

## **GOFASA Adventure Club**

### **Accreditation Summary**

**By Jeff Whitney Founder/Instructor/Fourth Grade Teacher**

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GOFASA (Grover, Osmond, Fairview, Afton, Smoot, Auburn) Adventure Club was founded in the summer of 2003 as a way to make a connection with at-risk students and school personnel. It was also a way to show students the benefits of outdoor recreation as a drug/alcohol free natural high, and as a way to teach resiliency, confidence, and grit. I wrote a grant that allowed us to purchase enough equipment for 30 students to safely enjoy backpacking and mountain biking in the outdoors. After the first year, my staff and I decided that we needed to have a mix of at-risk students and any other student that showed an interest. This decision was one of the most beneficial changes to the program. Mingling socioeconomic, behavior, and academic groups provided a way to assimilate our students into being constructive members of society in a meaningful way. It also made real connections with all of the students and the staff.

At present three of our leaders are from Osmond Elementary with one being a special education teacher, and one from the Junior High. The junior high connection has allowed a safe familiar face for students as they transition from elementary to junior high. The program has a max of 30 students, although I have a hard time turning kids that are referred away, so I have had up to 38 kids on one trip! We have also varied from two sessions per summer, to one session per summer, and now back to a modified two sessions again.

Traditionally a GOFASA session would take up to thirty kids on three overnight backpacking trips that build up in mileage and difficulty. We start with a two-mile hike, crossing a river and teaching the basic skills of packing, setting up tents, site selection, and fire building and safety. We then progress to a three-and-a-half-mile trip adding new skills like orienteering and culminate with a seven-mile two-night trip. We will play experiential education games as well as having nightly fireside discussions. Our students, some of whom weigh only 50 pounds themselves, pack and carry in their own tents, food and other gear. I can't tell you how many people have been amazed when we meet them on trails, that so many little kids can carry so much weight! We teach low impact camping, GPS navigation, compass skills, fire safety and many other outdoor skills. Each year we have a group party where students and parents (who are not allowed on any trips) fill out surveys and watch a slide show video of our summer experiences.

2020 would have been our 18<sup>th</sup> season. Unfortunately, it was cancelled due to the Covid 19 Pandemic. However, in each of the previous 17 years we have had from 20-60 students participate, so it is obvious how many students we have reached with this program. We have had rave reviews by parents, teachers, and students about how students have changed by becoming more confident, resilient, and responsible. I am most proud of the fact that we have not had a single major injury in all of those years! Hopefully, we can continue to reach many more students in the future!