

Youth Groups and Down Home Ranch; Building a Better Summer

My name is Jennifer Shirley, and I am the Volunteer and Donor Specialist at a very special ranch I can't wait to introduce you to. Down Home Ranch is a 501(c)(3) that sits just outside of Elgin, Texas on over 400 acres. While DHR is a working ranch, it is also a Village Living Community that serves people with disabilities. There are currently 48 resident Ranchers who live at Down Home Ranch full-time, and several hundred more people with disabilities are served each year through camp programs.

This summer, my goal is to cultivate a Summer Camp Volunteer program that will benefit Youth Groups and DHR's Summer Camp program alike. I would like to recruit youth groups to sign up for one week of camp volunteerism in exchange for the makings of a traditional summer camp experience of their own. Volunteer groups who would like to participate in this program would arrive Sunday to set up camp and depart Friday morning. Throughout the week, there will be several opportunities to serve at camp as well as ample time to participate in your own programming. DHR will make facilities available to volunteers and wishes to help make everyone's camp experience as fulfilling as possible. Ranch offerings include use of our swimming pool and pool house, archery range, indoor classroom, waterfront activities, campsites, hiking trails, and fire ring.

There are three hours per day of required volunteerism. Sunday, this will be lending helping hands during camper check-in. Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, volunteers will make themselves available between breakfast and lunch to help Camp Staff facilitate activities. Thursday evening, volunteers will be in charge of hosting an awards banquet for Campers to include decorations, dinner, and dancing! We even have our very own D.J. who can't wait to make your party pop! Along with these service opportunities, groups will find more ways to pitch in during the week if they'd like, such as helping with Camp's Tuesday night Outdoor Cooking Class. I'd also like to strongly encourage Troops hosting merit badge classes to invite Ranchers to join in their learning!

Below is a sample weekly schedule. Highlighted in orange are required volunteer hours or tasks. In green are facilities I have reserved for volunteer groups to use toward their programming. You will also find plenty of unstructured time to use as you please. Camp Staff will provide an Archery Range Master during your time at the range. If your group requires a lifeguard, I am happy to approach one of our lifeguards on your behalf. The fire pit will be lit for you if you'd like to use it on Wednesday evening. Waterfront activities include kayaking and fishing. Your group is welcome to borrow our kayaks with Camp Staff assistance. However, groups will be asked to provide their own fishing equipment.

Down Home Ranch has two camping facilities to offer. Because groups will volunteer a minimum of three hours each day, there will be no fees assessed for the use of campsites. First, we have a group of campsites with water and electricity which may be used. There are RV hook-ups as well as access to a picnic area and one bathroom and shower at the dock house, and one bathroom and shower in the barn. Alternatively, we have a large pond with a clearing that can be used as a group campsite. This would be considered primitive, dry camping. Groups will be in charge of providing their own meals, cooking needs, and programming for the week.

Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions or comments! This is a brand-new process, so I absolutely welcome questions, ideas, and feedback. Thanks for sharing your time with me!

Weekly Ranch Camp Volunteer Schedule

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:00		Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast
9:00		Volunteer	Volunteer	Volunteer		Clean Up
10:00						
11:00	Arrival and Set Up					Pack Out
12:00		Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	
1:00			Archery Range		Waterfront	
2:00	2:30-5:30 Camper Check-In		Reserved		Reserved	
3:00		Indoor Classroom		Indoor Classroom	Fishing/Kayaking	
4:00		Reserved		Reserved		
5:00		Pool			Volunteer-Run	
6:00			Optional			Thursday Evening
7:00	Opening Ceremonies	Reserved	Outdoor Cooking With Campers	Fire Pit	Banquet	
8:00				Reserved		