

City kids enjoy breath of fresh air

Thanks to donations and Newark fund

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Dressed in brown vinyl waders and a red Life Camp T-shirt, 12-year-old Ibn Banks walks through a tree-lined path toward a stream in Pottersville.

"You see that tree over there? A snake lives there," he says, pointing to a stump. "I'm not used to that stuff, but I like to learn about it."

Ibn is about 40 miles from his East Orange home, but he might as well be in a different world.

He is one of about 600 Newark-area children attending summer camp this year, compliments of the 2002 Greater Newark Fresh Air Fund. Thanks mostly to public donations, the fund has been sending inner-city children to camp for 120 years.

The Boys & Girls Club of Newark runs Life Camp, where Fresh Air Fund campers make up about 20 percent of the camp population. Deer roam the

96-acre campground where youngsters swim in an Olympic-size pool and act in a theater building. The camp day gets broken down into periods, where children create arts and crafts, use computers and play chess. They also take nature walks and swimming lessons during the periods.

Ibn discovered the garter snake's home on a nature walk. During the walks he thinks about his great-grandfather, who passed away on July 3.

"He's in heaven, working on a yard now," he said.

If Ibn didn't get the chance to attend camp, he said, he would be home watching TV.

"Coming out here takes my mind off stressy stuff. This is way better," he said.

Already, Ibn has gotten closeup looks at hawks, tadpoles and fish.

As Ibn wades through the stream he passes Michael Lawson, who has a small Pringles can with water, with a



Lifeguard Katie Roberts, 18, of Chatham gives Juanita Bracewell, 7, of Newark a swimming lesson at the camp in Pottersville, Hunterdon County.

crawfish and a minnow in it.

Along with catching crawfish, Michael, 12, who lives in Newark, likes going on bike rides through nature.

"You hear different things riding a bike out here. I hear birds, like a wood-

pecker. In Newark all you hear is cars whizzing past you," he said.

Away from the nature scene, Antwan and Racquan McKenith, 12-year-old twin brothers from Newark

[See FUND, Page 20]