

L'Oreal workers volunteer to help Arc's Camp Jotoni

Mike Deak, @MikeDeakMyCJ 3:02 p.m., EDT June 16, 2015

All of the employees at L'Oreal's Franklin plant came to Warren to spruce up Camp Jotoni for summer season



(Photo: Kathy Johnson/Staff Photographer)

WARREN (/search/warren/) – Every year, the employees of L'Oreal prove that beauty is not skin deep.

On Friday, all of the more than 200 employees at L'Oreal's Franklin (Somerset) cosmetics plant came to Camp Jotoni on Old Sterling Road to spruce up the Arc of Somerset County's summer camp before its season begins on July 5.

Camp Jotoni provides adults and children, ages 5 to 78 with developmental and intellectual disabilities, with recreation and respite services in day and residential programs.

The work that the L'Oreal volunteers perform at the camp makes a tangible difference.

Attendance has risen 30 percent, camp director Josh Burke said, since the L'Oreal volunteers have adopted the mission of performing general maintenance and special projects at the 15-acre property. Annual attendance has risen to about 250 clients, he said.

Burke estimated that the L'Oreal volunteers completed more than four years' worth of maintenance and improvements to the camp and expended about 1,500 man-hours on Friday.

Perhaps more importantly, the tasks done by the L'Oreal volunteers allow Arc staffers to spend more time and energy working with the campers, instead of worrying about lingering infrastructure, said Chris Corvino, assistant executive director of the Arc of Somerset County.

The L'Oreal volunteers had a special task on Friday. Not only were they giving the buildings a fresh coat of warm and welcoming red paint and landscaping in the hot and humid weather, they were also constructing a stage for a new dance and adaptive movement program for campers.

The volunteer work is an integral part of L'Oreal's corporate culture, said Nicole Zukowski, vice president of operations at the company.

Throughout the world at all of its sites, L'Oreal workers are given eight paid hours to volunteer in the community. But L'Oreal employees do not stop their commitment to the Arc of Somerset County when they leave at the end of the day.

Throughout the year, L'Oreal workers undertake smaller projects for the Arc of Somerset County, including adopting a family for the holidays, she said.

In addition, L'Oreal partners with its vendors to join the community effort. All of the supplies for Friday's work were donated by L'Oreal's vendors, Zukowski said.

The Grainger Foundation, a L'Oreal partner, gave the Arc a \$10,000 donation for Camp Jotoni, Rust-Oleum donated supplies and Northeast Painting of South Plainfield donated the time of professional painters to help with major paint renovation work throughout the campground.

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"It's so rewarding," Zukowski said. "Every year, we make a bigger difference."

Corvino said that L'Oreal's relationship with the Arc of Somerset County is a model for a partnership between the corporate world and nonprofit groups.

That partnership helps to make the time spent at Camp Jotoni a special experience for the Arc's clients.

"We're a typical summer camp," said Burke, who started volunteering at the camp 16 years ago when he was 14.

The day starts at 9 a.m. and the campers enjoy the same activities — arts and crafts, games, physical education — that every camp offers.

Every camper gets into the pool at least once a day, said Burke.

"It's the most popular activity," he said.

But there is a more important benefit at Camp Jotoni, Corvino said.

For many campers in the overnight program, it could be the first time on their own without their parents, he said.

But volunteering at the camp is also a special experience.

"It's helping the community," said Abraham Salmon, of Plainfield, one of the L'Oreal employees who came to the camp to get it ready for the summer program. He said that he looks forward to returning to the camp next year.

"We are once again so grateful for this opportunity to help our camp get a fresh start for the new season," said Lauren Panarella, executive director of the Arc of Somerset County. "The generosity of time, talent and funds has truly made an impact on Camp Jotoni and will ultimately benefit the children, adolescents and adults who attend the camp programs."

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