

How We Get Ready for the Summer- Working with Staff

By Kat Shreve

In the upcoming weeks prior to our company arriving (translation: campers checking in at camp), the rest of the Camp Kudzu Staff and myself will spend a significant amount of time in person, on the phone, and online getting nearly 400 volunteer staff ready to be on our summer team.

Orientation vs Training

Orientation

Prior to arriving at camp, every volunteer who joins our team is given a six-hour introduction to our mission, our policies, our procedures – from diabetes management to getting refills of broccoli in the dining hall. We work really hard to blend volunteers' preexisting skills with new knowledge needed to be on our summer team. We call this part of onboarding orientation.

During orientation, we help develop expectations and a positive vibe about the role of the volunteers. We find that spending this time with our new staff helps to reduce anxiety about entering a somewhat “unknown environment.” When we practice carb counting, talk about evening programs, stress the importance of name tags, and demonstrate the entire process of checking blood sugar start to finish, we hear an audible WHEW! in the classroom.

Training

During the 24 hours before the gate swings open and camper check-in starts, our on-site Camp Kudzu Staff Training begins. Our Medical Staff and Program Staff – including returning staff, new staff, junior counselors, and Counselors in Training – begin to fill up camp, go through the check-in process, get cabin assignments, unload personal supplies, and set up shop for the week.

This training is a process of gaining knowledge, skills, and competence. Our training provides volunteers an in-depth understanding of the job to be carried out, providing them the knowledge and skills to perform the job while in the camp environment. Phrases like “in the med lodge,” “meeting with your clinician,” and “on stage during Golden Syringe Awards” are words that jump off the pages and PowerPoint slides and become real, tangible places and things. Our Leadership Staff lean in and share their knowledge and expertise with all staff.

As the day goes on, staff are meeting in teams, getting information about their schedule, practicing emergency procedures, learning about the campers in the group, becoming orientated to where all the bathrooms are, and learning how to use the walkie-talkies. Everyone is working up a mental sweat listening and taking notes.

In concert with the training, a nearly flawless routine – as if it is the Opening Ceremony of the Olympics – complimented by a fleet of golf carts and strong backs, completes our takeover of the camp facility. The Pod arrives, low boxes are put together, cabin counselors meet one another for the first time, the clip of the carabiner adheres counselor packs to backpacks, the tie dye is mixed up, water coolers are filled, cabins are decorated, and everything begins to look like camp.

Both orientation and training are important to our volunteers AND the work we do. Our company will soon arrive. We want everyone to be prepared to make every day at Camp Kudzu a Kudzu Day!