

Peer Consult Success: Tamarack Camps

By: Keanna Leonard

Residential environmental learning camps and day use nature centers share many of the same challenges, but there are also unique situations that come with operating residential centers. Residential camps have a different set of staffing, maintenance, and risk management issues. They also handle food services, recruiting and preparing participants for multi-day experiences, and developing extended programming. When an organization begins to consider change and growth, it is extremely important that all of these challenges be addressed to help mitigate growing pains.



Tamarack Camps in Michigan, which operates three major camps, as well as teen trip programs was looking to renovate one of its residential camp facilities, Camp Maas. Camp Maas is a sixty-five-year-old seasonal use camp located in the beautiful forested area near Ortonville, Michigan. The camp accommodates well over one thousand youth summer campers each year. It is also the site for many conferences, corporate seminars, staff trainings, and much more.

Steve Engel, the Chief Executive Officer of Tamarack Camps, along with his staff and board knew that the aging camp needed to be updated to stay viable. They had dreams of expanding the usage of its year-round facility, but they were not sure how best to proceed. If not handled correctly, they knew that organizational growing pains could cause many unforeseen problems. So as part of the site plan for the capital and endowment campaign to renovate the camp, Tamarack included an ANCA Peer Consult to help them envision a redesigned facility.

“The ANCA Consult Team conducted a careful study of the operations and the programs we offered,” Steve said. “They talked with the staff and board, and toured the facilities. Then the team guided us through a visualization exercise that helped us focus our ideas for the camp. They also encouraged us to visit other year-round residential camps across the country to gather ideas that we could utilize at Camp Maas.”

“What came from that consult was a magnificent vision!” Steve declared. “The Consult Team’s diligent work helped us visualize an incredible year-round use, environmentally responsible camp facility that will be the anchor for Tamarack nature programs.”

“But they gave so much more,” he went on to say. “The consult went above and beyond what we had asked them to do. We not only received a vision of a world-class nature center, the team saw issues that were not even on our radar screen. They helped us reexamine our siloed programs through the lens of Tamarack’s mission and recommended that we look at ourselves as one agency. They even encouraged us to enhance our food services.”

Steve continued, “ANCA put a lot of thought into picking team members for our consult. Each and every member was highly professional, understood the unique challenges that residential nature centers face, and brought best practices from all over the country.”

“I just have to say it again. When you contract an ANCA Peer Consult, you receive so much more than what you bargained for. It is definitely worth the time and money,” Steve concluded.