



WATER-
FRONT

CLOSED

FILLING THE GAPS

Dealing with hard-to-fill roles

Many camp leaders face a similar crisis when the first hot days of late spring remind them that summer is rapidly approaching. Empty spaces on staffing rosters beg for names to fill their open positions. In response, camp leaders seek out one more college recruitment fair, post job openings on social media and add requests for staff to multiple prayer chains. It's a stressful time, and it happens every year.

To better understand the positions at camp that are the most challenging to fill, I reached out to camp leaders around the country. Almost all responses included nurses, housekeepers and lifeguards. ►



Photo courtesy of Hume Lake

Camp Nurses

Between injuries, dehydration or illnesses that often strike during the summer, a healthcare professional is a non-negotiable for camp staffs. But recruiting nurses is not always easy.

“Without a doubt, our biggest challenge is finding someone to fill the role of camp nurse,” says Steve Collins, executive director of South Mountain Christian Camp (Bostic, North Carolina). “Finding a nurse who is willing to work for us for six weeks has been a futile effort.”

While many camps struggle to find nurses, some have found approaches that help to fill the role, or at least fill some gaps.

Daniel Hyde, director of Beaver Cross Camps and Youth Programs for Christ the King Conference and Retreat Center (Greenwich, New York), works each year to recruit “returners” for the following summer. He offers increased compensation, tuition discounts for the children of staff and recruits multiple nurses to ensure fewer time commitments.

In my own experience years ago, moving to Camp Piankatank (Hartfield, Virginia) with my wife just after we married, we chose a local doctor as our primary care physician. He also agreed to serve in an on-call role for the camp. While we were often fortunate to have summer staff members who were also EMTs, we required all staff to be trained in first aid and CPR. We were unable to employ a nurse on-site for the summers, so having staff who could handle the day-to-day issues, as well as a nearby doctor on call, we made it work.

You can also consider reaching out to a local chapter of Nurses Christian Fellowship (www.ncf-jcn.org) and share your need. Share camp swag with them, and post on their social media accounts to raise awareness that your camp needs nurses. You can also search the Christian Medical and Dental Association (www.cmda.org) to find Christian physicians in your area. Reach out and ask if they’d consider sponsoring one of their nursing staff to serve as your camp nurse for a week or more in the summer.

Another option is the Association of Camp Nursing (ACN). Tracey Gaslin, executive director of ACN, knows that nurses are a difficult position to fill. “Most nurses are not able to take off an entire summer to serve at camp, and that leaves individuals who are [either] retired or new to nursing. Most retired nurses don’t have the desire or stamina for the camp environment, and new nurses often don’t have the experience to practice independently in remote locations,” Gaslin says.

ACN seeks to work toward healthier camp communities by supporting the practice of camp nursing. Recognizing that finding a camp nurse can be difficult, ACN provides a link between camps looking for a nurse and those nurses looking to serve at a camp. Go to www.campnurse.org to learn more about how your camp can work with ACN to find qualified nurses, and consider posting your openings for nurses on the ACN job board early.

Camp Housekeepers

Ensuring facilities are clean and sanitary can seem like an endless cycle, but it is a necessary one. Recruiting people to do this kind of “dirty work” can be a challenge.

“Housekeeping is my hardest job right now,” says Perry Rollins, executive director of Lake Swan Camp (Melrose, Florida). “The work is hard, thankless and private wages exceed what the camp can pay.”

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Kevin Pierson, executive director of Springville Camp and Conference Center (Odenville, Alabama), echoes the challenge. “We are not seeing as many young people that want or need a summer job as there used to be. Our summer positions are hot, sweaty and just plain work.” Pierson offers flexible schedules to summer staff when needed, to accommodate those with sports commitments.

Chip Sherer, executive director of Bonclarken Conference Center (Flat Rock, North Carolina), mentioned doing more targeted advertising within his denomination as a strategy to fill summer house-keeping needs. Communicating needs through the church bulletin, newsletters and even in person at services and Bible studies helps share the needs of your camp.

At Camp Piankatank, my wife and I soon found ourselves busy with the day-to-day ministry of camp, but we also had to clean all the cabins in the evenings. We needed help.

One afternoon I was at the post office and met the owner of a cleaning company who was servicing the building. I asked her to visit the camp and give us a quote for cleaning our buildings. She came, set the price and the contract was signed. Sixteen years later, that cleaning company is still making the cabins ready for the next group of campers and guests. ▶

Telemedicine

A virtual approach to healthcare

A video chat with a nurse or doctor is becoming more common in modern medicine and insurance programs. Telemedicine is something that has been piloted by Sky Ranch (Texas, Oklahoma, Colorado) at their different sites.

Through the program, although Sky Ranch also employed an on-site nurse, the camps were able to deliver additional quality care through telecommunications. This allowed a nurse online to inspect and diagnose a camper from a different location. Additionally, the camper’s parents could log in to the inspection to observe the process and provide relevant medical history. This process saves time and money. Also, it allows the camper to stay in camp.

The telemedicine approach may be a viable option for many CCCA member camps located in remote areas. Location may make it difficult to access advanced medical consultation quickly; camp leaders are often left guessing whether an injury requires a long trip to a medical clinic.

For more information on the Sky Ranch telemedicine program, log in to ccca.org and search for the Excellence in Training video, “Camp Telemedicine — Saving Money, Time and Tears” in the Resource Library.



Photo courtesy of Hume Lake

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Lifeguards

The difficulty of recruiting staff to serve as lifeguards is matched only by the struggle to get those staff trained as lifeguards.

Abby Friend, guest services director at Look Up Lodge (Travelers Rest, South Carolina), says that her camp “pays for lifeguard certification, but the staff often have trouble finding a class before summer starts. It’s difficult to find a training that fits between exams and staff training.”

Ryan Vernon, program director at Doe River Gorge (Hampton, Tennessee), also sees school schedules as barriers to recruiting lifeguards. “We commit four full-time staff to be certified as lifeguard instructors.” Vernon also asks nearly all staff to attempt the physical prerequisite tests for the lifeguard course, and about a third of the staff become certified. Lifeguard training is now incorporated into staff training at Doe River, as well.

During my first year at Caraway Conference Center and Camp (Asheboro, North Carolina), I recognized the challenge of finding credentialed lifeguards, so I found a lifeguard instructor course at a nearby YMCA. After a week of training, I was able to teach lifeguarding, CPR, first aid and AED administration. That allowed me to have training take place at our camp and on my schedule.

Even with a lifeguard instructor on staff, it can still be challenging to meet all the lifeguarding needs pulling from the summer staff. It’s helpful to start a list of contacts who could lifeguard as needed throughout the season. To start this list, consider offering lifeguard and water safety courses for free to the local community. Forming relationships with local lifeguards allows you to recruit them in times of needs. This benefit far outweighs the cost of their training. We were also able to offer our pool to other camps for their lifeguard training. This gave me more names to add to my potential lifeguard list.

You could also connect with local swim teams and offer to sponsor a pizza party to kick off or celebrate the end of their season, or sponsor team clothing, giving you even more opportunities to recruit for your camp.

If you still find yourself without lifeguards, you could try sharing staff with the local YMCA or public pool. It may cost you more, but if it means your waterfront can be open (and safe) for campers, it may be worth it.

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Part of recruiting involves retaining current staff. Keep in mind that some of these positions may feel a bit thankless, especially considering that the pay is not likely what those people could make doing their job outside of a camp setting. It helps to remind people that those roles are a ministry to others, even if they don’t see the fruit of that ministry. Their contribution to the mission of your camp is significant, so be sure to celebrate those staff members often. ■



Jeremy Jackson serves as director of operations and member services with Christian Camp and Conference Association. Prior to joining CCCA, Jeremy worked with Caraway Conference Center (Sophia, North Carolina) and Camp Piankatank (Hartfield, Virginia). Jeremy, his wife, Michelle, and their two daughters, Violet and Lily, live in Colorado Springs, Colorado, with a dog named Moose.