

Summer Camp '08: The Break That Refreshes



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The change is often dramatic and complete. From Phys. Ed. class wallflowers from August through May, kids with disabilities in summer camp morph into full-throttle dynamos, hurtling from one organized activity to the next in an environment that is safe, social and supportive. Fueled by good food, fresh air, high activity and companionship, kids in summer camp sleep the sleep of the satisfied, the day's challenges met, new friends made and another day just ahead. For parents and other caregivers, however, the trick is to find that most appropriate camp, one that in addition to offering the best environment for recreation and socialization also has staff that are knowledgeable about campers' assistive technology -- and register early enough so that a place for their child is ensured and a respite for parents can be planned.

Across the U.S. there are hundreds, perhaps thousands of residential and day camps that accommodate children with disabilities. Each has its own history, charm and structure. Some are brand new. Others are but a few years old and still others, though a shrinking number, have been in operation for decades. Some are only seasonal while others run sessions for campers year-round. Sign-up deadlines for most residential camps are in February and March. This issue, then, is dedicated to the summer camp experience which, for many children with disabilities, may be the most meaningful experience of their lives.

Charlie Becker, Camp Director, Speaks

Charlie Becker says he has been around individuals with disabilities since he was born. "We had a neighbor who dove into a swimming pool and was paralyzed from the neck down. My mother took care of that neighbor and I became close to the family. Back in the days when everyone had their milk delivered by a milk man, ours had a son who died from muscular dystrophy." In 1969, Charlie was a participant in Iowa's first-ever muscular dystrophy

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telethon. As he grew toward manhood Charlie became an avid volunteer. He volunteered to work in eastern Iowa's first group home.

Following graduation from the University of Iowa he taught school in England and in southern Iowa. It was as a teacher – he taught government to high schoolers – that he first took an active role on behalf of special needs students in a school environment. "Kids with disabilities always sat off to the side in phys. Ed. class," he recalls. "They sat in the bleachers or in their wheelchairs and did nothing. They were bored stiff. I didn't teach P.E. but I would load those kids into my car and drive them to the local YMCA." There, he remembers, he'd teach them how to swim. He volunteered for Easter Seals camps that focused on individuals with disabilities – "but I never dreamed then that I would do what I have been doing for the past 30 years: running a year-round camp for children with disabilities.

Charlie's camp, Camp Courageous of Iowa, now serves thousands of kids annually. Its funding, he emphasizes, is derived only from donations, mainly from individuals. "We have no fund raiser, no development group. We do all that we can to spread the word about the camp via word-of-mouth." Today, while many older camps for children with disabilities nationwide have succumbed to funding pressures, Camp Courageous thrives. "Nearly three decades ago I came to Camp Courageous intending to spend a couple of years here – sort of like the Peace Corps – and then return to teaching. I stayed and in doing so I have been blessed with the most rewarding career anyone can have."

Supporting our interview with Charlie Becker are resources that provide information on a range of summer camp resources. We also feature members of our Knowledge Network. The members spotlighted this month are summer camps across the nation and organizations that support the summer camp experience for children with special needs. We invite you to contact these members for further information. Please share this newsletter with other organizations, families and professionals who may benefit from it. We invite you to visit us at <http://www.fctd.info>. We welcome feedback, new members and all who contribute to our growing knowledge base.

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Summer Camp 2008: "Our Job Is to Provide an Exceptional Experience"

*An Interview with Charlie Becker,
Executive Director, Camp Courageous of Iowa*

"For one week a year, in summer or winter, parents of children with disabilities entrust us with their child. Our responsibility to those parents and to that child is to give them an exceptional camp experience, hopefully the experience of a lifetime." That is Charlie Becker's credo. Everything at his camp, Camp Courageous of Iowa, is structured around that premise and that promise.



Charlie Becker

Their Big Vacation of the Year

For so many kids with disabilities, camp is their big vacation of the year. "Most parents tell us that this is their highlight of the year. We take that very seriously. In other words, during staff orientation I let the staff know that they are the ones who will be responsible for making the campers' experience incredible."

Many of the Camp Courageous campers are mainstreamed, Charlie explains. "Some of the campers do not excel in their regular classes but they come here and suddenly they are climbing rocks and rappelling or tree climbing or caving or canoeing. When they return to a school environment they are a few steps ahead of everyone else as opposed to behind their classmates."

At Camp Courageous campers are grouped homogeneously. "Here's the benefit of a homogeneous group: If you are a child with muscular dystrophy and live in Monticello, Iowa you are probably the only person in Monticello, Iowa with muscular dystrophy. Then you come here to Camp Courageous and there are 80 other campers with muscular dystrophy." The result, he says, is that like campers are treated equally in all activities. They also have the opportunity to experience a social setting with campers who are similar to them. "It's a good mix of recreation with social skills," he comments.

In Charlie's opinion, special needs campers in a supportive mainstream environment tend to develop more independence. "We try to teach them through adventure activities that either individually or as a group the campers can ac-

complish anything. The hope here – and one of our goals – is that the campers will depart here with a feeling of much more independence and self-esteem than they possessed when they arrived."

No Competitive Activities; Group Support Is Stressed

Special needs campers learn to support each other in a group environment, he notes. "As soon as a camper arrives here, his parents go to check on medications and other related issues, but a counselor is right there at the car to greet the camper who is then brought to the cabin where the camper and counselor await the arrival of other campers."

Almost immediately, he points out, the campers form a group in order to participate in activities. "Take tree climbing. We don't care if the campers make it to the top of the tree so they can ring the bell and everyone claps. Even if a camper can make it past one or two pegs the entire group claps, cheers and is generally supportive. All that group enthusiasm is keyed by an exceptional counselor who is the linchpin of the positive, supportive group development we strive for."

There are no competitive activities at Camp Courageous. "No, we will not pit one camper against another. Competition will make one camper a winner and one a loser. We favor group activities that result in group accomplishments. For instance, we have a spindle that is six feet off the ground and there are five of us. How are we going to get everyone over that spindle? As a group we have to figure that out. Nobody will be a loser in this situation. Even activities such as archery are not set up to be competitive."

Bringing AT to Camp

Many of the kids with communications difficulties bring their own assistive technology to camp with them, a trend that does not faze Becker or his staff members. Prior to each camp session, counselors are given a folder for each camper for whom they are responsible.

"Before the camper appears at camp the counselors know everything there is to know about him," Charlie explains. "There is a lot of coordination and collaboration between our departments to make sure that the camper enjoys a wonderful camp experience. In that report are explanations and descriptions of all the apparatuses a camper needs and uses. We review the report with parents when they drop off the camper. If there is anything new regarding assistive technology we talk about it then thoroughly."



"As far as AT is concerned, we pride ourselves and our camp on being technologically savvy. We try to stay on the cutting edge of technology knowledge, including AT.

In fact, he adds, "we received a donation of a couple of Wii's yesterday. Nursing homes rave about them as a rehabilitation tool. Wounded GI's returning from Iraq use them. We'll hook them up today and we'll soon have campers in wheelchairs bowling and doing other virtual activities as well off a big screen TV. A Wii is a virtual activity in which the user can become physically involved on an interactive basis. The user's movements determine the outcome of the game. "In Wii bowling, even if the camper produces a gutter ball it produces a reaction from the camper," Charlie notes.

In the future, Charlie expects to see a trend toward more use of the Wii and Wii-type technology which, he says, has a definite place in special needs camps. "Technology is coming more and more into play in the camp environment, which is designed to be the opposite of a home and school setting. Here we try to avoid activities that the campers can do at home. We don't sit and watch movies. We don't play computer games. We keep the campers active. The tripping program is one of our fastest growing programs. We try to have the campers avoid passive pursuits. From the time they wake up to the time they go to bed they are moving. They eat well and sleep well."

Start the Camp Search Process Now

For parents, Charlie says, February is the ideal time to begin the camp search process in earnest. "For our camp the best time to start the process was yesterday – for the 2009 summer season." Camp Courageous registration occurred on three dates: one for adults, one for youth and a third for the camp's growing travel program. All sessions last one week. Registration begins at 7 AM and parents can register their children online, by phone or in person. All sessions are booked within 35 minutes.

"Our youngest camper was less than a year old and our oldest was 105," Becker notes. "For many of our campers, their first camp experience was with a school group. We have many school groups that come out to visit us in the spring for a one-, two- or three-day experience. Some will do a respite care weekend. From that they graduate to a week-long session."

Parents need to carefully consider the Camp Courageous program very early on. "We send our yearly schedules two months before January registration. Parents can look over that schedule and see which weeks are best for them and for their child."

As noted earlier, Camp Courageous campers are grouped ho-

mogeneously. "One week may consist of campers with brain injury. Another week might consist of campers with muscular dystrophy. Still another might be reserved for campers who are visually impaired. For example, he explains, "If a parent has a child who is 12 years old with muscular dystrophy, the parent will know that the week of July 7-14 is the week for him. The parents should then call in and get him registered as quickly as possible."

Check It Out: First Impressions Are Important

For parents seeking a camp for their special needs child, there is no substitute for a visit and a camp tour. "What other families say about the camp is very important, ask for references," Becker notes. "Parents should physically check out the camp. Call ahead of time and we'll be happy to give a tour. I'm big on looking at the longevity of a camp's staff and parents should do that as well. Do counselors come just for one season, leave and come back? Have the dietary and medical help been there a long time? Or is the staffing a year-to-year situation?"

"First impressions are important," he remarks. "Does it appear that the staff members really love their jobs? In other words, when you arrive is your first impression of the staff, 'Wow, they're really enjoying being here!'"



Are the facilities kept up? "I've always believed that if you can't take care of the facilities, how can you take care of people's loved ones?" Check out the camp activities, he advises, as well as the quality of the camp program, including medical, dietary and maintenance resources, he cautions.

How much administration does a camp have? "Is the camp's organization top heavy with administrators and light on programs?"

Staff training is another area of great importance, Becker notes. "Make sure that staff members are qualified," he advises. "Have staffers gone through CPR/lifesaving and behavioral management, for example?"

Parents should make themselves aware of a camp's staff-to-camper ratio," he notes. "If you are a parent of a child who is severely and profoundly handicapped, you will want that ratio to be 1:1 rather than 1:5."

What is the range of program activities? Are they age appropriate? "Get a sample of the schedule for the week. See what your son or daughter will be doing on any given day."

Do the accommodations fit the needs of a variety of camp-

ers? "Can the dietary facilities and staff meet the needs of your child's special diets?"

Consider the safety and security of a camp and the emergency procedures, Charlie points out. "Make sure they are in place. I'm a big believer that a camp's reputation should be the top consideration. The American Camp Association has an accreditation program which has consistently awarded Camp Courageous its top rating. Make sure the camp is ACA-accredited and check the rating."

What's most important to him, he says, "is that the staff conveys an impression of 100% dedication. The staffers must love what they are doing and that love must be obvious. That dedication is key to whether or not a special needs camper has an enjoyable camp experience."

Campers Come from All Over

Although Camp Courageous has a regional orientation it attracts campers from many locales. "We have no geographical limitations as far as our campers are concerned," Charlie says. "Most are from Iowa and then from Illinois and Wisconsin but they come from as far away as Minnesota and New York, California and Texas."

"We have parents who will drive from south Texas to Camp Courageous every summer in their Winnebago, leave their child with us and vacation around the Midwest before returning to retrieve their camper at the end of his session."

He adds, "One of the major benefits we gain from not being under the umbrella of another organization is that we have the freedom to attract campers from varied regions."

While Camp Courageous, like many other special needs camps, also maintains programs for adults, children form the bulk of its camper population. The age range for Camp Courageous non-adult campers extends from infancy to age 18-21.

Unsteady Growth in Special Needs Camps

Since he entered the camp profession three decades ago Becker has witnessed an unsteady growth in the number of camps dedicated to children with special needs.

"At Camp Courageous, where I've spent nearly my entire career, I've seen steady growth. In 1974 we served 211 campers, this year we'll serve 5,176 campers in a year-round program." With other camps, however, growth has not been steady, he observes. "I've seen perhaps 50% of the camps close and a large percentage of those that have remained open have had to struggle to stay in operation, with the balance experiencing some growth."

Charlie says that there have been opportunities to start camps like Camp Courageous from Florida to California. "We could have been the Wal-Mart of camps for kids with disabilities but we chose instead not to fill that role. We've assisted many camps with their programs to help them grow."

Programs have evolved during his 30-year tenure. "At Camp Courageous we have a travel program in which we take campers who have come to us for years on trips throughout the U.S., Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean."

The camp will try to grow the travel program further during the winter sessions, he says. "For instance, we have a week-long winter session for campers with severe and profound disabilities. Trouble is, we have two feet of snow on the ground and the thermometer quivering at zero. Not everybody wants to participate in camp in those conditions. However, if the summer is booked, if you as a parent don't have a choice, you'll take winter over nothing at all. We figured that if we arranged "tripping" programs to warmer areas we could bring in all the campers who want the Camp Courageous experience."

Planting Seeds to Grow Funding

The challenge, of course, is that this type of robust year-round operation requires a full bank account. What makes the camp's funding strategy unique, according to Becker, is that much thought and effort, but little financial investment, is expended on its implementation.



Camp Courageous is run entirely on donations. Says Charlie, "Nobody is paid to raise money for us; there is no development department. We have no formal sponsorship so are not part of the Easter Seals Society network or the United Way – but there is no organization on top of us to tell us what to do, what not to do or how to do it."

How does he attract donations? "My philosophy is that if a camp does a good job at achieving its objectives the donations will come naturally. We plant a lot of seeds. I give many programs. Aside from those programs, news of our camp circulates via word of mouth."

Camp Courageous receives donations from service organizations like Lions Clubs and churches. "We keep everything wide open so that we can solicit almost any type of institution."

However, most of the camp's donations, he explains, come from individuals. "Camp Courageous is extremely grass roots. You can touch it, feel it and be a part of it. A donor

who contributes \$5 can see where that \$5 goes. It's never just a drop in the bucket. Everybody who donates to the camp, whether the donation is earmarked for arts and crafts or magazines, or a donation of an hour of time, gets a personally signed thank you note from us. I always try to add a personal note telling the individual donor how much I appreciate their contribution."

"Integrity Is Everything"

Charlie credits the success of his camp's fundraising strategy to a single word: integrity. "Our success through the years boils down to integrity," he declares. "Integrity is everything. We do nothing that would jeopardize the integrity of the organization. We don't hold parties for prospective donors. We don't get involved in gaming or telemarketing. We keep it very clean."

When he first started at the camp, and for our first 10 years or so, he recalls, "I went to the county landfill to sift through people's trash in order to find items that the camp might be able to use, like bicycle parts and 2 X 4's. We had a volunteer maintenance person who helped us take advantage of what we found and what we had and to get things done."

The Goal: "The Experience of My Life"

Becker's goal for each camper is ambitious. "I love it when a camper leaves us and tells me, 'This has been the best experience of my life.' That may be selfish on my part but it is so rewarding for me and for my staff to hear. To offer something to campers with special needs that proves to be so profound to these campers means everything to us. That experience may be the camp session they just experienced. It may be a trip to the Grand Canyon or another destination. So many campers return from a trip program and tell us how important that one trip has been to them. Because it is unbelievably moving to them it is also unbelievably moving to us."



One incident in his 30 years stands out as an example of how profound the camp experience can be. "I remember when we had a week in which all the campers were physically disabled. Mentally they were fine. The president of the U.S. at that time was Ronald Reagan. Reagan was scheduled to come to the Cedar Rapids airport. I arranged to reserve a place for our campers in a roped off area at the airport

close to where the president was going to be. Some of our campers were physically in unique situations. One was on a gurney."

At breakfast he broached the possibility of the airport visit with his campers, most of whom were teenagers.

"I explained to them the opportunity that we had to see this very important man. I didn't perceive the opportunity as political. I saw it as a chance for our campers to get close exposure to the president of the U.S. I taught government before I came to Camp Courageous so I presented it as a civics lesson. I told them, 'This is the opportunity of a lifetime. Do you want to go or don't you? If you want to go we have camp buses that will bring you there. If you don't want to go it's OK; we'll do something else.'"

The campers voted unanimously to go to see President Reagan. "We brought them all to the airport. A photo was taken of the two counselors lifting the young lady in the gurney out of it so that she could see the president. Other photos were taken of counselors lifting campers out of their wheelchairs. Twenty years later those campers still tell me that that visit to the airport was the most profound event of their lives."

"We had a camper here this past fall who had muscular dystrophy and passed away. The parents wrote to let us know and all of our staff attended his funeral. His parents emphasized to me that the highlight of his year, every year, was his session at Camp Courageous. We all had tears in our eyes. Sometimes we are so into what we do that at times we can forget for a moment how important this camp is to the campers."

A Jump Start for School; Counselors Are Key

The camp tries to plan activities that may provide campers with a jump start for the beginning of their school year, to help them return to their world after an idyllic camp experience.

"This week at camp the campers all have severe or profound disabilities. The camper-to-staff ratio is 1:2. In this kind of week we will develop a schedule for the campers because the campers are not capable of doing that on their own. If the campers are higher functioning we give them the opportunity on Sunday night to pick their activities for the week. We want to make sure that the camper who loves the canoe, for instance, gets an opportunity to be in that canoe a couple of times during the week."

Counselors, Becker says, are the backbone of all the camp's recreation and social activities and the driving force behind the profound summer experience and the school jump start for which Camp Courageous strives. Recruiting and retain-

ing the right counselors is an ongoing challenge, one that the camp has successfully met through the years.

Because Camp Courageous operates year-round "we send out notices in August to camps with disabilities nationwide that only run summer programs informing their staffers that we are open all year if they want to remain employed in a camp environment. That works well for us."

Nearly 100% of Camp Courageous counselors go on to careers in the special needs field. "We kid special education programs and group homes that we do all the training and they get all the people. We don't have many counselors beyond age 30 because they become special ed teachers and work in group homes and in rehabilitation programs. We have found that a reference from us is very beneficial to our counselors when they move on in their careers. Other employers recognize that they will probably have encountered every possible scenario during their time with us as counselors. We are a great steppingstone for young people and we take great pride in that."

In fact, he says, "I received a letter from a parent a few weeks ago. Her daughter had come to us uncertain about what she wanted to do with her future. But after her time with us she chose a career in the disabilities field. Her parent thanked us for giving this young lady the direction in life that she had been lacking."

No Compromise on Counselor Quality

Staff quality, he reemphasizes, "is the number one priority for us. We won't compromise on a staff person. We want only the very best and then treat them in a way that ensures they will stay with us for the longest possible period of time. For example, if we recruit 10 more staff than last year then we will increase the camper population to match those hires. It's a win-win situation for us."

Camp Courageous uses no external trainers or training programs.

"We won't use trainers. We had a CIT program about 10 years ago and found that it required time and work that ought to have been spent with the campers. However, we do a substantial orientation between each of the seasons. We'll start on a Sunday and go through the following Saturday, from 7 AM to about 10 PM."

During that week, Charlie explains, the entire staff will become certified in CPR, defibrillation and first aid as well as

in other skills. "It's a week of total immersion in training. Because we do not experience much staff turnover year to year, many of our older staff members train the incoming staff. For instance, when a new summer counselor arrives for her first summer with us she is never alone; she is always with an older counselor."

Although the camp uses no external trainers it does send staff away to earn additional certification. "We sent our respite care volunteer coordinator off to earn her therapeutic recreation degree so that she could be a supervisor for TR students coming here to do internships. One of our maintenance people is going for a degree in heating, ventilation and air conditioning. A member of our dietary staff is earning a degree in dietary and chef."

For the year-round staff there are opportunities to obtain further education. "Nursing is difficult to find throughout the camping field, especially a three-month summer camp. Nurses are not leaving hospitals to find a three-month job. We had an exceptionally good counselor from Maine with a science background. We asked her if she would be interested in nursing. We sent her to the University of Iowa where she earned her Masters in nursing. She's contracted with us to be our nurse for the next five years. She loves nursing and the camping environment. We have nursing available every moment that a camper is here."

In a group of maybe five high functioning campers, Becker adds, there might be three counselors: one or two veteran counselors and one new one. "We never leave new staff to fend for themselves. Even after orientation we remain ever watchful. The entire process for us is organic, which helps us maintain a very high level of quality control."

Significantly, he adds, the administration roster of Camp Courageous has grown only by one person since the camp was founded: an IT professional. "Our IT expert will spend half time in administration and half time programming. He has a son with Angelman syndrome. His background as a parent of a severely and profoundly disabled child and as an IT professional enables us to stay on top of technology issues, knowledge and deployment as applied to a camping situation.

Camp Courageous volunteers can be any age, Becker says. "Counselors ideally are 18 years old and above. We have retired couples here who volunteer their services in, say, maintenance and dietary. We have a lot of retired couples who do that. Our average program specialist is about 25 years old. Our average department head is about 50. Our average year-round non-counselor staff is in their 30s and 40s – but they all look like teenagers. You need that youthful personality in order to remain excited and invigorated



about each day, because that's the image that is given to the campers."

Aides in Camp

Some campers now bring aides with them to camp. "This is a trend we've seen take shape in the past three or four years." The drawback to this trend, he explains, is that "many aides are already full-time employees and there is a lot of coming and going. We are very careful with aides because they are under the camp's radar. We do criminal checks on everyone who comes to work here to make sure that person is right for our camp. We do this because our campers are so vulnerable, which is why security cameras are sited throughout the camp."

"When an aide arrives with a camper we immediately check with his agency to make certain the correct background checks have been made. Aides are bound to a senior counselor. We have an ironclad policy that prohibits a counselor from being alone with a camper. If a camper needs to go to the bathroom, for example, two counselors will take him and one counselor will remain with the other two or three campers. Aides are a great asset because no one knows a camper better than they do.

Sometimes – but very rarely – a parent will come with the camper and stay. "Like the aides, the parent will plug right in. Having a parent here can defeat part of the purpose of the camp, which provides parents with a break from the day-to-day care of their child."

"You Can't Beat That"

In the future, Charlie Becker will not lose sight of the road he has traveled from the past to the present. "Before I came to Camp Courageous 30 years ago I never dreamed I'd run such a camp. The campers and their families hook you, however, and pull you in – and you realize that there is nothing in life that you would rather do.



"When we're in our 30s and 40s we begin to look back at our lives and ask ourselves, 'Have I wasted the prime of my life doing something that had no value?' I can look back and say, 'I have given the prime of my life to Camp Courageous and that is a very good thing.'" Does he miss teaching? "Sure, I miss it. Fortunately, though, I'm still invited to high school reunions by the kids I taught in high school who are now approaching middle age. For me, Camp Courageous combines the best part of teaching and volunteerism. You can't beat that."

March Online Discussion

Designing a Performance Technology Toolkit



Moderated by David Davis
Project Director of the
Florida Instructional
Technology Training &
Resource Unit (FDLRS/TECH)

We've long understood that individualization of instruction makes for better education. Teachers only have so much time, however, and when a range of technology tools are added to the mix of their regular curriculum materials, customization of those tools may be too much to expect. Where to look for help? Perhaps to the students themselves.

We will explore methods for promoting student self-customization of technology tools. We'll discuss a range of important questions, including the sometimes conflicting technology standards set for students by adults and peers.

To participate in the month-long discussion, visit
<http://www.fctd.info/webboard/index.php>



RESOURCES

ARTICLES

Summer Camps for Kids with Learning Disabilities or ADHD

Originally from Schwab Learning Center (2004), now on the Great Schools website

Aimed at parents of children with learning disabilities, ADD or AD/HD who are seeking a summer camp for their child, this article recommends several steps parents ought to take during their search:

- 1) Understand a child's needs and goals
- 2) Learn the differences between the types of camps available
- 3) Choose the type of camp best suited to a child's personality
- 4) Narrow the search to specific camps
- 5) Request brochures from the camps that best fit the child's needs
- 6) Discuss with the camp director any issues of special concern to the child

Addressing parents, the author concludes, "You know which accommodations in your household and at school help your child succeed, so address these with the camp director. By keeping your child's strengths, needs, and interests in mind throughout your camp search, you'll be able to choose a summer camp that addresses your concerns and is fun for your child."

<http://www.bridges4kids.org/articles/2-04/SchwabLearning2-25-04.html>

Selecting a Summer Camp for a Child with Learning or Attention Problems

By Linda Broatch, M.A. and Nancy Firtchow, M.L.S.

Great Schools: The Parent's Guide to K-12 Success (2008)
In addition to developing a clear understanding of a child's wants and needs as well as forming a database for the types of camps available, the authors urge parents to base their camp decision on the family's budget and schedule. They write, "A good starting point for the summer camp selection process is to assess your child's current challenges, strengths, and interests. This, along with knowledge of your child's temperament, personality, and level of maturity, will help you choose suitable camps. Kids with learning and attention difficulties often benefit from being involved in non-academic activities during the summer, especially those in which they excel. For many, the school year takes a heavy toll on self-esteem. So, while you may worry that your child will 'lose ground' academically over the summer, it can be

important to balance academic skill-building with activities that help your child regain self-esteem, relax and have fun, or explore exciting new pursuits."
<http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.aspx?r=285>

Choosing the Right Summer Camp

By Terry Mauro

Parenting Special Needs (2006)

The author asks parents, "Which is best for your child - a special needs camp, a mainstream camp in your own community, or a summer spent at home with you? Each has its pros and cons." Ms. Mauro lists the following pros and cons of a special needs camp:

Pros

- Environment geared to your child's special needs
- Opportunity to socialize with peers with same disabilities
- Opportunity for networking with other families
- Expectation that all activities and rules will be appropriate for your child

Cons

- Camp may not be close by, requiring extensive transportation time or residential stay
- Tuition is often very expensive
- Since all children are different, even within the same disability, accommodations made for one child may be detrimental to another.
- Reliance on high school or college-age counselors to do most of the work with the campers may cause even a good program to be implemented improperly.

She recommends that parents ask the following questions:

- Are there adult counselors with special-ed degrees and experience? How involved are they in the day-to-day activities of specific groups of campers?
- Can a child have a one-on-one aide if necessary? How much will it cost? What will that person's age and qualifications be?
- What are the rules in regards to discipline and behavior modification or management? Can a child have his or her own behavior plan? Who would administer that?
- Is there transportation or tuition assistance? Are there special services like speech, occupational or physical therapy? How much do they cost?

<http://specialchildren.about.com/od/specialneedssummercamps/a/choosecamp.htm>

Mentors at Work: Summer Camps Help Kids with Disabilities Push the Envelope

Diversity Careers in Engineering and Information Technology (2005)

This article describes an ongoing program in which IBM and the National Federation for the Blind promote a science academy aimed at exposing middle school students with disabilities to technology, science and engineering. IBM executive Guido Corona, a frequent participant in these programs declares, "The camps not only create interest in technology and engineering, they ignite a spark of leadership in the students." Corona says he has seen discouraged and disruptive young people become leaders as their energy is channeled into rewarding projects. "These camps discover and harness the human potential," he says. Corona himself has been blind for more than 20 years. He's a software engineer in sales and solutions for IBM's Worldwide Accessibility Center in Austin, TX.

http://www.diversitycareers.com/articles/pro/05-octnov/mentors_summerCamp.htm

Before Picking a Camp for Special Needs, Choose a Great Camp for Your LD Child

By Ann Logsdon

About.com: Learning Disabilities (2007)

Ms. Logsdon recommends that parents take the following steps when deciding on a summer camp for their child with learning disabilities:

- Choosing the right camp requires research; check out the camp's management
- Learn about camp activities; ask about the camp's daily operations
- Ask how the camp's staff will accommodate your child's learning disabilities
- Find camp references from resources you know and trust

<http://learningdisabilities.about.com/od/socialskills/bb/chooseacamp.htm>

GUIDES

Summer Camps for Children with Disabilities

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY) Published by NICHCY for camp year 2007, the list of camps and online resources will apply for 2008 as well.

<http://www.nichcy.org/pubs/genresc/camps.htm>

SUMMER PROGRAMS

Aspen Education Group

AEG provides a nationwide directory of camps for chil-

dren and teens with behavioral problems, ADD, AD/HD, learning disabilities, autism and Asperger's Syndrome.

<http://www.aegprograms.com/summerprograms.html>

WEBSITES

Special Needs Camps

Family Village Recreation and Leisure Center

The Family Village site is a directory of summer camps for children with disabilities.

<http://familyvillage.wisc.edu:8000/Leisure/camps.html>

Kids Camps.Com

This easy-to-use website allows families to search for camps by disability and state and to enter a variety of additional search criteria.

<http://www.kidscamps.com/>

MySummerCamps.com

A nationwide directory of summer camps for kids with disabilities, with brief descriptions, contact information and URLs provided.

http://www.mysummercamps.com/camps/SpecialNeeds_Camps/Physical_Disabilities/index.html

Therapy/Respite Camps for Kids

By Will Moore

Creative Commons License (2005)

Will Moore is a Florida State University professor and father of Kris, an autistic child. This resource grew out of Will's effort to find an appropriate camp for his son and respite camps for parents. His site features links to camps divided by regions and states within the US. It also includes camps in Canada, Central America and Greece. Moore offers to create a simple website for camp directors who lack one. Moore's site is updated often.

<http://wmoore.net/therapy.html>

VIDEOS

Beyond Summer: Conducting Internet Activities at Camp

By Sheryl Burgstahler, Ph.D.

DO-IT, University of Washington, (2006)

A brief video shows Muscular Dystrophy Association campers learning how to access the Internet at Camp Wascowitz, a facility located near North Bend, WA. This is a model program designed by the DO-IT program at the University of Washington to aid other organizations in offering internet access to campers with disabilities in community settings other than schools. The video and an accompanying four-page article describe how this access might be developed.

<http://www.washington.edu/doit/Video/camp.html>

KNOWLEDGE NETWORK MEMBERS

Camp Courageous of Iowa

Founded nearly 20 years ago, Camp Courageous is a year-round recreation and respite care camp for children and adults with disabilities. Sessions last one week and are separated by disability in order to give children exposure to those with like disabilities. Camp programs emphasize physical activity and group support. There are no competitive activities. All activities are based on the "Challenge by Choice" concept in which no camper is forced to participate in or fully complete any activity. Instead, campers choose the amount of challenge that they want to experience in the activity of their choosing. Campers set their own goals and staff members help to achieve them. A year-round travel camp is also available. For more information contact:

Camp Courageous of Iowa

P.O. Box 418

12007 190th Street

Monticello, IA 52310-0418

Phone: 319-465-5916

Fax 319-465-5919

Contact: Charles Becker, Executive Director

Email: cbecker@campcourageous.org

<http://www.campcourageous.org/>



American Camp Association (ACA)

With 7,000 members nationwide, ACA is a leading accrediting entity for U.S. camps with more than 2,400 meeting up to 300 standards for health, safety and program quality. ACA works closely with other youth-serving organizations and associations.



For more information on ACA, contact:

American Camp Association

5000 State Road 67 North

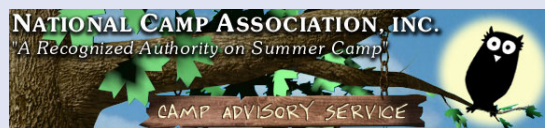
Martinsville, IN 46151-7902

Phone: (765) 342-8456

Fax: (765) 342-2065

<http://www.acacamps.org/>

National Camp Association, Inc. (NCA)



Established in 1983, NCA provides free referral services for parents seeking a summer camp experience for their child with disabilities. All NCA-referred camps are fully accredited programs that have met strict standards for health, safety and quality programming. All accredited facilities have been evaluated by NCA staff. For further information on NCA, contact:

National Camp Association (NCA)

610 Fifth Avenue, P.O. Box 5371

New York, NY 10185

Phone: 800-966-CAMP (2267)

<http://www.summercamp.org/guidance/>

Aspen Education Group (AEG)

AEG provides education programs for struggling or under-achieving youth. With a comprehensive network of therapeutic schools and programs, AEG aims to match professionals and families with the most appropriate setting. Services range from short-term intervention programs to residential treatment and include special needs summer camps and wilderness therapy. Financial assistance is available. For additional information, contact AEG by phone:



Phone: (888) 972-7736 (toll free)

<http://www.aspeneducation.com/>

The National Center on Physical Activity and Disability (NCPAD)

This organization is a physical activity information center for families of children with disabilities. The



NCPAD website offers an article entitled "Can Disability, Chronic Conditions, Health and Wellness Co-Exist?" which aims to refute the notion that health and disabilities are at opposite ends of a continuum. The site also provides directories of organizations and programs, including summer camps for children with special needs, which promote physical activity. For more information on NCPAD, contact:

National Center on Physical Activity and Disability (NCPAD)
Department of Disability and Human Development

College of Applied Sciences
University of Illinois
1640 West Roosevelt Road
Chicago, IL 60608-6904
Phone: (800) 900-8086 (Voice/TTY)
Fax: 312-355-4058
<http://www.ncpad.org/>

Camp Horizons

Located on a wooded site near Lake Probus in South Windham, CT, Camp Horizons' facilities include a program center, a media center, fitness center, hobby center and trading post, plus a dining hall, kitchen, infirmary, laundry and a recreation hall that houses a full basketball court, stage and game room. Campers ride horses and participate in arts and crafts, woodworking and pottery. A waterfront with a sandy beach, docks and boats accommodates water sports. Other amenities include a swimming pool, lighted outdoor tennis courts, miniature golf course, basketball court, playing fields and many cabins to house campers and staff. A 5:1 camper-counselor ratio, plus program instructors and staff, facilitates individualized attention to camper's special needs, including maintenance of academic skills, socialization, personal hygiene, independence, and development of leisure time skills. Campers attend three programs in the morning and four in the afternoon. Evening activities include campfires, dances, movies, field games and music. For further information on this camp, contact:

Camp Horizons
P.O. Box 323
127 Babcock Hill Rd,
South Windham, CT 06266
Phone: (860) 456-1032 Fax: (860) 456-4721
<http://www.camphorizons.org/whatsnew.htm>

The League for People with Disabilities: Summer Camp Programs

Founded 78 years ago, The League provides vocational, rehabilitative educational, medical, wellness and social services, including a year-round camping and therapeutic recreation program, to 1,800 individuals in the Baltimore, MD area with multiple, physical, cognitive and neurological disabilities.



- *Camp Greenwood*, located in rural Thurmont, MD, provides 400 campers annually with horseback riding, arts and crafts, sports and social activities. A day camp is also available.
- *League Pioneers*, located a half-mile from Camp Greenwood, is a "primitive camp" in which campers sleep in tents, cook over a fire and explore the outdoors.
- *Travel Camp* enables campers to travel to local points of interest during the summer. Travel campers spend their nights in hotels and days sightseeing.
- *Weekend respite programs* are held October through April at the Patuxent River 4H Center in Upper Marlboro, MD. Themed weekend activities include sports, cooking, nature and arts and crafts.
- Winter Camp takes place December 27-January 2 and features a New Year's Eve party and a surprise trip.

For more information on The League and its camping programs, contact:

The League for People with Disabilities
1111 E. Cold Spring Lane
Baltimore, MD 21239
Phone: (410) 323-0500; (410) 435-4298 (TTY)
Fax: (410) 323-3298
<http://www.leagueforpeople.org/index.htm>

Camp Arrowhead and Lion's Pride Camp



Nearly 50 years old, *Camp Arrowhead* is located 335 acres along the shores of Lake Cochituate near Natick and Framingham, MA and provides social and physical recreation for children from age five with and without disabilities. The program is sponsored by the Natick Recreation and Parks Department with the Parents Association of the Handicapped, Inc. The day camp portion runs for six weeks at the Amputee Veteran's Center from the end of June through the first week in August, while the residential portion entails a six day/five night trip to Lion's Camp Pride in New Durham, NH, scheduled two weeks after the end of day camp.

Located on Merrymaking Lake near North Durham in eastern New Hampshire and fully accessible, *Camp Pride* features a main pavilion, eight large bunk houses, an arts and crafts building, and a health center. Swimming, fishing and canoeing are available. Each camper is paired with a middle school or high school aged volunteer for the week. Two fulltime nurses and a

paramedic are on duty.
Camp Arrowhead and Lion's Pride Camp
Natick Parks and Recreation Department
1055 Worcester Rd
Natick, MA 01760
Phone: (508) 651-7333
<http://www.camparrowhead.us/>

Maple Leaf Clinic



This camp focuses on social and learning/relaxation skills development for children and adolescents diagnosed with non-verbal learning disabilities, Asperger's syndrome, high functioning autism and Pervasive Development Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS). Camp Maple Leaf offers opportunities for campers to expand their social skills, learn new leisure activities and take social risks. This environment is fostered by trained peer counselors and highly qualified staff.

On any given day Maple Leaf campers will participate in:

- Small and large group art projects (digital photography, creating a photo journal, etc.)
- Movement and sensory activities, including Yoga, Brain Gym
- Outdoor and indoor recreational experiences, including swimming, kayaking, hiking or a scavenger hunt
- Games enhancing fine and gross motor skills
- Direct social skills training activities, including computer activities and role playing games
- New, enriching and fun activities led by special guests who are experts in their fields, including health skills, stress management, relaxation and drumming

For additional information on this camp, contact:
Maple Leaf Clinic
167 North Main Street
Wallingford, VT 05773
Phone: (802) 446-3577
Fax: (802) 446-3801
Contact: Stephanie Fowler, M.Ed., Camp Director
<http://www.mapleleafclinic.com/camp.html>

Camp Aldersgate



Camp Aldersgate offers summer medical camps, respite camps and camps for children with disabilities.

Summer medical camps serve children with disabilities, developmental delays and a range of medical conditions including cardiac conditions, muscular dystrophy, spina bifida, cerebral palsy, arthritis, cancer, epilepsy, asthma, kidney disorders and diabetes. Camp Aldersgate provides the site, the staff, the program design and funding. The program works in partnership with local health agencies who recruit the campers, provide training, and partial funding. It also works with the organization, Med Camps of Arkansas, Inc., which provides volunteer physicians and partial funding. Since 1971 this partnership has provided camping to more than 8,000 campers. A typical week of camp includes an adapted ropes challenge course, archery, arts and crafts, fishing, horseback riding, canoeing/boating, swimming, and for the older campers, an introduction to SCUBA diving.

Respite care camps, funded in part by the Arkansas Department of Human Services and United Way, complement year-round weekend programs.

Kota camps are a program for campers with disabilities, their siblings and friends. These camps are named for the Quapaw Native American word for "friend." Campers with disabilities participate with siblings and friends in a summer week of camp or special weekend camps held throughout the year. Activities are the same as offered in the summer camps, but in addition, this program provides disability awareness and a better understanding of those with special needs.

For more information about Camp Aldersgate programs, contact:

Camp Aldersgate
2000 Aldersgate Road
Little Rock, Arkansas 72205
Phone: (501) 225-1444
Fax: (501) 225-2019
Contact: Sarah C. Wacaster, Executive Director
Email: info@campaldersgate.net
<http://www.campaldersgate.net/>

Quest's Camp Thunderbird

Camp Thunderbird serves campers of all ages with developmental disabilities. Thunderbird campers participate in activities such as camping, fishing, swimming canoeing, arts and crafts, sports and games, evening socials and nature study. Camp Thunderbird also provides day camp and six and 12-day overnight respite programs.



Located northwest of Orlando on the grounds of the Wekiva Springs State Park, Camp Thunderbird's 19-acre setting features:

- Nature trails
- Swimming pool
- Air-conditioned cabins
- Picnic area
- Activity center
- Outdoor amphitheater
- Recreation room
- Sport courts

The camp, which is accredited by the American Camp Association, provides certified lifeguards, nutritional meals, on-site infirmary, 24-hour nursing supervision and a 4:1 camper to staff ratio.

Quest's Camp Thunderbird

P.O. Box 531125

Orlando, FL 32853

Phone: (407) 218.4300; (888) 80. QUEST (toll free)

Fax: (407) 218.4301

Email: contact@questinc.org

<http://www.questinc.org/camp.htm>

Tourette Syndrome Camp USA

Founded in 1994, the camp is a residential program designed for children and youth ages 8-16 whose primary diagnosis is Tourette syndrome (TS) and, to a lesser degree, OCD and ADD/ADHD. The TS camp is run concurrently with a traditional camp week. Although TS campers have a separate cabin, all programming is arranged for both sets of campers together. Campers must be able to handle routine daily living skills, such as dressing and self-hygiene, and function in a group setting. While the camp program is modified to meet the needs of most children whose primary diagnosis is TS, the camp recognizes that not every child is capable of participating in the camp program. The camp cautions parents of prospective TS Camp USA campers that it is

not a therapeutic program and there are limitations in accepting children whose needs are beyond the scope of the program's design.

TS Camp USA is held at YMCA Camp Duncan located 30 miles north of Chicago. The camp is home to other special needs such as burn and diabetic camp. The facility features an Olympic size indoor swimming pool and a semi-private lake.

For further information on the camp, contact:

Tourette Syndrome Camp USA

6933 N. Kedzie #816

Chicago, IL 60645

Phone: (773) 465-7536

<http://tourettecamp.com/>

Wisconsin Lions Camp

Sponsored and operated by Lions Club International, the camp, free to all who qualify, serves Wisconsin children with mild cognitive disabilities and



diabetes and those who are deaf and hard of hearing or blind or visually impaired. Each summer camp week features nature hikes, campfires, games and skill building activities. Other activities include swimming, canoeing, sailing, paddle boating, inner tubing, kayaking, rowing, fishing, archery, crafts, nature programs, overnight camping and cookouts, hiking trips and challenge courses.

Each Wisconsin Lions Camp attendee must be a resident of the state or be attending school in Wisconsin. All campers must independent in self-care skills. Campers must also be able to be socially and behaviorally managed by a 1:6 staff-to-camper ratio.

For further information on this camp, contact:

Wisconsin Lions Camp

3834 County Road A

Rosholt, WI 54473

Phone: (715) 677-4969; (715) 677-6999 (TTY)

Fax: (715) 677-3297

Email: info@wisconsinlionscamp.com

<http://www.wisconsinlionscamp.com/>

Camp Rising Sun

Held in the mountains east of Albuquerque, NM, Camp Rising Sun



annually focuses on the needs of 30 children ages 8-13. Twenty of the campers will have autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Ten of the students will be siblings, cousins and close friends of those 20 campers and will serve as peer models. Activities include swimming, hiking, sports, arts and crafts, games horseback riding, music, drama, campfires, hayrides, a ropes course and friendship building activities. The staff-to-camper ratio is 1:1.

For more information, contact:
Camp Rising Sun, Inc.
7711 Rio Guadalupe NE
Albuquerque, NM 87122
Phone: (505) 858-0361
Contact: Laura White, Camp President
Email: camprisingsun@gmail.com
<http://www.camprisingsunnm.org/>

Camp Lotsafun

Located in northern Nevada, the camp annually provides recreational, therapeutic and educational opportunities for about 600 children and teens ages 5-22, plus respite care for their families. Sixty percent of Camp Lotsafun participants have autism; the other 40% are children with Down syndrome, ADHD, bi-polar disorder, cerebral palsy, traumatic brain injuries and other disabilities. In addition, many of the participants have a secondary diagnosis such as OCD, oppositional defiant disorder, sensory integration disorder, and/or post traumatic distress syndrome. The camp explains that these disorders may negatively affect children's ability to control impulses, interact and communicate appropriately with peers, identify social cues and maintain personal care and hygiene.

Activities include swimming, kayaking, archery, hiking, teamwork, pet therapy, outdoor games, drama, music, ropes challenge course, arts and crafts and campfire. Additional activities, which are scheduled at each session, and vary depending on availability, include: AT&T Hot Air Balloon, Care Flight, and the Tahoe Douglas Fire Department.



Camp staff and volunteers must be 18 years of age and are provided with extensive training in personal care, counselor responsibilities, disability awareness, behavior management, play therapy, sensory integration, anger management, positive reinforcement, first aide, and CPR.

For additional information on this camp, contact:
Camp Lotsafun
PO Box 7733
Reno, NV 89510
Phone: 888-825-2267 (toll free); 775-827-3866
Fax: 775-827-0334 Cell: 775-815-2956
Contact: Kristi King, CTRS, Executive Director
Email: Kristi@camplotsafun.com
<http://www.camplotsafun.com/index.html>

Sun Valley Adaptive Sports (SVAS)

A non-profit organization located in Ketchum, ID, SVAS is a chapter of Disabled Sports USA, a network that has enabled SVAS to collaborate with 80 of the top U.S. adaptive sports organizations in creating programs that produce measurable outcomes for children with disabilities, injured war veterans and others. SVAS winter and summer children's programs encompass youth of all ages with a range of disabilities. SVAS programs include:



PACK (Peak Adventure Camp for Kids), a summer program providing recreational activities to local children, teens and adults with disabilities via three summer day camps. Local professionals offer time and instruction in pottery, martial arts, tennis, swimming, biking, and rafting. Program activities are aimed at increasing participants' gross and fine motor skills. PACK runs five days a week, eight hours daily, for 10 weeks.

Get Out and Go, a year-round program for local teens and adults with physical or developmental disabilities, is aimed at enhancing campers' physical and social skills. Activities include skiing, nature walks, bowling, walking Animal Shelter dogs, movies, theater performances, theme dinners, gallery walks and game nights.

For more information on SVAS, contact:
Sun Valley Adaptive Sports (SVAS)
P.O. Box 6791

Ketchum, ID 83340
Phone: (208) 726-9298 Fax: (208) 726-0957
Contacts: Tom Iselin, Executive Director; Cara Barrett
CTRS, Program Director
Email: tom@svasp.org; caral@svasp.org
<http://www.svasp.org/contact.html>

Summit Camp & Travel

Located near Honesdale, PA, Summit Camp focuses on boys and girls ages 7-17 with attention related disabilities, including ADD, verbal or non-verbal learning disabilities, mild social or emotional issues, Asperger's syndrome, Tourette syndrome, OCD and mild mood issues. The camp also works with older children ages 15-19 with similar issues. Activities include water sports, sports and athletics, creative and computer arts, Discovery Centers, a teen program, mini camps and travel. Campers age 16 and over travel to San Diego, Hawaii and Virginia. On-site camp facilities consist of:



- A recreation hall that doubles as an indoor gym -- with a basketball court and space for indoor hockey -- and theater
- A creative arts center housed in three A-frames with fully equipped studios facilitating ceramics, arts and crafts and woodshop activities
- A camper kitchen for a culinary arts program adjoins the indoor science lab, puppetry room and drama workshop
- A nature center housed in a log cabin overlooking the camp's lake
- An air conditioned health and fitness center offering indoor day and evening programs
- Two classrooms, two air-conditioned computer labs and music room that provide additional indoor space
- A canteen housing a snack bar and game room that is the site of parties and socials.

For additional information on this camp, contact:
Summit Camp & Travel
18 East 41st Street, Suite 402
New York, NY 10017
Phone: (800) 323-9908 (toll free); (212) 689-3880
Fax: (212) 689-4347
Contacts: Ninette and Mayer Stiskin, Directors
Email: staff@summitcamp.com
<http://ftp.summitcamp.com/index.php>

Here at FCTD we always welcome
your suggestions for newsletter and
discussion topics.

If there is something you would like
to see discussed, please contact us
at
fctd@aed.org

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