



campCARE
By Colin Whyte

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As snowboarders, we belong to a privileged class. Sure, we might work minimum wage jobs in the dish pit to pay for our passion, but we have it easy. At least we were introduced to snowboarding in the first place.

campCARE, a Whistler-based charity directed by Heidi Landau, takes our privilege and brings it to the kids who could most benefit from the experience of sliding down a mountain sideways: abused and neglected youth. Troubled teens from residential treatment centers, transitional living houses and seriously tough homes are introduced to snowboarding through pro riders and given a chance to feel something positive for a change.

Snowboarding is a unique sport in that it's both cool and easy to learn. Kids who maybe have never been given the opportunity to do anything fun jump on a board and it can change their entire outlook on life. Feelings of hopelessness are replaced by a feeling like, *Yeah, I can do this.*

One look at child abuse statistics in the US or Canada lets us know just how many children are affected. This year 1,077 children died because of abuse or neglect. That's three kids per day. Dead. Those lucky enough to survive face a reality of bleak possibilities and few options.

campCARE tries to step in, to really bring the kids it helps a sense of independence and a notion that they are, in fact, the architects of their own destinies. By breaking the cycle of abuse with positive role models (yes, I'm talking about pro snowboarders) and a life-changing experience on snow, campCARE lets kids be kids, having the kind of fun they're supposed to be having. The kids see riders who have made the most of their talent and are making a living snowboarding and that *carpe diem* attitude can't help but rub off on them.

The season-long program runs 18 days on snow and another 7 off snow. Kids in the campCARE fold have to keep their grades up or someone on the long waiting list will usurp their spot in the program. Good incentive to do your science homework....