



Eagle View Newsletter

Volume XXVI

Success Oriented Achievement Realized

Spring 2011

Reflections

By Jonathan Jones, Executive Director

As Wandajeon and I celebrate our last full year with SOAR, I find myself reflecting on SOAR's "greater" successes and "lesser" successes over the past 30 years. From both, the SOAR team has learned much. I think back to our Alaska, Canadian Rockies, and Maine courses and am reminded how they fit into our "lesser" success category. They were wonderful courses but were not popular due to their colder climates. Key to SOAR's success has been understanding the preferences of our SOAR families and working to that end. Matter of fact, many of our greatest successes - including Llama Trekking, Horsepacking, and SCUBA - have been direct suggestions by SOAR alums and families.

A parent recently asked me what I considered my greatest contributions to SOAR over the last 30 years. I reflected for a short time and realized the list included three primary concepts. The above paragraph summarizes the first - being a great listener regarding the needs and preferences of SOAR alums and families. Understanding starts with being a keen listener. The second contribution goes back to one of SOAR's founding cornerstones - our focus on SUCCESS. Our students come to SOAR knowing far too much about failure. SOAR's greatest opportunity is to key them into their incredible gifts and abilities. This passion for success has been further enhanced by discovering Gallup's StrengthsQuest program and incorporating it into every aspect of the SOAR organization. NOTHING fuels success like success. NOTHING fosters success like focusing on an individual's strengths. Any other focus destroys self-esteem and healthy relationships. All great behavior management programs have one thing in common - they start with affirmation and "catching kids doing things right."

The third underpinning developed from an understanding that healthy self-esteem was not enough. I came to realize youth with LD and AD/HD need a specific "skill set" for consistent achievement as defined by research from the Frostig Center in Pasadena, CA. This research identified six core success attributes for our youth including self-awareness, proactivity, perseverance, goal setting, presence and use of effective support systems, and emotional stability. The research is particularly interesting as it indicates these attributes have a greater influence on success than such factors as academic achievement, IQ, gender, and socio-economic status.

Self-awareness is the ability to be open about the difficulties associated with learning disabilities or attention deficit disorder while not being overly defined by those difficulties. More important still, it is being aware of personal strengths, as well as weaknesses, and knowledgeable of strategies that contribute to personal success.

Proactivity is the belief I have the power to control my own life. It is the ability to make decisions and the belief these decisions control life's outcomes. It also includes the choice to participate in community activities and take an active role with family and friends.

Perseverance is the ability to keep pursuing dreams and goals despite adversity. It encompasses the belief that difficult situations and failures are necessary learning experiences.

Goal setting is the skill of setting realistic, attainable goals and the strategies to attain those goals. These goals are specific, yet flexible so they can be adapted to life's changing circumstances.

Effective support systems refer to significant others that provide support, guidance, and encouragement. These individuals include friends, mentors, teachers, therapists, co-workers, and family members. This attribute includes the willingness to accept support when offered and the ability of support system members to share feedback without being harsh or critical.

Emotional stability speaks to the development of effective means to cope with stress, frustration, and ambiguity. It also includes developing a positive, optimistic, and hopeful outlook in the face of difficulties.

As parents and caregivers, these attributes just might be the most important gifts we give our children. Our end goal is the same - competent, successful, joyful young adults who are developing their talents and abilities in spite of the challenges related to LD or AD/HD. They are the individuals to whom Theodore Roosevelt refers in his immortal words, "Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered with failure, than rank with those poor souls who neither enjoy much, nor suffer much, for they live in that gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat." May we continue to encourage our children to "dare great and mighty things."

As always, thank you for allowing SOAR to be a part of your life.

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A Word from Big John...

**Director of LD &
AD/HD Services**



Once a year, I have the incredible opportunity to review some of my favorite moments and explore, with you, some of the tremendous things that are happening here at SOAR. As I reflect on things I am grateful for, high on top of my list is all of you. Collectively, you bring so many wonderful qualities that enable SOAR to continue serving this incredible population of youth. One quality in particular, is your generosity. We had well over \$100,000 in scholarship requests come through our admissions office last summer, and you helped make sure that we were able to help serve 56 students that would not have been able to attend otherwise.

An opportunity to grow the Balsam Base campus presented itself this year, and once again you answered the call. This winter, we added a wonderful new log cabin to our base camp, which will support both the Academy and summer programs here in North Carolina.

However, the most exciting development we are seeing is the increase in enrollment for all of our courses. I know many of you have weathered the financial storm which beseeched us in 2009.



We, like so many other programs, saw a dip in services. However, so many parents found ways to make sure their children's needs were met, and we are proud of the value you put on the services we provide. Thank you all for helping us, your kids, and people who could not experience this tremendous opportunity without your generosity.

-Big John

Summer Preview

By Laura Pate

Well, this winter SOAR has seen its share of snow and ice- one snowfall was around two feet! But that hasn't kept us from keeping our sights toward summer. As June quickly approaches, we have some exciting, new developments to share. The biggest is the restructuring of our Wyoming courses to an 18-day model. All courses will begin on the same day with a fun, camp-wide opening ceremony and BBQ. There will still be three course tracks to choose from: Standard, Horsepacking and Academic Adventure. Each course will offer rock climbing in Sinks Canyon, whitewater rafting on the Snake River, riflery, and a visit to Yellowstone NP. But, each course will also have its own special focus: WY Standard Adventure features a 4-day canoe expedition; WY Horsepacking Adventure will conduct a 4-day horsepacking trip; and WY Academic Adventure offers an academic component with instruction in either Language Arts or Math. All courses will then end together with a SOAR version of traditional camp "Color Wars" and a final campfire and celebration. So, come visit Eagle View Ranch to check out the fun!

Another exciting new course for this summer is a variation of the NC Standard program- in which campers will embark on a multi-night canoe expedition, instead of the traditional backpacking trip. This course is perfectly suited for those that want all the components of the NC Standard course (ropes course, rock climbing, rafting, & electives) but prefer water travel over land travel.

We've also added a fun, new activity to our NC Academic Discovery course- JET SKIS! When groups travel to Gee Creek State Park, they will get to participate in an afternoon of jet skiing on nearby Park Lake. Students will be pulled behind a jet ski on a tube or will "rodeo" on the back of a jet ski driven by staff. Either way, plan on getting wet! We hope your winter has been as fun and productive as ours, and we look forward to seeing you all this summer!

Christmas Keys Review

This year, many of you experienced a white Christmas. Yet, as snow fell on much of the country, we had a different kind of white Christmas. Our white Christmas came in the form of white sandy beaches of the Florida Keys! While many of you were still digging out from the snow, we were down in the Keys wearing shorts and t-shirts. We had a wonderful trip this year, enjoying fun in the sun- without a drop of rain. Students had a chance to snorkel, sea kayak, fish and tube behind our wave runners. We also headed to to explore historic Key West, where the campers visited stores, the aquarium, and watched street performers in the famous Sunset Park at Mallory Square. We also enjoyed a New Year's Eve celebration and bar-b-que. We want to thank those of you who joined us this year for making the trip so special. As for the rest, the sunshine, smiles, and warm weather will be there next year...we hope you will be there too!



Spring Semester Update

By Logan Walters

With all 16 students returning from last fall semester, this Spring, the Academy picked up where we left off. We've been busy moving into our new Academy headquarters, and have begun transforming the previous school house into an art / music / writing space and life skills facility. The students have also been working hard on school assignments and their other responsibilities including culinary prep and planning, life skills, and goal setting.

The two Southeast Coastal teams, named "Rebel Tribe" and "Team Pangea" consist of 8 young men. While completing expeditions in the Everglades and Florida Keys, the groups enjoyed exploring the everglades by canoe, seeking



PADI SCUBA certifications, fishing for trout, Spanish Mackerel, red fish, jacks, and observing the diverse species of wildlife found in these unique habitats. This includes manatees, alligators, key deer, heron, osprey, eagles, raccoons, and more! Both teams are very excited about their upcoming adventures to Costa Rica, the NC Outer Banks, and their final expedition to be designed on their own.



The Southwest team, called "Dine-O-SOAR Brigade", has six young men and one young lady. They have experienced the joy of standing on the rim of the Grand Canyon after spending three days of backpacking in and back out of the canyon. Whereas most people are content to drive their car to the top, look into the massive canyon, snap a few pics and drive away, the "Dine-o-SOAR Brigade" are not most people. They conquered the Grand Canyon. They also battled and overcame the extreme winter weather Texas threw their way. They did not let

the cold and snow stop them from backpacking in the beautiful Chisos Mountains of Big Bend National Park. They wrapped up their Texas trip exploring two drastically different worlds: Carlsbad caverns and Guadalupe Peak- the highest point in all of Texas with stunning views in all directions. The team is now preparing to head towards California for their next two expeditions. They are excited to soak in the sun and enjoy Channel Island and Joshua Tree National Parks, as well as other state parks along Coastal California. Their final trip will be out to explore wonderful Wyoming.



Open House at our Balsam Base

April 30th, 2011

10 a.m. – 3 p.m.

SOAR is hosting an Open House at our Balsam Base for families looking for more information about our programs. Come see our facilities and meet the staff! Drinks and snacks will be provided. Please RSVP if you plan to attend by calling (828) 456-3435 or emailing admissions@soarnc.org.



Up Close With...

Michael Lefko

Michael recently joined us as the Academy at SOAR's Academic Director. He brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the SOAR family.



Who do you admire most and why?

You know I'd be in trouble if I didn't mention my wife Susan as first on my list. Working for SOAR has allowed me to pursue my professional dreams and passions but it has separated me temporarily from my family who live in Matthews, NC, outside of Charlotte. My wife has supported me over the years, through good times and through rough times. These days are no exception. She never stops believing in me. She now has assumed the role of full time single parent during the week, until I come home on the weekends. Her willingness to give of herself, selflessly, has allowed me to not only support the family, but to do it doing work that I love. How could you admire anyone more than someone that will do all that for you?

What do you like about working for SOAR?

SOAR has become my second family, which is something I really value. I like working with people who legitimately care about one another, and who want to work together toward common goals. I like working with people who have a passion for what they do, namely giving their hearts and souls in the best interest of kids every day. I like being a member of a team that works together, and shares and values each other's ideas. I believe this practice is probably a big part of what makes SOAR so great. SOAR makes me feel like I am an important part of the success equation for the students who attend SOAR, and for SOAR as a whole. It is a big responsibility, but one that I value and appreciate.

People would be surprised to know this about you....

While I am sensitive and caring toward our kids, I don't buy the excuse "I can't do it." Growing up as a person who stuttered, my life was often, and still is, a self-fulfilling prophecy. During times in my life where I said to myself and believed "I can't do it. I can't speak. I'm just not as good as other people at speaking", that's precisely what manifested itself. My wish was the command. When I focused on failures, and let fear of failing again paralyze me to the point of not speaking, my beliefs were realized. My life's challenge, my disability, if you will, is with me daily. It is a part of me. However, it is not the albatross around my neck that it was at certain times in my life. I try to maintain a positive focus on my speaking successes which makes me stronger, and more able to use with confidence all the things I have learned over the years to speak fluently. Does it work every day or every moment of every day? Of course not? Do I still have really bad speaking moments and days? Absolutely. I just work my hardest each day not to let the "I can't's" and "I'm a failure's" win over who I am and what I am truly capable of. So people might be surprised that while I can truly empathize with kids and young adults who have their own struggles, I won't cater to or enable a student who tells me, "I just can't do that." I know from life's experience that despite what anyone would consider your "disability", one is capable of anything that one sets their minds to. You've got to believe that. You've got to instill that in kids, and young adults.

Capital Campaign for Campus Expansion is currently under way!

SOAR recently acquired the property adjacent to our school house, and is transitioning the Academy's headquarters to this new facility. The additional facility provides us with additional classrooms (allowing multiple instruction to occur), a new computer lab, an arts space (for music, painting, & creative writing), and additional administrative space for teachers and staff. This addition will significantly improve the campus setting, consistent with expectations of students, parents, staff and professionals.

We have determined the first phase of the campus development will total \$250,000. To date, we have received \$113,000 in gifts and pledges. Our goal is to raise the additional funds in the next two years. You are the key in making this vision a reality. A successful campaign will provide us with the ability to build for current and future students of the Academy at SOAR.

Make your donation today.



A Very Special Thanks to our Capital Campaign Contributors to Date:

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A Special Thanks to all of our Contributors

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Contributions are reserved for our scholarship fund, unless otherwise indicated by the donor. Thanks to generous donations from these individuals, each year we are able to provide approximately \$50,000 in scholarship assistance to youth in need.

We thank you for your generous support of our programs!