

For More Information: For Immediate Release

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Fresh Air Family Grants Record Financial Aid in Summer 2017

Birmingham – The sound of laughter peeled from the creek bed as 20 children explored the banks, looking for crawfish and salamanders, or, as we say scientifically, macro invertebrates. Nearly half of the now wet and muddy children are studying science and biology thanks to financial aid.

At Fresh Air Family’s award-winning Gross Out Camp, 214 campers, or 38.25 percent of the campers received financial aid. Of those, 91 percent reported an annual family income below $20,000. In all, $43,500 in financial aid was granted to underserved children. The increase in aid was up 178 percent from the previous year.

While Gross Out Camp hosted a nearly 40 percent financial aid ratio, Prepared, Not Scared Camp extended aid to 78 percent of campers. The survivor camp is sponsored by Jefferson County Sheriff Mike Hale. Hoover Tactical Firearms also sponsors the camp and provides gun safety classes (don’t touch it, get an adult, always assume it is loaded.)

“Fresh Air Family rarely turns down a child, we just make a way for them to come. We have generous donors who supply funds to help underserved children attend. They are rewarded with thank you notes written by all of the children. They can be quite entertaining,” said Fresh Air Family Founder and Executive Director Verna Gates.

The students came primarily from good families struggling with medical bills, job loss, and single parent incomes. Others came from battered women’s shelters, homeless shelters and foster care.

Very few high quality education programs provide more than a handful of aid grants, and many offer none. Dedicated to improving science education, safety and critical thinking in Alabama, Fresh Air Family works to serve a diverse group of campers. The total number of campers and students served this summer were 702, which includes all of the camps plus special programs.

Primarily outdoor education oriented, the camps keep kids in the woods and creek beds – their natural habitat – studying hands-on field biology. This environment is, by its nature, equalizing.

Success stories abound, like the two foster kids whose parents are serving life sentences in prison. The brother and sister loved science and both won their grade’s science fair at their elementary school using lessons from Gross Out Camp. Another aided camper saw the snake show presented by Dr. Robert Hastings of Auburn University at Prepared, Not Scared. He has delved deeply into the subject and has returned as a peer presenter at camp. Chemistry attracted one of the girls, who is considering majoring in biology.

“Children who come from an under resourced family need quality education opportunities. We want them to get engaged with science so they can see critical thinking as a way of life and science as a career option for their future,” said Fresh Air Family Education Director, Amanda Clark, who is the only African-American woman in the Southeast getting a Ph.D. in molecular wildlife ecology. Clark spent a summer as a Gross Out Camp camp counselor and shifted her direction from medicine to education after discovering her love of teaching.

The monies raised for financial aid come primarily from Fresh Air Family’s signature fundraiser: the Wacky Tacky Christmas Light Tour. In 2016, 1,058 people hopped on the guided bus tours to see the best of the worst of Birmingham’s Christmas Light Tours. Most of the participants came in groups of family, friends, clubs and businesses. Dates this year are Dec. 12, 13 and 14. Or you can contribute to the financial aid fund at [www.FreshAirFamily.org](http://www.FreshAirFamily.org).

About Fresh Air Family

Fresh Air Family works statewide to provide healthy, family-oriented educational opportunities in the great outdoors. Programs include: school field trips and in-school programs, summer camps, Hikes for Tykes, and family hikes and fossil hunts.

FAF recently upgraded its curriculum to design thinking and will be hosting 3,000 school children this school year. More at www.FreshAirFamily.org.

Evaluation from Dotti King, a mathematician

174 scholarships valued at $36,700 were awarded to 127 children from 100 families

71% of the scholarships were awarded for Gross Out Camps and they represented 76% of the total value of the scholarships

The increase in the number of scholarships from the previous year is 138%

several children were awarded scholarships for multiple camps

the 174 scholarships do not include scholarships awarded for the Hillcrest Gross Out event

62 of the 174 scholarships were related to camps held at the BBG, and they were valued at $13,950 and accounted for 38% of all scholarship dollars

the 62 scholarships recipients represented 41% of the 153 attendees

Of the 332 camp attendees, 38.25% were on scholarship

28 scholarships valued at $6,300 were awarded for the Hillcrest Gross Out event bringing the total value of awarded scholarships to $43,000

if the 28 Hillcrest scholarships are included in the total, the increase from the previous year is 177%