

opportunity

FOR STUDENTS WITH AUTISM

A DC summer camp sponsored by the Hench Autism Studies Program is a great success

A summer camp for teens with autism provided participants with the opportunity to meet new friends, practice social skills, and express their creativity. This is the second year for the day camp sponsored by the Hench Autism Studies Program.

Dr. Jo Ann Burkhardt, associate professor of education and head of teacher education, said the goals of the camp were to increase social skills, communication skills, and functional life skills. All activities throughout the three-week camp were focused on meeting those goals.

Eleven staff members led the camp on campus, including eight Defiance College students. The college students participated as an extension of the peer mentoring program which takes place throughout the academic year.

Each camp day began with breakfast and a session called Meeting of the Minds, an exercise to increase communication skills. Participants shared answers to prompts such as, “tell your partner what you did last night

when you got home,” or “what was the most interesting thing you did yesterday?”

The schedule for the rest of the day included physical activity and recreation, art, filmmaking, leisure time, and cooking/lunch.

Every Friday was highlighted by a field trip including a visit to a Japanese anime conference in Fort Wayne, bird feeding at the Toledo Zoo, and a visit to the World War II Victory Museum in Auburn, Ind. All of the field trips were planned to meet specific interests of the campers.

The camp culminated with two highly successful events, a film festival and an art show. The latter included a silent auction with all of the participants’ works of art purchased by bidders from campus and the community.

Burkhardt said that while last year’s camp received positive feedback from parents and staff, this year’s session received high praise and positive comments. “We met our goals in a very significant and interesting way,” she said.

“This gives them an opportunity to be creative in a meaningful way,” she added, noting that lasting friendships have been developed among the participants. “And our college students learned more about diversity and how diverse our world is,” she said.

The camp received television coverage from WLIO-TV, Lima. ♦

