**Volunteers ‘Make a Difference’**

 It was an overcast, Saturday morning, as I approached the *Fort Fisher State Park* to attend an event called “***Make a Difference Day”***. Organized by the **Cape Fear Volunteer Center**, this event promised breakfast, fishing, sandcastle building, giant gerbil ball soccer, relay races, various arts and crafts, yoga, surfing lessons and lunch for *Big Buddies*, their *Little Buddies*, and from what I observed, any kid that wanted to participate, regardless of registration status. The day began with a beach sweep, another way that volunteers helped contribute, by keeping the *Fort Fisher Park* beautiful for all of its visitors to enjoy. I had volunteered for photography and was looking forward to networking and hearing the stories of the other volunteers.

 The idea for ***Make a Difference Day*** came from a conversation over a cup of coffee, when **Cape Fear Volunteer Center Director**, *Annie Anthony* met *Eddie Hargrove* at *Port City Java* to discuss how the two could work together to make a difference in the lives of “at risk” youth. *Annie* had just returned from the **National Conference on Volunteerism** in Philadelphia, where she had learned about the ***National Make a Difference Day***. *Eddie* had a strong desire to use his knowledge and skill to help people learn how to fish and a soft spot in his heart for “at risk” youth. After a lot of planning and action, *Annie and Eddie* brought ***Make a*** ***Difference Day*** to our community. That was ten years ago. The two volunteers have helped this celebration grow into a community movement and quest to help as many kids as possible, through the arts, learning life skills, and receiving exposure to positive role models, which can greatly affect how children interact and engage with others in their personal lives.

 **The Cape Fear Volunteer Center** covers the New Hanover County areas and offers its services to the children and families of those areas. **CFVC** oversees and supports *Big Buddy, Kids Voting, CareNet,* and offers services for *MLK Day*, *Global Youth Service Day*, *National Volunteer Week, 911 Day of Service*, and **National Make a Difference Day**. It also hosts the *Azalea Festival Children’s Tea* party, as well as the *Azalea Festival 5k-10k Fun Walk.* Volunteers come from many diverse backgrounds and locations. Students and faculty from *Cape Fear* *Community College, UNCW*, and other county schools volunteer their time for different reasons, though their collaborative efforts help make a universal difference in the lives of others. The *USMC* and other branches of military also play a major role in providing volunteers for the region, with as many as 40 marines present for the **Make a Difference Day** at *Fort Fisher State Park* *Recreational Area* on Saturday.

 Though there is an apparent level of community spirit and volunteerism here locally, the **CFVC** still struggles to operate and meet the challenges presented by the growing number of children in need and the demand for organizing volunteer services. First, there is no paid staff. **CFVC** operates completely on a volunteer basis. As a result, many of the volunteers find themselves performing an array of tasks in order to successfully get the scheduled events up and running without incident. “Without money it’s hard to function”, stated *Annie Anthony*. **Cape Fear Volunteer Center** still lacks a permanent office and would like to be able to operate a facility with growth potential. “We would like to move into a more permanent situation and have some room to grow”, *Anthony* said. She also noted that the need for volunteers is ‘endless’, as well as the need for donations and contributions from vendors in order to provide quality experiences for the recipients of **CFVC**’s support. *Annie* also addressed the need for qualified volunteers to interact with special needs cases. “Wilmington is blessed with lots of volunteers, but just finding the right ones for the “at risk” youth to be partnered with is sometimes challenging. We are currently, looking for more than 100 mentors right now”.

 ‘Volunteering is extremely rewarding. It fills your heart with only good things. When you see the joy on a child’s face, or their excitement when they catch their first fish, or even seeing the kids immediately, latch on to a volunteer after spending a day with them, inspires me. People inspire me with all of their ideas and many different ways they are contributing right now, in this part of the country. There’s just so much volunteerism going on, people making a difference, right where they are’. Annie Anthony has been part of the efforts of **CFVC** since 2003. She says the number of volunteers needed is “endless” , citing that the number of children in need only increases as time goes on.

 To register as a volunteer, to reach out to *Annie Anthony*, or contribute donations to the **Cape Fear Volunteer Center**, simply visit the website – [www.capefearvolunteercenter.org](http://www.capefearvolunteercenter.org) . Fill out the registration and each individual will be profiled and matched to areas where their skills and experience fits the best. **CFVC** looks forward to being a staple of the local communities for years to come. The mission statement: “To match agencies and individuals with service opportunities in Southeastern, North Carolina”.