

AT-RISK CHILDREN BECOME FIRE-FIGHTING HEROES

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Eight new honorary, volunteer firefighters were recently recognized by the Denver Fire Department for extraordinary bravery when they extinguished a rapidly spreading wildfire at a campsite in Summit County, just outside of Leadville. Unlike the other brave members of Denver's finest, however, these heroes are all under the age of 13.

On Monday, July 18, a group of residents from Tennyson Center for Children were approaching what would be their own campsite for the next two days, when they happened upon a campfire that had jumped its ring and was beginning to spread to nearby timber. Unable to call for assistance due to the unavailability of cell phone service in that particular area, the group of youngsters, under the supervision of Tennyson staff counselors, knew immediately that action had to be taken.

Armed with only mess kits and bowls, the children utilized the resources at hand by running down a hillside to the river below, filling their cups and bowls with water and hiking back up the slope to dampen the spreading wildfire, which, by that time, had ignited two trees and a group of dry bushes. Through teamwork and perseverance, the makeshift firefighters worked to extinguish the flames, after which they used a camping shovel to bury the embers.

The kids are all participants of Tennyson Center's Challenge-by-Choice (CBC), an experiential education program that encourages the children to achieve what at one time were unrealistic goals, which in turn builds their self-esteem, confidence and inner strength. The program, similar to Outward Bound, focuses on wilderness skills and goal-oriented responsibilities which the children would not normally encounter in their daily routine.

Tennyson Center for Children is the Rocky Mountain region's largest and oldest residential/day-treatment facility and K-8 school for abused, neglected and at-risk youth, aged 5-14.

"The personal accomplishments realized by the kids in the CBC program are almost immeasurable", said Tennyson Center Executive Director Bob Cooper. "Most of these kids endured more pain in their short lives than any of us will experience in a lifetime. We're normally amazed if they make it through the day without an outburst or incident of some kind, and here they are putting out wildfires. We couldn't be more proud of them...and, more importantly, they couldn't be more proud of themselves."