Columbus and Franklin County Metro Parks, Nature Camp Counselor

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BACKGROUND

Over the summer, I took a paid position with Columbus and Franklin County Metro Parks as a nature camp counselor! I was introduced to this position through another student who is currently a part time naturalist at Highbanks.

Every year the metro parks offer several nature camps to the public at different park locations. The camps are for children ages six to twelve. These are weekly day camps where new children come each week to experience nature, participate in organized camp activities, and make many fun memories! I was stationed at Highbanks Metro Park located in Lewis Center, Ohio.

The Columbus and Franklin Country Metro Park mission statement is: “to conserve open spaces, while providing places and opportunities that encourage people to discover and experience nature”. Offering the nature camps is a great way to help in implementing this mission by providing opportunities for children to get outside, experience all the great things the park has to offer, and to get them acquainted with nature and wildlife.

INTERVIEW AND TRAINING PROCESS

The interview process was several steps. Interview one took place with metro parks human resources. The second interview was with the metro park event and camp coordinator, which is also the head boss of all the camp head counselors and counselors. Both the first and second interview were rapid fire questions pertaining to personal work experiences, future goals, as well as situational prompts of how would you react if in a certain situation. The third step was a background check and drug test, where you were then interviewed a third time with more rapid fire questions. After background check and drug clearance, you report to provide documentation, tax forms, etc.

Training begins before the official start date. After completion of the interview process, counselors complete a series of online trainings related to camp and procedures. Online trainings also include a module on defensive driving. In person training begins the week before the start of camp. All counselors for all the different metro parks train together at headquarters. The week includes CPR and first aid certification, in person defensive driving tests, situational prompt trainings, team building exercises, introduction to camp themes, materials, activities and games.

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DAILY RESPONSIBILITIES

Each camp within the metro parks is ran a little differently depending on the head counselor, and the park amenities offered. All metro park camps participate in weekly big activities including fishing, creeking, hiking, kayaking, archery, and a campfire cookout. Each camp also uses the same weekly theme and small activities including daily crafts, and games. Camps average 35-45 campers a week with about 5-8 counselors per camp.

Counselor responsibilities include but not limited to:
- Checking in/out campers
- Clearly communicating with parents
- Daily cleaning-sweeping, mopping, organizing, etc.
- Maintaining proper paperwork for children, staff, and incidents.
- Participating and assisting children in camp activities.
- Communicating with other park employees such as rangers and naturalists.

REFLECTION

I had a very positive experience working with the metro parks this summer. As a child, I never experienced going to camp, so this was very fun to get to go to camp every day and enjoy the activities with the children and my inner child. Everyone that I met was very professional and made a great asset to the team. I recommend this position to anyone that loves teaching, working with children, as well as spending your days doing fun camp activities!

FUTURE

Prior to this position I saw myself becoming a naturalist or environmental educator. Being apart of metro park events, I now see myself gearing toward park event planning and camp coordinating. I thoroughly enjoy taking part in events and am hoping to obtain a position in that department with metro park after graduation this spring!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all my fellow camp counselors for accepting me with open arms into the crew! Also, thank you to Ashely Yockey and Carrie Keller for great leadership throughout the summer! A special thank you to Ayden Vanfosson for setting me up with the interview!