

Organization gives kids a challenging change

February 15, 2007

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By Bob Ehlert

ADVENTURE OF THE WEEK; OUTBOUND

--We don't know what you were doing Super Bowl weekend, but Tucker Farrar and two associates of **Today's Youth Matter** -- a Sacramento nonprofit serving at-risk teens -- were in the midst of an Outward Bound kind of experience in the Sierra near Sugar Bowl Ski Resort.

Six teenage boys who came from a pool of Northern California kids who have had rough lives got a change of scenery: fresh, crisp and cold mountain air during a three-hour hike and then two nights at a snow hut at 8,300 feet.

They left their group-home settings and were able to forget for 48 hours that they've been shuffled through more foster homes than the military has duty stations.

The great outdoors are a therapeutic wild card for kids who haven't been dealt the best of hands, said Farrar, 31, a former science teacher. Though Farrar has his own family, he believes, like his organization, that today's youths matter -- and that the outdoors has a lot to offer.

"These kids come out in the wilderness and have these experiences," said Farrar, recounting the group's trek to the Benson Hut, a primitive camp about five miles south of Donner Summit on the Sierra's crest. It's available to the public through the Mother Lode Chapter of the Sierra Club.

The six teens and three adults arrived for their adventure early Feb. 2, at Sugar Bowl Ski Resort. Though they could have hiked the full six miles from a trailhead to the hut, they were allowed to take a ride on a ski lift up Sugar Bowl's Mount Lincoln run. (Normally there's a nominal charge but it was deferred for these kids).

Once atop the hill, there was a three-mile hike to Benson Hut, an A-frame structure that can be rented for \$12 per person, per night. It's primitive camping, but comes with a woodstove, firewood and an outhouse. The boys and the adults packed in their sleeping bags and gear, food and provisions.

They escaped their "other worlds" to enjoy the natural setting of the hut. They built and tended to fires, participated in meal preparation, navigated with maps on explorations and, by all accounts, had a great time, Farrar said.

"We're dropping them off, back in Sacramento, they're like, 'What's next?' " recalled Farrar, program director for the Christian-based organization. "What we try to do is give them hope for the future. We do that with outdoor adventure and meaningful mentor relationships."

The boys who tackled the Super Bowl weekend outing can't wait for the next outdoor opportunity, Farrar said.

"One of them calls me almost every day when he gets home from school," said Farrar, who hopes the boys can transfer some of the problem-solving skills of that weekend to their self-esteem.

Justin Anable, 18, of Sacramento, told Farrar just that: "I have learned to stay calm and just relax during times of hardship."

More Information

Interested in learning more about **Today's Youth Matter**? Contact Tucker Farrar, program director, at (916) 452-6852 or visit www.tymkids.org.

If you're interested in duplicating the trip the boys took to Benson Hut: Call the Sierra Club's Clair Tappaan Lodge at (530) 426-3632 or (800) 679-6775, or e-mail ctl@sierraclub.org.

There are four huts, including Benson, in the vicinity. Benson rents for \$12 a night, per person. To arrange to take the ski lift at Sugar Bowl Ski Resort, visit www.sugarbowl.com or call (530) 426-9000.

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