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Students make transitions together

By Pamela Schehl
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GAMBIER — Some Kenyon College students have teamed up with Knox County Educational Service Center Transition Mission students for fitness and fun. One week the Kenyon folks visit and participate in Transition Mission activities, and the next week Kenyon serves as the host facility, giving both sets of students the opportunity to get to know each other better.

A recent Tuesday found the group gathered at Kenyon Athletic Center for basketball, racquetball and squash. The students also enjoyed checking out the indoor track and using the modern exercise equipment. Sharlene Perry, KCESC student, said she really liked going there because it made exercising fun. She also likes being able to interact with teenagers from the college.

The Kenyon students have visited day habitation centers with their KCESC counterparts, checked out the new transition (apartment living) lab, and joined in swimming at the Mount Vernon Developmental Center.

The cooperative venture is the brainchild of Kenyon College seniors Peter Frank and Kyle Whitman, who instituted the "Kenyon Club" last school year.

Frank, a sociology major from Boston, said, "We started it at the beginning of last year. We had thought about doing something like this before, but didn't have the time. When we stopped playing soccer, we had the time. Since we all have had some previous experience working with special needs kids, we contacted Knox County (Department of Developmental Disabilities) and got hooked up with the Transition Mission class.

"We have found it to be very rewarding and also a lot of fun all around. I like the excitement and the energy they bring to the activities. They are always so happy to see us."

"From our standpoint," said Whitman, an economics major from Wooster, "we've been able to get as much out of it as they do. They have a level of energy that we didn't expect and it's just been fun. We also like being an active part of the Mount Vernon community."

Since all of the participants are between the ages of 18 and 22, they have things in common. They all have to plan their meetings around class schedules, and work schedules and they talk about siblings, career plans and living away from home.

"The interaction has been incredible," said Transition Mission teacher Nancy Gregg. "The Kenyon students focus on our students' abilities and not their disabilities. We talk about what kinds of things we do, what kinds of things they do, where we've been, where they've been. Our students have had some pretty amazing stories to tell them, too."

The two groups plan to continue the interactions, and there are some Kenyon underclassmen stepping up to the plate to make sure the sessions continue beyond this school year. Two of the freshman participants are Ellen Gaglione from Grand Junction, Colo., and Ollie LaViolette from Los Angeles.

Gregg said the Kenyon Club and Transition Mission students will be combining forces with the Mount Vernon Nazarene University Cosmo group for "Make a Difference Day" activities later in the month.

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