

# KEEWAYDIN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER

## **A RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL PROGRAM**

Keewaydin Environmental Education Center (KEEC) is located on Lake Dunmore in Salisbury, Vermont. It is on the western edge of the Green Mountains, about 10 miles south of Middlebury and an hour south of Burlington. Keewaydin has been dedicated to children since 1910 where it began as a private boy's camp. Within the Keewaydin Foundation today, there are five programs; KEEC, Wilderness Canoe Trips, Songadeewin of Keewaydin (summer camp for girls), Keewaydin Dunmore (summer camp for boys) and Keewaydin Temagami (Canadian wilderness canoe tripping camp for boys and girls). KEEC was created in 1973 as a program dedicated to Vermont youths and their environment. We strive to better our programs and have since opened our doors to schools from all over the Northeastern Region.

Our campus hosts a variety of natural communities that make the study of natural sciences very convenient. These include: a swamp, a lake, a marsh, a meadow, and Mt. Moosalamoo with its varied ecosystems. Keewaydin is also a wonderful spot from which to study local history. Native Americans camped on our peninsula while making arrowheads from the mountain's quartzite. Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys spent time in the area during the period of early settlement. There is a cave on Mt. Moosalamoo that documents their presence. In Salisbury and the nearby town of Forestdale, there are old mills and dams from which to learn of Vermont's nineteenth century use of water power; two operating hydroelectric stations provide a wonderful contrast and a means of exploring our current energy systems and usage.

The focus of our week is "community". This concept is carried out in the academic aspects of the program as well as in the daily living arrangements. We function as a large community: eating, sleeping, playing, and working together. Within our large community the students are a part of three smaller communities, which consist of the study groups, cabin groups, and the tables for meals. If there are several schools at KEEC at the same time, the students are intermingled in the cabins, at tables, in the daily chores, and in the study groups. Students are assigned a daily chore to give everyone a sense of responsibility to the group. It helps to reinforce the importance of each member to the success of the whole. Learning to live within a community is a significant part of the experience.

Throughout the week, students will work in pre-assigned study groups of 8 to 9 children. The groups will take part in our academic units called investigations, lead by KEEC instructors. The investigations require a cooperative effort and emphasize reasoning, critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Various school subjects are interrelated within each investigation. The investigations also utilize the visual, auditory, and hands-on learning styles to reach all types of students. Investigations are active, child-based explorations of a particular topic from the following categories: natural science, local history, human impact, and land-use. Each study group will experience one investigation in each of the four categories. By the week's end, students will have experienced a variety of different investigations. This affords an opportunity for post-trip sharing among students as they report on or lead investigations for each other at school.

On Monday afternoon, an introductory investigation will be presented for all study groups on the concept of community and cycles; the theme for the week. On Tuesday and Wednesday, study groups participate in two assigned investigations each day from the four different categories. Thursday is a choice day in which the students choose their investigations for the day. We have many activities to choose from including hiking, canoeing, climbing and various off campus trips to local historical sites and interpretive areas. A concluding activity in which all groups participate takes place on Friday morning and graphically brings together the ideas that have been covered in the previous four days. We call this activity the Web of Life.

All students are given Keewaydin Journals that are used during each investigation to take notes on the information covered. These journals help to reinforce to the students that this is school and that the material covered is important. They receive the journals a couple of weeks before they arrive on campus. There is a 'Reference Page' which is discussed in their classroom to prepare them for the concepts we will explore on Monday; photosynthesis, the food chain, water, air, and soil cycles. In addition to being a personal log, these books become a reference tool and a written record of the student's activities. Most teachers use these journals for grading once they return to school.

Evening programs complement our day investigations. The first night is devoted to 'group initiatives'. These are problem-solving games that require everyone's cooperation for successful completion. It is a time for the study group to become mindful of group needs as they prepare for a week of learning together. The following evening the students will participate in a town meeting. This is a land-use simulation game where students must decide how their community is to be developed by taking on human and non-human roles that create a community. The students will also experience a night walk. Most students are afraid of the dark and this activity allows for safe exploration and sheds new light on the happenings after the sun goes down. The final night features a campfire. The main event is skit performance by study groups. Each study group will work together to plan and perform a short skit on a topic relevant to the week's activities. Games, songs and stories accompany the rest of the campfire.

The week spent at Keewaydin is a full, active, exciting learning experience. Living away from home with friends and teachers creates a sense of class cohesiveness as well as individual independence. It is a week of learning for all students. Some will soak up information about the environment and their responsibility to it. Others will learn about being away from home and will grow in their independence. Others will thrive in an atmosphere where the adults are caring and there are three hot meals a day. Most will learn a variety of things about themselves, their peers, their teachers and the world around them.

Many students will make new friends or get to know classmates and teachers in a new light because of the weeklong residential experience. It is a setting where the ability to do well on tests is less important than the ability to think; where material wealth is less important than the wealth of curiosity. The week allows many children to shine "in school" for the first time. Our main goal with students is to present them with information about how communities around them work so they are able to make socially conscious decisions for the good of all concerned. We also aim to inspire them about how they influence their environment, where ever that might be. Hopefully, these two traits will walk hand in hand off of our campus and into their community and world.

Keewaydin hosts school groups, grades 4-8, in this 5 day, 4-night residential program from late-April to early-June and early-September through mid-October. Staff, students, teachers, and chaperones live in wood cabins near the lake that are heated with wood stoves. We provide blankets and pillows. Flush toilets and hot showers are nearby. We require at least one adult for 10 students, including the classroom teacher. These adults come at no extra charge.

We know that budgets are tight all around. In comparison with other programs of our nature, our fees reflect our desire to offer high quality programs at prices schools can afford with the help of fund raising. We hope in the future that you and your students will become a part of Keewaydin's unique community.