

Partnership brings fun of summer camp to kids of incarcerated parents

The Salvation Army and Prison Fellowship team up for summer fun.

Across the U.S., The Salvation Army partnered with Prison Fellowship's Angel Tree Camping to provide summer camp experiences for children whose parents are in prison.

It all began several years ago, when Camp Tecumseh in The Salvation Army's USA Eastern Territory connected with Angel Tree Camping, The Salvation Army National Camp Liaison and Redwood Glen Camp Director Ed Covert said.



For years, Prison Fellowship has provided scholarships for kids to attend camp at little to no cost through its Angel Tree Camping program. The criteria? Kids are ages 5-18, have participated in Prison Fellowship's Angel Tree Christmas program and have a parent or stepparent who is incarcerated. The scholarships allow kids to attend camp with one of Prison Fellowship's established camping partners.

Historically, The Salvation Army's summer camp ministry serves kids from low-income households at its 40 some [camps across the U.S.](#)

“These are our kids,” Covert said. “So this was a match made in heaven.”

Camp Tecumseh Director John Copeland is also on The Salvation Army's National Camp Committee, and Covert said after they talked about Angel Tree Camping, Copeland invited representatives from Prison Fellowship to present the program at the [North American Camping Symposium](#) in February 2023.

A key requirement Angel Tree Camping required in exchange for providing scholarship for kids to go to Salvation Army camps? The means to connect them to a church, something built into The Salvation Army camping structure—individual [corps \(churches\) facilitate their campers' journeys](#) to camp.

“The hope is that then they will fall into ministry with that local church group that’s already taken them to camp, and they built that relationship,” said Senior Director Angel Tree Everyday Betsy Wright. “Then it becomes a year-round ministry, because they’ve invited them in and engaged them. We love that The Salvation Army has that capacity to do that.”

Covert said the speed with which the Memorandum of Agreement went through the national internal process was “nothing short of God’s affirming hand on the fact that this was a collaboration that needed to happen.”

“We met with Angel Tree Camping in February and by summer last year, we had a number of Army camps across the country who were signed up under this national agreement with Angel Tree Camping,” he said.

Through the partnership, The Salvation Army receives a list of eligible children from Angel Tree Camping that they can then contact about camp. For children who participate, Wright said scholarships of up to \$600 are given, which cover a majority of camps. In cases where costs are higher, she said the partner camp will supplement with a scholarship of their own.

“It’s just such a good blend and partnership,” she said. “We’re like minded in ministry and in our goals and just to be able to walk together to both add to serving these families and to do it well, and in that partnership to be able to reach more kids on both sides, it’s just a blessing for us.”

Additionally, Wright said Angel Tree Camping also provides resources and trauma-informed training for camp counselors and staff. That’s in addition to other items they provide to camp partners at no cost, including Bibles, water bottles, flashlights and fidget wristbands to help with regulation.

“We want to walk beside them in ministry,” she said.

While the agreement came into motion shortly before last summer’s camping season, Covert said there were early adopters throughout the West. In his own division, which serves the San Francisco, Silicon Valley and California’s

Central Coast and Valley areas, 15 kids attended Camp Redwood Glen through the partnership in 2023.

Covert recalled one parent in Santa Clara whose kids were invited to the corps’ youth programs once they got home from camp.

“The kids had a great time at camp so mom trusted that the programs at the church would probably be of benefit to them. And the kids went and they were invited to come back to church and made it to church. And now the kids and mom are coming to church,” he said. “So it’s a pretty beautiful thing.”

This year, Covert received a list of some 2,500 kids from Angel Tree Camping. He hopes that

between updated communication featuring a co-branded logo and a new coordinator position to manage the partnership in the division, Camp Redwood Glen would have 150 kids attend from the partnership.

In the Southwest Division, spanning Arizona, New Mexico and Southern Nevada, Captain Jessica Pearce received a list of 10,000 names last summer when she was formerly appointed as Divisional Youth Secretary. She divided them by zip code and sent each list to the respective Salvation Army location.

“I called each corps officer and talked through the benefits of this program,” she said, adding she had the corps officers initiate the conversations with those on the lists because of the structure—they are bringing them, talking to the parents and building trust.

She told them: “If you want to grow your churches, this could almost be used as a leads list because people are potentially in need that are on these lists.”

She said from her perspective, much of carrying out the partnership was working with each location that wants to engage with their portion of the list and supporting and encouraging them.

“Sometimes the families are tentative about committing because they’re in crisis,” she said. “Commitment is hard when you’re in crisis mode.”

Pearce said in Las Vegas, the corps scheduled a day for volunteers to come in and call people on the list. Later, they had a day of registering the families.

She said the location had about 30 kids come to the division’s Camp Ponderosa from the partnership last summer.

Through all the efforts, there is a lot of hope woven in.

“Maybe it’s not this year,” she said, “but maybe you’re planting those seeds for future years.”

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