

Transformed



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In the Balkans region of Europe, TMS Global cross-cultural witnesses teach leadership skills and disciple young adults through outdoor adventure.

Hiking ministry helps young people find their way

Sit around a campfire with me. You hear the wood crackle and pop. You see flames flicker and dance as tiny sparks shoot into the air. You smell the distinctive scent of campfire smoke. You feel a slight chill, and scoot in closer so that heat soaks into your feet, legs, hands, and face.

We're in the Balkans region of Europe. There are mountains and valleys, hills, plains, rivers, and all sorts of beautiful landscapes. It's a great place to sit around a campfire or go for a hike.

And it turns out hikes can be great for a lot of things. That's what a team of cross-cultural

workers (CCWs) is discovering as they run an outdoor adventure ministry in the Balkans.

Focusing on the next generation

"When we started taking people on hikes, it wasn't anything formal," says Nicole.* It was just like, 'Hey we're going for a hike on Saturday. You want to go with us? We're going as a family.' It was interesting to see what going on a hike meant to them."

Nicole, her husband Brian,* Stephanie* and her husband, Josh,* and two other families work

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together to teach leadership skills and disciple young adults through outdoor adventure.

Nicole says, “It’s focused on the next generation and helping the next generation grow up to be leaders—but in that, to be leaders who are value driven, who reciprocate the encouragement that they’ve received along the way.”

The team believes that camping and hiking teach people skills they can apply to other areas of life. Brian says the outdoors can help people learn how to navigate challenges and solve problems.

“When you go up in the mountains, no matter where we go, there’s always going to be challenges,” Brian says. “The idea of letting them actually try things is sort of novel because here; often people are just given a position without any knowledge of what they’re supposed to do, and then they flounder. So we give them opportunities to try leadership in different avenues. And then the other idea is that it’s transferable. So if you realize that you can figure these things out, if you take the time and look at what’s happening and reason it out, then you realize, hey, I can do that in other areas of my life too.”

Providing space to talk about faith

The outdoors also creates space for meaningful conversation. Nicole says she’s often asked deep questions while on hikes, especially on the downhill portion.

“I think there’s something to that spiritually,” Nicole says. “I think there’s something to the excitement of getting to the top and someone realizing I did this; I can do it. And then coming off the summit and recognizing they’re tired, but questions in their mind begin to come to the surface. I’ve been asked about

my thoughts on the afterlife. And I’ve been asked if I believe in heaven. If I do, what is it?”

The vast majority of people in the country where the team lives are Muslim. Nicole says both Muslims and Christians can find common ground in the outdoors, so it’s a safe space to begin talking about faith.

“The Koran [Muslims’ holy book] has numerous places where creation is talked about,” Nicole says. “It’s been interesting in those conversations to see God opening the doors deeper simply because I can say, ‘In our holy book, it actually talks about creation. And this is what it says about creation. What does it say in yours? Do you have a part of it that you would be willing to share with me?’ And some of them do. That’s turned into some really cool conversations,

several of which have turned into then talking about the Church and all sorts of other more religiously driven conversations.”

Teammate Stephanie has seen this happen, too.

“One time we were out hiking, and a student that had previously interned with us came along,” Stephanie says. “We were coming down the mountain and we heard him walking through the Old

Testament with another student. He was talking about all of the prophets and comparing them. He was starting to follow Jesus, and he was sharing how the stories of the prophets that he was reading in the Old Testament compared with the Koran. It’s really awesome when you see someone who you’ve been discipling, however poorly you feel like you may be doing that, to then hear them starting to disciple someone else. Only God can do that.”

Sharing hope

The team says there’s a sense of hopelessness in their country. Brian says time on the trail provides an opportunity to begin sharing where their hope comes from.





The majority of people in this area are Muslim. The outdoors provides space and common ground to begin sharing about Jesus.

“To be able to share that our hope isn’t in the United States, isn’t in governments or anything like that, but that our hope is in God and His kingdom allows for these conversations to develop,” Brian says. “It buys that time that’s so critical and then builds trust where we can then later follow up with coffee times and hanging out at the office to keep talking through these questions and pointing to Jesus so that Jesus can do the growing.”

The outdoors is a place for students to begin to dream of a hopeful future for their country. Stephanie says there’s a lack of opportunity for young people where they live. She says she interacts with bright students who have a lot of potential and are frustrated because they don’t have many options.

“We feel like there is so much potential for them,” Stephanie says. “Maybe because of years of bad examples and leadership in their government they don’t see how they can make change. So we’re hoping to introduce a different model of leadership clearly based in the person of Jesus. We want to show them that there is a different way to lead people. They can be the ones to create change within their own country and make things better and create opportunities for themselves and other people.”

Brian says the Balkans are beautiful. And there’s a generation of young people there trying to find their way. He says the team has found that going into the mountains creates an opportunity for people to leave behind fear, open up, grasp onto hope, and find joy in God’s creation.

By Jenifer Jones

Firsthand encounter

At the time of this writing, a spontaneous, student-led revival at Asbury University in Wilmore, Kentucky is in its fifth day of non-stop activity.

In both its humble beginnings and its attractive nature, this outpouring brings to mind the origins of the great Hebrides Revival in mid-twentieth century Scotland. It has all the marks of a genuine move of the Spirit, and busloads of students from other universities have been making their way to Wilmore.

“This revival is about Gen Z,” Dr. Steve Seamands commented.

“I think Jesus is on a mission to give His heart to them.” A long-time professor at Asbury Theological Seminary, Dr. Seamands has been studying revival for years. “I believe every generation needs a firsthand encounter,” he said.

This newsletter is about the next generation. It tells how God is working in the hearts of some young people in the Balkans through a creative, outdoor ministry. As you read, please pray for this outreach and pray for the young generation throughout the world—that they would have a firsthand encounter with Jesus.



Max Wilkins
President & CEO

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