

## Entry Level Program Staff Certificate Overview

Welcome to the Entry Level Program Staff certificate course!! If you have never held a program staff job, the new knowledge you learn and the skills you develop in this course can help you feel more confident and qualified when considering these jobs. So get ready to enter into your own world of learning and professional development!

### General Course Description

This certificate course is specifically designed for people like you who are interested in working with young people in a camp or other kind of youth setting like afterschool. This course is an intensive 15 hour course built around the ACA thirteen core competencies. This course assumes that you may have had little to no experience working with youth in an organized program. The “Special Interest Experience” component in this course is designed to give you the opportunity to focus on some aspect of particular interest to you. For example, you might be interested in working with a particular clientele (i.e., youth with special needs), a special setting (i.e., wilderness tripping), or a specialized activity (i.e., ropes courses). You then design the learning experiences that allow you to explore your chosen interests. You could attend a special training or Conference, complete an online experience, select additional readings, or create some other unique learning opportunity for yourself. At the end of the course, you will have completed learning experiences that help you offer quality experiences to the youth you serve as well as enhance your own professional development.

### Where to Start

This course was designed for entry level program staff who have limited experience working with kids in camp/youth work settings and programs. By the time you finish the coursework and your overall self-assessment, you will have gained valuable skills and knowledge that will be beneficial as you look for (or accept!) that perfect entry-level program staff position.

### Course Expectations

The online format of the course leaves much of the responsibility for learning and assessment to the integrity of the individual learner. The following list of expectations is important for the learner to accept:

- We assume that each of you has an interest in becoming more skilled in working with youth.
- We expect that you will complete all the required activities in the lessons.
- We expect you to design the “Special Interest Experience” as a 2-3 hour opportunity to explore more completely some topic that interests you.
- We expect you to complete the self-assessments with honest, thoughtful effort
- We expect you to be responsible for your own learning, which means that you will seek help from appropriate sources if necessary.

### Assignments and Evaluations

#### A Word About the Assignments...

Generally, you will be asked to read articles, watch short video clips, or listen to audio files. Many times you will be asked to respond to a set of questions in your journal, talk about what you learned with a friend or colleague, or to just reflect on the information. At times, you will be asked to complete sample forms often found in many youth programs, and sometimes you are asked to complete a process that

you will likely encounter in your job as youth program staff. We also believe that learners should be encouraged to complete the optional “Just for Fun” activities. While not required for certificate completion, these optional activities offer learners additional valuable, often more in-depth, experiences that extend the learning of that competency.

#### The Self-Designed Special Interest Experience

This learning opportunity is designed by you. The template for this experience needs to be completed by each learner and includes such aspects as: topic and why, learner outcomes, the actual activities and descriptions, and an evaluation reflection. When possible, some type of verification is desirable (i.e. conference program, certificate, authority signature, etc).

#### A Word about Evaluation...

Remember that assessment is about learning. We expect that adult learners are responsible for self-reflection and critical self-assessment that reflects your understanding of a topic or subject. The required assignments for each lesson are designed for the learners to complete as self-reflection in a learning journal, through quizzes, and checklists. As you complete the self-assessment at the end of each competency module, it is important that you recognize not only the new level of skill you have gained, but that you are also ethically accountable for these new skills. Upon completion of the entire Entry Level Program Staff certificate course, you will have the opportunity to receive a certificate of completion for the course.

#### **Course Schedule**

This certificate is an intensive 15 hour course. Each learner will work through the lessons for each competency at their own pace. There is a recommended order to the courses, because some competencies build on knowledge and skill development and learning experiences from earlier assignments. The “Special Interest Experience” can occur at any time although using it as a culminating experience may be the best choice.

#### **Course Outline**

1. Youth/Adult Growth & Development
  - What is Youth Development?
  - Stages of Development
  
2. Learning Environment and Curriculum
  - Powerful Learning Experiences
  - Physical & Emotional Safety in Experiential Learning Environments
  - Adapting Learning Experiences
  
3. Program Planning
  - Engaging and Empowering Youth Through Program Activities
  
4. Evaluation
  - What Is Evaluation? Why Is Evaluation Important?
  - Program Quality Assessment
  - Quick Evaluations!
  
5. Professionalism & Leadership
  - How ACA’s Standards Can Bring Out the Best!
  - Exploring Problem-solving & Conflict Resolution Techniques
  - “You’re Simply the Best”- Distinguishing the Best in Youth Professionals

6. Health & Wellness
  - The Perfect “Fit”- Keeping Kids Active
  - Keeping Kids Safe and Well
  - Bullying Prevention and Other Practices That Keep Youth Physically & Emotionally Safe
7. Risk Management
  - SUPERvision!
  - What’s the Worst That Could Happen?
  - Certifications for Program Staff
8. Cultural Competence
  - Promoting Respect & Valuing/Affirming Diversity
  - Dimensions of Cultural Diversity
  - Empathy
9. Family and Community Connections
  - We All Come From Somewhere
  - Standing in the Shoes of Parents
10. Nature and Environment
  - The Benefits of Nature
  - Pro-Environmental Attitudes, Behaviors, & Skills
  - Concepts of Experiential Learning
  - Connecting with Nature
11. Business Management and Practices
  - “The Business” of Camp/Youth Programs- Mission Statements & Other Good Things
12. Human Resource Management
  - Learning to “Get Along” With Your Colleagues & Participants
  - “To Friend or Not To Friend”: Social Networking & You
  - “Thanks for the Feedback”: Accepting Constructive Criticism & Changing Behaviors
13. Site and Facility
  - Caring for Your Site/Facility & Knowing the Regulations!

**Special Interest Experience** can be completed at any point in the course but is optimal to use as a culminating experience. See the description under assignments and access the planning template to guide your efforts.

**Learning Contract for the Special Interest Experience  
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Complete this form once you have decided on your Special Interest Experience. Be specific and thorough in this learning contract (so add space where you need it). If you have additional components you feel are important to this contract, add as you want. Be clear about the time involved- this experience **MUST BE A MINIMUM OF TWO HOURS OF ENGAGED LEARNING** (even more hours are optimal)! While academic coursework is critical to your development, this experience can **NOT** be met with formal college/university courses.

Topic and Justification:

Learner Objectives (minimum of three- and remember they should be specific and measurable):

Description of Activities and Timing:

Completion Requirements/Evaluation:

Other Materials (documentation materials, organizer signature, etc):