

Separated siblings get together at camp

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ANDOVER — Even a tropical downpour couldn't dampen the spirits of a special group of campers at the Channel 3 Kids Camp this week.

Through a program run by the camp, the Wheeler Clinic, and the Department of Children and Families, 50 foster children are enjoying a week of fun at the camp — with their siblings.

Some brothers and sisters might look forward to camp as a chance to get a break from one another. But these siblings have been placed in different foster homes, so this is a rare chance for them to be together.

Aidan, 6, and his brother, Tristan, 7, were happy to search for frogs in the camp's puddles.

"It's actually cool at night in the woods," Tristan says of staying overnight at the camp. "We could hear stuff crawling through the forest," adding that one night they heard a coyote howling.

Aidan is a day camper and returns to his foster home at the end of each day.

Tristan says that after dinner campers play volleyball and basketball, which he enjoys, while Aidan says his favorite activity is swimming.

The siblings are two of five in foster care. Their sister, Sloan, 9, is also attending the camp. Their other two siblings, Logan, 4, and Evelyn, 1, are too young to attend.

Lisa Flower, spokesperson for DCF, says that although they try to keep siblings together, often the children are separated from their brothers and sisters because foster families are limited in the number of children they can take in at one time.

Kimberly Nilson, program supervisor with the Bureau of Child Welfare at DCF, says this is the first year for the camp program.

"We are very pleased," Nilson says. "This is something you can really be excited about."

This year 50 children age 5 to 18, from 17 sibling groups and nine area offices, participated. The children age 8 and older stay overnight, while those who are younger are day-campers.

The siblings participate in the usual camp activities, such as archery, swimming, performing arts, arts and crafts, and campfires, as well as some more unusual activities including high ropes, nature hikes and exploration, ice staking, and video production.

The program has been such a success, Nilson says, they hope to hold it again next summer, with

even greater sibling participation, and are planning on holding fall and spring weekend follow-up events.

Nilson says the program is based on others like it in the country.

“We wanted to do something specifically to bring siblings together,” Nilson says.

David Meizels, camp director, says so far the program has been a success. “Our goal is to have the kids enjoy a week of camp, just like anybody else,” Meizels says.

At the end of the week, each child will receive a DVD of the week’s activities and a family photograph.

“Next year I want to come back,” Tristan says.