

Extending DL's Mission Strategy Initiative

Deerfoot's Mission Statement

Building godly men in a Christ-centered community through wilderness camping

Deerfoot's Approach

The Deerfoot mission extends beyond the summer camp program. It is a way of life that carries into all seasons. With this understanding, Deerfoot is launching a new strategic initiative that engages alumni and like-minded men after they 'age out' of the summer camp program.¹

At summer camp, we're intentional about spiritual growth ("building godly men"), emotional & relational development ("in Christ-centered community"), and physical or character growth ("through wilderness camping"). "Wilderness camping" is understood broadly as stretching or challenging experiences (often in the outdoors) that catalyze community formation. The camp staff's job is to nurture a Christ-centered community during these experiences. This creates a container for the spiritual growth and transformation that forms godly men.

To summarize, our method is to provide stretching relational experiences that result in brotherhood (community). We saturate that community with Jesus's ways. That experience calls participants to a closer personal walk with Him and the life of a godly man.

Problem To Be Solved

Boys and young men have lived this way for decades at Deerfoot summer camps. We've always expected that these experiences would forge foundational growth that would continue throughout life. There is evidence that this happens, as many older men testify about the formative impact their youthful Deerfoot days had on their lives.

Now, however, we see a need for a more intentional effort to apply the Deerfoot mission at subsequent stages of life. Deerfoot leaders note more and more alumni who have "aged out" of the summer program but still desire and need Deerfoot's influence at later ages. Our anecdotal evidence of needs in men is consistent with more sophisticated studies that reveal serious challenges for men throughout life. Depression, suicide, and loneliness are reaching epidemic levels (at all ages), as noted in the Surgeon General's recent report on loneliness in America.² Richard Reeves' recent book, *Of Boys and Men*, paints a disturbing picture of the cultural

¹ The summer camp program generally targets boys 9-17 and college-aged staff.

² 'Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation,' May 2023, <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2023/05/03/new-surgeon-general-advisory-raises-alarm-about-devastating-impact-epidemic-loneliness-isolation-united-states.html>

landscape for boys, young men, and beyond. Research reveals that male participation in churches is also declining.³

The Deerfoot's mission is relevant and needed in the lives of boys and men of all ages. The salient aspects of summer camp experiences can be replicated to help older men. An example is the "Ole Harwood" virtual group, which demonstrates the desire and benefits of Deerfooters reconnecting with one another⁴. That group, which started during the 2020 pandemic and has continued to grow under its momentum, provides outcomes greater than nostalgic remembering and renewed friendships. Participants report renewal and spiritual enthusiasm due to reconnecting with like-minded brothers.

Deerfoot's Winter Trek, a weekend winter hiking trip in the Adirondacks, is another example of the power of men coming together to share a challenging experience and connection. Winter Treks include little formal teaching, yet these short experiences stir participants' hearts to the high calling of walking with Him. Many participants have come for ten or more consecutive years, which shows its importance to them.⁵

The Deerfoot community and experience extend beyond the summer program and apply to every season of life. This is the basis for launching a new strategic dimension to our mission of building godly men. The idea is to develop events targeting Deerfoot alumni and like-minded men at later stages of life (23 years old and older) to encourage them to be and build godly men in their walks.

The primary objective of this initiative is to help DL Alumni and like-minded men to continually renew and revive their commitment to live as godly men in a Christ-centered community and to equip them to build others in the same way. While this is the primary objective, there are potential secondary outcomes that would be valuable to Deerfoot. Strengthening the alumni network and promoting engagement will result in stronger volunteerism and fundraising. Our organization needs to grow in both these areas.

This initiative would include efforts to provide the following:

- A **shepherding movement** for men. We envision a movement of men who build shepherding relationships for men's discipleship. We aim to develop resources and partnerships for discipleship and spiritual transformation accessible to men that encourage Christ-centered life-on-life relationships.⁶ Examples might be book clubs, podcasts, prayer or accountability groups, etc.

³ Of Boys and Men. Why the modern male is struggling, why it matters, and what to do about it, by Richard Reeves, Brookings Institution Press, Washington D.C., 2022

⁴ The Ole Harwood group includes about 25-30 Deerfoot alumni who meet weekly via Zoom. The group started as one of the Deerfoot "Cabin Groups" organized during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the Cabin Groups were temporary, the Ole Harwood group kept meeting, growing in numbers and depth of impact.

⁵ Most Winter Trek participants are DL alumni ages 35-60.

⁶ Core to discipleship, in Deerfoot's view, is deep and meaningful relationships.

- **Relational networks** for alumni and like-minded men that promote ongoing engagement with Deerfoot. Engagement examples include prayer, contributions, volunteerism, or advocacy for the Deerfoot mission⁷
- **Experiences & events** to unite men for connection and growth in godly living. These could be on the existing properties or at other compelling sites. Experiences will vary to meet men's financial and physical abilities or interests. Examples might include hikes or outdoor experiences, discipleship/spiritual formation events, gatherings for groups like dads, age groups, and pastors, and work weekends.
- **Support the summer camp programs.** Supporting efforts to recruit, train, and disciple staff. We envision that this initiative would rally support for the Deerfoot camp ministry and provide a motivated community of people to engage in
 - volunteer events, like work weekends;
 - promotion of camp wherever they live;
 - staff recruitment, which has been a significant challenge since the camp expansion and the COVID-19 pandemic;
 - fundraising and financial support of Deerfoot's ministry.

Leadership

This strategic initiative would require a mature and gifted ministry leader—a full-time staff person with proven ministry leadership experience and the ability to move from vision casting to implementation to assessment.

Ideally, this person will be a Deerfoot alumnus, but alumni status is not required. Ultimately, it's essential that the person knows and embraces the Deerfoot ministry and embodies the Deerfoot mission.

We seek someone with seasoned life experience and a passion for helping others grow in discipleship. He must also be a self-starter, able to work independently, and a capable administrator, as required of all Deerfoot directors.

⁷ Data shows that men become increasingly more isolated in terms of personal relationships/friendships as they age. An assumption is that proximity to one another is less important than shared purpose (like-mindedness) regarding relational growth in men. They will try to connect at a distance with their real friends.