.

### **Goal: Strengthening Capacity**

By analyzing the degree of outcome achievement in each camp and evaluating the inputs or program elements provided in each camp, we will identify individual camps and program elements (staffing, training, program characteristics, etc.) that appear to be related to strong achievement of outcomes. ACA will study these top-performing camps in more detail to develop "Best Practices" information that will be the foundation of new training for the 21st century, including training for camp directors in establishing outcome-based program and training for camp staff in the achievement of outcomes.