



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Summer Camp Programs Are Offering a Crucial Antidote to Youth Disconnection

– New Report from Farm & Wilderness Unveils the Hidden Power of “Unplugged” Summer Camps –

**PLYMOUTH, VT - July 11, 2024** - In an era of increasing digital dominance and mounting pressures on youth, summer camps are emerging as valuable spaces for children to unplug, grow, and thrive, according to a [report by Farm & Wilderness](#) exploring the impact of their immersive, device-free summer programs on youth development.

[Farm & Wilderness](#), an organization that has operated summer camps in central Vermont for 85 years, surveyed more than 400 of their campers and counselors to identify the most impactful elements of their programs. The findings highlight how camps are providing crucial opportunities for kids to reconnect with themselves, others, and nature, while building essential life skills.

“Today’s youth are navigating a world of constant digital stimulation, academic pressure, and social challenges,” said Frances McLaughlin, Executive Director of Farm & Wilderness. “More than ever, the summer camp experience offers a much-needed respite — a safe, inclusive space where kids can just be kids, discover their authentic selves, create connections with others and the earth, and build confidence through meaningful experiences. These are vital tools for navigating the challenges of growing up in today’s world.”

These insights come at a critical time for youth mental health. Last month, [U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy called for](#) a warning label on social media platforms stating that social media is associated with significant mental health harms for adolescents. In a [2022 Economist Impact survey](#), 80% of parents reported seeing new or increased signals of potential mental health issues in their teens, including anxiety, depression, behavioral issues, and increased problems with social interactions.

The research by Farm & Wilderness suggests that summer camp experiences offer a needed counterbalance to these concerning trends. Findings from camper surveys highlight three key areas where campers noted their camp experience made a significant impact:

1. **Building Confidence Through Skill Development:** F&W camps’ diverse, hands-on experiences — from fire building and backpacking to creative pursuits and even construction projects — push campers beyond their comfort zones and help them build confidence in real-world problem-solving. Survey results indicate that 71-87% of campers saw skill development as a key aspect of their summer camp experience.
2. **Fostering Authentic Connections:** In an age of digital relationships, F&W camps, which do not allow campers to use phones or other devices, have a deliberate focus on person-to-person

interaction and engage all campers in communal efforts designed to foster a deep sense of interdependence and shared purpose. Examples of collective activities include washing dishes, caring for farm animals, and maintaining equipment. The impact is clear: at one camp, 90% of F&W campers cited community-building practices as a crucial part of their experience.

3. **Supporting Identity Development:** Supporting the development of campers' identities is foundational to F&W's approach. F&W camps provide tools for exploring individual and social identities, with programming adapted to different age groups. Campers in F&W's survey expressed taking pride in learning about themselves and others, overcoming personal fears, handling new responsibilities, and being away from their families.

F&W's approach aligns closely with current research on youth development, highlighted in Jonathan Haidt's recently released book *The Anxious Generation*. Haidt says: "Find a sleepaway camp with no devices and no safetyism. Many summer camps offer children and adolescents the chance to be out in nature and away from their devices and the internet for a month or two. Under those conditions, young people attend fully to each other, forming friendships and engaging in slightly risky and exciting outdoor activities that may bond them together tightly." F&W's approach directly reflects these research-backed recommendations for positive youth development.

"The Farm & Wilderness research clearly shows how summer camps can play a crucial role in supporting youth development," said Michele Rowcliffe, Executive Director of the American Camp Association New England. "By focusing on connection, skill-building, and identity development, camps can adapt traditional summer camp activities to meet modern needs, relieve the pressures of daily life, and engage kids in meaningful personal growth. The insights from F&W's research offer valuable lessons for other youth-serving organizations seeking to create impactful experiences for children and teens."

To download the full report, visit [www.farmandwilderness.org/2024impactreport](http://www.farmandwilderness.org/2024impactreport).

### **About Farm & Wilderness**

Founded in 1939, Farm & Wilderness operates summer camps in central Vermont, nurturing youth through intentional programming rooted in strong values. Through joyful play, purposeful work, and rugged outdoor living, F&W camps and conservation efforts teach timeless skills and kindle the spirit within. More at: [www.farmandwilderness.org](http://www.farmandwilderness.org)

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