

# Hiking gives city youth leaders new outlook

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## CAMDEN

By the end of five days of hiking in the Rockies, a group of eight individual youth leaders from Hopeworks in Camden turned into a group of confident young men and women who cannot only lead geographic information survey projects, but who don't complain about walking to the corner store anymore.

It's what happens after you hike 12 miles up the White River Mountains at

the end of July, testing your physical and mental limits against fatigue and thinning air, according to Father Jeff Putthoff, S.J., the executive director of Hopeworks.

### Tremendous benefit

"It has had a tremendous benefit here," Putthoff said. "In part, because we know each other better."

That didn't come from just sharing bathroom facilities in the form of a shovel affectionately labeled "P.S." by the youth.

It came from the 15-

to-17-year-olds encouraging each other to hike 10,500 feet up in the first day with 70-to-80 pound packs on their backs. It came from scaling a 60-to-70-foot rock face or doing a 14,000-foot peak ascent.

So when Elyse Smith, 15, of downtown Camden, struggled with the rock face, the rest of the group chanted "Climb that sexy mountain." "They just made me so happy," Smith said. "So, I said 'Alright,' and I just kept trying."

### Huddled for warmth

The group of eight now

kid each other about who got sick from the treated water or how they huddled up to each other for warmth at night. They joke about how one of their guides came back from the trip smelling like onions.

But, Putthoff said they have also learned to respect their own abilities, something which will be key as they lead other youth. Over the summer, these same youth will coordinate geographic information surveys of the



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Angel Rodriguez, 16, watches video from the trip to the Rockies organized by Hopeworks in Camden.



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Youth leaders for Hopeworks in Camden talk about their trip to the Rockies to develop leadership skills. They are (from left) Patrice Williams, 17, Elyse Smith, 15, Joshua Smith, 15, Jamaal Johnson, 15, Jordan Peters, 16, Angel Rodriguez, 16, Endrix Afanador, 17, and Yesenia Nieves, 15.

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Camden Housing Authority. Or, they'll survey trees in the city for the New Jersey Tree Foundation.

"It's nothing compared to what we did in Colorado," said Joshua Rivera, 17, of Cramer Hill.

And, Putthoff said that con-

fidence is extended to their fellow youth leaders.

"I remember one of them said to someone, 'I'll never expect you to be unable to do something again,'" Putthoff said.

For Hopeworks, the aim is to keep students and those who have dropped out of school interested in education by expos-

ing them to technology.

For the youth leaders, exposing them to nature has given them a whole new outlook.

"I'll walk all around Camden," Rivera said. "That's nothing."

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