

*St. Albans*

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# MESSENGER

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STINA PLANT, St. Albans Messenger

*Mike Foote, one of the co-founders of the Dream Program, stops for a break at the main campsite. Below, tents at the "Playground" campsite, which features platforms at various heights connected by ramps.*

# Dream becomes reality

## Fletcher camp welcomes youths who otherwise might miss outdoor life

By **LEON THOMPSON**  
Messenger Staff Writer

**F**LETCHER — Thirteen-year-old Steven Gabaree, of Winooski, has attended a few summer camps in his day, but the time he recently spent in the dense Fletcher wilderness has been “one of the best ever,” he said.

Gabaree is one of about 60 children from all over Vermont who have spent a week in Fletcher this summer at an overnight youth summer camp established by the DREAM Program Inc. (Directing through Recreation, Education, Adventure and Mentoring).

DREAM, a Winooski non-profit, aims to empower children from low-income housing complexes with various activities and programs. DREAM’s residential camp is a first in Vermont for that demographic group. Children 8 and up attend for a one week stay.

Mike Foote, 26, co-founded DREAM at Dartmouth College with fellow alum Jon Potter. Foote’s twin brother, Jesse, founded the camp.



The camp operates on 50 acres of Metcalf Pond land that DREAM purchased from Bill McKinnon with a \$100,000 Vermont Housing and Conservation Board grant. DREAM also applied for the funds with the Vermont Land Trust, with the understanding that land not designated in the

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‘I think we just lucked out with this place.’

Mike Foote,  
DREAM Program



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*Campers have a small dock and buoyed swimming area on Metcalf Pond.*

## Camp

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site plan for camp use would be conserved.

"I think we just lucked out with this place," Mike Foote said Thursday, as he trekked along the trail that surrounds the camp.

DREAM volunteers began brainstorming about a summer camp in 2002. The site plan called for an outdoor amphitheater, cabins, ropes courses, gardens, a canoe shed and a dining hall.

Last summer, work began on the land with help from AmeriCorps volunteers, who have spent 16 weeks on the project over this and last year combined. Ben & Jerry's and the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps also have provided manpower.

AmeriCorps workers accomplished such tasks as building a wooden bridge.

And that outdoor amphitheater? It's there, along with the

ropes courses, three impressive camping sites, and access to two waterfronts on the pond – one for motor-less boating, one for swimming.

Last summer, the area felt just like any another forest. This year, it has become its own community in the wild.

"It's been the coolest project that we've had so far," said Brad Sullivan, an AmeriCorps worker. "It's been an awesome, beautiful experience."

DREAM obtained its town permit in early June and awaits Act 250 approval. No one has

**'It's been an awesome, beautiful experience.'**

**Brad Sullivan, AmeriCorps**

requested an Act 250 hearing; the deadline to do so was today.

"I'll have to check to see if they have all their permits in place, and I think they do," said Geoff Green, District 6 Coordinator. "Then, I'll go ahead and issue a permit."

The town permit allows for 22 children a session. There are full-time staffers, and mentors working with the kids through DREAM's satellite programs at six Vermont colleges who volunteer.

The camp is free, and the packing list is short: a

few changes of clothing, a sleeping bag, and a pillow.

"And whatever the kids don't have, we supply," Foote said.

That also goes for the winter excursion DREAM holds for children at the Fletcher site.

Foote said the camp introduces children to the outdoors and teaches them self-reliance. When they first arrive, he said, some are leery of walking through the woods at night, and scared of the animals lurking around them.

By the end of the week, campers say they will miss traipsing through the forest and sleeping under the stars.

"It's an amazing transformation," Foote said.

For more information about DREAM and the Fletcher camp, contact (802 ) 655-9015 or [info@dreamprogram.org](mailto:info@dreamprogram.org).