



## What’s New at Seven Circles Retreat?

### Supporting community - Creating collaboration

*A Note from Lusijah Rott, Seven Circles Retreat*

Seven Circles was established as a space for personal growth and spiritual renewal for people of all religions, ages, ethnicities, sexual orientation. Seven Circles Retreat is located in a part of California that has significant social needs: high poverty, educational disadvantage, health problems, and food insecurity to name a few. The location of Seven Circles has been a platform for social service to those in need. In the ten years since Seven Circles Retreat began, there are outcomes to celebrate. Below are some of them.

### *Inspiration, Healthy Living, Tools for your life, Community*

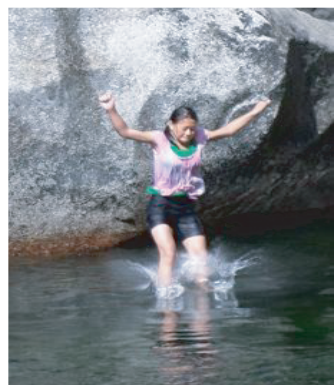


Camp Badger continues to touch young people’s lives: Both the children and teen camps are expected to be full this summer. Camp Badger has support from the local community, local businesses and has received a grant this year from Susila Dharma. Seven Circles’ management and board members are committed to support Camp Badger through further fundraising. The actual cost for each child to attend a 4-day camp is \$300.

Meet four campers who have attended Camp Badger below.

One student previously from Dunlap has a mother who is good hearted but is on permanent disability. They are occasionally homeless and he is shuttled between different relatives. He gets a full campership every year and hugely looks forward to it. It is the highlight of his year, even though he lives further away and goes to a different school. This is his chance to have a normal life for a few days every year. It means a great deal to him.

A teen student has been coming to camp for years. Every year he walks throughout his out rural neighborhood to sell scratch card tear-offs to earn his way here, and then he has to protect the money from his mother who is extremely dysfunctional. Last year we had to have a counselor drive down to get him for camp because the mother couldn’t manage to get it together to bring him (he did have his money safely stashed this time).



There is a Hmong family, very traditional, with four children. They have sent the 3 oldest to camp every year, but it is usually touchy because the father complains about the money. They absolutely love camp and talk to me about it all year. The eldest, a girl, was very shy and retiring. She was the age for teen camp in 2013 and we didn’t know if she would take that challenge, but she came and did wonderfully well, even jumping off a high rock at Tokopah Falls into the river. We were so proud of her and she was beaming. This is a real boost for her, and she is doing very well in school this year...even made the honor roll.

A boy from Fresno who comes to the teen camp who has mild Aspergers. The small, manageable size of our camp and the emphasis on community helps him to feel very welcome and we are happy to have him.

*From Sulfiati Harris, Director of Camp Badger:* I had a receiving when we were first working on the Seven Circles project that this place would be like a volcano that was spewing peace down the mountainside all the way to the valleys. Perhaps all of the dedication and steadfast commitment of the people working on this project are beginning to take effect.

If you would like to help sponsor a youth to attend Camp Badger, please go to [www.sevencirclesretreat.org](http://www.sevencirclesretreat.org) - a donation can be made to support Camp Badger on the donation page.

### Collaborations

It has long been the intent of Seven Circles Retreat to join hands with other organizations of like spirit and compatible mission in order to expand our outreach. Through the efforts of Robert Mertens, a local resident and longtime Subud member, we have initiated a dialogue with the Community Service and Employment Training (CSET) agency in the nearby community of Visalia. Although CSET is a conduit for many impressive projects, we are primarily interested in the issues of food insecurity and youth leadership. Robert is a strong advocate of Permaculture ([www.permaculture.org](http://www.permaculture.org)), which can be a major solution to overcoming hunger. A study by the California Institute for Rural Studies has confirmed that there is “Hunger in the Fields” in California’s Central Valley. In the richest agriculture region in the United States, 45 per cent of the population suffers from food insecurity. Through a partnership with CSET, we are presenting our “Seeds” project to create a permaculture demonstration site and learning center here at Seven Circles. Young people from agricultural families and communities in the Central Valley will have the opportunity to become leaders in their own communities in order to successfully address the twin challenges of low income and food insecurity.



We were delighted to discover the connection between food insecurity, poverty and youth leadership. Halfrid Nelson-Underhill, one of the managers at Seven Circles, reconnected with a friend and youth activist only to discover that his charter school youth were already growing a permaculture garden on land next to the Grizzly baseball stadium in Fresno. John Minkler is one of the founders of the Charter School for Civic and Entrepreneurial Leadership. A dedicated educator, John is a strong proponent of project-based learning and service learning. He often works with culturally and racially diverse young people. He has been successful at transforming young people from marginalized lives to becoming confident and productive citizens. We are in discussions as to how we might partner with John to create special programs as for at-risk youth in our unique environment at Seven Circles. It is very exciting to be working with a man of such great experience and dedication. Stay tuned to hear more about our progress.

### Community support

Subud has become well known in this small, spread-out mountain community for being very active in community development, and for being peaceable folk who know how to get along with all kinds of people. This is partly because of activities at Camp Badger and other Seven Circles events, but also because of the arts community work that Robert Mertens and Bachrun and Mahalia LoMele have done. The yoga class with Helena Mertens was an offering of good health to the community living near Seven Circles Retreat and was an immediate success! These activities continue to generate curiosity about the Subud practice. At least half of the women’s Subud group are originally from the local area.

It has been heartening to experience a support from the local community, two local people who do alot community activity have instigated a monthly group meeting called “7 Ups” in order to help Seven Circles thrive. We now have a community movie and pizza night one Tuesday a month at Seven Circles with the help of Marwan LoMele on the movies, Leo Horthy’s equipment, and pizza from one of our local Subud members, Jane Ziegler.

Guests from countries around the globe including Germany, England, Italy, Holland, France, Syria, Israel, and Canada have found this simple mountain retreat. All who visit here, regardless of nationality, ethnicity or religion, comment on the special feeliing of Seven Circles and express their gratitude for the rest, renewal and recreation found in this rare retreat center nestled among the pines and manzanitas in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains in central California.